

LOVE IS....

R. D. Hinshelwood

This paper aims at being reflective rather than authoritative. What authority it gains will come from a more introspective check on whether anything resonates within the reader.

I start with an observation from the French psychoanalyst Andre Green: 'It is customary to begin this topic [on feelings] by saying that there is no present satisfactory theory of affects although a hundred or more theories exist, (Green 2002: 208). And this has been noted by many others over decades. It is somewhat surprising for psychoanalysts, since our psychology is the principle alternative to behavioural and cognitive psychologies. We specialise in affects. So, it should be a propriety to address this omission.

Freud thought that the prime aim in life was sexual satisfaction. His model lies in biology, and stems from Gustav Fechner's nineteenth century idea of a 'psychophysics'. Bodily satisfaction arises from the discharge of some sort of accumulated sensations aroused in the erogenous zones. This was hotly disputed by many, many people, in many, many areas of interest – although also accepted with considerable fascination by many, many others. It is possible to argue that this is a simplification, as a simplification, it tears the heart out of what it is to be human, even though there is something valid about the kind of satisfaction that Freud pointed to.

In fact, there is an irony here, since the kind of sexual satisfactions that are sought by animals is, though, similar in character, a lot less intense and extremely abbreviated compared to the human orgasm – female as well as male. Thus, humans seem to spend an unnaturally large amount of time seeking the kind of satisfaction which appears to be unnaturally intense. That makes *Homo sapiens* a special kind of animal. If Freud was right in regarding the pursuit of libidinal satisfaction as the great problem of mankind, perhaps it is because humans are endowed with a much greater need of sexual satisfaction. This line of argument is in accord with Desmond Morris' *The Naked Ape* which traces human sexual obsession to our naked

skins which, unlike animals covered in fur or scales, is bound to be more sensitive and arousable. I once wrote:

We tend to think that in the course of evolution the enlargement of the human brain has given rise to a comparable enlargement of the capacity to reason and to understand reality. However, there is, it seems to me, evidence that the same enlargement must also be responsible for a vast enlargement in the capacity for impulses and intensity of feelings. No animal is more sexual; none more destructive. Only human beings are afflicted by serious mental illness in epidemic proportions. The irrational or so-called animal side of our nature is, in reality, as hypertrophied as the cognitive, rational side.

Hinshelwood 1998: 100

At first sight, Freud's observation on the special pursuit of sexual satisfactions in humans may be correct, but it is only partially correct. Human beings seem to have a particularly wide range of affects, with a particular propensity for a strength of feeling. We are the only animals who cry tears, or who laugh, or who mourn for years; our emotional bond with our children is quite unlimited in time, and that is more or less unheard of in the animal kingdom. Our focus on 'animal' desires like sex as antipathetic to cognition, is an opposition that distracts us from the fact that humans have a very great sophistication of what might be called the 'non-organismic' feelings.

The fact that there are organismic kinds of feelings that build up, and up, until some satisfaction (or some cut-out mechanism, defence) takes place, should not distract from other kinds of feelings which can be quietly enjoyed for the period that they last.

The upshot of this discussion is that there appear to be two classes of instincts: those that arise from the satisfaction, or frustration, of biological needs (instincts); and some other group which may not be quite so instinctual and are most pronounced in humans compared with other animals. I want to address this separation of two classes of emotions as a kind of layering.

The human emotions

In humans, the satisfaction of instinctual needs calls out more than just the feeling of satisfaction. For instance, sexual satisfaction can be said to go along with love – or perhaps, to

tease it out, sexual satisfaction with a partner leads inevitably to a powerful warmth towards that partner who has provided the satisfaction. Appreciation, gratitude, and love go along with satisfaction, or maybe a very enduring attachment to that partner. Sex does not presuppose one to fall in love with sex exactly, but with the accommodating partner who enabled the sexual satisfaction. And this of course is true of other bodily satisfaction, such as hunger, or care when ill and in pain.

