

## The Epistemology of Love

It is strange that under ordinary circumstances man seldom talks in order to really say something; neither does he remain silent in such a way as to say nothing. Ordinarily, when man talks he is mostly concerned with making himself feel good. And when he keeps quiet he is not really quiet; he talks to himself silently. His mind dwells not so much on the truth of what really is, as on manifold ways and means of making himself feel good and of avoiding feeling bad.

The preoccupation with feeling good, secure, strong, influential, and successful isolates man's consciousness from reality and hampers his cognitive and responsive faculties. Man derives pleasurable or comforting experiences and sensations from the gratification of his assumptions. Assumptions are thoughts of "what should be." When the "should be" is gratified, reality is ignored. Man tends to live to a greater or lesser degree in a private world of illusions. He is thus more or less estranged, alienated, and disconnected from life, reality, truth, love.

Man who is concerned with feeling good spends most of his life in "pursuit of happiness" and thus tends to miss out on truth, reality, love, communion, joy, health. For while illness is "disease" and health is "ease," ease is not necessarily health. The pursuit of ease does not lead to health. The pursuit of happiness, of feeling good, of being successful, as ends in themselves, is mostly self-defeating; these are at best only by-products of the loving mode of being-in-the-world. For instance, the quest for sexual pleasure and successful "performance" produces mutual exploitation with interpersonal complications that often result in such disorders as impotency and frigidity.

The concern with feeling good makes man a hedonist. He tends to become a "consumer" of cigarettes, alcohol, chewing gum, candy, drugs. To him, things become means to an end. People, business, profession, children, friends, objects, ideas, religion, and education all become tools and gimmicks serving the purpose of making him feel good. The hedonistic view of life tends to produce severe forms of egotism and a progressive deterioration of

cognitive and responsive faculties.

The striving to feel good is the foundation of ambitions, competitiveness, success-hunting, pleasure- and power-seeking. The primary concern with feeling good is a misguided mode of being-in-the-world. It makes man unavailable to the cognitive faculty that constitutes the prerequisite for love.

Love is essentially a mode of cognition. Love is concerned neither with feeling good nor with feeling bad. Love is concerned with understanding. Love listens to hear. Love is a state of complete attention, without intruding thoughts and motivations. Contrary to general belief, love is not just a feeling or emotion. The opposite of love is not hate, as is generally assumed. The opposite of love is calculative thinking (in the sense of Heidegger's "das vorstellende Denken"). The opposite of thinking is not nont-thinking; it is paying attention to understand.

The term paying attention is of some semantic significance because it implies a certain sacrifice or payment or giving up of something. The question offers itself: What is the payment that is being paid in paying attention? The payment in paying attention is the giving up or sacrificing of a certain mental content. This means that to pay attention one must give up certain thoughts and cherished assumptions. The mental currency to be paid for attention is the giving up or letting go of favorite assumptions. Mental assumptions are the price to be paid for the realization of the loving state of consciousness.

Attention is a state of mental receptivity to whatever is, in contradistinction to concentration and fascination, which are object oriented selective states of cognitive focusing. The object of attention is understanding. The object of love is Love. Love is that intelligence which forever reveals itself as Understanding. The concern with feeling good ignores love. Ignorance is that mental activity which ignores what is forever available. Ignorance then is not a passive state. Neither is love. Love is neither active nor passive. In order for love to come into being, both activity and passivity must "die."

"Whosoever would lose his life for my sake, shall find it" (Lk.

9:24). This well-known utterance of Jesus is of great significance for existential psychology. "For my sake" means for the sake of love. To lose one's life means to abandon the false meanings of life, to drop the misguided endeavors and concerns that give the illusion of constituting the essence of life. After a relatively short time in psychotherapy one patient remarked: "I don't understand how it happened but I lost my fear of dying. I never spoke to you about it but it used to be my most pressing problem." Actually, what happened was that the patient shifted her concern from the gratification of a desire for power and dominance to a realization of the essential significance of the loving mode of existence. This revealed to her that the fear of dying was the fear of discovering that what had previously seemed all-important in her life was based on erroneous assumptions.

Commitment to love is often experienced as frightening. Actually, love requires man to let go of all attachments, outward and inward. More often than not it seems particularly difficult to loosen the hold on mental attachments, for this amounts to what could be called "losing one's mind," because what is considered to be mind consists of memories and learned knowledge, assumed notions, favorite strivings. All this must be out of the way for understanding to occur. Since love is complete attention, it must be undivided. The striving, clutching, ambitious man is incapable of undivided attention; his consciousness is impaired, his cognition is deficient, his contact with reality tenuous. Such a man exists on an abased level of mentality. Love is that state of consciousness which brings human potentialities to optimal degrees of realization.

Pleasure-seeking man's consciousness is focused on gratification. Desires, if gratified, tend to increase; if frustrated, they tend to become more urgently demanding. As long as there is desire and "pursuit of happiness" in any form, there is anxiety, suffering and conflict. Love is neither gratification nor frustration. Love is harmony with what really is. It is at-one-ment with the flux of life.

Just as ignorance is an active ignoring of what is, anxiety is in no sense something that, so to speak, befalls man. It is self-manufactured.

Anxiety is that disturbance of consciousness which is caused by the discrepancy between what “should be” and what really is. Anxiety is generated by the ignoring of the actual. It is the experiential awareness of pursuing a false reality. Freedom from anxiety and freedom from ignorance are contingent on the same condition, namely, on the cognitive harmony with what is. This, in turn, can only take place in the absence of mental presuppositions concerning what “should be.” Fear, then is a product of thought and so is everything else outside of love.

True love cannot be thought. Love that is thought is not love; it is a concept, an idea about love. True love can be neither given nor gotten. When it is, it gives itself. True love can only be lived as a state of consciousness.