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Love and Perversions of Love

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In another chapter, I have written of Michael Gelven's idea that an evil person is someone who has failed to accept the worth and meaning of existence. Drawing on other writings by Gelven, I came to the conclusion that what he means by the worth and meaning of existence is what it is that makes life worthwhile and meaningful. One example he gave of what makes life meaningful is love. I believe that love truly is something that makes life worthwhile and meaningful. So I conclude that someone who fails to understand and value love fails, at least to that extent, to accept the worth and meaning of existence. And someone who goes even further, who twists and distorts the worth and significance of love, will be someone who, to that extent, twists and distorts the worth and meaning of existence. Such a person might very well be evil. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the subject of love. In this chapter, I will consider different views on love, compare and contrast them with one another, and finally come to some conclusions on the nature of love and the ways love can be twisted or forgotten. It is my hope that the conclusions drawn in this chapter will shed light on what it means for a person to be evil and on how a person could be evil.

Let's begin with ways to grossly fail to accept love or to pervert it in some significantly twisted way. The most obvious thing that comes to mind is to live a life of hate. Such a life puts hate on center stage, and the focus of life turns on what is detested. To obsessively focus on what you don't like about life is to fail to embrace life. Thus, a life focused on hate prevents a person from finding worth in life. Another thing it does is keep a person's attention away from the possibilities that life offers us. A hate

filled life focuses on what is wrong with the present. It focuses on problems and doesn't offer any solutions except for getting rid of what it hates. A person who finds meaning in life focuses on what can be done with life. This is a creative stance, whereas focusing on hate is a destructive stance. Thus, a hate filled life prevents a person from finding meaning in life.

Bar-Levav on Love

According to Reuvan Bar-Levav, in his book Thinking in the Shadow of Feelings, hate is frozen anger. He values anger as a feeling that tells us when things are wrong and which prompts us to action, which helps us to retain our self-respect, and which is useful for awakening people. But anger is supposed to pass after it has done its job, and it often does. But it sometimes becomes frozen and becomes a chronic state rather than a temporary feeling.

When anger is chronic, it is generally inappropriate. Like a broken clock that still gets the time right twice a day, chronic anger no longer measures anything. It doesn't tell you when things are wrong, it doesn't alert other people to your real needs, and it doesn't prompt you toward appropriate activity.

Anger changes from a living emotion to a chronic state when it is resisted. People can't stop themselves from feeling anger, but many people believe they can. They fear anger, regarding it as a bad emotion, and try to keep from being angry. What this does is dam up the anger, preventing it from passing through and flowing out. This dammed up anger becomes chronic anger and, according to Bar-Levav, turns into hate. The hateful person has blocked up the natural release of anger. So the anger stays inside, twisting and distorting his soul.

Hate can be understood as a perversion of love, for Bar-Levav says, "much hate is 'love' gone sour." (164) The word 'love' is quoted here, because Bar-Levav is referring

to frozen love. Both anger and love are supposed to be living emotions that flow through us, and each one can be blocked up and held in stasis. The blocking up of love results in what Bar-Levav calls romantic 'love.' He says,

Like romantic "love," hate is not strictly a feeling. Both are states in which a feeling has become frozen, both are often associated with extreme fears of rejection and abandonment, and both tend to produce psychotic-like behavior. Under their influence, judgment becomes grossly impaired and clear thinking is often suspended. Hate is to anger as romantic "love" is to real love. (164-5)

On the difference between real love and romantic "love," Bar-Levav says,

Real love is altogether different from either sexual or romantic "love." It can exist only in the absence of fear. Before we can love anyone else we must first be able to love ourselves. (158)

Bar-Levav understands love to be a feeling which comes and goes. (145) A person may be more capable of loving, and so feel love more often and to a greater extent than others do, but love is not a static condition that we should expect ourselves to be in at all times. He describes the essence of real love as "[t]he wish to share one's inner plenty." (146) Love comes from a sense that life is good and from a desire to share the goodness you find in life with others. Thus, love acknowledges the worth of life.

Romantic "love" comes from a sense of neediness. It is an attachment to someone based on the feeling that they will satisfy certain needs of yours that are going unmet. Although the expression "romantic love" typically refers to the exclusive love between a man and a woman, two lesbians, or two gay men, that is not what is meant here. These two senses of romantic love may often overlap, but they are not the same thing. Romantic "love," in the sense that Bar-Levav contrasts with real love, can be felt by one straight man for another, by one straight woman for another, etc. It is not sexual love. It is just romanticized. Many people are insecure and feel that certain needs, such as the need for approval, acceptance, etc. can be met by another. So they attach themselves to certain people in the hopes that these people will give them what they want. In romantic "love," people often pine and long for their "beloved." They feel pain

in the absence of their beloved, jealousy at perceived slights, and sometimes even hatred.

Hatred and romantic love are closely related to each other. Both are based on the fantasy that others control our fates. The hateful person focuses on things that have gone wrong and blames others for this. The romantic person focuses on his unmet needs and looks to others to meet them. Since the romantic has unrealistic expectations, people are likely to disappoint him. When this happens, “love” can easily turn into hate. The people he looked to to fill his needs are now the people he blames for his needs not being met. In contrast to both hate and romantic love, the person who feels real love focuses on what is good in life.

So hate and romantic “love” are both, on Bar-Levav’s account, perversions of real love. Real love focuses on joyfulness and goodness, whereas hate and romantic “love” shift the focus onto misery and neediness. A life focused on hate or on romantic “love” is one that neglects and twists the importance of love. Such a life fails to accept the importance of love, and insofar as love is essential to the worth and meaning of existence, such a life fails to accept the worth and meaning of existence.

It is easy to see evil in a life centered around hate. For example, Hitler centered his life around hatred for the Jews, and he is widely regarded as evil. It is harder to see it in a life centered around romantic “love.” Unlike hatred, romantic “love” is celebrated by our culture. Snow White’s song “Someday My Prince Will Come” is typical of this celebration. She is needy now, but someday her prince will come and make things all better. Nevertheless, we can look at some of the damage that romantic “love” has caused and at some of the people romantic “love” has made very unstable.

It was romantic love that led John Hinckley Jr. to attempt an assassination of President Reagan. The book [A Gallery of Rogues](#) says,

A letter found in his hotel room revealed he had a fixation on Jodie Foster, a young movie actress who was then a student at Yale. He had written her several letters, which she had not answered. He shot Reagan hoping to thereby win Miss Foster's affection. (176)

Another is Harry Kendall Thaw (1872-1947). He murdered Stanford White, who had once had an affair with his wife. A Gallery of Rogues says,

It was a crime of passion, but Harry Thaw had strange passions. His wife, the beautiful Evelyn Nesbit, once had an affair with White, and the fact preyed on Thaw's mind until he went mad with jealousy and shot the architect. (377)

Besides crimes of passion and attempts to impress the object of romantic love, there are immoral acts done at the behest of the beloved. These include the actions of the Germans in WW II, the suicides in Jonestown, Guyana, and the murder of Sharon Tate and others. The book Charismatic Cult Leaders says of Jim Jones, "he could make people trust him and believe in his ability to help them or harm or cause harm to others." (99) A Gallery of Rogues says of Charles Manson,

Manson's magnetic personality and his guru appearance turned him into an instant cult figure. He gradually picked up a harem of worshipful young girls, such as librarian Mary Brunner, Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, Susan Atkins, Linda Kasabian, and Bible-reading Patricia Krenwinkel. Abused by their parents, ignored by the world, unloved by a society that did not understand them, the runaways, the homeless and the hopeless turned to Charles Manson and found a god. (253)

What Hitler, Jones, and Manson all shared in common was the ability to inspire and manipulate romantic "love." They had legions of people who revered them, who looked to them to fulfill their needs, and who were willing to do as their leaders told them, even if it meant murder or suicide. So romantic "love" definitely has a dark side. It will drive people to murder and other crimes.

Real love, by contrast, does not lead to crimes of passion, to submissive

obedience to dastardly manipulations, or to desperate attempts to impress someone. Real love, as Bar-Levav presents it, is an overflowing of the joy found in living. A desire to share this joy cannot motivate someone toward destructive acts. Only something else, such as anger, hate, or romantic “love” can motivate someone toward destruction. This isn’t to say that a loving person won’t have other feelings and won’t destroy things. People are complex, and love is only one feeling that people know. People who love can also feel anger, unhappiness, and other negative emotions. No one is a perfect beacon of absolute real love. What I am saying is that love, as Bar-Levav understands it, should not lead that person to acts of destruction.

So far, I have discussed only Bar-Levav’s understanding of love. I think Bar-Levav makes a lot of sense, but it would be foolish to take him unreservedly as our expert on love. So I will now turn to other views on love. I will discuss views on love held by Ayn Rand, who wrote The Virtue of Selfishness, Nathaniel Branden, who wrote The Psychology of Romantic Love, John Gray, who wrote Men, Women, and Relationships, Peter McWilliams, who wrote Love 101, and M. Scott Peck, who wrote The Road Less Traveled.

