

Romantic Loving

An existential study

By

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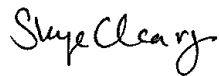
13th January 2013

Certification

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of PhD in the Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University. This represents the original work and contribution of the author, except as acknowledged by general and specific references.

I hereby certify that this has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaye Cleary', written in a cursive style.

Date: 13th January 2013

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Abstract

This thesis is an existential study of romantic loving. Its central thesis is that existential philosophies emphasise the importance of freeing oneself from misplaced expectations and flawed ideals about the nature of, and behaviour associated with, romantic loving. Existentialists have argued that if romantic lovers free themselves from these problematic ideas they are free to reinvigorate romantic loving in a way that allows for authentically meaningful relationships.

Five existential philosophers – Max Stirner, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir – are studied because they provide narratives by which roots of dissatisfactions and frustrations within our everyday ideas about romantic loving can be examined, and possibilities for resolution can be explored. An analysis of such existential notions as freedom, power, choice, authenticity and anxiety, challenges our assumptions regarding the nature and meaning of romantic loving.

Stirner argued that romantic loving characterised by obligations and unselfishness is hypocritical and unsatisfying. Instead he proposed self-loving and the creation of relationships which one finds enjoyable and interesting. Kierkegaard suggested that romantic loving was inherently disappointing due to its unstable and finite nature and advocated marriage and religious love as more secure foundations for relationships. Nietzsche proposed that the problems in romantic loving often stem from out-dated Christian values, inappropriate social conventions, and petty power dynamics. His medley of suggestions to resolve such issues is underpinned by the fundamental goal of striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*. Sartre argued that romantic loving is inherently frustrating because relationships descend into sado-masochistic dialectics in an attempt to attain an unrealisable ideal, and was sceptical about possible solutions. Beauvoir argued that dissatisfaction in romantic loving stems from possessive behaviours and more harmonious relationships can be achieved through reciprocal recognition of two freedoms.

Keywords: Romantic loving, existential philosophies, freedom, power, choice

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Introduction

The attempt to understand romantic loving has become big business or, as philosophers Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins describe it, “a global obsession”.¹ The popularity of matchmaking industries, internet dating, romance novels, relationship self-help books and celebrity relationship counsellors are just a few examples of how the dynamics of loving relationships remain of perennial interest. Expectations about romantic loving are grand, but there seems to be dissatisfaction with the way we understand it because reality often falls short of the ideal. Romantic loving suggests images of endless magical happiness, harmony, understanding and intimacy that make the lovers feel as if they are made for each other. The ideal is alluring but unsatisfactory, because romantic loving often involves suffering, conflicts and disappointments.²

For example, Robert Johnson argued that the Western approach to romantic loving is faulty because our expectations are misplaced and that is why “we spend much of our time with a deep sense of loneliness, alienation and frustration over our inability to make genuinely loving and committed relationships”.³ Cristina Nehring also argued that what she called our modern approach to romantic loving is flawed because the heroic and transcendental qualities have given way to a “pragmatic and pedestrian” attitude thanks to recreational sex, concern for sexual safety, family values and feminist cynicism about romance.⁴ Aaron Ben-Ze’ev and Ruhama Goussinsky proposed that “The gap between what we want from love and what we actually achieve is increasing and the resulting dissonance gives rise to mounting dissatisfaction with our love lives”.⁵ Robert Solomon said if there is a problem, it is love’s “*etherealization*. We have come to expect *too much* of love”.⁶ Part of the issue is that our

¹ Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds., The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991) 1.

² For example, see André Comte-Sponville, according to whom “Eros is its name, want is its essence, and passionate love is its culmination” (André Comte-Sponville, A small treatise on the great virtues: the uses of philosophy in everyday life, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001) 238.) Also, Ben-Ze’ev and Goussinsky say that romantic love is “a major factor in people’s misery, as it involves many disappointments and unfulfilled hopes...Love may be ‘many splendid things’, but love also hurts a lot, can be dangerous, and may lead us to foolish deeds” (Aaron Ben-Ze’ev and Ruhama Goussinsky, In the Name of Love: Romantic Ideology and Its Victims (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 3.)

³ Robert A. Johnson, The Psychology of Romantic Love (London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) xii.

⁴ Cristina Nehring, A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-first Century (New York: HarperCollins, 2009) 271, 273, 275.

⁵ Ben-Ze’ev and Goussinsky, In the Name of Love: Romantic Ideology and Its Victims, xiv.

⁶ Robert C. Solomon, Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) 78-79.

expectations of romantic loving are shaped by popular culture. Hsu-Ming Teo argued that as the American narrative fed by global marketing, advertising and publishing dominates our understanding of romantic love, there is “less and less common knowledge or understanding of alternative cultures or expressions of love”.⁷

This thesis is an existential study of romantic loving. Existential philosophies provide a meaningful framework through which the dominant ideas about romantic loving can be critically examined because, as I shall argue, they explore the space between the ideals of romantic loving and the compromises and sacrifices lovers make in order to try to achieve those ideals. Five existential philosophers have been selected for study because their narratives provide the means by which the roots of dissatisfactions and frustrations within our everyday ideas about romantic loving can be examined.

While every existential thinker interprets life within a meaningless world differently, there is a common emphasis on concrete personal experience, freedom, authenticity, responsibility, individuality, awareness of death, and personal determination of values.⁸ It is unsurprising, therefore, that existentialists would consider the question of romantic loving. This includes Max Stirner (1806-1856), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), who contribute significantly to the idea of romantic loving. The five existential thinkers do not provide a single solution, but rather a five-pronged critique that helps us to understand how romantic loving can go awry, but also how it can be reinvigorated.

My central thesis is that existential philosophies reveal to us the notion that once lovers free themselves from preconceived ideals about how romantic lovers *ought* to behave, and free themselves from being slaves to their passions, they will be free to create relationships that complement and enhance their personal authentic endeavours. Love is a passion to be chosen and mastered, not sacrificed to. Irving Singer, a contemporary philosopher of love who considered existential perspectives within a history of romantic loving dating back to Plato, said that although romantic lovers lose certain freedoms, the love they acquire compensates.⁹ However, I argue that one of the key contributions of the existential approach to romantic

⁷ Hsu-Ming Teo, “The Americanisation of romantic love in Australia”, *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU epress, 2006) 191-192.

⁸ Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011) 3-4.

⁹ Irving Singer, *The Pursuit of Love* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 166.

loving is its criticism of such an assumption, for it is by no means given that the romantic love gained necessarily compensates for freedoms lost and sacrifices made.

The existential perspective lends itself well to such an analysis, since relationships are an important part of existential discourse. Existential thinkers acknowledge that we are born into a web of relationships and they explore how relations with others infuse our world with meaning and modify our possibilities. Existential thinking brings to light complexities, knowledge and expressions of romantic loving because it provides a language to understand and reflect on our being in the world, being with others and expands our knowledge about possibilities and dynamics of relationships.

Existential philosophies, though widely criticised today, remain relevant. Christine Daigle argued that existential philosophies are still popular because they address fundamentally human experiences.¹⁰ Similarly, Felicity Joseph et al. highlight the relevance of existential philosophies today:

(E)xistentialism arguably represents the most significant recent attempt in the history of philosophy to foreground the practical problems of living, to relate these to the historical conditions of modernity, and to think them in a way that is both philosophically sophisticated and practically concrete. It is this connection of philosophical reflection with the problems of life as it is lived in the contemporary world that is, we believe, the reason for existentialism's ongoing appeal and relevance.¹¹

What is romantic loving?

In 1300 BC the ancient Egyptians wrote love poems;¹² around 350 BC Plato classified love into different forms; the Roman poet Ovid wrote erotic poetry in 19 BC; Heloise and Abelard famously exchanged letters about their love for each other in the twelfth century; and in the late 1500s Shakespeare wrote plays about love.¹³ While the literature of romantic loving dates as far back as the ancient Egyptians, only more recently has it been referred to as 'romantic'

¹⁰ Christine Daigle, Jean-Paul Sartre (London and New York: Routledge, 2009) 137.

¹¹ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 3.

¹² Martin S. Bergmann, *The Anatomy of Loving: The Story of Man's Quest to Know What Love Is* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 3.

¹³ Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins suggest that "Some of our most deeply embedded cultural images associated with romantic love stem from his plays" (Solomon and Higgins, eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, 72.)

and become a mass phenomenon, particularly in the Western world. Irving Singer argued that although romantic love arose at the end of the eighteenth century, “it stemmed from an evolutionary process in which theories about love had existed throughout two millennia”.¹⁴ Robert Solomon argued that romantic love is an eighteenth century concept, which intensified with “the rise of the individual in the ‘West’”.¹⁵ Charles Lindholm, an anthropologist, pointed out that romantic love is not uniquely Western, but “So potent is the romantic ideal that it has steadily gained more and more currency internationally”.¹⁶ In this section, I address a few key historical developments that have influenced our understanding of romantic loving in the twenty-first century Western world and some of the dominant current definitions of romantic loving.

Historically, associations between men and women were marriages based on economic alliances that aimed at either maintaining power and wealth or providing extra labour for domestic production.¹⁷ Coupling was arranged as a matter of economic convenience and so passionate love usually occurred outside marriage and was based on the natural functions of sex and lust. The love story generally ended in sexual union until the Middle Ages when the phenomenon of courtly love became popular.¹⁸ Some scholars argue that it also tended to be secretive or a one-sided admiration of a knight for a socially superior and unattainable female who was a passive participant.¹⁹ Because the relationship was unconsummated, the love was idealised.²⁰ This is why the pinnacle of love in great romance stories ends with lovers seeking unity in death: *Liebestod* (a metaphorical orgasm).²¹ William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Richard Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* are two pertinent examples. However, Robert Solomon argued that courtly love was often consummated within the upper classes of society, but “came slowly and after considerable effort”,²² and he and Kathleen Higgins explain that the focus was on “the process of wooing, not the winning”, because it was based on the potential lovers’ worth, charms, whims, and desires instead of economic arrangements.²³ If the love was consummated, Irving Singer proposed that it was defended as merging bodies

¹⁴ Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009) 2.

¹⁵ Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, 57.

¹⁶ Charles Lindholm, “Romantic Love and Anthropology”, *Etnofoor* 19.1 (2006): 5.

¹⁷ David R. Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003) 7.

¹⁸ Bergmann, *The Anatomy of Loving: The Story of Man's Quest to Know What Love Is*, 96-97.

¹⁹ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) 46.

²⁰ Bergmann, *The Anatomy of Loving: The Story of Man's Quest to Know What Love Is*, 96.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Robert Solomon, “The Virtue of (Erotic) Love”, *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991) 508-509.

²³ Solomon and Higgins, eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, 56.

and souls and considered 'good', "as long as their object is morally or aesthetically suitable".²⁴

The use of the term 'romantic' proliferated in the Middle Ages when things were likened to the Roman Empire, in which everything seemed grand, glorious, heroic, adventurous and passionate.²⁵ In the late eighteenth century, art, music, literature and philosophy that emphasised emotions, imagination, creativity, nature, freedom, individualism and the concrete over abstract reasoning, logic, rationality, convention, restrictions, sensibility and prudence, became known as 'Romantic'.²⁶ For the Romantics, sexual desire was a pre-requisite of love.²⁷ According to Irving Singer,

It involved oneness with one's alter ego, one's other self, a man or woman who would make up one's deficiencies, respond to one's deepest inclinations, and serve as possibly the only person with whom one could communicate with fully. If the world were properly attuned to the value of love, this would be the person one married, establishing a bond that was permanent as well as ecstatically consummatory. The sexual bond would participate in a social order constructed out of loving relationships that united all people to one another and mankind to nature as a whole. Since love was God, romantic lovers would be carrying out the dictates of divinity throughout their mutual intimacy – in their sexual as well as nonsexual oneness.²⁸

Narratives of love as romantic bloomed during the nineteenth century, at the same time that romance literature reached a mass audience and when romance came to be equated with courting.²⁹ With the growth of capitalism and industrialisation, the requirement for economic-based marriages became obsolete because domestic production declined and the corporation, not the family, became the central structure that controlled wealth.³⁰ Capitalism and the growth of individual liberties in Western society meant courtship and coupling became a matter of personal choice, rather than parental arrangement.³¹

²⁴ Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 2 ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 9.

²⁵ Robert E. Wagoner, *The Meanings of Love* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997) 51.

²⁶ Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 778.

²⁷ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 26. However, such Romantics as Milton, Shelley and Schlegel had already been talking about love as a basis for marriage in the 16-17th centuries.

³⁰ Shumway, *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis*, 22.

³¹ Mary Evans, *Love: An Unromantic Discussion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003) 7.

In the second half of the twentieth century, such developments as legal and technological advances in contraception, abortion, divorce, equal opportunity legislation, changes in traditional roles and growth of women's participation in the workforce, created greater possibilities and variations in forms of relationships. Feminism awakened women's psychosocial freedom to pursue economic independence and shifted the power dynamics in relationships. According to Elisabeth Badinter, "With contraception and abortion, Western women found themselves holding a degree of power unprecedented in the history of humanity", springing from two sources in particular: first, economic independence has meant that women possess "the atomic bomb that is separation and divorce" because they can survive financially and socially without men; and second, women's power over procreation means that the father need not be a factor in the decision as to whether to go through with a pregnancy.³² It also meant women were no longer required to marry and have children in order to gain social approval and be perceived as successful in life. The effect has been that in the Western world, the traditional nuclear family has broken down and more people are living alone.³³

Romantic love has grown primarily in Western societies, since, Robert Solomon argued, they place "an extraordinary emphasis on the concept of individuality and individual self-identity", as well as personal choice and flexibility in relationships.³⁴ With the weakening of familial and community bonds, romantic love has grown in importance since it contributes to an individual's sense of belonging, if only temporary.³⁵ Moreover, it has only been possible since women have been able to choose their partners and have been treated as objects of love rather than as property.³⁶

Romantic loving, while incorporating elements of both passionate and courtly love, raised the sexual to the sublime and encompassed the life trajectories and futures of individuals as they

³² However, Badinter argues the use and abuse of sexual, emotional and psychological power had always been available to women and men alike (Elisabeth Badinter, *Dead End Feminism*, trans. Julia Borossa (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) 1, 51-52.)

³³ According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, "The increase in the divorce rate represented one of the most spectacular family-related trends in the 20th century", peaking in 1947 (partly due to unstable war-time partnerships), soaring in 1976 (when less rigid divorce laws came into effect) and remaining stable but higher in the early twenty-first century compared to the 1980s. Marriages now last approximately 10-12 years and overall, there is a higher proportion of unpartnered adults than ever before (Qu Lixia and Weston Ruth, "Trends in couple dissolution: An update", *Family Relationships Quarterly*, ed. Elly Robinson (Melbourne: Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, August 2011), vol. 19, 15-17.)

³⁴ Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, xxviii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xxix.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

wrote their own narratives.³⁷ This shift in ideas about love meant that not only was it socially acceptable to marry one's beloved, but also that the ideal of romantic love culminated in marriage, as we see in Shakespeare's plays.³⁸ Thus, romantic love united passionate loving and marriage into "utopian harmony",³⁹ sexuality took on greater significance,⁴⁰ and anyone could participate (it was no longer only an aristocratic affair).⁴¹

Current definitions and understandings of romantic loving are wide and varied,⁴² sometimes confused,⁴³ and change historically.⁴⁴ Some of our modern ideas about love retain key themes of Romanticism, and yet other theories are also popular. In the following paragraphs I summarise six major ways of conceptualising romantic loving in the Western world today.⁴⁵

First, the conception of romantic loving that most clearly echoes ideas of love that evolved during the Romantic period is that of merging, which is an idea derived from the ancient Greeks.⁴⁶ For example, Plato described love in terms of merging and *Symposium* is, according to Robert Solomon, "the classic text" of love.⁴⁷ In *Symposium*, Plato's character Aristophanes explains that people used to be round creatures with four arms, four legs and two faces. They attacked the gods and as punishment, Zeus cut them all in two. Since then, people have desired their other half and yearn to grow back into their original whole. This myth encouraged the idea of romantic loving as a union of two people, who in compensating for each other's deficiencies together make a single entity. That there is only one other person capable of doing this fostered the idea that finding one's other half would result in perfect happiness, making it a monogamous and eternal bond, as well as one that allows for complete disclosure to, and understanding of, one another.

³⁷ Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 40, 45.

³⁸ Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love", 510.

³⁹ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁴¹ Solomon and Higgins, eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, 57.

⁴² e.g. Marston, Hecht and Robers found a "strong pluralism of conceptions" about romantic love, and "not only is there no single manner of conceptualizing love, there is also no predominant manner" (Peter J. Marston, Michael L. Hecht and Tia Robers, "True Love Ways': The Subjective Experience and Communication of Romantic Love", *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 4 (1987): 404.)

⁴³ Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love", 510.

⁴⁴ Susan S. Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick, "Romantic Love", *Close Relationships*, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000) 203.

⁴⁵ Since romantic loving is not a purely philosophical discussion, I have also drawn on psychological, anthropological and biological perspectives. Adapted from *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up*, 2.

⁴⁷ Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, 67.

Many modern definitions of romantic love incorporate aspects of Aristophanes' myth. For example, Martin Dillon proposed that romantic love is "to consummate a union with the beautiful object that betokens sheer pleasure" but the inherent contradiction is that while lovers desire perfection, reality cannot live up to the ideal.⁴⁸ Robert Nozick described romantic love as "*wanting* to form a *we* with that particular person", resulting in a new entity or unit that pools well-being, autonomy and decision making.⁴⁹ Aaron Ben-Ze'ev and Ruhama Goussinsky describe romantic loving as uncompromising, unconditional, comprehensive and encompassing the beliefs that "The beloved is everything to the lover and hence love is all you need; true love lasts forever and can conquer all; true lovers are united – they are one and the same person; love is irreplaceable and exclusive; and love is pure and can do no evil".⁵⁰

Robert Solomon argued "Romantic love is part and parcel of Romanticism" and "presupposes an unusually strong conception of privacy and individual autonomy, a relatively novel celebration of emotions for their own sake, and a dramatic metaphysics of unity – of which sexual unity in love is a particularly exciting and tangible example".⁵¹ In contrast to Aristophanes' ideal of a perfect single entity, Solomon described romantic love thus, "The other half starts with the fact of our differences and our stubbornness, and how we may ill fit together even after years of compromise and cohabitation".⁵² Solomon also argued that romantic love could be understood in terms of the opposition, tension, or dialectic between lovers' desire for "an eternal merger of souls" and their need to assert their individuality, freedom and autonomy, which is the foundation for romantic love.⁵³ This dialectic is a "progressive tension that supports and creates as well as threatens and destroys".⁵⁴ Although he maintains that love is a choice, albeit sometimes a pre-reflective or irrational choice,⁵⁵ it is not a simple matter of deciding to love someone, since it also requires the presence of a "plausible candidate" within appropriate circumstances.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Martin C. Dillon, *Beyond Romance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) 55.

⁴⁹ Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond", *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991) 417-419. Italics in quotes are as they appear in the original for all references in this thesis.

⁵⁰ Ben-Ze'ev and Goussinsky, *In the Name of Love: Romantic Ideology and Its Victims*, xi-xii.

⁵¹ Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love", 505.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 513.

⁵³ Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, xxx, 147.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48, 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

Romantic love, according to Solomon, involves four key components: sexual desire (even if unconsummated); desire for reciprocity (even if the loving is unrequited); it must be personal (aimed at a particular individual); and the creation of a ‘shared identity’.⁵⁷ This shared identity is equated with intimacy and is more than companionship, pleasure, or utility. He said it is “a redefinition of self which no amount of sex or fun or time together will add up to”.⁵⁸ Building on Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea that we are always more than we are, Robert Solomon said love is creation of a shared self that is developed together, “virtually anew”.⁵⁹ It is not self-love, but rather love of a shared self, “defined with, in and through a particular person”, or in other words, a mutual and reciprocal definition of selves.⁶⁰ Yet, creating a shared self takes time and is a process, and is thus a ‘dialectic’.⁶¹ Even if the relationship does not endure, romantic love involves the desire or hope that it will. This is why, he argued, Don Juan does not love: he is involved with too many women, does not allow time for a dialectic to develop, and knows in advance that the relationship will not last more than a few days at most.⁶²

Irving Singer argued that the “Belief in the feasibility of merging underlies all romanticism and most idealist philosophies in the nineteenth century. It explains their adoration of ‘organic unity’ in love of every sort”.⁶³ For example, Christians embraced the ideal of merging with God to become a total unity. Similarly, love is perceived as a merging that can provide value and meaning in life.⁶⁴ The possibility or fantasy of romantic love is that “the beloved is a uniquely appointed alter ego with whom true friendship can be established throughout a socially functional and lasting, even endless bond of the sort that married love represents”.⁶⁵ Moreover, the relationship would not be romantic without the desire for permanent oneness.⁶⁶

However, Singer proposed that there are problems with the idea of merging and offered a variation. He contended that the problem with the idea of romantic love as a quest for merging is that it undermines autonomy and assumes submission and dependence.⁶⁷ His solution is a conception of romantic love that is not a searching for shared self, a literal merging of selves,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., xxx.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 142-143.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 148.

⁶¹ Ibid., 140.

⁶² Ibid., 263.

⁶³ Singer, *The Pursuit of Love*, 23.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 69-70.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

the creation of a new self, or a merged self.⁶⁸ Rather, he said, it is a “sharing of selves”,⁶⁹ or in other words, interdependence.⁷⁰ This kind of interdependent love involves dependence on each other for benefits, but is not based purely on exchange: it involves a “reciprocal benevolence”, that includes “an interest in the welfare of the other as an autonomous being”.⁷¹ This is what he called “bestowal”, as opposed to “appraisal”, and is “inherently enjoyable”, because we often like to help another and feel needed and wanted.⁷²

A second approach views loving in terms of a personally constructed story. According to Robert Sternberg, people fall in love because they have similar stories and complementary roles within those stories, and greater differences in lovers’ stories mean that there is greater risk of dissatisfaction within their relationship.⁷³ Linnell Secomb adopts a similar approach by retelling divergent love stories of philosophers such as Plato and Sappho through to Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, supplemented by culture analysis and gender theory.⁷⁴ She described the complexities and paradoxes of love by comparing Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to Friedrich Nietzsche’s speculations of love, and then comparing Simone de Beauvoir’s description of love to the television series *Desperate Housewives* to show that both “high theory” and “trash” culture are valid means of elucidating narratives of love.⁷⁵

A third approach defines romantic loving as either passionate love or companionate love, or a combination of both.⁷⁶ One theory is that romantic or passionate love is “a state of intense passionate absorption of two lovers with each other in which emotion is primary and there is likely to be both anguish and ecstasy in the relationship”.⁷⁷ Over time, “passion cools” and if lovers are “lucky”, their relationship develops into companionate love, characterised primarily by affection and an intertwining of the lovers’ lives.⁷⁸ However, Susan Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick suggest that passion and friendship are not mutually exclusive and both are necessary to maintain romantic relationships.⁷⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁷² Ibid., 165-166.

⁷³ Robert J. Sternberg, *Love is a Story* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) x.

⁷⁴ Linnell Secomb, *Philosophy and love: from Plato to popular culture* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007) 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁶ Hendrick and Hendrick, “Romantic Love”, 204.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 205.

A fourth approach defines romantic love as a combination of passion and intimacy. For example, Robert Sternberg described different types of love in terms of three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment.⁸⁰ Passion encompasses physical attraction, sexual consummation,⁸¹ and longing for a union with the beloved. (Sternberg draws on the concept of passionate love as a union from Elaine Hatfield and G. Williams Walster, who derive their definition, in part, from Plato.)⁸² The decision is to be in the relationship, while the commitment is to maintain it over the long-term.⁸³ Intimacy encompasses “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness”, such as promoting the beloved’s welfare, highly regarding and valuing the beloved, mutual understanding, supporting each other emotionally, sharing oneself and possessions, and being happy in each other’s presence.⁸⁴ According to Sternberg’s classification, a relationship based on intimacy alone is ‘liking’. A relationship based on passion only is ‘infatuated love’. Decision and commitment in the absence of passion and intimacy is ‘empty love’. ‘Fatuitous love’ involves passion, decision and commitment. ‘Companionate love’ involves intimacy and commitment. One example of companionate love is marriage after the sexual passion has “died down”.⁸⁵ ‘Romantic love’ is a combination of intimacy and passion. ‘Consummate love’ involves all three components of intimacy, passion and decision/commitment, and, according to Sternberg, it is towards this that we strive in romantic relationships.⁸⁶

A fifth approach considers romantic loving to be a means of expanding one’s boundaries or reaching beyond oneself. For example, Arthur Aron and Elaine Aron proposed that loving is a means of self-expansion, through knowledge, experiences, social connections and resources.⁸⁷ Peter Koestenbaum described romantic loving as a way that consciousnesses grow and self-transcend by reaching out into the world beyond their given situations.⁸⁸ Charles Lindholm also presents the view that romantic love is not only a desire for sex, as many Western social scientists and philosophers imagine,⁸⁹ but rather a desire to exceed one’s concrete life.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ Robert J. Sternberg, “A Triangular Theory of Love”, *Psychological Review* 93.2 (1986): 119.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 122. Robert Sternberg references Hatfield & Walster (1981), who draw on Plato and other theorists to define passionate reciprocated love as desire for a union with the beloved, which “is associated with fulfilment and ecstasy” (Elaine Hatfield and G. Williams Walster, *A new look at love* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981) 9.)

⁸³ Sternberg, “A Triangular Theory of Love”: 119.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 120-121.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 124.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 123-124.

⁸⁷ Arthur Aron and Elaine N. Aron, *Love and the Expansion of Self* (Washington: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1986) ix.

⁸⁸ Peter Koestenbaum, *Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) 21, 36.

⁸⁹ Charles Lindholm, “Romantic Love and Anthropology”: 10.

The existential desire to escape the limits of the given is the source of the human yearning for the sacred. Romantic love is one modern form that this yearning takes, offering the experience of salvation in this world, even if only sporadically and in fantasy; as the realization of an impulse to transcendence it exists in tension with reality and with other forms of existential commitment; it may also suffer from internal contradictions due to various interpretations of how love should be enacted.⁹¹

A sixth approach focuses on the biological aspects. Evolutionary theory proposes that romantic love's greatest function is reproductive survival, and is defined in terms of passion for reproductive purposes and closeness (intimacy) for survival of the relationship and its offspring.⁹² Arthur Schopenhauer is one philosopher who takes such a view. He argued that love is determined by sexual impulse which appears as a "voluptuous illusion" that directs individuals towards those who seem to promise happiness and pleasure. However, only the species is satisfied because it is perpetuated through new generations.⁹³

Based on these definitions, the ideas of romantic loving, against which I will compare and contrast existential themes, include the following. Romantic loving is passionate, meaning that it is not just about sex, but often includes sex or at least sexual desirability. Romantic loving is personal, meaning that it is love of a particular individual and appreciation of that person's unique qualities. The ideal of love during the Romantic period was to establish permanent unions, especially through marriage, and would transform lovers' lives to such an extent that everything would take on a new meaning and even become the meaning of life itself. However, more recent ideas about romantic love do not always include the requirement that the relationship last forever. Lovers do expect it to last beyond the initial moments of passion and hope that it will last, but passion can cool over time and the relationship either ceases or evolves into companionate love. Thus, commitment is not a central feature of romantic love, unlike marital love. Romantic loving also involves a yearning for some kind of union. The literature reviewed above describes this in a myriad of forms, such as a desire to merge, to create a 'shared identity', to share 'selves', to become 'interdependent', to entwine lives such that the lovers' boundaries are blurred or overcome, or to expand oneself. Moreover, lovers' focus shifts from 'I' to 'we', whereby many decisions are made taking into

⁹⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Hendrick and Hendrick, "Romantic Love", 207.

⁹³ Solomon and Higgins, eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, 128.

account the interests of both parties. While passion is a necessary feature of romantic loving, some also insist on companionship and intimacy, since these latter elements balance the potential selfishness of an overt focus on passionate loving, by including such considerations as concern for the beloved's welfare.⁹⁴

While not all of the existentialist thinkers in this study refer to the type of love they speak of as 'romantic', they all describe love in one or more of these themes outlined above. Gary Cox proposed that the existentialists' view of love is not romantic because they do not believe in love as an abstract force or as sunset walks along the beach, and they believe that the ideal of total unity is doomed to failure.⁹⁵ However, he also said that "If your idea of romance is somewhat more gothic and stormy, full of heartache, yearning and the thwarted desire to possess; breaking up, making up and breaking up again, tears before bedtime and tears in the rain, then maybe it is romantic".⁹⁶

I argue that existential thinkers offer a critique of preconceived ideas about the nature of, and behaviour associated with, romantic loving and argue for reconceptions of it, in order to emphasise possibilities for creating authentically meaningful romantic relationships. Stirner's alternative is egoistic loving and Kierkegaard's alternative is initially ethical love (marriage) and ultimately religious love. Although Nietzsche's musings on love refer mostly to 'the love story', eros,⁹⁷ or 'sexual love',⁹⁸ which he said has been refined to amour-passion,⁹⁹ he referred to elements of romantic love discussed above. For example, he said that love is a desire to bridge two separate 'I's',¹⁰⁰ criticised the idea of love as merging when it is understood as mutual renunciation¹⁰¹ and when it is based on immediate responses to beauty because such impulses are persuasive but wrong,¹⁰² and warned against being misled by "blue

⁹⁴ Harry Frankfurt argued that disinterested concern characterises the essential nature of loving, and dismissed romantic loving relationships as impure because they include "a number of vividly distracting elements...that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on" (Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). I seek to explore such distracting and confusing elements.

⁹⁵ Gary Cox, *The Existentialist's Guide to Death, the Universe and Nothingness* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012) 114.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 76-77.

⁹⁸ E.g. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 40, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 97.

⁹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 167.

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator", trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 161.

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 228.

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 423-424.

eyes or heaving bosoms”.¹⁰³ Nietzsche suggested marriage and friendship are stronger bases for interpersonal relationships than romance. In his discussions of love, Sartre did not specifically refer to it as ‘romantic’, but his language indicates that he was exploring and criticising the merging model of romantic loving. For example, he described the ideal of love as uniting with, assimilating, or absorbing the beloved.¹⁰⁴ He used *Tristan and Isolde* as an example of passion in love,¹⁰⁵ and referred to such romantic platitudes as being ‘made for each other’ and ‘soul mates’,¹⁰⁶ wanting to be the world for one another and each other’s *raison d’être*,¹⁰⁷ and sacrificing such traditional moralities as being willing to kill or steal for love, as tests of love.¹⁰⁸ Although Sartre did not provide a comprehensive reconstruction of romantic loving in his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, he did suggest alternative understandings. Beauvoir also discusses romantic loving in terms of romantic attractions, desires, musings and daydreams in *The Second Sex* and explores examples of romantic loving in her fictional works. Her chapter in *The Second Sex* entitled ‘The Woman in Love’ is a critique of women’s romantic loving behaviour and the idea of romantic love as a form of merging, and proposed ‘authentic love’ as an alternative.

In the next section, I outline some of the key features of existential thinking before proceeding to identify the questions that it raises with respect to romantic loving as outlined above.

What is existentialism?

Defining ‘existentialism’ is not a simple task because none of the writers associated with the philosophy was writing for an ‘existential school’.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the very idea of being ‘an existentialist’ or ‘achieving authenticity’ is contrary to existential thinking because it implies an endpoint rather than a continuous process and suggested there is a role or external criteria to which one ought to subscribe.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, ‘existential’ was not used as a philosophical category until the mid-twentieth century, which means that some philosophers, notably Stirner, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, were retrospectively described as existentialists.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Ibid., 513.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) 475, 477.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 478.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 483.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 479.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 481.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Gary Cox, *How to Be an Existentialist or How to Get Real, Get a Grip and Stop Making Excuses* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009) 87-88.

¹¹¹ For example, see David Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 2, John Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 39.

Nevertheless, a few central themes characterise existential thinking. Felicity Joseph et al. describe existential themes in terms of “overlapping traits” and John Macquarrie argued that existential thinkers are related like “family resemblance[s]”.¹¹² The existential thinkers were concerned with finding meaning in life.¹¹³ Like the Romantics, they reacted vigorously to the Enlightenment, which emphasised objectivity and detachment at the expense of individual subjective experience.¹¹⁴ According to Robert Spillane, although the existential philosophers agreed with the Romantics on a number of such issues as subjectivity, uniqueness, and irrationality of human existence, existentialism was also Romanticism’s rebellious child because it dismissed Romanticism’s spiritual aspects.¹¹⁵ Instead, existential thinkers emphasised concrete living over abstract pondering.¹¹⁶ These elements contradicted G.W.F. Hegel’s (1770-1831) system building, idealism and belief in the power of reasoning:¹¹⁷ “what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational”.¹¹⁸ Hegel’s system sought to uncover the underlying order to the universe with its emphasis on the whole (the absolute ideal) rather than the individual. Existential thinkers disagreed because they saw that such a system fails to establish personal principles that are worth living for. Yet, Hegel was important to several existential thinkers because of his analysis of self-consciousness and exposition of the master-slave dialectic.¹¹⁹ Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was also particularly influential in the development of existential thinking, most importantly with regard to methodology and intentionality: actions are directed towards objects and meaning is derived through our awareness of them.¹²⁰ Moreover, phenomenology developed by such philosophers as Husserl introduced Sartre to the notion that a philosophy can be created from an apricot cocktail, that is, philosophy does not have to be an intellectual exercise but can be used to understand everyday living.¹²¹

By the 1940s existentialism had become popular due to the influence of Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir

¹¹² Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 3, John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 14.

¹¹³ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Robert Spillane, *An Eye for An I: Living Philosophy* (Melbourne: Michelle Anderson Publishing, 2007) 315.

¹¹⁶ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 3.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Spillane, *An Eye for An I: Living Philosophy*, 317-318, Robert Wicks, “French Existentialism”, *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Reference Online, 2006) 208, 223.

¹¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 14.

¹¹⁹ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 345-346.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹²¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (Deutsch, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962) 112.

and Albert Camus.¹²² They provided a philosophy that was particularly conducive to dealing with the extreme situations and great human suffering that occurred during the Second World War because it accounted for the absurdity of existence and stressed the importance of individual freedom.¹²³ Every day, people faced significant choices and life-or-death consequences. For example, if tortured, will I betray my friends and colleagues, thereby condemning them to certain death?

Existential thinking starts with the fact that we are cast into the world: having not chosen to be born, we arrive without a guidebook.¹²⁴ Yet, once we are conscious, we must choose. Because every action is a choice, we always have choices and so there is no escaping or, as Sartre put it, “no exit” from our freedom: we are “condemned to be free”.¹²⁵ Peter Koestenbaum argued that in terms of loving, freedom means that individuals are free to choose the meaning and importance they attribute to love and sex.¹²⁶ However, there are two aspects to freedom: freedom *to* implies that one has the power to do something, and freedom *from* is what we mean by liberty. To the existential philosophers of the twentieth century, both types of freedom were at the forefront of thought: freedom *from* oppression and freedom *to* choose one’s actions.¹²⁷ Robert Solomon described (romantic) love as freedom “*from* determination by our families, from arranged marriages and fixed community roles” and “freedom *to* form our ties as we choose”,¹²⁸ which was not the case for most people before the rise of romantic loving. However, although lovers are free to choose each other, they are also free to choose to leave and to choose to love others.¹²⁹

Moreover, with freedom comes responsibility for one’s choices.¹³⁰ This is a consequence of the maxim that ‘existence precedes essence’: individuals exist first, start with nothing and are free to create themselves through their choices and actions by “becoming in pursuit of the projects issuing from a reflective concern for his life”.¹³¹ Individuals are free to choose their

¹²² Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., The Continuum Companion to Existentialism, 5.

¹²³ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 327. For example, Beauvoir says “The child’s situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit” (Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1948) 35.)

¹²⁵ Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 186.

¹²⁶ Koestenbaum, Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love, 3.

¹²⁷ The difference between ‘freedom to’ and ‘freedom from’ is outlined particularly in Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Henry Holt, 1994) 35.

¹²⁸ Solomon, Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor, 140.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁰ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., The Continuum Companion to Existentialism, 364.

¹³¹ Ibid., 7, Cooper, Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 3.

relationships and those relationships are a reflection of the people they choose to be.¹³² Responsibility is, according to Peter Koestenbaum, “the luxurious philosophical discovery” that individuals create their own world: individuals are architects, builders, and construction workers of their own lives.¹³³ Loving relationships can distort our understanding of such freedom because lovers sometimes want to define or be defined by the beloved.¹³⁴ However, it is up to individuals to take responsibility for defining their own values.

Awareness of freedom and responsibility creates anxiety (or anguish or angst).¹³⁵ Aspects of romantic attachments can relieve anxieties. For example, Mario Mikulincer et al. argue that loving relationships can act as a “a death-anxiety buffering mechanism”, since the sense of security, protection, comfort, self-esteem and social validation that close relationships provide, may serve as defensive devices with respect to existential anxiety about the threat of mortality.¹³⁶ However, the weight of responsibility that comes with choosing our lives also tends to weigh heavily upon individuals and this is why individuals are tempted to deny their freedom and thus enter into ‘bad faith’ (*mauvaise foi*).¹³⁷ One is in bad faith when one allows one’s role or situation to rule one’s choices and actions.¹³⁸ Further to this, existential philosophies reject essential human nature, personality traits or psychological determinism, which is the view that one is the victim of one’s environment, culture, society, childhood, upbringing, genetics or passions.¹³⁹ When Sartre wrote that even in chains one is free, he meant that even if one is not free from oppression, one is still free to think as one chooses.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, since actions are voluntary, individuals choose to act passionately. What is important is what one does to overcome one’s given situation, that is, to transcend one’s facticity.¹⁴¹

¹³² Koestenbaum, *Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love*, 114.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 116, 162.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹³⁵ Spillane, *An Eye for An I: Living Philosophy*, 318.

¹³⁶ Mario Mikulincer, Victor Florian and Gilad Hirschberger, “The Terror of Death and the Quest for Love: An Existential Perspective on Close Relationships”, *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, eds. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole and Tom Pyszczynski (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 2004) 287-290.

¹³⁷ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 328.

¹³⁸ According to Christian Onof, “The project of bad faith thus involves a self-interpretation that does not recognise the for-itself for what it is”, but rather “in terms of some in-itself being” or “fixed interpretation of itself”. (*ibid.*, 329.)

¹³⁹ See, for example, Spillane, *An Eye for An I: Living Philosophy*, 324, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward, “Existentialism and Poststructuralism: Some Unfashionable Observations”, *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, eds. Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward (London and New York: Continuum, 2011) 265.

¹⁴⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 703.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 134.

While not all existential thinkers refer specifically to authenticity, they all have their own version of the term.¹⁴² Authenticity is deliberately to choose in accordance with what one thinks is genuine and right (for oneself), with external influences admitted by free choice, and to take responsibility for making the choice and its consequences insofar as they can be foreseen.¹⁴³ According to Koestenbaum, it is being awake to situations and taking charge of one's life: "It is the deliberate freedom of your decision which makes the disposition of the dilemma either authentic or inauthentic. The decision is based on subjective free choice and not on some objective, absolute value system".¹⁴⁴ In other words, it is doing things for oneself and being one's own person.¹⁴⁵ An authentic individual is sovereign, unique, self-governing, self-defining, and creates oneself through transcending and striving towards goals. According to John Macquarrie, existential authenticity relies on a form of self-mastery in order to "take possession of oneself" and not to allow oneself to be "moulded by external influences", such as moral codes, ideals, duties, roles or expectations of others.¹⁴⁶

This is not to say, however, that the existentialists view individuals in isolation. Rather, William Sadler argued that "human being is essentially being-with",¹⁴⁷ and defines authentic freedom as being engaged in situations that open possibilities beyond solitary existence and that "were not *there* when the individual saw himself essentially in terms of his own goals".¹⁴⁸ Thus, Sadler credits romantic love, when it is not "smothered in the fog of sentimentalism", as "a very significant existential possibility" because by throwing 'being' into new light, it opens new worlds, new realities, new structures of existence, and new meanings.¹⁴⁹

Koestenbaum also elaborated on the importance of others, particularly romantic lovers, in the existential context. Love is the choice mutually to create and mirror each other, confirming and validating each other's impenetrable realities: "it is the recognition of me by the other that makes clear to me *that* I am and *who* I am. This experience of the interpenetration of two independent freedoms is the integration of loving and being loved in the complex experience of existential love".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴² Ibid., 133.

¹⁴³ Adapted from: Koestenbaum, Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love, 13-14.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁵ Cooper, Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 109.

¹⁴⁶ Macquarrie, Existentialism, 206.

¹⁴⁷ William A. Sadler Jr., Existence and Love: A New Approach in Existential Phenomenology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969) 207.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 166, 173, 185, 210.

¹⁵⁰ Koestenbaum, Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love, 18-19.

A key theme of authentic love is resistance between, but welcoming of, “two consciousnesses [who] are independent, not equitable, not interchangeable, not one, not continuous with each other”.¹⁵¹ However, “This union is a mystery because it is the experience of being two and one at the same time, like a magnet, where positive and negative poles are different but nevertheless form the essential and inseparable ingredients of *one* magnetic field”.¹⁵² Closeness, according to Koestenbaum, is achieved through voluntary surrender, making appropriation, ownership and conquest central themes of existential love.¹⁵³

Although ‘being-with’ is primarily a Heideggerian concept, David Cooper argued that the underlying concept that holds for other existentialists is that “I am in a world in which others must also be present”.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, John Macquarrie wrote that existence is fundamentally social: “Even in the most fundamental ways of his being, the human existent spills over, so to speak; he transcends the bounds of an individual existence and is intelligible only within a broader social whole that we have designated being-with-others”.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, he also pointed out that there is a deep rift among and within existential thinkers’ view of the individual and a communal existence¹⁵⁶ and not all being-with-others is authentic.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, he argued that interpersonal relations are problematic for existential thinkers because they “pay at least lip-service to the truth that man exists as a person only in a community of persons. But in the main they are concerned with the individual whose quest for authentic selfhood focuses on the meaning of personal being”.¹⁵⁸ Also, Robert Solomon argued that:

What is sometimes left out of the existentialist argument about the importance of self-determination – the determination of self even in the face of facts to the contrary – is a full appreciation of the extent to which our conceptions of self – and thus the self itself – are formed in and with other people, through interpersonal discourse and intercourse, in mutual roles and expectations.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵² Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵⁴ Cooper, Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 106.

¹⁵⁵ Macquarrie, Existentialism, 106.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁵⁹ Solomon, Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor, 154.

Existential philosophers acknowledged that narratives were insufficient to describe and understand human existence. Some of them faced the abyss of a world where they saw God as dead, invalid or estranged and where no values could replace the Christian system that was undermined by the empirical rationality of the Enlightenment.¹⁶⁰ As Steven Segal argued, disruptions and uncertainties in previously taken-for-granted conventions of our lives “give rise to experiences of existential anxiety, the sort of anxiety that is experienced when our way of life is no longer experienced as supporting us and we have no new conventions to replace the outdated ones”.¹⁶¹ This vacuum left a nihilistic desert for twentieth century individuals to negotiate.

Yet, this is only the beginning of the story. In an effort to overcome nihilism and anxiety, existential philosophers considered individuals responsible for creating their own meaning. Values must be personally and passionately chosen and created through engagement and concrete action.¹⁶² However, each philosopher’s approach was different. It shall be seen that Stirner laughed at the abyss and, refusing to leap across it, leapt into it; to overcome the anxiety of the abyss, Kierkegaard leapt into duty and faith; Nietzsche attempted to construct a new morality and embraced the aristocratic ideal of the *Übermensch*; pessimistic about the conflictual nature of relationships, Sartre clambered out of the abyss into Marxism; and Beauvoir leapt into a form of humanism, seeking harmonious relationships based on friendship.

‘The leap’ is an existential term that originated with Kierkegaard as a ‘leap of faith’. Although Kierkegaard never actually used the expression ‘leap of faith’, he did refer to something like a leap *to* faith.¹⁶³ The leap is the recognition that there is uncertainty and lack of rationale to choose with confidence about the potential outcomes. It is a commitment to oneself: a bold and risky metamorphosis of choosing the life one wants to lead, or for our purposes, the loving relationship one wants. It is beyond the realms of feelings and reasoning, that is, it is not based only on satisfying sexual impulses, nor is it only based on whether the relationship is efficient, beneficial or socially acceptable; rather, it is based on willing.¹⁶⁴ The existential

¹⁶⁰ According to Stirner, “Man has killed God” (Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, trans. Steven T. Byington, ed. James J. Martin (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005) 154.); in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard suggests that God had been estranged by organised religion; Nietzsche declared “God is dead!” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 109, 120, 199.); and Beauvoir and Sartre were radical atheists.

¹⁶¹ Steven Segal, “The Yearning for Philosophy Today: Its Transformational and Therapeutic Value”, *The Capa Quarterly* (February 2012): 8.

¹⁶² Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 343-344.

¹⁶³ Alastair McKinnon, “Kierkegaard and the ‘Leap of Faith’”, *Kierkegaardiana* 16 (1993): 117.

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Hodgkinson, *The philosophy of leadership* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 38.

leap to a faith of love is the decisive declaration that ‘I choose you’, even if others do not approve, and even if the relationship is not physically consummated. A leap is not, however, a commitment to the beloved. As Robert Solomon argued, love is not a commitment,¹⁶⁵ but rather, it is “a decision to foster a set of conditions conducive to love”.¹⁶⁶ However, romantic love can be understood within the context of commitment to the life one chooses. According to Peter Koestenbaum, “A responsible individual creates a world for himself to which he can be devoted in good conscience. He makes only those commitments which are in harmony with the larger designs he has for his life”.¹⁶⁷

The aim of the above outline is to orient us in our understanding of the existential context of the philosophers to be addressed. However, each of the philosophers considered in this study emphasised different aspects of the above themes of both romantic loving and existential concepts, and these themes will be discussed further within the chapters devoted to the individual philosophers.

Research questions

Five existential philosophers will be considered in light of their views about romantic loving. This thesis addresses the following questions:

1. What were the existential philosopher’s views of romantic loving?
2. What are the common themes evident through this examination of romantic loving from an existential perspective?
3. Do existential philosophies pose problems for the traditional understanding of romantic loving?
4. Do existential philosophies offer solutions to overcome problems in the traditional understanding of romantic loving?

There are five key points for discussion that will allow us to unpack the key themes of, problems with, and possible solutions to, romantic loving from an existential perspective. First, romantic loving involves the idea of creating a union and becoming a ‘we’ instead of two ‘I’s. Yet, the idea of lovers blurring the boundaries between them brings into question the

¹⁶⁵ Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, xxxiii.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 223. Robert Solomon argues that such conditions include to allow love to flourish, to develop shared interests, in which decisions are not based on self-interest and self-identity no longer relies on the ideal of independence.

¹⁶⁷ Koestenbaum, *Existential Sexuality: Choosing to Love*, 164.

independent nature of individuals. Moreover, if merging is impossible, then how well can lovers know each other and how much can they know about themselves through each other? Not all mirrors provide accurate reflections.

Second, many people expect that romantic loving relationships will relieve anxieties because they seem to create meaning in lovers' lives, or at least provide a foundation on which everything else takes on new meaning. Since, existentially, meaning must be created in life, it would seem to make sense that in the absence of anything else, lovers become each other's *raison d'être*. However, founding meaning in one's life on a relationship that is not expected to last forever makes it inherently precarious. The existential question is: can romantic loving validly relieve anxiety by creating meaning in life, and if so, to what extent?

Third, to what extent does choice play a role in romantic loving? Lovers choose who to develop a relationship with and how much time and effort they invest in it. However, some elements are uncontrollable, in particular finding the 'right person' at the 'right time' who chooses to reciprocate. If, existentially, we are condemned to choose, how can we reconcile this with the passionate elements of loving? Moreover, is it unromantic to suggest that romantic loving can be chosen, since that means everyone is a potential lover?

Fourth, we have seen that loving relationships support lovers' freedom by opening up possibilities that did not exist without the other. For example, loving relationships offer individuals different perspectives, encouragement, confidence, support and advice. However, lovers are not free to do whatever they like without repercussion. Lovers expect to be taken into account or consulted when the other makes decisions. The key issues are whether it is possible to love without restricting freedom and whether it is existentially valid to choose to restrict one's freedom.

Fifth, to what extent can individuals be authentic within a romantic loving relationship? Since we create our essence, identity is not fixed and is constructed in light of loving relationships. The desire to be with the other, avoiding disappointment, supporting well-being and happiness, means that concessions, sacrifices and negotiations are commonplace. For example, lovers modify goals, shift priorities and forego possibilities for the sake of each other. However, if lovers must consider each other when making decisions, it would appear that the ability to make authentic choices is contradicted. Denying or evading one's freedom – in this case by appeal to another person – is bad faith.

An exploration of these issues through the works of five existential philosophers will assist in exploring the central thesis by understanding the ways in which our ideas about romantic loving shape our understanding of our freedom or power to act by calling into question lovers' desire for independence, the choices they make, how they act authentically, and how they find meaning through romantic loving.

Methodology

This thesis is based on a textual analysis of five existential philosophers who have written about romantic loving. I aim to explore romantic loving by doubting accepted beliefs, describing and exploring an area that often is not understood or misunderstood, and offering an understanding, interpretation and analysis of the existential philosophers' solutions to the problems of romantic loving. With respect to structural style, I make claims which I attempt to justify.

This thesis proceeds chronologically and phenomenologically by linking what we know about each philosopher's experience with the philosophy that each develops. Thus, the concepts are contextually embedded, which is important because existential philosophies are concerned with everyday living. However, although existentialism is a lived philosophy, it cannot be assumed that all the philosophers always lived by the principles they wrote about. For example, Sartre wrote that he was never able to be authentic: "I haven't felt Nausea, I'm not authentic, I have halted on the threshold of the promised lands. But at least I point the way to them and others can go there. I'm a guide, that's my role".¹⁶⁸

In light of this, a secondary theme that is pursued is: to what extent are their philosophies consistent with their lived experiences, as the philosophers themselves describe and reflect on them? Such a pursuit could be criticised as presenting an *ad hominem* argument. However, according to Béla Szabados, it can be dangerous to ignore the personal elements of philosophy,¹⁶⁹ since "philosophy is essentially a personal endeavour in truth".¹⁷⁰ Szabados was primarily referring to Wittgenstein, but the suggestion is that facets of philosophers'

¹⁶⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London & New York: Verso, 1984) 62.

¹⁶⁹ Béla Szabados, "Autobiography and Philosophy: Variations on a Theme of Wittgenstein", *Metaphilosophy* 26.1&2 (1995): 79.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

personalities are relevant to their philosophies.¹⁷¹ Ray Monk also argued that although “biography is irrelevant to the assessment of a greatness of a work”, it is relevant to understanding a person’s thinking because it considers “the tone of voice in which a writer expresses himself or herself and by accumulating personal facts that will allow us to see what is said in a different light.”¹⁷² Moreover, Monk suggested that by effacing the connections and differences between what people say and do is to miss something, or to use Wittgenstein’s words, to suffer from “aspect blindness”.¹⁷³

Further to these views, since existential thinkers emphasised passionate engagement and concrete living, the way they experienced romantic loving is central to their philosophies. Moreover, some of the philosophers invite us to consider the personal. Simone de Beauvoir wrote a four-volume autobiography, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote an autobiography about his childhood, and many of Beauvoir’s, Sartre’s and Kierkegaard’s personal journals and letters were published. In these writings, they reflect on both their lives and philosophical concepts, even if only the seeds of those concepts.¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche went so far as to suggest that all philosophy is autobiographical. For example, in *Human, All Too Human*, he wrote, “No matter how far a man may extend himself with his knowledge, no matter how objectively he may come to view himself, in the end it can yield to him nothing but his own biography”.¹⁷⁵ And in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he said:

It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; moreover, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy have every time constituted the real germ of life out of which the entire plant has grown. To explain how a philosopher’s most remote metaphysical assertions have actually been arrived at, it is always well (and wise) to ask oneself first: what morality does this (does *he* -) aim at? ...In the philosopher...there is nothing whatever impersonal.¹⁷⁶

For this part of the investigation, I employ a method similar to Max van Manen’s *Researching*

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ray Monk, “Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea”, *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 3-4.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁴ Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb, eds., *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008) 3.

¹⁷⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 182.

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 37-38.

Lived Experience. Thus, I consider the experience of loving existentially as the philosophers concretely lived, described and reflected on it through their writing, rather than only as they conceptualised it.¹⁷⁷ I have chosen this approach as a guide because it provides a means for practical reflection on the experience of romantic loving, rather than abstract philosophical discourse.

Thesis structure

The first five chapters of this thesis are devoted to answering the first research question: What were the five existential philosophers' views of romantic loving?

Chapter 1 reviews the philosophy of Max Stirner, who sets the existential stage in his defence of individuals as creative and self-governing. For Stirner, life is to be squandered, lovers are to be enjoyed and the only constraint is one's power. One loves oneself being in love and the beloved acts as an ignition for the experience. Stirner specifically criticised 'romantic love' for being sacred, dependent, bound by duty and obligation and thus possessedness.¹⁷⁸ His preferred view of loving is a union formed not only for passionate enjoyment, but also in order to extend one's power in the world. Such unions do not, however, involve any illusions or metaphors about blurring the boundaries between two lovers, as Plato describes in *Symposium*. I argue that Stirner was a strong advocate for conceiving of loving as a choice and provided an account of maintaining *Eigenheit*¹⁷⁹ within a loving relationship, which need not totally decimate all elements of romantic loving.

Chapter 2 discusses the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, a Christian philosopher who saw romantic loving as part of an immature and anxiety-ridden 'aesthetic' lifestyle. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard criticised romantic love for being weak, since it depends on beauty and sensuality, and thus is immediate and lacks reflection.¹⁸⁰ Instead, Kierkegaard suggested that by embracing a duty to one's lover through marriage, and ultimately a duty to God to love our neighbours, individuals could live more fully and meaningfully. To this end, he compared such aesthetes as Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and 'Johannes the Seducer' – men interested in passionate love and with no concern for enduring relationships¹⁸¹ – with Judge William, an

¹⁷⁷ Max van Manen, *Researching lived experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990) 30-31.

¹⁷⁸ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 292-293.

¹⁷⁹ Translated as 'ownness' in the English translation, but also akin to 'self-ownership' (ibid., 155.)

¹⁸⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1992) 393.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 100.

ethicist, who advocates marriage based on commitment in the face of fading passion.¹⁸² I explore the conditions under which romantic loving can be conceived as an existential stance and although the duty to love supports the nature of loving as a choice, it raises the question: is there anything left of romantic loving in the ethical and religious modes?

Chapter 3 investigates the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw romantic loving as a frivolous power game that distracts attention from pursuit of the ideal of the *Übermensch*. However, Nietzsche appreciated that worthwhile relationships open up possibilities for individuals by pushing them to achieve more than they could have alone, and such relations as friendship and marriage are more suitable than romantic love for doing so. Nevertheless, I argue that by drawing on his understanding of friendship it is possible to reconcile his ideals of aristocratic anarchism and romantic loving.

Chapter 4 explores Jean-Paul Sartre's view that romantic loving relationships are inherently frustrating because they are sado-masochistic encounters that ultimately end in bad faith. While his dominant view was that loving is a choice, it was not his final word. He emphasised the limiting aspects of relationships because love is an attempt to capture the beloved's freedom. I show that Sartre leaves us with an instrumental view of romantic loving that is an unreliable strategy for becoming one's own foundation, and his attempts to provide an alternative conception are inconclusive.

Chapter 5 considers the work of Simone de Beauvoir. She differs from her predecessors in her emphasis on situations which limit freedom. In particular, Beauvoir explored the difficulties in reconciling loving and authenticity because lovers tend to have differing priorities. Moreover, she highlighted that existential anxiety cannot be relieved through positing a lover as one's *raison d'être*. However, I demonstrate that Beauvoir was ambiguous as to the viability of maintaining a romantic loving relationship and authenticity unless lovers' priorities coincide with each other.

Chapter 6 explores whether the research questions can be answered satisfactorily by identifying existential problems of romantic loving and associated solutions, highlighting common themes and differences.

¹⁸² Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 50, Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 466.

Selection of five existential philosophers

While questions may be raised as to whether all of the five thinkers I have selected can be officially classified as ‘existentialists,’ I have included them because they contributed significantly to the development of existential ideas. This is why I discuss loving existentially (rather than the philosophy of *existentialists*)¹⁸³ and why I used the following two selection criteria for inclusion in this thesis: they develop existential themes and they address romantic loving.

Many other philosophers are often associated with the existential school, but they are not included in this study because they have not considered romantic loving in sufficient detail. For example, while Martin Heidegger addressed the notion of care, he did not address romantic loving in any depth. Albert Camus did not explicitly address romantic loving and claimed he was neither an existentialist nor a philosopher.¹⁸⁴ Karl Jaspers also rejected the label of existentialist¹⁸⁵ and Walter Kaufmann argued he is closer to Kant than to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, with whom he is often associated.¹⁸⁶ While Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work does cover existential themes, he is more often considered a phenomenologist.¹⁸⁷ Although Jack Reynolds includes Merleau-Ponty in *Understanding Existentialism*, he qualifies this by saying that “he never propounded quite the same extreme accounts of death, freedom, anguished responsibility and conflictual relations with others for which existentialism became both famous and notorious” and that he reduced existentialism to phenomenology.¹⁸⁸

Such religious existential philosophers as Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Lévinas and Martin Buber have been excluded because this thesis is concerned with the atheistic development of existential thinking. Søren Kierkegaard is the exception because of his pivotal role in

¹⁸³ Consistent with David Cooper, I am conducting this study on the basis that, “the important thing is not the card-carrying credentials of this or that writer, but his contribution to the development of that structure” (Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 10.)

¹⁸⁴ In an interview in 1945, Camus said: “No, I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked”. Quoted in Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy, ed. Philip Thody (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) 345.

¹⁸⁵ Alan G. Padgett and Steve Wilkens, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements*, vol. 3: Journey to Postmodernity in the 20th Century (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2009) 83.

¹⁸⁶ Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 285.

¹⁸⁷ For example, Christine Daigle says Merleau-Ponty leant towards the phenomenological side of the fence away from existentialism (Christine Daigle, ed., *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006) 4.)

¹⁸⁸ Jack Reynolds, *Understanding Existentialism* (Chesham, Bucks: Acumen, 2006) 110.

existential thinking; he is often referred to as ‘the father of existentialism’,¹⁸⁹ or the first existentialist thinker.¹⁹⁰

One of the most recent seminal texts about existentialism includes Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre and Beauvoir as four key existentialists.¹⁹¹ However, Nietzsche is a potentially contentious inclusion because his vitalistic idea of the will to power as a determining motivational force conflicts with the existential notion of existence preceding essence. Notwithstanding this caveat, it is difficult to ignore similarities between the ideas of Nietzsche and such existential ideas as authenticity. For example, Felicity Joseph et al. consider Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to be the two “forefathers” or “precursors” of existentialism.¹⁹² Gary Cox stated that “Nietzsche is an existentialist, although he has not often been described as one. Certainly, he helped to set the agenda for what later became known as existentialism”.¹⁹³ Christine Daigle argued that Nietzsche played “a very important role” in the development of existential thinking.¹⁹⁴ David Cooper contended that Nietzsche “tackles most of the philosophical questions which occupy later existentialists”.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, his “classical sense of responsibility” and “existential resolve” is enough for Robert Solomon to align Nietzsche with existential philosophies.¹⁹⁶ Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche is an existential thinker, if not an existentialist.

Although Sartre reluctantly accepted the ‘existential’ label, if he is not an existentialist, no one is.¹⁹⁷ Sartre coined many of the mantras for which existentialism is famous: ‘existence precedes essence’, we are ‘condemned to be free’ and ‘hell is other people’. However, only Sartre’s early works can be considered existential because later he turned towards Marxism and was never able to reconcile the two philosophies.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ E.g. Jon Stewart, “Kierkegaard as a Forerunner of Existentialism and Poststructuralism”, Kierkegaard's International Reception: Northern and Western Europe, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 431, C. Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard on faith and the self: collected essays (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006) 311.

¹⁹⁰ Daigle, ed., Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics, 5, Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., The Continuum Companion to Existentialism, 5.

¹⁹¹ The fifth is Martin Heidegger, who has not been included for reasons mentioned above. See Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., The Continuum Companion to Existentialism, 282.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 5, 290.

¹⁹³ Gary Cox, The Sartre Dictionary (London and New York: Continuum, 2008) 146.

¹⁹⁴ Daigle, ed., Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics, 5.

¹⁹⁵ Cooper, Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 9.

¹⁹⁶ Robert C. Solomon, Living with Nietzsche (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 206-207.

¹⁹⁷ Cooper, Existentialism: A Reconstruction, 6.

¹⁹⁸ John Gerassi, Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009) 44.

Like Sartre, Beauvoir was not only initially reluctant to accept the existential label, but also rejected the suggestion that she was a philosopher at all.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, she wrote about existential themes in her fictional and philosophical works and today she is not only considered to be a novelist, but also a significant contributor to existential thinking.²⁰⁰

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are a more usual introduction to existentialism but I propose that Max Stirner provided an alternative and much-neglected route, one that anticipated many existential ideas, especially the idea of individuals as creative nothingnesses. John Carroll pointed out that:

Existentialism, whose primary philosophical concern has been with questions of *being*, of *das Wesen* or *l'être*, and in particular with the axiom that existence precedes essence, received its first well-developed modern statement in 1844.²⁰¹ Heidegger and Sartre, like Nietzsche, neglect the man [Stirner] who, on a number of key issues, is their most significant precursor.²⁰²

While more thinkers could have been included in a broader examination, I decided to consider those whose work contributes significantly to my investigation.

Extant literature

Existentialism is often seen as overly negative. For example, John Macquarrie called existentialism deeply pessimistic and “excessively negative”,²⁰³ and Steven Earnshaw described it as self-centred and “anti-social”.²⁰⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that scholars looking to explore existentialism and love, such as William Sadler, look to such religious existential thinkers as Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber for answers. However, I argue that the group of five existential thinkers I have selected provide a meaningful framework through which to analyse the problems of romantic loving.

¹⁹⁹ Beauvoir said, “Sartre is a philosopher, and I am not, and I have never really wanted to be a philosopher” (Margaret A. Simons, Jessica Benjamin and Simone de Beauvoir, “Simone de Beauvoir: An Interview”, *Feminist Studies* 5.2 (1979): 338.)

²⁰⁰ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 310-311.

²⁰¹ He was referring to Stirner’s *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*

²⁰² Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 39.

²⁰³ Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 275, 282.

²⁰⁴ Steven Earnshaw, *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006) 169.

This study differs from the extant literature because it seeks to offer a critique of our modern understandings of romantic loving through an exclusively existential lens, and focuses this lens on the possible sources of dissatisfaction, particularly the sacrifices and compromises it calls us to make. Irving Singer, who wrote *The Philosophy of Love* (2009), *The Pursuit of Love* (1994) and the trilogy *The Nature of Love* (1984-1987), has incorporated analyses of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, and, to a lesser extent, Beauvoir, within a broad history of the philosophy of romantic loving from Plato through to recent scientific approaches. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins have also written widely in this space, for example, *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love* (Solomon and Higgins, 1991), *Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor* (Solomon, 1990), and *The Passions* (Solomon, 1983). Their analysis also incorporates existential ideas (building particularly on Sartre's ideas in Solomon's *Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor*), within a broader history of love. I look to expand on Solomon's description of romantic loving as freedom from external determinants of relationships and freedom to choose ties.²⁰⁵

William Sadler's *Existence and Love* (1969) explores an existential view of love. It is primarily a phenomenological analysis drawing on Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and others, but did not consult the philosophers in my study (except Kierkegaard) because he dismissed secular existentialism. He proposed that denying "the mysterious presence of a Thou" neglects that love expands freedom, leaves individuals menaced by anxiety, and thus, "To be fallen into a totally secularized world is not to be clear-eyed and objective".²⁰⁶ I intend to show that secular views do not preclude a 'clear-eyed' understanding of romantic love, and do not deny the possibility that love can 'expand freedom'. I aim to shift the focus from a largely spiritual view to one that also appreciates secular insights.

Peter Koestenbaum's *Existential Sexuality* (1974) is also a phenomenological-existential analysis that deals with love as an introduction to questions of sex and family. However, it is less a philosophical exploration and more a therapeutic self-help manual that uses case studies and questionnaires for self-evaluation. It does not consider what makes love specifically romantic, nor does it examine individual philosophers' views about romantic loving that form

²⁰⁵ See p.16.

²⁰⁶ Sadler Jr., *Existence and Love: A New Approach in Existential Phenomenology*, 312.

the root of their assumptions.²⁰⁷ Other literature in this realm is more focused in its scope, addressing individual philosophers, and it is to such works I now turn.

Max Stirner

Stirner's only major work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*Der Einzige*)²⁰⁸ burst onto the Berlin philosophical scene. The book caused such outrage that the censors initially banned it. However, about a week later, they announced that it was "too absurd to be dangerous" and one of the most radical books ever written was released.²⁰⁹ *Der Einzige* immediately became a notorious work, eliciting reactions from polar extremes. It drew praise from Friedrich Engels, who initially wrote that it captured "the essence of present society and present man".²¹⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, a fellow Young Hegelian, said in a letter that Stirner was "the most talented and most natural writer I know" and of *Der Einzige* that it was "highly intelligent and ingenious".²¹¹ William Brazill praised the book as "always inspired, always panting",²¹² R.W.K. Paterson said that *Der Einzige* is written with such "glittering literary style" that it is "compulsively readable",²¹³ and Max Welsh referred to it as an "extraordinary masterpiece".²¹⁴ James Huneker commended Stirner for being "refreshing" and "never a hypocrite".²¹⁵ James Martin in his introduction to *The Ego and His Own* suggested that no one comes close to Stirner in terms of consistency and logic of individualism.²¹⁶ Eduard von Hartmann recommended that *Der Einzige* is "a book that nobody interested in practical philosophy should leave unread".²¹⁷ John Carroll noted that it is Stirner's psychological method that gives his thinking "freshness and trenchancy",²¹⁸ as relevant today as it was in the 1800s. However, Feuerbach also criticised Stirner's egoism as eccentric, one-sided, and

²⁰⁷ Peter Koestenbaum assumes general existential principles derived in an earlier more general work: Peter Koestenbaum, *The vitality of death : essays in existential psychology and philosophy* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1971).

²⁰⁸ '*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*' means *The Unique One and his Property* but has been poorly translated into English as '*The Ego and His Own*'.

²⁰⁹ John Henry Mackay, *Max Stirner: His Life and His Work*, trans. Hubert Kennedy, From the 3rd German ed. (Concord, California: Peremptory Publications, 2005) 127.

²¹⁰ Lawrence Stepelevich, "The Revival of Max Stirner", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35.2 (1974): 323-324.

