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EXPERIENCE OF LOVE AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Abstract

Interpersonal communication is most fully manifested in the experience of personal love, thanks to which human beings express themselves as loving beings (*homo amans*). Love has many different dimensions depending on its object. The essence of love can be best grasped at the example of interpersonal relationship between man and woman. Descriptions of love bring to the fore such constitutive factors as selflessness, affirmation, sacrifice, and responsibility. Love has an autonomous and autotelic value, which is why it becomes essential for an authentic act of interpersonal communication.

Keywords: love, value, relationship, interpersonal communication

DOŚWIADCZENIE MIŁOŚCI A KOMUNIKACJA INTERPERSONALNA

Abstrakt

Komunikacja interpersonalna najpełniejszy swój wyraz objawia w doświadczeniu osobowej miłości, dzięki której człowiek wyraża się jako byt miłujący (*homo amans*). Miłość ma wiele różnych wymiarów ze względu na swój przedmiot. Najgłębiej można uchwycić istotę miłości, analizując ją od strony relacji interpersonalnej, jaka zachodzi pomiędzy mężczyzną a kobietą. W opisie miłości na pierwszy plan wysuwają się takie czynniki konstytutywne jak: bezinteresowność, afirmacja, ofiarność, odpowiedzialność. Miłość posiada wartość autonomiczną i zarazem autoteliczną, dlatego staje się ona niezbędna dla autentycznego aktu komunikacji międzyludzkiej, jak również dla samego ludzkiego bytowania, pokazując ich nierozzerwalny związek. Komunikacja bez miłości staje się tylko semantycznym werbalizmem.

Słowa kluczowe: miłość, wartość, relacja i komunikacja interpersonalna

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a condition for establishing contact in the human world, it is a path leading to personal and social development, and finally, it is a means of learning about the surrounding reality. Communication can take place at different levels, since there are many ways of communication. However, a condition for establishing a lively, authentic interpersonal relationship and an honest dialogue, is a real, direct and unforced acknowledgement of the human person, which means that in the space of communication, a person should always be affirmed as an autotelic value and as unique good, and it should be approached with selfless love.

Consequently, interpersonal communication being an interpersonal relationship consists solely of opportunities for love, which means that any attempts at depriving it of love can only turn it into a semantic, idle talk devoid of any depth. Therefore, mature love, understood in the Aristotelian sense as the desire for the other's good for the other's sake, love surpassing the level of senses and instincts, one based on free, conscious choice (*dilectio*) can provide the basis for an effective act of communication. It is worth noting that it is this that constitutes the backbone of interpersonal communication.

“Love is not yet one more of the countless powers fostering the well-being of an individual and society, neither is it the reason why it has value and it distinguishes its objects. It is love itself, which has an autonomous value, filling a person and making a life and existence which is adorned and marked only by its vibrations, rise higher, become more permanent, richer. What is important, therefore, is not to make the best for ourselves but to make our relationships full of love” (Scheler 1997, 101-102).

Love is a universal reality, which is why, all discussions of man and his various attributes, bring to the fore the issue of love as an inherent attribute of humanity, referring to man as *homo amans*. For it is love, that Boethius refers to as the thing “desired by all” (Boezio 1946, 119), which is awaited for as a gift. This dimension of love was emphasized by Thomas Aquinas himself, who believed that “love has the nature of a first gift, through which all free gifts are given” (Sancti Thomae de Aquino I, q. 38, a. 2)².

Human beings have an innate longing for this gift manifested as the need for love, because it is love that stimulates them to transcend themselves, to push their own boundaries of subjectivity, self-centeredness, and individualism. It is also a source of psychic energy, thanks to which a human being - in relation to another human being - develops as a human person. Thanks to love, man overcomes

² “Ratio autem gratuita donationis est amor, ideo enim damus gratis alicui aliquid, quia volumus ei bonum. Primum ergo quod damus ei, est amor quo volumus ei bonum. Unde manifestum est quod amor habet rationem primi doni, per quod omnia dona gratuita donantur” (Sancti Thomae de Aquino I, q. 38, a. 2).

isolation, loneliness, alienation, goes out to others, establishes a communicative dialogue based on openness, empathy, responsibility as well as on concern for the other. Without love in its various dimensions, it would not be possible to live a full social life, and thus, to establish effective, but also genuinely human communication, unless it would be one reduced to a banal exchange of information and messages.