Ayn Rand on Love

In her book The Virtue of Selfishness, in an article entitled “The Objectivist Ethics,” Ayn Rand writes,

Love, friendship, respect, admiration are the emotional response of one man to another, the spiritual payment given in exchange for the personal, selfish pleasure which one man derives from the virtues of another man’s character. (31)

Rand contrasts her understanding of real love, i.e. selfish love, with selfless love.

In an interview given to Playboy, Rand says,

[Selfless love] would have to mean that you derive no personal pleasure or happiness from the company and the existence of the person you love, and that you are motivated only by self-sacrificial pity for that person’s need of you. I don’t have to point out to you that no one would be flattered by, nor would accept, a concept of that kind. Love is not self-sacrifice, but the most profound assertion of your own needs and values. It is for your *own* happiness that you need the person you love, and that is the greatest

compliment, the greatest tribute you can pay to that person. (Ayn Rand Lexicon, p. 268)

It almost seems as though Rand believes just the opposite of Bar-Levav. She characterizes real love as the need for another person, and she characterizes love that does not begin with the person, i.e. selfless love, as base and ignoble. But this is not the full story. Although Rand's understanding of love is indeed different from Bar-Levav's, it is not its diametric opposite. She qualifies her understanding of love when she says in "The Objectivist Ethics,"

To love is to value. Only a rationally selfish man, a man of self-esteem, is capable of love –because he is the only man capable of holding firm, consistent, uncompromising, unbetrayered values. The man who does not value himself, cannot value anything or anyone. (32)

So Rand and Bar-Levav would agree on some cases. For example, both would agree that John Hinckley Jr. did not feel real love for Jodie Foster. But their reasons for coming to this conclusion would be different. Rand would claim that Hinckley wasn't capable of "holding firm, consistent, uncompromising, unbetrayered values" and so was incapable of self-esteem and real love. Bar-Levav would point out that Hinckley's feelings for Foster were rooted in his focus on unsatisfied needs rather than in the joy he took in living.

Another point of agreement between Rand and Bar-Levav is that real love is rooted in self-esteem and that you can't love others without first loving yourself. He writes,

[The capacity for loving] develops in Mother's bosom, the matrix of our ability to trust, or not to trust, anyone. Love, more than any other feeling, is in fact based on this ability to trust, oneself first and then others. (145)

According to Nathaniel Branden, Rand's onetime protege and a psychologist who has made the study of self-esteem his life's work, "To trust one's mind and to know that one is worthy of happiness is the essence of self-esteem." (The Six Pillars of self-esteem, p. 4)

Ayn Rand writes in “The Age of Envy,” an essay from her book The New Left: The Anti-Industrial Revolution, “self-esteem is reliance on one’s power to think.” (NL, 181) and “The man of authentic self-confidence is the man who relies on the judgment of his own mind.” (NL, 182) This indicates agreement with what Branden has said about self-esteem, that the ability to trust one’s own mind is essential to self-esteem. So both Bar-Levav and Ayn Rand agree that self-trust is an essential component of real love.

Despite their points of agreement, there are some real points of disagreement between Rand and Bar-Levav. Rand characterizes love as an emotional response to another person, whereas Bar-Levav characterizes love as an emotional response to life. With regard to those who are truly capable of loving, Bar-Levav writes,

Such individuated people are aware of their many blessings even without counting them. They are essentially free of old bitterness, hurt, or anger; and they are often filled with a sense of well-being that they are eager to share with others. It really is true that the more love one “gives” to others the more one has. (158-9)

According to Ayn Rand, love should be given to those who deserve it and withheld from those who do not deserve it. Someone who deserves your love is, according to Rand, someone who has earned it. And a person earns your love through the selfish joy you take in that person’s existence. And it’s not merely the person’s existence. It is, as she has said in “The Objectivist Ethics,” “the virtues of another man’s character.” So, for Ayn Rand, real love can be bestowed only by the virtuous upon the virtuous. To love someone who isn’t virtuous would, by her standards, be irrational.

This may explain why Ayn Rand never had any children. A baby is not born with ready made virtues. A baby has to become virtuous as it grows into an adult. Yet if Ayn

Rand is correct about the nature of love, it may be wrong for parents to bestow love on their babies and young children.

A corollary of this is that children do not feel real love for people. If they haven't yet developed virtues, they are not the sort of people who are capable of loving. Bar-Levav agrees that children are generally incapable of love. He writes, "the ability to really love does not exist in young children." (147) He characterizes the "love" that children have for their parents as gratitude and as "based on romantic idealizations." (147) Real love, they both agree, is possible only to those with a healthy sense of self, which children have yet to achieve.

Although they agree on this point, Bar-Levav does not agree that love should be withheld from children and others who have failed to "earn" it. He holds that our ability to love as adults is rooted in the love we received as children. He also holds that love may appropriately be freely given to those who have not yet done anything to earn it. In speaking of people with intact boundaries, these being the people who are capable of love, Bar-Levav says,

The pool of love from which they draw is practically inexhaustible; the walls that hold it are intact. Such people are often eager to give of themselves because their sense of fullness would become a burden otherwise. The capacity to remain receptive and thankful eventually becomes clogged when blessings are hoarded and never shared with others." (159)

Rand characterizes love as a payment, whereas Bar-Levav characterizes it as a gift. Yet it is not the altruistic and self-sacrificial gift of pity that Rand imagines is the only alternative to her brand of love. It is a gift given out of fullness, not because the recipient draws us to pity, but because the person who is full of joy for life feels the need to give and share the love. It is selfish in the sense that giving it away is a need that the

person who loves needs to fulfill. Rand regards love as a commodity to be given out only to those who have earned it. Bar-Levav characterizes it more as a fullness that needs to be released in regular acts of giving, lest the currants of love become clogged up. Bar-Levav is not advocating altruism, and he recognizes the importance of selfishness. But, unlike Rand, he recognizes that our self-interest isn't furthered by hoarding our love, and that it is indeed in our self-interest to freely share love with others.

Nevertheless, he is not advocating the all-out Christian conception of love, which says that love should be freely given to everyone. He says, “[Real love] is self-contained; specific toward some people, not generalized toward all of humanity; temporary even if frequent.” (160) People who love can freely give love because they are basically trusting. But trust can be broken in some instances and love withdrawn. He is not insisting that love be given equally to all. He recognizes that there will be people we do not love, yet that won't stop us from loving ourselves and others.

The main difference between Rand and Bar-Levav, as I see it, is on the matter of trust. Rand does not extend trust to others until they have earned it in her eyes. Bar-Levav advocates a trusting attitude toward people at least until they do something to shatter that trust. Rand regards it as wrong, or at least as a grave mistake, to extend love to someone who does not deserve it. Bar-Levav recognizes that there is risk in extending love to people we don't know well, but he also believes that those who are capable of loving are also capable of recovering from the occasional betrayal of love and trust, and that they can pull away from bad relationships.

The differences between Rand and Bar-Levav can be highlighted by how Ayn Rand integrated her conception of love in her life. Nathaniel Branden and Barbara Branden have both provided accounts of Ayn Rand's life. Nathaniel has written the book Judgement Day, an autobiography which focuses on the time he spent with Ayn

Rand, and Barbara has written The Passion of Ayn Rand, a biography of Ayn Rand.

Rand's two great loves were her husband and Nathaniel Branden. When she first saw her husband, Frank O'Conner, she fell in love with him right away. This was reflected in her novels, in which a heroine would meet a man and immediately recognize him as a man of great character who was worthy of her love. It was a common theme in her novels and stories that a person of outstanding character, such as she imagined herself to be, could easily and instantly recognize others of outstanding character. That is how she felt when she first saw Frank O'Conner.

After she met him, Frank disappeared for nine months. Barbara Branden quotes Ayn Rand as saying, "I was seriously in love. It was an absolute that this was the man I wanted." (81)

It was her affair with Nathaniel Branden which best illustrated her beliefs about love. Nathaniel was Ayn's protege, and the two of them had become a mutual appreciation society. Ayn, who was 25 years older than Nathaniel, had been his idol since he was 14. Out of their admiration for each other, romantic love grew. On the day that their affair began, Ayn decided to be open about it, and she told Barbara Branden, Nathaniel's wife, about it that very day. Nathaniel Branden quotes her as saying,

We're not Platonists. We don't hold our values in some other realm unrelated to the realm in which we live our lives. If Nathan and I are who we are, if we see what we see in each other, if we mean the values we profess--how can we not be in love?" (JD, p. 155)

She added, "This does not mean that Nathan does not love you, just as I love Frank. You must understand that." (JD, p. 156)

In looking back on his affair with Ayn Rand, Nathaniel Branden describes the way they proceeded as "barbaric." (JD 155) He and Ayn proceeded to have an open

affair known to both Frank and Barbara.