²¹¹ Lawrence Stepelevich, "Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39.3 (1978): 455.

²¹² William J. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 215.

²¹³ R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (New York: For University of Hull by Oxford University Press, 1971) 64.

²¹⁴ John Welsh, *Max Stirner's dialectical egoism: a new interpretation* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2010) 3.

²¹⁵ James Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909) 358-359.

²¹⁶ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, xiii.

²¹⁷ Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, New ed., vol. III (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1931) 97.

²¹⁸ Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 16.

incorrect.²¹⁹ Huneker condemned *Der Einzige* for being “vermicular”, “confused”, and repetitive.²²⁰ George Santayana called it a “rather tiresome protest against the folly of...spooks”.²²¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels soon retaliated with a long section in *The German Ideology* that was longer than *Der Einzige* itself.²²²

For the purposes of this study, the key issue with respect to Stirner’s philosophy of romantic loving is whether his understanding of forming unions with other individuals is consistent with his philosophy. If it is inconsistent, then romantic loving is impossible as Stirner sees it. John Carroll argued that the union is a “half-hearted...appendage to his theory”.²²³ Robert Paterson asked, “Why should a conscious egoist, prudently intent upon maximising his own interests, select for his associates *other conscious egoists*?”²²⁴ Rather, one would expect a conscious egoist to give “his fellow vampires a very wide berth, as being by far too devious and knowledgeable for his machiavellian purposes”.²²⁵ He suggested that Stirner’s pragmatic and utilitarian view of an egoistic loving relationship is in the short-term rewarding, but temporary and “clearly does not involve the egoist in anything resembling deep and formative relationships to which he personally commits himself as a true friend or lover”.²²⁶ Although John Welsh saw Stirner’s union as consistent with his philosophy, he also argued that ultimately, the war against all is an issue that Stirner fails to move beyond. However, I argue that in Stirner’s philosophy, there are latent themes of compromise and reciprocity that not only support the union, but also open up a window – however small – for romantic loving.

Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard criticised Mozart’s Don Giovanni as a man who dwells at the lowest rung of development, and yet, some scholars argue, Kierkegaard did not dismiss Don Giovanni’s lifestyle altogether. For example, Irving Singer suggested that, in Don Giovanni’s passion, Mozart highly valued “freedom to express one’s natural playfulness, to take one’s pleasure as one wishes, to sport with sounds and words and deeds and people, and in general to enjoy the

²¹⁹ Stepelevich, “Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach”: 455.

²²⁰ Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen*, 371.

²²¹ George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York, N.Y.: Haskell House, 1971) 84.

²²² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. S. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965) 123-508.

²²³ Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 80.

²²⁴ Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 270.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., 254.

sensuous aggressiveness of an emancipated male”.²²⁷ Similarly, James Collins wrote: “A Don Juan is there to remind us that no conception of human existence is adequate, which cannot find a distinctive place for sensuous experience and the full play of the passions”.²²⁸

However, Kierkegaard portrayed another aesthete, Johannes the Seducer, as also being immature, albeit not to the same extent as Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Bradley R. Dewey is one scholar who challenges Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Johannes as immature. Dewey points out, in my view correctly, that Johannes’ life is “serious business”, and “such a demanding lifestyle would seem to require a high level of selfhood – involving constant reassessment and constant recommitment”.²²⁹ This constant recommitment is demonstrated by his control of his behaviour and emotions within a life that is creative, fascinating, dramatic, challenging, engaged and socially rebellious.²³⁰ Moreover, Dewey asked, “Since for Kierkegaard there is no objective certainty about the truth or falsity of *any* lifestyle (aesthetic, ethical, or religious), why can’t we speak of Johannes’s ‘leap of faith’ into the aesthetic?”²³¹

Furthermore, the problem with romantic loving at Kierkegaard’s highest level – the religious – is that romantic love is subsumed into following God’s commandment to ‘love thy neighbour’. Theodor W. Adorno, one of Kierkegaard’s most vehement critics, argued that “Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love remains totally abstract” because a neighbour represents the individual, who is reduced to a general other, or the “universal human”.²³² M. Jamie Ferreira also pointed out that treating neighbours as equals is not enough to overcome Hegelian abstraction. Individuals need to be appreciated for their differences: “what we need is something to guarantee that these equal individuals are also recognised in their distinctiveness, that their concrete differences are recognized to be morally relevant”.²³³ Irving Singer criticised Kierkegaard’s solution to the problems of romantic love, a revitalised version of Protestant faith, for being “too remote from human experience to be convincing”.²³⁴ Through an analysis of both Mozart’s Don Giovanni and Johannes the

²²⁷ Irving Singer, Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in Their Operas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) 69.

²²⁸ James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Henry Regency Co., 1953) 52.

²²⁹ Bradley R. Dewey, “Seven Seducers: A Typology of Interpretations of the Aesthetic Stage in Kierkegaard’s ‘The Seducer’s Diary’”, Either/Or I, ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995) 168.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

²³² T.W. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love”, Studies in Philosophy and Social Science 8 (1940): 418-419.

²³³ M. Jamie Ferreira, “Equality, impartiality, and moral blindness in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*”, Journal of Religious Ethics 25.1 (1997): 69.

²³⁴ Singer, The Nature of Love: The Modern World, 48.

Seducer, I argue for a clarification of Kierkegaard's aesthetic lifestyle, revealing existential possibilities for romantic loving within it.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Many scholars have criticised Nietzsche's views of love as misogynistic and pessimistic. For example, Irving Singer accused Nietzsche of failing to overcome Schopenhauer's pessimism about sexual love: "For he never recognizes the joy and satisfying sweetness which belongs to the natural condition of sexuality as much as the bitterness and hatred that can result from a conflict of wills".²³⁵ Francis Nesbitt Oppel pointed out that "Nietzsche's works have often been considered misogynistic, for when they notice women at all, they patronize and belittle her, assign her to the bedroom and nursery, and apparently advocate taking the whip to her when they get out of line".²³⁶ Kathleen Higgins also said that "I think that Nietzsche was a sexist in the sense that he had negative attitudes toward woman and that these had psychological repercussions in his behavior and his image of them. I also believe that some of Nietzsche's published remarks about women reflect these attitudes".²³⁷

For example, Nietzsche proposed that the solution to women's problems is pregnancy.²³⁸ Carol Diethe takes his comments to imply that women are "completely defined by the reproductive urge" and "whose sole instinct is to crave for children".²³⁹ Always craving for sex, women are predators or "vamp-like *femmes fatales*" who seduce men for impregnation.²⁴⁰ With respect to Nietzsche's advocacy for married men to take concubines,²⁴¹ she proposed that the reason behind this was that contraception was not widespread, so sex meant reproduction: "There is thus a very blurred demarcation line between the sexuality of Eve, which invited disapproval, and the maternal instincts of the Madonna, which drew praise".²⁴² Nietzsche also wrote that one ought to take a whip when visiting women,²⁴³ which has created much speculation about possible misogyny. Francis Nesbitt Oppel said "Nothing

²³⁵ Ibid., 85-86.

²³⁶ Frances Nesbitt Oppel, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005) 1.

²³⁷ Kathleen Higgins, "The Whip Recalled", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 12 (1996): 2.

²³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1969) 91.

²³⁹ Carol Diethe, "Nietzsche and the Woman Question", *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 867.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 865, 867.

²⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 157.

²⁴² Diethe, "Nietzsche and the Woman Question": 866.

²⁴³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 93.

Nietzsche can say will get him out of the mess the whip continues to get him into with readers”.²⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s writings are not always considered to be misogynistic. Kathleen Higgins wrote that “popular opinion is content with so little of Nietzsche's writing, and...philosophical interpretation as currently practiced is unlikely to give Nietzsche a fair reading”.²⁴⁵ Solomon and Higgins suggest that the whip is symbolic of power struggles between the sexes, in which “the male is by no means assured of winning”.²⁴⁶ Robert Ackermann suggested the whip could be to help create disciplinary or “motivating distance” between men and women to enable fantasy about the feminine and inspire creativity.²⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida also supports this interpretation: because love is a power struggle, keeping one’s distance from a woman is important to avoid falling under her fascinating “beguiling song of enchantment” but still to “seduce without being seduced”.²⁴⁸

With respect to Nietzsche’s suggestions about how to overcome the problems of romantic loving, Irving Singer said that Nietzsche was vague.²⁴⁹ Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre argued that Nietzsche’s solutions were frivolous, but his greatness lies “in his relentlessly serious pursuit of the problem”.²⁵⁰ However, I argue that, through untangling Nietzsche’s views about men, women, love and friendship, and building upon the metaphorical interpretations of his provocations about the dynamics between the sexes, he did make room for the possibility of romantic loving and provided insightful – and even optimistic – advice about how to (and how not to) go about it.

Jean-Paul Sartre

In a conversation with Beauvoir, Sartre said that he did not understand why people said of him (as they did of Stendhal) that “he should not be read between seventeen and eighteen because he takes young people’s freshness away, gives them gloomy ideas, and disgusts them

²⁴⁴ Oppel, Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman, 118.

²⁴⁵ Higgins, “The Whip Recalled”: 1.

²⁴⁶ Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, What Nietzsche Really Said (New York: Schocken Books, 2000) 7-8.

²⁴⁷ Robert John Ackermann, Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) 124, 129.

²⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 49.

²⁴⁹ Singer, The Nature of Love: The Modern World, 94.

²⁵⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 2 ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985) 114.

with life”.²⁵¹ Indeed, Leslie Forster Stevenson and David L. Haberman pointed out that Sartre’s formulation of the human condition is determined because “he represents human life as a perpetual striving for the logically impossible” in that there is an insurmountable abyss between subject and object so relationships are doomed to conflict and that we are always striving to fill the nothingness in our lives, to fill the lack of oneself as an in-itself-for-itself.²⁵² According to Alan Soble, “A disturbing feature of Sartre’s argument is his eagerness to demonstrate the failure and futility of all concrete relations between human beings”.²⁵³ David West referred to Sartre’s portrayal of human relations as “melodramatic pessimism”.²⁵⁴ Martin Dillon argued that Sartre “is committed to an abject pessimism: there is no possible erotic interaction that is not founded on the dialectic of a sado-masochistic struggle for domination”.²⁵⁵ Linda Bell suggested that Sartre’s views on relationships are dismal and bleak since “the authentic individual may seem doomed to solitude and sequestration from others even though that individual may join forces on a social level”.²⁵⁶ Nicola Abbagnano highlighted Sartre as pivotal to notions of negative existentialism.²⁵⁷ For Irving Singer, Sartre’s ideas about merging are ambiguous, and merging is not “definitive of love”.²⁵⁸ He argued that Sartre reduced self-love to selfishness and narcissism because it is “nothing but the desire to *be* loved” and this disqualifies love because it means one disregards “the rights and welfare of others”.²⁵⁹ Since love is based on the benefits and utility that one derives from the beloved, Sartre provided “no viable way of escaping selfishness that is inconsistent with love”.²⁶⁰ Moreover, the tension that the idea of merging creates casts doubts on its value and, in a pessimistic view inspired by Schopenhauer, raises suspicion that romantic love is deceptive and undesirable, and will possibly even “degenerate into a mutual nightmare”.²⁶¹ Thus, according to Singer, the ideal of merging that Sartre addressed is a distortion and falsification.²⁶² Solomon criticised Sartre for mistaking the yearning in love to be for an absolute union,²⁶³ and for not being clear as to whether there is more to love relationships

²⁵¹ Simone de Beauvoir, Adieux: A farewell to Sartre, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: André Deutsch and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984) 194.

²⁵² Leslie Forster Stevenson and David L Haberman, Ten theories of human nature, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 192.

²⁵³ Alan Soble, Sex from Plato to Paglia: a philosophical encyclopedia (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006) 298.

²⁵⁴ David West, Reason and Sexuality in Western Thought (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005) 159.

²⁵⁵ Dillon, Beyond Romance, 102.

²⁵⁶ Linda A. Bell, Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989) 18, 21.

²⁵⁷ Nicola Abbagnano, Critical Existentialism, trans. Nino Langiulli (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969) 44.

²⁵⁸ Singer, Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up, 90.

²⁵⁹ Singer, The Pursuit of Love, 76-77.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 160.

²⁶² Singer, Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up, 18.

²⁶³ Solomon, Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor, 112.

than “a life-and-death struggle”.²⁶⁴ He also claimed that Sartre, among others, focused too much on the creation of personal identity through “one’s thoughts and actions” and not enough “through and with other people”.²⁶⁵

Many scholars have attempted to negate Sartre’s conclusions in *Being and Nothingness* regarding the failure of love by identifying a platform on which to identify with others. Singer, for example, suggested that sometimes people do eliminate hostility and achieve harmony through sexual intimacy and asked: “Does Sartre really want to deny that?”²⁶⁶ Some argue that Sartre was wrong because: “objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive”;²⁶⁷ one can choose whether to become an object or make others objects;²⁶⁸ a “look of love” can surpass the subject-object divide if it is not harsh or accusing;²⁶⁹ although we cannot experience another’s consciousness, we can still have access to it through unity or a sense of oneness based on language or views,²⁷⁰ interdependence,²⁷¹ gender²⁷² or such general identities as similar consciousnesses and languages.²⁷³ Others look to Sartre’s later writing for means of overcoming the problems of love. Thomas Flynn proposed that in *Notebooks for an Ethics* we see Sartre’s views of love as “respecting the other freedom as noninstrumental or as coinstrumental, of enabling it to pursue its end which is compatible with my own”.²⁷⁴ Guillermine de Lacoste suggested that Sartre’s views of love in *Notebooks for an Ethics* is a “full reversal” of *Being and Nothingness*.²⁷⁵

I argue that Sartre provided limited possibilities for resolving the problems of loving as outlined in *Being and Nothingness*, and the possibilities he did suggest in other existential

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 277.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

²⁶⁶ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 305-306.

²⁶⁷ Linda Hansen, “Pain and Joy in Human Relationships: Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir”, *Philosophy Today* 23.4 (1979): 343.

²⁶⁸ Stevenson and Haberman, *Ten theories of human nature*, 192.

²⁶⁹ Kelly Oliver, “The Look of Love”, *Hypatia* 16.3 (2001): 71. Irving Singer also criticised Sartre for neglecting the “look of love, which can be tenderness, devotion, protection, acceptance, adoration, and *not* appropriation” (Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up*, 91.)

²⁷⁰ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 289, 309. However, Singer said later that ‘oneness’ was a reification.

²⁷¹ Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up*, 91.

²⁷² In order to circumvent the problem of wanting to possess the beloved, Luce Irigaray suggests that instead of saying ‘I love you’, the expression should be formulated as ‘I love *to* you’. This shows respect for the lovers as “inappropriable” and creates a space of “possible alliance” (Luce Irigaray, *To be two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (New York: Routledge, 2001) 19.)

²⁷³ Robert Wicks, *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003) 52.

²⁷⁴ Thomas Flynn, “Inauthentic and Authentic Love in Sartrean Existentialism”, *Nature and Pursuit of Love*, ed. D Goicoechea (New York: Prometheus, 1995) 216.

²⁷⁵ Guillermine de Lacoste, “The Question of Reciprocal Self-Abandon to the Other: Beauvoir’s Influence on Sartre”, *Beauvoir and Sartre: the riddle of influence*, eds. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008) 55.

writings were more a modification than a reversal of his views. I also argue that within Sartre's existential framework, none of the aforementioned platforms for connecting to others are sufficient.

Simone de Beauvoir

Beauvoir has been accused of over-generalising; her portrayal of both men and women applies neither to all cultures, races, societies, classes nor all epochs. While Beauvoir did try to distance herself from the analysis in *The Second Sex*, saying it did not apply to her, it reveals more than she might have imagined. Many critics, such as Naomi Greene and Judith Okely, have attacked Beauvoir for portraying mainly mid-twentieth century ageing middle class Parisian women clinging to indifferent lovers, which is far from being the universal experience of women.²⁷⁶ Judith Okely said that Beauvoir “defeats her case that woman is made, not born, by resorting to a universalistic language as if ‘woman’ or ‘the young girl’ always apparently experienced life as de Beauvoir described it”.²⁷⁷ The underlying assumption is that the individual Beauvoir described is a poor example of the universal. Nevertheless, Beauvoir's approach of using herself as a case study was a hidden strength in two ways: because it not only provided concrete evidence of a woman's experience,²⁷⁸ but also many women did respond to *The Second Sex*, suggesting that even if not all women identified with Beauvoir's experience, they did relate to certain aspects.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, as Toril Moi pointed out, her personal bias “saves *The Second Sex* from reading just like another falsely universalizing master text”.²⁸⁰ Even though Beauvoir's analysis was restricted to the situation of her and her friends, the complexity, depth and magnitude of her analysis of relationships is to be admired.

Many scholars also disapprove of Beauvoir's criticism of women's romantic loving behaviour. First, there is Beauvoir's criticism of devotion to a lover and making the lover one's project. Jean Leighton argued that Beauvoir's definition of devotion is overly narrow and it is false to assume, as Beauvoir did, that *le dévouement* (devotion, attachment, self-sacrifice) is all-embracing, “total renouncement of egoism”, “pure self-sacrifice” and

²⁷⁶ Naomi Greene, “Sartre, Sexuality, and *The Second Sex*”, *Philosophy and Literature* 4.2 (1980): 210, Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-Reading* (London: Virago, 1986) 71.

²⁷⁷ Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-Reading*, 104.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁸⁰ Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994) 146.

“inherently sinister”.²⁸¹ Janet Farrell Smith suggested that one could derive a sense of identity from a lover without adopting the lover as a project.²⁸² As long as the relationship is not an escape or remedy, Hélène Peters envisages, “This fundamental quest is *situated* in the specific roles of mother or wife, not *determined* by them. It is lived in each instant”.²⁸³ Moreover, some scholars argue that Beauvoir fails to appreciate feminine values. For example, Judith Okely accused Beauvoir of aggrandisement of masculine values and failure to recognise that men have their own issues in living up to ideals.²⁸⁴ Jean Leighton claimed that Beauvoir glorifies and unquestioningly accepts male and traditional masculine values, but also indicts injustice, cruelty and egoism of the male and treatment of females; so, Leighton asked, “are these masculine values so splendid after all?”²⁸⁵ Similarly, Toril Moi attacked Beauvoir for “her persistent tendency to overestimate the freedom of men, and to underestimate the power of traditional women”.²⁸⁶ While Toril Moi defends Beauvoir for wanting everyone to be free, not for women to be more like men,²⁸⁷ I show that Beauvoir’s expression can be careless.

Second, there is the question of how Beauvoir’s ideas about ‘authentic love’ might be achievable. Irving Singer argued that she provides little detail about her alternative formulation of loving, which he described as “empty or utopian”.²⁸⁸ Okely charges that Beauvoir’s thesis that there is no program for change except through socialism means that the state of the master male and subordinate woman is fixed.²⁸⁹ She also pointed out that the implication of Beauvoir’s thesis is that “nothing can ever be changed except through surgery, chemistry and the laboratory”,²⁹⁰ and this is clearly not an existential perspective.

However, a number of scholars credit Beauvoir with making significant advances beyond Sartre’s philosophy of relationships. For example, Christine Daigle argued that Beauvoir overcomes Sartre’s conflictual dynamics by understanding an individual as “a situated embodied freedom that enjoys ambiguous relations with others”.²⁹¹ Karen Vintges proposed that Beauvoir distinguishes between knowing the ‘Other’ on an intellectual level and knowing

²⁸¹ Jean Leighton, *Simone de Beauvoir on Woman* (Rutherford, N.J. and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and Associated University Presses, 1975) 192-193.

²⁸² Janet Farrell Smith, “Possessive Power”, *Hypatia* 1.2 (1986): 117.

²⁸³ Hélène Peters, *The Existential Woman* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991) 96.

²⁸⁴ Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-Reading*, 98.

²⁸⁵ Leighton, *Simone de Beauvoir on Woman*, 39.

²⁸⁶ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 211.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

²⁸⁸ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 314-315.

²⁸⁹ Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Re-Reading*, 73.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁹¹ Christine Daigle, “Where Influence Fails: Embodiment in Beauvoir and Sartre”, *Beauvoir and Sartre: the riddle of influence*, eds. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008) 33.

or meeting her on a physical and emotional level. This means that although Beauvoir agreed with Sartre's "intellectual practical solipsism"²⁹² of never being able to know the subjectivity of the Other (i.e., their thinking), we can empathise with each other's feelings. In light of this research, I reassess Beauvoir's ideal of authentic loving and the pitfalls of loving inauthentically.

In sum, my thesis provides an alternative perspective to the extant literature because, by drawing on this particular group of five philosophers, greater possibilities are opened up for understanding how our common conceptions about romantic loving shape lovers' awareness about what they are free *from* and free *to* do. Such a discussion opens up new opportunities to clarify and understand possible sources of dissatisfaction and frustration with romantic loving.

What this thesis is about

This thesis is about romantic loving between adult women and men. Focusing on romantic loving means that this thesis is not about companionate or conjugal loving or love that develops in arranged marriages. While marriage is mentioned on occasion, it is only when it is useful to, or contrasts with, the discussion of romantic loving. Although marriage today is sometimes considered the culmination of romantic loving relationships in Western culture, marriage is just one legal association in which romantic loving can play a role. Second, this thesis is about relationships between *adults*. It is not about love between parents and children, gods and mortals, humans and their furry or feathered companions, or humans and such inanimate objects as teddy bears or the Eiffel Tower. Third, this thesis is about *heterosexual* loving relationships. Fourth, this thesis is about loving relationships in the Western world because, as argued above, romantic love is predominantly a Western cultural phenomenon.²⁹³ Moreover, I am a heterosexual woman embedded in Western culture and do not wish to speculate about other cultures. Although I expect further exploration would uncover similarities between other forms and contexts of relationships mentioned above, the scope of this thesis is limited to human adult heterosexual relations in Western society.

²⁹² Karen Vintges, Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Anne Lavelle (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) 62.

²⁹³ Robert Johnson also argues "as a mass phenomenon, romantic love is peculiar to the West" (Johnson, The Psychology of Romantic Love, xi.) Also see p.15.

Critical caveats

The most important caveat is to what extent the views the philosophers express in non-fiction works and via pseudonyms are their own. Kierkegaard often used the ‘indirect method’ of communication to encourage his readers to question themselves. This means that we need to be careful to note what was written by Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms as compared to the views he held personally and openly acknowledged. Contradictions abound in Nietzsche’s poetic writing and this has created much speculation as to whether he intended to be systematic. Moreover, he rarely argued, but rather aimed to provide insights through rhetoric.²⁹⁴ Much of Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s philosophy was expressed through novels and plays and thus references to those works have to be given careful consideration with respect to their stated philosophy.

Both philosophical texts and fictional works have been analysed because, congruent with the existential emphasis on action, we see painted through the philosophers’ fictional works concrete examples of the philosophical issues addressed. The criticism may be raised that taking characters in novels written by existential writers is not evidence for their views because the statements come from the mouths of unreliable characters. To this I propose that often the affinity between the philosophy and literature is obvious and direct. At times, they articulate their philosophy even better through fiction because it provides personal and intimate case studies, allows analysis of concrete actions and reinforces and exemplifies theories. Kierkegaard, for example, thought indirect communication was a better way of relating his ideas. Felicity Joseph et al. argue that the existential thinkers’ use of literature and indirect communication is strategic since they resist methodologies and systems that imply “essential features and thereby overlook significant features of concrete existence”. Instead, literature and indirect communication evoke, show or “simply ‘point to [human existence]’, rather than try to capture it in thematic analysis”. Benefits of such an approach include additional insights gained through showing concrete existing and avoiding abstract theorising, “breaking the stereotypical linguistic and conceptual structures”, and appealing to and engaging “a fuller range of human faculties (emotion, imagination, empathy, etc.) than

²⁹⁴ Zarathustra, the fictional protagonist of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) who descends from his hermitage in the mountains to look for friends, says, “In the mountains the shortest route is from peak to peak, but for that you must have long legs. Aphorisms should be peaks, and those to whom they are spoken should be big and tall of stature” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 67.) Also, in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says “The most valuable insights are arrived at last; but the most valuable insights are *methods*” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 261.)

abstract intellectual theory”.²⁹⁵

Fiction allows engagement with philosophical ideas from different angles and perspectives. It helps us to understand and explore philosophical ideas from a more personal perspective. It also provides authors with the flexibility to construct a context and situation that provides examples of their arguments. As Colin Davis wrote, for the existential writers, “literature probes and challenges philosophical ideas in their relation to lived experience. Rather than merely serving to express well-established theoretical positions, their literary texts often push their thought to its limits, creating productive tensions with their philosophical works”; however, it must be kept in mind that their literary works cannot always be taken at face value because they are a ground for exploration of their ideas and “often test or contradict the views which they express elsewhere”.²⁹⁶ Thus, they provide a forum to explore ideas, but do not always present a definitive conclusion.

²⁹⁵ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., The Continuum Companion to Existentialism, 8.

²⁹⁶ Colin Davis, “Existentialism and Literature”, eds. Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward (London and New York: Continuum, 2011) 138-140.

Chapter 1 - Max Stirner: Loving Egoistically

Max Stirner's philosophy, outlined in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (1844), has been regarded as outside "the polite discourse of academia and mainstream culture in the early part of the twenty-first century".¹ Manners and moral judgments aside, he provides some relevant insights into an existential critique of romantic loving. I argue that Stirner provides an alternate route to loving existentially, compared to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, because of his idea that the individual is a creative nothingness. Stirner anticipated many of the issues that the existentialists faced and many authors have identified theoretical links.² According to Herbert Read, "Stirner is one of the most existentialist of all past philosophers, and whole pages of *The Ego and His Own* read like anticipations of Sartre".³ Despite the similarities, existential thinkers have largely neglected Stirner. For example, John Welsh commented that "it is somewhat surprising that Stirner is not usually regarded as an important early proponent of existentialism"⁴ and R.W.K. Paterson pointed out that:

What is truly astonishing is that the leading representatives of atheistic existentialism should have failed to see – or, if they have seen, to acknowledge – in Stirner's Unique One the one finished, historic instance of that total encounter with nothingness from which they have themselves in the end recoiled.⁵

However, there are also significant differences between Stirner and other existential thinkers, particularly with respect to the nature of commitment and anxiety, but the commonalities and relevance to romantic loving are significant enough to warrant a careful and serious examination.

Stirner was a radical philosopher of personal power and extreme individualism. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* ("Der Einzige"), dedicated 'To my sweetheart Marie Dähnhardt' (his

¹ Welsh, *Max Stirner's dialectical egoism: a new interpretation*, 4.

² E.g. Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, John P. Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), Welsh, *Max Stirner's dialectical egoism: a new interpretation*.

³ Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 165.

⁴ Welsh, *Max Stirner's dialectical egoism: a new interpretation*, 24. However, Welsh ultimately dismissed the relationship between Stirner and the existentialists as superficial.

⁵ Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 170-171.

second wife), begins and ends with a quote from Goethe: “All things are nothing to me”.⁶ Stirner’s philosophy unfolds from this central theme, which places individuals at the centre of their world. Individuals wield their power to gain control of their predicaments through the acquisition of property. Individuals sever all ties with everyone and everything, including authorities, religion, morals, values, truth, emotions and intellect, which he dismissed as abstractions or “spooks”.⁷ Individuals hold nothing sacred and are masters of their own metaphysical universe. Having broken ties with everything, an individual is solitary, or in Stirner’s words, a ‘unique one’ (*der Einzige*). His emphasis on enjoyment, frivolity and personal interest encourages us to ask: why would one engage in a romantic loving relationship that lacks these essential ingredients?

Undoubtedly, Stirner was fully aware of the controversy that his philosophy outlined in *Der Einzige* would spark.⁸ But he did not care what anyone thought, nor if his book upset anyone. He said,

I write because I want to procure for *my* thoughts an existence in the world; and, even if I foresaw that these thoughts would deprive you of your rest and your peace, even if I saw the bloodiest wars and the fall of many generations springing up from this seed of thought – I would nevertheless scatter it. Do with it what you will and can, that is your affair and does not trouble me. You will perhaps have only trouble, combat, and death from it, very few will draw joy from it.⁹

Nevertheless, there is no reason to ignore Stirner, even if it is as one author suggested “more dangerous than a million bombs, if misapprehended”.¹⁰ Consistent with his philosophy, Stirner was not concerned with sharing his insights with humankind. He tells his readers: “We have only one relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use”.¹¹ Stirner is only interested in his audience insofar as they have ears to listen to him and they pay to read his book. Like a bird that sings because song springs forth from within, Stirner wrote because he is a writer and needs readers.¹²

⁶ From Goethe’s play *Vanitas! Vanitatum Vanitas*: “Ich hab’ Mein’ Sach’ auf Nichts gestellt”, which literally translates as: “I have set my affair on nothing”. (Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 3, 366.)

⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸ See p.31.

⁹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 296.

¹⁰ Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen*, 360.

¹¹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 297.

¹² Ibid., 296.

Contrary to Stirner's declarations, it is possible that *Der Einzige* and Stirner's response to his critics is a form of conversation. Considering the difference between content and process, Stirner's work describes others as instruments, which is the content of his work, but releasing his book to others initiates a form of dialogue. He perpetuated this dialogue through a response to criticisms of *Der Einzige*, called *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum"* (*Kleinere Schriften*).¹³ Perpetuating this dialogue is the process of his work, and this is why I am treating his work as philosophy rather than a personal tract.

In evaluating his philosophy of loving relationships, I begin by looking at the charges Stirner laid against romantic love, before proceeding to identify how Stirner constructed a more viable alternative. For this analysis, I draw primarily from *Der Einzige*, but also, to a lesser extent, from *Kleinere Schriften*. I then point out some of the key considerations with respect to Stirner's conclusions.

I argue that although Stirner dismissed romantic love, what he is really dismissing is the obligations and expectations that romantic love engenders. Instead, he argued for self-love. I also argue that Stirner's philosophy of self-love is not inconsistent with more modern conceptions of romantic loving and elucidate the circumstances under which self-love and romantic loving can be reconciled.

Problems of romantic loving

Stirner's problem with romantic love was twofold: romantic love evokes a duty to others, and it ought to be unselfish. First, Stirner was contemptuous of all relationships that create liabilities and duties. Romantic love is one such relationship. Romantic lovers become bound to each other by "duty, conscience, [and] oath".¹⁴ Specifically, Stirner assumed that the obligation inherent in romantic love is to love another forever.¹⁵ "He is therefore not an object of *my* love, but of love in general: an object that *should* be loved. Love appertains to him, is

¹³ Max Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, ed. John Henry Mackay, 2 ed. (Berlin: Treptow bei Berlin: Bernhard Zack's Verlag, 1914).

¹⁴ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 292.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 292-293.

due to him, or is his *right*, while I am under *obligation* to love him”.¹⁶ Moreover, romantic love imbues certain expectations: “I am to *assume a particular feeling*”.¹⁷

Stirner, however, argued that if another has a right or a claim to one’s love, then that means one no longer owns it: the other collects it like a toll.¹⁸ For Stirner, obeying a duty or obligation to love is tantamount to self-renunciation, because if one’s love is driven by ‘should’, then it means that the relationship is out of the lovers’ control, since “now the object no longer exists for me, but I for it”.¹⁹ It removes power from individuals, discounts the choice to love, and turns lovers into people subservient to the ideal of love. A duty calls for acquiescence, self-sacrifice and subordination and operates for the sake of others, rather than in accordance with one’s own judgment or interest. This obligation is a form of possessedness, because the relationship is dominated by what lovers should do, making it “blind and crazy”.²⁰ According to Stirner, the other is not sacred; love is not sacred; promises are not sacred. One should not turn love into a spook and subordinate oneself to it. Religious, mystical, marital, and familial loving also generate obligations; the only difference is the object to which one is obligated. Infatuation and sensual love are similarly problematic: infatuation is driven by a *must*, and sensual love by dependence on the beloved.²¹

Responsibility, accountability, obligation and commitment are annihilated in Stirner’s moral vacuum. Certainly, he would take little issue with accepting responsibility for his actions in saying, ‘yes, I did it.’ However, he did not accept *accountability* to others. He wrote: “Let us therefore not aspire to community, but to *one-sidedness*. Let us not seek the most comprehensive commune, ‘human society’, but let us seek in others only means and organs which we may use as our property!”²² The sanctity of the promise is also obliterated. Keeping promises, for the sake of the promise, is an illegitimate constraint because it is incompatible with individual ownness. Stirner rejects any general obligation to keep promises as just another attempt to bind the individual. “Only when I am under obligation to no being is the maintaining of my life – my affair. ‘A leap from this bridge makes me free!’”²³ The unique one must embrace the heroism of the lie and be willing to break one’s word so that one establishes oneself as self-determining instead of bound by morality and

¹⁶ Ibid., 293.

¹⁷ Ibid., 295.

¹⁸ Ibid., 293.

¹⁹ Ibid., 292.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 311.

²³ Ibid., 324.

ethics.²⁴ There is no acknowledgment of good and evil to guide one's choices: "I decide whether it is the *right thing* in me; there is no right *outside* me. If it is right for me, it is right".²⁵ Stirner did not accept the legitimacy of objective or external morals or values. For Stirner, the only important truth is that which is lived: the freely chosen personal subjective truth. "Wherever I put my hand I grasp a truth, which I trim for myself. The truth is certain to me".²⁶ Stirner would dismiss the realist objection that there is a physical aspect to reality that is independent of our knowledge of it. His emphasis on subjective truth links him to existential thinking.

Stirner also argued that romantic love presupposes unselfishness because it involves taking an interest in the beloved for the beloved's own sake. This is problematic because the beloved becomes sacred, and "*absolutely loveable*",²⁷ rather than lovable through being loved by another individual. According to Stirner, this belief is hypocritical, since he loves another because it interests him: I love "for my sake and mine alone".²⁸ According to Stirner, it is self-deceptive to believe that one loves solely for the good of others.

Stirner scoffed at the idea that loving necessarily involves self-sacrifice and unselfishness and chides people who think of it thus as foolish.²⁹ He recommended that if one wants a relationship where neither enjoys the other and the pair's loving consists only of sacrifices, one should look in a lunatic asylum.³⁰ He said "Get away from me with your 'philanthropy'!"³¹ Nevertheless, Stirner did not rule out the possibility of such values as community and cooperation.³² Stirner highlighted that one engages with the community and others for one's own profit, not for the advantage of anyone else, even though that can be a side effect. The unique one embraces life and all enjoyable experiences that come with it. Stirner even takes it to the extreme of a love of mankind, thereby allowing what is commonly perceived as altruism and charity to become acceptable to the unique one, because one loves loving: "I love men too – not merely individuals, but every one. But I love them with the consciousness of egoism; I love them because love makes *me* happy, I love because loving is

²⁴ Ibid., 236-237.

²⁵ Ibid., 190.

²⁶ Ibid., 354.

²⁷ Ibid., 292.

²⁸ Ibid., 293.

²⁹ Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 414.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 360.

³² E.g. John Clark criticised Stirner for having no "understanding of values like community, solidarity, co-operation, and mutual aid" (Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 97.)

natural to me, because it pleases me”.³³ If one derives a sense of enjoyment from communing with others, then so be it. Stirner’s objection would be turning ‘community’ into something sacred.

The implication of such an attitude is that there is no possibility of connecting or establishing a solid basis of mutual understanding with another because it is forever “an *I against* a You altogether different from me and in opposition to me”.³⁴ There is no possibility for ‘intersubjectivity’ because “opposition vanishes in complete – *severance* or singleness”.³⁵ Every individual is therefore doomed to solitude. Taking a binary view of subject and object, Stirner is consistent in his view that truth is subjective. As he can only know his subjective experience with any certainty, anyone else’s subjectivity is foreign and incomprehensible to him. Stirner digs a chasm across which it is difficult to imagine any bridge that could carry a sustainable human relationship, let alone a romantic one. However, instead of unselfishly loving others, Stirner argued for the importance of loving oneself. In the next section I explore Stirner’s alternative: egoistic loving.

Stirner’s alternative: loving egoistically

The alternative to romantic love, Stirner proposed, is self-love and it shall be seen that relationships based on egoistic unions support this. For Stirner, loving oneself means to appreciate oneself as a ‘unique one’. Stirner called an individual ‘unique’ because humans are different in terms of their bodies, facticities and subjective experiences. Never again will this exact human form exist. “My wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique I that I take everything for my own, as I set myself to work, and develop myself, only as this... This is the meaning of the – *unique one*”.³⁶ Being ‘unique’ is a form of self-government in which individuals refuse to be subordinated to anyone or anything. Stirner lives for nothing other than himself:

Away, then, with every concern that is not altogether my concern! You think at least the “good cause” must be my concern? What’s good, what’s bad? Why, I myself am my concern, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has meaning for me... My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what

³³ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 291.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

is *mine*, and it is not a general one, but is – unique, as I am unique. Nothing is more to me than myself!³⁷

Becoming unique involves owning oneself; realising that there is no ideal self towards which one ought to strive; and enjoying oneself by doing things in which one is interested. I shall explore each of these elements in turn below.

Owning oneself

The first integral feature of loving oneself that will be addressed is ‘owning’ oneself. Stirner saw life as a constant battle for self-possession, to raise one’s consciousness to recognise the fetters conditioning one and thus give oneself the choice to break free and assume one’s power to act in accordance with one’s choice. To live is to transgress and to be in a constant state of rebellion against society and one’s environment.³⁸ Not only does the unique one refuse to subordinate oneself to such constraints as the law and societal norms, but also so-called ‘virtues’ and ‘vices’ such as love and avarice. Self-mastery has external and internal dimensions, requiring that one neither subordinates oneself to others nor is ruled by appetites or emotions. Stirner wrote: “I am my *own* only when I am master of myself, instead of being mastered either by sensuality or by anything else”.³⁹

Stirner’s total apathy to any higher authority even justifies crime. Other people’s claims on property are not respected: “What I have in my power, that is my own”.⁴⁰ Thus, possession is property. Indeed, Stirner wrote that if crime is necessary to overcome a constraint on the individual, then so be it: “against every superior power I am the most impenitent criminal”.⁴¹ Such a philosophy could be construed as highly dangerous and hurtful for anyone who encounters such a person. While Stirner’s philosophy does allow for the legitimacy of criminal action, even murder, he approaches it in a very specific way. He provides an example of a man who greedily pursues materialism for his selfish pleasure alone. Stirner rejects this kind of “one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism” because an avaricious man has

³⁷ Ibid., 5. This does not imply that Stirner is solipsistic. Although the unique one is the centre of his or her own world, one does not hold the view that nothing else exists besides oneself. One recognises the existence of property and other people (as property), even if one’s attitude is to treat everything as objects. One seizes one’s existence and squanders it.

³⁸ Albert Camus, *L’Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951) 87. (Author’s own translation)

³⁹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 169.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 251.

⁴¹ Ibid., 205.

become possessed by his one ruling passion, in which he becomes “wholly absorbed”.⁴² Such a person has therefore become a slave to the ideal of avarice and renounces oneself for “an ideal phantasm, his *vanity*” or material gratification.⁴³ Similarly, an infatuated person becomes a slave to love, possessed by his desire. Thus, Stirner’s philosophy is no excuse for petty crime, reckless greed, or obsessive infatuation. The crime is only justified if it is an assertion of one’s autonomy, free from any pressure, conditioning or emotion, for increasing the property in which one takes an interest. One can pursue the possessions of the material world, provided one remains the master and not the slave.

Stirner referred to *Eigenheit*, which in the English translation appears as ‘ownness’ or self-ownership, since *eigen* means ‘own’.⁴⁴ ‘Ownness’ as Stirner conceives it, is ownership of one’s ideas, objects and body; it is about being self-determining and self-creating, ensuring one chooses for one’s own sake and on one’s own terms and not because one thinks one should or is coerced into it. It involves shaking free from the cobwebs that entrap and the pressures that push and pull one in different directions.

Owning oneself involves realising that one creates oneself and one’s world. He said: “You are yourself a higher being than you are, and surpass yourself...you are not only creature, but likewise your creator”.⁴⁵ The individual is never static, but rather continuously in a process, always transcending, always creating a new self and constantly choosing identities and transforming oneself. For Stirner, the self is a ‘nothingness’, or more specifically, a creative nothing;⁴⁶ one is not pre-determined and one is what one creates out of one’s surroundings.⁴⁷ He did not literally mean he creates everything in a God-like sense, but rather that one creates one’s own metaphysical identity. As the unique one is a creative nothingness, there are no pre-determined roles in society that the unique one must adhere to, nor are there any set vocations that the person must live up to because that would be an attempt to be something that the unique one *is* not and chooses not to become. The implications that this has for conceptions of the human condition are that no one is born with a personality; no one is introverted or extroverted. Nor can people inherit their behaviour. One is a transitory entity that continually develops and creates its own existence, extending as far as one’s power

⁴² Ibid., 76.

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴ Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 109. It could also be argued that Stirner’s *Eigenheit* is an embryonic understanding of existential authenticity, since the German word for authenticity is *Eigentlich*, and both have strong links to meanings of ownership and possession.

⁴⁵ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

enables. Since one is not pre-determined, one exists first in the world and is free to create oneself through actions and projects. Stirner said: “What a man is, he makes out of things; ‘as you look at the world, so it looks at you again.’”⁴⁸ One uses one’s creativity to surpass conditioning and assert oneself as a sovereign individual. This is the root of his problem with romantic loving: if lovers conform to pre-established expectations about how they should feel and behave, then they do not own themselves. To own themselves, lovers would create themselves as unique lovers.

Consciousness-raising is very important to Stirner because, he said, “Unconsciously and involuntarily we all strive toward ownness...But what I do unconsciously I half-do”.⁴⁹ This indicates that Stirner distinguished between the quality and strength of one’s actions, which is not far removed from what some of the later existential thinkers described as immanent living versus transcendental living. Moreover, the existential thinkers will also adopt this principle of the individual in the process of becoming and overcoming oneself. Thus, Stirner was the first to articulate the existential idea that ‘existence precedes essence’, which is a key reason he can be placed as a progenitor of atheistic existentialism.

Accepting oneself

A second element of loving oneself, for Stirner, is accepting oneself completely. Notwithstanding Stirner’s discussion about surpassing oneself, Stirner said we should be happy just the way we are. “We are perfect altogether!” he said, “For we are, every moment, all that we can be; and we never need be more”.⁵⁰ Stirner’s point is that just because one is constantly in flux and instantly able to change, this does not mean that one should change. There is no ideal self towards which the unique one ought to strive. Certainly, one is constantly becoming, but only in a sense of always being fluid, never tied to anyone or anything. One does not become towards anything in particular.

One might be compelled to point out, however, if the aim is to squander and dissolve oneself, then surely there are moments when one is not ‘perfect’, that is, when one ignores or foregoes possibilities for squandering. Elsewhere, Stirner urges us to recognise ourselves for what we are: “become egoists, become each of you an *almighty ego*. Or, more clearly: Just recognize

⁴⁸ Ibid., 336.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 358.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 359.

yourselves again, just recognize what you really are”.⁵¹ This is further evidence that Stirner does advocate striving towards something, specifically consciousness-raising and self-awareness. Stirner might respond that his aim is to avoid the situation whereby one wishes one had squeezed more out of a situation. Nevertheless, there ought to be no problem with recognising in hindsight that one had other possibilities and learning how to take advantage of other possibilities in the future.

Stirner’s description of the unique one can be vague and opens Stirner up to the criticism that the unique one is a spook.⁵² In *Kleinere Schriften*, he described the unique one as inconceivable and inexpressible.⁵³ The difficulty is that by its very nature as a creative nothing a meaningful definition is impossible because one is always changing. A better understanding of the unique one can only be obtained through recognising it as exclusive, isolated, solitary and a creative nothingness, as Stirner himself. Yet, exactly these qualities prohibit it from being fully described. In being unique at every moment, it cannot exist a second time. If it could be expressed completely, it would exist for a second time in expression.⁵⁴ Stirner’s description of the unique one is also comparable to an analogy used by Jean-Paul Sartre, who claimed it is not possible truly to understand or gain possession of another. It is impossible to grasp others’ essence because as they run away, all that is left is their coat in your hands.⁵⁵ Similarly, the essence of the unique one can never be fully grasped because it is intangible and becoming. Thus, a description is meaningless at any point in time because, by the time it is articulated, the unique one has changed. A person is never static and can never be defined absolutely and attempting to do so is a matter of reconciling the irreconcilable. Yet, surely there is nothing more concrete to individuals than their own existence, to saying, “I am – present”.⁵⁶ Stirner’s structure of being follows from this and by choosing oneself as the “beginning, middle, and end”.⁵⁷ The unique one is a concrete being, not an ideal to strive towards. Embracing the fact that individuals are egoists is raising one’s

⁵¹ Ibid., 164.

⁵² For example, Eduard von Hartmann charges Stirner with replacing those ideals he called spooks with yet another unsubstantial and self-created spook, the unique one, “whose absolute sovereignty he recognises, not however for this or that reason, but blindly and instinctively” (Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 97.) John Clark noted that Stirner hypostatizes “when he raises the ego to an independent reality contrary to its objective place in the course of nature” (Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 31-32.) Similarly, Camus says that it is precisely the nature of the unique one, erected against all abstractions and cutting itself off from its roots until it is entirely isolated, that makes itself abstract (Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, 87. Author’s own translation.)

⁵³ Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 348. (Author’s own translation)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 511.

⁵⁶ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 163. According to John Carroll, this is Stirner’s “ontological first principle” (Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 41.)

⁵⁷ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 163.

consciousness to reality, not striving towards an ideal. It is not sacred because it is up to the individual to decide how to live, squander, and dissolve oneself.

Taking an interest in oneself

A third necessary condition of loving oneself involves taking an egoistic and selfish interest in oneself:

Not till one has fallen in love with his *corporeal* self, and takes a pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person...not till then has one a personal or *egoistic* interest, an interest not only of our spirit, for instance, but of total satisfaction, satisfaction of the whole chap, a *selfish* interest.⁵⁸

This means that one does things in which one is interested, rather than things one is expected to do. In this sense, the world takes on value through the meaning one chooses and imposes on it. In *Kleinere Schriften*, Stirner stresses the importance of following one's interests. Appropriate your own interest, Stirner recommends: "You should make it your interest".⁵⁹ One chooses interests for oneself in order to further one's enjoyment. Unless it is a selfish interest, it is uninteresting because anything else is a general, human, abstract interest. "The interesting only becomes interesting through your interest in it; the valuable only gains its worth through the value you ascribe to it, despite if what you value is, to others, totally worthless".⁶⁰ For example, a lover is not intrinsically or objectively lovable. The beloved only becomes valuable through the interest that the unique one takes in the beloved. As soon as the unique one loses interest, so the beloved loses value that was bestowed upon them. This kind of person is not worse than anyone else; but rather, according to Stirner, such a person is more "definite" and "practical".⁶¹ Thus, disinterested concern is not a feature of Stirnerian relationships.

Stirner thought one attracts love by displaying certain merits that the lover appreciates. The unique one loves another when qualities that the beloved demonstrates in a high degree are greatly enjoyed. As Stirner wrote, "in you I discover the gift of making my life agreeable,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁹ Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 357. (Author's own translation)

⁶⁰ Ibid., 358.

⁶¹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 13.

therefore I choose you as a companion”.⁶² In this context, the unique one loves another like loving oysters or wine, which have a pleasing sensation, such as taste or scent or provide an interesting enjoyable experience.⁶³ The exchange is open for negotiation: “I fix the purchase price of my love quite at my pleasure”.⁶⁴ Just as the unique one is indifferent to the bottle in which the wine is presented, one is indifferent to other qualities that the lover displays. One can still claim to ‘love’ the wine, even if one does not love the bottle, which is nevertheless an essential component of the wine. If the wine turns sour, then one no longer loves the wine. Similarly, if the beloved stops demonstrating the qualities which the unique one enjoys, then one loses interest and one’s love for that particular human ceases and one becomes indifferent. The implication of such an attitude is that loving is entirely conditional because if it is not right for the unique one, then there is no obligation to continue the relationship.

Possession is of utmost importance to Stirner because the unique one maximises pleasure through exercising one’s power to appropriate what one is interested in. The unique one defines oneself through property. Stirner wrote: “For how we toss things about is the affair of our *option*, our *free will*: we use them according to our *heart’s pleasure*, or, more clearly, we use them just as we *can*”.⁶⁵ In Machiavellian terms, one desires something only for its use or as a means to a pleasing end. This includes other people. Stirner views the object of the game of human relations to be possession of the other, and has to be that way if one is to own oneself. “My love is my own only when it consists altogether in a selfish and egoistic interest, and when consequently the object of my love is really *my* object or my property”.⁶⁶

There is no need or desire to understand or acknowledge the other’s subjectivity because one treats others as objects. As the beloved’s subjectivity is not recognised and one defines oneself in terms of property relative to the beloved, Stirner highlighted that love is a power relationship: “the possessedness of love lies in the alienation of the object, or in my powerlessness as against its alienness and superior power”.⁶⁷

The implication of loving oneself above all else is not self-preservation, but almost the opposite. Stirner said, “Over the portal of our time stands not that ‘Know thyself’ of Apollo,

⁶² Ibid., 139.

⁶³ Ibid., 170-171.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 336.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 293.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 294.

but a ‘*Get the value out of thyself!*’”⁶⁸ A fulfilling life is one in which the individual ‘burns the candle at both ends’:

My intercourse with the world consists in my enjoying it, and so consuming it for my self-enjoyment...Henceforth, the question runs, not how one can acquire life, but how one can squander, enjoy it; or, not how one is to produce the true self in himself, but how one is to dissolve himself, to live himself out.⁶⁹

When one loves another person, what one loves is the feeling of being in love. In *Der Einzige*, he stresses that he loves because it makes him happy, pleases him, and feels natural.⁷⁰ But at the same time, love is a conscious choice and he is not simply succumbing to internal desires. In *Kleinere Schriften*, Stirner argued us ‘brutes’ “want to love because we feel love, because love pleases our hearts and our senses, and we experience a higher self-enjoyment in the love for another being”.⁷¹

Although connections to others are undesirable for Stirner, because they are a hindrance to one’s uniqueness, this does not preclude the possibility of loving. One can live a cloistered existence, but it is not a necessary consequence of Stirner’s philosophy. Enjoyable relationships are whole-heartedly encouraged. Stirner’s approach is open to the sweetness of loving, including devotion, making sacrifices and being sincere.⁷² One who does not concern oneself with others is poor because the knowing and tasting of all the joys and innumerable pleasures that come with consideration for others is absent.⁷³ One can engage with others as long as one chooses the ties, actively chooses the relationship and does not lose self-ownership in the process. A unique one ensures this by choosing what clings, that is, choosing limits and obligations, and the extent to which one attaches oneself to them.⁷⁴ Despite Stirner’s distancing the unique one from others, the isolated individual needs other people for the enjoyable experience of loving.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Ibid., 315.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 319-320.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 291.

⁷¹ Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 414.

⁷² Ibid., 375.

⁷³ Ibid., 373-374.

⁷⁴ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 164.

⁷⁵ John Carroll noted that “He uses the other as a complementary electrode: he needs him in order to express and realize himself, in order to experience his own passions”. (Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 29.)

However, Stirner also referred to other people as mere objects, like food to be consumed and devoured: “For me no one is a person to be respected, not even the fellow-man, but solely, like other beings, an *object* in which I take an interest or else do not, an interesting or uninteresting object, a usable or unusable person”.⁷⁶ The use of the beloved is to nourish one’s passions, which increases one’s enjoyment and pleasure in life. He said, “I can love, love with a full heart, and let the most consuming glow of passion burn in my heart, without taking the beloved one for anything else than the *nourishment* of my passion, on which it ever refreshes itself anew”.⁷⁷

Stirner’s attitude to squandering life stems from the fact he finds nothing given on which to found the meaning of his life. Stirner articulated a phrase that is often attributed to Nietzsche: “Man has killed God”.⁷⁸ However, for Stirner, God ought never to have been taken seriously. Like many of the existential thinkers, Stirner attempted to answer the question, if only for himself: how does one live in a world without given meaning? Logic alone cannot reveal meaning in life. Without an author of the universe, there is no legitimate authority and no inherent morals or values in the world.⁷⁹ Logical thinking leads Stirner to the abyss of a nihilistic world: the same predicament the later existential thinkers confronted.

However, what differentiates Stirner from the existentialists is the solution to the nihilistic world. While the existential thinkers face the abyss with anguish and anxiety, Stirner faces it unemotionally.⁸⁰ Nihilism was not a problem for Stirner; it was his facticity and he preferred to face it alone. Moreover, anxiety is uncalled for because when one is anxious, one is not applying oneself to squeezing out of life as much enjoyment as one can.⁸¹ Albert Camus, who also attempted to embrace the nihilistic truth of the world, said of Stirner in *The Rebel* that he laughs at the abyss, adventures into the absurd and takes nihilism to its logical conclusion.⁸² His philosophy rejects “everything that negates the individual and glorification of everything that exalts and serves it. What is the good, for Stirner? ‘That which I can use.’ To what am I legitimately authorised? ‘To all that I am capable of.’”⁸³ Camus’ interpretation of Stirner is that when an individual sheds ties with all things that threaten to be a hindrance,

⁷⁶ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 311.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 295-296.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁹ Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 155.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁸¹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 320.

⁸² Camus, *L’Homme révolté*, 84-88. (Author’s own translation)

⁸³ Ibid., 86. (Author’s own translation)

“the inside beyond [becomes] a new sky”.⁸⁴ The unique one, as a creative nothing, awakens, annihilates everything and is liberated in this self-created desert. Nevertheless, Stirner did not end with nihilism because he believed, as the existentialists came to believe, that individuals are creative nothingnesses with the power to craft meaning where they will. Stirner ignores the immanence of death and embraces life. Without God or any higher being, entity or ideal to serve, the only thing left for Stirner is himself: the isolated individual. Without an anchor, a unique one seeks not to discover one’s true self, but to discover one’s frivolity.

It is only when one is free from such spooks as obligations and expectations that one is able to truly own oneself. However, for Stirner, freedom is also a spook. Being free is not something to be won, but rather assumed or recognised. He said while the unique one is “*free-born*, the man free to begin with; the free man, on the contrary, is only the *eleutheromaniac*, the dreamer and enthusiast”.⁸⁵ Stirner argued that one who seeks freedom is in self-denial. Many people that think they are idealists are, in fact, egoists, and pretending otherwise is a “hypocritical endeavour” and a “foolish mania”.⁸⁶ Being free is Stirner’s starting point: once one recognises one is free, shaking off all ties, what then? What matters then is how one makes the world one’s own.

Stirner was more interested in ‘freedom *to*’, that is, what one has the power to do, rather than what one is ‘free *from*’. Stirner discounts this latter libertarian aspect of freedom and the libertarian claim that often accompanies it. He asked: “Free – from what? Oh! what is there that cannot be shaken off?”⁸⁷ He also said, “if one opines that a slave may yet be inwardly free, he said in fact only the most indisputable and trivial thing”.⁸⁸ What one can be free from is determined by one’s power. What one cannot be free from is outside one’s control: “To be free is something that I cannot truly *will*, because I cannot make it, cannot create it: I can only wish it and – aspire toward it, for it remains an ideal, a spook. The fetters of reality cut the sharpest welts in my flesh at every moment”.⁸⁹ He did not deny ‘facticity’, that is, certain situations and restrictions imposed upon individuals beyond their control. For example, he was all too aware that his own and his mother’s illnesses were hindrances, preventing him

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 164.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 157.

from performing well in his higher education, which meant that he found it extremely difficult to find a job as a teacher.

However, freedom is a pyrrhic victory if one does not have the power to act freely. Besides, one cannot be free from everything: “One can get *rid* of a great many things, one yet does not get rid of all; one becomes free from much, not from everything”.⁹⁰ Certainly, one has the power to think as one chooses because one owns one’s thinking as one owns a body. However, Stirner’s point is that unless one has the power to act, then it is meaningless. Unless freedom is concretely manifested through property, which one uses one’s power to get, then freedom is incomprehensible. The ‘unique one’, albeit a highly elusive concept, can be defined by its property because freedom is manifested in property. In Stirnerian terms, the unique one *is* one’s property (*Der Einzige is sein Eigentum*):

My power is *my* property.

My power *gives* me property.

My power *am* I myself, and through it am I my property.⁹¹

Instead of pursuing ‘freedom’, Stirner acted from and for his own power. Power is more important to Stirner than freedom because he understood that there were limits beyond his control to how he could exert his power and preserve his own life in order to squander it. Keenly aware of the power of others, he used his own power where he could. He was not interested in fighting battles for the sake of more property. Martyrdom is not for the unique one because there is nothing – no person, no cause, no belief nor principle – that is more important than oneself. Stirner recognised that some people do exert more power than he. So, he stressed the importance of how one uses things within one’s grasp. One uses the power one has to enjoy life, but should one’s power not be enough for something one wants, there is no reason to upset oneself about it. With hints of stoicism and pragmatism, Stirner said that if he fails in his endeavours, he is ready to give it up and walk away because all things are nothing to him:

Doubtless, as owner of thoughts, I shall cover my property with my shield, just as I do not, as owner of things, willingly let everybody help himself to them; but at the same time I shall look forward smilingly to the outcome of the battle, smilingly lay the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 185.

shield on the corpses of my thoughts and my faith, smilingly triumph when I am beaten.⁹²

Yet, how realistic is it to always smile when one is beaten?⁹³ For Stirner, anxiety and frustration are not fundamental aspects of life, unless one so chooses. When Stirner said that one must not let oneself be taken over by avarice or infatuation, he implies that passions are controlled. So, Stirner did not rule out the possibility of negative emotions, but as a nominalist, he did not reify them. Rather, we emotive negatively or positively. He did not seem to view emoting negatively as personally useful or beneficial, since those actions were inconsistent with enjoying and squandering his life. Stirner believed we act anxiously and he chose not to do so. He refused to act in ways that compromised him.

What is meaningful is what one has the power or 'might' to do. Stirner reduced everything to possession, which poses the question: what can I use my 'might' to attain that is of interest to me? And what can I do to transcend the influences that threaten me? Because the unique one accepts nothing superior to oneself, the unique one is then also centre of one's own universe:

"The world" is indeed only that which he himself is not, but which belongs to him, stands in relation to him, exists for him. Around you everything revolves, and you are the centre of the external world as well as centre of the world of thought. Your world reaches as far as your capacity to grasp it, and what you grasp exists through your very grasping of it.⁹⁴

In loving relationships, Stirner emphasised the importance of being free from preconceived expectations about how lovers should feel, and obligations always to feel lovingly towards that individual. Once one frees oneself from such ties, then one is free to choose relationships and endeavours that interest one. The next section addresses the question of romantic loving relationships for an individual who distinguishes oneself as 'unique'.

⁹² Ibid., 358.

⁹³ For example, John Carroll argues that applying a Freudian analysis, Stirner does appear "one-sided" in that he fails to give any credence to many of the emotions that seem to plague our existence: "It represses the recognition that loss, despair, constraint, and frustration are inherent in the human condition. This philosophy does not take a full and balanced account of human passions" (Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace*, 41.)

⁹⁴ Translation by Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 173. Original quote: Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 354.

Loving others

At first, it appears Stirner's approach to others is caustic. Stirner would seem to desecrate any opportunity for positive human relations when he talks about other people being mere objects, to be devoured and exploited. However, Stirner also acknowledged that one way to get value out of oneself is through relationships with others. He appreciated the value of a loving relationship when he said that one who loves another is richer than one who does not.⁹⁵ Moreover, Stirner established the possibility of romantic loving when he said:

I can with joy sacrifice to him numberless enjoyments, I can deny myself numberless things for the enhancement of *his* pleasure, and I can hazard for him what without him was the dearest to me, my life, my welfare, my freedom. Why, it constitutes my pleasure and my happiness to refresh myself with his happiness and his pleasure.⁹⁶

This suggests that a unique one can still do all those things traditionally associated with romantic loving that are not, on the surface, of direct or immediate benefit or enjoyment, such as giving, sharing, compromising and sacrificing. Similarly, a unique one can behave caringly and compassionately if he so chooses: "If I see the loved one suffer, I suffer with him, and I know no rest till I have tried everything to comfort and cheer him; if I see him glad, I too become glad over his joy".⁹⁷

However, these actions are always considered in relation to the unique one's benefit: "But, because I cannot bear the troubled crease on the beloved forehead, for that reason, and therefore for my sake, I kiss it away. If I did not love this person, he might go right on making creases, they would not trouble me; I am only driving away *my* trouble".⁹⁸ Even if the unique one is deeply concerned for the beloved, the beloved is still considered property and the unique one has no obligation to the beloved, any more than one has an obligation to one's body, which is also one's property. Just as the unique one has a use for one's body and enjoys it, so the beloved has a use and the unique one enjoys what the beloved can do for one: "I owe my property nothing, and have no duty to it, as little as I might have a duty to my eye; if nevertheless I guard it with the greatest care, I do so on my account".⁹⁹ I do not think Stirner is raising Cartesian dualistic issues here because for him, there is no essence behind

⁹⁵ Stirner, Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum" aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 374.

⁹⁶ Stirner, The Ego and His Own, 290.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 291-292.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 293-294.

appearances and no mind behind a body. One is one's body and one can choose to do what one wills with it. A unique one is a master of one's body and the way one chooses to live and act. One is what one does. One is an embodied consciousness in the sense that there is no 'self' that can be definitively described.

A unique one is not concerned for the beloved as an end in itself. One's actions are driven by the desire to receive something in exchange, even if it is simply the warm feeling of doing something nice for the "warmly loved" person.¹⁰⁰ The unique one trades one passion for another.¹⁰¹ One gives as a means to an end. The happiness of the beloved is preferred to the sacrifice. While Stirner can be read to be completely cynical, selfish and self-centred, I believe such comments show that his philosophy does allow for romantic possibilities.

Despite Stirner's apparent willingness to sacrifice his life, welfare or freedom for the beloved, he insisted that "*myself, my own self*, I do not sacrifice to him".¹⁰² He is willing to sacrifice everything except his 'ownness', that is, those self-chosen principles by which he defines himself. But he easily sacrifices anything that is less important to him than his beloved. Stirner admits: "Yes, I *utilize* the world and men! With this I can keep myself open to every impression without being torn away from myself by one of them".¹⁰³ He is keeping himself open to all kinds of potentially enjoyable and interesting experiences. Stirner realises that others open up possibilities that he would not have had alone and being with others can be highly rewarding.

The attitude outlined above can be manipulative, exploitative and thus, self-defeating because if the beloved does not appreciate being used and treated as an object, then the relationship collapses. Then, not only is a unique one closed off to other possibilities that a more sustainable and continuing relationship could provide, but also one risks loneliness and seclusion. Stirner's second wife, Marie Dähnhardt, suggested that for Stirner, this was the result of his approach to life.

Stirner's two marriages were brief. His first wife, Agnes Clara Kunigunde Butz, was the daughter of his proprietor. She was young, poorly educated and Stirner probably married her

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 296.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 290.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 295.

for her housekeeping skills.¹⁰⁴ Accidentally seeing her naked once, he never touched her again. She died while giving birth to a stillborn child less than a year after the marriage. In stark contrast to Agnes, Marie Dähnhardt left behind Christianity and her family to live more freely in Berlin where she met Stirner at the *Young Hegelians* philosophy discussion group. She smoked cigars, drank beer, played billiards and even went with the men when they visited brothels.¹⁰⁵ Stirner and his witnesses were playing cards at Stirner's apartment when the pastor arrived for the wedding ceremony. Marie arrived late and without a wedding dress. Having forgotten to buy wedding rings, they improvised with two copper rings pulled from a witness's purse and were married without a bible.¹⁰⁶

In little more than two years after his second wedding, Stirner had squandered Marie's inheritance on a failed milk shop cooperative, and they separated. According to R.W.K. Paterson, "With mounting indignation she accused him of improvidence, culpable fecklessness, and the idleness of complacent vanity".¹⁰⁷ Stirner's biographer, John Henry Mackay, contacted Marie after Stirner's death. Marie – who had converted to Catholicism and retired in a religious institution – refused to see Mackay and sent him harshly bitter and surly short responses to his queries: she had neither respected nor loved Stirner, he was "too selfish to have true friends" and he was "very sly".¹⁰⁸ Why she married Stirner remains a mystery, and Mackay concludes that she undoubtedly never understood her husband's philosophy.¹⁰⁹ However, she may have understood the man. Stirner ended up bankrupt, with few friends, and died alone from what was probably an infection from a wasp sting.¹¹⁰

Superficially, it could be argued that the fact Stirner was married meant that he did not live his philosophy, which condemns obligations to others. Yet, there is no indication that Stirner took his marriage commitments seriously or that he accepted any kind of obligation to his wives. Moreover, his frequent moves to avoid debt collectors and two stints in debtor's gaol suggest he also rejected any obligation to those from whom he borrowed money. Indeed, Marie Dähnhardt's comments to John Henry Mackay would seem to support the argument that Stirner did indeed live his philosophy, and there is no indication that Stirner regretted or was unhappy with his life choices.

¹⁰⁴ Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Mackay, *Max Stirner: His Life and His Work*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

Loving unions

It is clear from the above discussion that loving relationships with others are possible for Stirner, even though they are based on exploitation. The question arises as to whether loving is possible between unique ones, or whether it would be in Stirner's best interest not to enlighten lovers about his attitude.¹¹¹ One might expect that a self-denying or self-deceiving¹¹² lover would be reluctant to become involved with Stirner if they knew his philosophy. Moreover, it is possible that Stirner would be better able to gain possession of those things he is interested in by manipulating others and appealing to their generosity and kindness. While such an attitude is possible within Stirner's philosophy, there are two reasons that Stirner resists the conclusion that others ought to be ignorant of his intentions.

First, Stirner indicates that he would actually prefer relationships with other unique ones when he said, "I would rather be referred to men's selfishness than to their 'kindnesses' ['love services']".¹¹³ Kindness is given in response to one who needs help, and thus is dependent on a chance encounter with another who is merciful or takes pity on the unique one. Such love must be accepted as a present or repaid through "counter-love".¹¹⁴ On the other hand, selfishness "demands *reciprocity* (as thou to me, so I to thee), does nothing 'gratis', and may be won and – *bought*".¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Stirner did not accept obligations to others, so acts of kindness are irrelevant to him, since he would have no intention of 'counter-loving'.

Second, Stirner specifically considered the possibility of relationships between unique ones. Stirner was not utopian, not interested in providing a framework for future society, and did not advocate that everyone ought to adopt his philosophy. Politically, Stirner's egoist is a radical anarchist and so he rejects the State and the law. Indeed, Stirner did not support any economic or political system because he views them as oppressive exploiters of the individual; socialism subordinates the individual to the state and capitalism to the firm.¹¹⁶ However, Stirner recognised that "Society is our *state of nature*",¹¹⁷ and chose to live in

¹¹¹ See p.32.