Of course, sex and love may not always go together, or may even be in opposition. But most frequently the overwhelming sense is that a bodily satisfaction goes along with an appreciation of that attention and devotion. In other words, we have an emotional reaction to an emotional satisfaction (or its frustration). The vast range of complex feeling in humans, is a kind of second order set of feelings – *feelings about feelings*. Let us call them ‘sentiments’, in contrast to bodily satisfactions and frustrations. We can see that an association between bodily satisfactions and second-order appreciation is potentially of great importance in the evolutionary sense, forming a profoundly powerful basis for social associations. It in fact distinguishes humans as social animals from simply being herd animals.

Complementary affect

Thus, we can see from early in life (from the beginning) that a satisfaction – say feeding – brings out an appreciation for the person who satisfies, Mother is loved as the person who gives a feeling of satisfaction in the tummy, but also as someone who *wants* to give satisfaction. There is what we might call a ‘sub-text’ a secondary message to the satisfaction; it is an awareness of the other’s interest in creating one’s own satisfaction (or frustrating it). The object is loved and hated in its own right. These are straightforward observations on oneself and others. It does not need psychoanalysis to tell the ordinary man about these levels of affect in a relationship; it might rather need the ordinary person to tell psychoanalysis about it!

For a long time, we have talked in general psychology about non-verbal communication (Argyle 1967). A century ago, Freud (1912) himself puzzled over what seemed to him to be unconscious-to-unconscious communication. These secondary channels are filled just as much with affects as with the primary messages are – even though the primary messaging relies on overt semantic meanings. Maybe the secondary messages are *more* devoted to emotional transmission, to needs, demands and appreciations etc. They are the unspoken world we live in, the tremors we respond to in aesthetic appreciation.

Half a century ago or more J.L. Austin (1955) wrote a book called *How to do Things with Words*. He recognised that words do more than carry meaning, they have an impact on the 'other'. So, mother's feeding does more than create a satisfaction, and baby's appreciation for the satisfaction. She not only gives but she too has an experience of giving, giving to her baby also carries with it sentiments about the act of giving – i.e. a set of secondary emotions. Well, she has her sentiments about giving so long as baby appreciates her for it. If her baby appreciates her giving, then the giving becomes a joy in itself. Both mother and baby end up blissful. The important point is that at this level of sentiment that lies above simple bodily satisfactions, emotions are reciprocal; there is giving and receiving, and there is generosity and gratitude.

Falling in love

This mutuality is not just the vicissitudes of babyhood. When later in life, we fall in love, some similar reciprocal process occurs. A love relationship is not a rational 'act', entered into on the basis of semantic discussion at the level of an overt contract. Well, partly it is, and the State and the Church wish to emphasise that with a binding contract. But...

There is nothing rational about choosing a partner to fall in love with. If shall we say I am heterosexual then there are up to 3 billion female human beings from which to choose the one special one. Frankly, I confess, I did not sift all the possibilities on offer. Even if we reduce the number by restricting the age range. Shall we say five years older or young – a ten year age range. Thus, if we take the average age roughly as three score and ten, then the numbers are $10 / 70 \times 3$ billion, or roughly 430 million. Well, less than half a billion, but still more than I could hope to interview for the position! So, one could say I was not rational in picking out one of them as the unique ideal, for me. Or, it would seem so at the level of reason.

However, if we take into account the level that is not reason – the emotional level – it may not be quite so irrational. There is one sense in which my potential partner could be uniquely for me. What could make her unique? There is one thing – that one unique thing about her is that she decides that of nearly half a billion men I am unique for her. She would be picking me, reciprocally, as uniquely right for her on the basis that I have picked her as uniquely and specially right for me. And then of course the other way around; I will be the unique for her out of nearly half a billion men, only on the grounds that I think she is unique for me. We are each unique for the other, because the other sees me as unique.