Their affair ended when Ayn learned that Nathaniel had secretly begun having an affair with another woman, Patrecia. Ayn turned on Nathaniel, repudiating him as “less than Peter Keating or James Taggart,” two of the most contemptible characters, by her standards, in her novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. (JD, 386) Barbara told Nathaniel that Ayn had become obsessed with destroying him. (JD, 396) Barbara writes in her own book on Ayn Rand,

A tendency, present in her psychology since childhood, had grown and hardened over the years into an unquestioned absolute: that in any conflict between herself and another, the guilt, the blame, the responsibility could only lie with the other. ... As she had done with other friends with whom she had broken, so she did with Nathaniel; if she was his victim, still writhing in pain and anguish and confusion, then it was axiomatic that he was a moral monster; the estimate of him she had held could not be allowed reality. (361)

Ayn Rand’s love for Nathaniel Branden was romantic “love” in the worst way. It began with the delusion that he was a morally perfect being like John Galt, the hero of *Atlas Shrugged*. When their affair ended, it was in part because she could no longer imagine him as morally perfect. She had fallen in love with an image, and when that image was shattered, she ceased to love the man. She felt pain over being betrayed and jealousy for Patrecia. The passion she once felt for Nathaniel turned from romance to revulsion. A man who was once like John Galt to her was now less than James Taggart.

These are all classic symptoms of what Bar-Levav has described as romantic “love,” as distinguished from real love. The “love” is based on romantic idealizations. It was about what she wanted instead of what she could give. The light of reality led to the affair’s dissolution, and feelings of love turned to hate. This all suggests that Ayn Rand’s understanding of love was a perversion of real love.

Nevertheless, it would be an ad hominem if I left things at that. I want to show that Ayn Rand’s understanding of love was reflected in her affair with Nathaniel Branden. She understood love as a response that was owed to certain people for their

outstanding character. And this was how she interpreted her feelings for Branden. She perceived him as a man of outstanding character and felt accordingly. Although this understanding of love was not an open endorsement of romantic fantasy, it provided a cover under which romantic fantasy could disguise itself as love. In her case, that is what it did. Her evaluation of Branden was a romantic fantasy, and her love for him was based on that fantasy.

One might respond that she was delusional with respect to Branden, but that her conception of love was sound. If Branden had truly been the exemplar of Objectivist morality she had imagined him to be, her love would have been true love instead of romantic fantasy. But this response presupposes three ideas which are all faulty. These are:

- 1) Only outstanding moral exemplar can inspire true love.
- 2) Outstanding moral exemplars do exist.
- 3) People can reliably judge who these moral exemplars are.

Branden had bought into Rand's fantasy about him, but he came to realize that no one is morally perfect, and he grew comfortable with that fact. I believe there are no morally perfect people. No one can control his behavior to the degree required by moral perfection. This is widely accepted, being obvious to many people, and I won't argue it. If there are no morally perfect people, the second claim is false, and the third is irrelevant. If the first claim remains true, then no one is worthy of love. That seems absurd. People may be worth loving without being morally perfect.

One could then respond, granting that moral perfection is impossible, Ayn Rand still had the right idea. It is exceptional people, who are nonetheless imperfect, who are worthy of love. If this is what love is, the difference between real love and romantic fantasy would rest on the difference between knowledge and belief. Real love would be

possible only if you truly knew the person, and it would be fake love otherwise. Nathaniel Branden's theory of love, which we now turn to, goes something along these lines.

Nathaniel Branden on Love

Branden's views were once more in line with Rand's, but Patrecia, his second wife and the woman he had an affair with, helped him change his views. After Patrecia's untimely death, Branden began to fall in love with another woman, and he married her while writing The Psychology of Romantic Love.

In The Psychology of Romantic Love, Branden also distinguishes between love and romantic love, but he regards both as good, unlike Bar-Levav, who regards romantic "love" as bad. However, Branden does distinguish between healthy and unhealthy romantic love, and what he describes as unhealthy romantic love is much the same as what Bar-Levav describes as romantic "love." The main difference between them in this respect is that Branden believes there can be healthy romantic love, and Bar-Levav does not seem to agree.

Another difference is that Bar-Levav described love as a feeling, whereas Branden's understanding of love is more complex. Branden understands love as an emotional response, but also as an evaluation, an action tendency, and an orientation. Regarding love as an emotional response, Branden writes,

Love is, in the most general sense, our emotional response to that which we value highly. As such, it is the experience of joy in the existence of the loved object, joy in proximity, and joy in interaction or involvement. To love is to delight in the being whom one loves, to experience pleasure in that being's presence, to find gratification or fulfillment in contact with that being. (61-62)

On the grounds that "all emotions entail evaluations and action tendencies," he

asserts that love is also an evaluation and an action tendency. With respect to love as an evaluation, he writes, “Love is the highest, the most intense, expression of the assessment ‘for me,’ ‘good for me,’ ‘beneficial to my life.’” (62) With respect to love as an action tendency, he writes, “The emotion of love entails the action tendency to achieve some form of contact with the loved being, some form of interaction or involvement.” (63) Finally, he also describes love in a more fundamental sense, as a psychological state that is more enduring than passing feelings. This is love as an orientation. He writes, “As an orientation, love represents a disposition to experience the loved being as the embodiment of profoundly important personal values--and, as a consequence, a real or potential source of joy.” (63) In his later book Honoring the Self, Branden says the same thing but describes what he is presenting as a formal definition of love. (94) So Branden formally understands love as an orientation that manifests itself in emotional responses, evaluations, and action tendencies.

One important consequence of this understanding of love is that you can be truthfully said to love someone even when you don't feel love for that person. Bar-Levav, who regarded love as a feeling, maintained that you do not love unless you feel love. He then spoke of romantic love as an attempt to freeze the feeling of love. Branden's understanding of love allows for a different understanding of romantic love. And that is what I will turn to now.

Branden describes romantic love as “a passionate spiritual-emotional-sexual attachment between a man and a woman that reflects a high regard for the value of each other's person.” (3) This is a deeper, more intense, more focused kind of love than the love we feel for friends and relatives. The main thing that distinguishes romantic love is the attachment between two people. Although Branden frames his description in terms of a heterosexual relationship, he allows that it may apply, with the obvious

modifications, to homosexual relationships. He is inclined to think that homosexuality is a sign of immaturity, but he does not press this issue, and he allows that he could be wrong about homosexuality. So the main thing is not that romantic love is described as an attachment between a man and a woman, but that it is an attachment between two people who are bonded together through sexual attraction, passion, common spiritual values and emotional responses. Branden maintains that this attachment is a good thing, as opposed to Bar-Levav, who would describe any long-standing attachment to someone as the freezing of feelings. So let's try to understand why Branden believes an attachment between two people can be a good thing.

To understand what it means to say "I love," says Branden, we first need to know what it means to say "I." According to Branden, "we are each of us a single point of consciousness, a unique event, a private, unrepeatable world." (61) This is what it means to be an individual. Our individuality, according to Branden, begins with our aloneness. But that is not the end of the story. He writes, "First, a self--then, a possibility: the exquisite joy of one self encountering another." (61)

We should understand this as one private, unique, and unrepeatable world encountering another. People come across each other every day, and so encounters between separate, individual worlds go on every day all over the world. But many of these encounters are merely on the surface. Romantic love provides the deepest encounter between two individuals. Two lovers are in effect explorers of other worlds, i.e. each other. They reveal themselves to each other to greater depths than they reveal themselves to other people, and they know each other to greater depths than they know others.

Branden claims that healthy romantic love is rooted in the desire for visibility. To be visible is for people to see us for who we really are. This doesn't mean that

someone sees you down to your very essence or understands everything about you in vivid detail. Visibility is a matter of degree, and complete visibility is probably nothing more than an ideal. Branden makes this clear when he describes the incident that gave him his insight into the need for visibility. Branden was playing with his dog Muttnik, and he reflected on why he enjoyed playing with her. He writes,

If I were to view Muttnik as an automaton without consciousness or awareness and to view her actions and responses as entirely mechanical, then my enjoyment would vanish. The factor of consciousness was of primary importance. (71)

The conclusion he came to was that he experienced psychological visibility when playing with her. Branden and Muttnik were “jabbing at and boxing with each other in mock ferociousness,” and Muttnik understood that Branden was playing with her, and she trusted him not to hurt her. (70) The significant thing here was that Muttnik seemed to understand Branden’s intentions. He felt understood by her, and that was the psychological visibility he experienced.

Of course, a dog is incapable of understanding a human in any deep sense. Humans experience many things, such as the pleasure of good literature, that are completely alien to the experience of dogs. Try reading a poem to a dog and see if he really appreciates it. That a human can experience some visibility with a dog indicates that visibility does not have to be about revealing the depths of your soul. Visibility can be as simple as having your intentions understood.

Nevertheless, the need for visibility goes beyond what an animal can provide. Animals may understand some of our intentions, but they cannot share our joys and sorrows, they cannot have conversations with us, and they cannot share with us many of the activities that give humans pleasure. But to understand why the need for visibility goes beyond this, we need to understand what the need for visibility is rooted

in.

According to Branden, the self is a process, not some concrete entity which can be immediately known and perceived by itself. A self is not an object of perception to itself, but the need exists for the self to experience itself objectively, i.e. as something which exists out in the world. This is best achieved with the help of a mirror, but an actual physical mirror can only provide us with an objective experience of our bodies. To experience our psychological makeup, our soul, or whatever you want to call it, in an objective manner, we need something that will function as a psychological mirror. Glass just won't do. What is needed for a psychological mirror is another consciousness, a person who can experience us as a person and reflect back how they experience and perceive us.