¹¹² Stirner, The Ego and His Own, 164.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹¹⁶ Stirner, being the German translator of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, knew more than a little about it. However, there are some strong links between Stirner's philosophy and capitalist principles. For example, both praise individual self-interest, exploitation of resources, competition, profit or property maximisation and success is measured by the accumulation of assets (Clark, Max Stirner's Egoism, 57.)

¹¹⁷ Stirner, The Ego and His Own, 306.

society so that he could exploit it. To such an end, he outlined a form of relationships that he imagined could increase his power. Thus, being anti-social is not a necessary feature of Stirner's philosophy.

Stirner proposed that a means of establishing viable relationships is a free and voluntary association without hierarchy or domination, where everyone pursues their individual goals, which happen to be mutually beneficial. He called it a "*Union of Egoists*".¹¹⁸ The purpose of such a relationship is "to strengthen *my power*, and by combined force to accomplish more than individual force could effect".¹¹⁹ To this end, people come to agreements and understandings. Stirner avoids turning the union into a spook and being subordinated to it by insisting on two key criteria: the union is formed for one's own benefit and one does not let oneself be possessed by the union. He wrote that "a union is only your instrument, or the sword with which you sharpen and increase your natural force; the union exists for you and through you".¹²⁰ Moreover, the union is self-creating and does not crystallise into a "fixity" or "unitedness" of society.¹²¹ Despite Stirner's apparent distaste for commitments, he did allow ties to be made, as long as one remains ready to break them. "As *own* you are *really rid of everything*, and what clings to you *you have accepted*; it is your choice and your pleasure".¹²²

Stirner's methodology, terminology and themes have been likened to Hegel.¹²³ For example, they both refer to loving in terms of a union. Hegel thought that a true loving union can only exist between people who are "alike in power" and thus "excludes all oppositions" because love "destroys objectivity".¹²⁴ While in a corporeal sense the lovers are still individuals, "love strives to annul even this distinction"; as lovers sense subjective life in each other, their separateness unites and they become a "living whole".¹²⁵ If defence of private property exists in the loving relationship, Hegel said that injures the heart and cannot be called love. For Stirner, it is irrelevant whether the two are alike in power and opposition; objectivity and separation are facts of life. There can be no possibility of a true union as Hegel envisaged

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 311.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 313.

¹²¹ Ibid., 306.

¹²² Ibid., 164.

¹²³ For example, Stepelevich says "Stirner as 'Anti-Hegel' can also be understood as the *completed* Hegel" (Lawrence Stepelevich, "Max Stirner as Hegelian", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46.4 (1985): 604.) Karl Löwith argues that *Der Einzige* is the "ultimate logical consequence of Hegel's historical system, which – allegorically displaced – it reproduces exactly" (Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. David E. Green, 1 ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) 103.)

¹²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, "A Fragment on Love", *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991) 117-118.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 118.

because every relationship is in opposition and based on exploitation. However, in Stirner's opinion, this is not pejorative. To the contrary, Stirner thought it is to be cherished because obligations to others suffocate individuals. Others are not to be part of one's self-definition because, Stirner said, "If you are connected, you cannot leave each other; if a 'tie' clasps you, you are something only *with another*".¹²⁶ The unique one preserves and defines one's uniqueness through distance from other people. Thus, despite the unique one's solitude and attempts to detach oneself from others, one still needs others to define oneself. Stirner's liberating approach suggests that although there is a world full of people, it is up to individuals to choose how much they allow others to influence and define them.

Stirner's union is based on a voluntary exchange. Respect and reciprocity exist insofar as the other is "of consequence to me",¹²⁷ or in other words, the relationship brings something of value. However, Stirner admits, "in practice people respect nothing".¹²⁸ It is not a matter of breaking promises or commitments for the sake of breaking them, but rather only if they compromise one's self-assertion and self-determination. Thus, breaking promises is possible and acceptable but not automatic. Nevertheless, such relationships are rendered unreliable and tenuous to say the least.

Key considerations

Tautological?

Stirner asserts that everyone is an egoist even if there are those who affirm their egoism and those who deny it because they prefer to create the illusion of altruism.¹²⁹ But if everyone is an egoist then Stirner's argument amounts to the tautology that one cannot act against one's will.¹³⁰ Moreover, by asserting that one loves because one feels pleasure,¹³¹ he is simply restating his general argument that the egoist has no motives or purposes which are not its

¹²⁶ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 134.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹²⁹ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 164, 358.

¹³⁰ John Clark criticised Stirner for using "the trivial truth that we do what we want to do as the basis for an egotistical philosophy" and concludes that Stirner is wrong in grounding human nature in egoism. Rather, he says, "psychological egoism, if it is to have any validity, must be merely an expression of the tautology that any action of an ego must be in accord with a choice of that ego, or that one cannot act against one's own will". He suggests that Stirner advocates some kind of will based on personal interest but it is unclear and insufficient (Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 24-25, 41, 48.) Likewise, Eduard von Hartmann concludes that Stirner's idea of the unique one is a "perfectly empty and meaningless tautology that I can will my own will, think only my own thoughts, and that only my own thoughts can become motives of my willing". (Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 97.)

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

own. While Stirner acknowledges that such an argument is clearly tautological, he believes that it is ethically significant.

Stirner might argue that it is a mistake to assume that there is a motivating force behind the action. It is true but redundant that one cannot act against one's will because the act is the will. It is a tautology if one separates action from the will, which Stirner would not do. The unique one does not do what one wants; rather one is what one does and therefore cannot be anything other than what one wants. Often one does not know one's motivation at the time of one's actions, but the meaning is revealed through doing, as is one's knowledge as to whether the action is interesting or enjoyable. Furthermore, since for Stirner truth is subjective, he chooses to accept that he exists in the world, consciously acts, seems to be able to override many of the influences around him and does not see himself as part of anything greater (like Hegel). If it is true for him, it is true. Moreover, Stirner did not say that there are no reasons to act, just that reasons are not enough. One does not need a reason to do things and here we see latent underpinnings of the existential point that rationality and desires do not explain all behaviour.

Although there are elements of Stirner's philosophy that are synonymous with psychological egoism (such as self-interest as the motivation for behaviour), he does not fit perfectly into this category because his focus is not on immediate gratification of current and impulsive desires. Nor did he say that all actions are always egoistic, nor that everyone is motivated by self-interest.¹³² He also said that most people do not act egoistically.¹³³

Stirner acts in accordance with what he finds interesting and enjoyable in life. This could be understood on the assumption that the self is some kind of vessel that desires to be filled or satisfied with interesting and enjoyable things in life. Yet I do not think this is what Stirner intended. It is not a tautology if it is understood in existential terms: he acts, he learns, he becomes. He does not know what interests him until he throws himself into it. The opposite of self-interest is supposedly altruism, doing things for the good of others. Yet, Stirner said that this is hypocritical because it interests one to pursue altruistic or humanitarian activities, so one does it. His point is that by freely choosing to engage oneself in activities, one owns oneself. We are individuals and free to pursue things that interest us.

¹³² Psychological egoism is defined as "The theory that all human actions are motivated by self-interest...[and] considers only the influence of present desires on choice" (Honderich, ed., The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, 220-221.)

¹³³ See p.52.

Narcissistic?

One of the key risks of Stirner's framework is that it is conceived as narcissistic because of its overt self-centredness. However, Stirner is not entirely closed off from others because he seeks unions. His life did not necessarily come at the expense of others and result in reclusiveness. Moreover, whereas the narcissist loves the idea of oneself, Stirner annihilates and creates himself anew at every turn. With reference to Stirner and other Romantics, Dmitri Shalin argued:

It is fairly common to misconstrue the romantic thinkers' preoccupation with their own selves as an autistic exercise, to mistake the romantic attitude for indifference to the outside world, to mislabel the Romantic a narcissist. Narcissism is antithetical to the romantic approach – the former presupposing a passive attitude, and the latter an active one. The narcissist is hooked onto his familiar, comfortable self which he is afraid to lose; the Romantic, no matter how enamoured with the self of the moment, is prepared to give it up and to try a new one.¹³⁴

Romantic?

A third issue is whether Stirner's reformulation of love, with its emphasis on oneself, treating others as objects, and relationships based on exchange, can be considered romantic. Reconsidering the definition of romantic loving outlined in the introduction,¹³⁵ I argue that many of the elements are at least possible within Stirner's understanding of egoistic loving, which does not preclude rich and rewarding romantic relationships.

Anticipating the criticism that his philosophy leaves no room whatsoever for loving, Stirner challenges: "if you know another word for it, go ahead and choose it; then the sweet word love may wither with the departed world; for the present I at least find none in our *Christian* language, and hence stick to the old sound and 'love' my object, my – property".¹³⁶ Even so, *Der Einzige* created so much controversy on publication that Stirner published a response to his critics addressing (among other things) the issue of whether his construction of loving in

¹³⁴ Dmitri N. Shalin, "The Romantic Antecedents of Meadian Social Psychology", *Symbolic Interaction* 7.1 (1984): 47-48. Robert Spillane argues along similar lines that Stirner is not a narcissist because as "the narcissist is in love with his cozy 'I', whilst the Romantic [i.e. Stirner] actively projects 'I' into the world". (Spillane, *An Eye for An I: Living Philosophy*, 353.)

¹³⁵ See p.12.

¹³⁶ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 294.

Der Einzige is really 'love' as we know it. In *Kleinere Schriften*, Stirner asked one of his critics if he has ever had a lover where both found enjoyment and neither felt short-changed. He also asked what this person would do if he met a couple of friends on the street who invited him to go for a drink: does he go out of a duty to the friendship, or in the expectation of enjoyment? Stirner proposed that in both cases, an egoistic union has been formed for a short time with the goal of enjoyment.¹³⁷

The passionate elements of romantic loving are entirely consistent with Stirner's philosophy. Pursuing a relationship with another who sparks one's interests and nourishes one's passions is highly enriching for a unique one. Indulging in the sensual aspects of romantic loving is also unproblematic for Stirner, as long as one stays in control of one's urges, and as long as one does not become dependent on the beloved. Stirner did not advocate unrestrained hedonism whereby one maximises pleasure and minimises pain because there are instances where he will accept pain and suffering. Moreover, he is principled in that, although he endorsed frivolity, he did not accept blindly pursuing one's desires because that would imply one is controlled by one's passions.

Furthermore, the unique one does not greedily exploit another person only for the sake of more property. To do so runs the risk of avarice because it involves subordinating oneself to one's desire for more possessions. Stirner is not tied to his property, just as he is not tied to anything or anyone and this stops his philosophy being construed as materialistic or greedy. One uses property to assert oneself as unique, just as one uses objects to enjoy. Stirner's unique one defines himself through his possessions because they have a use to him. Like Hegel, he can see his freedom concretely manifested in the property he accumulates. Thus, he uses property as a currency or measure or evidence of his power within his particular context.

Stirner's understanding of romantic loving also supports the idea that it is love of a particular person who is appreciated for their unique qualities. However, it is not *unconditional* love of the individual, because that would turn the beloved into something sacred. Rather, love of the individual is based on the enjoyment one derives from loving the other. On one hand, it is an appraisive attitude, since one's love is fuelled by the other's charming qualities. But on the other hand, it is a bestowal, because there need not be any particular reasons for loving a particular person, other than being the particular object that one chooses to love.

¹³⁷ Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes "Der Einzige und sein Eigentum"* aus den Jahren 1842-1848, 395-396.

Stirner's main critique of romantic love is aimed at the expectation that the relationship ought to last forever, and the obligations that romantic love assumes in order to attempt to secure the love eternally. This is clearly a critique of love that grew out of the Romantic period. However, more modern understandings of romantic love suppose that, although romantic lovers hope that the relationship will last forever, there is no obligation as such for it to do so. Certainly, lovers often *want* to promise everlasting love and, although the hope that it will last forever is a central feature of romantic loving, making and keeping such a promise is not. If Stirner's view denies that romantic loving includes the desire or hope for lasting relationships, then it must be deemed unromantic. However, I want to argue that this is not a necessary conclusion of Stirner's view.

Although little is known about Stirner's love life, the short-term nature of his own relationships and his ex-wife's comments do bring into question the viability of long-term relationships. If relationships are built on enjoyment, then in tough times, when there is no enjoyment, the risk of the relationship breaking down is significant. Traditional loving relationships are built on the commitment to stick together through thick and thin, in sickness and in health. In theory, working through problems together strengthens the bond and deepens the respect and understanding for one another, in anticipation of a more enjoyable and better life in the long run. This is not so different from Stirner's idea of loving relationships: as discussed above, Stirner said he will kiss away the worry lines and help the other, in order to restore a more enjoyable future – albeit for himself and not the worrier. If a person exhibits strongly admirable qualities, then small challenges along the way are tackled to achieve the longer-term enjoyment of them. A small sacrifice here is the means to a greater end in the future. Stirner did allow for adjustments and compromises, albeit on his terms.

Stirner's own experience of loving indicates that he chose shorter-term egoistic unions, demonstrated by his short marriage to Marie Dähnhardt, his lack of enduring friends and his frequent moves to avoid repayment of his debts. However, others adopting the same egoistic principles could end up in long-term relationships in which both continue to interest one another and both appreciate qualities in the other which change over time. Even if youth and beauty were the initial interests, as those qualities evaporate the interest could be replaced with others, such as intellectual stimulation or entertaining companionship.

Egoistic loving relationships encompass the spectrum of possibilities from Don Giovanni's thousands of fleeting affairs to a happy marriage lasting a lifetime. Without externally imposed rules, the onus is on individuals to choose. How long the lovers' interests, enjoyment and loving feelings are aligned defines how sustainable the relationship is. However, duration will be sacrificed in favour of self-ownership.

Where a loving relationship, as Stirner constructs it, can break down is where one party values honesty and is deceived, or expects to be loved independent of the other's benefit, or misunderstands the basis of the relationship and is surprised by the consequences. Indeed, lying and breaking promises is perfectly acceptable to Stirner. On the other hand, it is also perfectly consistent in Stirner's philosophy not to lie if it so pleases the unique one. There is much to be said for two lovers understanding each other's philosophies.

Acknowledging that either lover is free to leave at any time and will not stay out of duty can strengthen the bond; for example, by acknowledging that the relationship is based on factors such as benefits from and enjoyment of each other's company, anticipated benefits and enjoyment, and battling the world together more powerfully than each alone. However, in Stirner's case, it is the mutual recognition of two unique ones, two powers, who enjoy each other's company as long as they both benefit from it. Stirner said that loving 'nourishes' his passion and the beloved is food for his love.¹³⁸ Reciprocity is not a necessary requirement, since Stirner loves himself and loves the feelings of love that the other inspires, and this need not include loving actions from the beloved. However, Stirner realises there is much to be enjoyed in reciprocal relationships, and insofar as he wants to engage in a loving relationship, there is latent reciprocity because the relationship will not exist if the beloved is benefitting from it. Further to this, Stirner's passion will go hungry if the object of his love is not cooperative.

Stirner clearly did not accept the idea that love is a harmonious merging with another being to create a blissful 'we'. Nevertheless, unions for the purposes of enjoyment or increasing one's property and possessions, and extending oneself in the world, are not only acceptable, but also desirable. Stirner opens up the possibility of a romantic relationship as a union based on mutual enjoyment, and/or in which lovers come together and intertwine lives for the purposes

¹³⁸ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 296.

of extending themselves and their boundaries in the world.¹³⁹ Thus, the lovers achieve more together than they could alone.

If romantic loving is about accepting the beloved's welfare as one's own, while in a loving relationship, then Stirner's philosophy of loving is romantic. However, it must come with the qualification that he only does so insofar as it does not conflict with his own interests that mean more to him than loving. Thus, he is not sacrificing anything important to him. For Stirner, sacrifices do not prove the depth of one's love. Stirner's philosophy can be understood as a critique of romantic loving that is based on 'agapaic' sacrificing of oneself for the beloved.

Stirner acknowledged that he did not enter a relationship for the sake of the ideal of love, for the sake of another, or maintain a relationship based on a prior commitment that compromises his ownness. Rather, Stirner took into account his life as a project and one that is constantly being created. He was strategic and realises that the time comes when some passions will be traded for others and sacrifices will be made, albeit on his terms. He was interested in effective use of power to squander his life, and to this end, he was interested in the consequences of his actions. Even the ultimate sacrifice – death – is within Stirner's realm of possibilities and it is in this sense that he draws close to the question: under what circumstances does one want to live? If the choice were either to sacrifice one's life or to betray one's ownness, such as subordinating oneself to the will of others, then losing one's life is a valid option. However, self-preservation was not Stirner's goal. He was interested in squandering his life.

The unique one exploits the other in the pursuit of interesting and enjoyable experiences. Stirner said that for his own happiness he would hazard anything and everything, including his life, for his beloved. The unique one is a risk-taker and only preserves his life in order to squander it. Yet, the enjoyable loving experience might well be worth the risk of losing his life. For example, the most interesting and exciting experience of loving could be with another 'unique one'. Certainly there is a great risk the beloved will exploit and exert power over the unique one. However, it is consistent for the unique one to choose to get value out of oneself by engaging in a highly risky loving relationship. Moreover, if the unique one does lose property or even life to the beloved, then Stirner would say that he would smile when he is beaten and acknowledge that all things are nothing to him.

¹³⁹ See p.11.

Romantic loving is consistent with Stirner's philosophy when it is understood as two individuals doing what they enjoy most and coincidentally finding interest in and attraction to each other. Stirner loves himself, loves another for himself and sometimes that aligns with another who takes an interest in him too. In a negative sense, we can paint the unique one as a vampire, prowling around in the world, looking for fresh quarry, in order to feed. With a loving interest, the unique one and the beloved work strategically together, increasing their property more effectively than either individual working alone. They stalk prey, consume others and enjoy life and each other. Not all lovers will be unique ones, and those who are not will be consumed. This is the predatory possibility within Stirner's work. Nevertheless, this is not the necessary outcome because, although Stirner did not allow for compromise politically, he did in loving relationships, and those exceptions are up to the unique one to negotiate.

All relationships, including loving ones, are power relationships, according to Stirner. The unique one appropriates a lover just as any other treasured possession from which he derives pleasure. The unique one frivolously squanders life. Stirner's formulation of a loving relationship is based on appreciation of enjoyable, charming and unique qualities in another human. Love as a duty or moral obligation is indifferent to those qualities and thus devalues the individual; it is also a recipe for a miserable loving relationship. Stirner rightly raises the issue as to why anyone would want an unenjoyable and uninteresting loving relationship, characterised by sacrifices and obligations without any benefit to the individuals.

Stirner's unique one is set against the world with battles at every turn. His philosophy is certainly not for those who want a quiet and peaceful life. Moreover, Stirner's mantra that 'all things are nothing to me' can be difficult to adopt into everyday psychology. For example, Marx and Engels criticise Stirner for creating an ideal individual that most people are not strong enough to live up to.¹⁴⁰ While Stirner's philosophy advocates the power of the individual, and it is not outside the scope of his philosophy to associate with and love others, it is outside his scope if one lets oneself be subordinated to one's lover. One only associates with another as long as one is in control of the association.

For Stirner, one ought to own oneself rather than be owned by a set of rules or norms. One can compromise on anything except what one deems to be right and important for oneself, that is, one's self-chosen principles. Thus, according to Stirner, the only commitment one can

¹⁴⁰ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 287.

make without compromising authenticity (ownness) is to oneself. In leaping to oneself, one does not subordinate oneself to any higher entity or external source of values. Thus, one takes up residence within the abyss of a world without given meaning. The commitments one makes are only to upholding oneself as a free and creative nothingness, directed towards one's chosen ends. However, Stirner's approach is beyond affirming one's freedom because he assumed his freedom to begin with and did not treat it as a value to be adopted or something to strive towards. More important than freedom is what one has the power to do. Thus, for Stirner, freedom would not take the existentialist far enough.

Stirner clearly foreshadowed many existential ideas and in his insistence on the contingency and primacy of becoming and in his rejection of anything other than individual choice as the singular voice of authority, he can properly be described as proto-existentialist. He pinpoints some of the most fundamental principles of living and loving existentially, for example, 'existence precedes essence', the understanding of an individual as a creative nothingness, transcendental living as preferred to acting immanently or half-consciously, and although Stirner was more interested in power, his self-owning unique one has much in common with the existential understanding of freedom as the starting point of the authentic individual. He outlines an ultra-authentic stance in its focus on owning oneself and in the weight it places on choosing how to live and love free from the constraints of anything other than what one finds interesting and enjoyable.

The strength of Stirner's philosophy is his emphasis on uncompromising self-ownership and the risk that it can come at the expense of obligations to others, rendering loving relationships anything but stable and secure. Such an attitude need not necessarily cause anxiety if one owns one's passions. It also reflects loving as a choice because it is based on strengthening and nourishing oneself through the other. Committing to oneself while rejecting obligations to others means that existing is defined by power rather than freedom. Relations with others are power-based relations and through egoistic unions, are instrumental in their contribution to enriching oneself. Owning oneself enables one to be free to pursue enjoyable and interesting relationships. The extent to which one can depends only on one's power to relate to people that one loves.

Chapter 2 - Søren Kierkegaard: Loving Aesthetically

For Søren Kierkegaard, passion and pleasure are at the heart of romantic loving, which he categorises as part of an aesthetic lifestyle. For one of Kierkegaard's aesthetic protagonists, Johannes the Seducer, romantic loving is beautiful because it is intoxicating, extraordinarily interesting and transforms one's life so much that it feels as if it is of mythological proportions.¹ One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms asks, "What, after all, is a human being without love?"² and another says that loving relationships give one "the courage to attempt and risk everything".³ Elsewhere, Kierkegaard wrote that "to love human beings is still the only thing worth living for; without this love you do not really live".⁴ However, Kierkegaard also views aesthetic loving relationships as inadequate because without consideration of ethics and religion, they are fleeting and immature, reflecting a lack of self-development and destined to end in despair. To overcome this despair and become a fulfilled individual, Kierkegaard recommends a leap into marriage and faith.

This chapter discusses Kierkegaard's view of aesthetic loving relationships, through two of Kierkegaard's examples of aesthetes. I want to show that they do not fit neatly into Kierkegaard's aesthetic spheres, and also note that there is little of romantic love left in Kierkegaard's preferred spheres. First, it will be worthwhile noting some of Kierkegaard's influences and key ideas underlying his philosophy, particularly the importance of the subjective perspective, and his pseudonymous approach to writing.

More than any other philosopher, Kant "sets the philosophical scene for Kierkegaard",⁵ particularly in his study of freedom, subjectivity and aesthetic judgment. Kant advocated freedom in the sense that "every man is to be regarded as an end in himself", and subordination of one's will to another is a most dreadful thing.⁶ Furthermore, Kant argued that phenomena could be understood as being constructed through the perspective of the thinking subject. Kant also proposed a framework for aesthetic judgment, separated from morality, utility or pleasure. In *Critique of Judgment*, he explored the basis for how we distinguish

¹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 275, 315, 341.

² The question is asked by the ethicist Judge William (a pseudonym) in *ibid.*, 518.

³ This is part of Johannes de Silentio's (the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*) description of the knight of infinite resignation who loves a princess (Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 35.)

⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 344.

⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 43.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984) 678.

whether something is beautiful or not. It is not a matter of understanding, or a cognitive process; nor does it have anything to do with morality or utility. Rather, beauty is a subjective judgment, based on one's imagination and feeling of pleasure or pain.⁷ Notwithstanding these similarities, Kant's philosophy is starkly opposed to Kierkegaard's (and existential philosophies in general). For example, the existentialists' passionate living is very different to Kant's "passionless and ponderous" writings.⁸ However, Kant 'spawned the growth' of Hegel's philosophical system and it was Hegel's system to which the existential thinkers reacted.⁹

Hegel was the most prominent modern philosopher of Kierkegaard's epoch. Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript (CUP)* criticised Hegel's system for two main reasons. First, he attacked it as useless and abstract because it does not help in addressing the problems of everyday life.¹⁰ Second, Hegel argued that people could feel a part of something bigger than themselves by being involved in a community, such as joining a church group. But Climacus worried that this produced unreflective 'mass-people' who are told what to think by the clergy, rather than working it out for themselves. Climacus was disappointed that people simply took it for granted that they were Christians merely because: (a) they lived in Denmark; (b) people who live in Denmark are usually Christians; (c) they obviously were not Jews or Mohammedans; (d) paganism was long driven out of Denmark; (e) they were good citizens of Denmark, a Christian nation; and (f) it would be considered "bad taste" to question one's Christianity.¹¹ Although these views are expressed by a pseudonym, entries in Kierkegaard's journals suggest that he concurred. For example, he wrote: "By the help of God my life will contribute a little to putting an end to the appalling wickedness of deluding men by the millions into thinking that they are Christians and of achieving status in the world by means of proclaiming Christianity".¹²

Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual and the personal passionate subjective human experience earned him recognition as the first existential philosopher. His exploration of subjective experience, personal decisions free from external influences, self-determination

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique Of Judgment*, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), n.d.: 3. 14 April 2012.

⁸ Robert C. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968) 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 6)*, trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong and Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978) 9.

and responsibility for one's choices was radical for his time. Jean-Paul Sartre described Kierkegaard as an anti-philosopher because he rejected philosophy that had come before him and sought "a first beginning".¹³ Kierkegaard disturbed Emmanuel Levinas because he "rehabilitated subjectivity – the unique, the singular – with incomparable strength" and "bequeathed to the history of philosophy an exhibitionistic, immodest subjectivity".¹⁴ These kinds of statements give an indication of Kierkegaard's radical ideas and how they differed from those post-Cartesian philosophers who revered disinterested objectivity and the scientific method.

Kierkegaard wanted simply "That Single Individual" to be written on his tombstone.¹⁵ The clergy, who found his writings to be outrageous, thwarted his wish. At Kierkegaard's funeral, the Archdeacon tried to undermine Kierkegaard's work by advising the huge crowd not to misunderstand or accept what he had written because Kierkegaard "himself had not been conscious of how far he had gone; and that he had gone too far".¹⁶ But this did not dissuade the many generations of people who have since given his work serious consideration.

Like Stirner, Kierkegaard emphasised personally lived experiences and relationality. Unlike Stirner, Kierkegaard was a Christian – "albeit a maverick Christian"¹⁷ – and thought that Christianity was a good choice of belief system because it promises eternal happiness.¹⁸ Climacus argues that such 'knowledge' as church dispensation is purported to be an objective truth but is misleading to an existing individual. By preaching 'objective truths,' organised Christianity discouraged individual thinking and reflection. Yet, eternal happiness is not to be found in a church or community group, nor in being told about the meaning of life. Rather, it is to be found with a passionate personal interest in one's existence and in creating a personal relationship with God, as opposed to the more common phenomenon of using the clergy as surrogates.¹⁹ It also appears to be why Kierkegaard addressed the "single individual", concrete and separate from the crowd.²⁰ He described the crowd or 'the public' as 'untruth'

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, Between Existentialism and Marxism, trans. John Matthews (London: Gallimard, 1974) 152.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, Proper Names, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1996) 76.

¹⁵ Flynn, Existentialism, 26.

¹⁶ E. Boesen, "Boesen's Account of his Hospital Conversations with Kierkegaard: 14 & 16 October 1855", trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen, Encounters with Kierkegaard, ed. B.H. Kirmmse (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) 132.

¹⁷ Cox, The Sartre Dictionary, 121.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 35ff.

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, The Crowd is Untruth, trans. Charles K. Bellinger (Amazon Kindle Edition, 1847).

because it is abstract, impersonal, and renders individuals anonymous and irresponsible, and is thus a place in which to hide like a coward.²¹

This gives some indication as to Climacus' scepticism as to the reduction of truth to objectivity. First, he argues that positive preachments attributed to God and Hegel are based on "certainty in sense-perception, in historical knowledge, and in speculative results", but these are deceptive and illusory because they do not account for the existing subject and the situation of the subject.²² He neglects to consider logically necessary truths. Second, objective truth is distant, aloof, removed, disinterested, indifferent and disengaged because in trying to be objective, one must give up one's passionate personal interest and this makes it inhumane and abstract.²³ He was despondent that people in his age and society lost their passion for life.²⁴ Without passion, there is a "negativity that pervades existence", and it is as if "in our age we do not exist at all".²⁵ Third, objectivity translates everything into a "superfluity of results. But there is no decisive result anywhere".²⁶ An overemphasis on objective results neglects the decisiveness of the subject.²⁷ Instead, Kierkegaard sought something he could be passionate about. In a journal, he wrote: "What I really need is to be clear about *what I am to do*, not what I must know...the thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*".²⁸

On the one hand, Kierkegaard's aim was to encourage individuals to question and reflect on their lives. Yet, taking aim at philosophers who overanalyse, his pseudonyms make such comments as "What seems so difficult to philosophy and the philosophers is to stop",²⁹ and "for why do we have our philosophers, if not to make supernatural things trivial and commonplace?"³⁰

One implication of truth as subjectivity is that it cannot be communicated directly, that is, with objective certainty. We have already encountered Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author of *CUP* and *Philosophical Fragments (PF)*. Kierkegaard published

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 67, 75.

²³ Ibid., 28.

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁵ Ibid., 75, 259.

²⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

²⁷ Ibid., 33, 68.

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse, vol. 1 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) 19. (1 Aug. 1835)

²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 55. Spoken by the aesthete 'A'.

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy by Johannes Climacus*, trans. David F. Swenson and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962) 66.

many works under pseudonyms and said of them: “there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them”.³¹ However, he did accept responsibility for them: although *Johannes Climacus* wrote *CUP*, Kierkegaard claimed responsibility in a “juridicial and literary sense” as well as for its publication.³²

Kierkegaard used indirect communication to enhance the production, to distance himself from the texts, to remove any preconceived notions that the reader may have about him or his work, to release the reader from dragging “the weight of my personal reality”, and instead to dance with the “light ideality of a poetically actual author”.³³ The effect is that Kierkegaard suggests, rather than dictates (like the clergy). Kierkegaard wanted to challenge the reader to dispute his ideas, to encourage the reader to take responsibility for interpreting the text’s meaning, thereby creating an individual subjective truth. In order to do this he created deliberately inflammatory statements,³⁴ and used irony to challenge the reader to question the true meaning of the text. As such, the reader can never be certain when Kierkegaard is being ironic and this forces the reader to make judgments. Accordingly, there is ambiguity as to how much Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works reflect his own views. In *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard said that to attribute all quotes to him is to confuse and exploit his writing, portrays him as a lunatic and makes one a “charlatan or a literary toper”.³⁵ This is why I attribute quotes to the relevant pseudonym, rather than Kierkegaard, and also draw upon his journals, letters, and non-pseudonymous works to complement the analysis.

Kierkegaard’s method of using indirect communication, pseudonyms, fragmentary pieces and postscripts was a rebellion against systematic philosophy. However, he did suggest a type of system by describing the path of self-fulfilment in terms of three lifestyles (also referred to as modes or spheres): aesthetic, ethical and religious. These three modes of existence are not necessarily rigid steps that one must take, but rather they outline the phases that one can expect to experience on the existential journey of finding meaning in life. *Either/Or (EO)* was

³¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 551.

³² *Ibid.*, 1, 552.

³³ *Ibid.*, 553.

³⁴ For example, “woman’s highest destiny is to be a companion to the man” (spoken by Judge William in Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 281.) and “viewed ethically, woman culminates in procreation” (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 66.) These statements attract attention as to whether Kierkegaard’s apparent misogyny is justified. I do not believe he is tied to this view because he provided no ontological grounds for excluding women from the possibility of an authentic and fulfilling existence.

³⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 288.

one of Kierkegaard's first works outlining the individual experience of life and love and is the primary text drawn upon in order to explore the modes. Victor Eremita, the editor of *EO* (another of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms), explains that he fell in love with and bought a second-hand desk. Frustrated with a jammed door, he kicked the desk and a secret drawer popped out. Inside it were letters and essays. Victor hypothesises that two different people wrote them: an aesthete and an ethicist, who he refers to as 'A' and 'B' (or Judge William) respectively. *EO* introduces the reader to the seminal choices one faces: either the aesthetic or the ethical. However, flaws are identified in both lifestyles and the book ends with a sermon that hints at another alternative: the religious. Climacus suggests "faith is the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity"³⁶ and it shall be seen that this idea, together with its relationship to romantic loving, is further explored in Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous *Works of Love (WL)*.

Problems of romantic loving

The aesthetic sphere is the first phase of life and, like a child, is bursting with possibilities. The aesthete drifts through a pleasure-seeking life, guided by sensualism, immediate gratification, free from commitment to anyone or anything, free from social and moral responsibility and devoted to hedonism. This phase is represented in part one of *EO*, portrayed as fun, exciting, dramatic, poetic and curiously mesmerising. It starts by alerting the reader to the dangers of the aesthetic life, which include depression about its inherent emptiness and meaninglessness, and then turns to the floating elation of falling in love and the exhilaration of seduction. Aside from the depressing beginning, his description is so enchanting that at times it seems to advocate for pursuing a richer aesthetic life.

The author of the aesthetic writings in *EO*, 'A', outlines three levels within the aesthetic sphere: dreaming, seeking and desiring.³⁷ Dreaming, the first stage, is a vague craving or desire for something unknown. It is "fickle and fleeting like the touch of a butterfly, and as harmless".³⁸ Desire then awakens and in the second stage, one seeks to satisfy the craving: "The seeking desire is not yet desiring; what it seeks is only what it can desire, but it does not desire it".³⁹ Papageno in Mozart's *Magic Flute* is a prime example. Papageno accompanies a handsome prince on a quest to rescue a beautiful woman with whom the prince has fallen in

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 118.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

love. He has no specific object of desire, but is excited about the adventure and possibility of discovery. The third stage is fully-fledged desire. Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, arguably one of opera's most unscrupulous seducers, is the ultimate representative of this sphere according to 'A'. Unlike Papageno who enjoys the adventure of discovery, Don Giovanni "is a knight who goes out to conquer".⁴⁰ Johannes, the protagonist of the legendary *Seducer's Diary* (the "Diary") in *EO*, also inhabits this third stage. However, unlike Don Giovanni, he reflects. He is therefore, in 'A's' view, a more developed individual. While Don Giovanni is constantly and impulsively in pursuit of satisfying his erotic desires, Johannes recognises the meaninglessness and emptiness of his life and is plagued with boredom. To overcome his boredom, he entertains himself by manipulating love interests.

In the following sections, I evaluate this third stage of 'desiring' in terms of the two main examples provided by 'A': the immediate erotic sensual aesthete whose essence is encapsulated in the Don Giovanni of Mozart's opera; and Johannes, who is the reflective aesthete and author of the *Diary*. While I acknowledge that there are other characters representing possibilities within the aesthetic lifestyle outlined in Kierkegaard's later work *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), they will not be addressed in detail because they are at a similar stage of existence as Johannes' character.

I refer to 'Don Juan' as the name of the legend and to 'Don Giovanni' as the title of and character in Mozart's opera. While I do refer to the pseudonymous author as 'A' so that Kierkegaard will not turn in his grave to call me a charlatan,⁴¹ there is evidence to suggest that the essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* reflects Kierkegaard's own views. For example, in a journal, Kierkegaard wrote that with *The Magic Flute*, the Page in *Figaro*, and *Don Giovanni*, "Mozart has perfectly and consummately presented a development of love at its immediate standpoint".⁴²

Loving unreflectively: Mozart's Don Giovanni

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is a legendary libertine and a womaniser who enjoys a fast turnover. As soon as he has seduced one woman, he moves onto the next conquest. He is strong, confident and boasts that he has loved over 2,000 women, recorded in his not-so-little black

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 288.

⁴² Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks*, 107. Other authors also support this interpretation, e.g. T.H. Croxall, "Kierkegaard and Mozart", *Music and Letters* 26.3 (1945): 152, Sylvia Walsh Utterback, "Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47.4 (1979): 639.

book. 'A' chooses Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the ultimate representative of the aesthetic life because he exists only in music, embodying his 'living in the moment' and lack of reflection. Moreover, he loves pleasure, is highly erotic and focuses entirely on the self-indulgence of sexual gratification. As a force of nature, 'A' argues that Don Giovanni is prisoner to his natural urges and primitive drives, to which he responds unreflectively. He is determined by intuitive reactions and characterised by selfishness and egoism. This makes him child-like, according to 'A' because he wants his desires to be satisfied *now*, with little or no regard for others. This puts him outside the realm of the moral and the ethical, unconcerned about the consequences of his actions. Owing to Don Giovanni's amoral status, 'A' would prefer to call him a deceiver than a seducer. Seduction requires reflection and time to devise cunning plans and wily measures, which Don Giovanni neither does nor has.⁴³

There are dozens of interpretations of the legend of Don Juan, but all Don Juans are concerned with the love and seduction of women, are in opposition to authorities, and do not fit into the structure and rules of the society in which they live. The main point of difference between the many interpretations usually pivots on Don Juan's motivation. Some interpret Don Juan as the seduced rather than the seducer: women pursue him for procreation purposes (e.g., George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, 1903); or Don Juan goes along with being seduced because it is easier than turning the women down (e.g., Max Frisch's *Don Juan or the Love of Geometry*, 1953). In Lord Byron's poem *Don Juan* (1821), an older woman seduces him. Alternatively, some interpret Don Juan as a great libertine, for example, Molière in his play *Don Juan* (1665) and Laclos' Valmont in the 1782 novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Despite the interpretation of the legend, Don Juan generally ends up dead or unhappy, censured, in trouble with others, and bored in a meaningless world.⁴⁴ Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' finds himself subject to moral censure and in conflict with others, but according to 'A', this was only as a result of his relentless quest to fulfil his sexual desires. Choosing hell over repentance and an absurd and meaningless existence, the stage collapses around Don Giovanni. Even when he finally faces the consequences of his actions and descends into hell, Don Giovanni does not despair or repent, since doing so would betray the character that Mozart and his librettist construct.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 104-105.

⁴⁴ Utterback, "Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness": 631.

The main problem that ‘A’ has with most interpretations of Don Juan is that in plays, novels or poems, the protagonist speaks. As soon as a word is spoken, the character becomes a reflective individual facing the ethical sphere and thus no longer immediate.⁴⁵ The spirit of the sensual erotic life, according to ‘A’, is best expressed in music because, like the aesthetic life, it is both immediate and sensual, amoral and pre-reflective; music does not exist in a single moment, but rather in a succession of energetic, stormy, impatient and passionate moments during its performance.⁴⁶ Mozart has found the ultimate expression of Don Giovanni’s lack of substance and his hurrying on in a “perpetual vanishing”, his intense passion, excitement of loving, overwhelming desire, irresistibility to women, omnipotence, gaiety and “exuberant good cheer”.⁴⁷ Just like Don Giovanni, Mozart’s music bubbles like champagne, “merrily chirping, vigorous, sparkling with love”.⁴⁸ No other medium can portray this quite so well. ‘A’ says “Hear the murmur of love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the swirl of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment – listen, listen, listen, to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*”⁴⁹ and

When Don Juan is interpreted musically I hear the whole of the infinity of passion in him, but also its infinite power which nothing can resist; I hear the wild craving of desire, but also that desire’s absolute triumphancy which it would be in vain for anyone to oppose...its function is merely to inflame the passion...the pleasure is magnified, the victory is certain...A life agitated in this elemental way, demonically powerful and irresistible...⁵⁰

However passionately and joyously Don Giovanni lives and loves, ‘A’ suggests it is a life void of true meaning because he acts unreflectively, without aim, goal, focus or strategy. His existence is shallow because his passion is frivolously directed at satisfying sexual urges. Lacking form and substance, Don Giovanni is not quite a fully formed individual; he “constantly hovers between being idea – that is to say, energy, life – and individual”.⁵¹ ‘A’ says that the vibrating music reinforces this ambiguity of existence and this hovering between a force of nature and an individual.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 90, 135.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 111. ‘Demonic’ (*daemonisk*) here does not refer to the Christian meaning of ‘devilish’, but rather ‘inspired’.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

Moreover, 'A' has a problem with the way in which Don Giovanni loves women. He loves sensually, repetitively and hence, faithlessly.⁵² The Greek legend Hercules was famous for loving fifty daughters in one night. Hercules could doubtless produce a list of lovers to rival Don Giovanni's but, according to 'A', Hercules and Don Giovanni are completely different. 'A' argues that Hercules is not a seducer like Don Giovanni because Hercules' love is of his soul and faithful, meaning that he loves the individual woman. When Hercules loves so many women it is because "when he is in love with one he does not think of the next".⁵³ Thus, love is not Hercules' primary goal, as it is for Don Giovanni; love is simply a consequence of Hercules' meeting lovely women. The individual woman does not matter for Don Giovanni, who desires the common, general or abstract woman. Conversely, faithful or soulful love would appreciate the individual and her unique characteristics.⁵⁴ Don Giovanni does not have time for the individual woman because he is concerned with all women: he loves indiscriminately.⁵⁵ 'A' imagines Don Giovanni giving a speech to the effect of: "every girl has what makes me happy, and so I take them all".⁵⁶

Anxiety is a key element that distinguishes Don Giovanni's sensual love from Hercules' faithful and soulful love: "Love from the soul...has in it the doubt and disquiet as to whether it will also be happy, see its desire fulfilled, and be requited. This anxiety is something sensual love does not have".⁵⁷ Don Giovanni does not become anxious because he never stops to reflect on his loving. He lives from moment to moment, so there is no time for thinking about possibilities from which anxiety arises. Kierkegaard highly disapproves of being busy precisely because it is a distraction from reflection and thus a distraction from consciously choosing one's life. In fact, Kierkegaard preaches focusing on a goal that unites one's existence: "*Purity of heart is to will one thing*", lest one's life become fragmented and unstable.⁵⁸ In a journal, Kierkegaard said he admires those who find something they can dedicate themselves to:

So it is with joy and inner invigoration that I contemplate great men who have found that precious stone for which they sell everything, even their lives, whether I see them

⁵² Ibid., 100.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 100-101.

⁵⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Purify Your Hearts! A "Discourse for a Special Occasion" the first of three "Edifying Discourses in a Different Vein,"* published in 1847 at Copenhagen, trans. A. S. Aldworth and W. S. Ferrie (London: The C. W. Daniel Company, 1937) 39.

intervening forcefully in life, with firm step, without wavering, going down their chosen paths, or run into them off the beaten track, self-absorbed and working for their lofty goals.⁵⁹

Love is the key to such passion. Kierkegaard likens life to a labyrinth and love to Ariadne's thread, and those who "plunge into life (the labyrinth)", without love, are destined to be sacrificed to the Minotaur.⁶⁰

One interpretation of the ending of Don Giovanni is that being dragged to hell was his 'come-uppance'.⁶¹ However, he can also be seen as a great hero who died fighting for his principles. Since a fulfilling life involves 'willing one thing', as Kierkegaard suggested, then Don Giovanni can be said to have done, preferring to die for his self-chosen principles than repent. The final scene of the opera decries 'herd morality' because the other characters go back to their mundane lives without 'an idea to live and die for'.⁶² Without Don Giovanni's passion, energy, exuberance and effervescence, the world is dull.⁶³ If Don Giovanni did not influence anyone else, it would not have mattered to him, since the only influence he valued was that of temporarily dazzling women in order to have his way with them. Moreover, there is no such imperative in Kierkegaard's philosophy to influence others.

Loving reflectively: Johannes the sophisticated seducer

According to Victor Eremita, *how* the reflective aesthete seduces is more important than *how many* (as in the example of Don Giovanni).⁶⁴ Whereas Don Giovanni, for 'A', represents unbridled Eros, Johannes is portrayed as less immediate and more sophisticated, is introspective and strategises meticulously. Don Giovanni is portrayed as a serial lover; as soon as he seduces one woman, he forgets her and starts working on the next. Sensuous pleasure is not enough for Johannes. He is intense and exclusive, coveting one woman over a

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks, 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ E.g. Marc Widner argues, "Don Giovanni's most interesting attribute is his triviality, his ultimate inability to influence those who come into contact with him. He is a playboy, an outstanding loser who does not understand things until it is too late. The come-uppance that he receives is perhaps the most valuable theme of the opera" (Marc Widner, "Love in *Don Giovanni*", Nature and Pursuit of Love, ed. D Goicoechea (New York: Prometheus, 1995).)

⁶² See p.78.

⁶³ Arthur Lourie and S.W. Pring describe the final moments: The dark and gloomy D minor reflects the death by switching from "the brilliant tone—to utter extinction, to immersion in gloom, to nothingness...Everything is eaten up and sucked out with an extraordinary appetite and a tranquil gluttony. It is not a death but a sort of refined gormandising" (Arthur Lourie and S.W. Pring, "Variations on Mozart", Music and Letters 11.1 (1930): 25.)

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, Either/Or, 32.

period of six months. While Don Giovanni loves sensuously, Johannes's attitude to love is intellectual. Johannes sees himself as an artist or scientist of love, having to create the interesting himself. He is more evolutionary than Don Giovanni because he seeks constantly to improve and perfect his art.

In the *Diary*, Johannes recounts in meticulous detail the seduction of a young and beautiful woman by the name of Cordelia. He knew how to:

tempt a girl, to draw her to him, without caring to possess her...to the point where he was sure she would sacrifice all, but when matters had come that far he left off without the slightest advance having been made on his part, and without a word having been let fall of love, let alone a declaration, a promise.⁶⁵

'A' is revolted by the "designing mind of this depraved person" and says the women who loved Johannes were unlucky victims of a conniving sick parasite because Johannes treats them as pieces of his own personal chess game, using them to construct interesting scenarios as long as they serve his purpose.⁶⁶ He plucks women like fresh flowers,⁶⁷ and then casts "them off as a tree sheds its leaves – he is refreshed, the leaf withers".⁶⁸ Highly aware of his impact, he says to himself: "My lovely Cordelia! I am cheating you out of something beautiful, but it cannot be otherwise, and I shall compensate you as best I can".⁶⁹ The 'best he can' turns out to be an interesting experience and a broken heart and highlights the disrespect he holds towards obligations to others.

Johannes is also portrayed as delaminated from reality. While he physically runs around in the world, he is intellectually beyond it. He is free because he is not bound by societal norms, or ethical considerations for others. He is so elusive in his convoluted dealings with others that they never know where they stand. He remains aloof from and uncommitted to others. 'A' comments, "Even his affair with Cordelia was so complicated that it was possible for him to appear as the one seduced; yes, even the unlucky girl was sometimes in confusion about it; here, too, his footprints are so indistinct that any proof is impossible".⁷⁰ Cordelia certainly does not know where she stands at the end of the *Diary*. She has called off the engagement;

⁶⁵ Ibid., 250.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 247.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 311.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 251.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 310.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 251.

nevertheless she is bewildered as to how it happened and why. This is because, according to Johannes, he surreptitiously convinced her to do so. Perhaps she realises that she has been deceived. Even so, she still loves him and forgives him,⁷¹ but to no avail.

Did Johannes actually love Cordelia? He has to ask himself the same question: “Do I love Cordelia? Yes! Genuinely? Yes! Faithfully? Yes! – in an aesthetic sense, and surely even that means something”.⁷² This then begs the question: what does loving ‘in an aesthetic sense’ mean? First, as Kant proposed, aestheticism is also about imagination, pleasure, beauty and art. Johannes is an artist of love. He has a hyperactive imagination and uses it to fashion the world around him to make people and situations more interesting. The possession of a woman does not interest him; his interest lies in “enjoying her artistically”.⁷³ Thus, Johannes loves the aesthetic experience of loving Cordelia, ignited by his appreciation of her beauty.

The biggest problem for the aesthete, however, is finding someone worth seducing. Young girls tend to get very boring very quickly, Johannes suggests: “Most men enjoy a young girl as they do a glass of champagne, in a single frothing moment; oh yes! that’s really nice, and with many young girls it’s no doubt the most one can make of it”.⁷⁴ Johannes has learned that first impressions are everything. His first criterion for picking out a girl is that she must enchant him from the very beginning: “When, at a first glance, a girl does not make a deep enough impression upon one to awaken the ideal, then the real thing is usually not particularly desirable”.⁷⁵ This highlights the ambiguous relation between loving as a choice and as an innate attraction. Johannes acknowledged that on the one hand he wants to choose a lover who will challenge and motivate him. This is why he must carefully choose his target, unlike Don Giovanni who is less discriminating. However, he also acknowledged that there must be some attraction to spark his interest in the first place.

For Johannes, seducing is easy and is not an art in itself. The artistry is in enchanting and beguiling a woman. Bringing her into his power and being loved is the most enjoyable thing in the world because, in Johannes’ view, it transforms him from the actual to the ideal and from the quotidian to the poetic.⁷⁶ Not only does he use Cordelia to create an aesthetic loving experience, but he also uses her to turn himself into art through the loving experience. This is

⁷¹ Ibid., 252.

⁷² Ibid., 321.

⁷³ Ibid., 309.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 282.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 276.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 306.

consistent with Climacus's explanation in *CUP* that existence is an art and not a science⁷⁷ because it cannot be understood objectively. It can only be understood from the perspective of the particular individual. It is up to the individual to create oneself and this action of constant creativity is an art form. For Climacus, it is not *what*, but *how* one says or knows something.⁷⁸

Johannes sees Cordelia as entirely his creation.⁷⁹ He was so confident of his ability to make Cordelia fall in love with him, that he did not recognise her as a choosing subject. What Johannes does with Cordelia, at least in his own estimation, is sculpt her, thereby transforming his entire aesthetic experience into a work of art.⁸⁰ He sees himself as in complete control of her. He only recognises her as a sexual object, not for-herself but for-man. This is a confronting and irksome aspect of the *Diary*:⁸¹ that woman is viewed as a victim, having no autonomous choice in the matter, since Johannes bewitches her.

However, why should Cordelia not have chosen to love him? He presented himself as confident, charming, mysterious and sensitive. He was a man who took a particular interest in her, made her feel special and declared his undying devotion and love for her in beautiful love letters. Perhaps one might be suspicious of such eloquent and exuberant expressions of love. However, to a nineteenth-century seventeen year-old girl whose only other option at the time was an awkward and lovesick young boy called Edward, it seems obvious that she should choose the exciting, interesting and unique alternative. Moreover, Cordelia may well have been seeking in Johannes the same as he was seeking in her: the interesting experience, but with the difference that she was unaware of Johannes' time limits.

Johannes loves the beauty of the objects of his desire and the interesting experience of loving, particularly the game of seduction and his power over girls. Perhaps not unlike Cordelia, Johannes values the interesting in life and being in a loving relationship is fascinating. He says, "How beautiful to be in love, how interesting to know one is in love!"⁸² Not only is the feeling fascinating, but also to know how in love one and the other is and how passionate one can be. Moreover, he delights in the possibility of seduction, rather than loving physically. To

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 314.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁹ Perhaps not accidentally, Cordelia's last name is Wahl, which means 'choice' in German.

⁸⁰ E.g. According to Jane Duran, "Cordelia attains a Galatea-like status that enables the seducer/Pygmalion to think of her as entirely his created thing" (Jane Duran, "The Kierkegaardian Feminist", *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Celine Leon and Sylvia Walsh (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 251.)

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 275.

use a cliché, it is the journey (the chase and seduction) rather than the destination (sex) that Johannes loves. For Johannes, her beauty and his power are intoxicating.

First, Cordelia is beautiful: “How royally Nature has endowed this girl, her pure soft contours, her deep feminine innocence, her clear eyes – everything intoxicates me”.⁸³ Assuming that there is some truth in the letters that he wrote to Cordelia in which he described his feelings for her, he says that loving her transforms the meaning of everything in his life: “Love is everything. So, for one who loves, everything has ceased to have meaning in itself and only means something though the interpretation love gives it”.⁸⁴ He lets the enjoyment of her beauty consume him, fill his soul and exalt his life to a legendary level. The feeling of harmony and euphoria generated by the loving relationship leverages it to this mythological level. Johannes writes in a letter to Cordelia: “since my whole soul is filled with you, life takes on another meaning for me: it becomes a myth about you”.⁸⁵ The analogy of a myth is interesting in two ways: not only because the myth in this instance is a form of art, but also because his loving relationship with Cordelia is a myth in itself, that is, an illusion, albeit with some semblance of truth. Kierkegaard also wrote in a journal about the illusory and crippling power of love: “They say love makes one blind; it does more than that – it makes one deaf and it makes one lame”.⁸⁶

Second, the idea of having power over Cordelia intoxicates Johannes. Although he claims to be intoxicated, he maintains control of his passion. Johannes seems to align himself with Stirner’s construction of loving whereby he loves the experience of Cordelia, he finds himself exhilarated in her presence, and loves himself in the state of loving. She nourishes his passion. His sense of power comes from maintaining control of the situation by planning the end of the relationship. It is possible that after six months, there is a greater risk of Johannes becoming attached to her, tired of pretending to be someone interesting or the creator of interesting situations. There is also the possibility that he worries that he will let his guard down and reveal his flaws, or that Cordelia will become bored, or that being too intimate with her means she will find out what he is really like and lose interest in him. These remain speculations: he does not take the risk so we will never know. If he does limit himself to six-month relationships for any of these reasons, then he is purposely closing possibilities to himself, which would contribute to his boredom.

⁸³ Ibid., 315.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 341.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong and Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975) 34.

Nevertheless, Johannes is a master strategist of love and writes of applying strategic principles, launching campaigns, sitting in ambush, spying Cordelia out, gathering intelligence from her friends and family, stealing after her, attacking and assaulting psychologically. Involving her in interesting situations is Johannes' main strategy.⁸⁷ Presumably by doing this, he sparks her interest and gets her attention. She is curious and wants to know more. Like a Venus flytrap, he attracts her. Judge William, the representative of the alternative ethical sphere in *EO*, describes an aesthete as being like a spider that weaves a web and waits patiently for the prey. Moreover, the Judge criticises the aesthete for his obsession with observing other people. He says it is "treacherous": the problem with being an observer is that one "has to put up with being an object of observation in return".⁸⁸ Freely, Cordelia flies over to Johannes to observe him. Too late, she is psychologically trapped. Johannes describes his tactic as "sitting in ambush".⁸⁹ Perhaps pre-empting the damage he knows he will create, he says: "It is a matter of life and death".⁹⁰

While gaining psychological power over a woman is the ultimate aphrodisiac for Johannes, in a broader sense, there is the possibility that he becomes beholden to his own desire to pursue interesting loving experiences. If he is addicted to his aesthetic endeavours, then this is true. One of Kierkegaard's lessons is not to be prisoner to one's immediate desires. Yet if he remains in control of his passions and actively chooses them, it cannot be said he is beholden to them.

Johannes claims to know everything about love: "I am an aesthete, an eroticist, who has grasped the nature and meaning of love, who believes in love and knows it from the ground up".⁹¹ However, there is a contradiction here. If he is an artist creating new loving experiences, how can he claim to know everything before it has happened and if it has not yet been defined? He seems to believe that women are totally predictable and malleable. However, seeing something new, different and interesting in each woman he chooses to take on as a challenge suggests that he does not know everything about women. We do not really know whether he has ever been rejected or encountered an unpredictable woman. That would be his ultimate challenge.

⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 286.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

Johannes fights two wars of love. The first ‘war’ is to liberate his lover, by which he means to educate her to realise her psychosocial freedom. Of utmost importance is that his lover accepts him freely. By this he means that he wants her to choose him, not because she thinks she should, but because she wants to. Although Johannes thinks he has total control over her – “A girl with her passion can be made to do anything at all”⁹² – he also says that he wants “only to own her in her freedom”⁹³ because unless she gives herself freely, the relationship is neither aesthetically pleasing nor challenging and thus not worthwhile. Common bungling seducers, Johannes says, are happy to take from a woman who does not give freely:

She must owe me nothing, for she must be free; love exists only in freedom, only in freedom are there recreation and everlasting amusement. For although I intend her to fall into my arms through, as it were, natural necessity, and am striving to bring things to the point where she gravitates towards me, it is nevertheless also important that she does not fall as a heavy body, but gravitates as spirit towards spirit...Between the two of us must prevail only the proper play of freedom.⁹⁴

Johannes’ dream-girl is one who is independent, self-sufficient and standing ‘alone in the world’. However, he does not believe such a woman exists because he does not think women are free.⁹⁵ He sees women as essentially natural, that is, unreflective:

This being of woman (for the word ‘existence’ already says too much, since she does not subsist out of herself) is rightly characterized as charm, an expression suggesting vegetative life; she is like a flower...She is wholly contained in categories of Nature, and so she is free only aesthetically. She only becomes free in a deeper sense through the man, and that is why we say [in Danish] *at frie*, and that is why the man ‘frees’ [*frier*].⁹⁶

This is, however, part of their attraction for it would be unfeminine for a woman to choose after deliberating. This is why Johannes prefers a woman without girlfriends: women talk about their relationships and the reflection and insights from such discussions has the potential to ruin his plans and undermine his power. For Johannes, scepticism and questioning destroys a girl’s innocence, beauty and quality of being interesting.

⁹² Ibid., 305.

⁹³ Ibid., 321.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 299.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 281.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 363.

At best, in Johannes' view, woman is 'being-for-another'. Yet most, he says, are neither for themselves nor others.⁹⁷ While there appears to be a contradiction here between woman defined as being-for-other and his battle to liberate Cordelia, this is not necessarily so. That he thinks he can liberate her means that woman is capable of being free, but is not encouraged to be so in middle nineteenth century Europe. However, the problem for Johannes is that once he has liberated her, he does not want her anymore because in liberation one realises spirit; spirit is unfeminine; and her beauty, in his eyes, is lost.⁹⁸

Whether Cordelia even stood a chance of resisting this master of seduction is another question. For example, Johannes fancies himself as a physician of love: he observes her symptoms with pleasure, theorises and calculates. He amazes himself at how good he is in predicting her behaviour: "One would not think it possible to calculate so accurately a soul's historical development. It shows how healthy Cordelia is".⁹⁹ This implies that if there were a woman immune to Johannes' charm, he would cast her as sick, rather than admit his failings.

Johannes certainly did not doubt his ability to gain power over Cordelia, not only because of his confidence and his expertise in understanding how women behave, but also because he does actually love her. It is, therefore, not a complete lie: "She will gain the courage to believe in love, to believe it is an eternal power, when she sees its dominion over me, sees my movements. She will believe me, partly because I count on my art, partly because at the bottom of what I do there is truth".¹⁰⁰

The second war for Johannes, after liberating a woman, is to conquer her. The more surrender, the more interesting is the experience because the greater is the demonstration of his power over her. He wants her freedom. But this is somewhat vacuous because Johannes believes "woman's highest destiny is to be a companion to the man" and through him, she becomes free.¹⁰¹ Johannes says, "woman's nature is submission in the form of resistance".¹⁰² So, even though women are destined for submission, he finds differing levels of resistance most interesting. He even tells Cordelia in a letter that: "Only in opposition is there freedom".¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Ibid., 362.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 301.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 298.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 320.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰² Ibid., 324.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 358.

And of course, there is no question of Johannes surrendering anything: “But what pleasure can there be in love when it is not the most absolute self-surrender, that is, on the one side?”¹⁰⁴

However, the woman’s surrender signals the pinnacle and demise of the relationship. Johannes grumbles: “Oh why is a young girl so pretty, and why does it last so briefly?”¹⁰⁵ The game is only interesting and beautiful while there is resistance. The seduction is finished when the girl ‘gives herself’ totally. While there is ambiguity about the meaning of ‘giving herself’, it is possible that Johannes was more interested in the art of seduction than the loving act, especially as there is no evidence that he is interested in consummating the relationship.

Once a freshly plucked flower, Cordelia grows weak and loses her fragrance. “Once it is gone, love is only weakness and habit” and she turns into a “heliotrope”.¹⁰⁶ The suggestion is that Johannes decides that he and Cordelia cannot grow together. She bores him, the experience becomes boring and so he needs to find new “vegetative flowering”¹⁰⁷ to rejuvenate his soul. He then convinces Cordelia to break off the relationship. Johannes feels no anxiety or remorse about the end of the relationship. He claims he has never experienced “lovesick fear and trembling” and wonders if that means that he has never been in love.¹⁰⁸ The answer remains ambiguous.

Still hoping that he will return, Cordelia writes, “Is there no hope at all, then? Will your love never reawaken?”¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding Johannes’ deceptive and manipulative behaviour, she continues to proclaim her love for him, declaring herself his slave in the very same letter that she calls him “my seducer, my deceiver, my foe, my murderer, source of my unhappiness, grave of my joy, abyss of my ruin”.¹¹⁰ Heart-broken and despairing, she appears to have denied responsibility for her own choosing of Johannes and disappointingly, confirms Johannes’ belief that she had no choice and her surrender was inevitable. Declaring herself his

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 277.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 367.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 376. A heliotrope is a hairy purple plant that turns towards the sun. The analogy of the heliotrope could mean a couple of different things. First, a purple hairy plant does not initially sound like a compliment. Strictly speaking, however, lavender is a heliotrope because it is a beautiful hairy purple plant with a lovely fragrance. In this context, it is not an insult. Second, the heliotrope grows towards the sun because it knows that is where its life force is and it needs the sun to survive. Third, a heliotrope is greedy to absorb as much as it can of life’s energy. This last interpretation would suggest Johannes perceives Cordelia as one who is soaking up his energy and this is why he grows weary of her. However, if one imagines Johannes as shade, the flower Cordelia grows weak because Johannes blocks her sun.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 352.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 288.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 256.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 255.

slave is surely a signal of loss of self-respect or emotional blackmail and indicates her giving up responsibility for her own life. She realises her freedom and then throws it away. She has demonstrated that while he understood the kind of man she wanted (charming and mysterious), she did not understand the type of woman he wanted: strong, independent, interesting, refreshing and perpetually combative.

Dancing over the abyss

EO begins with a collection of ‘A’s’ poetic musings in the chapter entitled ‘Diapsalmata’. The musings highlight some of the pleasures, but mostly the pain of an aesthete when he recognises the meaninglessness and emptiness of life. It acts like a siren: beware of the enchantment of the aesthetic sphere; danger lies ahead. This danger is the risk of the aesthetic life dissolving into melancholy, loneliness and boredom, fuelled by despair and meaninglessness. Indeed, Johannes does start to show signs of boredom when he laments the brevity of romantic loving. The suggestion is that anxiety lurks around the corner for both Don Giovanni and Johannes.

As demonstrated in the analysis of Don Giovanni and Johannes, pleasure exists in the power one has over others:

The real pleasure consists not in what one takes pleasure in but in the mind. If I had in my service a humble spirit who, when I asked for a glass of water, brought me all the world’s most expensive wines nicely blended in a goblet, I would dismiss him until he learned that the pleasure consists not in what I enjoy but in having my way.¹¹¹

Yet, this attitude – particularly the treatment of women as sex objects – is painted as immunising the aesthete from meaningful connections to others and rendering him somewhat pitifully alone and sad. ‘A’ describes his sorrow as his castle, which he uses as a refuge from engaging in life and from it, looks down on other people as his prey. Here, he says, “I live as one dead”.¹¹² Melancholy is such an intimate feature of the aesthete’s life that ‘A’ even takes great solace in it, calling melancholy his “intimate confidant” and “most faithful mistress”.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹¹² Ibid., 56.

¹¹³ Ibid., 44.

‘A’s’ message is that eventually an aesthete will become bored with his shallow existence and lose the motivation to live.¹¹⁴ He describes his life as a “bitter drink” which he must take drop by drop.¹¹⁵ “How terrible is tedium – how terribly tedious...I lie stretched out, inert; all I see is emptiness, all I live on is emptiness, all I move in is emptiness. I do not even suffer pain”.¹¹⁶ He psychologically withers: “My soul is so heavy that no longer can any thought sustain it, no wingbeat lift it up into the ether”.¹¹⁷ ‘A’ describes the anxiety and the emptiness of the abyss:

What is to come? What does the future hold? I don’t know, I have no idea. When from a fixed point a spider plunges down as is its nature, it sees always before it an empty space in which it cannot find a footing however much it flounders. That is how it is with me: always an empty space before me, what drives me on is a result that lies behind me. This life is back-to-front and terrible, unendurable.¹¹⁸

‘A’ summarises Don Giovanni’s life as a dance over the abyss because he is blissfully ignorant of the fleetingness and meaninglessness of his existence and the inherent danger:

Don Giovanni’s life evolves for us in the dancing tones of the violin in which he lightly, casually, hastens forward over the abyss. As when one skims a stone over the surface of the water, it skips lightly for a time, but as soon as it stops skipping, instantly sinks down into the depths, that is how Don Giovanni dances over the abyss, jubilant in his brief respite.¹¹⁹

Similarly, Johannes is dancing over the abyss because he is also an aesthete. Like Max Stirner, Johannes commits to his chosen way of life at the expense of commitments to others. Although, strictly speaking, Cordelia breaks off the engagement, it is clear that Johannes had no intention of marrying her. Johannes loved the chase, the sensuous loving feeling, the power he had over Cordelia, and the interesting experience that she, a beautiful young woman, facilitated. Once she gave in, the game was finished.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 130-131.

In the meantime, one may wonder what Johannes does with himself. Although there is little evidence within the *Diary* as to what Johannes does next, one would imagine Johannes most likely searching for the possibility of his next challenge of a young interesting muse. For without the possibility to create beauty in his life, he must return to the quotidian and survive on memories of his romantic creations. Another chapter in part one of *EO* suggests that in order to avoid boredom, one ‘rotates crops’, meaning that one ought never to stay with the one crop for too long and always be ready for the next season.¹²⁰ The suggestion here is that one should always start working on new lovers before one gets bored with the old ones. Marriage is, therefore, to be avoided because it binds one for life.

The issue is not so much the anxiety of discovering the abyss, but the individual’s lack of purpose as he confronts it, a lack of propulsion to overcome it. He longs for an escape from boredom: “If only there were a higher expression, a stronger one”.¹²¹ The source of anxiety, it is suggested in *EO*, is frustration and disillusionment with the finite world and longing for the infinite, a longing to belong to something more than this life. The despair that pervades the aesthetic sphere due to its meaninglessness and lack of form or structure is the fuel for transitioning to the higher spheres (ethical then religious). In leaping to a new sphere, one ‘chooses oneself’. Rather than floating passively through life, one actively asserts oneself to ‘become’ a more complete individual. Concerning loving relationships, Kierkegaard suggested that this means to turn away from Don Juan’s trysts and Johannes’ seductions. I shall return to and explore ‘the leap’ in more detail shortly. In the meantime, I shall briefly address the other two spheres: the ethical and the religious.

Kierkegaard’s alternatives: loving ethically and religiously

Loving ethically

The ethical lifestyle is one in which the individual recognises the meaninglessness of the aesthetic life and takes a definitive leap into making active reflective choices, accepting social norms and morals, and recognising the corresponding duties and obligations to society. While the aesthetic life represents possibility, the ethical realm is about existing.¹²² This means that while the aesthete’s life is filled with possibilities that do not turn into concrete action due to

¹²⁰ Ibid., 223.

