

Love that Moves the Sun and the Other Stars

Au Sui Sum Susan

ME Welcome to my drinking party. As you may know, this is held to honour Agathon's symposium on love held in Athens, and as we are turning 20, I am sure we have all experienced different kinds of love. You are free to make a speech on any of them and the best speaker will get a prize! Why don't we start from you, Amethyst?

AMETHYST Well, I basically know nothing about erotic love as compared to the others. My status is A0 (currently available, no previous relationships), and this contributes to my ignorance.

EMERALD That is quite true. Let us leave the part on erotic love to Sapphire whose status is NA6 (currently not available, with 5 ex-girlfriends), if I remember correctly?

SAPPHIRE Sure, leave that part to me. I am not being boastful here, but I am quite confident on my experience.

Everyone burst into laughter.

TOPAZ All right, that was an interesting conversation, but we should start delivering our speeches because I really want to know what the special

prize is Well, I'm just joking. Let me make the first go. I'll give a general introduction to what love, or more precisely, what relationship, is.

ME Sure, go ahead.

TOPAZ

Interpersonal relationship refers to the mutual psychological link established between two or more people for the satisfaction of each other's needs in their common activities. It can link together couples, friends, parents and children, teachers and students, or even strangers. Humans live together. It is not easy for us to leave the community and live in isolation. Therefore, through interaction with each other, interpersonal relationships are formed.

Doubtless, love is built on the basis of interpersonal relationship. From the Confucian perspective, we should extend family love to the whole society (*The Analects* 185). Though founded on humaneness, a sentiment that comes from our inner self, Confucian love is not self-centered. It is about getting along with and taking care of each other. Whereas from the Aristotelian point of view, we take every action, including loving others, for the ultimate goal of happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics* 151–156). It emphasizes individuals' happiness rather than society's goodness.

This is my opening for your speeches on love. Being no expert on the subject, I am eagerly anticipating to learn from you all.

ME Thank you for your contribution, Topaz. I believe we all agree with you

that love has to be based on interpersonal relationship, or it would merely be a matter of physical attraction.

EMERALD That's right. The comparison between Chinese and Western views of love has been well made, too. So is it Amethyst's turn now?

AMETHYST

I shall talk about family love then, and I would like to further divide it into three parts, namely, parental love, sibling love, and filial devotion.

By definition, a family consists of a husband and a wife who form the basic core. After that, children come along. Everyone in Hong Kong now says that bringing up a child would need four million dollars, but we all know it is well above that amount as the parental love we receive is priceless. We are so spoiled as to take it for granted. Real-life stories which will move us to tears are plenty. Parents are always our last resort as they are the only ones who would forgive us for whatever wrong we have done and support us unconditionally. I will leave this part short as we have all experienced parental love and how great it is.

In the Bible, we read that Cain killed his brother Abel, both being Adam and Eve's children, because God rejected Cain's offering of his harvest but accepted Abel's lamb (Gen. 4.3–5). This is a counter-example of sibling love. Nowadays, the majority of families are small ones with only one or two children, which makes sibling love more precious. When we are small, our siblings—if we do have siblings—make family life free from dullness;

when we grow up and get married, sharing with siblings on our own family matters is comforting. Siblings provide us with the longest company on our life journey.

With all the above provided by our parents, filial devotion should not be considered a mere virtue, but rather a necessary responsibility or duty. I personally detest the idea of “abandoning” aged people at elderly homes, except in cases where there is insurmountable difficulty in taking care of them. Filial devotion is not just about giving parents enough to eat, but about reverence (*The Analects* 196). Though it should be noted that obedience does not equate filial devotion because parents may not always know what is best for their children, listening to their advice would certainly be helpful and is one of the ways of respecting them.

All in all, family love is always around us, though we may not be aware of it sometimes. My dear friends, do treasure your family with all your heart.

TOPAZ Amethyst, that speech you have just made was surely an impressive one. It is a pity that family ties today are not as strong as those in the past.

ME That’s sad but true. I think it is because people nowadays do not need each other as much as family members of the older generation did.

AMETHYST Yes, children of the new generation are taught to be independent. This might be a good thing but it makes it more difficult to tie families together when we reach adulthood.