The need for visibility is rooted in the need to have our soul mirrored back to us. This provides us with an objective experience of our own existence. The need for visibility is a profound psychological need. You might easily imagine Gaia, existing alone in the chaos before creation, choosing to create Uranus for the sake of experiencing psychological visibility. (Or substitute characters from your favorite creation myth.) Quantum physicists sometimes depict the universe as bringing forth life so that it (the universe) can come to know itself. My point is not that Gaia or the universe really felt the need for visibility, but that the need for visibility is not rooted in our mortality, as many of our other needs are. We need food and water, because without them we will die. That is not why we need to experience visibility. It is possible to live without experiencing visibility, and many people can live a full life span with only very meager experiences of visibility. The need for visibility is rooted in consciousness. So I'm inclined to believe that even an immortal consciousness, such as that of God or Gaia, would experience the need for visibility.

The nature of this need helps us distinguish between Branden's conceptions of healthy and unhealthy romantic love. In an unhealthy relationship, a person may focus on needs other than visibility, such as the need for self-esteem, for a sense that life has meaning, or for a sense of excitement. These are all important needs, but they are best provided by ourselves. No one but you can make you appreciate yourself, or make your life meaningful, or make you find excitement in things. That is why a relationship is unhealthy when its purpose is to satisfy needs such these. A relationship is incapable of satisfying these needs for someone who can't satisfy them for herself, and if you look to a relationship to fulfill these needs, you will be disappointed. But visibility is a different matter. You cannot mirror yourself. You need another person to function as a mirror. So a relationship based on the need for visibility may very well succeed. Since a relationship may succeed in satisfying the need for visibility, a relationship based on this need might very well turn out to be healthy.

Nevertheless, a relationship based on this need could still be unhealthy. If you seek perfect and complete visibility in a relationship, you are going to be disappointed. These ideals are unobtainable. But a relationship that is devoted to ever expanding visibility can turn into a lifelong journey of discovery and self-discovery. A relationship is unhealthy when unreasonable expectations are put on it. Unrealistic expectations, such as experiencing complete visibility with someone, will put a drag on a relationship. But the on-going expansion of visibility is a reasonable expectation with the right person. It won't be a reasonable expectation with just anyone, but it will usually be reasonable to expect it with some people.

I have said that psychological mirroring is a matter of degree. It is also a matter of accuracy. A Nazi may mirror a Jew back more fully than a dog can, but insofar as the dog mirrors back the Jew, it may be more accurate. Another consciousness is not like

a flat piece of glass that just reflects us back to ourselves. The ability of a consciousness to reflect back another is shaped by its own preconceptions, prejudices, experiences, etc. People often project themselves onto other people, and the reflections that people receive back from other people often bear very little resemblance to how they picture themselves. Branden makes an analogy to fun house mirrors, which wildly distort how a person looks.

Let's now return to Branden's understanding of romantic love and link it with the need for visibility. Branden has described love as "a passionate spiritual-emotional-sexual attachment between a man and a woman that reflects a high regard for the value of each other's person." (3) People are drawn to people who will mirror back the way they think of themselves or sometimes to people who mirror back the way they would like to think about themselves. Mirroring back someone's fantasies about himself is usually a recipe for disaster, and a romantic relationship between two people of low self-esteem will generally be unhealthy. For these two people will each reflect back images of each other that don't match how they really think of themselves, and each will feel invisible. This is because romance implies a high regard for each other. If they reflected a low regard for each other, it wouldn't be a romantic relationship, per Branden's definition. So a healthy romantic relationship will be between two people of high self-esteem. These two people will more accurately reflect back how each thinks of himself.

Besides self-esteem, other factors which affect the accuracy of psychological mirroring include shared spiritual values and common emotional responses to life. A relationship between a freethinker and a fundamentalist is going to have certain obstacles to visibility. Neither will likely perceive the other as she thinks of herself. In a romantic relationship, people relate to each other spiritually, emotionally, and sexually. The attachment of romantic love is based on the need for visibility in these

areas. Visibility in these areas is better satisfied by an on-going relationship than it is by a string of new relationships. In an on-going relationship, visibility can grow out of the intimacy shared between two people. As a result, greater visibility is possible in an on-going relationship than is possible between two strangers or acquaintances. This is not to say that two strangers will never experience greater visibility with each other than with people who have known them longer. After all, one Trekkie might experience greater visibility with a fellow Trekkie he just met than he does with a mother who thinks Star Trek is godless, secular humanist trash. My point is that two strangers who do experience visibility with each other can come to experience greater visibility with each other by beginning an on-going relationship. Thus, an on-going relationship with somebody is the best means for adequately satisfying the need for visibility.

This begins to explain why romantic love involves an attachment to another person. It is not that the object of romantic love is pictured as some kind of superhuman who is somehow more special than other people. Rather, it is because mutual visibility has grown between two people who are in love. Ideally, two people who are in love are visible to each other to a greater extent than either is to anyone else. To lose the other is to lose this visibility. Although the same amount of visibility could be regained with someone else, it would take time. Thus, the bond in romantic love is to something very precious. It isn't to a magical superhuman who makes life wonderful, but it is still something precious. Thus, the attachment of romantic love is a reasonable attachment. It is not based in the fantasy that someone is a Prince Charming or a beautiful princess. It is based in the reality that two people have achieved a deep sense of visibility with each other.

One of the results of visibility in a romantic relationship is that two people begin to see aspects of each other in one another. This helps to cement the bond between

them, and, according to Branden, it leads each to expand her sense of her own self-interest to include the self-interest of her partner. Branden writes,

To love selfishly does not mean to be indifferent to the needs or interests of the partner. To say it once more: When we love, our concept of our self-interest expands to embrace the well-being of our partner. ...

It would hardly be a compliment to tell a person we love that his or her well-being and happiness are not of selfish interest to us. To love is to see myself in you and to wish to celebrate myself with you; this is hardly unselfish. Yet it is the very essence of love. (169)

Romantic love is immensely valuable, according to Branden, because it fulfills our need for visibility. But how does this square with Bar-Levav's conception of love? Bar-Levav says, "The joy and pleasure of loving are derived from the very act of giving, not from obtaining anything from anyone. The wish to share one's inner plenty is the essence of real love." (146) It seems that Branden and Bar-Levav contradict each other. But there may be a way around this. Suppose you are full of inner plenty, as Bar-Levav believes a loving person is, and you try to share your inner plenty with some moping drudge of a person who hates his life. Let's say that he doesn't appreciate you and turns you away as some kind of weirdo. So you have tried but failed to share your inner plenty with this person, and so you have failed to experience the joy of loving, as Bar-Levav understands it. As it turns out, you have also experienced invisibility. If you seek out a relationship with someone you can share your inner plenty with, you will also be seeking out a relationship where you will experience visibility. To effectively give love, you must receive visibility. So the need to give love, to share your inner plenty if you have it, is inseparable from the need for visibility.

Despite this way of reconciling their differing opinions, there are still other points of difference between them. Their differences show up mainly in what Bar-Levav leaves out. Although Bar-Levav never condemns what Branden understands as healthy romantic love, he never mentions it either. Branden's understanding of healthy romantic love seems unknown to Bar-Levav. Whenever Bar-Levav speaks of romantic or sexual

love, he criticizes it or downplays it. Unlike Branden, Bar-Levav does not say anything about a healthy version of anything we might identify as romantic love.

Although Bar-Levav says a lot that is worthwhile, I think that Branden is more on track. Both recognize the dangers of romantic fantasy, but Branden recognizes a possibility that Bar-Levav ignores or remains oblivious to, the possibility for a healthy attachment based on the need for visibility. Bar-Levav seems to assume that all attachment is rooted in romantic fantasies, whereas Branden argues otherwise.

It may be raised against Branden that many people don't want visibility, that, being ashamed of who they are, they hide true knowledge of themselves from themselves and others. There certainly are such people. But it doesn't show that the need for visibility isn't universal. The need for visibility is coupled with the need for self-esteem. Visibility may not do much good for someone ashamed of who she is, but visibility will be important when she develops self-esteem. Even without self-esteem, the need for visibility is there, making the need for self-esteem all the more important. Without visibility, a person lives in alienation from herself and others.

John Gray on Love

According to John Gray, "To love someone is to acknowledge the goodness of who they are." (Men, Women, and Relationships, p. 196) This is similar to Rand's idea that love is a response to someone's virtues. This understanding of love also implies visibility, which Branden says is a part of love. To acknowledge the goodness of who someone is, requires knowledge of that person's goodness. If your feelings for someone are based on fantasies, you are not acknowledging that person's goodness. Not even if you think the person is really great. Rather, you are seeing a goodness that exists only in your mind, and you are not acknowledging that person's real goodness.