¹²¹ Ibid., 53.

¹²² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 262.

his emphasis on the moment and experimenting with himself, the ethicist sees his future filled with concrete tasks, that is, actions, goals, and aims, such as marriage.¹²³

To overcome the meaninglessness and anxiety inherent in the aesthetic lifestyle and the temporal nature of romantic love relationships, Judge William, the pseudonymous author of part two of *EO*, implores aesthetes to choose despair. This is important for two reasons. First, choosing despair is synonymous with choosing oneself, “not in one’s immediacy”, but instead, “in one’s eternal validity”.¹²⁴ Second, according to the Judge, despair is part of the process of aesthetic repentance for exploiting others and the ethical response allows for deep and meaningful connections to others.

According to the Judge, choosing despair also prepares one for marriage: a difficult, meaningful, life-changing and irrevocable decision. Marriage does not eliminate romantic loving, but rather enhances it by providing the loving relationship with constancy and stability.¹²⁵ While romantic loving thrives only in the moment, married loving is healthy, constantly rejuvenating itself between the same two people and thereby overcoming the fleetingness of romance and preserving the loving relationship in time.¹²⁶

In a letter to his fiancée Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard wrote that love unites, but the problem is that love is never truly able to possess its object. Rather it constantly strives to acquire it; it never settles, “but runs on forever”.¹²⁷ In *EO*, it is suggested that in marriage, possession is not a game but already assumed because the lovers have already conquered one another.¹²⁸ Truly free and independent love does not change if the object of affection changes.¹²⁹ The attitude ‘If you don’t love me anymore, then I won’t love you’ demonstrates dependent love. Free and independent love would love the other regardless of whether one’s love is reciprocated.¹³⁰ This might seem irrational at first, but Kierkegaard argued that it is a way to avoid disappointment in loving relationships because lovers can do or say anything and the lover will not cease to love them. Thus, Kierkegaard is advocating unconditional love. He said,

¹²³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 543. Climacus in *CUP* also discusses this theme: Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 262, 263, 265.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 513.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 387, 392-393.

¹²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 5)*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) 158-159.

¹²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 462.

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 52.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

“Duty, however, makes a man dependent and at the same moment eternally independent”.¹³¹ For example, married loving is bound by a duty, which ironically frees an individual in the same way that law gives freedom.¹³² However, it also implies that the object of affection is irrelevant; one’s choice resolutely to commit to love and marriage is paramount because it is within one’s control. Love that depends on reciprocation is not within one’s control.

Both the criteria and the problem with romantic loving, as discussed in *EO*, is that it is sensuous.¹³³ Being sensuous means that it is temporal and likely to evaporate at any moment. It is based on instant satisfaction. Kierkegaard wants to find a means of making love more secure. The internal history of marriage provides a foundation for constancy.¹³⁴ However, marriage does not do away with sensuousness. Rather, reflection on one’s moods allows one to master one’s desires and, like Stirner, gives one the ability to say: “Now I own myself”.¹³⁵ In the ethical mode of life, one controls one’s aesthetic impulsive behaviour. While ‘A’ interprets Don Giovanni in this manner, that is, he acts on impulse, the same cannot be said of Johannes whose actions are calculated.

The ethically endorsed married life also has its drawbacks. Even the Judge admits that the risk of married life is habit: “Its uniformity, its total uneventfulness, its incessant vacuity, which is death and worse than death”.¹³⁶ Kierkegaard develops this theme in *WL* when he proposed that over time, love can naturally become miserably exhausted and lose “its ardour, its joy, its desire, its originaive power, its living freshness”.¹³⁷ In a journal, Kierkegaard likens marriage to two cows he saw yoked together: “the one gadded about and flourished her tail very smartly; the other appeared to be more prosaic and more despondent over having to share in these same motions”.¹³⁸

Anxiety is inherent in married loving relationships, just as much as it is in aesthetic loving because they are both changeable, since they are not grounded upon the ‘eternal’ and are thus insecure.¹³⁹ Even if people love each other their whole lives, their love has *continuance* but not *continuity*. They have no security about the survival of the relationship amid

¹³¹ Ibid., 53.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 392.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 435.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 528.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 466.

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 50.

¹³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, 124-125.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 46-47.

change.¹⁴⁰ Changeable love “is either happily unconscious of this misalignment or is disposed to sorrow”.¹⁴¹ No matter how confident the lovers may be, Kierkegaard concludes that anxiety exists inherently in erotic love because it is not ‘eternally secure’, and this is why lovers are compelled to test each other’s love.¹⁴² In a journal, he explained that “Erotic love dedicates two to union, but death dedicates them to separation”.¹⁴³ In his own copy of *EO*, Kierkegaard wrote that he had thought about including a narrative to contrast with the Seducer entitled ‘Unhappy Love’, in which the man behaved exactly as the Seducer did, but was melancholic: “His love made him indescribably happy at the moment; as soon as he thought of time, he despaired”.¹⁴⁴ This emphasises the conflict between the joy of romantic loving and anxiety about its duration.

Judge William not only concedes that the ethical life of duty-bound actions can be very boring, he justifies the aesthetic life. This leads one to wonder if he justifies the way of life he is denouncing. At the end of *EO*, there is a sermon on the religious life, which suggests that neither the aesthetic nor the ethical life is satisfactory. As both are flawed, Kierkegaard seems to be challenging us to ask more questions. The religious sphere, it seems, is Kierkegaard’s solution to the problems of erotic love. Security and escape from despair will not truly exist and anxiety will continue until the loving relationship has been eternally secured through God.

Religious love

In his journals, Kierkegaard noted that the romantic novel that culminates in marriage falls very short of the necessary passion to lead a vigorous life: “after a prolonged struggle with dragons and wild beasts the lover finally manages to fall into his girl’s arms, and then the curtain falls on a marriage as prosaic as all others”.¹⁴⁵ Instead, Kierkegaard envisioned that a great relationship would awaken “a new growth in love, an intimate, mutual mirroring in each other”.¹⁴⁶ He was talking about forming a new relationship with God, but conceivably the same applies to a loving relationship.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴² Ibid., 47-48.

¹⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 5)*, 221.

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Kierkegaard thought that the goal of life is to create oneself as an authentic individual and to be as good a human as possible before God. Kierkegaard's religious perspective gives God the role of 'other'. The reason for this, according to Kierkegaard, is that God is the only one who can really know an individual to the core and therefore is the only one who can be a judge of an individual's true character. Although there are no empirical facts to support his belief in God, Climacus says in *CUP* that: "If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith".¹⁴⁷ Abraham's intent to murder his son Isaac at the command of God illustrates such passionate loving faith, beyond the ethical realm.¹⁴⁸

In *WL*, Kierkegaard argued that the religious sphere is the highest sphere of existence and requires one to 'love thy neighbour.'¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard generalises loving to a universal love for all humanity, as opposed to specific human erotic loving. However, by definition, love for that special someone is encapsulated in one's love for all.¹⁵⁰ This is the secret to peaceful, happy and eternally secured love, according to Kierkegaard, because as a divine commandment, thy love must not change. Even if the attraction withers, the previously coveted object loses all its loving qualities, the love is unrequited or bestows its interest on someone else, one's love must not wane. Thus, it is steadfast in its security and overcomes the temporal nature of erotic loving. This unwavering commitment to loving everyone, according to Kierkegaard, demonstrates a supremely developed human being.¹⁵¹

Kierkegaard accused erotic love of selfishness because even lovers who are selfless towards each other tend to be selfish with respect to others outside the couple: "At the peak of love and friendship the two really become one self, one I", and unite "in a new selfish self".¹⁵² Through loving everyone equally, religious love overcomes the exclusivity of erotic love and jealousy will not be an issue because there are neither comparisons nor preferences, and Kierkegaard equates preferences in love to self-love and narcissism.¹⁵³ Although Christianity advocates loving one's neighbour as one loves oneself, "Self-love is egotism unless it is also love for God – thereby love for all".¹⁵⁴ In a journal, Kierkegaard wrote that sharing one's life

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 182.

¹⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 34.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 50, 65-66.

¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, 36.

with others brings happiness, self-esteem, and purpose, but he said that erotic love and friendship “are to be desired for happiness but should not be made delusively important”, because they are ultimately self-love.¹⁵⁵ “To love someone *because* he makes me happy – is egotism”.¹⁵⁶ Even if one makes sacrifices for a lover, “it is still a form of self-love, for the sacrifices remind a person of himself”.¹⁵⁷ True love is to love someone who makes one unhappy.¹⁵⁸

Religious love also protects against the pain of breaking up. If one loves abstractly rather than individually, then it does not matter if the love is requited or not. Instead of relating to the beloved, one relates to love and thus the beloved cannot break the relationship because it does not depend on the beloved.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the one who ‘falls away from love’ is not only guilty but also worse off by missing love. The religious lover becomes richer with every new person loved even without reciprocity.¹⁶⁰

Leaping

Now that Kierkegaard’s three phases have been canvassed, the traverse between the spheres shall be addressed in more detail. At the precipice of each of Kierkegaard’s ‘stages on life’s way’ (i.e., aesthetic, ethical and religious) lie either/or choices, momentous and life-changing possibilities that cause anxiety.¹⁶¹ For Kierkegaard, the anxiety inherent in the lifestyles of the lower spheres is the impetus for leaps to higher realms, because, as longed for by the author of *Diapsalmata* in *Either/Or*, they provide the means of a higher and stronger expression.¹⁶² Higher realms are the way out of the absurdity and meaninglessness of the aesthetic sphere. Passionately committing oneself to a freely chosen path gives meaning and purpose to individual existence. For Kierkegaard, this is ultimately how one is judged before God.

In the *Concept of Anxiety (CA)*, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis says anxiety stems from awareness of one’s possibilities. Haufniensis gives the example of Adam eating the apple from the tree of knowledge. Adam experienced anxiety when he faced the possibility of freedom, that is, the possibility that he *could* or was *able* to disobey God.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 56.

¹⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 282-283.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 227.

¹⁶¹ ‘Anxiety’ has also been translated as dread, angst or anguish.

¹⁶² See p.96.

Anxiety is what exists between discovering the possibility of eating the apple and the actual eating of it. As such, anxiety is the “intermediate term”¹⁶³ between possibility and actuality, or, in other words, the experience of becoming aware of one’s potential. The leap is then the decision to turn the possibility into actuality.¹⁶⁴ Life is a series of leaps between states and in every state possibilities lie in front of it and give rise to anxiety.¹⁶⁵ It is through leaping that the self is posited,¹⁶⁶ because we create ourselves through our commitments.

There are some peculiar things about anxiety. First, it is unavoidable because awareness of one’s possibilities draws one in like a moth to a flame and “ensnaringly disquiets with its sweet anxiousness”.¹⁶⁷ Second, anxiety is quite different to fear. One is a passive victim of fear. In anxiety, on the other hand, one is active because it is a matter of assertively choosing one’s self. To use an example that Sartre developed from Kierkegaard’s analogy: one *fears* being pushed off a cliff by another person, but one is *anxious* about the possibility of throwing oneself, actively and freely, over the cliff.¹⁶⁸ If it were anxiety of something, all that would be required is a transition.¹⁶⁹ The suggestion here is that if the decision is, for example, stepping back from the cliff to safe ground to avoid being pushed off by someone, it is not a leap because it is a reaction to an external influence. The leap, on the other hand, is the decision not to throw oneself off the mountain path because one wants to live. In this sense it is self-assertion.

Anxiety has a similar effect to vertigo: it is the “dizziness of freedom”, and “he whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy”.¹⁷⁰ Yet it is not only the abyss (the possibility) that creates the anxiety, rather the individual who looks upon it, “for suppose he had not looked down”.¹⁷¹ This point is reiterated in *CUP*: The size of the chasm across which one has to leap depends on the individual’s subjective perception of it. “(F)or it is not externally the width of the chasm which prevents the leap, but internally the dialectical passion which makes the chasm infinitely wide”.¹⁷²

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 49.

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 94, 105.

¹⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 113.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 77.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 91.

Like looking into an abyss from a great height, anxiety has both a dark and a bright side. On the bright side, anxiety can be an adventure.¹⁷³ Realising one's possibilities is educative and "the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man",¹⁷⁴ because it indicates one is more highly attuned to one's options. On the dark side, anxiety is characterised by desperate fear and trembling,¹⁷⁵ according to Climacus in *CUP*. Haufniensis in *CA* says, "one feels in one's bones that a storm is approaching...the individual trembles like a horse that gasps as it comes to a halt at the place where once it had been frightened".¹⁷⁶ It risks turning into "bestial perdition", "horror", "wretchedness"¹⁷⁷ and can be the scariest thing in the world:

And no Grand Inquisitor has such dreadful torments in readiness as anxiety has, and no secret agent knows as cunningly as anxiety how to attack his suspect in his weakest moment or to make alluring the trap in which he will be caught, and no discerning judge understands how to interrogate and examine the accused as does anxiety, which never lets the accused escape, neither through amusement, nor by noise, nor during work, neither by day nor by night.¹⁷⁸

Leaping requires bravery and effort and nothing can make it easier. Another person cannot lend a helping hand: "it is an act of isolation, which leaves it to the individual to decide".¹⁷⁹ Nor can one stumble into the leap by accident, or simply creep up to the precipice and let it happen, or make it easier by performing a transition to it. According to Climacus, this is well intentioned but deceptive because, "When one is indisposed to make the leap, so indisposed that this passion makes the chasm infinitely wide, then the most ingenious contrivance for the purpose will help one not at all".¹⁸⁰

The only way to conquer anxiety entirely is with faith, according to Climacus and Haufniensis, because, as with marriage, even the ethical does not extinguish it entirely. Without faith, one is at risk of suicide by sinking into "wretchedness of the finite" instead of struggling with the infinite.¹⁸¹ With faith, one finds "rest in providence".¹⁸² It is a matter of confronting the abyss and making a decision beyond rationality in the face of absurdity.

¹⁷³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 155.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 96.

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 115.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

¹⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 92.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 160.

It would appear, however, that Kierkegaard himself had problems with leaping. He wrote in a journal that “It takes courage to get married” and yet he never had the courage to marry.¹⁸³ There are similarities between Kierkegaard’s own situation and the story of Johannes the Seducer. At the age of 21, Kierkegaard met and fell in love with the 14-year old Regine Olsen. However, Regine already had a boyfriend, Fritz Schlegel. At the time, the legal courting age for women in Denmark was 17, so Kierkegaard waited. During that time, he studied her and made himself well known to Regine’s family and friends, including Schlegel. As soon as Regine was 17, Kierkegaard wooed her and they became engaged. He had “decided upon her” and said to her one day: “It is you I am searching for, it is you whom I have sought after for two years”.¹⁸⁴

The day after they were engaged, Kierkegaard changed his mind. In his journal, he wrote: “But inwardly; the next day I saw that I had made a false step”.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he did not tell Regine right away and in the meantime, she “gave herself unreservedly to me, she worshipped me”.¹⁸⁶ Kierkegaard said he was melancholic and felt treacherous and guilty about the situation, and thought it was God’s punishment.¹⁸⁷ Although Regine noticed he was unhappy, he said to her, “Surrender to me; your pride makes everything easier for me”.¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard imagined that with Regine he would have been happier than he could have ever dreamed, “But there was a divine protest, that is how I understood it. The wedding. I had to hide such a tremendous amount from her, had to base the whole thing upon something untrue”.¹⁸⁹ This is because he did not want to have to explain to her why he was melancholy, there were things that he could not tell her,¹⁹⁰ and thought his anxiety and misery would have quickly ruined the relationship. Thus he convinced himself that it was in her best interest not to marry him, and decided for her: “I broke it for her sake”.¹⁹¹

¹⁸² Ibid., 161.

¹⁸³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, 125.

¹⁸⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938) 69-70.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 5)*, 241.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 198.

Kierkegaard broke up with Regine by a letter accompanied by the engagement ring.¹⁹² Regine's father told Kierkegaard that she was in despair, utterly desperate, and pleaded with him not to break up with her, but to no avail.¹⁹³ Of the two months that followed the break-up, he wrote that "It was a time of terrible suffering: to have to be so cruel and at the same time to love as I did. She fought like a tigress. If I had not believed that God had lodged a veto she would have been victorious".¹⁹⁴ He had to "repel her with all my powers", and was 'necessarily cruel'.¹⁹⁵ For example, when she asked if he would ever marry, he replied, "Yes, perhaps in ten years time when I have sown my wild oats; then I shall need some young blood to rejuvenate me".¹⁹⁶ He thought it would be easier for Regine to accept the end of the relationship if she thought he was deceptive and frivolous, rather than melancholy, so tried to make her hate him.¹⁹⁷ He thought it was the only way he could "make good my mistake" of becoming engaged to her.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, he was very grateful for his relationship with her, since through her he discovered how happy he could be but also how melancholy he was.¹⁹⁹ He wrote that, like Socrates, "I owe my best to a girl. I did not learn it from her directly, but she was the occasion".²⁰⁰

After his cruel discussion with Regine, he cried all night, but the following day he behaved as if he were happier than ever, even though he thought of and prayed for her every day thereafter.²⁰¹ Although he could not be faithful to Regine through marriage, he suggested he was faithful to her by never loving another woman as he loved her: "I saw a pretty girl to-day – but it does not interest me any more – I do not wish it – no husband can be more faithful to his wife than I am to her. At the same time it is good for me; those little romances distracted me a good deal".²⁰² Regine subsequently married Schlegel.

Kierkegaard went to Berlin to study Hegelian philosophy. It was also at this time he wrote *Fear and Trembling (FT)* and *Either/Or (EO)*. He wrote in a journal that "'The Seducer's Diary' was written for her sake, in order to clear her out of the relationship", implying that it

¹⁹² Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, 72.

¹⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 6)*, 195.

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, 73.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 5)*, 180, 185.

¹⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 6)*, 19.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰¹ Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, 73-74.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 77.

was an attempt to explain that he was at fault,²⁰³ and to repulse her.²⁰⁴ The difference between his situation and Johannes' was very little from an outsider's perspective, but while the reason for Johannes' behaviour was wantonness, the reason for his own behaviour was melancholy.²⁰⁵

Kierkegaard was keen to hide the truth, threatening to put a bullet in his brother's head if he tried to show anyone otherwise,²⁰⁶ and begging a friend not to defend him.²⁰⁷ He felt called to the service of God and that precluded him from having any relationship with Regine. It would seem that Kierkegaard's search for truth and meaning in life was to him inconsistent with the state of marriage, and yet he advocated marriage as a stage on the existential path to a fulfilling life. Thus, the way he lived his life seems to contradict his philosophy. He wrote in his journal in 1843: "Had I had faith I should have remained with Regine. Thanks and praise be to God, I now see that".²⁰⁸ He seems to be saying that he could have made the same journey if he had married her, and reconciled both his love for Regine and his love for God in the religious sphere. In *EO*, Judge William argues that faithful love is demonstrated in and by marriage. Nevertheless, in a draft letter of 1849 that never reached Regine, seeking reconciliation, he wrote that even if she were still available, he could not marry her.²⁰⁹ His journals reveal that for the rest of his life, he still loved her, and was conscious of the suffering and humiliation he caused her, but thought that he suffered more than she.²¹⁰ He longed to explain his actions to her, but dared not to, since he thought she would regret marrying Schlegel and wanted to save her from more distress that he thought such knowledge would cause.²¹¹ However, it would seem that he wanted to save himself the risk of complications to his own life if Regine decided she wanted a relationship with him despite his melancholy.

Kierkegaard considered himself to be the exception to his rule about marriage since he had been granted "unusual capacities"²¹² and had what he called a 'primitive God-relationship': "The special one is the exception and ought to be conscious of himself as such, and rather

²⁰³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (Volume 6), 144.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (Volume 5), 176.

²⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, 74.

²⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (Volume 5), 173.

²⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, 87.

²⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (Volume 6), 255.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

²¹¹ Journal entry dated 1848. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Journals of Kierkegaard, 1834-1854*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Fontana Books, 1969) 144-145.

²¹² Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (Volume 6), 141.

than advising others to do the same, the exception should instead advise others to do the universal".²¹³ He thought himself to be like Diana who was unmarried but helped others give birth.²¹⁴ Thus, through what could be construed as an inflated sense of self-importance, Kierkegaard justified not being married, even though he advised others to do so.²¹⁵ Even though he thought that God would "place the stamp of Governance" on his life because he could show others how to lead "the highest life, a life in fellowship with God", he acknowledged that his life was his choice and sacrificed himself for others not because he thought he was better, but because he felt more wretched, sinful and melancholic.²¹⁶

Key considerations

Problem with the aesthetic sphere

One question at the heart of Kierkegaard's philosophical spheres is the relationship between existential development and intellectual development. For example, Kierkegaard suggested that Don Giovanni is neither intellectually nor existentially developed and Johannes is portrayed as intellectually developed but not existentially developed.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, this representation confuses the issue, which I see as Kierkegaard's relegating Don Giovanni and Johannes to an 'aesthetic' sphere, characterised by immaturity and immediacy and placed at the most primitive stage of life. I argue that (a) Kierkegaard was wrong to categorise immature child-like behaviour in the same mode of existence as appreciation of beauty, creativity and passion, and (b) the aesthetic sphere to which Johannes belongs is characterised by the latter description and not the most primitive mode of life.

Let us consider the situation where an aesthete becomes aware of the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical and yet still chooses the aesthetic. Kierkegaard criticised the aesthetic sphere primarily because of the lack of commitment to meaningful moral decisions. Judge William discounts the aesthete's choice as superficial: "The aesthetic choice is either wholly immediate, thus no choice, or it loses itself in multiplicity".²¹⁸ For example, a young girl following her heart is not really choosing because her actions are immediate and based on primitive desires; her choice is made for that instant but can be changed in the next moment.

²¹³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 3)*, 131.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

²¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers (Volume 6)*, 7-8.

²¹⁷ Evans argues that Kierkegaard does detach the two forms of development and Johannes demonstrates that "a person can be intellectually sophisticated without personally becoming anything at all" (C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love - Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*, 2004: 46. 13 January 2008 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0199272174.001.0001>>.)

²¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 485.

A real choice, for the Judge, is that of either/or: one stands at the crossroads in life and makes a meaningful, absolute and essentially irreversible decision. The quality of one's choice divides the aesthetic and ethical spheres. Don Giovanni and Johannes, in the Judge's estimation, do not make any proper moral decisions. Judge William also criticises the aesthete for lacking seriousness²¹⁹ and being "only a lodger in life".²²⁰ An aesthete is thus, as Kierkegaard suggested, still immature and has a very long way to go on the existential road to becoming a fulfilled human being alone before God.

Don Giovanni and Johannes do not deserve these criticisms. Johannes is intellectually very highly developed. Both have deliberately chosen their lifestyle, are unwaveringly dedicated to it and are successful.²²¹ The only conclusion is not Judge William's, that is, they are indifferent to their life choices. On the contrary, Don Giovanni strives for as many loving experiences as he can manage; Johannes strives for ultimate enjoyment through creating and perfecting loving experiences, making them as interesting as can be, and has high standards for the women he chooses. Both characters' commitments to their chosen lifestyles are demonstrated by their extraordinary seductive skills and strategies to evade being captured by authorities and jilted lovers in Don Giovanni's case, and the skills and strategies to beguile women into surrendering themselves to him in Johannes' case. Both actively choose their lifestyles and commit to their self-chosen principle of sensuality, and are willing to die for it.

'A's' conclusion – that Don Giovanni is completely oblivious to the consequences of his actions – is not the only conclusion to be drawn. Don Giovanni has to deal with others and their ethics to achieve his ends. He is not completely detached from the world, but engages with society on his own terms. Don Giovanni and Johannes are extraordinary human beings who excel at their chosen pursuits, are both creators of their own life, and are not determined or restricted by society and law. They are not beholden to the ethical realm. Kierkegaard implies that these two men are *undersocialised* because Don Giovanni is child-like and immature, acting impulsively and unreflectively to satisfy his biological urges and Johannes does not make any meaningful decisions. However, there is support for the argument that they are rather *oversocialised*. For example, Don Giovanni can be portrayed as a Romantic hero, living and loving as he chooses. It was not simply good fortune or luck that Don Giovanni evaded capture for so long. In the end, a dead man reincarnated as a statue sent him to hell.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 386.

²²⁰ Ibid., 481.

²²¹ Some interpretations of Don Juan, such as Byron's, portray him as self-aware and engaged in an epic struggle, but 'A' specifically disagrees with this interpretation. (ibid., 113.)

Both Don Giovanni and Johannes chose not to conform to socially accepted norms or the law (which, according to Kierkegaard, characterises ethical individuals).

They have committed to celebrate enjoyment in life and love, are powerful beings, and not as immature as suggested in *EO*. This suggests that that self-development and Kierkegaard's spheres are not simultaneous, meaning that an advanced person could take up residence in the aesthetic sphere and still become a fulfilled individual, albeit not before God. This then brings into question the definition of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere. If we consider the aesthetic sphere to be characterised by appreciation of beauty and artistic creativity (which Kierkegaard includes in his definition of the aesthetic), then it is not justified to paint it as if it were undeveloped. If for Mozart, "his art was the highest aesthetic morality",²²² then Kierkegaard's placing of the aesthetic at the lowest level is in conflict with Mozart's view and thus in conflict with the aim of the opera.

While doubt can be cast upon whether Don Giovanni is undersocialised and child-like, there is little question that he is sensual. The main point of difference between Don Giovanni and Johannes, as pointed out in *EO*, is reflection. Don Giovanni actively chooses his lifestyle and is very successful, but this does not mean he reflects upon it. He has no interest in becoming a better seducer. For example, he does not reflect as to how he could have better avoided Donna Anna, a past conquest, who intercepts his seduction of Zerlina. Don Giovanni is a womaniser; he is purely libidinal. There is nothing spiritual or cerebral about his lifestyle. Don Giovanni is also not romantic in the traditional sense of the word because the relationships he created were purely sensual. He did not show any hope that the relationship would endure; since he loved so many women, it is dubious that he was interested in the individual woman, suggesting that his love was impersonal. He shows no concern for his beloved's welfare. Sexual desire alone is insufficient to classify Don Giovanni as a romantic lover, and since he shows no interest in anything more than sex, not even appreciation of beauty,²²³ relegating him to an aesthetic sphere is problematic and a more appropriate name for it would be

²²² Lourie and Pring, "Variations on Mozart": 26.

²²³ Leporello, while recounting Don Giovanni's conquests to Donna Elvira in *The Catalogue Aria*, says that although Don Giovanni prefers youthful beginners, he thinks not about whether the woman is blonde, brunette or white-haired, plump or lean, tall or tiny, rich, ugly, beautiful or old, but only that she wears a skirt (Andrew Litchfield, Jessica Frawley and Skye Nettleton, "Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes", *Higher Education Research & Development* 29.5 (2010): 101-102.)

‘sensual’ sphere. He leads a hedonistic lifestyle,²²⁴ in pursuit of sexual satisfaction and guided by sensuality.

Johannes, on the other hand, is not only interested in sex. He sublimates sexual desire into a romantic relationship. He is passionate about particular women and reflects. However, his enforced six-month time limit on relationships renders his activities unromantic, since romantic loving involves at least the hope that the relationship will endure. Nevertheless, Johannes also laments about the brevity of romantic relationships,²²⁵ which raises the possibility that he would have liked his relationships to last longer, but knew it was unlikely, so adjusted his expectations accordingly. He does show some concern about his beloved’s welfare, even if somewhat superficial, when he writes about wanting to compensate Cordelia as best he can.²²⁶ Nevertheless, he is in a very different realm to Don Giovanni. He is authentic, self-determining, committed to his chosen lifestyle, refuses to be subordinated to external influences or his base desires and chooses his own values, morals and actions. If the existential leap is equated actively to deciding and committing to a lifestyle, which is consistent with Kierkegaard’s description, then a leap into an aesthetic sphere, beyond a purely sensual realm, is valid and need not result in anxiety, as Kierkegaard would argue.

Problem with the ethical and religious spheres

From reflecting and thinking one enters into the realm of the rational. The reflective sphere is pragmatic. In such an ethical/rational sphere, one marries for money, fame or in order to have children. It is a terribly sensible sphere but potentially very dull and boring, as the Judge in *EO* knows all too well. His relationship with his wife is characterised by respect and excitement in his life is limited to thinking while in his armchair.

The problem with loving in the ethical sphere is that it ceases to be romantic because sexual passion for the beloved is irrelevant, and it becomes impersonal since it is no longer an appreciation of the beloved individual. While marriages can be romantic, romantic loving is not a necessary feature. Rather, the focus is on upholding one’s obligations and tasks, as established by society. The duty to love does not necessarily involve the choice to be passionate about one’s beloved. Even though the aim of marital love is to establish a

²²⁴ Wilfried Greve proposed that in a hedonistic sphere, the goal in life is pleasure, which involves satisfying one’s natural impulses and is thus predetermined (Wilfried Greve, *Kierkegaards maieutische Ethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990) 50-51.)

²²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 367.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

permanent union, Kierkegaard suggested that it is still based on erotic love, which depends on the beloved to reciprocate. He sought to find a way to love another that does not depend on the beloved, hence his leap to religious faith.

Kierkegaard's religious mode of existence is based on the idea that we use reason as far as it will take us, but at a point, reason becomes insufficient for existing, and a leap into something suprarational is then required. While faith in God can require such a leap, it is not necessarily so, since many religions base their doctrines on rational grounds (even if questionably rational). Thus, religion can be pragmatic.²²⁷

Kierkegaard saw a leap to faith as the only possible remedy for anxiety. Yet, if one is not anxious about the abyss, then there is no imperative to change and no need to find something to leap to. Kierkegaard had already decided that one is going to have existential problems if one does not have faith in religion and therein lies the difficulty with his argument. *Haufniensis* and *Climacus* suggested that anxiety grows in the space between possibility and actuality. Yet, awareness of one's possibilities need not necessarily result in anxiety. I may not know what lies ahead and may be nervous or have reservations about what to choose, but that does not mean I am anxious. Rather, I may be bursting with excitement about what to choose and what to do. *Haufniensis* recognises this more positive aspect of anxiety, but suggests, unconvincingly, that it is only possible with the support of one's faith in God. Kierkegaard suggested it is only a matter of time before Don Giovanni and Johannes do experience anxiety and yet Don Giovanni shows no such signs before descending into hell. Certainly Johannes seems bored after Cordelia, but boredom does not equate to anxiety and he admits he has never experienced "lovesick fear and trembling" that is associated with anxiety.²²⁸ And who is to say that he ever will? The imperative to leap – anxiety – does not exist for either of them.

Even if one does face anxiety, what is the imperative to leap to spheres of ethics and religion, that is, to marry and to love everyone equally? Kierkegaard suggested Don Giovanni and Johannes are immature because they make a welter out of the aesthetic sphere and do not make the required leap to higher modes of existence. However, these are not the only options.

²²⁷ Immanuel Kant, for example, proposed that "The *concept* of God and even the conviction of his *existence* can be met with only in reason, and it cannot first come to us either through inspiration or through tidings communicated to us, however great the authority behind them" (Immanuel Kant, "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?", trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni, *Religion and rational theology*, eds. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 14.)

²²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 288.

Another option is a leap into an existential sphere of self-chosen principles based on neither religious faith nor ethical considerations.²²⁹

For example, it could be argued that Don Giovanni and Johannes leap beyond rationality, into suprarational principles. They know how the world works and what women want. They are not oversexed teenagers because they are enlightened by knowledge and experience. They are confident, capable and aware. They throw themselves into what they find beautiful and enjoyable and something they ‘lived and died for’, that is, loving relationships. They would not die for their beloved, but they would die rather than give up their passions. Nevertheless, since Don Giovanni lives only for sex, he is animalistic, determined by his libido, and must indeed remain at the lowest sensual level of existential development.

The implication of adopting Kierkegaard’s religious sphere is that lovers are objects of love and used as stepping-stones on the path to the religious person’s fulfilment and, in this sense, his higher spheres are no more honourable than his lower modes of existence. Moreover, Kierkegaard is endorsing the view that one should never stop loving so as never to be hurt in any relationship, even despite abhorrent acts. The nastiness of a relationship breakdown can be prevented through defiance. The one who is dismissed simply refuses to ‘fall away’ from love. Kierkegaard did not endorse denial as such (although I think this is the effect), but rather because one has a duty to love everyone, it does not matter if the love is reciprocated. Kierkegaard is essentially recommending ‘don’t think, just love.’ In fact, the more terrible others are, the more a lover can prove goodness to God by resolutely adhering to God’s commandments.²³⁰ Yet, an insecure love relationship is not necessarily a terrible thing. To know that the relationship could change means that lovers must work harder at making it extraordinary. Unlike Kierkegaard’s middle nineteenth-century Denmark, few people nowadays will stay married because it is a duty or because they are Christian. The insecurity of love ensures that lovers do not take the other for granted.

²²⁹ Christopher Hodgkinson’s ‘grounds of value’ framework is useful in understanding this and can be compared to Kierkegaard’s modes of existence. Hodgkinson outlines three spheres: preference, consequence/consensus and principles. Preference is the lowest level because it is based on feeling and emotion (like Kierkegaard’s aesthetic sphere). A person operating on such a level values something based on whether it feels good or bad. Consequence/consensus is the middle level and is based on cognition, reasoning and thinking. As such, it is the rational sphere (like Kierkegaard’s ethical mode) and considers whether an action is unpleasant, beneficial, efficient or congruent with public opinion. The highest level is the transrational realm of principles. It is based on the psychological faculty of willing and its philosophical orientations include religion, existentialism and intuition (Hodgkinson, *The philosophy of leadership*, 38.)

²³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 308.

While Kierkegaard criticised Hegel for being abstract, Kierkegaard is himself guilty of abstraction in his support of the duty to love thy neighbour. The neighbour is an abstraction and represents anyone and everyone that the individual may happen to encounter. Kierkegaard referred to them as “those we see”.²³¹ The object of affection would appear to be irrelevant in Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love because one loves a generalised other.²³² And this element is at odds with romantic love. Kierkegaard came to argue that romantic love could still exist at the religious level, because one loves everyone. However, romantic love is personal, and religious love, which loves everyone equally, devalues the personal element of the romantic. In Kierkegaard’s religious sphere, he recommends that one become blind to individual differences in order to ensure that one loves all humans equally. For a philosopher who defends subjective truth so magnificently, loving everyone despite their individual differences would appear to contradict his defence of the individual and there is nothing left of romantic loving.

Thus, while religious love upholds the Romantic ideal of total consummation with a beloved into a spiritual union with God, upheld by one’s irrational commitment, it devalues the personal aspects of romantic love. While one might be passionate about one’s commitment to such an ideal, passion for one’s beloved is not guaranteed, and the love is sublimated into a love of God. Just as the individual woman Don Giovanni loves does not matter, so too does the religious sphere render the beloved accidental because one loves everyone; lovers’ qualities do not matter. It is precisely because religious love is not preferential that it cannot be romantic.

In sum, Kierkegaard was wary of the frivolity of sensual loving. He described the appeal of wanting to give up one’s freedom and devote oneself to the beloved, and the struggle to control one’s passions in light of the overwhelming nature of romantic loving. He suggested that freedom is incompatible with romantic loving because it is dependent on one’s desire and the other’s qualities and is void of choice. Actively choosing and committing oneself ethically to others overcomes the spontaneous nature of sensual loving and allows for meaningful connections. However, it takes a leap to faith to achieve purpose, constancy and stability, through overcoming the anxiety of preferential loving and freeing oneself from dependency on the object of affection for reciprocation. Nevertheless, I suggest that loving subject to a duty or independent of the beloved’s reciprocity is neither romantic nor a human relationship.

²³¹ Ibid., 153.

²³² See p.33.

Although Kierkegaard imagines that romantic love survives in his higher realms, the discussion above shows that while there might be love, it cannot be considered romantic. Kierkegaard's hierarchy is also problematic, since the romantic and aesthetic are not the lowest rungs of existential development. It would be more appropriate to classify such a lifestyle as Don Giovanni's as sensual, rather than aesthetic, and for this reason he can indeed be placed at the lowest rung of existential development.

Chapter 3 - Friedrich Nietzsche: Loving Powerfully

Nietzsche identified at least four key developments as the source of problems in heterosexual loving relationships. These stem primarily from what he thought were antiquated religious values: historical precedents with respect to romantic loving; the popularity of the virtue ‘agape’; Christianity’s demonising of sex; and the malfunctioning institution of marriage which is incompatible with romantic love. In response to each of these issues, I have identified and assessed Nietzsche’s suggestions. Ultimately, I argue that for loving relationships to be compatible with Nietzsche’s ideal view of being with others (that contributes to *Übermensch* striving), they need to overcome these four issues. While Nietzsche comes close to rejecting romantic loving, such a relationship remains possible, albeit extraordinary, within his thinking.

Nietzsche admired the ancient Greek model of relationships, where friends were great, men were warriors and women were for their recreation.¹ He saw the fact of loving relationships as another example of the collapse of standards in a hedonistic world that is heading for nihilism. We have forgotten what it means to be courageous and strong. A great life should be challenging, not comfortable and secure. Nietzsche advocated a philosophy of “aristocratic radicalism”,² where a few brave human beings take up the challenge of striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*. The ideal of the *Übermensch*, sometimes tenuously translated as ‘superman’ but meaning ‘overperson’, is not necessarily a goal that can be achieved, but is rather characterised by striving passionately and creatively to overcome oneself, living life to the fullest, constantly combating and overcoming obstacles to become greater, or in other words, to transcend.³

Nietzsche often wrote in aphorisms, which provide a variety of fragmented perspectives that can appear “scattered”,⁴ “contradictory and confused”,⁵ or over-generalised. Moreover, often Nietzsche’s ideas are so impregnated with possible meaning that it is difficult to conclude definitively what he is trying to communicate. Irving Singer, for example, criticised Nietzsche

¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 91.

² Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971) 104.

³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) 225.

⁴ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 84.

⁵ Secomb, *Philosophy and love: from Plato to popular culture*, 29.

for lacking “detailed argumentation” in favour of “exhortation and shrieking revelation”.⁶ Bryan Magee also noted, “You can’t make his writings stand up in terms of rigorous intellectual argument, because then they all come apart at the joints, which are the images. But if you take everything as poetic utterance then it’s often unclear and highly disputable what it is he is saying”.⁷

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche encourages readers to create their own interpretation. Also, like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche was unsystematic.⁸ He said “*Beware of systematisers!*”⁹ and “I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity”.¹⁰ However, some writers have argued that Nietzsche is indeed systematic because, for example, his thought is “organized and logically ordered” in its aim to overcome nihilism.¹¹ Nevertheless, if he attempted a systematic approach, the contradictions within his writing invalidate it. However, I intend to take a generous approach and assume that he was not trying to be systematic. The implication of this is that the contradictions are less important and the point will not be to try to reconcile them, but to look at his key messages and themes. In light of this consideration, the purpose of this chapter is to gain insights into Nietzsche’s views on romantic loving by canvassing his comments across a variety of his works.

While Nietzsche’s vitalism differs from existentialism, he contributes significantly to existential ideas. Many of the existentialists agreed with Nietzsche that there is no inherent meaning in life. Since God is dead, Nietzsche argued that it is up to individuals to create their own morality and values. It is this focus on the individual as creator, “human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!”¹² that opens his thinking to be aligned with, even if not officially classified as, existentialism.

One of the great mysteries surrounding Nietzsche’s intellectual predecessors concerns Max Stirner. To this day, speculation continues about whether Nietzsche read Stirner’s *Der Einzige*

⁶ Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 71.

⁷ Bryan Magee, *The Great Philosophers* (London: BBC Books, 1987) 248.

⁸ Will Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 123.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 158.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* (London: Penguin, 1990) 35.

¹¹ Bernard Reginster, *The affirmation of life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006) 3, 290.

¹² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 189.

und Sein Eigentum.¹³ Nowhere in Nietzsche's published writings did he mention Stirner's name. However, Nietzsche undoubtedly knew of Stirner, who has been called the precursor or "springboard" to Nietzsche,¹⁴ even as having provided "the 'intellectual arsenal' from which Nietzsche derived his weapons".¹⁵ Nietzsche had read quite a few books that referred to Stirner, for example, Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, and in 1874, Nietzsche allegedly recommended *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* to a student, calling his work "the boldest and most consistent since Hobbes".¹⁶ Also, a close friend of Nietzsche's reported that he spoke to her of the affinity he felt with Stirner but did not want to talk about him for fear of accusations of plagiarism.¹⁷ On the other hand, Brobjer argued that it is "highly unlikely that Nietzsche in any sense was profoundly influenced by Stirner" because if he were, he would have written about him.¹⁸ However, it is also possible that Nietzsche did not write about Stirner for fear of not being seen as a unique and radical thinker. Camus suggested Nietzsche attempted to provide a solution to Stirner's nihilistic desert. He said this is where "Nietzsche's exhausting quest starts"¹⁹ to create a new aristocratic culture. Moreover, as Georg Simmel pointed out, Stirner, like the Greek sophists, "holds that all objective standards and values are imaginary and inessential, ghostly shadows confronting subjective reality".²⁰ However, Nietzsche is nobler and could be seen to be condemning Stirner's egoism when he wrote: "We find abominable any decadent spirit who says 'Everything only to me!'"²¹

Nietzsche might seem to be an odd authority on the subject of love, since, as far as we know, Nietzsche's romantic aspirations were never reciprocated. Nietzsche tended to love women who were already married, in love with someone else, using him to become famous, or put off by his bushy moustache and awkward manner.²² Nietzsche's life was so void of romantic involvements that his interest in women has been brought into question. In *Zarathustra's Secret* Joachim Köhler asked "What love life?" highlighting that "So little was known about it

¹³ E.g. Thomas H. Brobjer, "Philologica: A Possible Solution to the Stirner-Nietzsche Question", *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 25 (2003), John Glassford, "Did Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) Plagiarise from Max Stirner (1806-56)?" *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 18 (1999).

¹⁴ W.C.A. Wallar, "A Preacher's Interest in Nietzsche", *The American Journal of Theology* 19.1 (Jan. 1915): 78.

¹⁵ Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 187.

¹⁶ Sander L. Gilman and David J. Parent, eds., *Conversations with Nietzsche: A Life in the Words of His Contemporaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

¹⁸ Brobjer, "Philologica: A Possible Solution to the Stirner-Nietzsche Question": 112.

¹⁹ Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, 88. (Author's own translation)

²⁰ Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, trans. Helmut Loiskandl, Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 162.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² E.g. Lou Salomé, *Nietzsche*, trans. Siegfried Mandel (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) xxvii, xlv, Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, 94.

that people had concluded that he had none”.²³ Or perhaps, Köhler argued, he was discreet about it because he was homosexual. Since homosexuality was illegal at that time, if Nietzsche was homosexual, Köhler implies that he may have been writing about loving relationships in a form of code. Yet, the evidence for this is dubious. While Nietzsche’s behaviour and letters can be suggestive of homosexuality, Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins conclude that the evidence “remains speculative, at best”.²⁴ For the purposes of this study, I will proceed on the basis that when Nietzsche wrote about the relationship between men and women, he means heterosexuality and that it is not coded homosexuality.

Regardless of Nietzsche’s sexual preference, it is clear that he had difficulties in his relationships with women. He seemed to have romantic hopes, reportedly proposing to Mathilde Trampedach after three conversations. In a letter to her, he wrote:

Gather all the strength that is in your heart so that you will not be frightened by the question I now put to you: Will you be my wife? I love you, and I feel as though you were already mine. Not a word about how quickly I’ve fallen! At least there is nothing improper about it, so there’s no need to apologize for anything. What I want to know is whether you feel as I do – that we were never strangers, not even for a moment! Don’t you share my faith that together each of us could become freer and better than we could separately, and so “excelsior”?²⁵

Mathilde Trampedach declined as she was in love with her teacher, whom she later married.²⁶ Then, in 1882, Nietzsche’s friends introduced him to Lou Salomé because they thought she could be a “panacea for Nietzsche’s intellectual loneliness”.²⁷ She was a young, beautiful, precocious and “devastatingly talented”²⁸ woman who was “eager to meet famous people...and proud of being free of old-fashioned inhibitions”.²⁹ On their first encounter, Nietzsche reportedly said to Salomé: “From what stars have we fallen to be brought together

²³ Joachim Köhler, *Zarathustra's Secret*, trans. Ronald Taylor (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002) xiv.

²⁴ Solomon and Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, 24.

²⁵ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 33.

²⁶ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, xliii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xlv.

²⁸ Robert C. Solomon, “Friedrich Nietzsche”, *Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, eds. Robert C. Solomon and David Sherman (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 92-93.

²⁹ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3 ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968) 50.

here?”³⁰ By some accounts, Nietzsche was smitten and proposed twice, the first time only a few days after they met, but she refused.³¹ Nietzsche also expressed great admiration for Cosima Wagner, wife of the composer Richard Wagner. Nietzsche wrote of her that she was “the most appealing woman I’ve ever met”,³² of “the most noble nature”, the only person he acknowledged as his equal, and “by far the leading voice that I have heard in questions of taste”.³³

It shall be seen that his writing suggests he loved and honoured women, yet was critical of much of their behaviour. Some Freudians and feminists blame his growing up without a father as the source of his apparent misogyny and failure to find a wife or lover.³⁴ Nietzsche may have been persuaded: he grew up in a dominating matriarchal family,³⁵ and wrote that one’s view of women is largely determined by one’s relationship to one’s mother, which in turn “determines whether, in his dealings with women, he respects them or despises them or is in general indifferent to them”.³⁶

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s work does provide valuable insights into the nature and problems of romantic loving. Although he often spoke critically of love, perhaps not surprisingly given his difficulties in finding it, he also described it in *The Will to Power (WP)* as “the most angelic instinct” and “the greatest stimulus of life”.³⁷ Although his lack of romantic involvements meant that he was not able to personally test out his own advice in practice, it does not mean that he was unaware of the problems and pitfalls of romantic relationships. Indeed, it is possible that his experiences and longing for romantic loving made him even more highly attuned to its importance. Nietzsche’s personal letters suggest that he was lonely and looking for a companion and secretary. For example, in 1874, he wrote to a motherly friend “I’d like to find myself a good wife quite soon, and then I can look on my life’s desires

³⁰ As cited in Robin Small, *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 138.

³¹ R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 149.

³² Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 51.

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, trans. Judith Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 78, 90.

³⁴ For example, Kelly Oliver argues that Nietzsche can only understand love of a woman as maternal love. She credits Nietzsche’s fear and confusion regarding women to the fact that he has not “abjected” from his mother; he has not properly individuated and is thus not a “free spirit”. Had Nietzsche’s father not died when he was so young, Oliver imagines this castration fear would not have been such a problem for him (Kelly Oliver, “Nietzsche’s Abjection”, *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, ed. Peter J. Burgard (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994) 60, 63.)

³⁵ Diethe, “Nietzsche and the Woman Question”: 12.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 150.

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 426.

as fulfilled ...”³⁸ He thought love was a very important part of life, so much so that he told a friend in 1880: “One stops loving oneself properly when one stops loving others. Which is why the latter is a very bad idea. (I speak from experience)”.³⁹ He repeated this idea in his philosophical works. For example, in *Human, All Too Human (HATH)*, he warned that if one does not learn and practise loving, then one’s “soul will grow dry”.⁴⁰ Similarly, in *Daybreak*, he said that if one “unlearns” to love others, then one cannot love oneself.⁴¹ And in *The Gay Science (GS)*, he likened learning to love to learning to hear music. Once we learn how to hear it and stand its strangeness, we become used to it, expect it, then become enchanted by it and want more of it: “We are always rewarded in the end for our good will, our patience, our fair-mindedness and gentleness with what is strange, as it gradually casts off its veil and presents itself as a new and indescribable beauty”.⁴² He wrote to a friend that: “I for my part suffer horribly when I’m deprived of affection”,⁴³ and in an 1884 letter he said: “Oh my friend, what a wild, secluded life I lead! So alone, alone. So without ‘children’!”⁴⁴ Again in 1886, “If only I could give you some idea of my feeling of isolation. Neither among the living or the dead is there anyone with whom I feel any kinship. This is inexpressibly horrible”.⁴⁵

Problems of romantic loving and Nietzsche’s advice

According to Nietzsche, the basis on which Western society’s values were built – Christianity – is crumbling because with the Enlightenment, religion ceased to be the dominant framework for regulating moral values. Like Stirner, Nietzsche declared, “God is dead!”⁴⁶ By this, he meant that the Christian value structure had been destroyed by science, but no one realised it or knew what to do about it. Science cannot penetrate value and thus spirituality was lost, but the world had, by default, kept a Christian-style ethical system. And it is inauthentic to live in a system with false foundations.⁴⁷

Nietzsche thought that this meant humanity was heading towards nihilism because the Western lifestyle is based on decadence and hedonism in a moral void. Questions arise such as: how should we regulate our lives? Nietzsche thought that to avoid nihilism, it was time for

³⁸ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 192.

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 174.

⁴² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 186.

⁴³ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 53.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 109, 120, 199.

⁴⁷ Magee, *The Great Philosophers*, 235, 240.

a revaluation of values. Instead of accepting life as dictated by an obsolete deity, Nietzsche thought we ought to accept life on its own terms – *amor fati*. He said this was his “formula for human greatness”, that is, “that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it – all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity -, but to *love* it...”⁴⁸ Nietzsche thought that if Schopenhauer was right and the world was meaningless, then the best thing to do is to try to change it for the better. Rather than reject reality, Nietzsche urged creative action and a striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*.

The next section addresses four fundamental issues that Nietzsche identified with respect to romantic loving that should be re-valued. First, issues arising from the way loving relationships have evolved, originating with the myth of Adam’s idolisation of Eve and Eve’s cooperation. Nietzsche did not propose an end to the idolisation of women, but rather attempts to remind women of their power over men. Second, Nietzsche’s accusations that Christians are guilty of first-degree propaganda with respect to ‘agape’ and his antidote. Also, with the aim of thwarting Christian misinformation regarding demonising of sex, Nietzsche’s advice to celebrate sensuality and sex education is outlined. Finally, what happens when Nietzsche’s gaze turns towards the value of marriage, which is often confused with romantic loving, is explored. Nietzsche’s attack on romantic loving as a basis for marriage is dispersed but sustained and so in the final section I analyse his musings on the issue.

1. Precedents of sexual loving

The myth of Adam and Eve has created major difficulties for women, according to Nietzsche. In *Twilight of the Idols (TI)*, Nietzsche suggested the problem started with the story that man created woman “out of a rib of his God, of his ‘ideal’”.⁴⁹ In love, women fulfil such ideals: It is their “Proteus nature”.⁵⁰ A ‘wise man’ in *GS* explains it as a function of the law of the sexes: “the way of men is will; the way of women is willingness”.⁵¹ The effect of this is that women are unwittingly coerced into conforming to the ideals or images that men have about them, so that men hold the advantage. Men have been idealising women and women have been shaping themselves to this ideal.⁵² In a passage that suggests Nietzsche was sympathetic towards women’s historical, socio-cultural predicament, he said women, being “doubly

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, 99.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 33.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 152.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 73.

⁵² Ibid.

innocent”, have not realised that men have been corrupting them.⁵³ In *WP*, Nietzsche discusses a similar point in relation to the perfection and idealisation of woman in art:

Woman, conscious of man’s feelings concerning women, assists his efforts at idealization by adorning herself, walking beautifully, dancing, expressing delicate thoughts: in the same way, she practices modesty, reserve, distance – realizing instinctively that in this way the idealizing capacity of the man will grow.⁵⁴

Here Nietzsche emphasised both – seemingly contradictory – elements of instinct and consciousness. If women’s behaviour is instinctive, it suggests that it is pre-reflective, but if women are conscious of their behaviour, then it implies that women are complicit and use it as a form of power. However, Nietzsche also said that women know that their innocence and naivety will seduce men, but since their instincts are so subtle, it is not hypocrisy, but rather “A deliberate *closing of one’s eyes to oneself*”.⁵⁵

Nietzsche also addressed this point in *GS*. With women conforming to men’s ideals of them, He proposed that they have also instinctively learned to be actresses as a defence: “consider the whole history of women – *mustn’t* they be actresses first and foremost?”⁵⁶ He also pointed out women’s acting skills for the purpose of seduction in *Beyond Good and Evil (BGE)*: “man wants woman to be peaceful – but woman is *essentially* unpeaceful, like the cat, however well she may have trained herself to present an appearance of peace”.⁵⁷

While he sympathised with women who have ended up in such a position, Nietzsche is also scornful of women for perpetuating it and for their tactics in dealing with the situation: “The idolization of love practised by women is fundamentally and originally an invention of their shrewdness, inasmuch as it enhances their power and makes them seem even more desirable in the eyes of men”, and also likens young women who use their youthful charm and cunning for seduction to courtesans, with the difference that courtesans are less shrewd and more honest.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 425.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 226.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 100.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 152, 154.

Nietzsche distinguishes between women who are aware of these dynamics and use it to their advantage from those who forget they are acting. The former are to be respected but the latter are vacuous and “spectral” women who are “purely masks”.⁵⁹ In *BGE*, Nietzsche said such women tend to rely on other people’s opinions of them: “To seduce one’s neighbour to a good opinion and afterwards faithfully to believe in this good opinion of one’s neighbour: who can do this trick as well as women?”⁶⁰ The effect is that such women appear mysterious and elusive and as such “are able to arouse the desire of the man most strongly: he seeks for her soul – and goes on seeking”,⁶¹ to no avail. Thus, the problem is not being an actress; it is a reliance on others for self-definition and a belief in one’s own false performance. Not consciously to reflect on one’s behaviour is a sign of a weak, undeveloped and inauthentic individual. Such women, after playing a part to seduce a man, face a dilemma because they have won their battle on false grounds. It would be a mistake to stop acting at that point because they would lose the power they had gained.⁶²

Nietzsche did, however, appreciate feminine charm, mystery and allure and saw woman’s greatest strength in her beauty and ability to lie. His solution to the problem of men idealising women was not emancipation because he feared that would equate to women losing their femininity. He did not want women to “enlighten men about ‘woman as such’”,⁶³ which is what he thought emancipation would involve. Women’s tactic in revealing the truth about themselves in order to scare and gain mastery over men is absurd: “But she does not *want* truth: what is truth to a woman! From the very first nothing has been more alien, repugnant, inimical to woman than truth – her great art is the lie, her supreme concern is appearance and beauty”.⁶⁴

He said men honour and love the mystery, beauty and enchantment of the feminine and this would be lost in emancipation because it would expose the ugly, shameful and boring side of women, that is, the abundance of “pedanticism, superficiality, schoolmarmishness, petty presumption, petty unbridledness and petty immodesty”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, he envisions that woman will “forget her arts and best policy: those of charm, play, the banishing of care, the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 102.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 152.

⁶² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 73.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 163.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 163.

assuaging of grief and taking lightly, together with her subtle aptitude for agreeable desires!”⁶⁶

Another consequence of woman forgetting how to charm is that she will end up hating men.⁶⁷ Nietzsche did not want to encourage this because he believes women can be dangerous and hostile: their “dagger-pointed intellect renders them excellent service”.⁶⁸ Women usually gain the upper hand because “In revenge and in love woman is more barbarous than man”,⁶⁹ they do not play fair, they know how to find Achilles’ heels and rather than fighting back, men tend to become “restrained and often inclined to reconciliation and generosity”.⁷⁰

Assuming that women are trying to gain mastery over men rather than equal rights, Nietzsche seemed not to understand emancipation. For example, he said, “The weaker sex has in no age been treated by men with such respect as it is in ours”.⁷¹ He also noted that women have stopped fearing man, which is a sign that women have lost modesty, charm, taste and femininity.⁷² He referred to modern women who do not fear men as ‘clerks,’ appropriately boring and sterile, and decrees that through emancipation, women are “*retrogressing*”.⁷³ Furthermore, he saw emancipation as a stupid movement in which women are actually losing power because it involves their becoming unfeminine: “To lose her sense for the ground on which she is most sure of victory; to neglect to practise the use of her own proper weapons; to let herself go before man”.⁷⁴

Nietzsche seemed to fear that women would free themselves from a male-dominated society, but had not created their own, new rules. By his own account, he did not have a problem with women freeing themselves from the spider-threads that strangle them, but questioned what were they gaining freedom to do? Nowadays we understand it as freedom to participate in the same activities as men. Nietzsche thought women could do most things that men could do, but he could not understand why they would want to. He believed that a system that enables women to raise children while supported by working husbands is a good system. From

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 154.

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 101.

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 154.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 167.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 168.

Nietzsche's perspective, emancipation just makes her "more and more incapable of her first and last profession, which is to bear strong children".⁷⁵

It is difficult to pinpoint what Nietzsche thought women ought to do. He criticised women for being actresses and lying, but he did not want women to tell the truth about themselves: "I think it is a true friend of women who calls on them today: *mulier taceat de muliere!*"⁷⁶ He blames women for being complicit in their subordination but is not interested in changing their situation.⁷⁷ Such comments as these have earned Nietzsche a reputation for misogyny. However, looking into his comments across a range of texts, the jigsaw can be understood differently. Taken in context, we can see that Nietzsche explored and reported on his view of sex roles and women's cultural conditioning. Although men have idealised women, Nietzsche suggested women are to blame for perpetuating their subordination to men. He admires woman's ability to adapt and gain power and mastery over men while maintaining their femininity. Indeed, Nietzsche's perfect woman, he said, "is a higher type of human being than the perfect man: also something much rarer".⁷⁸ Yet, vacuous women who have forgotten that they are actresses disgust him because they lead empty lives, void of their own goals. He also disdains shrewd women whose aim in life is to entrap men with their youthful charms because their success is short-lived. He loved women to be feminine. He appreciated their mystery and did not want things to change because this could only be for the worse. He considered women's strength to come from their femininity and losing their femininity means becoming masculinised, which means that they lose their power because they do not play to such strengths as intelligence, cunning and beauty.

2. Christian morality

Nietzsche credited Christianity not only with starting the problem of men idealising women, but also for turning morality upside down. Nietzsche's two main criticisms of Christian morality were that it was sourced from outside this world (i.e., God) and it glorified the meek while dragging down the strong because it helps and aids the herd and denies "the most splendid and best-constituted men".⁷⁹ The latter phenomenon was a result of the Roman tactic

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Translation: "Women be silent about women" (ibid., 164.)

⁷⁷ Carol Diethe criticised Nietzsche for presenting us with an impasse: "the qualities which might make a woman seem outstanding would also make her seem manly and detract from her worth: a cyclic argument which Nietzsche used quite cheerfully to demonstrate the pitfalls which await woman at every turn" (Diethe, "Nietzsche and the Woman Question": 871.)

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 150.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 198.

to control the resentment of the weak by “shaking off their dull displeasure and feeling of weakness”.⁸⁰ In doing so, it destroyed the ancient Greek doctrine of power – an aristocratic code of warriors – and replaced it with a doctrine of subordination and emotional repression. Nietzsche worried that by sheer majority the weak would dominate the strong.

In attacking Christianity, Nietzsche also attacked its core: ‘love thy neighbour’. In *HATH*, Nietzsche, like Stirner, criticised love’s impartial and indiscriminate nature as foolish: “It is stupid and possesses a rich cornucopia; out of this it distributes its gifts, and does so to everyone, even when he does not deserve them, indeed, does not even thank them”.⁸¹ Through love of, and sacrifice to, one’s neighbour, we bestow value on things that are not otherwise particularly valuable.⁸² Nietzsche portrayed agape as the lowest form of love because he saw it as a herd-animal strategy to achieve safety in numbers. He saw it as an excuse to be animalistic and lazy because one pursues such a strategy to avoid conflict and enemies.⁸³ A higher type of person does not fear life or rely on the masses for protection, but rather embraces battles in life, and thus Nietzsche encouraged neighbour-flight.⁸⁴

Nietzsche’s antidote to the hypocrisy and weakness of agape is self-mastery. Scoffing at Christianity’s advocacy that we should love others at our own expense, Nietzsche asked in *Daybreak*: If one does not love oneself, how can one expect others (or even God) to? “It would be contrary to all decency to let oneself be loved while being all the time well aware that one *deserves* only hatred”.⁸⁵ Using Christianity’s argument against itself, Nietzsche suggested that if Christians advocate clemency towards neighbours, then why not “go a step further: love yourselves as an act of clemency”.⁸⁶ In *Ecce Homo (EH)* and *WP*, Nietzsche argued that it is absurd to talk about egoistic and unegoistic actions,⁸⁷ and “there could not be anything other than egoism;” there are only varying degrees of willing.⁸⁸ Like Stirner, Nietzsche annihilated any possibility of disinterested charity and emphasised the hypocrisy of altruism.

⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On The Genealogy of Morals”, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, *On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 135.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 45.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 183.

⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 87. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, did not understand agape as a herd-animal strategy, and like Stirner and Nietzsche, disdained subsuming oneself into the crowd (see p.77).

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 48.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, 105.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 197.

However, Nietzsche is also wary of egoism, because it depends on the kind of ego in question.⁸⁹ Selfishness must be assessed in terms of ascending and descending lives. Selfishness has extraordinary value in ascending individuals, “and since the whole of life *advances* through them, the effort put into their maintenance, into establishing their optimal conditions, might even be extreme”.⁹⁰ However, descending people are ugly, parasitical, decadent, decaying, degenerating and deprive one of strength, since they drag others down with weakness and sadness.⁹¹ Such a person is “of little value and in all fairness he should be taking away as little as possible from those who have turned out well”.⁹²

He said sexual loving is the “most candid expression of egoism”⁹³ because it is really about loving one’s ideal self and a means to satisfy one’s passions. Like Stirner, Nietzsche thought that when one loves another person, one really only loves the feeling of love: “Ultimately one loves one’s desires and not that which is desired”.⁹⁴ Further to this, Nietzsche said in *Daybreak* that sex is natural and a benevolent arrangement whereby “one person, by doing what pleases him, gives pleasure to another person”.⁹⁵ This suggests that while erotic loving can result in interpersonal pleasure, the other’s happiness and well-being is a function of one’s own. In *HATH* Nietzsche acknowledged the fact that social interactions open up a new kind of pleasure that one cannot experience on one’s own, and this potential for pleasure explains why men and women are so interested in one another. Another’s pleasure enhances one’s own because it fosters a reciprocal sense of wellbeing.

To feel sensations of pleasure on the basis of human relations on the whole makes men better; joy, pleasure, is enhanced when it is enjoyed together with others, it gives the individual security, makes him good-natured, banishes distrust and envy: for one feels a sense of wellbeing and sees that others are likewise feeling a sense of wellbeing.⁹⁶

This is an idea that is not dissimilar to Stirner’s perception of the value of relationships: we are social because it furthers our pleasure in life. “It is no doubt upon this that the oldest form of alliance is based: the sense of which is that to act together to ward off and dispose of a

⁸⁹ Ibid., 198.

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 97.

⁹¹ Ibid., 90.

⁹² Ibid., 97.

⁹³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 40.

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 106.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 45.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 52.

threatening displeasure is of utility to each individual. And thus the social instinct grows out of the feeling of pleasure”.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he said empathy generated from the feelings people have in common is a fantasy.⁹⁸

Nietzsche saw love as ultimately narcissistic because it is the search for one’s idealised self. This is a strong theme repeated throughout Nietzsche’s writing. For example, in *BGE* Nietzsche suggested: “Fundamentally they love and honour only themselves (or their own ideal, to express it more pleasantly)”,⁹⁹ and in *HATH*: “what they are seeking...is not a complement but a perfecting of their own best qualities”.¹⁰⁰ This is also consistent with *Daybreak* where Nietzsche emphasised that love is the search for a means of resolving personal deficiencies and excesses (reminiscent of Aristophanes’ myth): “This one is hollow and wants to be full, that one is overfull and wants to be emptied – both go in search of an individual who will serve their purpose”.¹⁰¹ The message here is that loving is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The effect of the search for one’s perfected self is that it is easy to become delusional. In an idea reminiscent of Stendhal’s crystallisation process whereby lovers discover – and possibly even create – new perfections in each other which (for them) seem to be as mesmerising as shimmering crystals, Nietzsche suggested that: “Love contains a secret impulse to see as much beauty as possible in the other or to elevate him as high as possible: to deceive oneself here would be a joy and an advantage – and so one does so”.¹⁰² Similarly, in *BGE*, he said “Love brings to light the exalted and concealed qualities of a lover – what is rare and exceptional in him: to that extent it can easily deceive as to what is normal in him”.¹⁰³ This suggests that lovers tend to overestimate each other’s virtues. Nietzsche also made a point of this in *The Anti-Christ (AC)*, emphasising the delusional aspects of loving:

Love is the state in which people are most prone to see things the way that they are *not*. The force of illusion reaches a high point here, and so do the forces that sweeten and *transfigure*. People in love will tolerate more than they usually do, they will put

⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 99-100.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 153-154.

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 91.

¹⁰² Ibid., 157.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 104.

up with anything. A religion had to be invented where people could love: it gets them through the worst in life – they stop noticing the bad aspects completely.¹⁰⁴

Further to this, in *GS*, Nietzsche pointed out that “Love forgives the beloved even his lust”,¹⁰⁵ suggesting not only that lust is a normal part of love, but that it is not one of its admirable features, since lust is a primal instinct in which unrestrained indulgence is decadent. The message is that when one is in love, one tends to overlook the beloved’s vices. Also in *GS*, Nietzsche pointed out that lovers tend to be quite willing to support each other’s imagination in bestowing undeserved or delusional merits upon each other, not out of vanity, but rather because they do not want their lovers to suffer from being exposed to their defects.¹⁰⁶

The deceptiveness of love is so powerful that it transforms the lovers’ understanding of themselves: “one seems perfectly transfigured, stronger, richer, more perfect, one *is* more perfect”.¹⁰⁷ Living such a lie becomes more than imagination, since lovers understand themselves to be stronger, more capable, more valuable, more daring and adventurous.¹⁰⁸ In a passage strikingly reminiscent of Stirner, Nietzsche described the perspective of a man in love: “His whole economy is richer than before, more powerful, more *complete* than in those who do not love. The lover becomes a squanderer: he is rich enough for it”. Nevertheless, Nietzsche described such a lover as a “happy idiot” with “intestinal fever”,¹⁰⁹ since such perceptions are based on a delusion.

Nietzsche warned against yielding to one’s impulses immediately, lest one become a slave to them. Yet, love is such a powerful passion, like a narcotic drug, that it seriously impairs judgment and it is difficult to avoid becoming a slave to it.¹¹⁰ Love is not blind, he said, but is “dazzled” by its own fire.¹¹¹ Taking the view that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’, Nietzsche explained in *WP* that all instinctive judgments, such as beauty, are persuasive but shortsighted because “they decide most quickly and pronounce their Yes and No before the understanding can speak”.¹¹² Thus, “To experience a thing as beautiful means: to experience it

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, “The Anti-Christ”, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 426.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 426-427.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 187.