The present paper will, therefore, concentrate on providing an outline of the phenomenology of love, in other words, on describing the phenomenon of love, which is, as has been emphasized, a *conditio sine qua non* of interpersonal communication. Love, as is known, has many different forms depending on its object, but perhaps the best way to capture its essence will be to analyze a specific form of a love relationship between man and woman, namely, the conjugal love, when two complete strangers overcome a distance and enter a space of closeness in which affirmation touches upon all aspects of their being. Viewing the essence of love through the prism of this particular form of love will make it possible to understand its importance for the overall interpersonal communication. It will also allow to show that man, who due to his social nature is a *homo communicans*, is able to transcend from the sphere of artifacts to the spiritual sphere and make it communicable through love. It is, therefore, worth examining this axiological category, since it provides the foundation of the whole process of truly human communication, without which this process would be impoverished and disturbed.

1. MEANINGS OF LOVE

It seems quite unnecessary to persuade anyone about the value of love, although, the feeling itself defies a clear definition. “Love is like the light that enlightens the world. However, one cannot look at the source of light” (Gadacz 1995, 60).

It is said, however, that love is a value, although at the same time, as D. von Hildebrand notes, “love is a response to value” (von Hildebrand 2014, 222), it is evoked by value. Elsewhere, this German philosopher will add that love:

“represents something so great, so ultimate, so vitally enveloping of the whole person, that its depth can be taken as a measure of the depth and greatness of the whole man. It offers the highest and noblest earthly happiness, one which fills the soul more than any other value on earth. It is the noblest of natural powers, moving the world beyond anything else” (von Hildebrand 2017, 49).

However, referring to love in general terms, such as “happiness”, “life energy”, “experience”, mystery, or the principle of life, actually does not explain anything. It may be due to the fact that love has many specific meanings and its nature can only be grasped within them. Needless to say, each of those meanings has its own specifics, however, it seems that there is a set of permanent factors allowing to describe the quintessence of love that is to be discovered.

First, it is worth noting that love is always a real personal relationship: of man to woman, parent to child, sister to brother, friend to friend, and even more broadly – it is a relationship of one man to another, as well as a believer to God. Without those relationships, social life would not be possible *in sensu largo*. There are many types of love within love. This fact is highlighted by Jose Ortega y Gasset, who in *Studies About Love*, writes:

“we should consider the phenomenon of love in its various aspects. It is not only that a man loves a woman or a woman a man, but we also love art or science, a mother loves a child, and a believer loves God. Love is revealed in the immeasurable wealth of forms, and the awareness of this fact warns us not to take for its important attributes those qualities that characterize rather affectionate objects” (Ortega y Gasset 1989, 5).

Similarly, Erich Fromm in his book *On the Art of Love* analyzes various objects of love, distinguishing on this basis: brotherly, parental, erotic love, self-love and God’s love (Fromm [bwm], 53-89). In an analogous sense, other things can also become objects of love. For example, one can talk about love for music, love for the mountains, love for books, love for football, etc.

However, a prerequisite of establishing a love relationship with any of these objects is that this love should be selfless, or, in other words, it should have no other purpose than the good of the object of love. Abelard put it brilliantly: “Love means no other thing but to desire something for its own sake” (Abelard 1969, 441). Cicero, who noted, also pointed to this important aspect of love:

“Is not one good man naturally dear to another? The word “dear” is in itself a term of affection (*verbum amoris*), and it is from the latter word that *amicitia*, or friendship, is derived; if we make it tend to our own advantage instead of to the good of the person to whom we are attached, it will not in that case be friendship, but a kind of self-interested traffic. To meadows and fields and herds of cattle we are attached in that way, because advantages are derived from them, but the affection and friendship of men are given freely.” (Cyceron 2019).