Gray also says, "Love is an attitude that embraces another as one would embrace

oneself. It upholds, nurtures, and supports. Whenever we are truly feeling love, there will also emerge a selfless desire to serve the well-being of the loved one.” (196) This seems to contradict Branden, Rand, and Bar-Levav, all of whom have said that love is selfish. For example, Branden writes, “Of all the nonsense written about love, none is more absurd than the notion that ideal love is selfless.” (169) But I don’t think that there is a real contradiction here. I think that Gray is somewhat inarticulately trying to describe what Branden describes when he writes, “When we love, our concept of our self-interest expands to embrace the well-being of our partner. That is the greatest compliment of love: to declare to another human being that his or her happiness is of selfish importance to ourselves.” (169) Both assert that you take a special interest in the well-being of the person you love. Branden recognizes this as an expansion of our self-interest, whereas Gray doesn’t seem to understand the difference between expanding your self-interest and the denial of your self-interest. Gray is not talking about the denial of your self-interest for another, and his words reveal this. He writes, “Love is also a connective feeling. Love relates you to another. It says you are like a part of me.” (196) If this is what love is, it doesn’t take you outside of yourself. Rather, it expands your sense of self. If that is what happens in love, it makes more sense to describe the interest you take in someone as an expansion of your selfishness rather than as selflessness. So it seems to me that Gray agrees with Branden on the major points. Love is built on visibility and admiration, it expands your sense of self, connecting you to the person you love, and it expands what is selfishly important to you.

Peter McWilliams on Love

In Love 101, Peter McWilliams says “Love is taking care of, with regular intervals of taking good care of, and occasional splurges of pampering.” (3) He distinguishes this from romantic love, which he describes as an emotional bungee-jump from the depths

to the heights of romance. Being “in love” generally implies people have “lost themselves in someone (or at least the illusion of what that other person comprises), are obsessed by the other person (and relishing the addiction), and are desperate for the other person to feel the same way about them. (3)

What McWilliams describes as romantic love is much the same thing that Branden describes as unhealthy romantic love. McWilliams describes people as losing their sense of self, as obsessing over romantic fantasies, and as feeling needy and desperate. But what he contrasts this with is more bare bones than anything the others have described as love. But it should be emphasized that this is merely what he means by love in his book, which is a book on self-love. Rather than attempting to give a comprehensive definition of love, I believe he is isolating that part of love which he believes is most important in self-love. His central claim in the book is that you should take real good care of yourself, and this understanding of love serves that end. Understood in this light, McWilliams use of love underscores the point agreed on by Branden and Gray that we take an interest in the welfare of those we love. Given McWilliams’ emphasis on self-love, it also underscores that this interest is selfish. The interest you take in your own welfare is essential to self-love, and it is of course a selfish interest. McWilliams and Branden both agree that you can’t love others until you love yourself. If selfishness is required for self-love, and if self-love is required before we can love others, it makes no sense to assume that loving others is suddenly selfless rather than selfish. So McWilliams underscores the selfishness of love.

M. Scott Peck on Love

In The Road Less Traveled, M. Scott Peck defines love as “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” (81) He agrees with the others that you can’t love others without loving yourself first. If you

don't have the will to extend yourself for your own spiritual growth, he reasons, how can you have the will to extend yourself for the spiritual growth of others? It seems that you cannot. If you value spiritual growth, you will value your own. And if you aim to nurture the spiritual growth of others, you will aim to nurture your own as a means to this end.

Let's now look at this definition more closely. Peck understands will as "desire of sufficient intensity that it is translated into action." (83) So love is not just the desire to do as love does, nor is it the mere doing of it. Love is action rooted in desire. Thus, you cannot passively love someone, and you cannot love someone out of mere habit.

So love is both an action and a choice. As an action, love requires effort. He understands extending yourself as extending your own limits, and he says, "One extends one's limits only by exceeding them, and exceeding them requires effort." (83) Thus, as he points out, love creates a process of self-evolution. As you extend your limits, you establish new limits. As you love, you continue to exceed the limits you set for yourself, and this process repeats itself, leading you to extend yourself further and further.

As a choice, love requires courage. Peck writes,

When we extend ourselves, our self enters new and unfamiliar territory, so to speak. Our self becomes a new and different self. We do things we are not accustomed to do. We change. The experiences of change, of unaccustomed activity, of being on unfamiliar ground, of doing things differently is frightening. It always was and always will be. People handle their fear of change in different ways, but the fear is inescapable if they are in fact to change. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the making of action in spite of fear, the moving out against the resistance engendered by fear into the unknown and into the future. (131)

Like many of the others, Peck distinguishes love from unhealthy love. He refers to unhealthy love as falling in love, which he describes as "a sudden collapse of a section of an individual's ego boundaries, permitting one to merge his or her identity with that of another person." (87) This is a very different matter than love, which involves the expansion of ego boundaries, not their collapse. I can relate to what Peck is speaking of from my own experience. I once met a young woman whom I simply wanted to lose

myself in. It wasn't a rational experience, but that is what it felt like, and I had a big crush on her for a while.

This distinction between love and falling in love brings to mind a distinction that Branden makes between healthy and unhealthy romantic love. Branden makes it clear that love begins with a solid sense of self. Furthermore, he describes love for another as an expansion of our own self-interest, and this is distinguished from selflessness, which is an abandonment of self-interest. Thus, Peck and Branden both understand love as something which expands our sense of self.

Besides this, Peck also agrees with Branden and others that true love is selfish. He writes,

When I genuinely love I am extending myself, and when I am extending myself I am growing. The more I love, the longer I love, the larger I become. Genuine love is self-replenishing. The more I nurture the spiritual growth of others, the more my own spiritual growth is nurtured. I am a totally selfish human being. I never do something for somebody else but that I do it for myself, (160)

Summing Up

Although there are commonalities among the visions of love I have described here, there are also differences. I will now try to make sense of these similarities and differences and move toward an understanding of real love. Bar-Levav says love is a feeling. Peck says that love is not a feeling but rather a matter of will. Rand describes it as an emotional response to a person. McWilliams describes love as an action. Gray describes love as an attitude. Among these five, love is generally represented as one kind of thing, but each has a different opinion on what sort of thing love is. Among the six authors I've discussed, only Nathaniel Branden describes love in a multi-faceted way. For Branden, love is a primarily an orientation, but it also manifests itself as a feeling, as an emotional response, and as an action tendency. Contrasting Branden's understanding of love with the others, I'm reminded of the story about the five blind men and the elephant. Five blind men each felt a different part of an elephant and came

to a different opinion on what an elephant was. The one who felt the trunk concluded that the elephant was a serpent. The one who felt a leg concluded that an elephant was a tree. And you should get the idea.

I'm inclined to believe that each of the authors has focused on different aspects of love and come to different conclusions about love, much like the blind men describing the elephant. Thus, I think it would be more appropriate to pool their insights together, for the sake of coming up with a broader perspective on love, than it would be to argue that some are right and some are wrong. Yes, some may be wrong about some things, but I want to focus on getting what is right in what they say. Since Branden offers the broadest perspective on love, I will use Branden's understanding of love as a focal point for relating the others together.

Rand and Branden

I will begin with Rand and Branden, because they were once closely associated with each other. Rand asserts that to love is to value, and she understands romantic love to be an emotional response to someone's virtues. Branden agrees with Rand that valuing is an integral part of love and that a positive emotional response to someone is definitely part of romantic love. But, unlike Rand, Branden believes there is more to love than valuing and more to romantic love than a positive emotional response to someone's virtues. The basic difference between Rand and Branden is that Rand offers a simplistic understanding of love, whereas Branden offers a more complex understanding of love. On Rand's simple understanding of love, love at first sight is a real possibility, and it is also possible to be romantically attached to multiple partners. Rand lived with these beliefs herself, and she also presented this picture of love in her novels. She fell in love with her husband at first sight, and she openly had an affair with Branden without understanding that she was hurting her husband.

One of the things which distinguishes Branden's understanding of love from Rand's is the importance he places on visibility. Although you may be able to size up a person at first sight, the visibility the two of you may experience upon meeting will still be less than the visibility you experience later as you become intimate with one another. Furthermore, Branden's understanding of romantic love includes types of intimacy that do not exist between two people who have just met. So, on Branden's understanding of romantic love, you may recognize that a stranger has potential for a romantic relationship, but you will not have established the bonds that tie two people together in a romantic relationship. As Branden puts it,

Fascination, attraction, passion may be born "at first sight." Love is not. Love requires knowledge, and knowledge requires time. (97)

On Rand's view, you ought to love any suitably admirable member of the opposite sex. If Dagny Taggart, the heroine of Atlas Shrugged, lived in a world of John Galt's, she would have to love them all. On Branden's view, the bond you have already established with one person is going to make a big difference. Whereas Dagny Taggart could easily move from Francisco to Hank Reardon to John Galt, simply because each was slightly more admirable than the last, two people in a real romantic relationship have established bonds between each other that go beyond mere admiration for one another's character. These bonds make it difficult to uproot one relationship with someone you love only to replace it with a relationship with someone you admire more. Branden recognizes the importance of the bonds that two people establish over a period of time, whereas Rand shows no respect for these bonds. I believe that Rand's ideas ring true insofar as she agrees with Branden, but I also believe her views on love are deficient, especially when it comes to respecting bonds of intimacy.

