



FOR LOVE OR MONEY

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The expression “for love or money” is generally used to indicate the two extremes, which cover between them the entire spectrum. “I wouldn’t do that for love or money” means I wouldn’t do that in exchange for anything. It can be interesting, however, to read that *or* as marking not an opposition but a common function that love and money share, somewhat like the *or* in Spinoza’s famous phrase “deus sive natura,” which claims polemically that god and nature are two names for substance itself. I do not intend to propose that love and money are the same thing, but rather, that putting them in relation can reveal the power to create and maintain social bonds that is proper to money and can (and perhaps should) be also the vocation of love. Posing love in relation to the power of money can help us construct a properly political concept of love.

We lack such a political concept of love, in my view, and our contemporary political vocabulary suffers from its absence. A political concept of love would, at the minimum, reorient our political discourses and practices in two important ways. First, it would challenge conventional conceptions that separate the logic of political interests from our affective lives and opposes political reason to the passions. A political concept of love would have to deploy at once reason and passion. Second, love is a motor of both transformation and duration or continuity. We lose ourselves in love and open the possibility of a new world, but at the same time love constitutes powerful bonds that last.

I have found that the attempt to develop a political concept of love today, however, runs into a series of obstacles. One of the primary obstacles derives from the fact that our intimate notions of love and our social notions are generally held to be radically separate and even divergent. The love of the couple and the family, for example, the dominant conceptions of love in our current vocabulary, are most often considered to be a private affair, whereas love of country, probably the most widely recognized public form of love today, is most often seen as operating outside the sphere of intimacy. Overcoming this obstacle is not merely a matter of revealing either how power hierarchies are mobilized and managed in private, intimate love relations or how intimacies are deployed in the formations of patriotism or other public forms of love. Such analyses can be very important, but they do not suffice to create a political concept of love. A political concept of love, I argue, must move across these scales, betraying the conventional divisions between personal and political, and grasping the power to create bonds that are once intimate and social.

A second, and perhaps more significant, obstacle I encounter has to do with the unifying qualities, practices, and aims of love as generally conceived today in both private and public spheres. Love generally names either the bond experienced by those who are already the same or the process of unification by which differences are shed or set aside. I am told, for example, by not only innumerable Hollywood movies and romance novels but also the classics of Romantic literature and the major theological traditions, that in love I will find my other half, the missing puzzle piece that completes me, and achieve union. Likewise, patriotism and nationalism aim to set aside our differences and make us one in political projects in the interest of the country, creating social, national bonds. I would argue also—but this requires its own articulated analysis—that identity projects conventionally conceived, including those based on class, race, gender, and sexuality, operate according to a similar conception of public love: they are based on the recognition of sameness and function through a process of unification, setting aside or expelling differences in the interest of the same and what unites.

Love conceived as a process of unification is an obstacle. Such narcissistic love—the love of the same and the love of becoming the same—can be conceived as a political form of love, but one that is author of the most reactionary political projects: the love of the race at the foundation of white supremacy, the love of nation that grounds nationalism, the love of both race and nation that supports fascism, and so forth.¹ It is more accurate and more useful in my view not to claim such projects lead to bad politics but, rather, to designate them as not political

at all. Power and hierarchies, of course, can be created and maintained through logics of sameness and processes of unification but politics requires multiplicity and must function through the encounter and interaction of differences. Following this logic, Hannah Arendt rightly deems such love inimical to politics. Love, she claims, “is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces.”² Arendt considers love’s fundamental and ineluctable effect as unification, and indeed she does grasp by this the dominant form it takes in our society today.

But what if we were able to identify or invent another love, a love that is properly political? Such a political concept of love would have to be characterized by at least three qualities. First, it would have to extend across social scales and create bonds that are at once intimate and social, destroying conventional divisions between public and private. Second, it would have to operate in a field of multiplicity and function through not unification but the encounter and interaction of differences. Finally, a political love must transform us, that is, it must designate a becoming such that in love, in our encounter with others we constantly become different. Love is thus always a risk in which we abandon some of our attachments to this world in the hope of creating another, better one. I consider these qualities the primarily pillars of a research agenda for discovering today a political concept of love.

Many modern and contemporary authors have already worked on aspects of this research agenda. Psychoanalysis and theology, most obviously, provide central resources for this project and also pose numerous difficulties. Queer theorists who work on emotions, affects, and intimacies, such as Eve Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, and Adam Phillips, make important developments in this regard, as do too a series of feminists of color such as bell hooks, Cherie Moraga, and Chela Sandoval. Martin Luther King’s notion of a beloved community also approaches love as a political concept. And the list of perspectives that should be engaged and sometimes struggled with to develop an adequate political concept of love goes on and on.

In this brief essay, I consider only some of Karl Marx’s reflections on love in relation to money and property in his 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts as an illustration of the kind of work that seems useful to me. Marx refers to love most directly in these manuscripts in his critique of the power of money. Money corrupts, he argues, on the one hand, by displacing *being* with *having*. “He who can buy courage is brave,” he writes, “though he is a coward.”³ Our relations and bonds to each other and the world can only truly be established based on who

we are. “If you wish to enjoy art,” Marx continues, “you must be an artistically educated person; if you wish to exercise influence over other men you must be the sort of person who has a truly stimulating and encouraging effect on others. Each one of your relations to man—and to nature—must be a *particular expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your *real individual life*” (p. 379). One problem with money, in other words, and with the way it focuses our lives on “having” is not only that it distracts us from our being in society and the world but also and more importantly that it causes us to neglect the development of our senses and our powers to create social bonds.