¹¹² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 423.

necessarily wrongly”,¹¹³ because the viewer ignores long-term ramifications. For Nietzsche, to focus on immediacy is a feature of decadence, hedonism and a weak will that he scorned as the ugly side of humanity.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche did not argue against expressing one’s passions, and admired the power of loving. In *HATH*, he suggested that love, like ‘goodness’, is extremely precious as one of “the most salutary medicine(s)” in human relations.¹¹⁴ And in *AC*, he suggested that love is the panacea for the unbearable pain of reality: “love as the only, the *final* possibility for life...”¹¹⁵ He also endorsed intoxication, especially for artistic creativity, since intoxication, along with sexuality, is one of the “oldest *festal joys* of mankind”,¹¹⁶ and is “an exalted feeling of *power*”.¹¹⁷ Intoxication’s transfiguring powers are great¹¹⁸ and can accomplish a tremendous amount, thus “how wise it is at times to be a little tipsy!”¹¹⁹ However, a strong will coordinates desires and passions in concert with reason.¹²⁰ Everyone can be impulsive and indulge blindly, but mastering them reveals great character.¹²¹

Yet, loving is all too often an unrestrained desire for possession, and both women and men are guilty of treating it as such. In *HATH*, he proposed that women like to put their lovers, if they are “of consequence”, under lock and key so that they could have them all to themselves; however, their vanity stops them, since they want other people to see their catch.¹²² Similarly, men tend to want to keep their beloved “caged up” like an exotic bird so they do not fly away.¹²³

In *GS*, Nietzsche suggested that egoism in relationships manifests itself in different ways for men and women based on how they have sought to gain power in the world. For men, sexual loving is a manic and desperate “craving for new property” and a desire for power: “The lover wants unconditional and sole possession of the longed-for person; he wants a power over her soul as unconditional as his power over her body; he wants to be the only beloved, to live and

¹¹³ Ibid., 424.

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, “The Anti-Christ”, 27.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 421.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 420-421.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 426.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 425.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 208, 420.

¹²¹ Ibid., 490.

¹²² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 152.

¹²³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 166.

to rule in the other soul as that which is supreme and most desirable”.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, in *BGE*, he suggested that there are different ways in which men are content with possession of their beloved. While some men are happy with sexual gratification as evidence of their ownership and possession of her, other men want their beloved to give up everything for him, and even more ambitious men want to ensure their beloved knows them “to their very heart...He feels that his beloved is fully in his possession only when she no longer deceives herself about him but loves him as much for his devilry and hidden insatiability as she does for his goodness, patience and spirituality”.¹²⁵ However willing women are to love in this manner, Nietzsche was sceptical that it was possible.¹²⁶

This also explains, at least in part, jealousy. Jealously fighting to protect one’s sexual trophy, the lover “aims at the impoverishment and deprivation of all the competitors and would like to become the dragon guarding his golden hoard as the most inconsiderate and selfish of all ‘conquerors’ and exploiters”.¹²⁷ Acknowledging the avaricious nature of loving, Nietzsche exclaimed: “Greed and love: such different feelings these terms evoke! – And yet it could be the same instinct, named twice”.¹²⁸

In *GS*, Nietzsche also said romantic loving is always unequal in terms of what a man and a woman put into – and get out of – the relationship. When it comes to sex, “Woman gives herself away; man takes more”.¹²⁹ It is precisely the nature of romantic loving relationships to be unequal and this suggests that the differing approaches are complementary. Each partner’s life is enriched in its own way through the unequal elements.

What woman means by love is clear enough: total devotion (and not mere surrender) with soul and body, without any consideration or reserve, rather with shame and horror at the thought of devotion that might be tied to special clauses or conditions. In this absence of conditions her love is a *faith*: woman has no other.¹³⁰

A passionate woman who unconditionally relinquishes herself and her rights for love becomes “a *more perfect* woman”.¹³¹ A ‘real’ man would never do the same for a woman, lest he

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 40.

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 117.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 40.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

become slavish: if “there should also be men to whom the desire for complete surrender is not alien, well, then they are – not men”.¹³² Nietzsche asserts that the man “*wants* precisely this love from her and is thus himself as far as he can be from the presupposition of female love”.¹³³ Similarly, a woman wants to be possessed by a man who wants to possess her devotion, and who is “to be made richer in ‘himself’ – through the increase in strength, happiness and faith given him by the woman who gives herself”.¹³⁴ If both lovers were to renounce themselves, then Nietzsche suggested that all that will be left is an empty space.¹³⁵ In Nietzsche’s estimation, the empty space created is a vacuum, thus there would not be any possibilities within the space created.¹³⁶

Further to the notion that women compromise their authenticity in loving relationships, Nietzsche suggested they do so in order to satisfy their passion. In *WP*, he said they sacrifice themselves not to their lover, but rather to their “unbridled urge”.¹³⁷ He raised a similar point in *HATH* when he suggested that sacrificing oneself to another is egoistic because it is giving in to one’s wish, impulse or desire: “Is it not clear that...man loves *something of himself*, an idea, a desire, an offspring, more than *something else of himself*, that he thus *divides* his nature and sacrifices one part of it to the other?”¹³⁸ Since succumbing to one’s immediate desires is characteristic of a weak will, lovers who succumb to their urges are also weak willed. Furthermore, contrary to the claim that sacrificing oneself to a lover is unegoistic, Nietzsche suggested that “These desires are just as selfish even if they please others and implant gratitude”.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, women also gain power through their subordination by portraying themselves as weak, clumsy and fragile and attempt to “burden [men’s] conscience with this”.¹⁴⁰ It tends to be a successful strategy because, he suggested, the sick and weak are more changeable, entertaining, fascinating, malicious and interesting than the strong and healthy.¹⁴¹ Herein lies the paradox of women: their will to power is satisfied through their will to slavery. Since women can achieve power by using their will to slavery, it is still an expression of their will to power. The point is that there is no action that is not an expression of the will to power.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ While this empty space can be interpreted as “losing their separate identities”, Frances Nesbitt Oppel suggests that it is rather a space opened up for a new reality (Oppel, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*, 115-116.)

¹³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 407.

¹³⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 42.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 407.

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 73.

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 460.

For Nietzsche, the prerequisite for being capable of loving another is self-mastery: “to be firmly grounded in *yourself*, you have to stand bravely on your own two feet to be *able* to love at all”.¹⁴² Self-mastery is required not to let oneself become addicted to, and deceived by, the unproductive trappings of devotion, greed and jealousy that can be a part of loving. Nietzsche presented a similar idea in *WP*, where he proposed that one of the great crimes of psychology was to falsify love as surrender and altruism.¹⁴³ It is, rather, “an appropriation or a bestowal following from a superabundance of personality. Only the most complete persons can love; the depersonalized, the ‘objective,’ are the worst lovers (–one only has to ask the girls!)”¹⁴⁴

The different understandings of men and women about love are possibly one of the most important reasons for confusion between the sexes. Hence, Nietzsche praises Bizet’s *Carmen* for its insights into love as war, since it is a “*deadly hatred* between the sexes!”¹⁴⁵ Love is a form of possessiveness for both sexes, but while men gain power through domination, women gain power through submission. Romantic loving is a dynamic whereby women want to submit and men want to dominate.¹⁴⁶ This relationship is not, however, complementary, since both are forms attempting to gain power over the other and a battle ensues.

Another source of problems in loving relationships is the sexes’ differing attitudes to life. Whereas women naturally like peace and comfort, men want quite the opposite; men welcome challenges and obstacles, according to Nietzsche. “In every kind of womanly love there also appears something of motherly love”,¹⁴⁷ and one of the manifestations of motherly love is that women do not like to see their lovers suffer and try to help them to have easier lives, by removing obstacles. Doing so is very frustrating for men: “Without realizing it, women behave as one would do who removed the stones from the path of a wandering mineralogist so that his foot should not strike against them – whereas he has gone forth so that his foot *shall* strike against them”.¹⁴⁸ While women might think they are concerning themselves with their beloved’s welfare, their concern is misdirected, since it would be in their beloved’s best

¹⁴² Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, 105.

¹⁴³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 167.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Case of Wagner: A Musician’s Problem”, trans. Judith Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 236.

¹⁴⁶ For example, Singer argues, if woman submits and man dominates, there should be “no grounds for antagonism”; the relationship should be complementary (Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, 86.)

¹⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 151.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

interest not to remove obstacles. Thus, women who try to make their lovers lives easier do so for their own sake, since they prefer calm lives: “Wives always secretly intrigue against the higher being of their husbands; they desire to deprive them of their future for the sake of a quiet, comfortable present”.¹⁴⁹ Alternatively, they see men’s ambitions and passions as rival projects to their affections, so would prefer he had none, unless she derives benefits from his activities.¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche resented the motherly women in his life who spoiled, smothered and sentenced him to bondage in the golden cradle, and instead, “the free spirit wants not to be served and in that he discovers his happiness”.¹⁵¹ In a flashback to “antiquity” in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche pondered whether sexual loving has interfered in the achievement of greatness:

All great achievements on the part of the man of antiquity were supported by the fact that *man stood beside man*, and that a woman was not allowed to claim to be the nearest or highest, let alone the sole object of his love – as sexual passion teaches us to feel. Perhaps our trees fail to grow as high on account of the ivy and the vines that cling to them.¹⁵²

Nietzsche suggested that one could only appreciate the heights of the mountains after experiencing the depths of the abyss. Zarathustra explains the phoenix-like rebirth that comes from the most harrowing experiences: “You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?”¹⁵³ Like giving birth, great creations and achievements are painful.¹⁵⁴ This idea is something of which Nietzsche had first-hand experience, since he was sick most of his life and probably died from syphilis. His illness was excruciating and exhilarating, crippling and propelling his ability to work. He said his paralysis, seasickness, seizures and days and nights of vomiting “unblocked” him and:¹⁵⁵

I’d long ago have chucked it were it not for my having done the most illuminating psychological and moral research in just this state of suffering and almost absolute renunciation. My joyous thirst for knowledge brings me to heights where I can triumph over all torment and despair.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 153.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁵² Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 205.

¹⁵³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 120.

¹⁵⁵ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 51, 114.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

One of Nietzsche's most enduring maxims, "What does not kill me makes me stronger"¹⁵⁷ was something that seemed to inspire him. For example, he wrote "My illness has been my greatest boon: it unblocked me, it gave me the courage to be myself".¹⁵⁸ Constantly overcoming the obstacles and challenges in life, he thought, proved strength of character and could bring the greatest rewards and creativity. "*Become hard!*" urges Zarathustra stoically.¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche admired people who cared more about challenging than safeguarding themselves: "I love those who do not wish to preserve themselves. I love with my whole love those who go down and perish: for they are going beyond".¹⁶⁰ In *WP*, Nietzsche reiterated this idea when he suggested that pleasure is not derived from satisfaction of the will, "but rather the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way. The feeling of pleasure lies precisely in the dissatisfaction of the will, in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.— 'The happy man': a herd ideal".¹⁶¹ This suggests that comfort and happiness is characteristic of a weak will, whereas discontent and constantly striving to overcome obstacles reveals a strong will.

3. Christianity's demonising of sex

Although Nietzsche champions mastery of one's passions, he also celebrates them and condemns Christianity for demonising them. Christianity's position on sexual loving has not helped the battle of the sexes because it turned sexual loving into a taboo: "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink – he did not die of it...but degenerated into vice".¹⁶² The reason it originally did this is because, as Nietzsche highlighted in *TI*, passionate people can behave foolishly: "There is a time with all passions when they are merely fatalities, when they drag their victim down with the weight of their folly".¹⁶³ To prevent this stupidity, Nietzsche said in *Daybreak* that Christianity sought to destroy passions, successfully making sex "evil and malicious" and turning it into "diabolical kobolds and phantoms".¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, just as it is absurd to pull out a tooth if it hurts, so too is it absurd to ban passions just because they can have foolish consequences.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", 33.

¹⁵⁸ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 114.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 231.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 370.

¹⁶² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 105.

¹⁶³ Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", 52.

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 45.

¹⁶⁵ Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", 52.

It is also ridiculous to associate something as natural as Eros with a bad conscience as most religions have done. For example, sexual relationships have been made shameful through the mystery created around them, hiding them away in harems and bedrooms, where they could be watched over by gods.¹⁶⁶ “Is it not dreadful to make necessary and regular recurring sensations into a source of inner misery, and in this way to want to make inner misery a necessary and regular recurring phenomenon *in every human being!*”¹⁶⁷ In a strikingly pre-Freudian analysis, Nietzsche argued that because the sex drive is natural, turning it into something evil means that people attempt to suppress their desires. Unfulfilled sexual desire fuels the “demons raging within”¹⁶⁸ and like a full vessel, one more drop of water will cause the vessel to run over, spilling into a devastating torrent of violent passion.¹⁶⁹

Zarathustra also warns of the havoc that suppressed sexual desires can create: “These people abstain, it is true: but the bitch Sensuality glares enviously out of all they do...And how nicely the bitch Sensuality knows how to beg for a piece of spirit, when a piece of flesh is denied her”.¹⁷⁰ Thus, through denial and suppression of passions it is much easier to become slaves to them and they are much more difficult to control.

Nietzsche offered two resolutions. First, he proposed ‘de-demonising’ of Eros, or in other words, to revitalise and celebrate the body and passions. Reprimanding Christianity for castrating the passions, Nietzsche also accused the church of never asking the obvious alternative: “how can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?”¹⁷¹ Nietzsche’s frustration with Christianity and any religion that turns sexuality into something shameful by making it secretive is that it is a “crime against life” and this “anti-nature” is the true vice.¹⁷²

Although often critical of romantic loving, Nietzsche respects its role in reinvigorating sensuality and passion from Christianity’s attempt to eradicate them.¹⁷³ By denying the passions, Christianity unwittingly turned sexual love into romantic love. The scorpion stung itself with its tail because demonising the erotic and making it dark and secretive made it

¹⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 53-54.

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 45.

¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 76.

¹⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Wanderer and His Shadow”, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *Human, All Too Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 319, Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 188.

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 81.

¹⁷¹ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 52.

¹⁷² Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, 106, Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 54. Nietzsche’s loathing of Christianity and attempt to undermine it is, according to Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, the reason why he “frequently assumes the role of romantic debunker” (Solomon and Higgins, eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, 141.)

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 53.

more interesting and intriguing. Thus “excessive importance” has been placed on the ‘love story’ and “on this account it may be that posterity will judge the whole inheritance of Christian culture to be marked by something crackbrained and petty”.¹⁷⁴

Nietzsche also extols Eros in an attempt to overthrow Christianity’s demonising of sex. He acknowledged that sex is a natural part of being human and lobbies for it. Instead of educating people about sex, Christianity began a smear campaign, a strategy aimed at keeping the meek uninformed and under control. One antidote, Nietzsche proposed, is regular sex: “It is well known that sensual fantasy is moderated, indeed almost suppressed, by regularity in sexual intercourse, while it is on the other hand unfettered and dissolute when such intercourse is disorderly or does not take place at all”.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, as soon as a fantasy is realised, it stops being a fantasy. However, Nietzsche realised that regular sex alone is not going to solve the problem. Ironically, both Nietzsche and Christianity want to avoid unbridled, naive hedonistic sex, but in opposite ways: Christianity through abstinence and Nietzsche through indulgence.

Nietzsche’s second suggestion to overcome the clandestine phenomenon of sexual loving is sex education. Part of the process of de-demonising sex is empowering people, particularly women, with knowledge. In *GS*, Nietzsche said he thought it to be “amazing”, “monstrous”, and “paradoxical” that men keep women ignorant about sexual matters and concludes: “one cannot be too gentle towards women!”¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche was disgusted that men have not thought enough about the effect on women of keeping sexual discussions taboo.

Nietzsche takes a similar outlook in *BGE*, when he suggested that because of their naivety, women are in an awkward place from the very beginning: “The tremendous expectation in regard to sexual love and the shame involved in this expectation distorts all a woman’s perspectives from the start”.¹⁷⁷ Comments like this suggest that Nietzsche was not as misogynistic as he is sometimes made out to be.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche suggested, “the innocent will always be the victims because their ignorance prevents them from distinguishing between measure and excess and from keeping themselves in check in

¹⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 46.

¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 76.

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 74-75.

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 97.

¹⁷⁸ Kathleen Higgins, for example, suggests that although Nietzsche is considered “the founder of peculiarly modern patriarchy and the inventor of one of the crassest and most subtle misogynies”, this is one instance in which he reveals he is not always “obviously sexist or crass”, and one might read this particular aphorism as sympathetic towards women and their socially cultivated facticity, providing “a psychological interpretation of the social pressures that constrain women’s outlook on sexuality” (Kathleen Marie Higgins, “Gender in *The Gay Science*”, *Philosophy and Literature* 19.2 (1995): 229-230.)

good time”.¹⁷⁹ While Nietzsche was not specifically referring to sex education in this aphorism, it certainly could apply in this situation. Nietzsche implies that the more educated one is, the better decisions one will be able to make and the more fully one will be able to live. By Nietzsche’s own account of this situation, it seems logical that sex education will overcome the shock of sex to women.

However, Nietzsche also has a problem with education of women. On the one hand, in *HATH*, he proposed that women are just as intelligent and capable of being educated as men.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, in *BGE*, Nietzsche warned against women becoming too enlightened because he associates education with masculinity, which is unnatural for women: “When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexuality”.¹⁸¹ There is a contradiction here: Nietzsche suggested that sex education for women would be prudent, but not so much education that they become masculine. It is an invalid inductive inference that if women become educated and scholarly they will become masculine, or will have to become masculine to be educated. Another possibility is that Nietzsche considers being educated and being scholarly to be two different characteristics, but if so, his point is unclear.

4. Romantic loving as a basis for marriage

On the one hand, Nietzsche praised the fact that marriage had become the culmination of romantic loving. He appreciated that there was value in the belief that marriage can secure love for a lifetime, since “marriage has bestowed upon love a higher nobility...raised it to a new rank...[and] introduced a new *suprahuman* concept which elevates mankind”,¹⁸² making romantic loving more meaningful than a fleeting encounter. Yet, on the other hand, Nietzsche recognised that romantic loving has created problems for the institution of marriage, two of which will be addressed in this section. First, romantic loving is ephemeral because loving feelings wane over time and lovers change, and second, romantic loving that culminates in marriage often does not lead to an ascending life because procreation is accidental and lovers are distracted by the urge to merge. I then propose a solution to these issues which can be derived from Nietzsche’s musings, which is based on lovers being great friends too.

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 159.

¹⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 157.

¹⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 101.

¹⁸² Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 21-22.

Romantic loving is ephemeral

In a statement similar to Kierkegaard's views, Nietzsche suggested that the key problem with romantic loving is that it is ephemeral: "Sensuality often makes love grow too quickly, so that the root remains weak and is easy to pull out".¹⁸³ Because sensuality, a key element of romantic love, has weak roots, Nietzsche saw the belief that love could be enduring and lifelong through marriage as problematic.¹⁸⁴ In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche suggested that romantic loving relationships are brief follies and it is crazy to turn a folly into a long-term commitment. Zarathustra reprimands: "And your marriage makes an end of many brief follies with one long stupidity".¹⁸⁵ Similarly, in *HATH*, he said, "Marriages contracted from love (so-called love-matches) have error for their father and need [or misery] for their mother".¹⁸⁶ The effect is that awkward marriages are commonplace: "How many married men there are who have experienced the morning when it has dawned on them that their young wife is tedious and believes the opposite".¹⁸⁷

Such factors have contributed to the meaninglessness of modern marriage. If Nietzsche were a god looking down on humanity, he said he would be hugely disappointed with what he saw going on with modern marriages.¹⁸⁸ Nietzsche thought marriage had become one of the greatest banalities in the tragi-comedies of life, along with birth and death,¹⁸⁹ and had become completely irrelevant, irrational and nonsensical.¹⁹⁰ Basing marriage on romantic love, as modern marriages often are, undermines the whole institution because it is based on an idiosyncrasy, which is an absurd basis for an institution.¹⁹¹ In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche contends that marriage has become fraudulent ("*pia fraus*") because it is "very often and almost as a general rule refuted", and thus has "introduced a very great deal of hypocrisy and lying into the world".¹⁹² For example, Nietzsche suggested that people rush amorously into marriage and when it goes wrong, it causes the couple, as well as everyone around them, a lot of aggravation. A woman says to Zarathustra, "True, I broke up my marriage, but first my marriage – broke me up!"¹⁹³ Zarathustra insists the pair ought to end their relationship quickly

¹⁸³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 98.

¹⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 21.

¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 96.

¹⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 151.

¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 150.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸⁹ Nietzsche, "The Wanderer and His Shadow", 324.

¹⁹⁰ Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", 105.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 21.

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 228.

rather than having to endure the vengeful suffering inherent in the collapse: “And yet rather break up of marriage than bending of marriage, lying in marriage!”¹⁹⁴

One of Nietzsche’s suggestions is that lovers promise each other loving actions instead of loving feelings. Since romantic loving is ephemeral, promising to love one’s partner forever is absurd and a lie because “One can promise actions but not feelings; for the latter are involuntary. He who promises someone he will always love him or always hate him or always be faithful to him, promises something that does not reside in his power”.¹⁹⁵ However, one can promise actions that “are usually the consequences of love”.¹⁹⁶ It would be much more appropriate to recognise this contingency and be honest about it. To avoid deception in wedding vows, Nietzsche recommends saying something along these lines: “For as long as I love you I shall render to you the actions of love; if I cease to love you, you will continue to receive the same actions from me, though from other motives”.¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche is convinced that this would be perfectly acceptable because outwardly, the couple will appear to still love one another.¹⁹⁸ This will not be deceptive because one is promising to act as if still in love, rather than mistakenly promising the feeling of love. Nietzsche assumed that the beloved would understand and still say “I do” to marriage when being confronted with a partner who is uncertain about how long the loving feeling will last. He assumed that feelings are involuntary and thus loving is not a choice, so one ought to embrace the commitment of marriage.

Nietzsche’s suggestion is that one has no control over one’s feelings. However, this is at odds with his ideas elsewhere that we can master our passions. For example, he said in *TI* that it is characteristic of a weak will not to “impose moderation” on desires and described freedom as a mastery of instincts.¹⁹⁹ Thus, if one is strong-willed, then one ought to be able to cultivate one’s feelings (or allow them to atrophy), as one does with *amor fati*. Zarathustra represents such a stance when he urges lovers to master their passion, “We love each other: let us *see to it* that we stay in love! Or shall our promise be a mistake?”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 42.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 53, 104.

²⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 228.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche was right in acknowledging that for many people, it is absurd to promise the irrevocability of a feeling. Since romantic loving is usually not strong enough to endure a lifetime, other motivations are needed. Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche recommended accepting a duty to perform loving actions, irrespective of feelings. Promising the semblance of love, not the continuation of the feeling of love, will make it easier to keep the promise and to stay together as expectations had already been set. Trying further to convince the reader that romantic love actually is irrelevant in a marriage, Nietzsche wrote:

Sample of reflection before marriage. – Supposing she loves me, how burdensome she would become to me in the long run! And supposing she does not love me, how really burdensome she would become to me in the long run! – It is only a question of two different kinds of burdensomeness – therefore let us get married!²⁰¹

Nietzsche acknowledged that once romance begins to wane, the foundation of a marriage built on romantic love crumbles. Romantic love does wane because too much proximity and familiarity means people tire of each other quickly. Nietzsche used the analogy of an engraving, which when continually touched with bare fingers deteriorates to the extent that “we never see the beauty of its original design again. – One always loses by too familiar association with friends and women; and sometimes what one loses is the pearl of one’s life”.²⁰² Distance in relationships would assist in their longevity: “If married couples did not live together good marriages would be more common”.²⁰³

At the very least, Nietzsche was urging lovers to keep their promises in order to avoid what he saw as all-too-common problems and disappointments associated with waning romance in marriages. In *GM*, Nietzsche said a human is “an animal *with the right to make promises*”.²⁰⁴ The implication is that if humans cannot make and keep promises, then we are no more than animals.

Yet, Nietzsche suggested that romantic loving is short-lived, not only because loving feelings wane, but also because people change and grow apart. In *GS*, Nietzsche referred to a noble “star friendship”, where two friends had a magnificent time together, but grew apart as they took separate paths to different goals:

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 172.

²⁰² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 158.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁰⁴ Nietzsche, “On The Genealogy of Morals”, 57.

We were friends and have become estranged. But that was right, and we do not want to hide and obscure it from ourselves as if we had to be ashamed of it. We are two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together, as we did – and then the good ships lay so quietly in one harbour and in one sun that it may have seemed as if they had already completed their course and had the same goal. But then the almighty force of our projects drove us apart once again, into different seas and sunny zones, and maybe we will never meet again – or maybe we will, but will not recognize each other: the different seas and suns have changed us!²⁰⁵

Nietzsche suggested that it is only natural for some relationships to be transitory: “That we had to become estranged is the law *above* us; through it we should come to have more respect for each other – and the thought of our former friendship should become more sacred!”²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Nietzsche himself questioned whether he was strong enough for such an attitude. For example, according to Lou Salomé, Nietzsche found in her a “true companion-disciple” with whom he could discuss his great ideas.²⁰⁷ In letters he described her as “keen as an eagle, brave as a lion” and “amazingly ripe and ready for *my* way of thinking”,²⁰⁸ as well as “the most intelligent ‘of all females...Lou and I are *all-too-similar*, ‘blood related’”.”²⁰⁹ He told her she was his “twin brain” and of one of the days they spent together he said: “the most enchanting dream of my life, that I owe to you”.²¹⁰ Salomé was equally enthralled by her discussions with Nietzsche:

We positively talked ourselves to death, and in a remarkable way it suddenly happens that he is able to endure conversing for about ten hours daily...Curious that in our conversations we involuntarily descend into the depths. And to those dizzying places, always choosing mountain-goat paths, and if anyone would have overheard us he could have thought two devils were talking.²¹¹

But Salomé had great ambitions of her own and was most interested in Nietzsche as a “distinguished teacher-friend”, with whom she could candidly discuss her own ideas and who

²⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 159.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, xlv.

²⁰⁸ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 62.

²⁰⁹ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, lii.

²¹⁰ Ibid., xlvi.

²¹¹ Ibid., li-iii.

was an “incisive and unsparing critic”.²¹² Their great friendship began to fall apart when Nietzsche’s sister Elisabeth and Salomé crossed paths. Elisabeth criticised Salomé for being “the personified philosophy of my brother – a rabid egoism, as well as complete immorality, that tears down everything in its path”²¹³ and told Nietzsche of many hurtful things Salomé allegedly had said about him. He was devastated that Salomé would say such things, but equally angry with his sister about her interference in his friendship with her. Nietzsche’s relationship with his sister and Salomé continued to deteriorate for months and he never saw Salomé again.

In a letter he never sent, Nietzsche referred to Salomé as “This scrawny dirty smelly monkey with her fake breasts – a disaster!”²¹⁴ and of both Salomé and another close friend, Paul Rée, Nietzsche wrote that they “aren’t fit to lick the soles of my boots”.²¹⁵ When Salomé later informed Nietzsche of her engagement to another man, he never responded, but wrote to a friend: “I sincerely wish her prosperity and good fortune. This sort of person, so lacking in reverence, ought to be avoided”.²¹⁶ Revealing his struggle with living his philosophy, Nietzsche said that he was becoming “prey to relentless thoughts of revenge, just when my innermost way of thinking has repudiated such feelings”.²¹⁷

It has been suggested that it was his friendship with Salomé that inspired him to be so critical of women.²¹⁸ However, his own experiences and the passage above that discusses star friendships would seem to suggest that like ships that come together and separate in the star friendship, so too do lovers have their own personal goals and seek to pursue their own paths that are not always parallel. Thus, the custom of marriage where two people are bound together for life is naturally unsuitable.

An alternative to lovers marrying, Nietzsche suggested, is a trial or limited-term relationship: “Allow us a term and a little marriage, to see if we are fit for the great marriage! It is a big

²¹² Ibid., xlv.

²¹³ Ibid., li (fn).

²¹⁴ Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002) 255.

²¹⁵ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 75.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 99.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

²¹⁸ For example, Janet Lungstrum credits Salomé “as venomous inspiration for his dialectic of feminine creativity” (Janet Lungstrum, “Nietzsche Writing Woman / Woman Writing Nietzsche: The Sexual Dialectic of Palingenesis”, *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, ed. Peter J. Burgard (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994) 144.) Likewise, Carol Diethe interprets the “debacle” with Salomé, compounded by his love-hate relationship with his mother and sister, as explanations for his frustration with women (Diethe, “Nietzsche and the Woman Question”: 866.)

thing always to be with another!”²¹⁹ It was something that Nietzsche also considered for himself. When his friends wrote to him describing Lou Salomé before their meeting, he responded:

I have a passion for this kind of soul. So much so, that I shall very soon go on the prowl for one. Considering what I intend to do in the next ten years, it's essential. Marriage is an entirely different story; I could agree to two years of it at most, and even this much only in view of what I have to do in the next ten years.²²⁰

In *HATH*, Nietzsche outlines the benefits of such limited-term relationships. He suggested that it would be prudent (for men) to “set aside the demands of custom for a moment” and “very well consider whether nature and reason do not dictate that a man ought to have two marriages”.²²¹ The first marriage is the most important and necessary for a man's education; it should be when the man is twenty-two years old to a woman who is “intellectually and morally his superior and who can lead him through the perils of the twenties (ambition, hatred, self-contempt, passions of all kinds)”.²²² The second marriage, “useful, but not necessary”, should be during a man's thirties and to a younger disciple whom he would educate.²²³ Obligations are restrictive and distracting, especially for philosophers, because they hold one back from greatness; for example, marriage “is often harmful and promotes the spiritual retrogression of the man”,²²⁴ and thus, a man should preferably be without a wife later in life. Nietzsche cites a raft of great unmarried philosophers as evidence for this incompatibility: “Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer”.²²⁵ Socrates is the ironic exception. Even though Socrates would not have sought his wife, Xantippe, had he known her better, “the heroism of even this free spirit would not have extended to that. [But] Xantippe in fact propelled him deeper and deeper into his own proper profession, inasmuch as she made his house and home uncomfortable and unhomely to him”.²²⁶

Yet even when he wrote *HATH*, Nietzsche was sceptical about whether a “free spirit” could be married: “like the prophetic birds of antiquity, as present-day representatives of true

²¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 228.

²²⁰ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 59.

²²¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 156.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Nietzsche, “On The Genealogy of Morals”, 107.

²²⁶ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 159.

thinking and truth-telling they must prefer *to fly alone*²²⁷ and “all married men are suspect”.²²⁸ The risk of marriage lies in its “habitation and rules”, hated by free spirits because they are “enduring and definitive”.²²⁹ Like the fibres of a spider web, marriage ends up trapping the spider so that it has to feed off itself.²³⁰ That is the reason why the free spirit repeatedly and “sorrowfully again and again rends apart the net that surrounds him: even though he will as a consequence suffer numerous great and small wounds – for he has to rend those threads *from himself*, from his own body and soul”.²³¹

It is not only ties with other people that Nietzsche wrote of breaking, but also self-imposed ties. To Lou Salomé, he wrote, “become what you are! First one needs to emancipate oneself from one’s chains, and then one must free oneself from this emancipation. Each of us, though doubtless in very different ways, has to suffer from chain fever, even after he’s broken his chains”.²³² ‘Become what you are’ is a line he repeated in his philosophical works,²³³ and it suggests that one is incomplete and must overcome oneself to fulfil one’s potential, which he also likens to striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*. In order to do so, however, one must free oneself from such ‘chains’ as expectations of others, ‘herd mentality’, and social conditioning. Nevertheless, freeing oneself from such pressures is only part of the problem. Such pressures constantly threaten to re-encapsulate individuals, since they are comforting like lovers’ arms. Moreover, it is insufficient simply to be free, but rather greatness is about using one’s freedom to overcome oneself and strive towards greatness. In *BGE*, Nietzsche wrote that independence is only for the strong and “daring to the point of recklessness”:

He ventures into a labyrinth, he multiplies by a thousand the dangers which life as such already brings with it, not the smallest of which is that no one can behold how and where he goes astray, is cut off from others, and is torn to pieces limb from limb by some cave-minotaur of conscience. If such a one is destroyed, it takes place so far from the understanding of men that they neither feel it nor sympathize – and he can no longer go back!²³⁴

²²⁷ Ibid., 158.

²²⁸ Ibid., 160.

²²⁹ Ibid., 158.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 66.

²³³ E.g. *Ecce Homo*’s subtitle is: *How to Become What You Are*

²³⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 60-61.

Similarly, in *TI*, Nietzsche suggested that freedom is measured “By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*”.²³⁵ The free spirit must constantly free oneself from anything that binds, traps, restricts or makes comfortable because to constantly challenge oneself, one must never risk laziness. Perhaps this is why in 1887, Nietzsche wrote that it would be “asinine” and much too late for him to be married because it “would lead to the loss of independence that I have won at a bloody price”, yet he pondered what he would like in a wife:

(1) someone to oversee my stomach; (2) someone gay to laugh with me; (3) someone proud of my company who would hold the others in front of me at a respectful distance; (4) someone who might read to me without making it dull and stupid. There is fifth but I do not even want to mention it.²³⁶

While Nietzsche did not address how serial monogamy could be of benefit to women, he recognised that it would require generosity on her side – hence the title of an aphorism in which he discusses this idea: ‘Opportunity for female generosity’.²³⁷ Nevertheless, Nietzsche did not specifically exclude the possibility of women being able to strive for the ideal of the *Übermensch*.

Another possible option Nietzsche proposed was to separate romantic loving and marriage altogether. Nietzsche saw marriage as a worthwhile institution for creating families and much more reliable foundation for heterosexual relations than romantic loving. Marriage used not to be about flight of fancy; it was about what was good for the family and society. Ancient Greek marriages had solid foundations because they were rational business arrangements; roles were very clearly defined as “the husband had sole juridical responsibility”; couples could not get divorced; and love was not a factor in the decision. Thus, marriage “could *make itself heard* against the accidents of feeling, passion and the moment”.²³⁸

Nietzsche proposed suggestions to help lovers to think twice about whether they ought to marry. For example, he recommended preparing lovers for the inevitable evaporation of attraction: “Sometimes it requires only a stronger pair of spectacles to cure the lover, and he

²³⁵ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 104.

²³⁶ Letter of 23 March 1887 as quoted in Sarah Kofman, “Baubo: Theological Perversion and Fetishism”, trans. Tracy B. Strong, *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, eds. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) 47.

²³⁷ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 156.

²³⁸ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 105.

who had the imagination to picture a face, a figure twenty years older would perhaps pass through life very undisturbed”.²³⁹ Alternatively, before walking down the aisle, Nietzsche exhorts the betrothed to ask themselves this question: “do you believe you are going to enjoy talking with this woman up into your old age? Everything else in marriage is transitory, but most of the time you are together will be devoted to conversation”.²⁴⁰ Thus, being interested in one another is infinitely more important to the durability of a relationship than being attracted to each other. Indeed, he also suggested that to preserve a friendship between a man and a woman, “a slight physical antipathy” is required.²⁴¹ If lovers continue to walk down the aisle while in love, Nietzsche suggested making it illegal:

We ought not to be permitted to come to a decision affecting our life while we are in the condition of being in love, nor to determine once and for all the character of the company we keep on the basis of a violent whim: the oaths of lovers ought to be publicly declared invalid and marriage denied them:- the reason being that one ought to take marriage enormously more seriously!²⁴²

While in most Western cultures today this idea seems archaic, arranged marriages still exist in many cultures.²⁴³ Emphasising the importance of choice in relationships, Nietzsche recommends marrying not only because the individuals happen to be sexually attracted to one another, but to consider other factors in the decision, such as the ability to talk to the spouse and to maintain the family’s “power, influence, wealth” for future generations.²⁴⁴ Even popularity or fame, he thought, would be better reasons for marriage than romantic loving, since the marriage would be more stable if partners use the association for other ends.²⁴⁵

Romantic loving distracts lovers from striving for the ideal of the Übermensch

Nietzsche identified a second problem with marrying for love: romantic loving tends not to contribute to an ascending life, and distracts lovers from striving for the ideal of the *Übermensch*. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche suggested that people are so swept away with the frivolity of romantic loving that they do not realise their greatest achievement would be

²³⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 154.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁴² Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 98.

²⁴³ Roger Penn, “Arranged Marriages in Western Europe: Media Representations and Social Reality”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 42.5 (2011): 637.

²⁴⁴ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols”, 106.

²⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 152.

creating new generations of even more amazing individuals. With people marrying for love, mate-selection is based on chance and thus, making babies is a random exercise. Humankind is capable of amazing things, yet “individuals are squandered” because “he gives no thought to the fact, indeed, that through procreation he could prepare the way for an even more victorious life”.²⁴⁶ Thus, it is actually in the individual’s greatest self-interest not to marry for love, but to create strong healthy well-educated progeny.²⁴⁷ While it is conceivable that when in love, partners think highly of each other and would produce fine offspring, Nietzsche’s point is not to be fooled by romantic delusions.

Campaigning against marrying for love, Nietzsche advocates improvements to the human species and building great civilisations through careful mate selection. Zarathustra exhorts, “You should propagate yourself not only forward, but upward!”²⁴⁸ He thought having babies was not about a blind biological desire for survival of the species (reproduction), but rather about procreation in the sense of actively creating new beings. He urges: “Let the flash of a star glitter in your love! Let your hope be: ‘May I bear the Superman!’”²⁴⁹ Indeed, a developing market for fertility clinics where parents can create bespoke babies by choosing physical traits and screening for defects and diseases suggests that there is indeed a demand for creating stronger and more attractive children cosmetically.²⁵⁰ Nietzsche was urging a natural form of this through partner selection rather than in test tubes.

While marriage is not a necessary condition for procreation, Nietzsche thought the family unit would assist in building those new generations: “May the garden of marriage help you to do it!”²⁵¹ Nietzsche’s assumption here is that two great parents will create a child who is better than they are. Yet, there is no guarantee that this will be the case in practice and Nietzsche acknowledged this, citing Lord Byron who had a “low-minded father” and a “childish and irritable mother” as an example that “noble-minded and ambitious men” may still be born of poor souls.²⁵² Conversely, it is also logical that two great parents can still create an underwhelming child and Nietzsche regretfully acknowledged that children cannot be pre-determined by their parents (as nice as that would be if they were great parents). Thus, Nietzsche suggested procreation can be an authentic transcendental activity, although it

²⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 97.

²⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 360.

²⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 95.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁵⁰ Philip Sherwell, *Beautiful bubs designed to perfection*, March 3 2009, Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/03/02/1235842327396.html> 10 Aug 2009.

²⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 95.

²⁵² Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 156.

usually is not. Nevertheless, his advocacy for building strong family units potentially contradicts his suggestion above about serial monogamy.

Nietzsche also suggested that pregnancy is a means of resolving relationship problems. In fact, Zarathustra says that pregnancy is the solution to all women's problems: "everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy" because it is the reason that a woman needs a man: "For the woman, the man is a means: the end is always the child".²⁵³ In *EH*, Nietzsche reiterated this point: "Did anyone hear my answer to the question of how to *cure* – 'redeem' – a woman? Give her a baby".²⁵⁴

These comments, read at face value, suggest that women's primary quest in life is to create babies, and thus they use men for impregnation. This view suggests that women use their skills of seduction in order to select a mate based on the criteria of attempting to produce strong offspring. However, Nietzsche also held pregnancy in high regard. As seen above, Nietzsche argued that having babies can and should be creative and a great achievement, contributing to creation of a new and better humanity and therefore a form of *Übermensch* striving. Moreover, in *TI*, Nietzsche links the pregnancy to eternal recurrence: "the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation".²⁵⁵ The Greeks venerated procreation and pregnancy, and sanctified the pain of childbirth, since "all becoming and growing, all that guarantees the future, *postulates* pain".²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Nietzsche also pointed out that procreating often is not an achievement because when mate selection is based on romantic loving, it is not focused on building strong family units or bearing supermen, and is sometimes a mistake.²⁵⁷ This could be a reason that Nietzsche did not specifically discuss women striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch* (although he did not specifically exclude women either): the latent suggestion is that women should want to focus their efforts on creating baby *Übermenschen*.

A second reason why Nietzsche was suspicious of romantic loving as a distraction from striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch* lies in the desire for lovers to merge. The illusion or temptation of merging is strong but inadvisable. For example, in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*SE*), Nietzsche painted such a desire as a longing to bridge the gap between them:

²⁵³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 91.

²⁵⁴ Nietzsche, "Ecce Homo", 106.

²⁵⁵ Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols", 120.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 99.

there are moments and as it were bright sparks of the fire of love in whose light we cease to understand the word 'I', there lies something beyond our being which at these moments moves across into it, and we are thus possessed of a heartfelt longing for bridges between here and there.²⁵⁸

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche painted love as a strong but futile desire to make lovers the same: "Love wants to spare the person to whom it dedicates itself every feeling of *being other*, and consequently it is full of dissimulation and pretence of similarity, it is constantly deceiving and feigning a sameness which in reality does not exist".²⁵⁹ The problem, according to Nietzsche, is that the attempt to merge is a quest to dissolve otherness and involves lovers abnegating themselves: "both consequently abandon themselves and want to be the same as one another: in the end neither knows what he is supposed to be imitating, what dissimulating, what pretending to be".²⁶⁰ This insight is consistent with Nietzsche's comments in *GS* that if both lovers renounce themselves then all that is left is an empty space.²⁶¹

Nietzsche supported the idea that strong lovers master their desire to merge or make the same, and instead, embrace their differences. In *HATH*, he saw love as an appreciation of otherness: "What is love but understanding and rejoicing at the fact that another lives, feels and acts in a way different from and opposite to ours?"²⁶² While this would appear to contradict Nietzsche's comments that love is narcissistic, since lovers look for themselves in others, I believe he was talking about different levels of relationships. Narcissists look for themselves in others, while those striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch* celebrate their individual differences and frictions.

Elsewhere, Nietzsche portrayed the temptation for lovers to merge as madness and, like Stirner, advocates distance from others to keep power over oneself: "The thinker must always from time to time drive away those people he loves" because love tends to blind one to the truth, giving lovers power to deceive and to seduce.²⁶³ Indeed, we have already seen how philosophers must tear away the spider web threads to free themselves from ties to others.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator", 161.

²⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 210-211.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁶¹ See p.132.

²⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy", trans. Ronald Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 229-230.

²⁶³ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 197-198.

²⁶⁴ See p.145.

One instrument used for keeping distance could be a whip. The following piece of advice given to Zarathustra has created a huge amount of speculation: “Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!”²⁶⁵ If one were to take this quote literally, it suggests disdain for women and physical violence against them.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Zarathustra is a work of fiction and can be taken in many ways and the context of the quote prompts scepticism about such a conclusion. A woman gave him the advice as a special gift of thanks: “Zarathustra has said many nice things...And now accept as thanks a little truth!”²⁶⁷ The old lady cryptically warns: “Wrap it up and stop its mouth: otherwise it will cry too loudly, this little truth!”²⁶⁸ implying such wise words must be kept secret because in the wrong hands, they would be misunderstood.

Keeping one’s distance from others, particularly lovers, is a recurring theme in Nietzsche’s work. For example, in *GS*, Nietzsche wrote that men prefer not to know about women’s “repulsive natural functions”,²⁶⁹ but rather to admire her beauty from a distance: “The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, to speak the language of the philosophers, action at a distance...but that requires, first and foremost – *distance*”.²⁷⁰ In this context, a whip would be a self-disciplinary or self-defence tool for men to keep themselves sufficiently distanced from women so as not to spoil the mystery and beauty of the feminine.

Nietzsche also touched on the idea that distance from other people must be kept in order to retain one’s power in *GS*. ‘Over the footbridge’ is an aphorism that tells the story of two people who discover the tension between friendship and power:

There was a time in our lives when we were so close that nothing seemed to obstruct our friendship and brotherhood, and only a small footbridge separated us. Just as you were about to step on it, I asked you: ‘Do you want to cross the footbridge to me?’— But then you didn’t want to any more; and when I asked again, you were silent. Since then, mountains and torrential rivers, and everything which separates and alienates, have been cast between us, and even if we wanted to reach each other, we couldn’t

²⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 93.

²⁶⁶ For example, Diethe suggests the whip quote implies Nietzsche is afraid of women, that he “condones male sexual aggression” and man needs the whip because “unless man keeps the upper hand, woman, through mere cunning, will seek to take control” (Diethe, “Nietzsche and the Woman Question”: 868.)

²⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 92-93.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 70.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

anymore! But when you think of that little footbridge now, you have no words anymore – only sobs and bewilderment.²⁷¹

This passage suggests that two friends became so close that one friend wanting to cross the footbridge raised the issue as to whether doing so would equate to subordinating to the other.²⁷² Their closeness was then ripped apart because of the risk of a power dynamic, even if it was unintended or accidental. The mere awareness of the possibility of there being a power relation meant that the friends became alienated from one another.

It is most unlikely that Nietzsche meant physical violence when Zarathustra was advised to take a whip to women. It is much more likely that the comment is metaphorical and the whip is to be used by either or both lovers to preserve distance from one another. In the context of loving relationships, the whip can also be seen as being for the great Zarathustra to give to a woman to help one or both of them to be even greater. Thus the best type of relationship is one where the partners are brave enough to keep their distance and to ‘whip each other into shape’, so to speak.

Great lovers are also great friends

It has been shown that Nietzsche recognised the importance of loving, and saw marriage as a worthwhile institution, but that the ideal of romantic loving culminating in marriage is problematic. It has also been seen that Nietzsche respected the ideal of friendship and in this section Nietzsche’s idea of friendship, which is the key to overcoming many of the problems of romantic loving identified above, is explored.

Nietzsche agreed with Aristotle that great friends should inspire and educate each other.²⁷³ Nietzsche discussed a kind of relationship that Stirner did not: one that is beyond mutual advantage, benefit, pleasure or enjoyment. While a great friendship may include all these elements, the key difference is that great friends help one another to become better people, through “a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them”,²⁷⁴ acting as “catalytic muse[s]” for one another.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁷² Irvin Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept* (Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 1993) 85.

²⁷³ Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, 157.

²⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 41.

²⁷⁵ Lungstrum, “Nietzsche Writing Woman / Woman Writing Nietzsche: The Sexual Dialectic of Palingenesis”, 137.

Nietzsche asked: “What do you love in others?” His answer was: “My hopes”,²⁷⁶ if friends are capable of inspiring and pushing each other to live beyond what they might have thought possible alone, to extend their achievements and fulfil great ambitions. Zarathustra urges us to strive for that future, higher ideal of human greatness: “I exhort you to love of the most distant”.²⁷⁷ To be a good friend, Zarathustra encourages “you should be to him an arrow and a longing for the Superman”.²⁷⁸

For Nietzsche, “Man is something that should be overcome”,²⁷⁹ and yet this is something that is extremely difficult to do on one’s own. In *BGE*, Nietzsche warned, “He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you”.²⁸⁰ Thus, the friend is valued not so much for her ‘gaze’ as Sartre later envisaged, but rather for her ability to pull one up from the depths of the abyss and be a launching pad to push one towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*. For example, in *HATH*, he wrote, “The surest aid in combating the male’s disease of self-contempt is to be loved by a clever woman”.²⁸¹ Even though Nietzsche warned against marriage for philosophers, older men and free spirits, he also suggested that “Men who are too intellectual have great need of marriage, though they resist it as they would a foul-tasting medicine”,²⁸² and this pedagogical function is perhaps why. Like Xantippe, who made their home inhospitable, a challenging partner can educate even Socrates.

Yet being a great friend is not an easy task. The best teachers are the harshest critics and should be wary of being too sympathetic towards the friend. Zarathustra says: “Let your pity for your friend conceal itself under a hard shell; you should break a tooth biting upon it. Thus it will have delicacy and sweetness”.²⁸³ Indeed, because great friends must be unsympathetic and ruthless, they “must be *capable* of being an enemy”.²⁸⁴ The eternal question is whether lovers can be friends. Nietzsche was sceptical because he saw that love involves dependence and petty power dynamics instead of the nobility and strength of great friendships.²⁸⁵ It is because of this fundamental difference and power game that Zarathustra claims: “woman is

²⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 152.

²⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 88.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 102.

²⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 150.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 83.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁸⁵ See p.131 and Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche*, 157-158.

not yet capable of friendship: she only knows love”.²⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s criticism of women’s capability of friendship is not as misogynistic as it first appears. First, he qualifies his statement with ‘yet’, implying that the possibility exists. Second, Zarathustra is equally as critical of men’s ability to be friends: “But tell me, you men, which of you is yet capable of friendship?”²⁸⁷ He asked: “Are you a slave? If so, you cannot be a friend. Are you a tyrant? If so, you cannot have friends”.²⁸⁸ It seems anyone distracted by power games cannot be a friend. Third, in *HATH*, Nietzsche explicitly wrote that “Women are quite able to make friends with a man”.²⁸⁹ Fourth, in Nietzsche’s discussions about star friends, he is ambiguous about the sex of the participants in such a friendship.

Nietzsche’s challenge is for lovers to be better friends. A true friendship does not entail dependency, but rather camaraderie, encouragement, concurrent striving and flourishing. A relationship based on great friendship between two autonomous individuals opens partners up to new experiences, possibilities and opportunities for self-overcoming. Considering Nietzsche also described love as greediness, reconciling love and friendship is potentially contradictory. Nietzsche’s problem is that love usually manifests as greediness and power struggles, whereas friendship can sublimate the will to power, thus helping each other to be creative and find the way to the ideal of the *Übermensch*. If lovers were capable of friendship, then such love would involve arousing “longing for the Superman”.²⁹⁰ Nietzsche proposed precisely this kind of great friendship will make a great marriage. In fact, “The best friend will probably acquire the best wife, because a good marriage is founded on the talent for friendship”.²⁹¹

An indication that Nietzsche saw the same kind of possibilities for loving relationships appears in *SE*: “for it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it”.²⁹² This suggests that Nietzsche saw the possibility of great love as compatible with striving for the ideal of the *Übermensch* and a strong will is required for both. In *WP*, Nietzsche also supports such an idea, since “the

²⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 83.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 151.

²⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 96.

²⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 150.

²⁹² Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator”, 163.

greatest lovers are so from the strength of their ego”.²⁹³ Moreover, Nietzsche indicates that there are two types of love: “There is a slavish love that submits and gives itself; that idealizes, and deceives itself – there is a divine love that despises and loves, and reshapes and elevates the beloved”.²⁹⁴ His suggestion is that the former ‘slavish’ love is weak and decadent, and is a misunderstanding of love. However, the latter ‘divine’ love is based on the principles of friendship outlined above: it supports striving for the ideal of the *Übermensch* not only through loving, but also through being an enemy because at times it is necessary to challenge the beloved.

Key considerations

While some of the contradictions within Nietzsche’s views of romantic loving have been highlighted above, this section addresses more general criticisms with respect to Nietzsche’s comments on romantic loving.

First, Nietzsche tends to overgeneralise about what men and women want, such as when he said that women like comfort and submitting to their lovers, but men want challenges and to dominate their lovers.²⁹⁵ However, Nietzsche was highly cognisant of the issues between the sexes and the dynamics that can destroy relationships and distract lovers from achieving their own goals. There is certainly merit in reinforcing potential problems in romantic relationships: that it is often more difficult for women than for men to be authentic; romantic loving is often egoistic even when it appears superficially to be self-sacrificial; concern for the beloved’s welfare can easily be misdirected and frustrate relations; and succumbing to one’s impulsive loving urges is hedonistic and weak.

Second, Nietzsche’s views on women’s roles are contradictory. On the one hand, he did not explicitly exclude women from striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch* or being a ‘star friend’, but did not specifically include them either. On the other hand, he expresses concern that this would mean women would lose their femininity. For example, Nietzsche accused scholarly women of being stunted sexually.²⁹⁶ Education and femininity are, however, not mutually exclusive, and Nietzsche’s concerns are unfounded.

²⁹³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 197-198.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 506.

²⁹⁵ See p.133.

²⁹⁶ See p.138.

Third, Nietzsche provided no concrete details or examples of the *Übermensch* and the ideal friendships that might develop. Zarathustra, Wagner and Goethe could arguably be included, although these people have their weaknesses too. I suspect Nietzsche's omission or elusiveness at best was intentional: to provoke the reader to find one's own unique solution to becoming a creative individual rather than being distracted with trying to follow in the footsteps of some concrete example. That would hardly be creative.²⁹⁷

Fourth, in terms of Nietzsche's vision of creating baby *Übermenschen* as well as his support for an aristocratic moral code, elitist self-development and individualism, it is possible to see how this attitude was distorted by his anti-Semitic sister Elisabeth and used – albeit highly selectively and misleadingly – for Fascist purposes. Practically speaking, civilisation would likely have to go through severe domination of a police state to create the conditions in which aristocratic supermen may emerge. Nietzsche knew he was “dynamite”²⁹⁸ and even tried to recall *Zarathustra*, “to protect it from mishaps (I read it in the last few days and almost died of emotion). It won't be ripe for publishing until after several decades of world historical crises – wars!”²⁹⁹ These statements suggest that first, Nietzsche was quite confident of his pending fame, even if it was not to be fully realised during his lifetime; and second, that he knew exactly how dangerous his books could be. Nevertheless, he also seemed aware of his limited appeal during his lifetime: “I've thrown my hook out to “the few” instead, and even with them I'm prepared to be patient”.³⁰⁰

Fifth, Nietzsche has been accused of pessimism, especially with respect to loving relationships.³⁰¹ Notwithstanding the many cynical things Nietzsche did say about romantic loving, there are indications that Nietzsche also thought very highly of it. On the one hand, Nietzsche respects romantic loving for its role in reinvigorating the passions after Christianity's attempt to extinguish them. On the other hand, he is highly sceptical of romantic loving because those types of romantic relationships that are based on petty power struggles and frivolously indulging in one's passions are those that are ephemeral and do not contribute to *Übermensch* striving. The issue is that there are few details as to how romantic loving relationships might be reconciled with marriage and friendship; however, I have

²⁹⁷ Christine Daigle, for example, argues that the *Übermensch* is a state that one must strive towards but that is dynamic in the sense of continually becoming and overcoming oneself and is therefore ultimately unattainable: “It is not clear in Nietzsche's mind whether there will ever be *Übermenschen*” (Christine Daigle, “Nietzsche: Virtue Ethics...Virtue Politics?”, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 32 (2006): 8-9.)

²⁹⁸ Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo”, 144.

²⁹⁹ Fuss and Shapiro, eds., *Nietzsche: A Self-Portrait from His Letters*, 135.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 99.

³⁰¹ See p.34.

suggested that he did not exclude the possibility. He has paved the way through his ideal of the *Übermensch* and friendship to find a way of being with lovers that is not doomed to pettiness and descending power games, and sublimates the will to power and one's sexual instincts into a romantic relationship. At least in this respect I see more than a glimmer of optimism.

Sixth, while Nietzsche's remarks about romantic loving are fragmented, I have attempted to demonstrate that he did provide valuable perspectives and practical suggestions for reinvigorating and strengthening romantic relationships. While initially some advice may appear frivolous, for example, giving a woman a baby and taking a whip to her, I have shown through a number of alternative interpretations that Nietzsche's ideas are insightful. He saw it as natural that people fall in love and like to get married, but when they fall apart, they can be painful and despicable. Romantic loving relationships, he thought, can be great when they are between strong individuals. Yet, such relationships are rare, difficult and conflicted. At times, the lovers will have to be enemies. Yet, Nietzsche would chuckle because he welcomed conflict and obstacles in life.

Seventh, although Nietzsche did not specifically refer to loving as romantic, he did indeed grapple with the key elements of romantic loving. Nietzsche acknowledged and admired the passionate nature of romantic loving, but warned that not to master one's lust and loving feelings is decadent and weak. There are indications that he thought love only possible for those strong enough to master their passions, that is, to overcome the desire to possess or sacrifice oneself to the beloved, and to master their lust and egoistic desires. He acknowledged that love is personal, but was wary of the delusions that love evokes, not only creating and enhancing merits of the beloved, but also enhancing one's own feeling of strength. Nevertheless, he also admired the power of love's delusions and intoxication as valuable for creativity and providing relief from the anxiety of living. Nietzsche considered the ideal of romantic loving as everlasting to be one of its most damaging features. For those who do not master their passions, romantic loving is bound to be fleeting. Not only is this indicative of a weak will, but also it becomes particularly problematic when lovers seek to secure their love frivolously through marriage, which is rendered absurd when the basis for it, romantic loving, crumbles. Nietzsche was also critical of the idea that romantic loving is a merger between two individuals. Problems with such an ideal manifest themselves when lovers seek to renounce themselves to the other in the name of love. Since individuals are will to power, all relationships are power struggles. However, great relationships sublimate the

power struggle into striving for the ideal of the *Übermensch*. Descending relationships manifest in a desire to appropriate the other. This is problematic because one's striving is limited by the other, for example, locking away the beloved like an exotic bird, or making one's own life more peaceful by restricting the life of the other. If lovers are truly concerned about each other's welfare, according to Nietzsche, they ought to be challenging and discomforting. Ultimately, a great friendship is the basis for lovers to become great.

Nietzsche's revaluation of values contributes much to the discussion of romantic loving. He advocated that lovers free themselves from the shackles of romantic mythology, sexual conventions, agapaic self-renunciation, suppression and ignorance of sexuality, decadent instinctive romantic and sexual delusions, and the ideals of merging, as well as everlasting love frivolously secured through marriage. To be free from such chains allows the lovers to be free to use their power to create their own values, to be secure in themselves rather than using the beloved to compensate for their own weaknesses, and to create strong relationships that allow individuals to strive towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*.

Chapter 4 - Jean-Paul Sartre: Loving Sado-Masochistically

This study of loving existentially culminates with Jean-Paul Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's philosophies in chapters 4 and 5. Beauvoir and Sartre were two of the leading atheistic existential thinkers and were involved in a very public and long-standing loving relationship. They met as young philosophy students in 1929. Sartre won first prize in the *agrégation*, France's highly competitive teachers' exam, after failing the first time. Beauvoir drew second place in what was a fiercely contested jury decision.¹ They fell in love, inspired and challenged each other for the rest of their lives. They became highly admired teachers, writing about their new philosophies in cosy Paris cafes. In 1964, Sartre was awarded (but refused) the Nobel Prize for his autobiographical narrative *The Words*, while Beauvoir won France's top literary award, the Prix Goncourt for her 1954 novel *The Mandarins*.²

Despite saying in a 1959 interview that love was a topic that did not interest him,³ Sartre's writing and interviews reveal that he did actually have plenty to say on the topic. First, I address why, in *Being and Nothingness (BN)*, Sartre thought love to be so alluring but problematic. Second, I seek solutions within Sartre's works, but for this we need to look beyond *BN* to such works as *Notebooks for an Ethics* and to how he sought to resolve the issues in his personal life. However, Sartre's solutions are fragmented and undeveloped, and the value of his analysis of romantic loving lies firmly in understanding its problems.

Much of Sartre's 'existentialist' writing was published in the 1940s. While he accepted and used the term 'existential' in his early writing, later in life he said he thought the word was ridiculous, but "if a label is absolutely necessary, I would like 'existentialist' better" (than 'Marxist').⁴ His most comprehensive views of romantic loving relationships appear in his existential manifesto *BN* (1943) and will be the primary work addressed. Other major works drawn upon include *Nausea* (1938), *The Room* (1938), *The Flies* (1943), *Huis Clos* (1944), *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1945),⁵ *The Chips are Down* (1947),⁶ *Notebooks for an Ethics*

¹ Hazel Rowley, *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 20.

² *Ibid.*, 234, 282.

³ "I'll never write a play about love; I'm not interested in it" (Michel Contat, Michel Rybalka and Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, vol. 1 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) 361.)

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (London: Deutsch, 1978) 60.

⁵ *Existentialism is a Humanism* is a lecture Sartre delivered specifically in order to simplify and clarify some of the key themes he raised in *Being and Nothingness* and to address criticisms that it paints a dark and gloomy

(1948-49)⁷ and *Lucifer and the Lord* (1951) and a number of interviews because these provide examples relevant to existential themes raised in *BN*. This analysis is existential and so deliberately excludes Sartre's later writings that veer towards Marxism, because although he spoke about integrating existentialism and Marxism, he was never able to reconcile them.⁸

Attracted to philosophy through Bergson's ideas about consciousness, Sartre went on to explore Lévinas, Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl, Kant, Hegel and Descartes.⁹ In *BN*, Sartre began by rejecting Kant's idea of noumena, which is the notion that essences of being hide behind appearances; instead, he bases his phenomenology on that of Husserl and Heidegger, that appearance reveals the essence of being; "it is the essence".¹⁰

While Sartre denied reading much Hegel before *BN*,¹¹ there are three key points relevant to this analysis that Sartre derives from Hegel. First, they both split being into in-itself and for-itself realities that oppose each other.¹² Second, the role of the 'Other' is a fundamental aspect of self-consciousness. Hegel said "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is to say, it exists only in being acknowledged".¹³ Sartre was attracted to Hegel's idea that a being-for-others is necessary for being-for-myself.¹⁴

The third key element that Hegel and Sartre have in common is the source of conflict in relationships. They discuss a form of encounter between humans, a master and slave interaction, as a 'dialect', or in other words, an oppositional relationship characterised by "a

picture of life (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) xii.) Sartre later regretted the lecture because of the way it was interpreted (Stephen Priest, ed., *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 7.) For this reason and its oversimplification, the essay is referenced where it complements the ideas in *Being and Nothingness*.

⁶ With this film, Sartre said he was having fun with determinism because "existentialism never admits that the chips are ever down" (Contat, Rybalka and Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 163-164.)

⁷ *Notebooks for an Ethics* is a collection of notes written in 1947 and 1948 and published posthumously. Sartre did not want them to be published until after his death in case he did actually get around to writing a more comprehensive work. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre (Sartre's ex-lover, adopted daughter and executrix) explained in her introduction to the publication that Sartre said they are unfinished, obscure and undeveloped ideas, but they are more than notes because although they are unstructured, they do have a guiding theme and order. While it cannot be taken as a comprehensive work, it is worth noting where Sartre's thinking about romantic loving relationships was headed after *BN*. (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) xxiii-xxiv.)

⁸ Gerassi, *Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates*, 44.

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre", *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1981) 7-10.

¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 5.

¹¹ Sartre, "Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre", 9.

¹² Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, 26-27, Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, 43.

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 111.

¹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 321-322.

topsy-turvy logic”, in which the master and slave switch roles.¹⁵ Hegel described the dialectic as two consciousnesses who meet and in their recognition of each other, they realise there is a part of their being lost in the other. Their reaction is to attempt to recover their lost fragment of being which will provide them with full knowledge about themselves. “They must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth”, and the attempt to recover their being from the other results in “a life-and-death struggle”.¹⁶

The problem is that in killing the other consciousness much is lost. Most importantly, one loses the truth one was seeking in the first place, self-certainty and the ‘interplay’ of opposing characteristics.¹⁷ So it is essential that both consciousnesses survive in order to recognise each other as opposed. The more powerful one seizes the independent essential position of ‘lord’ or ‘master’ existing for-itself.¹⁸ The one who is more afraid of dying surrenders and becomes the dependent and unessential ‘bondsman’ or ‘slave’.¹⁹ The relationship is not quite so simple, however, and the story takes an unexpected turn. The lord finds that he is not as independent as initially thought because he needs the slave in order to establish his self-certainty. Paradoxically the bondsman becomes the essential and more powerful force in the relationship. This provokes the master-slave dialectic that Sartre explored with regard to sexual and loving relationships in *Being and Nothingness*.²⁰

Sartre did not discuss Max Stirner,²¹ yet there are a number of similarities in their approaches, especially the idea that humans are creative nothingnesses. Stirner would likely, however, have criticised Sartre for his obsession with the ‘spook’ of freedom because it is another abstraction and ideal to which individuals subordinate themselves. Sartre would have us believe that his exploration of Kierkegaard was delayed until around 1939-1940 because he was put off by the double *a* in his name.²² Yet, Sartre’s existential writing bears comparison to Kierkegaard’s in terms of his emphasis on subjective truth, individualism, primacy of choice and anxiety. In *BN*, Sartre adopts Kierkegaard’s ideas about irony and anguish and in

¹⁵ Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 529.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 113-114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

²⁰ Other scholars who support this interpretation include Debbie Evans, “Sartre and Beauvoir on Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic and the Question of the ‘Look’”, *Beauvoir and Sartre: the riddle of influence*, eds. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 90, James Ogilvy, “Mastery and Sexuality: Hegel’s Dialectic in Sartre and Post-Freudian Psychology”, *Human Studies*.3 (1980): 201, Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, 273.

²¹ However, Sartre mentions him in a passing comparison with the Marquis de Sade. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Problem of Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen & Co, 1963) 114.

²² Sartre, “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre”, 10.

Existentialism is a Humanism (EH), he reviews Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham's anxiety. In interviews, Sartre did not speak highly of Nietzsche. While he said he read a lot of Nietzsche and found him interesting, he also said Nietzsche did not stand "for anything particular in my eyes".²³ Elsewhere he said, "I hated [Nietzsche]. I think his crap about the elite, his *übermensch* [*sic*], radicalized us a lot" when he was a student.²⁴ Sartre and his friends used to throw urine-filled condoms on the heads of students who loved Nietzsche and shout "Thus pissed Zarathustra!"²⁵ Yet, Sartre has more in common with Nietzsche than he may be willing to admit because they both portray romantic loving as a desire to possess the other.

Before proceeding to the problems of romantic loving, I shall outline why Sartre proposed that romantic loving is so alluring. For Sartre, love is an important way of understanding what one is. To understand why this is the case, it is necessary first briefly to address Sartre's view of consciousness. In *BN* Sartre identified two primary modes of being: being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*) and being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*). The key difference between the two is that a for-itself, such as a human, is conscious, whereas an in-itself, such as a table or a rock, is not conscious. The implication of this is that possibilities are available to a for-itself and not an in-itself.²⁶ In other words, humans can modify their being and their situation through the choices they make: "we are a choice, and for us, to be is to choose ourselves".²⁷ In contrast, an in-itself can only have possibilities by being modified by a for-itself or another in-itself.²⁸ For example, a table cannot paint itself white; only a for-itself can change it. The significance of this emphasis on modification is that "to act is to modify the *shape* of the world; it is to arrange means in view of an end...We should observe first that an action is on principle *intentional*".²⁹

Another aspect of being is that it is more than 'the self' because it cannot be understood without taking into account one's intentions and projects. This is why being implies becoming³⁰ and is incomplete. Sartre referred to this incompleteness as a 'lack', a 'not yet' or a gap called 'nothingness'. Being cannot be completed until death at which point there are no

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Gerassi, *Talking with Sartre: Conversations and Debates*, 53.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29.