This free, selfless giving is an important feature of love and means renouncing all forms of egocentrism, the desire to satisfy one’s own needs, including the need for reciprocity. Therefore, for love to occur, there must first be a disinterested relationship, which will now be seen, as mentioned above, in one of its most complete and multi-faceted aspects - as a conjugal relationship of man and woman.

2. LOVE AS A RELATIONSHIP

The love relationship reveals primarily the fact that love is essentially a *metanoia*, a deep and fundamental transformation of the subject in relation

to the “object”³ of its desires. In the face of the “revealed” good, in the face of what suddenly begins to fascinate and attract the subject to the object, the subject begins a gradual (and sometimes violent) process of change, experiences some kind of shock. Something arises in him, something happens that causes a kind of bodily movement, a pleasant “pain”, which is creative rather than destructive. The language of love or of literature often uses the expression of a “wounded heart.” The subject’s intense desire for an object is internally transformed into a strong and dynamic power of attraction.

If love is awakened in a person, it means that there appears an enigmatic sense of kinship, harmony of non-empirical understanding between this person and the object of his or her love, as well as the desire to accept the one who loves us because we love this person and because we become his or her good. However, this good cannot be imaginary, inauthentic, wishful, because this good is a real person with all his or her shortcomings and weaknesses. Love, to put in Platonic language, has the ability to receive another man as he is, because “it is man’s peculiar duty to love even those who do wrong” (Marek Aureliusz 1968, 141).

Therefore, the object, affirmed in its authenticity, evokes in the subject a desire for the greatest possible field of adaptation for the learned object, a desire to receive it in the best and greatest possible way, a readiness of the attitude, which can be compared to the readiness of a photographic lens. This adaptation is, at first, a gentle attempt to reconcile the tones that could realize the deep harmony of one symphony. And, it does not manifest itself initially in the psychological dimension, but in the internal area of being, in matching the nature, equality, in the metaphysical relationship of subject and object. This phenomenon is perceived *a priori* by two beings who, when confronted with each other, for the first time feel as if they have always known each other, that they are on the same wavelength, experiencing similar emotions and states.

The psychological aspect of this metaphysical relationship is complacency (*amor complacentiae*). A mysterious sense of affinity, evoking in the area of consciousness, inspires the heart to turn to the object with full interest and devotion. This is one of the specific features of love most clearly perceived and most characteristic. The subject approves of the other, who “binds” him or her with some hidden bonds, which, however, do not enslave, but evoke a sense of joy, excite, elevate, “give wings”, change the perception of the whole reality. It is not yet the joy of full possession, but the joy of hope that promises possession and the mysterious union of love.

This stage marks the awakening of desire, which joins in to act towards taking possession of the beloved item. The other, therefore, becomes happiness which is being won and which will be finalized as a union of two beings, as a complete integration of the beloved with the beloved, a synthesis of two loving persons who

³ In this context, the “object” should also be understood as another person who, despite this concept, is not reified, but presented as the other side of the relationship.

will merge into unity. Such a symbiosis will only be possible insofar as this revealed love will be, as mentioned above, selfless; in other words, if it will want the good of the loved one for its own sake. Even more, the loved one will become a value in itself, a supreme value worthy of being regarded as the goal of aspirations. The goal to which the subject becomes in a sense “addicted” and without which he or she cannot imagine their future existence.

3. LOVE COMPONENTS

It is obvious that a person who loves in this way is developing and changing. For a love, which fails to perfect the participants of a love relationship, does not deserve to be called love. If any of them renounces enriching his or her own value or is forced to do so in the name of love, if they do not improve, do not grow in their humanity, then this relationship cannot be called love, but only a contract or a project for life. Aspects of “rising up”, being “differently and higher”, “change” are inherent in love.