In this way by designating the other as special and unique we are co constructing each other as special and unique. It describes a cyclical process, in which one party affirms the other's uniqueness, and affirmed as unique. Narcissism is rampant, but it has a purpose in being the fuel for this cycle. This means that the other is not just a desired object of attraction fitting my sexual (and other) needs. She is unique for me on the basis of what *she* sees in me.

The feature of uniqueness is not just the bodily attributes (thank goodness), or the mental traits of personality; 'You are unique for me because you think I am unique for you', each person conveys to the other. What she feels (not what she 'is') grants her the uniqueness for me. And I am suggesting that negotiation of making unique someone who makes me unique is a negotiation at the level of sentiment, of the level of secondary messages of feelings only half spoken. Of course, as the messages build up they gradually do become spoken. Implicitly, the uniqueness of, and the uniqueness for, become laid down for an enduring period of time.

Of course, falling out of love is not so difficult to understand then on this basis of cycles of attributed uniqueness. So long as the mirage of uniqueness and specialness is continually recycled and re-affirmed, the relationship endures perhaps for a long time, a lifetime. However, the fate of the mutual narcissism may be different. In living together, which these cycles usually lead to, the rough edges sooner or later begin to assert themselves. The lack of narcissistic perfection becomes apparent with the threat of great disappointment and the brutal removal of the bliss, and of course that hope for ever and ever. Many couples give up in despair, usually blaming the other for the failure – which is in fact realistic, on both sides. It does take two to keep the cycle going. It is necessary that the other person thinks I am unique, in order for me to go on thinking she is too.

The special relationship built up by this cycle of affirmative sentiments of uniqueness (in secondary messages) requires continuity, especially as rough edges of each personality cause friction for each partner. The uniqueness has to be constantly re-affirmed by each one to the other. If one party refrains from the re-affirmative sentiment, the other must be tempted to hold back, even temporarily, and that is the beginning of a possible process in which the more one withholds, the more the other does, another cycle, this time a 'vicious' cycle. Then a sustained period when mutual re-affirmation does not happen, results in the inability for either partner to rescue the situation with a heroic attempt at affirmation again. It may be attempted but the result aimed for is deeply uncertain. A love relationship is a kind of heavier-than-air machine which needs to keep going in order to keep going. It flies only by going forward, and

the cycle needs to be constantly turned. If the partners tire of the task of re-affirmation the cycles wear thin and the machinery cannot keep afloat so the heavier-than-air contraption falls to the ground, usually with a devastating crash for both parties. The imminent crash becomes more and more certain as the vicious cycle of mutual withholding, mutual disaffirmation, becomes stabilised (instead of the benign cycle of mutual affirmation).

Indeed, it really only needs one to begin to tire, and the cycle risks being seriously interrupted, when the other is confronted with the lack of the necessary narcissistic affirmation. It takes two to fall in love, but it takes only one to break it up.

Perhaps, some protection against the emotional crash from the sky can be maintained by the physical relations. Giving sexual satisfaction to each other, and receiving from each other, is a concrete form of the non-verbal mutual communications that go on beside the verbal ones – or can step into the gap at times when the benign emotional cycle is interrupted. The giving of sexual satisfaction is a case in point where a secondary message of sentiment is being communicated. Being such a powerful bond, sexual relations have a big impact on the cycles. Being mutual, by involving satisfaction of both bodies, it has a form that is suited to the affective cycles. Affective interchange of satisfaction and appreciativeness at the mental level go hand-in-hand with mutuality of satisfaction at the bodily level.

This potential mutuality is not so dependent on the inherent narcissism of falling in love. A similar mutual narcissism is celebrated in the mutual cycles of emotions set up through bearing children. Each of the partners feels giving and feels given to, and in response each feels appreciation and appreciated. The double-level affective mutuality is rehearsed with birthday presents, Christmas presents; and significantly with the mutual celebration of anniversaries of the initial meeting, engagement, wedding or moving together, and child birth. All this goes for other, more simple, less climactic events; cooking meals, driving the car, and the countless little actions and contributions to the joined lives every day.