²⁷ Ibid., 432.

²⁸ Ibid., 152.

²⁹ Ibid., 559.

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

more possibilities.³¹ That is the moment when a for-itself turns into an in-itself. Sartre wrote: “at the moment of death the chips are down, there remains not a card to play. Death reunites us with ourselves...By death the for-itself is changed forever into an in-itself in that it has slipped entirely into the past”.³² However, human reality is a striving towards completion, or in other words, a project of becoming an in-itself-for-itself.³³ One wants to become complete and secure to overcome the anxiety of the meaninglessness of life. Sartre defines such a project as *Ens causa sui*: the project to constitute oneself as one’s own foundation, “which religions call God”.³⁴

In the meantime, Sartre said “Human reality is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given”.³⁵ Human consciousness thrusts itself forward in the world, surpassing itself toward that which it lacks, or in other words, totality. The goal is not predetermined. Sartre incorporates a very similar idea to that of Nietzsche’s self-overcoming when he referred to perpetual surpassing but, unlike Nietzsche, striving is not towards an ideal of the *Übermensch*. Yet, he also said “Imperfect being surpasses itself toward perfect being”,³⁶ suggesting a striving towards an ideal. While Nietzsche strove towards something great, Sartre’s concept is actually more similar to Stirner’s view that one is a creative nothingness. Even though he referred to ‘perfect being’, he meant “only human reality itself as a totality”.³⁷

Sartre was anxious about not knowing whether he was becoming that self who he thought he would be – or whether he would want to. He refers to Kierkegaard’s idea about making an appointment with oneself in the future and not knowing whether one would be able to make that appointment or recognise oneself when one gets there. Moreover, this quality of lacking – this nothingness of being – means that human reality is characterised by suffering and unhappiness because it is “perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it”.³⁸ With specific reference to Kierkegaard, Sartre argued that the consequence of being as an inherent lack, the absurdity of life and the absence of predetermined values and morals is that it creates anguish. Whereas fear is of something external, anguish has no object: “A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without; my

³¹ Ibid., 169.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 784.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 139.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 140.

being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation”.³⁹ For example, walking along a mountain precipice alone, one’s concern is not fear of falling into the abyss, as there is nothing external to compel one to fall.⁴⁰ However, one may be anguished about throwing oneself into it because slipping is within the realm of possibilities. If one does not wish to die, one takes control of the situation and exerts all one’s strength in order to make the preferred possibility come to be, that is, to avoid placing one’s foot in a spot where one might slip and fall.⁴¹ Unfortunately, anguish is so inbuilt into the structure of one’s being, that one cannot fully overcome it.⁴²

Sartre defines consciousness as “*a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself*”.⁴³ There are two key implications of this definition: first, being conscious means not only that humans are able to question, but also that one’s being is never simply given but is always a challenge; and second, following Husserl, being conscious is to be conscious *of* something, meaning also that consciousness does not possess or hold contents within it. Moreover, neither an unconscious force nor a Nietzschean will to power drives humans.

However, the fundamental problem is that in order to question one’s own consciousness – that is, to conduct psychological research on oneself – one has to be able to objectify oneself: “He must be able to put himself *outside of being*”.⁴⁴ This is impossible, according to Sartre, because one cannot split oneself in two to be a subject and an object at the same time. Any reflection is impure and only captures the “shadow of being”⁴⁵ because, as the adage goes, the eye cannot see itself. However, the project is impossible: one lacks one’s own foundation and thus “Man is a useless passion”.⁴⁶

Sartre outlines three types of self-knowledge: ordinary simple self-reflection, a much deeper self-reflection, and reflection gained through others.⁴⁷ At the basic level, individuals are pre-reflectively conscious. Being conscious of an object pre-reflectively is spontaneous

³⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁴¹ Ibid., 67-68.

⁴² Ibid., 82.

⁴³ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 784.

⁴⁷ Sartre, “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre”, 47-48. Although this interview was conducted more than 30 years after *BN*, Sartre says that his views on this did not change throughout his life.

perception.⁴⁸ One sees or does something, but does not focus on it. This differs from reflective consciousness, in which one knows one is aware of something and can pass judgment on it.⁴⁹ For example, the difference between voluntary and involuntary actions is that involuntary (or spontaneous) action is unreflective.⁵⁰

To discover the third type of self-knowledge, one needs other people. There are aspects of one's psychology that cannot be grasped alone, so much so that, "One would not know oneself without the Other".⁵¹ Lovers are in a prime position to provide that deeper level of self-knowledge because although many people come and go from one's life daily, romantic loving relationships are significant because lovers form some of the deepest, most intimate and intense relationships. While other such human relationships as family, friends, and work colleagues, can be more time consuming than a romantic loving relationship, the former do not normally engage on a sensual level. Sartre places much importance on sensual engagement and this is why, in his view, lovers are among the best people to provide a comprehensive and valued reflection for each other. Thus, love is an important way of understanding what one is because possibilities for intimacy between lovers are deeper than other types of relationships.

For example, in an interview, Sartre discusses how sexual relations add another dimension to communication with the Other and this is the logic underlying his philosophy: that sexual relations are a way of revealing another aspect of the Other and discovering oneself. Sex adds a whole other dimension to communication because there are ways of communicating without using language when one has had sexual relations, enabling people (Sartre was speaking of himself and Beauvoir) "to understand each other when we've barely opened our mouths".⁵² In another interview, Sartre said that in loving relationships there is a deeper language which not only refers to the sexual experience, but also opens up a whole new body language involving hands and faces. He said: "My relations with women have always been the best, because relations that are literally sexual allow for the objective and the subjective to be given together more easily" and this has made his relations with women "richer... With a woman, the whole of what one is can be present".⁵³ The important factor in Sartre's loving relationships is not the sexual act itself, but rather "the tenderness that changed into something very profound –

⁴⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 581.

⁵¹ Sartre, "Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre", 47-48.

⁵² Catherine Chaine, "A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre", *Playboy* January 1978: 124.

⁵³ Sartre, *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*, 64-65.

something that was not always bound to the sex life and that at that moment caused each of us to be himself at the very depths of himself”.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding the allure of romantic loving, there are also inherent problems in such relationships, and it is these problems which shall now be addressed.

Problems of romantic loving

For Sartre, there are two aspects of interhuman relationships: being-for-others and being-with-others. Being-for-others shall be addressed first. An experience such as shame is the key to understanding being-for-others, according to Sartre. If one makes an awkward or vulgar gesture when one is alone, one does not judge oneself, “I simply live it”.⁵⁵ One cannot be ashamed unless other people are involved. If one then realises someone was there and saw it, “I am ashamed of myself *as I appear* to the Other”.⁵⁶ The presence of the other forces one to pass judgment on oneself as an object and reveals completely new aspect of oneself.⁵⁷ For example, one is alone and spying on someone through a keyhole. Alone, one sees nothing wrong with this but if one realises that someone is watching (or is aware of the possibility of someone watching), one becomes ashamed pre-reflectively. The other shifts one’s whole world: “The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting”.⁵⁸ Sartre assumed that one’s pre-reflective response will be shame, but this is by no means given. One’s pre-reflective response will relate back to one’s original choice: “it is this original choice which originally creates all causes and motives which can guide us to partial actions; it is this which arranges the world with its meaning, its instrumental-complexes, and its coefficient of adversity”.⁵⁹ If peeping through a keyhole is an activity that is not taboo in the world one constructs for oneself, then there is no compulsion to be ashamed. One possible reaction will indeed be shame, but only if one’s assumption about the world is that looking through the keyhole is something to be ashamed about, if one expects the other to disapprove, and if one considers the other’s opinion to be of value, which is generally the case with a lover.

⁵⁴ Chaine, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 116.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 302.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 343.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 598-599.

The point of the above example is to consider how other people add complications because they impose their own meanings on the world,⁶⁰ and in doing so, modify each other's possibilities, and bring each other's existence to a new level.⁶¹ Sartre argued that how one responds to others' limits depends on the individual: does one accept the limits others attempt to exert, ignore them, or actively disobey them? Even if one is being tortured or one's life threatened, one can still choose one's response. Pain or death may be preferable to life under certain circumstances.

Other people are only limits insofar as one recognises them as part of one's self-definition: "I can grasp myself as limited by the Other only in so far as the Other exists for me, and I can make the Other exist for me only as a subjectivity recognized by my assuming my being-for-others".⁶² If a lover catches one peeping through the keyhole, then concern for the lover's opinion is greater than if it were another. The implication of this is that the more highly one regards the Other, the more important the interpretation of actions becomes, the more power the other gains in one's self-recognition, the more dependent one becomes on the other's view, and the more desperate one is to control that view, fuelling the conflict that Sartre said characterises relationships.

Sartre acknowledged that there are people who refuse to take into account the way others see them or deny that the way others perceive them is valid, but dismissed it quickly and insufficiently by saying that this person would not be "man".⁶³ The reason he did so is linked to his attempt to avoid the solipsist position in establishing a fundamental connection or primary relation to Others. For other people not to be imaginary, "A theory of the Other's existence must therefore simply question me in my being".⁶⁴ Early in *BN*, Sartre made a very Stirnerian and Kierkegaardian comment regarding the subjective experience of life: if one is conscious of something, "it exists *for me*".⁶⁵

Aware of the risk of reducing others to utility, since interactions with others aim at becoming an in-itself-for-itself through the self-knowledge that others can provide, Sartre argued that his "concept of the Other is not purely instrumental",⁶⁶ because he recognises that he is an object

⁶⁰ Ibid., 655.

⁶¹ Ibid., 671.

⁶² Ibid., 674.

⁶³ Ibid., 376.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 338.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 309.

for the Other. Thus, reciprocity is an integral part of one's being, because "The value of the Other's recognition of me depends on the value of my recognition of the Other".⁶⁷ On the one hand, if both value recognition, then the more one values the Other's recognition, the more the Other is likely to reciprocate. On the other hand, there is no guarantee of mutual recognition, which seems to be why Sartre is melodramatic when he said, "In order to make myself recognized by the Other, I must risk my own life",⁶⁸ and this reveals elements of Hegel's master-slave dialectic in which relations with others are an appeal to be recognised in order to establish one's self-certainty. However, Sartre criticised Hegel for his abstract conception of consciousness and for being too optimistic.⁶⁹ Hegel thought it possible to understand oneself through the other but Sartre's view is that there is no common measure on which to do this.⁷⁰ The root of the problem is Sartre's scepticism about the attitude of being-with-others (*Mitsein*)⁷¹ and the difficulties in the conception of 'we'. Whereas Sartre claimed being-for-others is ontological, 'we' is a psychological concept because even though we might identify with other projects in the sense of common actions, aims, or rhythm, this "in no way implies a similar and correlative experience in others".⁷² Rather, we are "multiple individual projects",⁷³ and "subjectivities remain out of reach and radically separated".⁷⁴ Furthermore, to be able to say 'we' presupposes "an awareness of what the Other is",⁷⁵ because it begs the question: I am with *whom*?⁷⁶ The answer to such a question one cannot know beyond doubt. Thus, "The essence of relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein*; it is conflict".⁷⁷ Because one cannot apprehend the other's subjectivity, one cannot apprehend how the other apprehends one as object and so "the Other-as-a-mirror is clouded and no longer reflects anything".⁷⁸

In sum, there are at least three reasons why Others are disruptive for Sartre. First, others decentralise one's world, as in the shame analogy. More broadly speaking, the Other "pushes me into a new dimension of existence – the dimension of the *unrevealed*".⁷⁹ In other words, the Other reveals aspects of one's being that one cannot recognise alone because one cannot

⁶⁷ Ibid., 320.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 324.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 534.

⁷² Ibid., 549-550.

⁷³ Ibid., 546.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 550.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 553.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 555.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 327.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 359.

look at oneself as an object, which would require a “scissiparity”⁸⁰ of being. It is thus out of vanity that “I attempt to lay hold of the Other so that he may release to me the secret of my being”.⁸¹ This seems to be why Sartre wrote much about relations with Others. How does one find out this secret of one’s being? Just ask: “We resign ourselves to seeing ourselves through the Other’s eyes; this means that we attempt to learn our being through the revelations of language”.⁸² Nevertheless, doubts will remain because people can lie, and thus, “often one does not unravel it”.⁸³

Second, one recognises that the Other qualifies one’s possibilities, meaning that one has to modify one’s actions to take into account the Other’s presence, just as one would have to modify one’s possibilities when confronted with a mountain crag to overcome. Sartre described the presence of others as a “drain hole”,⁸⁴ and the world being stolen from him.

Third, in the presence of other people one recognises that one is in danger: “that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense”.⁸⁵ One recognises that one could be an instrument to the other’s possibilities and this is frightening because one is a means to an ends of which one is ignorant.⁸⁶ As Sartre famously wrote in *Huis Clos (HC)*: “There’s no need for red-hot poker. Hell is...other people!”⁸⁷

In light of the above discussion, loving relationships are alluring because the intimate nature of them would seem to provide the means of deeper self-reflection through an Other whose opinion is held in high regard. However, the question is: if language is an unreliable means of revealing such understandings, what other means are available? Sartre outlined a number of strategies that lovers employ in order to attempt ‘*Ens causa sui*’. In *BN*, Sartre reduced relationships to two attitudes: assimilation and appropriation. The next section highlights

⁸⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁸¹ Ibid., 387.

⁸² Ibid., 463-464.

⁸³ Sartre, “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre”, 47-48.

⁸⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 343.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 347.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 358.

⁸⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Huis Clos”, trans. Stuart Gilbert, *Huis Clos and Other Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 223. Although this is one of Sartre’s most famous statements, spoken by the fictional character Garcin, it is not Sartre’s last word on human relations. In a later interview, Sartre said that what he meant by this was that “if our relations with others are twisted or corrupted, then others have to be hell...Fundamentally, others are what is most important in us for our understanding of ourselves...” (Contat, Rybalka and Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 99.)

some of the key elements of these two attitudes at play in romantic loving relationships, namely, possession, freedom, seduction, sadism and masochism.

Possession

“Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others”,⁸⁸ according to Sartre. One is both indebted to the other for being the catalyst by which one realises whole other dimensions of one’s being, but also threatened by the other’s theft of “my being from me”.⁸⁹ The Other realises an aspect of oneself that one cannot grasp without being told because one cannot become Other to oneself. Because the Other holds “the secret of what I am”,⁹⁰ one tries to enslave the Other in order to learn these secrets. In the process of trying to enslave the Other, one is actually trying to possess the Other. Yet, the Other is trying to do the same. At the same time, both are trying to free themselves from each other’s hold.

This dynamic also means being is a project of possession.⁹¹ Reminiscent of Stirner, Sartre said, “The totality of my possessions reflects the totality of my being. I *am* what I have” because through appropriation, “these objects are *myself*”.⁹² For example, one possesses a bicycle and exercises that possession by using it, but also using it up. Possession thus involves “a violent urge to *destroy* it” because “to destroy is to reabsorb into myself” and “in annihilating it I am changing it into *myself*”.⁹³ Sartre’s statements discount the idea that if one values a possession, then it is not just a matter of using it up, but of also maintaining, preserving or improving it in order to extend its usability.

However, the problem is that even using something does not satisfy the desire to possess it because nothing can ever be assimilated into one’s being: “No particular act of utilization really realizes the enjoyment of full possession”.⁹⁴ Complete possession is impossible because although one can lock up a body or an object, there is actually nothing concrete in possession. A lover is not just satisfied with physical possession because if so, “it could in many cases be easily satisfied”.⁹⁵ For example, Proust’s Marcel can physically possess his lover Albertine

⁸⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 475.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 763.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 754.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 756.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 478.

anytime; and yet he is gnawed by anxiety because through her consciousness she escapes him.⁹⁶

Furthermore, to possess is more than just to use because there are plenty of things that are used but not possessed, for example, a plate in a cafe. Rather, “to wish to possess is to wish to be united to an object in this relation”.⁹⁷ Similarly, love is an enterprise with unity as its ideal, motivation, end and unique value.⁹⁸ A lover wants to possess the beloved in order to unite and reveal unknown aspects of one’s being that lie with the beloved.

Hegel argued that consciousness aims at recognition, which amounts to the desire to assimilate and destroy the other but both must survive in order to recognise each other. Sartre agreed and argued this was the fundamental problem of romantic loving relationships: on the one hand, one desires to unite with the Other; but on the other hand, one does not want to destroy the Other because that would be “to kill the hen that lays the golden eggs”.⁹⁹ Sartre said that we must not objectify the Other because in doing so, the quality of ‘otherness’ would collapse. The Other’s opinion of one would be undiscoverable.¹⁰⁰ This is also why a lover does not want complete control over the beloved: because then the beloved would be little more than an “automaton” and that would mean the death of love.¹⁰¹

As Kierkegaard’s Johannes the Seducer also brought to our attention, love is desire for the beloved’s freedom.¹⁰² Similarly, Sartre argued that “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”.¹⁰³ On the one hand, lovers want to be loved freely. Yet, on the other hand, lovers do not want each other to be completely free because they want the promise of unconditional love to each other alone.¹⁰⁴ Sartre might well have had Nietzsche’s suggestion in mind when he challenges the irony of this situation and pointed out that no lover would be satisfied with being loved because the other does not want to break a promise.¹⁰⁵ This tension, Sartre explained, arises because loving “is a freedom which *plays the role* of a determinism of the passions and which is caught in its own role. For himself the lover does

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 751.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 477.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 387.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 359.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 478.

¹⁰² See p.91.

¹⁰³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 478.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 478-479.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 479.

not demand that he be the *cause* of this radical modification of freedom but that he be the unique and privileged occasion of it”.¹⁰⁶ Further to this, lovers do not want each other automatically to limit their freedom because of the other (which would imply some kind of causal determinism), but rather a lover wants the other to freely choose as the limit to freedom. Hence, lovers seek to become the absolute ends, “supreme value”,¹⁰⁷ and “the whole World” for each other, that is, unsurpassable and the condition or limit of each other’s freedom.¹⁰⁸ For example, lovers want assurances that their relationship usurps all other values and morals, and the beloved would do anything and everything for the other, such as steal, kill or betray friends.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the lovers want to be the top priority for each other. If the lover becomes the end and justification of one’s life, there is no need to worry that one is the instrument or means to other ends. This, according to Sartre, explains the joy of love.¹¹⁰

In *Nausea*, Sartre was already sowing the seed for this idea. Anny says to Roquentin: “I could very well think of you only as an abstract virtue, a sort of limit”.¹¹¹ Roquentin had hoped Anny would save him by providing him with a reason to live; but now, he finds himself “Alone and free. But this freedom is rather like death”.¹¹² Both characters illustrate the point that during their relationship they had sought justification and foundation of their existence in each other. Roquentin’s situation brings to light the problem of making another person one’s *raison d’être*: founding one’s existence on an unknowable and unpredictable person is hazardous because there is always the risk that the relationship will break down. However, it also indicates the importance of loving, since even though not loving means one is free from the futility of possessive dynamics, being free from a loving relationship is not to be engaged in an important part of existing, hence Roquentin’s description that being alone is like death.

Seduction

Sartre concludes that lovers can never truly find security, nor know whether they are being used as instruments or are the absolute ends for each other. After all, the real goal of the lover is a project of oneself, to discover secrets about oneself. Love becomes an act of seduction in order to try to appropriate the beloved without the threat of objectification or utilisation. Seduction involves flaunting oneself like a peacock to try to impress and fascinate the beloved

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 488.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 479.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 481.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 484.

¹¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964) 137.

¹¹² Ibid., 156-157.

in order to present oneself as unsurpassable. Sartre described it as an attempt to make the Other recognise one as a full, deep and hidden being with an abundance of possibilities that “present me as bound to the vastest regions of the world”.¹¹³ One does this by giving the other “infinitely varied examples of my power over the world (money, positions, ‘connections’, *etc.*)”¹¹⁴

Sartre was practised in such activities. As a teenager, he realised he was unattractive. He told an early lover, Simone Jollivet: “Until last year I was very melancholy because I was ugly and that made me suffer. I have absolutely rid myself of that, because it’s a weakness. Whoever knows his own strength must be joyful”.¹¹⁵ Sartre decided to seduce women with his power of language. He dreamt of being “a scholarly Don Juan, slaying women through the power of his golden tongue”.¹¹⁶ His ardent language and passionate love letters were highly successful tactics in seducing many young women. One of Sartre’s lovers, Bianca Bienenfeld, wrote that he was “a master of the language of love”, and, “just as a waiter plays the role of a waiter, Sartre played to perfection the role of a man in love”.¹¹⁷ She was satirising one of Sartre’s famous examples in which he illustrates how a waiter is in bad faith by playing a role. However, Sartre understood that language has an important role in establishing and amplifying love. He said “it was a matter of capturing the world in words; capturing it *for* my companion; making it exist more strongly and beautifully”.¹¹⁸

He was also mischievous and loved the game: “I was less keen on the woman than on the play-acting she gave me the opportunity for – since I’d not have agreed to obtain her by just any old means...Possessing her counted for less than the prospects of possession”.¹¹⁹ He found the conquests easy, but the game of seduction draining: “I’d come back from a rendezvous, mouth dry, facial muscles tired from too much smiling, voice still dripping with honey and heart full of a disgust to which I was unwilling to pay any attention, and which was masked by satisfaction at having ‘advanced my affairs’”.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 485.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir 1926-1939*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Scribner, 1992) 21.

¹¹⁶ Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, 266.

¹¹⁷ Bianca Lamblin, *A Disgraceful Affair*, trans. Julie Plovnick (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996) 39.

¹¹⁸ Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, 285.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

However, in *BN*, Sartre argued that seduction and fascination are not enough. For love to come to fruition, one still needs the consent of the beloved, which Sartre assumed would happen when the Other's freedom is captured by "making it recognize itself as nothingness in the face of my plenitude of absolute being".¹²¹ The frustration is that one cannot force another to love in return but rather wants to be loved freely. On the one hand, love is the demand and "project of making oneself be loved".¹²² On the other hand, lovers neither want to demand being loved nor to be reduced to the "project of being-loved".¹²³

Sartre concludes that love is destructible in three ways: dissatisfaction, insecurity and interference by others. First, lovers will never be satisfied because love is deceptive in that "to love is to wish to be loved", but this aspect is masked by acts which attempt to seduce and fascinate.¹²⁴ However, it is debatable whether this is something to frown upon. It is wholly conceivable that two lovers know and accept that seduction and fascination are part of the game of loving relationships and embrace it, but Sartre neglects this line of thought. Second, love is insecure because at any time, the beloved can break the spell and look at the lover as object, that is, as a means to an end. Lovers can never fully trust each other: they can never truly know that they are not means to other ends or instruments because they can never merge and thus never fully comprehend each other's consciousness, nor how they truly see each other. Third, "love is an absolute which is perpetually *made relative* by others" so the love will never be sustainable as "an absolute axis of reference".¹²⁵ There will always be a third person to look at the lovers and disrupt the harmony and illusion they had with making each other the foundation of their existence and to transcend the lovers when they are trying so hard to be untranscendable. This is why Sartre said that lovers seek solitude:¹²⁶ because the rest of the world and other people always are looking, thereby revealing other facets of one's being, meaning that the beloved is not the absolute axis of reference.

Masochism

With the failure of love, lovers turn from seduction to masochism. It is not possible successfully to obtain the lover's freedom through seduction while maintaining the lover's objectivity (which is necessary to understand how one is perceived). One does not want to end

¹²¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 485.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 488.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 491.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

up with an automaton because not only does that spell the end of the loving relationship, but also there is no possibility for self-discovery in a relationship with a robot. Both lovers try to seduce and fascinate each other and are each other's projects. So instead, one stops seducing the beloved and lets oneself be appropriated and used as an instrument in an attempt to reveal how one appears as an object.¹²⁷ This is masochism.

Nevertheless, masochism is also unsuccessful because one is still using the Other as an instrument to reveal objectivity and can never actually 'taste' objectivity before the other. For example, "Even the masochist who pays a woman to whip him is treating her as an instrument and by this very fact posits himself in transcendence in relation to her".¹²⁸ And yet, Sartre supposes that failure is actually the goal anyway.¹²⁹ So ironically one succeeds in and enjoys failing. With the failure of masochism, a strategy of assimilating oneself into the beloved, one throws oneself back into the attitude of trying to appropriate the beloved, and this is sadism.

Sadism

Sartre argued that sexual desire is a strategy whereby the body is used as an instrument in order to fascinate and appropriate the beloved. It is an attempt to enchant the Other's freedom through caresses.¹³⁰ Caressing aims at reducing the Other to "pure flesh" or "pure 'being there'", that is, stripped of action and possibilities, and this is what Sartre refers to as the "attempt *incarnate* the Other's body" by making it appear simply in facticity.¹³¹ Sartre likens the ability to appropriate the Other's free subjectivity from the body's surface just as cream can be skimmed from the top of milk.¹³²

Sexual desire is not terminated by fulfilment, as with other forms of desire, according to Sartre. Since sex does not terminate desire for the Other, there must be another goal, which Sartre suggested is the "radical incarnation" of the Other's freedom.¹³³ This would explain why two people in love like to touch each other: in pressing their flesh together they attempt to arouse each Other's consciousness to be revealed through their flesh.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 493.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 515.

¹³¹ Ibid., 506-507.

¹³² Ibid., 511.

¹³³ Ibid., 515.

There are, however, problems with this strategy. First, this is only a temporary situation lasting only as long as caresses can be enchanting. Second, if the beloved stops transcending, freedom is obliterated.¹³⁴

Such is the impossible ideal of desire: to possess the Other's transcendence and at the same time as *body*, to reduce the Other to his simple *facticity* because he is then in the midst of the world but to bring it about that this facticity is a perpetual appresentation of his nihilating transcendence.¹³⁵

Third, in using bodies, each person becomes an instrument. As soon as one attempts to appropriate the Other's freedom through the body, "I break the reciprocity of incarnation. I surpass my body toward its own possibilities, and I orientate myself in the direction of sadism".¹³⁶ Whereas desire uses caressing and one's own flesh to attempt to incarnate the Other, sadism is the attempt to appropriate the Other's freedom without losing one's own, that is, without the reciprocity of desire. To this end, sadism treats the other as an instrument and uses violence to force the Other into obscene positions and ungraceful acts, which creates the illusion that one holds the Other's freedom.¹³⁷ Sadism aims at forcing "this freedom freely to identify itself with the tortured flesh. This is why the moment of pleasure for the torturer is that in which the victim betrays or humiliates himself".¹³⁸

Sadism, however, also fails because the victim's freedom is out of reach in two key respects. First, the victim exercises freedom by choosing the moment of abjuration and remains responsible for it;¹³⁹ and second, while the goal of sadism is to recover one's being-for-others, the victim's look has the power to alienate the sadist.¹⁴⁰

Sartre's purpose is to outline different strategies that lovers use to attempt to experience each other and themselves. Yet, the most pressing question is why Sartre thought lovers' consciousnesses are better revealed during sex. Practically speaking, it makes sense that without clothes, where skin touches skin, it seems as if there is nothing physical coming between two bodies intertwined. People feel extremely close, as though they are present in the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 511-512.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 512.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 524.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 518-519.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 522.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 523.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 526-527.

moment, forgetting everything except each other's touch. At this time, they tend to have a very narrow focus and purpose. Nevertheless, it is a stretch to propose that caressing is a reliable way to reveal thinking. Certainly, one might be able to see the other's body react to pleasure or pain, but whether and to what extent that contributes to a lover's self-knowledge is questionable. Moreover, as Sartre himself recognises, it is easy to lie. In this case, it is not difficult to act as if one is swept away by the beloved's touch, while at the same time reflecting on something completely different.

Sartre concludes that the goal of love, to merge, is impossible because there is always an "ontological separation" between people.¹⁴¹ In his fictional works, he also illuminates the abyss between lovers. For example, in *The Room*, the sick husband Pierre asks his wife Eve about their eternal separation and voices the impossibility of love: "There is a wall between you and me. I see you, I speak to you, but you're on the other side. What keeps us from loving?"¹⁴² Also, in *Lucifer and the Lord* the warlord, Goetz demonstrates that lovers want what they cannot have. He is frustrated with his unrealisable desire to merge with his lover Hilda and conflicting desire to remain separate: "you are *not myself*. It's intolerable. I cannot understand why we are still two people. I should like to become you, and still remain myself".¹⁴³

In sum, Sartre saw romantic loving as inherently problematic. The source of the problem is that lovers attempt to merge in order to discover aspects of themselves that they cannot alone, thus becoming *ens causa sui*. Nevertheless, there is an insurmountable abyss between lovers that means that they can never really know how they are viewed by each other, and thus can never definitively capture the aspect of their being lost to the other. The upshot is that "The Other is on principle inapprehensible",¹⁴⁴ and lovers are forever caught in the vicious circle of assimilation and appropriation and doomed to conflict.

Possible solutions

Now that we have seen why Sartre thought romantic loving to be so alluring but problematic, I shall outline some possible solutions to be found within Sartre's writing and personal life.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 328.

¹⁴² Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Room", trans. Lloyd Alexander, *The Wall (Intimacy) and other stories* (New York: New Directions, 1969) 35.

¹⁴³ Sartre, "Lucifer and the Lord", 142.

¹⁴⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 529.

First, Sartre pointed out that the allure of loving is the joy felt when with the beloved; then existence seems to be justified. This is the source of fatalistic expressions such as being made for each other, or each other's soul mate.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, such phrases are "awkward and vitiated" because they refer to an original choice.¹⁴⁶ Love, as Sartre saw it, is not pre-determined. The implication of existing preceding essence for lovers is that they are not destined for one another. Unlike Plato's character Aristophanes, who described love as looking for one's 'other half', Sartre said it would actually be humiliating if one were to find out that the beloved is psychologically determined to love the Other (or 'made for each other') because it would cheapen the relationship. As in the legend of *Tristan and Isolde*, the relationship is less interesting if they only love because of the potion.¹⁴⁷ Rather, lovers choose each other freely. The basis of such a choice will now be explored.

According to Sartre, "existence precedes essence",¹⁴⁸ which means one exists first and defines oneself through one's choice of action. Such freedom to choose our lives makes existence absurd, because without any foundation for consciousness and without a god, we are abandoned without predetermined morals or values and "consciousness absolutely can not derive being from anything, either from another being, or from a possibility, or from a necessary law. Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* for eternity".¹⁴⁹ In *The Flies*, Sartre's play based on the Electra myth, Orestes highlights the existential requirement to create one's own values: when he is about to kill his stepfather Aegistheus he says, "Why should I feel remorse? I am only doing what is right".¹⁵⁰ However, Sartre's attitude is also positive and liberating because it is up to us to choose our own values, morals and meaning of life. As Dostoyevsky said: "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted" and Sartre said this is the starting point of existentialism because there is nothing to depend upon.¹⁵¹

Although one is nothing to begin with, one gives one's life meaning through surging up in the world and leaping into existence.¹⁵² A human being is a project, a purposeful being and propels oneself towards a future, unlike a cauliflower or a rock. However, the past is like a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 483.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 478.

¹⁴⁸ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 20.

¹⁴⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Flies", trans. Stuart Gilbert, *Altona, Men Without Shadows, The Flies* (Penguin, 1962) 293.

¹⁵¹ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29.

¹⁵² Ibid., 20.

ball and chain because one's past actions make up one's essence: "Essence is all that human reality apprehends in itself as *having been*".¹⁵³ This does not mean one is determined by one's past or psychological factors. It means that existence is a projection into the future and one can choose to change and there is no essence consisting of latent or pre-determined motives that cause one to act in a certain way. Psychological determinism, according to Sartre, is only a hypothesis that provides an excuse to help "fill the void" by giving one's acts an external foundation and is thus ultimately a distraction from one's possibilities.¹⁵⁴ Although belief in determinism is alluring because it seems to provide a means of escape from the anxiety of having to choose and take responsibility for one's actions, it is what Sartre called a form of bad faith, which is hiding the truth from oneself.¹⁵⁵

Consciousness of one's freedom comes from apprehending oneself as the original source of one's possibilities.¹⁵⁶ According to Sartre, if behaviour was already determined or 'given', behaviour would be motion and not action. Action incorporates intention, that is, choosing. Since to choose is to be free, there is no difference between the intention and the act. Only by throwing oneself into living and loving does one discover one's intentions: "The intention can no more be separated from the act than thought can be separated from the language which expresses it; and as it happens that our speech informs us of our thought, so our acts will inform us of our intentions".¹⁵⁷ Causes, motives, intentions and ends are integral parts of one's actions and only arise through one's transcending: "in a single upsurge...[i]t is the act which decides its ends and its motives, and the act is the expression of freedom".¹⁵⁸ In this sense, life is a leap because one creates one's life and finds both meaning and intention by doing. Disputing the idea that there are underlying motivations that cause action, Sartre argued that one is an impartial judge of one's own causes and motives and asked sensibly: "How can I evaluate causes and motives on which I myself confer their value before all deliberation and by the very choice which I make of myself?"¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 72.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹⁵⁵ Sartre acknowledged the obvious difficulty here: "I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully". Since Sartre also rejects the Freudian unconscious to explain the magical suppression of the truth, it begs the question as to how one can lie to oneself if one knows the truth. Sartre actually said that it is impossible: "We must agree in fact that if I deliberately and cynically attempt to lie to myself, I fail completely in this undertaking" (*ibid.*, 89.)

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 622.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 565.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 581.

Sartre's emphasis on action suggests that just as the hammering reveals the hammer,¹⁶⁰ so too does loving reveal the love. He reinforces this point in *EH* when he said that one is "nothing more than the sum of his actions".¹⁶¹ This also means that a romantic loving relationship is the sum of the loving actions: "there is no love other than the deeds of love; no potential for love other than that which is manifested in loving".¹⁶² Thus, the experience of love is only understood through loving behaviour. Another implication of Sartre's emphasis on loving as an action is that it is not an abstraction; it does not exist without a subject experiencing it, nor does it exist without an object of love. Love is a transcendent intention directed toward another.¹⁶³ In other words, love is love *of* and aroused *by* someone.¹⁶⁴

However, Sartre also suggested that love is more than an action because no matter how commonplace the romantic loving relationship appears, it is "irreplaceable and unique" because "nobody can love for me" and nobody experiences *my* emotions.¹⁶⁵ From a functional point of view, almost anyone could perform those actions usually associated with love. If love is reduced to efficacy, function and result, then it is impersonal and not unique:

If it is a question of making this woman happy, of safeguarding her life or her freedom, of giving her the means of finding her salvation, or simply of realizing a home with her, of "giving her" children, if *that* is what we call loving, then another will be able to love in my place, he will even be able to love for me.¹⁶⁶

Yet the whole of one's being is "an individual venture"¹⁶⁷ so every person's experience, choice, emotion and end are unique. Actions always occur within and take their identity from the situation in which they occur. Hence, for Sartre, loving is more than performing a function. Loving is also to choose oneself as one who does loving things: "'To will to love' and to love are one since to love is to choose oneself as loving by assuming consciousness of loving".¹⁶⁸ In *HC*, one man, Garcin, and two women, Estelle and Inez, find themselves in hell, which consists of an eternity together in a small sparse room without mirrors. Unconvincingly, Garcin suggests to the glamorous Estelle that love is a choice: "But if you'll

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 665.

¹⁶¹ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 37.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 435.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 231-232.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 684.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 763.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 595.

make the effort, if you'll only *will* it hard enough, I dare say we can really love each other".¹⁶⁹ His plea begs the question as to whether love conceived as purely choice is sufficient.

Yet, classifying loving as pure feeling is equally insufficient.¹⁷⁰ In answer to this, Sartre introduces the idea of a 'state', which is a succession or synthesis of choices intended towards an overarching project. Sartre clarifies that "by *acts* we must understand the whole synthetic activity of the person; that is, every disposition of means as related to ends, not as the for-itself is its own possibilities but as the act represents a transcendent psychic synthesis which the for-itself must live".¹⁷¹ In this sense, a loving relationship is understood as a projection towards a loving relationship. He described love as an enterprise: "an organic ensemble of projects toward my own possibilities".¹⁷² Thus, it is more than discrete moments and isolated loving actions. The discrete loving actions are intended to contribute toward and reaffirm one's original choice to engage in the loving relationship.

The key difference between a state and a feeling is that "there are intermittent periods for a living love during which we *know* that we love but we do not *feel* it".¹⁷³ For example, when lovers argue, both are angry, neither feels loving at that point, yet both still conceivably claim to love each other 'overall' or in a general sense. This understanding of loving as a state means that one can behave unlovingly and yet still claim to live the 'state' of loving. However, this contradicts his statement that love exists only in the deeds of loving.¹⁷⁴

A romantic loving relationship is constituted by a synthesis of past loving actions, presently choosing oneself as a loving person doing loving things and projecting oneself into the future as one who will love a particular person. The problem is that lovers can always choose differently. This appears to be one of the reasons that Sartre places so much emphasis on the future and becoming, so much so that in *BN* he claimed that "love is given its meaning as love by its being in the future".¹⁷⁵

In *Notebooks*, Sartre explored loving as a choice and his portrayal appears to be related to Kierkegaard's leap when he said love is an "undertaking" and an "oath".¹⁷⁶ As a conscious

¹⁶⁹ Sartre, "Huis Clos", 217.

¹⁷⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 595.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁷² Ibid., 477.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 229.

¹⁷⁴ See p.180.

¹⁷⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 230.

¹⁷⁶ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 476.

choice, it is neither a ‘given’, nor a “reality underlying my being”.¹⁷⁷ Nor is love simply an experience because to treat it so is “to decide to decide at every instant whether one loves, which is already not to love, not to see that to love and to will to love are one and the same”.¹⁷⁸ The problem is that on the one hand, if it were just a matter of willing to love, it would be an “abstract decision”; and on the other hand, if it were just a matter of loving without willing it or without choosing it, it would be a “purely passive experience”.¹⁷⁹ So it is “a reciprocal contestation” of first, choosing to love: “the feeling is upheld in its being by choice”; and second, loving “in spite of oneself” or allowing “oneself to be overcome by one’s love”.¹⁸⁰ This makes sense if love is understood as being aroused by someone and emphasises that reciprocity is required for a loving relationship.

Thus, in *BN* Sartre qualifies the idea that loving is an action by arguing that loving is not a matter of fulfilling a function, but rather a state. However, in *Notebooks*, he suggested that loving is a choice as well as a feeling. Nevertheless, Sartre’s explanation is ambiguous because he did not identify which elements of a loving relationship are chosen. Moreover, it is confusing when he said that to decide (in other words *to choose*) to love is not to love, and when he said to love and to will to love are the same thing.¹⁸¹ Willing to love and loving understood as an action imply choice. He said the feeling is supported by choice, but in *Emotions*, he had argued that feelings *are* choices: emotions are free because they are responses to given situations, ways of relating to the world, strategies or means to ends.¹⁸² But he did classify love as a state that is a series of actions directed towards an original choice. All these instances do point to loving as a choice; however Sartre seems to hold some hesitation that there is something about loving which cannot be fully explained by choice, decision or willing. It is as if instead of addressing it, he side steps around it and his failure to resolve and clarify this issue would go some way to explaining why he never wrote a cohesive piece on loving.

Sartre provided some indications that he was looking to expand his views about romantic loving beyond the two fundamental attitudes in *BN* of assimilating and appropriating. He said in an interview that after *BN* he saw “more positivity in love”, and although he maintained

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 477.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 476.

¹⁸² Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) 58-59, 66-67, 91.

that sadism and masochism normally taint human love, “what must be shown is what transcends them”.¹⁸³ One hint appears in a cryptic footnote in *BN*: he said that there is a possibility of “deliverance and salvation” from the vicious sado-masochistic circle via “a radical conversion”, but did not expand on it.¹⁸⁴ Sartre’s other existential works provide clues about what such a radical conversion could be.

First, notwithstanding Sartre’s defence in *BN* of the radical separation between freedoms and associated frustration and anxiety, elsewhere Sartre suggested leaping anyway. In other words, lovers ought to engage in relationships in spite of the issues. In *Notebooks* Sartre said a fundamental anxiety exists in the structure of love because lovers hate to think the relationship will end, but there is every possibility it will because love given freely can also be retracted freely.¹⁸⁵ The only way to deal with the anxiety is to embrace it: “just as love is willed at the same time that it is felt, this anxiety too must be willed in authenticity as our only defense against the future”.¹⁸⁶ Like Kierkegaard’s leap, being in a romantic loving relationship is a difficult and life-changing decision. It is filled with anxiety because it is unknown where one will land and what one will find there. There are no guarantees that the beloved will reciprocate or that one will find any kind of safety in the other.

For example, in *Nausea*, although Anny has a new lover, she says that she does not think she will ever feel as passionate about anyone as much as her ex-lover Roquentin and does not want to become as deeply engaged with another again because it requires such a massive effort. Anny says to Roquentin: “You know, it’s quite a job starting to love somebody. You have to have energy, generosity, blindness. There is even a moment, in the very beginning, when you have to jump across a precipice: if you think about it you don’t do it. I know I’ll never jump again”.¹⁸⁷

A similar theme is explored by Orestes in *The Flies*, who comes to realise that by not leaping, that is, by not engaging in the world, he is incapable of loving. Without commitments, he is free from prejudice, superstition, family ties, religion, and callings; he is “gloriously aloof”,

¹⁸³ Sartre, “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre”, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 534. Mary Warnock proposed the radical conversion was (unsatisfactorily) Marxism (Mary Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965) 179.) David Cooper proposed it was “reciprocal freedom” (Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 186.) Others such as Robert Santoni and Gary Cox proposed it was authenticity (Robert E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) xxvii, Cox, *How to Be an Existentialist or How to Get Real, Get a Grip and Stop Making Excuses*, 99.)

¹⁸⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 477.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Sartre, *Nausea*, 145.

“light as gossamer”, “like strands torn by the wind from spiders’ webs that one sees floating ten feet above the ground”.¹⁸⁸ However, this meant that he was not engaging concretely in life, and on reflection described himself as “a mere shadow of a man”.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, his loving relationships were also ghostly: “The only loves I’ve known were phantom loves, rare and vacillating as will-o’-the-wisps. The solid passions of the living were never mine”.¹⁹⁰ He was free from many things, but was not using his freedom to do anything concrete and meaningful. Another point that Orestes raises is that love requires self-surrender and he never had anything to surrender because he never had anything concrete in his life.¹⁹¹ The suggestion is that love requires restricted freedom through self-surrender. But self-surrender in this case is not self-denial, rather engaging in life, leaping and surrendering oneself to the consequences of one’s actions.

Sartre’s film *The Chips are Down* also provides a variation on this theme. It is a story about Pierre and Eve who meet in the afterlife, fall in love, discover they were destined for one another and are given a second chance on earth. If they succeed in loving each other “with perfect confidence” and all their might for 24 hours, they will be granted the opportunity to live out the rest of their lives together on earth.¹⁹² If they fail, they will return to the afterlife and go their separate ways because love is not possible in death. Pierre and Eve do fail, but do not try to stop another couple who also want the opportunity to return to life in order to love each other.

Pierre and Eve look at each other, hesitating.

They smile gently at the young couple.

“Try,” Pierre advises.

“Try it anyway,” murmurs Eve.¹⁹³

Pierre and Eve are not suggesting that such a goal is achievable, but rather that loving requires a leap, since it requires engaging with others regardless of its potential for success. Leaping is unlikely to be a portal for a way out of the circle of bad faith relations mentioned in *BN*

¹⁸⁸ Sartre, “The Flies”, 246.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 277.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Chips are Down*, trans. Louise Varèse (London: Rider and Company, 1951) 63.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 127. Although Sartre said *The Chips are Down* was not an existentialist film because the script was “bathed in determinism” (Contat, Rybalka and Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 163-164.), this point does reiterate his conclusion in *BN* that relationships begin and end in failure.

because it will, ultimately, be unsuccessful, reiterating Sartre's conclusion in *BN* that romantic loving relationships begin and end in failure.

Sartre's *Notebooks* reveal that he was looking elsewhere for a solution. He wrote, "An original structure of authentic love [is] to unveil the Other's being-within-the-world, to take up this unveiling, and to set this Being within the absolute; to *rejoice* in it without appropriating it; to give it safety in terms of my freedom, and to surpass it only in the direction of the Other's ends".¹⁹⁴ This is a significant point because Sartre is opening up a possibility of love that was neglected in *BN*: to love without attempting to appropriate or assimilate the beloved. He said we want to possess the Other *as they are*: "desire is not the desire to gain recognition from the other and to recognise him by suppression of his being-there or facticity; on the contrary, desire desires the other *in his being-there*".¹⁹⁵ Thus, when it comes to other people, total possession is neither possible nor desirable. This portrayal emphasises freedom as the dominant dynamic rather than power because it appreciates the other as they are, as a subject, and is less concerned with assimilation and appropriation, but it is also more reminiscent of friendship if it is without possessiveness and anxiety.

He also wrote that "Concrete human relations are possible only through the suppression of the element of the Other", and "deeper recognition and reciprocal comprehension of freedoms" was missing from *BN*.¹⁹⁶ Sartre acknowledged the ambiguous nature of romantic loving, and reiterated that sadism and masochism are still strategies that lovers employ and possible sources of conflict; however, he toyed with the idea of reciprocal comprehension of freedoms as a competing approach. Both approaches are fundamental to the phenomenon of love: "*Tension* is necessary to maintain the two faces of ambiguity, to hold them within the unity of one and the same project".¹⁹⁷ Also in *Notebooks*, Sartre suggested – perhaps influenced by Beauvoir – that mutual respect for other freedoms is the basis for connecting with others and overcoming the great divide. In an interview, he also said that true relationships would be possible when both love and esteem are present, but "We haven't arrived at that point. We will be there when the subjective has been completely uncovered".¹⁹⁸

Herewith Sartre offered a competing view of the theme that conflict in romantic loving relationships means that they contain the seed of their own destruction. Seeds of such an

¹⁹⁴ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 508.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 414.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹⁹⁸ Sartre, *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*, 63.

attitude exist in *BN* when he wrote that recognition depends on how two people value each other.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Sartre did not explore this in depth and is quick to conclude that, similar to Hegel's master-slave dialectic, a battle of consciousness ensues.

Notebooks opens up the possibility of a loving relationship that is more palatable to those looking for more positivity in love: the joy of love, the safe feeling one gets from being in a relationship, where one does not feel as though one is a possession, or wants to possess the beloved, and takes the other person's goals into consideration. Nevertheless, it remains ambiguous as to how such a loving relationship can be constructed. Moreover, he also said that the attempt to overcome sado-masochistic games destroys loving: "the attempt to bring about a love that would surpass the sadistic-masochistic stage of desire and enchantment would be to make love disappear, that is, the sexual as a type of unveiling of the human".²⁰⁰ Thus, Sartre's existential views leave us with an overwhelmingly bleak attitude.

There are, however, other possibilities if we look to Sartre's personal life and the way he lived his philosophy. First, there is the practice of transparency. In *War Diaries*, Sartre explained that freedom was of utmost importance to him. So, after seducing a woman, he would insist that she not infringe on his freedom; which meant that she must permit him to pursue romantic loving relationships with other women because he thought that a great man had to keep himself free. Not wanting to be a hypocrite, Sartre grandly offered the same precious gift of freedom to his girlfriends, saying, "it's the finest present I can give you".²⁰¹ The women were always grateful – or at least they pretended to be. However, said Sartre, "Happily for me...circumstances independent of my will would intervene in time to restore me (after a bit of drubbing) to that dear freedom, which I'd forthwith make haste to bestow upon some other young lady".²⁰²

As usual, after falling in love with Beauvoir, he offered her this gift of her freedom (as if he owned it to give). However, Sartre said, this time, "I was hoist with my own petard. The Beaver [Beauvoir] accepted that freedom and kept it. It was in 1929. I was foolish enough to be upset by it: instead of understanding the extraordinary luck I'd had, I fell into a certain melancholy".²⁰³ It was an unconventional pact because although Beauvoir and Sartre would be devoted intellectual loving companions for life, they would not marry, have children or be

¹⁹⁹ See p.168.

²⁰⁰ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 414-415.

²⁰¹ Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, 75.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

monogamous. Their love would be an ‘essential’ or primary love, meaning that they would be most important to one another but free to have other love affairs, which they saw as ‘contingent’ or ‘secondary’ loves.²⁰⁴ In practice, this meant that although they allowed each other to fall in love with other people, they would never allow their love for, or commitment to, each other to be usurped by one of the contingent loving relationships. Their loving relationship was therefore based on a “certain fidelity”,²⁰⁵ of trust, rather than sexual abstinence.

In an arrangement of which Nietzsche would have approved, Beauvoir and Sartre agreed to a “two-year lease” and felt that jealousy would not be an issue because they would each be completely honest and open with the other.²⁰⁶ To prove this to each other, they entered a transparency pact to tell each other every detail of the other relationships and deconstruct every sensation. However, they found they could not be completely open because other people were involved so they lied shamelessly to their third-party lovers to spare their feelings and keep them happy. Often, lies were created to hide with which woman Sartre was spending his time and holidaying. As much as possible, he kept his lovers in total ignorance of each other because they were notoriously jealous, possessive and demanding.²⁰⁷

Moreover, there is the question as to how transparent one can be with another. Sartre said that he kept nothing, or at least nothing important, secret from Beauvoir. Nevertheless, there are two types of lies: lying by commission and by omission. He said that Beauvoir had some concern that he would lie by omission: “Now and then, it amuses Simone de Beauvoir to say that I’ve failed to tell her something, that I’ve hidden some detail from her. But it’s not true”.²⁰⁸ He said he greatly valued transparency and never hid anything from Beauvoir.²⁰⁹ That was important because with her he discussed the most vital decisions and ideas in his life.²¹⁰ The problem is that if one does not have such a relationship, it is susceptible to “trickery and to contrivance”.²¹¹ However, he told another girlfriend that he did not tell Beauvoir everything and in an interview he famously said that he lied to all his lovers,

²⁰⁴ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 24.

²⁰⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968) 134.

²⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 24.

²⁰⁷ Rowley, *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Chaîne, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 118.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

“particularly to the Beaver” (Beauvoir).²¹² While in *BN* Sartre saw lying to oneself as a form of bad faith, there is no philosophical issue with lying to others.²¹³ Sartre’s comments reiterate the impossibility of complete disclosure and thus futility of the romantic ideal. Moreover, if it is true, it is a confession that he could not maintain both transparency and freedom in his loving relationships.

A second solution that Sartre and Beauvoir practised, and that Sartre discussed in *BN*, was establishing the beloved as primary, essential, and the “end-all” of one’s life, despite simultaneously having “deep” relationships with other women.²¹⁴ He considered his relationship with Beauvoir to be “of greater value” than, and “superior” to, any other relationship, which is why they agreed to be transparent with each other.²¹⁵ This is a manifestation of Sartre’s discussion in *BN* about lovers seeking to become the unsurpassable and the condition or limit of each other’s freedom.²¹⁶

This is the problem in *The Chips are Down*. Both Pierre and Eve have personal ends that were left incomplete at the time of their deaths. During the 24-hour trial period, they each attempt to pursue these individual ends. Specifically, Pierre finds out in the afterlife that his comrades will be massacred the following day and on returning to earth, tries to warn them. In letting Pierre go to try to save his friends, Eve shows that she respects Pierre’s individual end. She realises how important his personal goals are to him. In the meantime, Eve pursues her individual end, which is trying to save her sister who is in love with Eve’s gold-digging and murderous husband. Pierre chooses to die fighting for his friends rather than to live on earth loving Eve. Thus it would appear Pierre values saving his comrade’s lives more than loving Eve. If love is placing the beloved above all else and making them the source of all values, then Pierre fails in this respect. Certainly, Eve also chooses to pursue her own goals to try to save her sister. While it is ambiguous whether she chooses this only in response to Pierre leaving or would have done it anyway, there is every indication that she was waiting for Pierre and would have placed her love for him above her other personal goals. When Pierre tells her that he will not be back in time (before the 24 hour trial period was over), Eve is devastated, which gives her husband the opportunity to murder her again. It must also be noted, however, that she does not give up her own ends to help Pierre achieve his. Neither

²¹² Rowley, *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 337-338. Original reference: Olivier Todd *Un Fils rebelle* Paris: Grasset, 1981 p.116.

²¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 89.

²¹⁴ Chaine, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 118.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118, 124.

²¹⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 479. (See discussion on p.172)

makes the other's ends their own, which as per *Notebooks* is part of authentic loving. Thus, it is understandable that once they meet up again in the afterlife, Eve considers Pierre's claim to love her as vacuous and unbelievable.

This example highlights the magnitudes of the decision lovers make: Pierre was torn between loving Eve and saving the lives of his comrades. An important condition Sartre raises in *BN* with respect to freedom is *at what price* can one choose otherwise? As long as one is conscious, one must choose because "Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing".²¹⁷ Yet, the issue is that while other choices are possible, they would be inconsistent with the way one chooses oneself and gives one's world meaning. Sartre said there is an "original choice" or fundamental project by which we interpret the world and create motives and causes.²¹⁸ If the alternative requires a "radical transformation of my being-in-the-world",²¹⁹ then the price would have been "another choice of myself and of my ends".²²⁰ While one can always choose differently, possibilities are opened and closed depending on how one wishes to live. While insisting on radical freedom, it can be seen here that one's being can be understood in terms of an overarching project in life, that of creating oneself. Sartre's existential psychoanalysis aims to uncover this project by exploring the meaning one gives to one's actions.

Freedom constitutes the framework and determines the limitations.²²¹ For example, one looks upon a mountain crag and decides it is unclimbable. Yet, it is because of the recognition of the possibility of climbing it that it has become an obstacle. Others may have never even contemplated the idea of climbing it and so it could never be a limit to them. Thus, Sartre proposed, "our freedom itself creates the obstacles from which we suffer" because the obstacles reveal themselves through the ends we choose.²²² Similarly, previous commitments such as marriage "limit my possibilities and dictate my conduct;" however, they do so only in light of one's projects.²²³ One's project in life may well incorporate living a marriage contract, imply fidelity and support "the decision to have an 'honourable life' as a husband and a father".²²⁴ In this light, commitments are not limitations, but rather freely chosen priorities.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 595.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 598.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 585.

²²⁰ Ibid., 598.

²²¹ Ibid., 620.

²²² Ibid., 635.

²²³ Ibid., 640.

²²⁴ Ibid.

While Sartre's later writings feature the element of authenticity, he avoids it as much as possible in *BN* because, he said, it implies morality.²²⁵ It implies morality because it could be taken to mean that someone *should* strive to achieve authenticity, or in other words, it implies a prescribed set of values and thus risks becoming a project of bad faith. This is something Sartre wanted to avoid – or defer for a more comprehensive study – since he emphasised choosing one's own values. In an ambiguous footnote, Sartre suggested that authenticity is the means of escaping bad faith, but dismissed it as a digression having “no place here”.²²⁶ Yet in a statement that sounds like authenticity, Sartre said “an act is free when it exactly reflects my essence”.²²⁷ So if an act is consistent with how one wants to be, or in other words, in accordance with a chosen project, it is a ‘free’ act. Reminiscent of Stirner's view of oneself as the centre and author of one's own universe, Sartre argued, “It is a matter of envisaging the self as a little God which inhabits me and which possesses my freedom as a metaphysical virtue”.²²⁸

In *War Diaries* Sartre discusses authenticity and loving relationships. He raises the situation whereby a man who had been living an inauthentic bourgeois life is called to war. It was such a shock that it “induced him to a conversation towards the authentic”.²²⁹ If he adapts his life to pursue his newly-found authentic project, then what is he to do when his wife visits him at the front? Does he reveal his new authentic attitude and behave differently with her? Or does he “yield” to his wife's expectations, “revive [his] old love”, and revert to his former role as a loving committed husband, which he now realises is inauthentic?²³⁰ The old project was inauthentic, the new project is authentic, and so the answer seems clear: he ought to break his previous inauthentic commitments. But what if the man had authentically committed himself to the project of loving husband? Sartre assumed being a soldier and a loving husband are mutually exclusive for this man, and did not address what happens when authentic projects change and clash. For Sartre, there is only one authentic mode of being: “one either is or isn't authentic” and there are only two alternatives with respect to the desire for authenticity: either one is inauthentic but is tormented by wanting to be authentic, or one is authentic and does not realise it. “There's no room for a third estate”.²³¹ It is one's subjective interpretation of

²²⁵ Ibid., 680.

²²⁶ Ibid., 116.

²²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, 220.

²³⁰ Ibid., 220-221.

²³¹ Ibid., 219.

brute things as resisting or favourable which puts limitations on one's world, not the mere objective presence of them,²³² and it is in this way that one is entirely responsible for one's situation. If one is free to choose, then one must be responsible for one's interpretation and one's choice. Sartre's philosophy needs this quality to avoid determinism, which would release one of responsibility for one's interpretation and by extension, one's actions. Thus, individuals are "condemned to be free".²³³

In light of this, the loving relationship between Pierre and Eve can be viewed either deterministically, as though it was destined to fail, or existentially: it is conceivable that Pierre and Eve made their choices with full awareness of the consequences and embraced the responsibility for their actions and choice of being. They had every intention of placing each other as their top priorities during their second chance on earth, but they did not know until they threw themselves into life. As Sartre pointed out in *BN*, at what cost can one do such a thing? Only with a radical modification of his very being could Pierre have left his friends to the ambush. The cost, it seems, was too great for Pierre. Their loving relationship fails because it does not fit within their fundamental projects in life. The film confirms the futility and absurdity of human relationships. Yet Pierre's and Eve's response to the young couple shows that Sartre acknowledged the importance of leaping anyway.

Key considerations

Narcissistic

In *BN* Sartre suggested that it is out of vanity that one seeks the secrets that Others hold about one.²³⁴ Such statements as this, as well as his emphasis on love as a project to be loved, in order to establish *ens causa sui*, open Sartre to the accusation that his philosophy of love is narcissistic. In Sartre's emphasis on choosing, his view of love does indeed include the desire to be loved and his emphasis on this aspect presents a one-sided perspective. In *BN*, Sartre said each individual's project is in a way self-interested because it aims at being. Life is a project and this constitutes selfness²³⁵ and "can appear to be an egoism".²³⁶ However, he also argued that self-interest is only one way to choose to realise one's passion, that is, one's existence and the meaning one confers upon it.²³⁷ In an interview, he proposed that narcissism

²³² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 627.

²³³ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29, Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 186.

²³⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 387.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 796.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

is love of the *idea* or image that one has of oneself, which is fabricated.²³⁸ Sartre was not fixated with an idea of himself, but rather actively engages in the world.²³⁹ He seeks to deepen self-knowledge through the gaze of the other, but is only shaped by it to the extent that he chooses to value the other's opinion.

Sartre thought that one loves in order to become oneself. Thus, the other is a condition for becoming. The implication of Sartre's thesis is that loving others is just as important as loving oneself because others are vital in discovering oneself. Understanding oneself does involve looking in the mirror, but is not necessarily detrimental to others. In Sartre's estimation, one should not disregard other's rights and welfare because they are important. But one does so because one values the other's opinion. Being-for-others is an important and necessary aspect of being human.

In Sartre's personal life, he certainly did not seem to neglect his lovers' welfare. Sartre amazed his lovers and friends with his extreme generosity, giving away money faster than he earned it. He had so many lovers that he had to keep a strict schedule to fit them in with time for his writing. Friends of Sartre said he referred to himself as "the district nurse" who went on "medical rounds" when visiting his desperate, insecure, "drowning" but devoted mistresses.²⁴⁰ Sylvie Le Bon, who became Beauvoir's executrix, accused Sartre of being paternalistic, macho, suffering from a God complex and for making his women hopeless by allowing them to be so dependent on him; "For a man who never wanted a family, you have the worst of family life!"²⁴¹ According to Le Bon, Sartre replied that he did not respect men who abandoned their women, he felt obliged and grateful to his women for loving him and "preferred to be a fool than a jerk".²⁴² Beauvoir saw it differently: it was his "guilty conscience".²⁴³ Sartre wrote in a letter to Beauvoir that at times he was ashamed at how he treated women and felt "like a grubby bastard. A really small-time bastard at that, a sort of sadistic university type and civil-service Don Juan – disgusting".²⁴⁴ In an interview, Sartre, acknowledging potential *machismo*, said his women brought him happiness, and he felt responsible for them, not only emotionally, but also for their lives, and this is why he

²³⁸ Sartre, *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*, 65.

²³⁹ Dmitri Shalin's point is as relevant for Sartre as it was for Stirner. See p.67.

²⁴⁰ Rowley, *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 311.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Schwarzer, *After The Second Sex: Conversations with Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Marianne Horwarth (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 110.

²⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Quiet Moments in a War: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir 1940-1963*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, ed. Simone de Beauvoir (New York: Scribner, 1993) 75-76.

supported his lovers financially, often long after the affair had ended and wrote plays for his lovers to give them work.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he did not see it as generosity; he gave his money away because he did not want to be possessed by his money or enslaved by his possessions, but wanted other people to be so.²⁴⁶

I want a woman to have moments of profoundness that are also mine: for her to be completely mine and me completely hers...For me, that is not “keeping” her. It’s helping in the development of someone who is not totally what she should be. Often, I love it when a woman feels that, at least for a while, she owes *everything* to her relationship with me.²⁴⁷

The fact that he condemned the way he treated women suggests that if Sartre was living consistently with his philosophy, then he was judging it to be ignoble. On the one hand, he seemed to be living inconsistently with his philosophy in *BN*, since despite his philosophical emphasis on freedom, he did not seem to think himself free from obligations to secondary lovers after the affairs ended. However, there are elements that are consistent with his philosophy in *BN*, such as the desire to be everything to a lover, and to remain free from constraints of money and possessions.

Romantic loving is not a good basis for self-discovery

Sartre presents contradictory portrayals of lovers’ abilities to provide sufficiently deep reflections and understanding. In *BN*, Sartre argued that because another holds the secret to what one is, one tries to be as close as possible to the other to discover those secrets. One of the strategies is caressing the lover’s flesh to try to incarnate their consciousness.²⁴⁸ The implication is that the person with whom one can achieve maximum intimacy ought to be able to provide the best reflection. Indeed, lovers often do value each other’s opinion more highly than anyone else’s. Moreover, in interviews, Sartre said that those with whom one has sexual relations are in the best position for self-discovery because the physical intimacy lovers achieve unleashes a deeper level of communication.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Chaine, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 239.

²⁴⁶ Madeleine Gobeil, “Playboy Interview: Jean-Paul Sartre”, *Playboy* May 1965.

²⁴⁷ Chaine, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 239.

²⁴⁸ See p.175. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 511-512.)

²⁴⁹ Sartre, *Sartre in the Seventies: Interviews and Essays*, 64-65, Chaine, “A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre”: 124.

Yet, it is conceivable that intimate relations close down certain possibilities for knowledge about oneself, especially when awkwardness, discomfort or regret ensue. Similarly, some lovers do not want a partner to unleash self-discovery, especially if it brings to light unpleasant aspects of one's existence. Alternatively, lovers become agreeable and accepting of each other to such an extent that they fail to provide any reflection or insight into each other. Further to this, it is also conceivable that other people with whom one is not intimately involved could better fill this role, such as friends, family or, as Nietzsche also acknowledged, even enemies.

Sartre broaches this latter view – that enemies provide better reflections than lovers – in some of his fictional works. For example, in *HC*, when there are only two people who Garcin can talk to in order to explore that deeper aspect of his being, he says the acquiescent Estelle does not matter, but Inez does because she hates and challenges him.²⁵⁰ Goetz, the ruthless general in *Lucifer and the Lord*, also demonstrates the inability of lovers to be capable enough of being enemies and worthy of reflection. Goetz has kept a woman, Catherine, by force and only values her to the extent that she hates him. Later in the story, he tells another lover, Hilda, “I cannot see my soul any longer, because it is under my nose; I need someone to lend me his eyes”.²⁵¹ When Hilda offers her eyes, he responds that she cannot see him because she loves him. He professes that only his enemy can see him and he decides to find the man who hates him. He tells Hilda: “You don't see me either; you love me. Heinrich hates me, therefore he can convince me”.²⁵²

In these plays Sartre suggested that the reason enemies are better for exploring one's being than lovers is because their distance enables them to provide a more critical perspective. In a passage reminiscent of Nietzsche's admiration for friends who can be enemies, Sartre warned against acquiescence in *BN*:

To realize tolerance with respect to the Other is to cause the Other to be thrown forcefully into a tolerant world. It is to remove from him on principle those free possibilities of courageous resistance, of perseverance, of self-assertion which he would have had the opportunity to develop in a world of intolerance.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Sartre, “Huis Clos”, 220.

²⁵¹ Sartre, “Lucifer and the Lord”, 163.

²⁵² Ibid., 164.

²⁵³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 530.

In the context of loving, this comment suggests that tolerance is not a desirable quality. In these examples, Sartre did not explore the possibility of romantic loving that would include intolerance and criticism, which is a connection that Nietzsche seemed also reluctant to make explicit. If the lovers in each of the examples above had provided more resistance then they would have provided a more helpful basis for self-discovery. Conflict is an excellent way to learn about oneself and Sartre's example warns of the risk of loving relationships without conflict. The more partners can be challenging, the better it is for the individuals involved. If the purpose of a loving relationship is to discover as much as possible about oneself, then it ought to be challenging.

Indeed, Sartre's relationship with Beauvoir suggests lovers can be good sparring partners.²⁵⁴ Sartre valued her relationship and opinion above all others and discussed his ideas with her. Despite Sartre's insistence that merging is impossible, he said in an interview that he had felt a kind of merging: the creation of "almost an individual entity – an *us* that is not two *yous* but that is truly an *us*".²⁵⁵ Similarly, Goetz in *Lucifer and the Lord* tells Hilda towards the end of the play that "You are myself", suggesting that, at least, lovers come to feel as if they are merged.²⁵⁶ Sartre's philosophy in *BN* does not account for feelings of intimate connections and harmonious moments within romantic loving relationships, and yet he did appear to have experienced such a relationship with Beauvoir.

In an interview, Sartre described the secret to his relationship success with Beauvoir as a "certain similarity of cultures", and emphasised the necessity of viewing the world in the same way,²⁵⁷ which could be understood as a platform on which lovers can bridge the abyss between them. However, philosophically he did not support this. Given Sartre's views in *BN*, he might respond that the problem with connections to others is that they are ambiguous and tenuous.²⁵⁸ It is certainly possible to find similarities and commonalities with others, for example with those with the same types of chromosomes, but this is not a ready-made platform for full disclosure of each other's consciousnesses. It would be mistaken to assume that every woman apprehends femininity or every man apprehends masculinity in exactly the

²⁵⁴ Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb, for example, highlight this more constructive interpretation of Sartre's and Beauvoir's loving relationship: "These two great minds were not engaged in a conflictual relationship of the kind described by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. They were intellectually, at least, not a 'hell to each other' but rather equal partners for elaborating, experimenting, and playing with common ideas" (Daigle and Golomb, eds., *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*, 6.)