Love implies also self-sacrifice, that is, the value revealing the greatness of devotion, dedication to the other person, the struggle and effort made so that the most precious one can become the property of the loved one. In fact, love comprises everything one is and everything one has. And what is the thing that one has and which is most precious? Well, that is man himself, i.e. the Platonic “virtuous good” (*bonum honestum*). If man gives himself, in essence he gives away everything that is most valuable, namely, his life, health, his own intellect, products of his work, time. Because, it is only love which can state: “I choose you and I give you everything I possess.” Therefore, love is not a matter of emotions, feelings, fascinations, infatuations, and drives. It is always a matter of irreversible choice. Love is a lasting choice built on the ground of sacrifice. When love is only an effusion and not a choice, when it is not sacrificial but self-absorbed, it certainly will not flourish or survive.

So, “tell me who you choose, and I will tell you who you love.” Fromm put it in the following way, “you love what you work for and you work for what you love” (Fromm [brw], 35). Sometimes, only erotic desire lies behind the newly discovered love, but it deceives the other with the appearance of love because it is only its false resemblance. Desire is not love, because it is dominated in the first place by the tendency to subordinate the other to his or her own goals, and in fact it always turns the second being into an object (Marcel 1987, 179).

Therefore, contrary to common belief, widespread in psychology as well as in literature and film, love is not a matter of feelings, but a permanent choice of will, which, regardless of changing circumstances, wants to “cling” to the object of its love. Today, however, this understanding of love as a permanent choice encounters disapproval and even rejection, because such a love is interpreted in terms of a violation against one’s freedom and self-determination. Faithfulness

to permanent choice often appears as an oppressive situation, determination - by marriage vows, the need to raise children, joint property, exchange of services, etc., which is often, wrongly, perceived as limiting the freedom of the subject who suffers from emotional burnout and does not want to stay forever with the other only due to volitional persistence. Such a person does not want to sacrifice his or her life forever, especially when there appear other values (for example, another person) important enough to give up sacrificing a life to the one chosen before. The various tangled interpersonal relationships that people encounter clearly show that a relationship devoid of sacrifice regarding one's own life, that is, its dedication to another person, can be questioned in terms of its being founded on authentic love. For love always offers to others what is priceless, namely, indivisible reciprocity in which one's own existence is contained. What is more, true love invokes reciprocity, because in human love an invitation to reciprocity is of the highest importance, because it binds more than a command.

Love is also closely and inseparably related with responsibility, because a person who loves, has a sense of responsibility. "In love between adults, responsibility mainly concerns the mental needs of the other" (Fromm [brw], 35) - but not only - which should never be underestimated. For love should evoke responsibility for another and for ourselves as well as for the awakened love. In this context, Karol Wojtyła wrote:

"There is a particular responsibility in love - responsibility for a person, the one who is drawn into the closest community of being and acting, whom one makes in a way his or her own property, availing oneself of that person's devotion. That is why, there is also responsibility for one's own love: whether it is mature enough and thorough enough to encompass this great trust of another person, this hope born out of his or her love, that the other person offering himself or herself will not lose the «soul» but, on the contrary, will find in it the greater fullness of existence - whether all this will not be disappointed? Responsibility for love comes down, as can be seen, to responsibility for the person, originates in it and returns to it. That is exactly why it is a great responsibility. However, its greatness can only be understood by the one who is deeply sensitive to the value of the other person. Those who can respond only to sexual values related to and inherent in another person, but do not see the value of that person, will continue to mistake eroticism for love, will entangle their own lives and the lives of others, forfeiting in all this love and its essential «taste» for themselves and for them. This «taste» of love is associated with a sense of responsibility for another person. This sense, after all, gives rise to concern for the other person's true good - the quintessence of all altruism, and at the same time the infallible sign of enlarging one's "I", one's own existence with the «other», and with this other existence which is as close to me as my own. A sense of responsibility for the other person can be full of concern, but it is never unpleasant or painful in itself." (Wojtyła 1986, 116-117).

The only measure of love is love without measure closely connected with responsibility adapted to love.