However, the cycles of affirmation or of withholding of affirmation may seriously degenerate. In physical sexual relations most dramatically. Satisfaction may be devoid of appreciation of the kind just discussed. Secondary messaging may be suspended, and the purpose of sexual relations becomes purely a bodily satisfaction. That level of bodily relating may be mutually satisfying, but it is lacking something if that is all; if for instance money is substituted for appreciation. Of course, money may be given *as well as* appreciation, and may be the

expression of it. There is a subtle shift here, and money expresses this well. The distinction is the use of money with which there is a secondary message, or the use of money in place of the sentiment of the secondary message. That secondary affirmation slips out of the situation.

Besides this sex-for-money situation, sex may also be without sentiment; that is where the partners each get their primary body satisfaction as, almost, a bargain. Or, as it were, that is the bargain, each reaches bodily satisfaction. This implies a potential separation, a cleft between primary and secondary satisfaction. Where the sentiments are separated away or non-existent, the primary message becomes impersonal, mechanical – satisfaction indeed, but only a partial satisfaction, and a failure to enter the benign cycle described above in connection with narcissism. This may have a convenience of course, so long as the convenience of the impersonal engagement is mutual. It becomes painful for at least one partner if he or she has not decoupled the secondary affective level of appreciation.

A note on morality

The second order emotions are dependent on an awareness of one's emotional state. As Freud said the ego has a self-observing function, the super-ego (Freud 1933). This he thought was connected to the super-ego and the watchfulness that an ego has to sustain in order to ensure it pleases the super-ego's demands and standards.

The sentiments are, at least in part, a response to the self-observation, and an assessment of the acceptable (or non-acceptable) state of mind. There is a reaction to what seem to be acceptable feelings, and against the socially unacceptable ones. One of the powerful emotional constituents of this system is guilt and shame. The capacity to have the right feelings and to cultivate the right sort of behaviour is important to the socialised human being. Failures in this respect bring out the secondary emotion of guilt; guilt is an emotion about having certain emotions. This is the moral sense. It is a system that observes and assesses the secondary emotions, the sentiments, as well as the bodily satisfactions and frustrations. That is to say, the appropriate appreciation is required – that appropriate second-order sentiment. And failure in its appearance is a social error. It might be regarded perhaps as a third-order system as it is an emotional reaction to the second-order sentiments (as well as the first-order bodily satisfactions).

Forgiveness

Another example of the mutual emotional interactiveness is that between forgiveness and apology. It is clear that over time hiccoughs in the benign loving cycle will result in brief (or longer) interruptions of the mutual affirmation. The hurt of one, due to conflicts, stress, or depression, may lead to a suspension of re-affirmation. The hurt of one leads to the hurt of the other with potential disaster. The initiating partner (let us say 'IP', for short) affects the second partner (let us say 2P), who reacts typically by suspending his/her re-affirmation. However not always. If my partner is upset in some way, preoccupied and neglectful of the needs of the relationship for this mutual affirmation cycle, I may not retaliate. It appears to be a capacity in the human psyche for something else to click in. Instead of retaliation, there can be some other affective response; that is a feeling of forgiveness.

Forgiveness leads to a cycle different from the affirmation cycling. And, it is not an easy response, but it leads to a potential rescuing cycle. The cycle is potential as it requires a response from the IP, a response of apology sooner or later; the sooner the better than later. It is not just difficult to respond forgivingly; but it is difficult to respond forgivingly if there is no apology, or during the period until the IP has begun to recover from their distress. The apology in response to forgiveness then is somewhat similar to the appreciation for satisfaction (narcissistic or other). But apology differs from ordinary appreciation. Apology acknowledges a responsibility for initiating something going wrong; it is in effect guilt. So, the sentiment that IP feels is for 2P's tolerance of the missed appreciation from one side of the cycle, and tolerance for the hurt it has done.