²⁵⁵ Chaïne, "A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre": 118.

²⁵⁶ Sartre, "Lucifer and the Lord", 173.

²⁵⁷ Chaïne, "A conversation about sex and women with Jean-Paul Sartre": 124.

²⁵⁸ See p.37.

same way, especially as there is no universal understanding of gender. How people choose to behave and interpret gender is entirely individual. Similarly, how people use language and form opinions is individual. As to whether one can choose not to objectify or be objectified, I imagine Sartre might respond that one is certainly free to choose whatever one likes, but if one does not have the power to make it happen, it is unattainable because it is outside one's realm of possibilities. Sartre was right in acknowledging that while another person can tell us what they think, we will never know with perfect confidence if they are telling the truth. One can approximate another's consciousness, or make assumptions about what it must be like, but can never know it.

Narrow view of romantic love

Sartre's assumption in *BN* is that wanting to discover one's being through the eyes of the beloved means one desires to merge with the beloved, but proposed that this is impossible. Sartre seems reluctant to consider other conceptions of romantic loving. Doing so would require him to dispute the assumption that lovers aim to merge and this would require either a reassessment of the two fundamental attitudes in *BN* – assimilation and appropriation – or creation of another attitude. Limiting himself to only two attitudes leaves romantic loving relationships inside the vicious circle. Sartre said that after the failure of one's attempts to appropriate and assimilate the other, "nothing remains for the for-itself except to re-enter the circle and allow itself to be indefinitely tossed from one to the other of the two fundamental attitudes".²⁵⁹ Thus, in *BN*, Sartre seems not to acknowledge any possibility of overcoming the situation because "we can never get outside the circle".²⁶⁰

In sum, Sartre's contributions to our understanding of romantic loving are as follows. First, Sartre places great importance on the sexual aspects of relationships, since the intimacy developed through such interactions opens up a new means of communication and understanding between people. For example, the caress, he said, was a way of revealing the other's consciousness through their flesh. Nevertheless, I also argued that it is an unreliable means of doing so. Second, Sartre pointed out that loving understood as an action risks reducing loving to a function. However, Sartre avoids such a conclusion by emphasising the uniqueness of loving experiences between two individuals. Since one is an individual, one's loving experiences, choices and projects are unique.

²⁵⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 534.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 474.

Third, Sartre and Beauvoir established a life-long loving relationship. Although some of the romantic elements faded, such as sexual passion, they sought romantic involvements elsewhere. One of the underlying issues for them in practice was that although they had established their own relationship as primary, the lovers with whom they established secondary relationships seemed to be disappointed when they realised not only that their love was not exclusive, but also that it would not involve being the most important person in the other's life, and that made their relationships unsustainable. *HC* emphasised the effort and bravery that leaping into love requires, and also the desire for lovers to justify their being in each other. However, as Sartre pointed out in *BN*, there will always be others holding other secrets of one's being, meaning that even if merging with another for eternity would be possible, it is inherently an unstable means of justifying one's existence.

Fourth, Sartre's understanding of romantic loving implies that through merging lovers hope to become complete, their own foundation, or *ens causa sui*, because one can discover aspects of one's being that one cannot alone. However, the problem is that, like Hegel's master-slave dialectic, a lover is faced with two alternatives: either appropriate or assimilate the beloved, which destroys the other's objectivity and means one cannot discover anything through them (as per *BN*); or leave the beloved to be and respect the beloved's freedom (as per *Notebooks*), in which case the lover does not achieve understanding through the beloved, since there is no reliable means of establishing a connection with the other. Nevertheless, in Sartre's own experience, lovers do feel as if they had become a unity. While Sartre said that he lived his loving relationship with Beauvoir as a 'we', philosophically he identified such an idea as problematic, since to be able to say 'we', one must understand and connect with the other. However, understanding the other is tenuous thanks to the insurmountable abyss between lovers.

Moreover, in some of Sartre's plays, he revealed scepticism about whether a beloved would be able to provide a rigorous enough reflection to assist with understanding oneself, and instead suggested that enemies would be better candidates. While Nietzsche implied the possibility of lovers and marrieds also being friends and enemies, Sartre did not definitively take his philosophy in such a direction.

Finally, Sartre's philosophy in *BN* raises questions about how concerned for the beloved's welfare one is, since one is concerned with the other only insofar as one's existence is in question and values the other. Nevertheless, he also condemns the attitude of being indifferent

to others. Moreover, in *BN*, Sartre argued that romantic loving is a manifestation of a master-slave dialectic, but his comments on his own experience do not support that theory. Romantic loving, as he said he experienced it, was not like that.

Sartre emphasised the importance of freeing oneself from illusions of determinism, such as lovers being destined for one another, in order to be free to choose the loving relationships that one perceives will be most valuable in understanding oneself and providing a deep level of reflection. Nevertheless, the implication of Sartre's discussion is that romantic loving relationships are inherently disappointing and frustrating. They are conflicted and begin and end in failure because in attempting to merge lovers aim at possessing each other, or modifying each other's freedom. While Sartre did mention the possibility of an attitude to others that breaks the vicious circle of bad faith relations in *BN*, he did not provide a comprehensive resolution to the problem of being with others within his existential realm.

For Sartre, one loves the experience that is aroused by another. One chooses love by committing to being a lover. Love is understood as loving behaviour and is a means to try to complete one's being by becoming one's own foundation. Others reveal new dimensions of one's being and thus expand one's possibilities. Others can limit one's freedom, but only insofar as one accepts their authority. Lovers tend to be so important that one values their opinion above all others, giving them great power to define and make one desperate to control that view by attempting to possess their freedom. However, possessing or merging is impossible because there is no reliable basis for connecting and lovers are rendered vulnerable and frustrated. Anxiety is inevitable because romantic loving is insecure, but it must be accepted and lived. Authenticity is impossible unless lovers let go of the desire to merge, but since the desire to understand oneself and become complete is fundamentally human, this is unlikely. This is one explanation as to why romantic loving relationships can be frustrating and disappointing.

Chapter 5 - Simone de Beauvoir: Loving Authentically

Romantic loving is, for Simone de Beauvoir, existentially dangerous. The two most important points of departure from the treatment of loving identified in the chapters on Stirner, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre are: Beauvoir's acknowledgement of how situations modify freedom; her attempt to create an ethics; and the way she incorporates equality and economic independence as a way to navigate through the dangers of love. Less concerned with creating a system than Jean-Paul Sartre, Beauvoir is more attentive to living attitudes and practical existential solutions.¹ Beauvoir's existentialist morality is, according to Michèle Le Dœuff, "The most obvious and no doubt most fundamental change operated by Beauvoir in the existentialist formulation of problems".² I argue that while Beauvoir did not solve all the existential dilemmas (mainly because she appeals to non-existential solutions), she does enrich our understanding of the complexity of the problems of loving with her analysis of what constitutes inauthentic loving and the conditions under which authentic loving ought to be achievable.

According to Beauvoir, one has to be free from oppression in order to be free to love authentically. The problem for women is that throughout all of history, they have been subordinate to men, as men's slaves or vassals.³ She said that "it is the masculine code, the society developed by males and in their interest, that has defined the feminine condition".⁴ Women's situation has inhibited their capacity for free choice and so practically, they have had fewer possibilities available to them than men, and thus, they are "heavily handicapped".⁵ This is why dependency has been a ubiquitous condition for women. It shall be seen that this is undesirable existentially, however, because it is an escape from standing forth in the world as a self-governing subject. The existential rub lies in the fact that individuals are responsible for their actions and therefore women have been complicit in their subordinate situation. Beauvoir called for men to end the oppression and for women to stop accepting it. Only when

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, "What Is Existentialism?", trans. Marybeth Timmermann, *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Margaret A. Simons, Marybeth Timmermann, Mary Beth Mader and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 324.

² Michèle le Dœuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989) 89.

³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010) 8-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

women are free from oppression and dependence and free to pursue the same opportunities as men will authentic love be possible.

This analysis draws primarily on Beauvoir's philosophy in *The Second Sex* (1949) as well as *Pyrrhus and Cineas* (1944), *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) and *Must We Burn Sade?* (1955). I also refer to such essays as *Existentialism and Popular Wisdom* (1945), *An Existentialist Looks at Americans* (1947), *What is Existentialism?* (1947), *It's About Time* (1950) and *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome* (1959). Her autobiographies, letters and novels complement exploration of philosophical principles outlined in these central texts, especially *She Came to Stay* (1943), *Blood of Others* (1945), *Who Shall Die?* (1945), *The Mandarins* (1954), *The Woman Destroyed* (1967) and *When Things of The Spirit Come First* (1979).⁶

Such a broad range of texts has been consulted because, unlike the philosophy of Sartre, whose pre-Marxist existentialism can be quarantined to works within a specific period, Beauvoir's writing is more integrated, making it difficult to isolate existential texts. For example, her magnum opus *The Second Sex* (SS) is a medley of existentialism in the premium it places on individual self-assertion and transcendence, Marxism in the emphasis she gives to work as the path to freedom and equality, and Marxist determinism in her thesis that economic changes will bring about social change. It also includes social and biological determinism in her pardoning of women's bad faith on account of their upbringing and reproductive organs, and even possibly latent Christianity in her advocacy of contributing to a greater good and doing unto others as we would do unto ourselves. This breadth of ideas shall be discussed further in the context of her philosophy of loving.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. First, a brief introduction to Beauvoir's philosophy is presented, canvassing her existential views relevant to her perception of loving existentially. Second, the temptations and pitfalls of inauthentic romantic loving as Beauvoir saw it are discussed. Third, Beauvoir's definition of authentic romantic loving is analysed and finally, some of the main objections with respect to her philosophy of romantic loving are explored.

The phrase 'I am not myself today' is common enough, but *how* or *why* one is oneself is much less common. Beauvoir's philosophy begins here. She finds it astonishing that she should be

⁶ *When Things of the Spirit Come First* was originally submitted for publication in 1937 but was rejected.

in this particular life as opposed to thousands of other possibilities. “If I had not been born no question would have arisen: I have to take the fact that I do exist as my starting point”.⁷

Like her existentially-minded predecessors, Beauvoir agrees that one is what one does, existence precedes essence, individuals create their own values and reasons for living, and one’s being is one’s passion which is one’s choice.⁸ To be an individual is to express oneself meaningfully by engaging in the world and striving towards concrete ends.⁹ Beauvoir replaces Nietzsche’s ideal of the *Übermensch* with a more general view of striving towards whatever one chooses via concrete projects. Exciting and liberating, Beauvoir said existentialism provides the clarity to realise that one’s destiny is in one’s hands. The very antithesis of doom and gloom, existentialism aims at self-fulfilment through whatever project one chooses in life.¹⁰ The question of life is not whether it is useful or worthwhile, but whether and how one wants to live.¹¹

We are not, however, absolutely free, according to Beauvoir. To adjust one’s possibilities by accepting a door not opening, as Sartre argued in *BN*, is an abstract notion of freedom, annulment of power and “gloomy passivity”,¹² and should be restricted to “its proper limits”.¹³ In Beauvoir’s estimation, there are some parts of being that cannot be controlled, such as being seasick: “I [...] claimed that stomach and tear ducts, indeed the head itself, were all subject to irresistible forces on occasion”.¹⁴ Another example is a woman shut up in a harem. Beauvoir disagreed with Sartre’s point that “even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several quite different ways”, on the grounds that such situations could not actively be transcended and thus freedom would be invalidated.¹⁵ But the problem Beauvoir faced was that “to defend my attitude I should have had to abandon the plane of the individual and therefore idealistic, morality on which we had set ourselves”.¹⁶ Indeed, she did need to abandon the plane of the individual by appealing to a collective struggle and this is where she betrays her existentialism: by trying to reconcile it with Marxism.

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *All Said and Done*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974) 1.

⁸ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 11.

⁹ Beauvoir, “An Existentialist Looks at Americans”, 309.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 346.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Importance of others

Beauvoir was compelled to find a means of relating to others that overcomes Sartre's pessimism and is based on respect. She discounts egoism as naïve because its reaction to others stealing the world is hatred and it neglects the positive side of others' existence. She acknowledged that beings are separate and opposed¹⁷ and cannot be united: "So solidarities are created, but a man cannot enter into solidarity with all the others, because they do not all choose the same goals since their choices are free".¹⁸ However, this is nothing to be depressed about because others also *give* the world by infusing our environment with "human significations" and one's projects only take on meaning through interaction with other people and their projects.¹⁹ For Beauvoir, life would be meaningless without other people because a person can only be identified as free and as an individual through relationships with others and the world. Also, people open up possibilities for each other. As freedom is embraced by disclosing one's being into the future, others also disclose the future to oneself. As each individual gives life meaning, the world is fashioned.²⁰ Thus, one finds oneself in situations that influence one's actions and among other people who influence one's possibilities.

Beauvoir agrees with Sartre that conflict is a fundamental part of life because one is an individual faced with ontological chasm and tension. Engaging in life is risky because of clashes with other freedoms. Beauvoir said relations between men and women are "a struggle of consciousnesses" and "all human relationships entail conflicts".²¹ Nevertheless, embracing the struggle is a necessary part of life because transcendence (*pour-soi*) is a struggle and renouncing it equates to renouncing being.²² Transcendence is necessary to being a sovereign subject, which Beauvoir defines as actively, assertively, ambitiously, creatively and courageously pushing oneself forward in the world, overcoming oneself, going beyond the 'given' in life and engaging in self-chosen projects. It is dynamically to choose and decide. One is an agent in one's own life, actively choosing from possibilities that one creates for oneself.

The opposite of transcendence is immanence (*en-soi*): "Our existence is marked-out as 'active' to the extent that we transcend the immanence of our situation in pursuit of our freely

¹⁷ Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus and Cineas", 92, 127, 135.

¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

¹⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 70-71.

²⁰ Beauvoir, "What Is Existentialism?", 325.

²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 266, 359.

²² Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus and Cineas", 138.

chosen projects”.²³ Facticity is the given of one’s existence, that is, the situation one finds oneself in, including one’s body, anatomy, nationality, class, roles or functions.²⁴ Passively to accept one’s facticity is to live immanently. Traditionally, according to Beauvoir, women have been doomed to immanence because they passively maintained life instead of risking it like men.²⁵ Their normal destiny was marriage and maternity, relegated to the monotonous chores of childbearing and housework that she said are the boring, repetitive, unproductive and uncreative maintenance activities of life.²⁶ Such a life is “not directly useful to the group, it does not open onto the future, it does not produce anything”.²⁷ This was, however, generally the easiest option for women because of the unequal opportunities afforded to men and women historically. For example, the workplace has been an unattractive option: women have been given fewer possibilities and opportunities, less specialised tasks, worse jobs and lower pay.²⁸

To resign oneself to the separation between people and disengaging from others means one is to turn away from possibilities and hence, to cease to transcend. To be indifferent is to seek peace and renounce hardship: it is the easy road where little can be accomplished.²⁹ For example, in *Who Shall Die? (WSD)* Jean-Pierre adopts a nihilistic position based on the assumption that there is no possible connection between people. He shrinks from telling Clarice he loves her because if we are forever separate, commitment and promises must be nonsense and love must be a lie. Yet, one is the sum of one’s actions and by doing nothing, Jean-Pierre is nothing. It is only by daring to vow that he loves Clarice, throwing himself into loving activities and projecting a future together with her that he is able to live and love authentically. Beauvoir said, “I take on a shape and an existence only if I first throw myself into the world by loving, by doing”.³⁰ And we need other people to justify our existence: “Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men”.³¹ (It is important to note that here she argued that one’s existence is justified through other people, but as shall be seen, elsewhere she argued that it is inauthentic to justify one’s existence in a lover.)

²³ Joseph, Reynolds and Woodward, eds., *The Continuum Companion to Existentialism*, 370.

²⁴ Ibid., 342.

²⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 73-74.

²⁶ Ibid., 73.

²⁷ Ibid., 484.

²⁸ Ibid., 154.

²⁹ Beauvoir, “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, 92.

³⁰ Ibid., 130.

³¹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

Beauvoir did not mean that the need for others should be taken in the Machiavellian sense of using each other as means to ends.³² Rather, each individual acts and decides in the context of society.³³ “Our freedoms support each other like the stones in an arch, but in an arch that no pillars support”.³⁴ Her aim seems to be to suggest that other people are not always hell as Sartre indicates because they bestow possibilities that would not exist without them. The important thing for Beauvoir is acknowledging that the world is shared with other people and that one way or another, individuals depend on the community for survival, self-definition and meaning.

Ambiguous ethics

The foundation of Beauvoir’s being with others is that they are there. From this, she derives an ethics that makes one accountable by virtue of the presence of others. The question is then: how to reconcile existential philosophy, which focuses on individual freedom, with her desire for equality and freedom for all? For if individuals are free to choose how to live, then is everything permitted, as per Dostoyevsky’s character Ivan Karamazov? Beauvoir said in *Ethics of Ambiguity* (EA) that if one creates one’s own values and tries to impose them on others, as is the case with Nietzsche’s will-to-power, then certainly “the result would be a conflict of opposed wills enclosed in their solitude”.³⁵ She wants to veer away from this and her attempt to create an existential ethics is a response to this conclusion towards which existential freedom leads.³⁶

In *WSD*, Beauvoir toyed with the hazards of living in a world in which power trumps freedom. It is fourteenth century Flanders and the town of Vaucelles is under siege. Food supplies are running short. Louis the alderman and the council want to protect the city at all costs, so they decide to cast all the ‘useless mouths’ (women, children, old and sick people) out of the town so there is more food for the men to protect the city for longer. The decree gives way to an ethical void, paving the way for a new morality based on power. Georges

³² Ibid., 9.

³³ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 435.

³⁴ Beauvoir, “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, 140.

³⁵ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

³⁶ Nevertheless, Daigle has shown that Beauvoir’s and Nietzsche’s views on freedom are not inconsistent because Nietzsche’s “will to power is not about exerting brute force. Nietzsche would even consider that as an instance of decadence or declining will to power...Because every individual is an instance of will to power and seeks to flourish as an instance of that, everyone should collaborate in creating the best conditions for everyone’s ability to flourish. In Beauvoir’s pattern, human flourishing as a free authentic individual is pursued, whereas in Nietzsche, it is the flourishing of an authentic individual as an expression of will to power that is to be pursued”. (Daigle, “Nietzsche: Virtue Ethics...Virtue Politics?": 13.)

demonstrates the implications of the new situation when he attempts to rape his sister Clarice but is interrupted by his father Louis:

Louis: Leave this house. Now. You are no longer my son.

Georges: Why all this fuss? Are you not about to murder her?

Louis: How dare you! Get out, or I will kill you like a dog!

Georges (*sarcastically*): Why such hypocrisy? You have broken the ancient Commandments. Now there is neither good nor evil. Force alone is the law.

Louis: Enough! (*Pause*). I have used force for the salvation of my town, for the good of the whole world.

Georges: You have served your own fancy!

Louis: My fancy! I have sacrificed more than my own life!

Georges: You have chosen freely your sacrifice. I am free to choose my pleasure.³⁷

It is not until Louis discovers his son Georges is plotting to kill him and take over the city that Louis finally realises what Georges had already warned: that once individual freedom is dishonoured and oppressed, right and wrong no longer matters and the door is opened to a world in which power triumphs and “Might makes right”.³⁸ Beauvoir’s siren is that without ethics based on respect for freedom for all, a savage world emerges.

This means Beauvoir’s answer to whether everything is permitted, is no. Reasons to get out of bed in the morning do not exist in an abstract Platonic sense, nor does a god give them. One is free to create one’s own meaning and values, which are realised through concrete human action. While freedom could mean all-out anarchy, Beauvoir believed it is kept in check because without a god, there is no one at the pearly gates to grant forgiveness.³⁹ In other words, there is no one in the afterlife to forgive sins and the responsibility for behaviour lies squarely with individuals. According to Beauvoir, “Far from God’s absence authorizing all licence, the contrary is the case, because man is abandoned on earth, because his acts are definitive, absolute engagements”.⁴⁰ Moreover, she said later in *EA*:

And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass

³⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, trans. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier (Florissant, Missouri: River Press, 1983) 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 15-16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom.⁴¹

Beauvoir appeals to a moral claim to support one's obligation to others in society. She takes a Kantian approach, by which there are moral capacities inherent in freedom and that people are aware of the difference between one's passion and what is 'right'. One has a moral duty to others because, "To will oneself free is also to will others free".⁴² For although the individual is unique and sovereign, so is everyone; the human condition is universal and collective.⁴³ Responsibility must exist according to Beauvoir's ethics by default of involvement in each other's lives, regardless of choice. Hence, her message in *The Blood of Others* (BO) is that coexistence is "an inborn curse".⁴⁴ For example, even though Blomart told Hélène he did not love her, he comes to realise that just by consequence of having met her, he is responsible for her: Perturbed, he asks: "what kind of choice had been given her? Could she choose that I love her? That I should not exist? That she should not have met me? ...She was there, bound by my docile hands, imprisoned in a joyless love. In spite of herself and in spite of me".⁴⁵ The problem is, however, that being responsible for another person negates the other's freedom, because people are responsible for themselves.

To summarise Beauvoir's approach to being in the world with others, she maintains that we are abandoned on earth together, and although individual and separate, we share common ground, the same world and human condition. Beauvoir appeals to a sort of empathy on these grounds to salvage an 'ethics of ambiguity' in which the struggle and conflict are transcended in order to reach for that connection with others. In her sustained attempt to do so, she is differentiated from Sartre. However, Beauvoir recognises that in practice one's freedom often comes at the expense of others and accedes that violence is sometimes necessary to enforce freedom.⁴⁶ And this suggests that a savage world can emerge even from an ethics based on respect for freedom for all.

In examining Beauvoir's philosophy of loving, the philosophical issues that she saw plaguing loving relationships and rendering them inauthentic are explored, and her solutions analysed.

⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

⁴² Ibid., 73.

⁴³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 430.

⁴⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, trans. Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1964) 129-131.

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus and Cineas", 138.

Problems of romantic loving

Romantic relationships can be such intoxicating experiences that lovers can get lost in the associated elation and euphoria. Like *Tristan and Isolde*, they passionately sink together into the muck and mire of immanence, boredom, inaction, immobility and an “egotistical and empty solitude”,⁴⁷ which Beauvoir dismissed as inauthentic or bad faith loving. While anyone can be guilty of inauthentic loving, women have been more susceptible to it than men because of their oppressive situation. Historically, the problem for women, according to Beauvoir, is that while men appropriated the role of subject, women were delegated to the inessential role of ‘the Other’. Women did not originally choose to be wives and mothers; it was their duty and role in society and the happenstance of biology.

For the existentialists, freedom is implicit in one’s consciousness. This is one of the meanings of ‘existence precedes essence’: one is born free and creates one’s being. Beauvoir suggested that while women have always been ontologically free, they have not been ‘situationally’ free. However, Beauvoir might better have spoken of restrictions on women’s psychosocial freedom, that is, woman’s social situation limited their perceived freedom, which through their actions (or lack thereof) perpetuated their predicament and influenced their attitude. Thus, society’s concept of woman defined her actions, instead of woman existentially choosing her passion to define her being.

Beauvoir granted that while there have been many factors influencing women’s position as ‘the second sex’, the key issue is that women have been complicit in their subordination. Beauvoir built on Hegel’s master-slave dialectic but explained that while the slave’s oppression is not voluntary, woman’s is, taking the form of a problem-solving strategy: “The fact is that men encounter more complicity in their woman companions than the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed”.⁴⁸ Women accepted the externally imposed limitations on their social freedom, allowed men to dominate and have not stood up for their rights (until fairly recently). To voluntarily renounce one’s freedom, however, is a ‘moral fault’ or ‘bad faith’. Beauvoir mitigates that women’s complicity is understandable, given that: “Everything encourages her to be invested and dominated by foreign existences”.⁴⁹ So, Beauvoir implies,

⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 698, Simone de Beauvoir, “It’s about time woman put a new face on love”, *Flair* 1950: 77.

⁴⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 757.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 749.

women's bad faith has been a rational decision given that the alternatives and consequences were too costly or unsavoury, such as being ostracised from social circles.

It is difficult to see from the existential perspective how Beauvoir can blame women for choosing to accept and perpetuate their condition and yet exonerate them from responsibility for their choice. Beauvoir wants it both contradictory ways. It is perplexing that she accused women of being complicit in their subservience: "she cheerfully accepts" male propaganda because it invites "her to take the easy slope";⁵⁰ woman lets herself be dependent and yields to this temptation;⁵¹ and temptations are not totally, but "nearly irresistible".⁵² Beauvoir did not go so far to say women have been ignorant, but rather they have accepted that it is in their best interest to be the second sex.

This same philosopher then seems in the next breath to release women from the responsibility of these choices by introducing situation as a limitation on their freedom. For example, "she has been made to play" immanent roles;⁵³ she has been forced by men to assume a secondary status;⁵⁴ she is "imprisoned in her condition";⁵⁵ her situation explains her limits;⁵⁶ she is surrounded by constraints and tradition "weighs on her";⁵⁷ and she is determined by "the way she grasps, through foreign consciousnesses, her body and her relation to the world".⁵⁸ This final point is most disturbing, for Beauvoir robs women of existential responsibility to be the sum of their actions and for creating themselves.

The core problem with Beauvoir's argument is that she equates unpleasant choices as equivalent to having no choice, which is clearly false. Because we are free, choice is ontological, cannot be denied and thus one is condemned to choose, despite one's sex or situation. Women always had choices but usually chose to conform because, according to Beauvoir, it was the least strenuous choice. Women may have been making pragmatic decisions, but that does not make them existential choices made in fear and trembling with the anxiety of associated consequences. For example, a harem girl can choose to accept her situation, or choose to attempt to leave. The consequences are a separate matter. By daring to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 757.

⁵¹ Ibid., 758.

⁵² Ibid., 685.

⁵³ Susan J. Brison, "Beauvoir and feminism: interview and reflections ", *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claudia Card (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 191.

⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 17.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 721.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 750.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 749.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 761.

escape, it is possible that she finds herself in an even worse situation; yet, it is feasible that in some cases punishment, death or poverty is preferable. Beauvoir has forgotten the question that she asked in *EA*: how does one want to live?⁵⁹ Nevertheless, let us continue to explore why Beauvoir affirms that voluntary servitude has been so convenient for women in love by outlining seven deadly sins of inauthentic loving.

Beauvoir was an atheist, so it was not actually sins that she expounded, but rather the existential equivalent of a sin: bad faith. They are not physically deadly, but according to Beauvoir, indulging in such moral faults as these is parallel to metaphysical suicide: the realm of non-being, whereby transcendence is degraded into immanence and freedom into facticity.⁶⁰

Idolising and subordinating to a lover

One issue with romantic loving, according to Beauvoir, is the temptation to idolise a lover because it means voluntarily subordinating oneself. Paula in *The Mandarins (TM)* is a prime example of a woman loving idolatrously because she uses love as an excuse to evade responsibility for establishing her own independent existence. She sacrifices her singing career and flees from any possibility of taking up her own projects on the pretext that loving Henri is a full-time vocation. Henri, on the other hand, sees it as ‘vegetating’. Paula’s reward for her dependence is (a false sense of) security and justification in her life because she is necessary to her lover. Paula asks Henri:

“Could you get along without me?”

“You know very well I couldn’t.”

“Yes, I know,” she said happily. “Even if you said you could, I wouldn’t believe you.”

She walked towards the bathroom. It was impossible not to weaken from time to time and speak a few kind words to her, smile gently at her.⁶¹

While men do not need women and often find them a burden, according to Beauvoir, Paula’s desire to be necessary to her lover is a typical characteristic of a woman in love. In *SS*, Beauvoir said women are happy, joyful and at peace when they love and are loved by a male

⁵⁹ See p.201.

⁶⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 16.

⁶¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, trans. Leonard M. Friedman (London and Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1960) 31-32.

that they see as god-like because they derive prestige and feel justified from being necessary to their beloved god.⁶² By latching onto what they believe is a stable and majestic male, Beauvoir suggested women piggyback their way through life, avoiding the strain of transcendence. Dependent, they become like slaves, giving up their own transcendence for their lover's because they think it is more worthy: "She lets her own world founder in contingency: she lives in his universe".⁶³ Women recoil from taking on their own projects, defining themselves, asserting themselves and undertaking their own independent authentic existence. Yet, to deny one's freedom and to live in immanence is bad faith and characteristic of inauthentic loving. "She abandons herself first to love to save *herself*; but the paradox of idolatrous love is that in order to save herself, she ends up totally disavowing *herself*".⁶⁴

If we accept Beauvoir's argument, that idolisation was a rational choice given the alternatives, what can be said about this dynamic today? For much has changed since Beauvoir's time. In the Western world we have had many years of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, women are virtually in control of reproduction through the pill and abortion, the majority of women now work and expect to work, women's chances for success in the workplace has increased and the pay gap between men and women has narrowed, although there is still a gap.

Certainly, Beauvoir argued, women will still be tempted to idolise and serve their lover because it is easy. However, there is also a second reason Beauvoir saw perpetuating this dynamic (a view she has in common with Nietzsche): transcendence is unfeminine and women can do nothing to change this. Beauvoir surreptitiously assumed man is the standard of which the idea of the feminine is constructed. She said, "Precisely because the idea of femininity is artificially defined by customs and fashion, it is imposed on every woman from the outside".⁶⁵ Not conforming to the feminine ideal will be social suicide: she will be cast as an insurgent, eccentric and she will be sexually and socially demeaned.⁶⁶

Therefore, according to Beauvoir, a woman trying to charm a man will need to suppress her transcendental qualities, that is, intelligence and independence, and present herself as "a subtle carnal throb".⁶⁷ Some women do overtly debase their freedom and use their power of

⁶² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 693-694.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 693.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 691.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 723-724.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 724.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 725.

beauty and charm to seduce men. This poses a problem to an independent woman who, according to Beauvoir, is too busy for slavery and grooming and refuses to fall into bad faith by playing the adoring chattel.

Beauvoir did not mention that sex object status is not a long-term sustainable situation because lust, passion and the adrenaline rush are part of romantic loving relationships, but loving relationships that depend entirely on those elements tend to be short-lived. Moreover, it is a gross generalisation to suggest that all men want what Beauvoir called “a statue animated by hidden vibrations”.⁶⁸ Yet, brains and feminine charm are far from mutually exclusive, as Beauvoir seems to suggest.

Additionally, for women to allow externally socially imposed ideals of beauty guide their choices is bad faith. A woman acting existentially would not let others choose what is beautiful or what defines her. Some women claim that it is an authentic choice and being more beautiful makes them feel better about themselves. But perhaps they only feel better about themselves because they think they look better through the gaze of others.

Merging with a lover

Lovers commonly refer to each other as their ‘other half’, implying that in finding each other, they have become complete. Beauvoir said that a woman who idolises her lover imagines that he is infinite and by integrating with him and dissolving the boundaries between them, they can create an “ecstatic union”.⁶⁹ She dreams of obliterating the ‘I’ and becoming a ‘we’, so that “she is associated and identified with him, she shares his prestige and reigns with him over the rest of the world”.⁷⁰

The dream of unity is a phenomenon that Beauvoir said she experienced in her relationship with Sartre (and, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, that Sartre said he experienced in his relationship with Beauvoir). For example, in Beauvoir’s letters, she said she feels she and Sartre are merged: “We truly are just one person”.⁷¹ She often referred to him as her life, her happiness, herself, her other self and her absolute. In her memoirs, she said they “possessed a dual identity”.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid., 726.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 691.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 693.

⁷¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992) 100.

⁷² Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 21.

Notwithstanding these declarations of unity, Beauvoir maintained in her philosophy that one of the main pitfalls in inauthentic loving is the dream of merging, for as we have seen, Beauvoir maintained we are separate beings.⁷³ But dreaming of unity is bad faith if one knows it is impossible to achieve. In *The Prime of Life (PL)*, Beauvoir talks about her shock when she realised this problem. When she and Sartre disagreed, Beauvoir said her world was shaken to the core:

Very conveniently I persuaded myself that a foreordained harmony existed between us on every single point. 'We are', I declared, 'as one'. This absolute certainty meant that I never went against my instinctive desires; and when, on two occasions, our desires clashed, I was completely flabbergasted.⁷⁴

The surprise and disappointment of the shattered dream of merging is a recurring theme in Beauvoir's work. For example, it comes as an awkward surprise to Françoise in *She Came to Stay (SCS)* to discover her separation from Pierre. She thought: "'We are but one.' With the help of this convenient confusion she had always been relieved from worrying about Pierre – but these were only words: they were two separate persons".⁷⁵ When their perfect union is disrupted by the arrival of the young, beautiful and impulsive Xavière creating a feisty *ménage-à-trois*, Françoise's dream of unity melts into alienation: "If she now so often felt estranged from Pierre, it was because she had allowed him to progress alone down these paths of admiration and affection. They no longer saw things eye to eye. Where she beheld no more than a capricious child, Pierre saw a wild and exacting soul".⁷⁶

Likewise, Laurence in *Les Belles Images* is astounded when she discovers she and her husband Jean-Charles disagree, exposing the rift between them. Laurence swerves to avoid hitting a cyclist and her car rolls into a ditch. While Laurence is relieved no one is injured, Jean-Charles would have preferred to hit the cyclist instead of writing off the car. Stupefied, Laurence reflects, "Jean-Charles is a part of me, another self, she thought. We make a whole. I behaved as if I had been alone".⁷⁷

⁷³ See p.202.

⁷⁴ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 118.

⁷⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, trans. Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse (London: Fontana, 1975) 131.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Les Belles Images*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1985) 87.

While in Beauvoir's writing the dream of unity is exclusively a woman's delusion, her analysis is one-sided, for there is no reason why a man would not also dream of this. In Beauvoir's writing, men are not sidetracked by the dream of unity because they are focused on independent projects and do not want to be weighed down with another person. Nevertheless, there are men who are distraught to discover their lovers have opposing or disagreeable views, but Beauvoir did not write about these.

Furthermore, Beauvoir defines this sense of oneness as having the same views and opinions and differences in thinking reveal the rift. Yet existentially, the problem with this view is clear: differences should come as no surprise; sameness and acquiescence are not admirable qualities because they overlook the individuals' unique characteristics, independence (of thinking) as well as the benefits of otherness. Later Beauvoir realises her mistake: the word 'we' was "equivocal and all-too-handy...There were some experiences that each individual lived through alone. When I said 'We are one person', I was dodging the issue. Harmony between individuals is never a *donnée*; it must be worked for continually".⁷⁸

Possessing and dominating a lover

Possessiveness is implied in the metaphysical dream of loving unity because when lovers imagine themselves as one entity, there is no room for a third person. This is most poignantly portrayed in *SCS*, when Françoise and Pierre bring Xavière into their inner circle. Pierre wants not just to be the most important thing to Xavière, but rather the *only* thing in the world that matters to her.⁷⁹ He has a wild desire to possess and dominate her: "To be at peace with himself, he had to feel that she was in his power. When people came between them, he was always disturbed and irritable".⁸⁰ The problem is that love usually implies exclusivity. Xavière hated having to share Pierre with Françoise: "It was the whole of Pierre that Xavière coveted, and since she could not have him without sharing him, she renounced him with an infuriated bitterness which enveloped Françoise together with him".⁸¹ Xavière took comfort in the arms of another man who she did not have to share because, she says, "It's restful to have someone entirely to yourself".⁸²

⁷⁸ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 118.

⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 208.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 343.

This example demonstrates that it is not only men who want to dominate and possess. Pierre's and Françoise's mad desire to possess Xavière raises questions about who really holds the advantage in the *ménage-à-trois*. This is a prime example of Hegel's master-slave dialectic where the slave ends up with the power to define the master, which Sartre came to discuss in *BN*. Xavière was initially perceived as a child in a subservient position, but she influenced Pierre and Françoise to such a degree that Françoise sets out to murder her and Pierre became dependent on Xavière's submission to him for his self-assurance and sense of self-worth: "if [Xavière] loved me I'd be as sure of myself as I was before. I would feel that I'd compelled her approval".⁸³ Pierre reinforces that we need others to define ourselves, but concomitant with the ability to define is the power to define each other in a disagreeable manner. Thus, lovers want to control each other so that they can control that aspect of themselves. This is one of the reasons Françoise set out to murder Xavière, since Françoise did not like Xavière's gaze.⁸⁴

Beauvoir's problem with possessiveness in loving is that the other is treated as an object, as opposed to being accepted and respected as a free subject. Françoise initially treats Xavière as an object, especially when she talks about giving her to Pierre like a prized Barbie doll: "Pierre had already adopted Xavière to a far greater extent than Françoise had ever agreed to do; she was handing her over to him. Henceforth, Xavière belonged to Pierre".⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the problem with possessiveness is that it is bad faith because, according to Beauvoir, as for Sartre, humans are not objects that can be appropriated,⁸⁶ and also the game of possession encourages inauthenticity because of the strategies lovers use in order to try to charm, merge and justify their lives. Nevertheless, people do fool themselves into thinking if they possessed their lover, they would be able to control them. We shall now turn to this issue.

Devoting oneself to a lover

One of the key misconceptions held by many is that loving devotion is good, selfless, generous and virtuous. However, Beauvoir suggested that devotion is rarely any of these

⁸³ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁴ Many scholars have pointed out the philosophical similarities between Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay*. There is much speculation as to whether the ideas that appear in *BN* were originally Beauvoir's because *SCS* was written before *BN*. E.g. See Edward Fullbrook, "She Came to Stay and Being and Nothingness", *Hypatia* 14.4 (1999).

⁸⁵ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 112.

⁸⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Deutsch, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972) 319.

things because it demands something in return. Reminiscent of Nietzsche, she said a woman in love desires her love to be requited and thus devotion, which she equates with loving generosity, is dangerous because it often becomes demanding and tyrannical.⁸⁷ As already seen with Paula and Henri in *TM*, the woman who ‘generously’ becomes a slave to her lover actually wants to possess him: “Acceptance is thus a commitment that ties the lover up, without his even having the benefit of appearing to be the one who gives; the woman demands that he graciously welcome the loads she burdens him with. And her tyranny is insatiable”.⁸⁸

Superficially, devotion implies that one wants the best for the lover. Beauvoir casts a stormy shadow over this assumption. The problem is threefold. First, the devoted chooses the goal, not the devotee.⁸⁹ For example, in devoting herself to Henri, Paula made him her project for which she wanted to be the mastermind in, for example, controlling his career decisions. This is out of the question because it is the responsibility of all individuals to create themselves and define their own unique essence. No one else can do that for them. Paula’s existential problem is thus: Paula defined herself through Henri’s actions; but Paula could not control Henri’s actions; so when Henri acted in ways of which Paula did not approve, she was distraught because she did not like how he was defining himself and by association, herself. Her attempt to define his project for him undermined his sovereign right to define himself.

Second, devotion hopes to fill a void in the other and supposes that you can actually fill it. The problem with this assumption is that ‘nothingness’ is part of every being, so one cannot ‘complete’ another; and one cannot presume the beloved wants that void to be filled.⁹⁰ Third, devotion means adopting the same end as the lover. But how can anyone really know another’s end for sure? It is presumptuous and mistaken to assume one has such intimate knowledge of a lover. The lover may not even be aware of it because:

Every project extends across time; it envelops a plurality of elementary projects. We must know how to distinguish those that accord with the essential project, those that contradict it, and those that relate to it only in a contingent manner. The other’s will must be distinguished from his whims.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Beauvoir, “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, 118.

⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 696.

⁸⁹ Beauvoir, “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, 118.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

Thus, Beauvoir portrayed devotion as selfishness, possessiveness and domination in disguise. This should come as no surprise, however, considering loving includes love of loving. Maurice recalls to Monique in *The Woman Destroyed* (*WD*) that he was in love with both her and love.⁹² Furthermore, it is pleasing to give pleasure: “‘You’re wonderful,’ Maurice used to say to me...‘because giving others pleasure is in the first place a pleasure to you.’ I would laugh. ‘Yes, it’s a form of selfishness.’”⁹³ Elisabeth in *SCS* also hints at the selfishness of giving when she says that: “I wanted to give you more than you were prepared to accept. And, if one is sincere, to give is a way of insisting on some return”.⁹⁴

A generous love would be much more agreeable, yet it risks becoming a tyranny if the recipient does not want it, or one insists on something in return. Beauvoir is mysterious as to what constitutes a generous love without these issues.⁹⁵

Justifying oneself in a lover

One of the reasons women in love are so willing to devote themselves to their lover, according to Beauvoir, is to attempt to find their *raison d'être* in their lover by making him their project. Part of our being is nothingness and latching on like a leech to a lover who appears to be a sovereign subject might seem like an easy option, but it is naïve and futile because no one is perfect or complete. We are creative nothingnesses and are constantly changing until death.

For example, Blomart in *BO* points out the absurdity of Hélène’s attempt to justify her life through him: “How could I justify her existence, I who was here for no reason, with no justification, useless?”⁹⁶ The trouble with justifying one’s existence in another is that others have their own justifications – or not, as in Blomart’s case – making Hélène’s justification in him completely without foundation.

Similarly, in *TM* Paula used Henri as the justification of her life. As her one and only project, Paula sees herself as having created Henri and takes credit for his life. When Paula sees him straying from his original mission, she thinks it is her job to bring him back to the ‘right path’

⁹² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Fontana, 1984) 180.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁴ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 75.

⁹⁵ For example, Hélène Peters suggests that according to Beauvoir’s approach “authentic *generosity* seems desperately out of reach”. (Peters, *The Existential Woman*, 46.)

⁹⁶ Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, 154.

as she sees it. She fails to realise that Henri is the only one who can choose his mission. For Paula to dictate Henri's mission is tantamount to hijacking his freedom. And this is characteristic of inauthentic loving because it does not respect the other as a free subject.

One cannot depend on a lover to justify one's existence because another person cannot be claimed as one's own nor controlled. Beauvoir argued, "What is built up upon me, without me, is not mine. The rock that passively supports a house cannot claim that the house is its own".⁹⁷ In other words, one must neither thrust one's justification onto another, nor usurp another's project because people cannot be relieved of the responsibility of their own life, nor escape the associated risk and anguish.

Not diversifying

In an idea already encountered with Nietzsche,⁹⁸ Beauvoir argued that the differences in the way men and women love each other is a source of conflict and misunderstanding. While women in love make the relationship not just the most important thing in their whole lives, but often the *only* thing in their lives, men see it as only one element. "They want to integrate her into their existence, not submerge their entire existence in her".⁹⁹

For example, this is the case with Paula and Henri in *TM*. Henri's freedom, work and travel matters more than his waning love for Paula. Paula says she does not want to imprison Henri in her love, but it seems that way because he is always transcending, "always looking for new horizons, new nourishment".¹⁰⁰ Frustration and disappointment set in when Paula finally realises she is a burden to Henri and he leaves her.

Similarly, for Hélène in *BO*, love is a curse whereby lovers are so passionate about each other that they are the most important thing in each other's lives and cannot live without each other. She cannot comprehend that her lover's work is more important to him than she is and that he would not kill himself if she died.¹⁰¹ Hélène makes the same mistake with her next lover Blomart. She sees love as being each other's whole life and cannot agree with Blomart that love involves friendship, which accepts that the lover has other interests.¹⁰² Blomart insists,

⁹⁷ Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus and Cineas", 92.

⁹⁸ See p.131.

⁹⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 683.

¹⁰⁰ Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, 83.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 181-182.

“love is not the only thing”.¹⁰³ In a letter to the American novelist Nelson Algren, with whom Beauvoir had an intense romantic affair, Beauvoir indicates her desire for love to include friendship: “If I were proud of anything in my life, it would be of our love. I feel we have to tell to each other an many things as we can, so we are not only lovers, but the closest of friends at the same time”.¹⁰⁴

So we see that two individuals having the same understanding of what it means to love is imperative for a relationship to be successful. According to Beauvoir, the right way to love is the way men love. She is supporting the idea that love is about sharing individual lives, not making the other person all-consuming, for lives with nothing else are hollow. Yet what, might one ask, is the risk of loving the way Beauvoir said women do? Her concern is with being dependent on a single source of meaning in one’s life.¹⁰⁵ Beauvoir demonstrated repeatedly the devastation that doing so has on a woman when the relationship fails. For life is impermanent and everlasting love tends to be the exception not the rule. If the lovers make the relationship their only project in life, the entire meaning in their life or the only source of their happiness, then they are left empty handed when the relationship ceases. For example, in *WD*, when Monique’s husband leaves she feels her life is hollow, empty, pointless and void of meaning. Also, sisters Marcelle and Marguerite in *When Things of the Spirit Come First* (*WTS*) each in turn fall in love with the fickle and avaricious Denis and dream of being his saviour. When he leaves Marcelle, she despairs: “My life is finished”¹⁰⁶ and Marguerite does not know how she will live in a world without Denis at its centre.¹⁰⁷

Beauvoir’s legacy is to have a back-up strategy through diverse projects in case things go wrong. For a man is not a retirement plan. Beauvoir’s premise appears to rest on the assumption that the older a woman, the harder for her to support herself once a relationship ends. So, breaking-up often means poverty and thus a situation that affords fewer possibilities. While being left without meaning and justification in life is initially a shock, there is no reason why one cannot find a new justification. All of Beauvoir’s women survive and some even show hope of discovering themselves. For example, in *BO*, after breaking with Blomart, Hélène eagerly joins the Resistance. When Denis leaves Marguerite in *WTS* she discovers that

¹⁰³ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren* (New York: The New Press, 1998) 208.

¹⁰⁵ This idea contrasts with Kierkegaard’s idea of the virtues of willing one thing. See p.84.

¹⁰⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) 44.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 210.

“the world was shining like a new penny, and although I did not yet know what I wanted to do with it everything was possible, since there in the centre of things, in the place Denis had left empty, I had found myself”.¹⁰⁸ The women began bravely to think about what they wanted in life, rather than trying to please Denis at their own expense, if only fleetingly.

Beauvoir shows that a woman who loves inauthentically may have further to recover, but all is not lost. While her intention is to warn against throwing caution to the wind by delving passionately into a loving relationship, she is not completely convincing that such a strategy is existentially dangerous. Nevertheless, her message is prudent: it is risky and reckless to make a lover one’s primary project. The women in the above examples would have been better off had they had diverse and independent interests. The more committed to a single project one is, the harder it is to change when that project concludes. It is thus prudent to maintain and actively to follow multiple projects.

Believing in destiny

According to Beauvoir’s existential principles, to be human is to strive towards freely chosen ends, so it is wrong to believe that one has a ‘destiny’. Beauvoir claimed that one of the problems women face in romantic loving is that they have been culturally conditioned to want the traditional feminine destiny of being a wife and mother. A young girl’s upbringing, coupled with pressure to marry and have babies, glorifies and tempts women towards these roles. The Prince Charming fantasy of a man to love and be loved by, the romance of an expensive ring to value her worth, the glory of a wedding day dedicated entirely to the woman where she is the centre of attention, and the production of children to dote upon, are all ideas instilled in girls from a very early age. “For twenty years of waiting, dreaming, and hoping, the young girl has embraced the myth of the liberating hero and saviour”.¹⁰⁹ From an existential point of view, Beauvoir should dismiss this social conditioning as bad faith on the basis it is deterministic, but she did not. She said that a woman’s youth has “predisposed her” and a girl would have to be “brought up exactly like a boy” to overcome it.¹¹⁰

Beauvoir plummets even further down the slippery slide of determinism when she said men, because of their anatomy, do not experience nearly as much conflict with masculine destiny as do women with feminine destiny. She argued that such female biological functions as

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 212.

¹⁰⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 734.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 734-735.

childbirth and breastfeeding are crippling and are to blame for rendering women subordinate and dependent, while male anatomy provides them with a ready-made tool for transcendence: “the phallus is the fleshy incarnation of transcendence”,¹¹¹ and this means “man’s social and spiritual successes endow him with virile prestige. He is not divided”.¹¹²

Beauvoir’s aim is to dispute determinism – “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman”.¹¹³ Also, Beauvoir refused to accept “a fixed destiny” for women¹¹⁴ and argued, “anatomy and hormones never define anything but a situation”.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is a form of biological determinism to assert that transcendence is natural for men, but unnatural for women. Not only is determinism an example of existential bad faith, but her stance, that men’s transcendence is not a choice, undermines her existential argument that we are free to choose our passion. Rather, it is up to women to realise that while such factors as society and biology can influence thinking, authentic behaviour is not determined by it.

This section has outlined the traps that women usually fall into when loving or seeking love. There is one final point I would like to make with reference to her description of the problem of inauthentic loving: does Beauvoir know what men want? Her novels tend to polarise men into happy if they are in an open relationship (e.g., Pierre in *SCS* and Robert in *TM*) and miserable and trapped if they are not (e.g., Henri in *SCS*, Maurice in *WD*, Denis in *WTS*). Yet, this seems a bland portrayal of men. To assume that men only want slaves and are bored by monogamy is a generalisation that cannot be substantiated.

Moreover, Beauvoir argued that it is difficult for both partners to give up playing power games because men want to dominate women and women know this. As a consequence, women behave submissively because either they believe they are not as good as men, or they are afraid that appearing to be intelligent and independent is unattractive, hindering their chances of finding a lover. While a love slave is appealing to some men, it is far from being the rule and is an unreliable stratagem. The point that Beauvoir did not sufficiently explore is that men are individuals and are attracted to different types of women. Indeed, Beauvoir often portrayed men who have female lover-slaves as losing interest quickly, especially when they realise that they are not the dominant one in the relationship. Plenty of men want someone to enrich their life rather than just do their laundry. There are easier ways to find housekeepers.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹¹² Ibid., 723.

¹¹³ Ibid., 283.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 418.

Much of what Beauvoir said about women can be applied to men too. There is no reason why anxieties about loving relationships apply only to women. It is equally possible for a man to be anxious about the security of a relationship, or living up to the masculine ideal, or how he should present himself to a female suitor, or how to idolise and be subservient to his lover. It could equally be said that masculinity is imposed from the outside and defined by customs and fashion and those men who do not conform, for example, those who do not behave aggressively, show vulnerability, or go out to work every day, can be cast as lazy or weak. It would have been a more rounded analysis, had Beauvoir focused on anxiety and the psychodynamics of relationships between the sexes, rather than concentrate on only the female sex.

Nevertheless, Beauvoir's key message still stands: that women should stop trying so hard to please their lovers at the expense of pursuing a rich and diversified life. For Beauvoir, more often than not, the goal of love is to find the justification of one's existence and self-worth. This strategy is fraught with danger because the other may not have her or his existence justified. The desperate attempt to merge with and justify one's life in the lover is why lovers tend to forget all else and play games of idolisation, devotion, submission, domination and possession. These are all examples of bad faith and are characteristic of inauthentic loving. Now that we have canvassed the problems Beauvoir saw in romantic loving relationships, we shall turn to her solution: to reconcile romantic loving and authenticity.

Beauvoir's solution: loving authentically

In *SS*, Beauvoir wrote: "Authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other: neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world".¹¹⁶ I will analyse this proposition in terms of four key components as follows.

Reciprocal recognition of two freedoms

Beauvoir believed that in a trusting romantic loving relationship, authenticity is achievable if the lovers believe and recognise each other as free and equal and act that way. This means

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 706.

both partners are economically independent sovereign subjects. On both sides, it requires modesty, generosity, trust, appreciation and respect of each other as autonomous individuals to lift the lovers above power games. Beauvoir said, “I’m certain, in fact, that this idea of domination is one of the features of the masculine universe that must be totally destroyed, that we must look for reciprocity, collaboration, etc”.¹¹⁷

In *WSD*, Beauvoir demonstrated this point through a relationship that loses reciprocal recognition. Louis, the alderman of Vaucelles, and his wise wife Catherine initially consider themselves a partnership of equals because they discuss important decisions in their lives and come to an agreement together. When Catherine realises Louis has cast her as a ‘useless mouth’ and sentenced her to certain death, he introduces a power relationship. Reminiscent of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, Louis asserts himself as the master and relegates Catherine to the status of a slave.

Louis (*in a low voice*): Catherine, my wife.

Catherine: No, not your wife – an instrument that you may break and throw away when you have no more use for it...you have disposed of me as one disposes of a stone; and behold! you are nothing but a blind force crushing me to death.¹¹⁸

Catherine takes her dagger and tries to stab Louis. Some suggest it was to preserve their unity through death;¹¹⁹ others propose it was to “end his usurpation of moral responsibility and selfhood from others;”¹²⁰ or perhaps it was because she felt betrayed, angry and vengeful. What is obvious is that in her attempt to murder Louis, Catherine refuses to be an object or a victim and asserts her independence. Authentic loving is, for Beauvoir, impossible when there is oppression and Catherine’s attempt to murder Louis illustrates her defiance and establishes her as authentic. Since Louis – somewhat surprisingly – understands the attempted murder to be evidence that she loves him, it also implies that the relationship is both authentic and loving.

Turning to women’s situation seven hundred years after Catherine, the question of what a woman is to do with her future has become complicated by her newly recognised

¹¹⁷ Brison, “Beauvoir and feminism: interview and reflections”, 190-191.

¹¹⁸ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, 53.

¹¹⁹ E.g. Virginia M. Fichera, “Simone de Beauvoir and 'The Woman Question': Les Bouches inutiles”, *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 55.

¹²⁰ E.g. Liz Stanley, “A Philosopher Manqué? Simone de Beauvoir, Moral Value and ‘The Useless Mouths’”, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 8.2 (2001): 213.

psychosocial freedom. Should she choose a career or marry and procreate? Beauvoir noted that “a liaison or marriage is far less easily reconciled with a career for her than for the man”.¹²¹

Although women have always been ontologically free, there are now fewer obstacles than ever to women choosing their passion. Although growing and delivering a baby is still a female act, it is about the only thing, apart from breastfeeding, related to children that is. With access to birth control and abortions, Caesarean deliveries to avoid difficulties, proliferation of mobile communication, widespread availability of baby milk formula, government-subsidised childcare, paid parental leave and the possibility of a male being the primary carer, a woman need have little time away from work. These changes in the structure of Western society have made it easier for women to choose family and career; they are no longer mutually exclusive.

Women seem to have discovered that with higher education and economic independence, it is relatively easy to refuse to give up their transcendence for the sake of support. Women are no longer ‘doomed’ to immanence because they have established their psychosocial freedom to pursue economic independence, are transcending *en masse* and are no longer required to marry and procreate in order to survive as members of a social community and be successful in life.

However, even though more women are working, they are still doing a large share of housework and child rearing.¹²² This suggests that Beauvoir was right when she said that women are reluctant to give up the housework and child-rearing because, “She does not want her husband to be deprived of the advantages he would have had in marrying a ‘real woman.’”¹²³ Nevertheless, it is somewhat simplistic to suggest that men choose wives for their housekeeping skills, or that women do housework because they think housekeeping makes for a real woman. Other possible reasons as to why women choose to do such tasks include wanting to control what, how, and how well they are done.

¹²¹ Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 733.

¹²² Rebecca Cassells, Riyana Miranti, Binod Nepal and Robert Tanton, She works hard for the money: Australian women and the gender divide (AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report, 2009), 2.

¹²³ Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 734.

The obvious advantage of men outsourcing immanent activities¹²⁴ is that they have more time for transcending activities,¹²⁵ such as creative endeavours. Indeed, Beauvoir said historically this is why women have placed so much importance on love: since their time was spent finding and keeping a husband and having children, these enterprises became highly significant to their lives. The risk for lovers these days, however, is resentment and potentially destructive conflict stemming from unequal effort put into the maintenance activities of life. Maintenance activities in life are boring, but have to be done. Beauvoir's aim is for lovers to be, and treat each other as, equal. Nevertheless, equality can negate freedom since individual freedom also means freedom to treat others unequally and to exploit them. Moreover, if one cannot pursue one's projects because there are restrictions in place ensuring equality, then authenticity is also compromised.

There will be times when lovers are dominant and submissive for the purposes of efficiency and getting things done, for example, cooking a meal or doing the washing, and such tasks which do not necessarily constitute a master-slave dynamic. Even so, some women, such as Paula in *TM*, do give up their career in order to support their partner. Yet, this is existentially immoral because voluntary servitude annihilates choice.¹²⁶ Indeed, choosing not to choose, choosing to hand one's future over to another, and choosing to avoid responsibility for one's life are all examples of bad faith.

Beauvoir did not seem to appreciate just how free women can be from the burdens of child-rearing; nor did she consider a man as the primary caregiver for a child. She did, however, emphasise that the benefit of ending women's oppression is not only the social argument of contributing towards a stronger workforce, but also the existential argument that women will become sovereign subjects and, as a side-effect, relationships will be enriched. With respect to the relationship between a mother and child, Beauvoir said, "it is the woman who has the richest personal life who will give the most to her child and who will ask for the least".¹²⁷ Arguably, this benefit could also apply to a lover because partners are not completely dependent on each other (relieving the *need* for one another) and both are more interesting people.

¹²⁴ See p.203.

¹²⁵ Andrea Veltman, "The Sisyphean Torture of Housework: Simone de Beauvoir and Inequitable Divisions of Domestic Work in Marriage", *Hypatia* 19.3 (2004): 126.

¹²⁶ Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Romantic Love, Altruism, and Self-Respect: An Analysis of Simone De Beauvoir", *Hypatia* 1.1 (1986): 139.

¹²⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 568.

Experience of oneself as self and other

A second element in Beauvoir's formulation of authentic love is that both in the relationship experience themselves as self and other. "While she posits herself for herself, she will nonetheless continue to exist for him *as well*: recognizing each other as subject, each will remain an *other* for the other".¹²⁸ Beauvoir's language is confusing, given that elsewhere in *SS* she condemns women who assume themselves as both self and other because in being both passive and active they "play both sides".¹²⁹ Despite this obvious contradiction, what she apparently wants is to discourage women from adopting the position of 'other' in the traditional sense of acting like a weak secondary being and instead realise the strength that can be derived from otherness.

In *SCS*, Beauvoir explored this point. In practice, it means lovers are not only sensual and affectionate, but more importantly, friends.¹³⁰ Authentic loving requires friendship, which requires recognising and respecting the lover as a subject, considering others and renouncing "individual self-importance".¹³¹ This is the problem with selfishness: Beauvoir suggested it is inconsistent with friendship because it treats the other as an object to be possessed or dominated. Love can exist without friendship, but, Françoise says, "It makes you feel that you are simply an object of love, and not being loved for yourself alone" and dismisses it as "wretched".¹³² Nevertheless, Beauvoir did not elaborate on the other aspects of the effect of friendship: does the relationship then involve less commitment, passion, intimacy, emotional attachment or continuity, as friendship implies? Moreover, she did not seem to consider that friends can also attempt to possess and dominate each other.

In addition to friendship, the key to rising above the 'hell' of each other, according to Beauvoir, is tender lovemaking because in this activity, lovers experience a connectedness or what she referred to as an "intersubjective experience", where the lovers go beyond themselves.¹³³ Sharing Sartre's idea that sexual love is a strategy to incarnate the other's consciousness through the flesh, Beauvoir agreed that it is doomed because the other's subjectivity can never be understood. However, she stands apart from Sartre on two points. First, sexual love need not be hostile if based on friendship, mutuality, equality, tenderness,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 766.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 755.

¹³⁰ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 367, 373.

¹³¹ Ibid., 302-303.

¹³² Ibid., 237.

¹³³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 467.

togetherness and affection.¹³⁴ Second, unlike Sartre, Beauvoir separates consciousness into thinking and feeling (which is not an existential way of thinking). In the state of emotional intoxication of sexual loving, Beauvoir argued in *Must We Burn Sade?* (*MBS*) that lovers forget themselves, are liberated from their own presence, and their awareness of each other's reality is heightened. Lovers simultaneously experience themselves as "subjectivity and passivity".¹³⁵ The boundaries of the two individuals are dissolved and they become as if one merged consciousness, thereby achieving "immediate communication",¹³⁶ that is, a place of understanding. And in *SS*, she is more explicit: "the act of love finds its unity in its natural culmination: orgasm".¹³⁷

Pitying the Marquis de Sade, Beauvoir said emotional intoxication was out of reach because he was too "lucid" and "cerebral", never forgetting himself or losing himself "in his animal nature", never swooning or abandoning.¹³⁸ Thus, despite his passionate desires, he could never be truly satisfied and so was "autistic" or "cursed".¹³⁹ Sade was caught forever in a battle with the other because while he mastered sensuality, the other elements of authentic loving – friendship and affection – were seriously lacking.

Let us note here that in the state of emotional intoxication, Beauvoir throws out her rulebook about inauthentic loving: unity is possible and desirable, passivity is appropriate and abandoning oneself is necessary. It is unclear why these are acceptable in sexual loving and nowhere else. The difference, Beauvoir suggested unconvincingly, is that "she remains free in the submission to which she consents".¹⁴⁰

Beauvoir suggested that this is possible because the elements of respect and sharing enable lovers to experience pleasure simultaneously and become aware that the source of their pleasure is in the other. Elevated above the battlefield, they surpass themselves instead of abdicating, generously giving their separate bodies and marvelling at the union: "two beings who together passionately negate and affirm their limits are fellow creatures and yet are different".¹⁴¹ Love will be a free exchange and bestowal whereby the partners give but do not

¹³⁴ Beauvoir, *Old Age*, 318-319.

¹³⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?", trans. Annette Michelson, *The Marquis de Sade* (New York: Grove Press, 1953) 32.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 383.

¹³⁸ Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?", 32.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 415.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 413, 415.

lose themselves.¹⁴² One would not be blamed for being confused that here, Beauvoir said lovers must not lose themselves; and yet, as discussed above, intoxication is essential and her evaluation of Sade's problem was his inability to lose himself. However, just as one cannot know what the other thinks, there is no reason why one should assume that it is possible to tell what another person is feeling.

Neither would abdicate transcendence nor mutilate themselves

For Beauvoir, transcending is the most important activity in living existentially. This is why voluntary subordination and renouncing transcendence is tantamount to self-mutilation. Traditionally, men live transcendently because: "Since he is the producer, it is he who goes beyond family interest to the interest of society and who opens up a future to her by cooperating in the construction of the collective future".¹⁴³ According to Beauvoir, transcendence will be equally available to women with access to productive labour, gainful employment and control of reproduction.

Beauvoir said that even she fell into the trap about which she wrote: "Ever since Sartre and I had met, I had shoved off the responsibility for justifying my existence onto him".¹⁴⁴ She decided to establish her autonomy by writing, for which she alone would bear the consequences. Hence, she created her first novel: *She Came to Stay*. The protagonist, Françoise, finds a similar need to break her dependence on her lover Pierre and does so through setting out to murder Xavière, the third wheel in their *ménage-à-trois*. Beauvoir said that through this story, she was also resolving "irritation and resentment" that she had towards her student and lover Olga Kosakiewicz, on whom she based the character Xavière and to whom she dedicated the novel.¹⁴⁵ Murder on metaphysical grounds was, however, an unnecessarily extreme manoeuvre to establish Françoise's independence and one Beauvoir later said was a mistake.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, murder is not a satisfactory way of dealing with a troublesome other.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Ibid., 373.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 443.

¹⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 252.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 270-271.

¹⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 283.

¹⁴⁷ As Hazel Barnes rightly pointed out, an existential Françoise should have accepted the consequences of her actions and resolved to change her being in the world because there could always be another Xavière (Hazel E. Barnes, *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961) 136.)

While Beauvoir argued that many men are reluctant to support this social change because they are afraid of having to play the slave themselves, she gives numerous reasons why women's transcendence is of benefit to everyone. First, partners will be able to understand each other better.¹⁴⁸ Second, presumably because loving is between two more interesting individuals, love will become a source and enrichment of life.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, a man will have the opportunity to tackle "problems other than his own".¹⁵⁰ While sometimes this might be interesting, it is debatable whether it is always an advantage. Third, men are more liberated because they do not have a dependant. Some men derive advantages from having a dependant partner, such as a sense of self-worth and security, because he feels superior and trusts that she will not leave him because he is providing for her. Men may find autonomous women draining and prefer an adoring slave. Or they fear that if women refuse servitude, they may have to be a slave to the woman.¹⁵¹ More women are working in the twenty-first century than in Beauvoir's era, and assist in providing for the family, thereby relieving men of the full responsibility of being the chief breadwinner. There is also increased security for each person's independence in the occupation of the other. Yet, arguably, the most profound benefit of all is that the understanding one gains through the gaze of an independent other is much deeper than that of a slave. As Nietzsche and Sartre also pointed out, one learns nothing through a passive and tolerant reflection.

Together they would both reveal values and ends in the world

It is not enough, however, for lovers to transcend themselves independently. Transcending *together* gives relationships strength. Otherwise, it is the difference between Mr/Mrs 'Right' and Mr/Mrs 'Right-Now'. A 'good right now'-type relationship without a future is without value and stuck in immanence: "The strength of a relation with somebody comes from the fact that you indicate yourselves together in the future (to use Heidegger's vocabulary)...The connecting link: transcendence, future, activity of consciousness, reveals itself as profoundly true in the sentimental domain".¹⁵² This appears to be part of the problem in Beauvoir's relationship with Nelson Algren: since Algren knew Beauvoir would always leave again, the "death [of her relationship with Algren] was implied in the life I've chosen [with Sartre]".¹⁵³ Beauvoir seems to suggest that Algren's view of the relationship was that its future was so

¹⁴⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 261.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 706, 708.

¹⁵⁰ Beauvoir, "It's about time woman put a new face on love": 77.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁵² Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, 183.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 459-460.

limited that it was reduced to being glad to see her, but detached to the point of being indifferent.¹⁵⁴

In Beauvoir's novels she suggested that adopting a common struggle or goal seals the lovers' bond and understanding. When Clarice asks Jean-Pierre in *WSD*, "How does one love 'on this earth'?" he replies, "Just by joining in a common fight".¹⁵⁵ It is up to each couple to agree what that will be.¹⁵⁶ It could include work, home, children, future or simply their attachment.¹⁵⁷ Beauvoir admits so many degrees of commonality that it could conceivably cover anything at all, as long as lovers can share or reconcile them.