One of the Latin fathers, Saint Augustine, also called the “Doctor of Love”⁴ because he wrote about love very knowledgably, maintained that perfect love cannot be achieved in this life, but one must constantly move forward and never stop, because love is active, it cannot be idle. It keeps growing, advancing incessantly, moving forward without rest; it does not stop on the road, does not back down, does not lead astray (Olivier 1965, 609). St. Augustine even wrote: “My weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this ‘weight’ that draws me” (Saint Augustine, *Sermon 169*, quoted from Olivier 1965, 609). Therefore, love is not passivity, but an active and devotional action for the good of others. Josphe Ratzinger described this dynamics of love in the following way:

“Only the seeing love, love that does not want to be blind, has the salvific power: it can discover what is the essential quality of man, what lies behind the veil of contortions and distortions, what is the eternal, divine idea of human possibilities and vocations. Real love, being realistic, is also dynamic, takes the other as he is, and reveals to itself and to him the perspective of who he could become. And thus love becomes the power of change” (Ratzinger 2001, 333).

Cardinal Ratzinger rightly emphasized that love takes in its possession also the deficiencies of another man, his or her weaknesses, imperfections, and shortcomings. Max Scheler also pointed to the same aspect when he wrote in his work *Essence and Forms of Sympathy* that “The truth of love, however, manifests itself in its fullness in the fact that while we recognize the “deficiencies” of specific objects, we love them together with these deficiencies” (Scheler 1986 , 245). If, however, love faded away because of these shortcomings and because of not finding higher values in the subject of love, then such an attitude could not be called love.

4. PRACTICE OF LOVE

How should love practically manifest itself? Martin Buber in the *Hasid Tales* answers this question by telling the following story about how Rabbi Mosze Lejb learned love:

“Here is what Rabbi Mosze Lejb told: I learned how to love people from a peasant. This peasant was sitting and drinking together with others in a ham. He was silent for a long time, like others, but his heart softened under the

⁴ Love in a prominent place his theology holds. The order of the heart, in the sense proposed later by Pascal, is so prevalent in the overall Augustine’s thought that one can justifiably use the term “affective method” in reference to it. St. Augustine does not devote long treatises to love. However, he addresses it in most of his works, and his *adagium* from the Commentary to Saint John, VII “dilige et quod vis fac” - love and do what you want, is one of the best known maxims about love.

influence of wine, so he finally asked his neighbor: Tell me, do you love me? The other replied: «I love very much». «You say you love me, said the peasant, and you do not even know what is bothering me. If you really loved me, you would certainly know». The other could not answer, and the one who was asking stopped silent again. But I understood: to love other people means to sense their needs and take on their suffering” (Buber 1986, 219).

In love, those who love each other carry one another, that is, they are for each other in every space and time, both in the time of joy and in the one marked by suffering and pain. They can read themselves without unnecessary words and gestures, support each other, meet each other, above all, take care of the needs of the other, which are becoming as important as their own - in fact even more important, they do not count profit and loss, because, as Karol Wojtyła concisely put it, “we don’t square up in love” (Wojtyła 2000, 108).

C.S. Lewis in *Four Loves*, outlined practical manifestations of love: “In one high bound it has overleaped the massive of our selfhood; it has made appetite itself altruistic, tossed personal happiness aside as a triviality and planted the interests of another in the centre of our being” (Lewis 1983, 144). Therefore, love is always an active interest in the life, development and goodness of who you love.

5. LOST LOVE

However, is such a love given once and for all? Pascal noted that “love has no age as it is always renewing itself” (Pascal 1962, 325), and therefore it requires care, concern, effort, sacrifice, and compromise. Sometimes love can die away. This happens when “I love you means I need you, and not I need you because I love you” (Fromm [brw], 48) or when I love you means only taking, not offering, treating the other as a source of well-being, comfort, safety - without any reciprocity. Often people are also inclined to think that love “has died” because they no longer feel the original interest, delight, spontaneous emotional reaction to the other person. Meanwhile, it is not love that has died, but the stage of “infatuation” based on feelings, which due to their physiological component are simply changeable, and thus may cause that falling in love, as a seed of love, has not developed into a more mature form. In this regard, Fromm rightly concluded that “loving someone is not only a matter of strong affection - love is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. A feeling comes and it may go” (Fromm [brw], 63-64). With it may also go infatuation, which is undoubtedly as joyful and exciting as it is impermanent, fluid and fleeting.