Not only this, but the tolerance and forgiveness of 2P drawing out apology and guilt from IP, has created a further interaction. For IP, when things go right, 2P's forgiveness has a further message; it is a sort of secondary message to a secondary message (a tertiary message). It says at this new level, that 2P feels IP to be worth tolerating something painful; as it were 2P is saying, 'I will tolerate and forgive because I want to get back to our narcissistic affirming cycle'. So, the apology IP should feel conveys a tertiary message of appreciation that 2P wants to keep things going with IP.

Here are two cycles, one the mutually affirming cycle and one the forgiveness-apology cycle. These two cycles exist in the second-order of sentiment. In the course of this discussion, I am assuming the reader will more or less find in accord with his or her own experience of their pleasant and unpleasant feelings in relations, we have touched on a couple of other things.

Athymic

The second thing is that these self-perpetuating cycles existing at the secondary level of sentiment do not necessarily occur, and the possibility is for both parties to forgo that level, and resort only to the immediate primary level of satisfaction for themselves. This is as if the affects normally functioning along the relational dimension have reverted back to zero. Affects are then only experienced as pleasant or unpleasant.

The removal of the secondary layer where affects are so much more easily, though stealthily, communicated, brings out this alternative, more impersonal and mechanical exchange of services for each other. Though going into a shop to buy a bottle of milk involving the exchange of money for it, may attract an exchange of mutual thanks, that affective exchange is much less dominant than the highly intimate love relationships. In the bartering/exchange situation the importance is the exchange rather than the relationship. It is a bookkeeping relationship, plus and minus which needs to be kept in balance. In contrast to sentiments these basic satisfactions and dissatisfactions comprise a system of rights and obligations. If you have a right to something, and can find someone with an obligation to provide it, then an exchange of service/ goods takes place without the 'handshake' of sentiment. It is seemingly outside the domain of affect, except that when someone fails in their obligation, then he who has a right to expect it can become full of, and very expressive of, indignant negative feelings. This system occupies the first dimension – pleasant-unpleasant; but remains neutral on the second, relational dimension of mutual sentiment. This too represents a bookkeeping mode of interchange, in contrast to the more relational giving-receiving cycle.

These forms of emotional exchange can be seen to conform to those systems described by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947), which they called 'Game Theory'. There are three categories of exchange they identified. The one I have called the bookkeeping mode where there is an exchange characterised by the fairness of the deal, what Game Theory calls a 'zero sum'; one person's gain and another's loss. On the other hand, there are those forms of giving where the giving person gains (appreciation, love and a sense of generosity, etc.) as well as the receiver (who benefits from the goods/ services, plus the feeling of being generously treated with appreciative love). In this case, Game Theory terms this a win-win situation, as both sides have a gain, even though the giver may lose something. Then the third category is the lose-lose situation the category to which the vicious cycle described above that crashes the relationship.

Conclusion

This paper could be said to be just personal musings based on self-experience, and do they explain anything? The train of thought started with the apparent irrationality of human love and does explain a phenomenal irrationality. It has entailed describing and differentiating a secondary affect system, the sentiments that arise from the several conditions:

- Sentiments supervene on experience of satisfaction
- Sentiments occur in the interpersonal (or object-related) field between two parties, starting at birth
- The level of sentiment shows a mutuality, and complementarity between the two parties
- Both parties gain or lose at the secondary level of sentiments about satisfactions
- That mutuality of giving-receiving, generosity-gratitude, and or forgiveness-apology lead to hidden emotional cycles of interaction, benign or vicious
- The complex interactiveness of the sentiments arises from the complexity of brain way beyond that of the animals; and it relies on the specific human capacity for self-observation, and self-representation which has been developed into a symbolisation and human civilisation.

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