EMERALD Oh no, this city is dying!

Then Emerald gave a speech on friendly love, and it was Sapphire's turn to give his.

SAPPHIRE

According to the "Triangular Theory of Love," which is developed by the psychologist Robert Sternberg in a paper published in 1986, the three components of love are passion (physical attraction and sexual satisfaction), intimacy (feelings of connectedness and closeness by sharing and communication), and commitment (promises to maintain a relationship with our partner) (Sternberg 119).

Eros, the goddess of love, acts with a powerful and unpredictable force (*Symposium* 133). Yet Agathon said that in the love between a couple there is justice as there is mutual consent and agreement; in such love also lies virtue and courage because the lover, inspired by love for the beloved, is willing to control pleasures and desires; finally, there is wisdom because it is Eros that makes all living things come into being and grow (121–122). These good qualities, though not always, still exist in the present world, which shows that the love that was discussed in the symposium so many years ago is fundamentally the same as that we have now.

As love has been examined in detail in the *Symposium*, it would be unwise of me to repeat those points. That's why I would like to criticize some of them here instead. First of all, Phaedrus mentioned that lovers are the only people prepared to die for others (104). Well, this has obviously been proven to be wrong. There are numerous examples in our daily life that some

people would risk their lives even for strangers. To name a few examples in Hong Kong, we may recall Doctor Tse Yuen Man, who contracted SARS and died after dutifully treating patients of the deadly disease during the SARS outbreak in 2003. We may also remember the two firemen who lost their lives helping victims during the Mongkok Cornwall Court Fire in 2008, or Customs Inspector Simon Hui, who donated his liver to help a colleague that had been badly injured while performing customs duty. All three are heroic figures admirable for their selfless deeds.

Second, Pausanias claimed that lovers' vows are not binding as they have a unique dispensation from the gods (108). Again, I cannot agree with that. Though I have had six girlfriends, I never make promises on things that I cannot accomplish. More importantly, divorce should never be an expected ending between a married couple, so people should think twice before making their vows and be prepared to live with it once it has been made.

There are some thought-provoking points in the *Symposium* though. Time is a good test of most things (109). People should spend their whole lives together with the other half (117). Let's wish every couple in the world a happy and everlasting relationship. Cheers!

ALL Cheers!

TOPAZ There is a lot of reflections in your speech, Sapphire. It is true that we should take relationships seriously.

SAPPHIRE I'm so glad to know you like it. I believe that couples should be prepared to be companions and live together for life.

ME

Thank you all for your inspiring speeches. I believe we have learnt one of the most useful lessons in life. Let's give a big round of applause to yourselves, and your friends.

Well, it has been tough to choose between the speeches of Amethyst on family love and Sapphire on erotic love. Both of you have chosen the greatest love on Earth, if we don't count God's unconditional love. There was a lot of critical thinking in Sapphire's speech whereas Amethyst has given us a warm reminder to love our family.

As Sapphire has been able to demonstrate a higher level of thinking on the basis of classics, I am proud to announce that the winner for tonight is Sapphire!

The prize is a digital camera. I have chosen this because I believe that whichever kind of love the winner talks about, he or she would be able to use the camera to take pictures of his or her beloved ones. Thank you again for coming!

And that was the end of the symposium. We used Sapphire's prize to take as many pictures as we could to remember the night of friendly love and good discussion.

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Teacher’s comment:

The theme of the drinking party is a serious one; however, thoughtful reflections on the various aspects of love are well balanced by witty exchanges between the participants. Reading Susan’s record, one can still feel the joy and playfulness of the speakers. Guess what “NA6” means?

The names of the young people are all names of precious stones. The author does not tell us why, but we may think the names suggest both preciousness and invulnerability of love. The prize was given to Sapphire because of his “higher level thinking on the basis of the classics.” Sapphire contrasts the love praised by Phaedrus with a more general love for all humans; to Pausanias’ concept of love that exists between *friends* he adds trust and loyalty that are crucial for the love between couples. “Higher thinking” can be understood as a critical reflection on the thoughts expressed in the classics; this is certainly an important goal of our course. (Ho Wai Ming)