Branden and Bar-Levav

Bar-Levav claims that love is a feeling, and Branden also describes love as a feeling. So I will begin by describing the sort of feeling that each describes love to be. Bar-Levav does not state outright what kind of feeling love is. The best he does is assert that those who love “are often filled with a sense of well-being that they are eager to share with others.” (158-9) He also asserts that love occurs only in the absence of fear. So we may conclude that he regards love as a sense of happiness and optimism and the eagerness to share this happiness and optimism with others. Branden describes the feeling of love as an emotional response to a specific person. He describes it as “the experience of joy in the existence of the loved object, joy in proximity, and joy in interaction or involvement.” (62)

Branden and Bar-Levav agree insofar as both describe love as a feeling of joy or happiness. But their descriptions of love are otherwise very different. Bar-Levav does not describe any sense in which love is an emotional response to a specific person. Although he speaks of loving specific people and says that we cannot love everyone, this seems to be little more than a matter of logistics for him. We can love only specific individuals, on his account, because we can share our sense of happiness and optimism only with specific individuals. We can't share it with some individuals, because some won't accept it, and we can't share it with everyone, because we are not superpowerful beings who can extend ourselves to everyone. It seems as though, on Bar-Levav's account, loving someone is nothing more than sharing joy and optimism with that person. So, on Bar-Levav's account, you can love anyone at all who is receptive to love. Who you love is of no concern at all. What is of concern is that you are capable of loving and find someone who is receptive to love.

Branden would surely criticize Bar-Levav's conception of love on the same grounds as he has criticized Erich Fromm's. Like Bar-Levav, Fromm divorces love from

valuing. He has said in The Art of Loving, “In essence, all human beings are identical. We are all part of One; we are One. This being so, it should not make any difference whom we love.” (131) Bar-Levav may not share Fromm’s mystical belief that we are all one, but he does seem to agree with Fromm that it doesn’t matter whom we love. Branden paraphrases this notion by saying, “It should not, in other words, make any difference whether the person we love is a being of stature or a total nonentity, a genius or a fool, a hero or a scoundrel.” (The Disowned Self, pp. 241-2) Branden completely disagrees with this notion that it doesn’t matter whom we love. He says against it, in completely italicized text,

To love is to value; healthy love expresses admiration. Love is not alms, but a tribute. If love did not imply admiration, if it did not imply an acknowledgement of moral qualities that the recipient of love possessed—what meaning or significance would love have, and why would Fromm or anyone consider it desirable? Only one answer is possible, and it is not an attractive one: when love is divorced from values, then “love” becomes, not a tribute, but a moral blank check: a promise that one will be forgiven anything, that one will not be abandoned, that one will be taken care of. (The Disowned Self, p. 243)

Indeed, Bar-Levav does regard the giving of love as a gift and not as a tribute. I have previously criticized Ayn Rand for saying much the same thing as Branden has said. I am now in the position of thinking that Branden makes more sense than Bar-Levav, even though the ideas he expresses here are very similar to the ideas I have criticized Rand for. In fact, these words, even though they appear in a book he wrote after his break with Rand, were originally written when he was in Rand’s camp.

I criticized Rand for not allowing any room for loving babies and young children. Nevertheless, I think there is a slight difference in what Rand and Branden are saying. Rand was insisting that love was a response to another’s virtues. My criticism was that parents may love babies who as yet have developed no virtues. Although the examples Branden gives are of the virtuous vs. the unvirtuous, what he actually asserts is that love requires admiration. Parents might not admire a baby for his virtues, but they may admire a baby for how cute he is, for the small accomplishments he makes each day,

and just for being their kid. Surely, the world is not lacking parents who admire their babies. Many parents admire their babies and young children, even if they, by being adults, are more mature and more admirable.

Besides this, I think Branden provides a loophole for babies that Rand doesn't. I have previously quoted Branden as saying "To love is to see myself in you and to wish to celebrate myself with you; this is hardly unselfish. Yet it is the very essence of love." (169) There is a way that parents see themselves in their children that is different from the way that adults normally see themselves in other adults. Their children are their offspring and share many of their genes. If TV has taught me anything, it is that parents love to look at their children, especially newborns, and note just how much they are like them. Parenthood is not a selfless duty that people regularly submit themselves to out of altruism. Having children is, for many parents, a celebration of themselves, and, as Branden says, that is hardly unselfish. So I believe that Branden's understanding of love, unlike Rand's perhaps, allows for parents to love their young children and even their newborn babies.

With this said, I am free to say that Branden makes more sense than Bar-Levav. The advantage that Bar-Levav's understanding of love had over Rand's is not had over Branden's. I agree with Branden that an understanding of love that makes no discrimination between loving one person and loving another is inadequate. Such an understanding of love robs love of being a compliment, it provides no basis for choosing whom to love, and it provides no reason to remain faithful to someone. The first two should be obvious. I will dwell a bit on my last point here. Suppose you are married. Why should you remain faithful to your husband or wife if all there is to love is what Bar-Levav says there is? On Bar-Levav's view, loving is a need that comes and goes, and it is always a good thing to share love. If you happen to be with someone other than

your spouse, someone who would be receptive to your love, why not share your love with that person as fully as you can? A spouse who would be bothered by this is probably just attached to you in an immature way, feeling romantic “love” instead of real love. So why let these immature concerns bother you? The only reason Bar-Levav can give for remaining true to your spouse is that you have made a promise to remain true. But he doesn’t recommend making commitments at all, and his notion of love is very much like the notion of free love that was popular in the seventies.

In contrast to Bar-Levav, Branden’s understanding of love offers a reason to remain faithful that goes beyond mere promises of fidelity. For Branden, two lovers have developed bonds of intimacy that would be put in danger by an affair. I have already discussed this issue in comparing Branden with Rand. Like Rand’s, Bar-Levav’s understanding of love fails to respect the bonds of intimacy that people develop in a relationship.

Although Bar-Levav’s understanding of love is grossly inadequate in some ways, what he describes as love is not itself a bad thing. Optimism and exuberance for life are very good things, and eagerness to share these with others is also a good thing. It is good for people to have a sense of fullness and well-being. Indeed, these will be an important part of any healthy love relationship. But they are not all there is to love. As a result, Branden’s theory stands up much better than Bar-Levav’s.

Branden and Gray

Gray and Branden are alike in that they both give broader understandings of love than the others do. Gray describes love as an acknowledgment of someone’s goodness, as “a connective feeling,” and as “an attitude that embraces another as one would embrace oneself.” (196) I don’t think that Branden would disagree with these descriptions of love. The main difference between Branden’s understanding of love and

Gray's is that Branden's is more systematic. Like Gray, Branden offers different descriptions of love, but unlike Gray he also provides a definition of love that unites the varying descriptions under one concept.

One useful thing Gray does is distinguish the need for love from six other needs that are related to it. These are the needs for acceptance, appreciation, trust, care, understanding, and respect. But he confuses things in Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by asserting that these plus six other needs are all different kinds of love. Ultimately, it would seem, Gray's books may be more useful for learning how to make someone feel loved than for understanding what love is. In general, Gray's writing is confused and perhaps contradictory. In a choice between Gray and Branden, I will put aside Gray and go with Branden.

Branden and Peck

Peck describes love as a kind of will and describes will as "desire of sufficient intensity that it is translated into action." (83) This most resembles Branden's description of love as an action tendency. So these are what I will compare. The first distinction to be made here is between will, as Peck understands it, and an action tendency, as Branden understands it. Peck understands will as something which is always translated into action. It is distinguished from action by being rooted in desire, but it still entails action. Peck even emphasizes the word "is" to underscore his belief that will entails action. Unlike Peck's notion of will, Branden's notion of action tendency is just a tendency to act in a certain way. The tendency exists even when you aren't doing anything. An action tendency can even exist when you are trying to get rid of it. For example, a smoker who is trying to quit still has the action tendency to smoke. If Peck were to talk about a will to smoke, as opposed to an action tendency to smoke, he would say that the will was not there unless the smoker was actually smoking.

Let me now turn to their descriptions of love. Peck defines love as “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” (81) Branden, in describing love as an action tendency, says “The emotion of love entails the action tendency to achieve some form of contact with the loved being, some form of interaction or involvement.” (63) It goes without saying that the actions described here are very different. Furthermore, the action tendency described by Branden is also entailed by obsession. John Hinckley Jr. certainly sought contact with Jodie Foster. So the description that Branden offers here fails to distinguish love from its counterfeits. But it should be borne in mind that I am presently discussing only one aspect of Branden’s understanding of love.

Nevertheless, insofar as Branden is describing the action tendency associated with love, it seems reasonable to assume that he hasn’t given a complete picture here. Besides seeking contact with loved ones, people who love others seek to nourish, support, and take care of those they love. Indeed, Branden has said that the welfare of a loved one becomes selfishly important to the one who loves. Therefore, a person who loves another would seek to do things that serve the best interest of the person he loves. What Peck is describing is his idea of what best serves someone’s self-interest. Peck believes that our self-interest is best served by growing spiritually. With this in mind, he asserts that love is something which promotes spiritual growth.