Beauvoir's novels suggest that a humanitarian struggle is a preferred means of establishing a connection. For example, the problem with the relationship between Blomart and H       in *BO*, we are led to believe, is that they have nothing in common (not even the desire to be in a relationship: Blomart reluctantly gives in to H      's persistence).¹⁵⁸ Without Blomart, H       seeks meaning through the Resistance, and it is this comradeship, the two acting as allies and accomplices, that finally gives license to an authentic loving relationship. As H       prepares for a fatal mission, Blomart says: "Now, nothing will separate us, ever".¹⁵⁹

This dream of unity conflicts with Beauvoir's philosophy of independence. Philosophically, Beauvoir accepts individuals as separate and advises against unions whereby lovers become dependent. Yet, here she also subscribes to a kind of transcendental handfasting. Nevertheless, Beauvoir's formulation of this idea sounds in principle like a modification of Stirner's union whereby people come together to achieve more than they could alone. The difference is that Beauvoir's interpretation recommends two people working with a group towards a cause greater than themselves, otherwise life is meaningless. "Deprived of mass effort and ambition", she argued, "man would be no more on this earth than one animal among others, an insignificant accident".¹⁶⁰ Yet how can one presume to know what is in humankind or society's best interest? Her view presupposes an objectively defined 'good' and glosses over the fact that individuals can disagree on productive endeavours.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 460-461.

¹⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 26.

¹⁵⁷ Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus and Cineas", 98, Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 134.

¹⁵⁸ Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, 182.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 234-235.

¹⁶⁰ Beauvoir, "It's about time woman put a new face on love": 77.

Beauvoir seems to be proposing a modified Kierkegaardian leap from an aesthetic hedonistic mode of existence (immanent 'right-now' living) to an ethical one (Mr and Mrs Right's common struggle). However, she did away with Kierkegaard's focus on duty and marriage and instead emphasised the importance of commitment to a cause. Beauvoir dismissed the possibility of two lovers struggling together for their individual projects that happen to be mutually beneficial as selfish or egoistical, but there is no existential justification for doing so. For fighting together need not be for an objectively noble and heroic cause.

Key considerations

Despite Beauvoir's metaphysical utopia of authentic loving, there are problems with achieving it in practice. While some of the problems with Beauvoir's philosophy have already been addressed, the aim of this section is to indicate in more detail some of the more pertinent objections to her construction of a philosophy of loving.

Narrow view of power and domination

Although the greatest aspiration in authentic living for existentialists is freedom, Beauvoir's philosophy demands limited freedom to establish relationships. When Beauvoir suggested that violence is sometimes required to overcome those who are obstacles to freedom, she means that increasing freedom for some entails simultaneously limiting freedom for others. Here she slides towards a utilitarian view of the greatest good for the greatest number.¹⁶¹ Yet, this is not existential, especially for those individuals against whom violence is waged.

Beauvoir also assumed power struggles in relationships are necessarily pejorative and hostile. This ought not to be the case, for she said explicitly that to live and to become is to struggle, and freedom must constantly be fought for. This should be no different in loving relationships, but Beauvoir did not give credence to the idea that alterity in relationships can develop galvanising strength, creativity and energy.¹⁶² Furthermore, power is not just about dominating, but also cooperating, energising, implementing and acting effectively; and power

¹⁶¹ For example, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill argue for utilitarianism based on promoting maximising total happiness for those whose interests are at stake. See John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism", John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham: Utilitarianism and Other Essays, ed. Alan Ryan (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 282, 288, Jeremy Bentham, "An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation", The Making of Modern Law (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1907) 310.

¹⁶² Janet Farrell Smith, for example, suggests that possession involves preservation and protection (Smith, "Possessive Power": 103.)

does not have to be over people, but also among them.¹⁶³ There is no reason why Beauvoir should not support power in a manner similar to Nietzsche's 'star friends'. Beauvoir seems to be heading towards this idea when she advocates choosing a cause to work towards together, but she did not go this far.

Love can justify life

Notwithstanding Beauvoir's argument that lovers cannot be a justification for each other's life, for some people, the ideal of love can include this criterion. Love is such an invigorating activity that it does tend to take over the lovers' worlds and gives their lives meaning. Anne in *TM* expresses a theme Beauvoir repeats throughout her writing: "being loved isn't an end in itself, a *raison d'être*; it changes nothing, it leads nowhere".¹⁶⁴ The question one might ask is: for whom does it change nothing? Beauvoir's implicit assumption here is that it changes nothing for society because it produces nothing of commercial or objective value. Yet, if we consider the individual subjective existential experience, would any lover say it changed nothing? Not only the joy, but also the depth of emotion, passion, enthusiasm and experiences necessarily changes lovers' lives. At times, Beauvoir seems to want to play down the importance that loving has in making many people's lives worth living.

Beauvoir's philosophy appears at odds with her letters. Beauvoir told Sartre that he was her "sole reason for living",¹⁶⁵ that she needed him,¹⁶⁶ that her life was nothing without him,¹⁶⁷ "Nothing has any meaning except through you"¹⁶⁸ and without him, she would be "wretched",¹⁶⁹ "mutilated"¹⁷⁰ and "the world would crumble beneath my feet".¹⁷¹ In her philosophy, such an attitude is portrayed as unexistential, for it is invalid to use another person as one's reason for living. Perhaps she is warning women not to fall into her trap, but if her relationship with Sartre was so meaningful, then why should women not follow her lead? Also, if one is free to choose passion, why could that passion not be for a lover? A simple common bond of attachment is sufficient in Beauvoir's philosophy.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶⁴ Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, 670.

¹⁶⁵ Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, 354.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 348.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 350.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 286.

Returning to one of her definitions of transcendence, Beauvoir said it must go “beyond family interest to the interest of society”.¹⁷² Firstly, society is a collection of people, so if it is authentic to justify one’s existence in doing something for society, then it should also be authentic to do something for a particular individual for whom one happens to care, such as a lover. Secondly, her emphasis on society reflects her Marxist flirtation and reflects elements of Kierkegaard’s leap of faith into the ethical or religious sphere. Kierkegaard advocates loving everyone equally rather than one preferred individual. Similarly, Beauvoir advocates contributions towards humanity rather than devotion to an individual; and also advocates justifying oneself through others when she said one’s justification is only to be found in others,¹⁷³ but apparently not a preferred individual.

The issue of transparency

Another question that arises from Beauvoir’s philosophy, life and loves, is how to reconcile freedom and fidelity, “And if so, at what price?”¹⁷⁴ If freedom is paramount in an existential romantic loving relationship, then it could include freedom to engage in other relationships. It would be considered bad faith to say that one would not engage in other intimate relationships because one is married, that is, a choice ruled by a contract. Likewise, the virtue of fidelity is externally imposed and limits one’s freedom by not engaging in other loving relationships when one wishes. According to Beauvoir, “Often preached, rarely practised, complete fidelity is usually experienced by those who impose it on themselves as a mutilation; they console themselves for it by sublimations or by drink”.¹⁷⁵ Appealing to infidelity as a sin is also bad faith. Hence, freedom in relationships is essential to loving existentially. However, if the freedom means only sex, then even though it is still a manifestation of freedom, Beauvoir considered it to be a cheap and easy form of it. This is why Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s freedom included the opportunity to love others.¹⁷⁶ While the traditional view is that Sartre instigated the open relationship, it recently has been suggested that Beauvoir wanted freedom because Sartre could not satisfy her passionate desires.¹⁷⁷ According to Beauvoir, the physical side of her relationship with Sartre did not last long:

¹⁷² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 443.

¹⁷³ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

¹⁷⁴ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 133.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷⁷ Fullbrook and Fullbrook argue, “It was Beauvoir’s demand for sexual freedom that dictated the open terms of their relationship” (Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008) xiii.)

(I)t was rather deep friendship than love; love was not very successful. Chiefly because he does not care much for sexual life. He is a warm, lively man everywhere, but not in bed. I soon felt it, though I had no experience; and little by little it seemed useless, and even indecent, to go on being lovers.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Beauvoir suggested that her relationship with Sartre was still romantic many years later. In a letter to him, she said that “the novelty and romance and happiness of my life are with you, my little companion of 20 years”.¹⁷⁹ However, early on, when she realised her desires were stronger than Sartre’s, she embraced the freedom to fall in love with other people. Often Beauvoir pursued romantic relationships with female students who had crushes on her. She thought they were in love with her freedom and saw their own future in her.¹⁸⁰ Beauvoir would also introduce them to Sartre, knowing that he would try to seduce them. Sartre said “Nobody could love one of us without being gripped by a fierce jealousy – which would end by changing into an irresistible attraction – for the other one, even before meeting them, on the basis of mere accounts”.¹⁸¹ Such a relationship gave them freedom to experience the world rather than isolate themselves from it.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Beauvoir and Sartre identified jealousy as the biggest risk in a free relationship, since one is excluded from parts of the other’s life. This is why they agreed to transparency, in order to provide a secure basis of trust for their love. However, their pact of transparency could also be viewed as demanding and limiting their freedom to lie or protest.¹⁸² Beauvoir was not dogmatically tied to telling the truth and it would appear that Sartre did not accept transparency as a limitation despite the pact, since he admitted lying to her.¹⁸³ Indeed, Sartre has no philosophical justification for transparency: the other is a threat so there is no obligation to be honest.

Beauvoir suggested that lying to lovers is not only acceptable but also sometimes preferable. For example in *PL*, she said sincerity is not “a universal necessity or a universal panacea: I have frequently had occasion...to ponder its uses and abuses”.¹⁸⁴ Beauvoir realised some things are better left unsaid and it is absurd to agree to tell each other the whole truth because

¹⁷⁸ Beauvoir, *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, 208.

¹⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, 472.

¹⁸⁰ Rowley, *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 106.

¹⁸¹ Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War 1939-1940*, 274.

¹⁸² Suzanne Lilar, *Aspects of Love in western society*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965) 207.

¹⁸³ See p.188.

¹⁸⁴ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 25.

while noble in theory, transparency can be hurtful when used as a weapon. For example, Anne tells Nadine in *TM* that “you have to try to build relationships in which it would be inconceivable to lie”.¹⁸⁵ With reference to confessing infidelity, Beauvoir suggested that while the confessor aims for redemption, the effect is rather to “bludgeon someone with an indiscreet truth”, which “inflicts a double hurt upon his partner”.¹⁸⁶

The issue, Beauvoir illustrates, is not infidelity but rather telling the truth. If a certain type of relationship is agreed to up-front, or adapted to change as the couples change, then there should be no issue with an agreement regarding (in)fidelity as part of a relationship if lovers so choose. Nevertheless, there often are issues with fidelity, which will now be addressed: the complication of the third person and the fact that lovers often *want to* restrict their freedom.

The issue of the third person

Beauvoir and Sartre neglected the impact of their freedom on others. For example, in her memoirs, Beauvoir acknowledged that she and Sartre deliberately avoided the question and went so far as to call it a defect in their system.¹⁸⁷ The contingent or ‘non-essential’ lovers paid the price with lies, disappointment, hurt and unhappiness. After affairs with Beauvoir and Sartre, Bianca Bienenfeld had a nervous breakdown and Evelyne Rey killed herself at age 36. Beauvoir felt responsible and remorseful for Bianca’s suffering: “it’s our fault I think...we have harmed her”.¹⁸⁸

While Sartre was truthful with his lover ‘M.’ (Dolores Vanetti) from the beginning about his situation with Beauvoir, this did not prevent M. from being disappointed. The reason was, according to Beauvoir, women believe, “love triumphs over every obstacle...Love’s promises express the passion of a moment only; restrictions and reservations are no more binding; in every case, the truth of the present sweeps all pledges imperiously before it. It was natural that M. should think: Things will change”.¹⁸⁹ Beauvoir blames Sartre for underestimating the expectations involved in saying he loved her and blames M. for not telling Sartre that she did not believe or accept his limits.

¹⁸⁵ Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, 457.

¹⁸⁶ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 25-26.

¹⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 134.

¹⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, 389.

¹⁸⁹ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 136.

The question Beauvoir asked is significant: “But if he loved her, how could he bear not to see her for months at a time?”¹⁹⁰ Nelson Algren, Beauvoir’s greatest contingent lover, was probably wondering the same thing when he wrote: “Anybody who can experience love contingently has a mind that has recently snapped. How can love be *contingent*? Contingent upon *what*?”¹⁹¹ These examples highlight the contradiction between existentialism’s respect for the individual and how it can come at the expense of others, despite Beauvoir’s attempts to mitigate it.

Loving restricts freedom

The problem for existentialists, who revere freedom and any limitation on it, is that the phenomenon of loving tends to restrict freedom because the common approach is exclusivity and acting as a couple. However, as already mentioned, consenting to restricted freedom constitutes a moral fault in Beauvoir’s philosophy.

Not only was Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s pact of transparency a limitation, but so also was their pact to remain primary, necessary or essential to one another. Owing to this pact, Beauvoir chose to remain in Paris with Sartre, rather than move to Chicago for Algren or allow Jacques-Laurent Bost, another lover, a ‘primary’ position in her life. We have seen that Beauvoir scorns the idea of being necessary to a lover and Susan J. Brison argued correctly that the concept of an “essential” love is, in fact, bad faith because it is merely an illusion:

If, as Sartre had written, there was no such thing as love apart from the deeds of love, how could a so-called ‘essential love’ that supposedly became an ineradicable part of one’s self-definition be anything other than an illusory act of faith? Even in love...every individual remains radically free to choose new projects, new futures, and every relation constantly evolves, sometimes in unpredictable ways. So how is a love that is both ‘essential’ (necessary, permanent, and unchangeable) *and* authentic possible?¹⁹²

On the one hand, making a commitment to another person is a constraint if lovers take it seriously. Being a couple means that each considers the other in many actions. Lovers expect and demand consideration and one’s plans are modified in light of the other person. In *WD*,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Nelson Algren, “The Question of Simone de Beauvoir”, *Harper's Magazine* May 1965: 136.

¹⁹² Brison, “Beauvoir and feminism: interview and reflections”, 201.

André considers spending a couple of weeks apart from his wife because, “Life as a couple implies decisions. ‘When shall we eat? What would you like to have?’ Plans come into being. When one is alone, things happen without premeditation: it is restful, I got up late...”¹⁹³ André realises that the only way to restore his freedom is separation from his lover. Yet, André’s comments also highlight the fact that with a partner one has to be conscious of decisions and make commitments, whereas alone, it is easy to slip into immanence and not to reflect on everyday activities.

On the other hand, according to Beauvoir, being free from commitments does not make one free either. Jean-Pierre in *WSD* tries to uphold his freedom from everything including love, on the basis that “any vow is a prison”.¹⁹⁴ However, being free from commitments stifles his actions. The moral of the story is that one is responsible for action and inaction alike and only by engaging in the world can one create a meaningful life. Jean-Pierre’s life is meaningless until he learns Clarice has been classified as a ‘useless mouth’ and condemned to death. When he imagines that his life without her would be worse, he changes his tune and throws himself into life and commitments.

Jean-Pierre: ...I simply cannot bear to go on living if you die. I love you, Clarice.

Clarice: Yesterday you said that this word has no meaning.

Jean-Pierre: Was that yesterday? It seems so long ago.

Clarice (*bitterly*): It was yesterday, and you did not love me.

Jean-Pierre: I did not have the courage to love you because I did not have the courage to live. The world seemed unclean to me, and I did not want to defile myself. What stupid arrogance!

Clarice (*with irony*): And does this world seem more pure today?

Jean-Pierre (*humbly*): We belong to this earth. Now I can see the truth. I imagined that I could stay away from everything, and I shrank from my duties as a man. I was a coward, and I have condemned you to die by remaining silent. I love you on this earth of ours. Love me, do!¹⁹⁵

The curious nature of loving, however, is that limitations are happily accepted. Fidelity can be an unintended side effect of loving, as Beauvoir and Algren discovered. Beauvoir called him

¹⁹³ Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, 29.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

her “beloved precious husband”¹⁹⁶ and referred to herself as his loving wife for ever.¹⁹⁷ Beauvoir wrote:

[Y]ou have not to be faithful in the conventional way if you don’t feel like it. But for myself, I just know I could not sleep with any man now until I meet you again. I just could not bear to feel another man’s hands or lips when I long so bitterly for your beloved hands and kips [*sic*]. I’ll be faithful as a dutiful and conventional wife just because I could not help it – that is the way it is.¹⁹⁸

While Beauvoir insisted on Algren’s freedom, she playfully revealed that she would prefer otherwise: “I will interfere with your freedom: I’ll put an electric fence around Wabansia home; I’ll poison your skin and lips so that if you touch any woman, she’ll fall dead”.¹⁹⁹ This highlights the difference between theory and practice: in theory they were free to have other affairs but in practice neither wanted to.

These examples bring to light the conflict between freedom and love: in a relationship, lovers are constantly torn between self-government and compromise. Existentialists value freedom but as we see here, lovers are always attempting to rob the other of it.

Love requires devotion

Not only do lovers want to restrict their freedom, but also notwithstanding Beauvoir’s insistence that it is inauthentic to put one’s loving relationship as the most important priority in one’s life, lovers often want to and do. In contrast to her work that condemns devotion, and the giving of one’s whole life to another, Beauvoir knows that lovers expect it and not to do so is a risk. She wrote to Algren:

But do I deserve your love if I do not give you my life? ...Is it right to give something of oneself without being ready to give everything? May I love him and tell him I love him without intending to give my whole life if he asked for it? ...I could never give everything to you, and I just feel bad about it.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Beauvoir, *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, 194.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

True to her philosophy, Beauvoir made it clear that her work was more important than her love for Algren. It was not a question of what made her happy (happiness is not Beauvoir's goal in life), for if it were, she would have chosen Algren. She said, "I could not live just for happiness and love, I could not give up writing and working in the only place where my writing and work may have a meaning"²⁰¹ and she did not think that she would be successful in Chicago: "I just *cannot* do anything else".²⁰²

This example shows that it is not only women who want to place love as the top priority, as Beauvoir suggested in much of her work; the relationship seems to have been extremely important for Algren, who wanted to marry her and for her to live with him in Chicago. All the same, Algren was not willing to move to Paris to be with Beauvoir, which is perhaps unsurprising given her later admission that it was not only her work that held her back, but also her love for Sartre. She explained to Algren:

I could give up most things; but I should not be the Simone you like, if I could give up my life with Sartre. I should be a dirty creature, a treacherous and selfish woman...it is not by lack of love that I don't stay with you...Sartre needs me. In fact, he is very lonely, very tormented inside himself, very restless, and I am his only true friend...I could not desert him. I could leave him for more or less important periods, but not pledge my whole life to anyone else...it is not possible to love more than I love you, flesh and heart and soul.²⁰³

This is somewhat difficult to accept because Beauvoir seems to believe herself necessary to Sartre, which as we have seen is a characteristic of inauthentic loving. Beauvoir repeatedly said love is not everything and one must not give up anything for a lover, but she was devoted to Sartre. Algren found the situation too difficult to accept and ended the relationship after two years. While we might consider her explanation to be an excuse to break up with Algren, she did seem devastated when he falls out of love with her and she starts taking orthedrine to calm down.²⁰⁴ She would forever wear a ring he gave her early in the relationship. Beauvoir made a choice (Sartre over Algren) but painted a picture as if she had none. She decided to limit herself and her possibilities for the sake of her love for Sartre.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰² Ibid., 197.

²⁰³ Ibid., 202.

²⁰⁴ Beauvoir, Force of Circumstance, 137.

Although Beauvoir often paints men as the ones who want to make use of their freedom to have sex with women, the desire for fidelity is not exclusively female. Existentially, we are free to create our essence, so there is no a priori fidelity compulsion in men. In *TM*, Anne (based on Beauvoir) would not give up life back in France and Lewis Brogan (based on Algren),²⁰⁵ tells her, “[Y]ou can't love someone who isn't all yours the same way as someone who is”,²⁰⁶ and he stops loving her.

Similarly, while Françoise in *SCS* philosophically supported the pact of freedom that she and Pierre forged, she finds it difficult to do. She is constantly suppressing her fear and uneasiness, reassuring herself of their love and reminding herself to be strong: “[S]he had promised herself to love him for himself, and even in that condition of freedom of which he was now availing himself to escape from her; she would not stumble over the first obstacle”.²⁰⁷ Later in the novel, Françoise concedes “there was still too easy an optimism in such a resolve”.²⁰⁸

A pact of fidelity is reached, ironically, within the *ménage-à-trois* because Pierre says, “we’ve got to take advantage of it without bothering about anything else”.²⁰⁹ According to Beauvoir’s ethics, to limit one’s freedom voluntarily is not existential, but this example highlights the fact that lovers do often want to impose constraints, since romantic loving relationships require time, energy and attention.

Even though Beauvoir’s life was freely chosen, her murder of Xavière in *SCS* suggests she did have difficulty with freedom within relationships. Nevertheless, if lovers do away with those expectations, shaking free from familial, societal and cultural customs and mythologies then the relationship can be built upon a platform of *tabula rasa* on which the couple can decide their own goals. Beauvoir suggested that “the privileged role of love does not depend on this or that superficial structure of society”.²¹⁰ This is what Sartre and Beauvoir did: they went against social norms and created a new relationship based on what was important to them, embracing freedom to the greatest possible extent.

²⁰⁵ Beauvoir said *The Mandarins* was based “very approximately” on her affair with Nelson Algren (ibid., 134.), and there were many similarities between Anne and herself: “I lent her tastes, feelings, reactions and memories that were mine; often I speak through her mouth”. However, there were also many differences between Anne and Beauvoir and many of Anne’s other, more positive, qualities were described through Henri (ibid., 280.)

²⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, 589.

²⁰⁷ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 207.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 279.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 230.

²¹⁰ Beauvoir, “It’s about time woman put a new face on love”: 76.

Devotion and transcendence are not mutually exclusive

Beauvoir saw devotion and transcendence as incompatible, so dismissed devotion entirely. Yet, there is no reason why both cannot be integrated into an authentic existence. There is no existential rule to suggest that devotion has to be absolute and focused only on one thing.²¹¹ One can still be devoted to one's lover and have other interests. Most people do balance devotion and transcendence, including Beauvoir and Sartre. Being a lover, wife or mother can be all-consuming, but to be prudent, it can only be a temporary *raison d'être* or one of many.

Devotion is consistent with existentialism in the context of dedicating oneself passionately to a freely chosen project. Therefore, Beauvoir's objection should not be with devotion itself but rather with devotion to a single project that limits one's possibilities to be engaged in others, which is consistent with her earlier warning not to invest oneself entirely in a lover. However, Beauvoir made a sensible point about what happens if the relationship breaks down, or when children grow up: lovers need other interests. Lovers who have nothing outside their relationship sink together into the quicksand like Tristan and Isolde. Having other interests is not just a safety net, but also enhances one's being, enriches life and makes for a more interesting person. So if what Beauvoir meant about going beyond the family means to engage in a broader world than one's own sheltered little nest, then that is certainly sage advice.

A problem of value

Another problem is the underlying values that support Beauvoir's ideal of authentic loving relationships. Beauvoir proposed that authentic love is only achievable if men and women are equal, and yet there are issues with achieving the required conditions for authentic loving to flourish. For example, Beauvoir forfeits the idea that women's situation can only be changed "if there is a collective change",²¹² and as already pointed out, "the individual is not free to shape the idea of femininity at will".²¹³ Moreover, she also suggested that there is nothing individual women can do to change things and those who do try are ridiculous and pathetic, implying that any attempts at transcendence are futile.²¹⁴ Such statements are defeatist because existentialism proposes that values do not exist inherently in the world; they are

²¹¹ See p.39.

²¹² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 761.

²¹³ Ibid., 724.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 664.

chosen and created by humans and they do not have biological roots. While there are still structural impediments and habitual thinking regarding expectations and women's subordination, making it what some refer to as 'a man's world,' existentially, it is up to each individual to challenge those obstacles as they arise and make changes. Beauvoir thought it would take more than a few individuals to do this because many women do not believe themselves equal, actively perpetuating their submissive roles. But how can women think themselves equal when Beauvoir herself has no confidence in women's ability to assert themselves, to transcend or change their situation? She implies women that will have to wait quietly for socialism, or for men to change things for them. Existentially, this view is debilitating and flawed if individuals define themselves through their projects.

Furthermore, Beauvoir suggested that for women to be in a position to love authentically, they need to adopt masculine values: "[T]he 'modern' woman accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, acting, working, and creating on the same basis as males".²¹⁵ However, she did not seem to acknowledge the ways in which women do gain power. Beauvoir said women "don't generally have power".²¹⁶ Yet, women's alternative engagements with the world are not necessarily inferior to men's. On the one hand, Beauvoir commends women for lacking negative male qualities such as self-importance, fatuousness, complacency and emulation and for being more truthful, ironic, detached, simple, caring and giving than men.²¹⁷ But in her philosophy, she did tend to underemphasise the power of traditionally feminine values such as gentleness, kindness, devotion, trust, patience, creating and nurturing life, as well as manipulation and deception. Nietzsche thought these latter two qualities were particularly powerful feminine weapons. Instead, Beauvoir portrayed such women as either pathetic or 'disquieting vamps'.²¹⁸

It is up to individuals to create their own values, irrespective of sex, gender, historical attributions or utility in order to live authentically. Thus, it is up to women to create new values, embracing transcendence and femininity, free from the objectifying gaze of men. Living by self-chosen values will be more difficult for some than others, but it is open to every human in potentially every endeavour.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 755.

²¹⁶ Brison, "Beauvoir and feminism: interview and reflections", 191.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 207, Beauvoir, "It's about time woman put a new face on love": 76.

‘Money can’t buy me love’

Further to this issue of masculine and feminine values, Beauvoir argued that economic independence is a requirement for authentic loving. Beauvoir assumed money increases freedom and this is why women need to be economically independent. This stems from her inclusion of situation as a factor that restricts freedom. There are a number of issues with this, however.

First, in *SS*, Beauvoir suggested transcendence comes hand-in-hand with economic independence: “(W)ork alone can guarantee her concrete freedom”.²¹⁹ She neglects the fact that it is a necessary but insufficient condition. Neither work nor economic independence entails freedom. This is a point that Beauvoir portrayed in the characters of Anne and Françoise who were economically independent and yet dependent on their lovers for their sense of self-worth.

Second, Beauvoir is absolutist about being either economically independent or doomed to immanence. She considered only paid work to provide the means for self-development and transcendence. Thus, she considers housework and childcare unexistential and ignores husbands’ historical parasitical dependence on wives’ labour.²²⁰ Transcendence can be found in any activity and is not only a result of working and making money. The transcending moment is found when one surpasses, overcomes, or reaches beyond oneself and one’s given situation. It is the active choice not to be determined by one’s role or facticity. Paid work can be just as repetitive, boring, and defined by one’s roles as housework. There are few occupations where huge amounts of creativity are possible. Even creative jobs have elements of repetition. Housework and childcare can be just as creative as some jobs in finding new, more efficient or more fulfilling ways of doing things. Beauvoir acknowledged that more transcendence can be found in housekeeping than in some paid jobs, but it contradicts her dominant view.

Third, pursuing economic independence is not necessarily an authentic activity. It is not an easy task to find a job that nourishes one’s passion and returns enough money to establish independence. Those who are able to find jobs they truly love are the rare and lucky few. Many people work in order to survive and to buy time to do more fulfilling things. It is conceivable that someone is very poor, but is being more authentic by doing an activity that

²¹⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 721.

²²⁰ Veltman, “The Sisyphean Torture of Housework: Simone de Beauvoir and Inequitable Divisions of Domestic Work in Marriage”: 126.

makes little or no money, than a person who is making a lot of money but is working at a job that is neither creative nor inspiring. For example, a struggling artist or writer might represent the epitome of freedom, transcending and projecting into the future courageously, adventurously and committedly. Yet by Beauvoir's criteria, if no one buys the artist's creations, then financial dependence on a lover also means disqualification from an authentic loving relationship. Such people may not have financial security, but they are conceivably much 'freer' than 'organisation' men and women who earn more money but engage in joyless striving.

These examples show that Beauvoir has failed to prove that work alone guarantees freedom. Money provides the power to withdraw from a relationship of dependence with comfort and without poverty. However, for Beauvoir to advocate a safety net to avoid poverty is pragmatic and not an existential description of authentic loving.

Leaping does not relieve anxiety

There is one final issue with loving authentically and inauthentically alike, which Beauvoir acknowledged: loving requires a leap. Beauvoir portrayed love as an elusive concept, manifested and revealed through loving actions (in the past or present), but sustained by faith that loving will continue into the future. Faith in love is supposed to provide the lovers with a sense of security but, in fact, it is false, flimsy and hollow. For example, Pierre tells Françoise in *SCS*: "“I love you. You ought to know that, but if it pleases you not to believe it, I have no way to prove it to you.” ‘Faith, always faith,’ said Françoise”.²²¹

Actions present only the façade of love. One never knows what lies beneath and beyond the actions, that is, the reasons for the actions and whether the actions will persist into the future. Faith is what sustains Paula in wrongly believing she and Henri still have a loving relationship in *TM*. In *SCS*, Françoise mourns how magnificent loving relationships can appear superficially, but consist of nothing tangible. Feelings are, she says,

‘like the whited sepulchres of the Bible: they dazzle outwardly. They’re firm, they’re faithful, they can even be whitewashed periodically with beautiful words...Only, they must never be opened. You’ll find only dust and ashes inside.’ She repeated: ‘Dust

²²¹ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 158-159.

and ashes'. It was blinding evidence. 'Oh,' she said, hiding her face in the crook of her arm.²²²

Beauvoir also exposes the inadequacy of love orchestrated this way in *BO*. Blomart does not love Hélène but reluctantly agrees to a loving relationship with her. He behaves lovingly by telling her he loves her, gives up his other mistress and proposes marriage. He wants to see her happy, he is very fond of her, he likes her body, he finds her charming, he feels tenderness and esteem for her and her presence affects him. Yet, none of these things equates to love. Simply choosing to love is insufficient for Blomart.

Finding evidence of loving in actions says nothing about the future and for Beauvoir loving is projecting together into the future. Anything beyond the moment, beyond concrete actions, requires faith. "And is faith courage or laziness?" asks Françoise.²²³ Furthermore, love requires repeated leaps of faith and constant reaffirmations. Françoise concedes: "Once and for all time she had performed an act of faith, and she was now resting calmly on out-dated proof. She would have had to re-examine everything from the beginning; but that required a superhuman strength".²²⁴

Notwithstanding the depressing realisation that all we might find below the surface is dust and ashes, Beauvoir urges us to embrace it, because there is no certainty in anything in life. Everything is ambiguous and we must act and choose regardless. In *An Eye for an Eye*, Beauvoir urges, "love and action always imply a failure, but this failure must not keep us from loving and acting. For we have not only to establish what our situation is, we have to choose it in the very heart of its ambiguity".²²⁵ Anguish and risk are conditions of life, and we cannot let it stifle us into inaction, because inaction is still a choice and we are responsible for all the choices we make. While we can never be sure of the consequences of our actions and the associated risk and anguish, Jean-Pierre in *WSD* asks rhetorically: "But why should we wish for anything else?"²²⁶

Beauvoir works in the space of ambiguity by exploring the contradictions of existence, that is, free vs. limited, separate vs. united, rational vs. intoxicated and for vs. against submission.

²²² Ibid., 159.

²²³ Ibid., 163.

²²⁴ Ibid., 123-124.

²²⁵ Beauvoir, "An Eye for an Eye", 258-259.

²²⁶ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, 64.

However, Beauvoir retreats too far and made too many concessions for her to be strictly existential in her venerated goal of freedom to remain solidly intact.

Beauvoir emphasised that romantic loving is so important that it tends to become a major part of our lives, but if the individuals have no other interests, there is a risk of inauthentic loving due to the power struggles that emanate from dependence. She gives us no definite formula as to how to balance one's love interest within her recommended diversified portfolio of life. However, she highlighted the fact that love is a high-risk game and what is really important is that lovers be authentic through their personal projects, and also respect and support each other in their individual quests, even if it means lovers are not always each other's top priority. Being supportive in this sense need not be submission, but rather together tackling the world and opening up possibilities for each other. She acknowledged that it is not easy and it is up to each couple to work it out together.

This chapter focused on the ways in which Beauvoir attempted to create a framework for authentic loving that Sartre failed to do. She accepted that others modify one's choices through infusing the world with opportunities and meanings. Beauvoir highlighted many of the difficulties in traditional ideas of romantic loving: primarily that they tend to be incompatible with authentic living. Like Nietzsche, she pointed out that historically women have not been authentic because they have tolerated oppression and compromised their freedom for the sake of romantic relationships and an easier life. Like Sartre, she pointed out that lovers want to form a 'we' to become a whole, but this is undesirable existentially because it fosters dependency. Also like Sartre and Nietzsche, she said love is the desire to possess the other, but that it is also bad faith, not only because it is impossible, but because it is inauthentic to usurp another's transcendence. For Beauvoir, friendship is a much better basis for a relationship than a relationship built on merging with the beloved, because it respects the other as a free subject and accepts that the other has independent projects. It recognises otherness, but does not treat the other as an object to be dominated or subordinated. Authentic romantic loving is possible if lovers recognise each other as and act as free, equal and transcending subjects. Such relationships will be richer, more interesting and lovers will understand each other better and durability will be strengthened through pursuing common goals.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In this thesis, I have undertaken an existential quest to understand the meaning and nature of heterosexual romantic loving relationships. This final section seeks to assess whether the remaining research questions, as outlined in the introduction,¹ can be answered satisfactorily. By exploring the problems existential philosophies pose for romantic loving and possible solutions, I shall identify the common themes and points of difference.

1. What were the existential philosopher's views of romantic loving?

The discussion has so far concentrated on the first research question: what were the existential philosopher's views of romantic loving? To summarise, Max Stirner considered romantic loving to be problematic due to associated obligations and façades of unselfishness. Instead, he recommends self-love, whereby one owns, accepts, and takes an egoistic interest in oneself. Not until one has freed oneself from the expectations of others can one create one's own enjoyable and interesting loving relationships.

Søren Kierkegaard suggested romantic loving was inherently disappointing due to its unstable nature, rendering it a fleeting and meaningless erotic encounter. He sought to establish loving relationships as more secure through such commitments as marriage and faith in God. Freeing oneself from erotic impulses and loving independently of the beloved was his solution to overcoming disappointment in relationships.

Friedrich Nietzsche proposed that the problems in romantic loving stem from outdated Christian values, inappropriate social conventions, and petty power dynamics. Freeing oneself from these chains enables one better to strive towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*. His advice on how to overcome these restrictions is wide and varied, but primarily he advocates raising awareness about one's power and means of self-mastery, celebrating the passions, and becoming great friends.

Jean-Paul Sartre argued that the allure of romantic loving is that it seems to be a means of becoming oneself, but is inherently disappointing and unsatisfying because the ideal is unattainable, leaving loving relationships to wallow in sado-masochistic dialectics. Sartre did

¹ See p.21.

not comprehensively articulate solutions, but suggestions for dealing with the frustrations – even if they cannot be resolved – include recognising that loving behaviour is a choice, realising that there is the possibility of accepting the other as they are, and treating the other as the most important person in one's life.

Simone de Beauvoir argued that problems in romantic loving stem from such degenerate behaviour as idolising, submitting to and dominating the beloved, attempting to merge with, possessing, devoting to, and justifying oneself in the beloved only, and accepting pre-established social roles and conventions. More harmonious relationships can be achieved, she argued, through reciprocal recognition of two freedoms. This requires being free from oppression and acceptance of fixed roles, and enables pursuit of authentic projects.

2. What are the common themes evident through this examination of romantic loving from an existential perspective?

The first common theme evident through this examination is that frustrations with romantic loving can arise from our understanding of the passionate nature of romantic loving, expectations about the durability of romantic relationships, and behaviour which aims at attempting to merge with a beloved. These difficulties will be summarised in the next section that addresses the third research question: do existential philosophies pose problems for the traditional understanding of romantic loving?

The second common theme is that of freedom, which must be understood in terms of freeing oneself *from* both external and self-imposed constraints in order to be free *to* act in accordance with one's choices and establish oneself as self-determining and self-creating. Stirner and Nietzsche understood that this is determined by whether one has the *power* to act as one chooses. These themes shall be summarised in the section below that addresses the fourth research question: do existential philosophies offer solutions to overcome problems in the traditional understanding of romantic loving?

3. Do existential philosophies pose problems for the traditional understanding of romantic loving?

Returning to the definition of romantic love in the introduction, the key elements include that it is passionate, personal, lasts indefinitely, a merging or uniting, shifts from 'I' to 'we', and

can include friendship and/or intimacy, and concern for the beloved's welfare.² The existential thinkers reveal that our understanding of these elements can harbour misplaced expectations and flawed ideals about the nature of, and behaviour associated with, romantic loving, which can contribute to dissatisfactions and frustrations with romantic relationships. The main problems that the five existential thinkers identify with these elements are summarised below.

The existential thinkers do not have a problem with the fact that romantic loving is based on sexual desire. However, they do have a problem with uncontrolled and impulsive behaviour. To lead a hedonistic life ruled by immediate gratification means that one is a slave to one's desires, or in other words, ruled by natural urges and drives. It is decadent, weak-willed, shallow, reactionary, animalistic and immature to indulge without restraint in one's primal instincts. While there are hedonistic elements to Stirner's philosophy, such as his focus on pleasure, he strongly opposes allowing oneself to be ruled by one's love, or any other passion, because it indicates that one is subordinating oneself to one's desires.³ Kierkegaard criticised Don Giovanni for being unreflective and a prisoner to his sexual urges.⁴ For Nietzsche, allowing oneself to be swept away with the frivolity of loving is delusional and deceptive, since one's judgment is blinded by beauty and sensuality.⁵ It is not only reflective of a weak will, but also problematic if it is the basis for important decisions like marriage and procreation, because mistakes are made.⁶ Beauvoir was particularly worried that lovers, subordinating themselves to the elation and euphoria of loving desires, risk losing themselves and sinking into immanence and egotistical solitude.⁷ Although Sartre was more resigned to such loving behaviour, he also argued that behaviour is a choice, even if it is pre-reflective.⁸

A further problem that the five existential thinkers pointed out is that if romantic loving is based on whimsical uncontrolled desires, then there is every likelihood that it will fade or wane. This makes romantic loving inherently insecure which goes some way to explaining why the ideal that romantic love should last forever is so elusive. The existential thinkers acknowledged that this is a major source of disappointment in relationships. Stirner focused his attack not on enduring loving relationships, but on the expectation that they *should*

² See p.12.

³ See p.50.

⁴ See p.83.

⁵ See p.129.

⁶ See p.139, 148.

⁷ See p.207.

⁸ See p.165.

endure.⁹ The issue for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche was that loving relationships based on sensuality and instant satisfaction are fickle and fleeting.¹⁰ While Kierkegaard thought that a lack of serious definitive choices makes romantic loving meaningless,¹¹ Nietzsche was more concerned that romantic lovers do make serious choices based on a delusional affectation that all too often tires with age and frequency of contact, and broken promises and wrong choices turn lovers into liars and hypocrites.¹² The issue for Sartre and Beauvoir alike was that the ideal of romantic love includes the idea that it will last a lifetime, and that lovers tend to establish each other as a primary source of meaning in their lives. However, it is risky founding one's being in something so unpredictable, and lovers are left void of meaning if the relationship ceases.¹³

The idea that romantic loving is for a particular individual is not problematic for Nietzsche, Sartre or Beauvoir. Kierkegaard's concern with the personal aspect of romantic loving was that the loving relationship is preferential, and this is problematic because it is dependent on the beloved to reciprocate and is thus insecure.¹⁴ By loving everyone through one's love of God, one's love becomes independent of the beloved. However, this also makes it impersonal and I have argued that impersonal love can no longer be considered romantic.¹⁵ Stirner also takes issue with loving that is dependent on the beloved, such as sensual loving, but this does not necessarily make it impersonal.¹⁶ Loving, for Stirner, is based on an appreciation of another individual's appealing qualities and this makes it personal.¹⁷ However, it is not dependent on the beloved because one enjoys oneself loving and can love romantically without reciprocation.

The ideal of romantic love as a merger between the lovers is also problematic existentially, if it involves slavishness, or possessiveness, or is understood as perfect harmony and oneness. First, either being a slave to the ideal of love, or to the beloved, is problematic because it involves annihilating oneself as a self-determining and self-creating sovereign subject. Nietzsche and Beauvoir suggest that it is the feminine ideal of love to relinquish and devote oneself to a male lover, but it is actually egoistic because it is a subtle strategy either to satisfy

⁹ See p.45.

¹⁰ See p.98, 139.

¹¹ See p.107.

¹² See p.129, 141, 139.

¹³ See p.172, 216.

¹⁴ See p.100.

¹⁵ See p.113.

¹⁶ See p.46.

¹⁷ See p.54.

their unbridled urges or to escape responsibility for an independent existence.¹⁸ Nietzsche and Sartre, in particular, emphasise the benefits to be had through appreciating distance, differences and otherness, such as different perspectives, ideas and challenges.¹⁹

Second, the desire to merge can also be problematic if it involves possessiveness. For Stirner and Nietzsche, romantic loving, like all relations, is possessive in nature.²⁰ However, they both suggest that possessiveness for the sake of such desires as greed, jealousy or avarice, is weak and reflective of one who is not master of oneself.²¹ Kierkegaard acknowledged that the desire to possess another was characteristic of romantic loving and a source of dissatisfaction because possession could never be satisfied; hence, he advocated marriage, which he suggested would overcome such power dynamics because it implies already having conquered one another.²² Beauvoir scorned the possessiveness that merging implies because it treats the other as an object and is disrespectful since it implies an attempt to hijack the beloved's freedom.²³ The attempt to possess the other's freedom is the ideal of romantic loving, according to Sartre, and is problematic because it seeks to destroy what one values in the other: their otherness.²⁴

Third, all five existential thinkers agreed that merging with another is impossible if it is understood sentimentally as fusing with one's other half, creating a single entity, and being one and the same person. Even though others are a condition of one's existence, this does not mean that one should subsume oneself into others, for that is to lose oneself. The existential view is that individuals are separate and opposed. Stirner abhorred the very idea of being tied to another. In his view, it restricts individuals and one would only be something *with* another.²⁵ Nietzsche agreed that lovers all too often hold each other back from greatness and thus keeping distance from lovers is important.²⁶ Although Sartre acknowledged that lovers do feel as if they have achieved the ideal, for example when he said that the tenderness of love caused him to be himself at the very depths of himself, philosophically, any respite is impermanent because there is no reliable means of establishing a connection with another:

¹⁸ See p.121, 132, 215.

¹⁹ See p.150, 171, 194.

²⁰ See p.54, 130.

²¹ See p.50, 131.

²² See p.97.

²³ See p.214.

²⁴ See p.171.

²⁵ See p.48, 65.

²⁶ See p.145.

since lovers cannot merge, they cannot fully trust or comprehend an other beyond doubt.²⁷ For Beauvoir, if the attempt to merge occurs in the context of a lover trying to control the beloved's actions, it neglects the fact that the other is a sovereign subject and authentically choices cannot be made on behalf of the beloved.²⁸ Alternatively, if it is a means of trying to define oneself through another's actions, this is not authentic because one can only be defined through one's own actions. Either way, it equates to the same concern with a loss of independence and is an invalid means of self-definition. Moreover, Beauvoir argued that the sense of oneness established or the concept of 'we' is misplaced because no two people can be exactly the same and will have differences in thinking.²⁹

This discussion on merging places us in a position to be able to answer the research question regarding the validity of the idea that romantic loving is about two 'I's' becoming a 'we'. The temptation to try to merge with another is strong. Nietzsche described such an attitude as a heartfelt longing,³⁰ Sartre as a wish to be united,³¹ and Beauvoir as the desire for ecstatic oneness.³² However, attempting to merge is an impossible ideal. It also involves slavishness and unproductive or futile possessive power struggles. Loving relationships promise complete disclosure between the couple because such 'closeness' with another allows for unparalleled intimacy and creates a sense of completion, or as Sartre called it, the (unrealisable) being-in-itself-for-itself.³³ Although lovers can feel as if they have merged into a harmonious entity, connections are unreliable and unstable. Nevertheless, even though 'we' is problematic, because we cannot merge and cannot definitively know the other, lovers can still come to understandings through pursuing common or complementary goals.

The next question that can be answered is as follows: if two people cannot merge, and blurring boundaries is an illusion, then how well can lovers know each other and how much can they know about themselves through each other? All five thinkers emphasise the importance of being with others, particularly lovers, in being human, in self-discovery and self-creation, regardless of whether the goal of a relationship is to know oneself. Relationships are a fundamental existential category: we are for-ourselves, but we exist in a world with others, and we define ourselves through relationships. Nevertheless, the five

²⁷ See p.166, 174.

²⁸ See p.217.

²⁹ See p.213.

³⁰ See p.150.

³¹ See p.171

³² See p.211

³³ See p.163.

existential thinkers bring to light the limitations with respect to defining ourselves with and through others. Lovers long for connections between them, but the bridges we build are unsteady.

For example, Stirner proposed that unique ones come to understandings through unions. The purpose of such unions is not to know oneself, but rather to enjoy oneself and extend one's power.³⁴ Kierkegaard thought that God was the only one who could really know an individual, but also that his beloved Regine inspired the discovery of meaning in his life.³⁵ He suggested a great relationship would create an intimate, mutual mirroring.³⁶ For Nietzsche, others are important for discovering and creating oneself through the challenges they provide.³⁷ He thought that enemies and friends are more rigorous in that area than lovers, but I argue that such an attitude is possible for lovers too.³⁸ While Sartre argued that lovers can know themselves better through intimacy with a beloved,³⁹ he also suggested this is unreliable because people can lie.⁴⁰ In his fictional works he, like Nietzsche, finds the intolerance and resistance that enemies provide of more value.⁴¹ Beauvoir thought that a connection between lovers could be achieved through great sex.⁴² However, the problem remains that even if lovers can establish an understanding, they cannot control what the other thinks, and this is what led towards the murder of Xavière in *She Came to Stay*.⁴³ Thus, the existential answer is that we cannot fully know another, nor can we control how another views us. Since we are the sum of our actions, that does give some indication as to the people we are, but it cannot predict the future, since we are creative nothings.

This leads to the research question regarding whether romantic loving can relieve existential anxiety by creating meaning in life. Sartre and Beauvoir argue that the allure of romantic loving as a merging is strong because if it were possible, it would overcome the anguish of existence by finding completeness in each other.⁴⁴ In finding a complementary being, lovers gain a sense of fullness and an end to anxiety about being alone. Lovers can relieve anxieties regarding self-worth, self-esteem and confidence because one is valued, accepted and desired

³⁴ See p.64.

³⁵ See p.100, 105.

³⁶ See p.99.

³⁷ See p.153.

³⁸ See p.154.

³⁹ See p.165.

⁴⁰ See p.169.

⁴¹ See p.194.

⁴² See p.226.

⁴³ See p.214.

⁴⁴ See p.165, 210.

by another. Romantic relationships provide a sense of security, certainty, protection, safety and comfort in an unpredictable, ever-changing and unstable world. For example, Kierkegaard suggested that secure relationships give life continuity;⁴⁵ Nietzsche proposed that romantic loving is like a medicine that can relieve the pain of life;⁴⁶ for Sartre, love's joy is the feeling that one's life is justified;⁴⁷ and similarly for Beauvoir, it is the (illusion of) harmony that comes from the feeling of oneness with the beloved.⁴⁸ Stirner is the notable exception, since he argued that it is up to individuals to choose their own source of meaning and how they can best squander their lives, and being anxious about it is a choice of emoting that is not personally useful.⁴⁹

Existentially, individuals are free to choose meaning wherever they see fit, and thus it is existentially valid to choose to establish meaning in one's life through lovers. However, since a lover cannot be fully possessed, and since one cannot control another person, one cannot rely on them for absolute justification. Nietzsche also suggested that such a feeling is delusional,⁵⁰ and Sartre proposed that any relief is likely to be short-lived, thanks to a myriad of factors working towards love's destruction.⁵¹ Beauvoir's writings suggest even more scepticism when she argued that it is inauthentic to seek meaning through a lover.⁵² Kierkegaard thought romantic love is plagued by melancholy since it is insecure.⁵³ Thus, the answer is that love can relieve anxieties by infusing one's life with meaning, but such relief is inherently precarious given the problems outlined above and is likely to be temporary, unreliable, or illusory.

This also reveals why dependence on another is precarious. Romantic loving does infuse individual lives with meaning but the problem is when one depends on the other for one's entire existence. By making the other the only source of meaning, or depending on another for self-worth, one is denying oneself as a sovereign subject. Beauvoir argued that love cannot be a *raison d'être*, but I have suggested that there is no reason why it cannot be one among others, or a temporary one.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ See p.99.

⁴⁶ See p.130.

⁴⁷ See p.172.

⁴⁸ See p.212.

⁴⁹ See p.56.

⁵⁰ See p.129.

⁵¹ See p.174.

⁵² See p.231.

⁵³ See p.95.

⁵⁴ See p.240.

Moreover, the existential thinkers question whether security in romantic relationships is desirable. Existential living ought not to seek safety and comfort, but rather risk life. Sartre highlighted that absolute security is unachievable: since individuals are creative nothingnesses, they are free to change in unpredictable ways.⁵⁵ Thus, one never knows with perfect confidence whether and to what extent loving will be requited and not wanting it to end and knowing that the possibility exists.

Finally, the five existential thinkers all acknowledge that romantic loving includes concern for the beloved's welfare, but disagree on whether it is for the beloved's sake or one's own sake. Kierkegaard suggested that romantic loving is selfish either individually or as a couple, and thought it ought not to be that way.⁵⁶ Similarly, Beauvoir seems to disapprove of the idea of romantic loving as selfish if it treats the other as an object because it does not respect the other as a free subject.⁵⁷ While she suggested such loving still could be considered romantic, it is inconsistent with friendship, which she saw as a desirable element of loving.⁵⁸ Stirner and Nietzsche proposed that lovers are hypocrites if they think loving is unselfish or unegoistic, since by helping others they are actually helping themselves.⁵⁹ For Sartre, love is a project of the self, to discover secrets about oneself, and the value of other's recognition depends on one's recognition of the other.⁶⁰ Similarly, for Stirner, one loves another insofar as the other is valuable.⁶¹ Stirner, Nietzsche and Sartre are more consistent existentially, since their concern for the beloved is based on self-chosen values, rather than respect for others because God says so, or by virtue of a humanist ethics.

Now that the existential problems with romantic loving have been outlined, the next section summarises possibilities for resolution.

4. Do existential philosophies offer solutions to overcome problems in the traditional understanding of romantic loving?

First I shall address the key factors in understanding what the existential thinkers suggest lovers free themselves *from* before outlining what this enables them to be free *to* do.

⁵⁵ See p.174.

⁵⁶ See p.100.

⁵⁷ See p.216.

⁵⁸ See p.225.

⁵⁹ See p.47, 132.

⁶⁰ See p.174.

⁶¹ See p.53.

Free *from* being a slave to one's passions and pre-established romantic ideals

We cannot be free from everything because some things are out of our power. Stirner said we can be free from much, but not from all;⁶² Kierkegaard considered the lack of ability to control another's love as problematic;⁶³ Nietzsche suggested we can lose control of ourselves if passions are suppressed;⁶⁴ Sartre argued some things in the world, like mountain crags, can limit our possibilities;⁶⁵ and Beauvoir argued that situations can be oppressive.⁶⁶ However, there are many aspects of one's life within one's power, notably one's behaviour.

The five existential thinkers emphasise that it is important to be free from being a slave to one's passions so that one's impulses do not determine one's behaviour. Instead of yielding to one's sexual and romantic impulses immediately, Stirner and Nietzsche emphasised the importance of self-mastery, whereby one rules one's appetites, emotions and sensuality.⁶⁷ Kierkegaard also encouraged lovers to reflect on their moods, master their desires, and free themselves from making impulsive or reactionary choices, in order that an individual may own oneself.⁶⁸ He, Stirner and Beauvoir argued for being free from dependence on another individual.⁶⁹

However, the existential thinkers are careful not to discount the importance of the passionate and intoxicating nature of romantic loving. There is nothing wrong with love-fuelled exhilaration, excitement, elation and enthusiasm. For example, Stirner emphasised frivolity and enjoyment of loving another.⁷⁰ Through the eyes of Johannes, Kierkegaard described the beauty and exhilaration that romantic loving sparks.⁷¹ Nietzsche was acutely concerned that suppressing passions can wreak havoc and thus emphasised the importance of passionate expression and intoxication so as not to be overwhelmed by the storm within.⁷² Sartre referred to the importance of allowing oneself to be overcome by one's love.⁷³ Beauvoir took such an idea to another extreme by suggesting that not all passions can be mastered and proposed that intoxication is an essential element of authentic loving. She criticised Sade for being too

⁶² See p.58.

⁶³ See p.84, 101.

⁶⁴ See p.136.

⁶⁵ See p.189.

⁶⁶ See p.201.

⁶⁷ See p.49, 133.

⁶⁸ See p.98.

⁶⁹ See p.97, 46, 227.

⁷⁰ See p.48.

⁷¹ See p.88.

⁷² See p.130, 136.

⁷³ See p.182.

controlled and not being able to abandon himself.⁷⁴ For the existential thinkers, passionate expression is an essential and important part of living and loving. However, becoming helplessly inebriated and blinded by one's love or abandoning oneself recklessly to it, is weak-willed.

The five existential thinkers are also critical of preconceived expectations about how romantic lovers ought to behave. Since they advocate choosing one's own values, they regard many pre-determined values and conventions implicit in romantic loving as suspicious. They did not dismiss romantic loving entirely, but rather highlighted flaws in romantic ideals and problems that arise from misplaced expectations. Automatically to accept preconceived ideas about how lovers ought to behave is to not to be authentic (or as Stirner would say, not to own oneself), since one is not choosing and creating one's relationships. Just as instinctively to respond to one's impulses is reflective of a weak, undeveloped, unreflective and immature individual, so too is instinctively to accept pre-established ideals indicative of a herd animal, or one who hides in the crowd.⁷⁵

Stirner criticised any expectation that a lover ought to behave in a certain manner, but specifically condemns the expectations that romantic loving ought to be unselfish, unconditional, and forever.⁷⁶ Instead, he advocated owning oneself rather than being owned by norms and values created by others.⁷⁷ Sartre emphasised being free from illusions or belief in determinism, for example, that lovers are uniquely destined for one another.⁷⁸ Since existence precedes essence, we create our relationships and are responsible for our romantic choices. Beauvoir emphasised being free from such sentimental notions as love's all-consumingness and ability to triumph over every obstacle, restriction and reservation and was critical of loving behaviour, particularly women's, in blindly accepting their conventional roles and customs, that is, subordinating oneself to one's male lover, and unquestioningly accepting the traditional destiny of being a wife and mother.⁷⁹

While Stirner, Sartre, and Beauvoir objected to the ideal of romantic loving culminating in marriage because it suggests acceptance of pre-established social roles and values, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche did not, for they both saw it as a worthwhile institution for

⁷⁴ See p.226.

⁷⁵ See p.77, 126.

⁷⁶ See p.45.

⁷⁷ See p.49.

⁷⁸ See p.178.

⁷⁹ See p.234, 217, 219.

elevating romantic loving into something more serious, stable, and durable.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Nietzsche was not wedded to this view and oscillates between supporting marriage, even for ‘free spirits’, and arguing against it as being unnatural and irrational and based on romantic loving, which is ill-considered and petty.⁸¹ And like Beauvoir, he also criticised both men’s and women’s loving behaviour which manifests as instinctively acting out and conforming to masculine and feminine ideals and images.⁸²

Free to choose behaviour, passions and relationships

Freeing oneself from such chains as instinctive loving behaviour and blind acceptance of problematic romantic ideals is not sufficient for the existential thinkers. The question becomes what will lovers have freed themselves to do? Or, since for Stirner and Nietzsche freedom is not the issue, they would have asked: what do lovers have the power to do? Freeing themselves from such fetters, lovers will have empowered themselves to be self-determining and self-creating, which means that they will be able to reinvigorate romantic loving in a way that allows for authentically meaningful relationships. I shall explore this dimension by answering the remaining research questions regarding the role of choice, freedom, and authenticity in romantic loving.

To what extent does choice play a role in loving?

Choice plays a key role in the existential attitude to romantic loving. Individuals are free to choose loving behaviour, passions, and relationships. Romantic loving is an action, and those actions are not pre-defined. Lovers are creative nothings and just as they create themselves, so too do they create their loving relationships, and choose themselves as people who do loving things. If romance of a relationship fades, it is because lovers choose not to behave lovingly and choose not to engage in a romantic way.

In Sartre’s words, loving actions reveal one’s love, romantic loving is the sum of loving actions, which can be understood as a synthesis of choices directed towards the project of a romantic relationship.⁸³ Nevertheless, he and Nietzsche also acknowledged that choosing loving behaviour is easier said than done, and they were particularly sceptical that most

⁸⁰ See p.97, 138.

⁸¹ See p.145, 137.

⁸² See p.210, 123.

⁸³ See p.180, 181. Although some choices are pre-reflective, the goal of existential psychoanalysis is to raise our awareness to our original project which sheds light on such choices. See p.189.

people would be able to overcome possessive behaviour in romantic loving.⁸⁴ While Don Giovanni acts on his passions impulsively and responds to natural urges, to proceed to a higher, existential mode of living, Kierkegaard suggested that he needs actively and assertively to choose his relationships.⁸⁵ Kierkegaard drew on marriage as a means of sublimating power dynamics, and while Nietzsche also appreciated the value of marriage, he and Beauvoir advocated friendship as a means of sublimating sexual impulses into more productive relationships which promote self-overcoming, and nourish and strengthen the individuals so they can better strive towards personal goals.⁸⁶ Stirner advocated egoistic unions to a similar end.⁸⁷ Although he thought power dynamics were a fact of relationships, unique ones embrace this fact and use their power to create and negotiate relationships that interest them.⁸⁸

Thus, the final two questions relating to choice and romantic loving can be answered. First, if, existentially, we are condemned to choose, how can we reconcile it with the passionate elements of loving? The answer is that lovers choose their passions, choose to master them, and choose themselves as loving people. Passions can be intoxicating, and intoxication is a valuable part of relationships, but it is not existential to let oneself be paralysed, or lose control of oneself in the process. Second, is it unromantic to suggest that romantic loving can be chosen, since that means everyone is a potential lover? Romantic loving conceived as a choice does mean that everyone is a potential lover, but that does not make it unromantic. Although it means that lovers are not destined to find their ‘other half’ or their ‘soul mate’ and they are not ‘made for each other’, romantic loving is an appreciation of an individual’s unique qualities. To be loved independently of one’s unique qualities is to depersonalise the relationship and that would make it unromantic. Since lovers are creative nothings, it is possible that both lovers change what they find lovable in the other, and it is up to the individuals to choose the criteria, and create their own relationships.

⁸⁴ See p.186, 130.

⁸⁵ See p.96.

⁸⁶ See p.152, 225.

⁸⁷ See p.64.

⁸⁸ See p.64.

Is it possible to love without restricting freedom and is it existentially valid to choose to restrict one's freedom?

The problem with romantic loving is not only that being with a lover potentially calls for restricting the lovers' freedom, but also lovers often want to restrict their own freedom. This is potentially contradictory since the five existential thinkers also emphasise the importance of freeing oneself from self-imposed limitations. The existential thinkers overcome this issue not by denying they are free, but rather accepting responsibility for their choices and prioritising their passions. Being conscious of the chains that threaten to encapsulate lovers allows individuals to choose their ties.

Romantic loving does not necessarily entail restricted freedom. For example, Stirner and Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer did not accept restrictions. Similarly, unrequited love does not limit one's choices. Beauvoir's and Sartre's experience would seem to indicate that although they attempted to maintain freedom in their relationship, there were still such restrictions as transparency and maintaining each others' status as 'essential'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it was seen that transparency does not appear to have been a restriction that Sartre took seriously.⁹⁰

The five existential thinkers suggest that enduring relationships do tend to call for individuals to choose to restrict their freedom, or modify their choices because the relationship is more important than absolute freedom and they barter certain liberties, such as sexual freedom, for other expected benefits, such as trust, security or depth of experience. Moreover, freedom from chains does not automatically mean one is free to do things, and turning away from others is to turn away from possibilities. Since loving behaviour, passions and ties are chosen, lovers are also in a position to choose to prioritise, and this can be understood as foregoing certain possibilities because one wishes to maintain a loving relationship. There is no issue with compromising and sacrificing for the other's benefit, as long as lovers do not sacrifice themselves, and as long as they master their loving behaviour. Such a relationship is built on the strength of two self-defining individuals, not weakness and slavishness.

For example, Stirner argued that lovers can choose whatever ties, limits and obligations they like, as long as they own them, and are ready to break them if they compromise ownness.⁹¹

⁸⁹ See p.187.

⁹⁰ See p.188.

⁹¹ See p.64.

Although Nietzsche recommended repeatedly breaking ties with others to reassert oneself as better able to exert one's power in the world, he also welcomed the challenges which only great lovers can provide.⁹² Kierkegaard suggested that by making commitments, one opens up possibilities for oneself and gives meaning and purpose to existence.⁹³ According to Sartre, denying one's freedom by turning away from possibilities is a form of bad faith, but the way one engages with the world determines whether something is a restriction, and thus limitations are freely chosen priorities.⁹⁴ Beauvoir argued that it is a moral fault or bad faith to voluntarily renounce freedom, but she was referring to being a slave and escaping responsibility for self-determination through becoming an other for the male lover.⁹⁵ However, restricted freedom in the form of fidelity was a consequence of Beauvoir's and Algren's romantic relationship, but it was not a moral fault because it was freely chosen, not imposed externally, and did not involve abdicating themselves.

To what extent can individuals be authentic within a romantic loving relationship?

Romantic loving can place pressure on pursuing one's own or authentic projects, since lovers make concessions, sacrifices and negotiations, modify goals, shift priorities and forego possibilities for the sake of each other. However, following on from the conclusion in the preceding section, just as freedom need not necessarily be limited in romantic relationships, so too lovers need not compromise their own authentic pursuits. The five existential thinkers reveal possibilities for choosing relationships that do allow for lovers to pursue their own authentic self-chosen projects. Romantic relationships that do not allow for that can and do exist but are problematic existentially, since lovers then are not free from being a slave to their passions or problematic romantic ideals, or, as Beauvoir emphasised, oppression. The challenge for romantic lovers is to create more satisfying relationships that complement and enhance their personal authentic endeavours.

Such an attitude is evident in Beauvoir's emphasis on the importance of lovers working together towards a common goal.⁹⁶ Similarly, it is seen in Stirner's union to pursue mutually beneficial goals,⁹⁷ and Sartre's authentic loving as mutually supporting each other's ends and

⁹² See p.145.

⁹³ See p.102.

⁹⁴ See p.189.

⁹⁵ See p.207.

⁹⁶ See p.229.

⁹⁷ See p.64.

viewing the world in a similar way.⁹⁸ It is further seen in Nietzsche's idea of two strong individuals who act as catalysts for each other's striving towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*,⁹⁹ and Kierkegaard's eventual realisation that he could have had a romantic relationship with Regine if he had had faith in God (which was his authentic project).¹⁰⁰ It is up to lovers to reinvigorate their romantic behaviour in a way that allows for authentically meaningful relationships.

Despite the existential thinkers' scepticism about the way romantic loving can impinge on individual freedom, authenticity and power, they suggest that the most fulfilling and satisfying existence can only be achieved through romantic loving because it is enriching and enables individuals better to engage in the world. It seems fitting to give the philosophers the final word: Stirner said someone who loves is richer than someone who does not;¹⁰¹ Kierkegaard suggested loving others is the only thing worth living for;¹⁰² Nietzsche said we need lovers like bitter medicine to be able to better strive towards the ideal of the *Übermensch*;¹⁰³ Sartre said that lovers are the key to revealing deeper dimensions of our being;¹⁰⁴ and Beauvoir suggested that the world takes on meaning by throwing oneself into loving.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ See p.185, 195.

⁹⁹ See p.152.

¹⁰⁰ See p.106.

¹⁰¹ See p.60.

¹⁰² See p.75.

¹⁰³ See p.153, 130.

¹⁰⁴ See p.165.

¹⁰⁵ See p.203, 236.

Publications and awards related to this PhD

Awards

- **Philo Agora 2010 Award:** My presentation was judged the best talk and paper (of the year) that meets Philo Agora's objective of relating philosophical thought to the question of how we think about and/or act out our lives. The paper was entitled 'Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of loving relationships' (a summary of my chapter on Sartre) and was presented in November 2010 in Sydney to an audience of approximately 50.

(See <http://www.philoagora.com/content/view/135/143/>)

Scholarships and Grants

- **Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship (MQRES):** 2008-2012
- **Macquarie University Post Graduate Research Fund (PGRF):** \$4,000 awarded to attend the Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (EPTC) 2011 Conference in Canada

Publications¹

- Cleary, S.C., 'Simone de Beauvoir and loving existentially', *Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society*, Cagliari, Italy, June 2010 (forthcoming)
- Nettleton, S. 2009, 'Ten tips for a great marriage according to Friedrich Nietzsche', *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, vol.10, no.1
<http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ipjp/article/viewFile/61115/49300>
- The above article was republished in *Café Philosophy* magazine's special issue 'Love and Marriage' March/April 2012, Auckland, New Zealand, p.6
<http://cafephilosophy.co.nz/articles/wait-just-a-moment-before-you-begin-married-life/>
- Nettleton, S. 2009, Review of the book *The Overman in the Marketplace: Nietzschean Heroism in Popular Culture*, by Ishay Landa, *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 39.
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/jns/reviews/ishay-landa-the-overman-in-the-marketplace-nietzschean-heroism-in-popular-culture>
- Nettleton, S. 2006, 'Loving Existentially', *Cogito Journal of Philosophy*, vol. IV (New Series), No. 1, 16-27

Conference Papers

- Cleary, S. 2011, 'Loving existentially', paper presented at the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, Fredericton, Canada
- Cleary, S. 2010, 'Simone de Beauvoir and loving existentially today', paper presented at the 18th International Simone de Beauvoir Society Conference, Cagliari, Italy

¹ My maiden name is Nettleton

- Nettleton, S. 2009, 'Loving egoistically', paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Philosophy, Athens Institute for Education and Research, Athens, Greece
- Nettleton, S. 2009, 'Ten tips for a great marriage according to Friedrich Nietzsche', paper presented at the Australasian Association of Philosophy Postgraduate Conference: Philosophy and the Real World, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
- Nettleton, S. 2008, 'Power, passion and pleasure: the phenomenology of Kierkegaard's aesthetic relationships', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP): The Post/Human Condition, University of Auckland, New Zealand
- Nettleton, S. and Rolfe, B. 2008, 'The extreme existential manager', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP): The Post/Human Condition, University of Auckland, New Zealand
- Nettleton, S. 2008, 'Egoist executives: working without emotions', paper presented at the 3rd Asia Pacific Symposium on Emotions in Worklife, Newcastle Graduate School of Business, Australia
- Various philosophical papers presented at *Philorum*, *Philoagora* and *United Nations Association of Australia* philosophy discussion groups in Sydney as well as at the *Graduate Management Association of Australia* boardroom briefing sessions

Selected papers and presentations are available at the following website:
<http://mq.academia.edu/SkyeCleary>

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