There is also a love that has no future but only a short present of latent life, a short “now”. While love always demands a future, and only moments remain, it is worth remembering that there is also love that cannot keep the object of its love by itself, which has no possibility of existence, and which must be reduced to pure “soul movements” because for various reasons, it is impossible for it to be

realized together. One should not, it seems, say that such a love “should be passed in silence”. Sometimes people have to accept the fact that what they long for, what they dream about and what they cannot achieve will remain forever more valuable than what they have already gained. This situation is best conveyed by poets such as Fr. Jan Twardowski, who wrote:

Because you see there are those who love each other
and they have to meet to to pass by
close and distant as if standing in a mirror
they write hot and cold letters to each other
they leave like abandoned flowers in laughter
not to know why it happened
there are others who will find themselves even in the dark
but they will pass by each other because they dare not meet
so pure and calm as if the snow has begun
they would be perfect but they lacked flaws

the loving ones are afraid to be close so as not to be far
some die - that is, they already know
love is not sought or it is absent
none of us is alone by accident
there are those who love each other forever
and that's why they can't be together
like peacocks which never walk in pairs

you can even get lost but on the other side
our cut roads come back together

Love implies not only joy, but also pain. It was already Saint Thomas who noted that: *ex amore procedit et gaudium et tristitia* - joy and sadness come from love (Sancti Thomae de Aquino II II, q. 28, a. 1), and an English writer and philosopher, C.S. Lewis seemed to uphold this view:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell. I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness” (Lewis 1983, 153-154).

Man in love can experience a deep disappointment. When he loves unhappily, as Joseph Pieper writes (Pieper 1974, 130-132), he suffers so much that he often loses his sense of contact with reality, cannot bear the pressure of life, moves like a weightless person, experiences his state as mourning. Then he asks himself many questions about himself, about the other, about the truth of the lost love, about the reasons for abandonment or separation. However, also in this situation one must see the horizon of salvation and hope, because this *homo amans* as a *homo patiens* can thus face a chance for what Jean Nabert (Tarnowski 2007, 314) the French “reflective philosopher” called “primary affirmation”, i.e. unveiling an authentic being, the discovery of one’s «I», understanding the meaning of one’s own existence. Unrequited or lost love can become the beginning of human regeneration, release from the painful past, acceptance of one’s own existence, which remains valuable despite the loss. “Affirmation distracts me and at the same time restores me, gives me confidence and gives attention to a specific time. It calls for saturating the world with spirit by creating value, work, culture and morality” (Tarnowski 2007, 314), by reducing pain by contact with others, entering into a space of dialogue with others.

Therefore, love appears in every context as the principle of human life and the basis of interpersonal communication. It opens a perspective of delivery and happiness, because a person can only be happy he or she loves and gives.

CONCLUSION

Interpersonal communication as a reality of people who are in a relationship with each other is always a chance to multiply love. The conducted phenomenological description of love - based on conjugal love - while presenting its essence, pointed out that love is the best language of communication, that it is able to build a *koinonia* of people, living in mutual “for”, experiencing the gift of “one for another”. This description also confirmed that the person is such a good that the only proper and adequate attitude to him or her is love (Wojtyła 2010, 109). Nothing but love in the act of communication guarantees its effectiveness, subjectivity, authenticity and certainty. At the same time, love reveals what is most important in the “I-you” relationship, i.e. in interpersonal communication - a desire for directness, authenticity, honesty, devotion, selflessness, certainty, overcoming loneliness. A desire for communication is always a desire for love.

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