This is an understandable move, but I think that the logic which leads to this move is missing a link. A person who loves another will, let us assume, seek to do what he believes is in the best interest of the person he loves. I don’t think we could expect anything more than that. He may fail to do what is in the best interest of the one he loves, for the simple fact that he doesn’t truly know what is in her best interest, but that would be due to a lack of knowledge, not to a failure to truly love. Thus, a person who

isn't aware of the importance of spiritual growth might love someone without willing to extend himself to nurture her spiritual growth. And this would be because he simply doesn't know any better, not because he doesn't love her.

Nevertheless, assuming that Peck is right about the importance of spiritual growth, we may assert that the will he speaks of, or at least an action tendency toward extending oneself to nurture someone's spiritual growth, is a part of healthy love. I am inclined to say that only the action tendency need be part of love. The will may be absent at times simply because thoughts of the loved one are absent. People who love in a mature way don't obsessively think of those they love. It is quite normal, I think, for them to focus their minds on other things for extended periods of time. So the will won't always be there, but it may be true that the action tendency is always there.

Another point I want to make is that it would be mistaken to identify love solely with the will, or even the action tendency, to extend oneself to nurture someone's spiritual growth. I will speak of only the will here, but what I say will also apply to the action tendency. The will to extend yourself to nurture another's spiritual growth may be maintained even for complete strangers, people you will never meet personally or even know exist, and people who won't be born until after you die. How is this? Our actions can directly affect people we never meet. In particular, an author may nurture the spiritual growth of many people she will never meet, including later generations who read her writing. If she desires to have this effect and extends herself for the purpose of bringing it about, then, according to Peck's understanding of love, she loves complete strangers and unborn generations to come.

It may be because of reasoning along these lines that Peck came to the conclusion that love is not a feeling. After all, what feelings can I have for a Kathryn Janeway or a Jim Kirk born hundreds of years from now? I can't even bring to mind any

individual people who will be born in the future, much less have any feelings for them. But if this is all there is to love, then the fondness and affection I feel for some people has nothing at all to do with love. Furthermore, if love is the will to extend yourself for someone, you cannot love people who are dead and gone, not even the people you loved when they were alive (unless you believe you can affect their spirits in the afterlife). However, this particular criticism can be addressed by modifying Peck's definition of will.

It strikes me that Peck is using a nonstandard sense of the word will. Suppose a smoker gets stranded on a desert island without any cigarettes. He may want to smoke very badly, but he can't, because he has nothing to smoke. We would normally say that the will to smoke is there but that all opportunity to smoke is absent. So I will suggest a modification to Peck's understanding of will. I submit that will is desire that is so strong it would result in action if the opportunity arose. In this sense of will, you may have the will to extend yourself for dead people.

However, Peck's definition of love has other problems with this sense of will. Since it relies on what you would do, it becomes hard to know who you really do love unless you actually extend yourself for someone. But since you can't extend yourself for dead people, at least so long as you know they're dead, you couldn't really know that you love them. The best you could know is that you once did love some of them.

And there are other problems with either sense of will. For starters, Christians who believe that God is perfect can't love God. A perfect being is incapable of spiritual growth, because spiritual growth involves becoming better, but nothing is better than a perfect being, and nothing can become better than a perfect being, not even a perfect being. The irony here is that Peck, who is a Christian, provides a definition of love that bars love for God, but Branden, who is an atheist, provides a definition of love that

allows for love of God. If we are created in God's image, as the Bible teaches, then loving God may be a way of celebrating the divine image in ourselves, thereby celebrating ourselves.

Another problem with Peck's definition of love is that it divorces love from motivation. You may have the will to extend yourself to nurture another's spiritual growth for a variety of reasons. Here are some. You might be an altruist. You might selfishly desire to be surrounded by spiritually developed people. You might selfishly desire your own spiritual growth and find that loving others is a convenient means to that end. You might believe that God wants this of you. Or someone might mean so much to you that her welfare has become selfishly important to you. Only the last, which corresponds to Branden's understanding of love, is going to provide any guarantee of stability. Someone who is motivated by one of the other reasons may more easily switch from loving one person to loving another. Altruism, self-serving desires, and fear of God can merely inspire a person to love, in Peck's sense; they cannot tell you who to love. And if they just inspire you to love, they are going to inspire you to love indiscriminately.

Consider that Peck wrote, "were I ever to have a case in which I concluded after careful and judicious consideration that my patient's spiritual growth would be substantially furthered by our having sexual relations, I would proceed to have them." (176) Even though he mitigates this by saying that he has never had such a case and finds it difficult to imagine one, this assertion demonstrates that his understanding of love blurs the distinction between the love he has for his wife and the love he has for his patients. This is made possible, because Peck's definition of love does not provide for any distinction between his love for his patients and his love for his wife. Indeed, since his patients hire him to nurture their spiritual growth, and since they may also be

needier in this respect, he could end up loving his patients more than his wife. Although Peck's ideas of love have value, especially as a supplement to Branden's ideas, this consequence of Peck's understanding of love is abominable. So I submit that Peck's understanding of love should not be understood as the last word on love, but that some of his ideas may have value in the proper framework.

Branden and McWilliams

McWilliams defines love as an action, which is most closely related to Branden's description of love as an action tendency. I have already gone over this discussing Peck. What McWilliams describes as love is better understood as active caring. Caring is a very good thing, but it is not all there is to love. Like Peck's understanding of love, this understanding of love allows for a professional caretaker, such as a minister or psychiatrist, to love others more than his own spouse. But it is not just this. Branden's understanding of love will also allow someone to love another more than his spouse, such as when the marriage just isn't working. For example, when his marriage to Barbara wasn't working, he met Patrecia and loved her more. The difference is that your marriage could be working just fine and you could still, on Peck's or McWilliams' understanding of love, love someone more than your spouse merely by taking better care of that person. The positive thing that comes from McWilliams is that caring is an important part of love. But it would be wrong to take McWilliams' understanding of love as the final word on love.

Defining Love

Of the authors I have discussed here, I believe that Nathaniel Branden offers the best and most accurate understanding of love. Ayn Rand gets some things right, but her understanding of love doesn't add anything to Branden's. Gray and McWilliams are of negligible consequence too. Bar-Levav and Peck both provide flawed understandings of

love, but their ideas, taken as observations about love rather than as comprehensive theories, may be used to supplement Branden's ideas. What I will proceed to describe is an understanding of love that is rooted in Branden's ideas but also supplemented by Bar-Levav and Peck.

So, to begin, love is an orientation toward a person. As Branden puts it, "love represents a disposition to experience the loved being as the embodiment of profoundly important personal values—and as a consequence, a real or potential source of joy." (Honoring the Self, p. 94) Speaking of love as a disposition to an experience allows that the experience is not always present but implies that it is present fairly regularly. This experience of a person as the embodiment of profoundly important personal values can be an emotional response or an action tendency, usually both together. As an emotional response, love is "the experience of joy in the existence of the loved object, joy in proximity, and joy in interaction or involvement." (62) The action tendency associated with love is the tendency "to achieve some kind of contact with the loved being, some form of interaction or involvement." (63) So, to summarize, love involves being drawn to someone whom you experience as the embodiment of important values. When you love someone, you have made the evaluation that this person is good for you, and your interest in the person is inspired by your interest in your own well-being.

This much covers what Branden says when trying to explicitly define what love is. Another important aspect of love, mentioned by Branden, is that the loved one's well-being becomes selfishly important to you. It isn't simply a matter of caring to protect what is important to your own well-being, as I might care to protect my wallet from a mugger. Rather, the well-being of the loved one takes on an importance to you that goes beyond what is instrumentally important to you. In experiencing the loved one as the embodiment of your values, you experience a deeply selfish concern for the

well-being of the loved one. This is different from an altruistic concern for another. Altruism asks you to put aside what matters to you for the sake of what matters to someone else. The concern for the loved one is selfish, because it is a concern for what truly matters to you.

If someone's well-being matters to you, then her maturity, her wisdom, and perhaps what Peck calls her spiritual development will also matter to you--at least if you understand the importance of these concepts and yours matter to you. This is the contribution that Peck brings to the understanding of love. In a healthy relationship, the value of such things as maturity and wisdom will be appreciated, and the maturity and wisdom of your partner will be as selfishly important to you as your own maturity and wisdom. So, in a healthy love relationship, you will often have the will to extend yourself for your own wisdom, maturity, and spiritual growth and for your partner's.

Nevertheless, I am not agreeing with Peck that this will is the essence of love. You may have this will toward people you do not experience as the embodiment of your values. This may show that you care about these people, but I submit that there is more to love than just caring. Caring might be based on the belief that the person you care about has the potential for embodying values you hold dear, but love is based on the experience that the person you love presently embodies what you value. There is a difference here. Caring is the active interest in preserving what you value and in bringing about more of what you value. Love is the celebration of your values. Love generally implies caring, but caring, especially when it is focused on bringing out the potential good in things, can exist in the absence of love. One exception to the rule that love implies caring may be love for God, at least if God is understood as perfect. Love for God would be a celebration of God's goodness rather than an active concern with looking out for God's welfare.

Turning to Bar-Levav, we find the idea that love involves a sense of fullness and an exuberance for life. Bar-Levav understands love as nothing but a feeling, whereas Branden understands it more as a disposition to certain kinds of feelings. Thus, we may qualify Bar-Levav's idea and say that love involves the disposition to a sense of fullness and an exuberance for life. I think this fits in with Branden's understanding of love, because his definition of love implies that a person who loves has profoundly important personal values. The presence of such values suggests the capacity to deeply appreciate life. And if you didn't value life, you wouldn't value much of anything, much less have profoundly important personal values. So I submit that a person who loves has the capacity to deeply appreciate life and that the exercise of this capacity results in a sense of fullness and an exuberance for life. The exercise of this capacity may also be instrumental in helping a person recognize what matters most to her, and this recognition is an important part of love itself. So I believe that a person who can love, especially one who loves in a healthy way, will often feel a sense of fullness and an exuberance for life.

Defining Hatred

Having defined love, I can proceed to a definition of hatred. My assumption is that hatred is the opposite of love. With that in mind, I merely have to turn the definition of love into its opposite. Love is, in its essence, "a disposition to experience the loved being as the embodiment of profoundly important personal values." (63) I submit that the opposite of this is the disposition to experience someone as the embodiment of profoundly important personal negavalues. I have coined the term negavalue, because English does not seem to have a suitable word for what I mean. To value something is to appraise it as good, and to negavalue something is to appraise it as bad. Your values are your appraisals of what is good, and your negavalues are your

appraisals of what is bad. Disvalue was not a suitable word, because it means to appraise something as having little value. To make an analogy with math, values are like positive numbers, and negavalues are like negative numbers, whereas disvalues are like small positive numbers.

It is appropriate to define hatred in terms of negavalues instead of disvalues or non-values, because hatred is not indifference. If I experience someone as the embodiment of something I disvalue or merely fail to value, my orientation toward that person will be better described as indifference than as hatred.

Like love, hatred can be experienced as an emotional response or as an action tendency. As an emotional response, hatred is the experience of disgust or displeasure in the existence of the hated object, in proximity with it, and in interaction with it. As an action tendency, it is more complex than love. I believe hatred can have one or more of four different action tendencies, which depend upon the temperament, circumstances, and maturity of the person who hates. One action tendency is to avoid contact, interaction, and involvement with the object of hate. Another is to condemn what you hate. A third is to seek the destruction of the object of hate. And a fourth action tendency is to seek to transform what is hated into something that can be valued. This fourth option allows for the possibility of caring for someone you hate.

We might find in this a way to understand the injunction to love your enemies. As I have ended up defining love, loving your enemies would often be an act of self-deception, and that would be wrong. If someone is truly the embodiment of what you hold in negative esteem, i.e. what you negavalue, then it would take an act of self-deception to experience that person as the embodiment of your values. But people have often had caring in mind when they spoke of love, and the injunction to love your enemies may simply be telling us to care for them. Caring for those you hate is probably

the most mature way to respond to hatred, especially when it involves what Peck has described as love, extending yourself for the sake of nurturing another's spiritual growth. Since caring for those we hate would involve the attempt to transform what we negavalue into something we can value, it could be understood as selfish.

Love and Hatred

Love and hatred are opposites, but this isn't to say that one is categorically good and the other is categorically bad. Loving everything and hating nothing would be as much an act of blindness as hating everything and loving nothing. Love and hate both require a set of evaluations about the worth of things. Generally speaking, values and negavalues come in pairs, much like electrons and positrons. For example, I value beauty but place a negative value on ugliness. I value intelligence and place a negative value on stupidity. I value life and place a negative value on death. So it is to be expected that a person with strong values will also have strong negavalues.

Love has a survival advantage by helping us identify what is good for us. The survival advantage of hate is to help us identify what is bad for us. In this respect, love and hate are both good for us, and each is most helpful when it works alongside the other. Being able to love without being able to hate would be like being able to feel pleasure without being able to feel pain. Although pain hurts, we need it; otherwise, we would all too easily get injured and die all the sooner. Hate is useful, because it can alert us to bad situations, and it can provide us with the resolve to get out of bad situations and make things better.

What is bad is not hate itself but inappropriate hate. Hate is inappropriate when it is for something which isn't really bad for us. For example, the hatred that many people feel for homosexuals is inappropriate hate. Hate is also inappropriate when it is out of proportion. A person may sometimes hate an appropriate target of hate but hate

with greater revulsion than is appropriate.

When Love is Absent

Now that I've provided a definition of love, I will focus on describing ways in which love may be absent. The idea behind this is that an evil person will sometimes be evil out of a failure to accept the worth and meaning of love, or more simply put, out of a failure to love. One of the prerequisites for love is a set of profoundly important personal values. After all, love involves the recognition of their embodiment, and you cannot recognize the embodiment of what does not even exist. A person might lack a set of such values if he cares little for life, or even worse, hates life.

Even if such values are present, the ability to love may break down at the recognition of your values. Your deepest values may actually be embodied in others, but for whatever reason, you fail to recognize this. The cause for this may be preconceived notions, projections, prejudices, or other mental obstacles. This seems to have been a problem for Ayn Rand in her later years. When she met Devers Branden, Nathaniel Branden's third wife, she was surprised that he had married such an intelligent and self-assured woman, and she said that she had expected him to marry some unintelligent hausfrau. This indicates the low opinion she had of Branden, and this is despite the fact that Branden still embodied her values better than nearly anyone. Branden was the man she had dedicated Atlas Shrugged to, and he had once been her intellectual heir. But she still felt betrayed by Branden, over his affair with Patrecia, and she allowed prejudices to cloud her judgement of his true worth.

Distorting Love

Some people may love but do so in an unhealthy or distorted way. The idea here is that an evil person may be someone who distorts or twists the meaning of love, or put more simply, someone who loves in a twisted or distorted way. One way to do this is to

deeply value what shouldn't be valued, such as something that is not good for you, something that may be detrimental to your well-being. With twisted values, the people you love would be those you recognize as the embodiment of your values, your twisted values. Thus, they might be people who are not really good for you.

Another way to distort love is to have an impaired ability to recognize your values in others. Instead of recognizing the people who truly embody your values, you may mistakenly recognize the embodiment of your values where it doesn't exist. This may come about through the brainwashing that some cults do. For example, a cult leader may teach his followers to revere him and to detest their families.

Counterfeits of Love

There has been little consensus on the nature of love. As a consequence, people can be confused about what love is. This may lead to the lack or rejection of genuine love, or to the distortion of love. At the very least, it blocks the recognition of genuine love. I will now discuss some counterfeits of love.

Bar-Levav described unhealthy love as the attempt to freeze the feeling of love. This is the attempt to hold onto the feeling of love even when it isn't there. If someone fails to understand that love is a disposition to certain feelings rather than a feeling itself, she may try to hold onto love by holding onto the feeling of love. This is the best sense that I can make of Bar-Levav's notion that romantic "love" is frozen love. I think Bar-Levav is wrong in this respect, but I do think he may be right to regard frozen emotions as a serious psychological problem. Holding onto the feeling of love may impair a person's ability to experience real love. Holding onto the feeling of anger may cause similar problems.

A couple other counterfeits of love are infatuation and obsession. Infatuation is a feeling of fascination and attraction toward a person which, unlike love, isn't based in

true knowledge of the person. Obsession is an excessive preoccupation with a person. Infatuation and obsession are often mixed together. It is quite common for a person who is preoccupied with someone he is attracted to to think he is in love. It is so common, in fact, that some of the authors I discussed describe romantic love, or being in love, as nothing more than a mixture of infatuation and obsession.

The English language doesn't have a good antonym for infatuation. Prejudice may be the closest we can get to an antonym. So I will say that obsession may also be mixed with prejudice, understanding by prejudice a feeling of disgust and aversion that is as baseless as infatuation. Obsessive prejudice, such as the obsessive prejudice of the Rev. Fred Phelps against homosexuals, is a virulent caricature of genuine hate. Like obsessive infatuation, which is often mistaken for genuine love, obsessive prejudice is often mistaken for genuine hatred, and both love and hatred get a bad name from their unhealthy counterfeits.

Peck has described falling in love as involving the dropping away of ego boundaries. This is a characteristic of obsession, not of genuine romantic love. Obsession involves a failure to properly distinguish between yourself and another.

Conclusion

I began with the supposition that an evil person is someone who fails to accept the worth and meaning of existence. Since love is an important part of what makes life worthwhile and meaningful, I proceeded to the conclusion that someone who fails to incorporate the worth and meaning of love into his life would be a likely candidate for someone who is evil. To find out how this failure could come about, I analyzed different ideas about love for the sake of finding out what love is. After coming up with a plausible definition of love, I enumerated ways that someone could fail to love. This included the mere failure to love, distorted ways to love, and counterfeits of genuine

love. The causes for a failure to love included an absence of values, mental blocks against recognizing values, inappropriate values, and obsession. The final conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that these are traits that may count toward distinguishing an evil person from someone who is not evil. This is not to say that the mere presence of any of these traits will mark a person as evil. It may be a matter of degree and magnitude. But these will be traits to watch for in judging whether someone is evil.