Marx also argues that money corrupts, on the other hand, by distorting relations of exchange, and this is where love comes into the discussion. His primary concern is that money creates exchanges indifferently among elements of different nature. “Money is not exchanged for a particular quality, a particular thing, or for any particular one of the essential powers of man, but for the whole objective world of man and of nature. Seen from the standpoint of the person who possesses it, money exchanges every quality for every other quality and object, even if it is contradictory; it is the power that brings together impossibilities and forces contradictions to embrace” (p. 379). The exchange of money indiscriminately for all qualities and objects seems to make all of our particular human essential powers indifferent, thus distorting our relationships to each other and the world and undermining our powers to create social bonds.

Marx proposes that love, in contrast to money, operates through proper exchanges, and thus maintains the singularity of our human powers. “If we assume *man* to be *man* and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love, trust for trust, and so on” (p. 379). Love or money, Marx tells us, that is our choice. It is significant in my view that, by establishing this alternative, Marx poses love on the same level of money: love operates not only in terms of intimate relations but also in a primary role of social organization. This same comparison, however, diminishes the power of love, in my view, insofar as it leads Marx to consider love only terms of exchange. “If you love unrequitedly,” he writes, “i. e. if your love as love does not call forth love in return, if through the *vital expression* of yourself as a loving person you to become a *loved person*, then your love is impotent, it is a misfortune” (p. 379). This a dubious notion of exchange—why should we believe that to preserve the singularity of qualities and objects that like must be exchanged only for like?—but more importantly considering love only in terms of exchange undermines an understanding of love as a power that generates

social bonds. What is most important about love, in other words, is not what it can be traded for, but what it can do and how it can transform us.

Marx is on more solid ground when, in a different section of the manuscripts, he refers to love as a social power, and, interestingly, the alternative here is not between love and money but, rather, love and property. Marx cites love as one of the senses or organs by which humans relate to each other and the world that will have to be created anew in communism. Before reading this passage, however, we should remember that Marx prefaces his account of communism with a critique of “crude communism,” which does not really abolish private property but instead transfers property from the individual to the community. One consequence of all property being owned collectively by the community is that all differences and talents are leveled in such a way that makes human powers indifferent. Communism, in contrast, while abolishing both private and communal property, must not only preserve or restore but also, and more importantly, generate in a new way the singular human powers.⁴

In this context Marx proposes that communism (and the abolition of private property) requires or implies a new sensorium, that is, a renewal or extension of the existing human senses. “Man appropriates his integral essence in an integral way, as a whole man. All his *human* relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs that are directly communal in form, are in their *objective* approach or in their *approach to the object* the appropriation of that object” (p. 351). This is admittedly a very brief mention of love, but it is not insignificant, I think, that love is the final element of this catalogue of senses. Love, like the other senses, is conceived as a social organ or, really, a human power to create social bonds. Like new powers to see and think we also must gain a new power to love. Perhaps we should call these social “muscles,” rather than “organs,” because we develop them through use and practice, breaking them down and building them up to strengthen and expand our human relations to the world, that is, our powers to create and manage social bonds. The development of a new sensorium, increasing our power to love and the strength of the other social muscles, is inversely related to the rule of private property. “The supersession [*Aufhebung*] of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become *human*, subjectively as well as objectively” (p. 352). Love, along with the other human senses and qualities, is not merely set free by the abolition of private property. It must be created anew, and this new love must fill

the social role that property does now: It must have the power, in other words, to generate social bonds and organize social relationships.

Communism can thus be conceived as the creation of a new love, which operates not by reproducing the same or unifying society in indifferent harmony—that would be crude communism—but, rather, by increasing our power to create and maintain relations with each other and the world. Under the rule of property, in which property structures and maintains social order and bonds, Marx claims that the power of the love and the other senses cannot be developed. And correspondingly to achieve a society beyond the rule of property those human powers would have to be transformed and expanded.

Marx's exploration of the power of love, of course, is quite limited. But he does nonetheless suggest some of the qualities that I cited earlier as essential for developing a political conception of love. Love is a power, first of all, that operates simultaneously at the most intimate and widest social levels. Secondly, love operates not in relation to the same or through processes of unification but, rather, in the encounter among multiplicities. And finally love enacts a process of transformation and is also a power to create lasting bonds with each other and our world. This third character is what Marx highlights most clearly when he poses love and the other human powers as the alternative social powers to property in the sense that they can (and must) achieve in a communist society the role that private property serves today. Marx thus gives us one point among many others for beginning today a project to construct a political concept of love.

[love, political, communism, private property]

NOTES

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1. In his critique of Rosa Luxemburg's antinationalist position, V. I. Lenin argues that, whereas the nationalism of dominant states is always reactionary, the nationalism of subordinated states can be progressive when it serves as a protest and a defensive mechanism against oppression and imperialism. One might claim in the same spirit that love of the same, although always reactionary when deployed by the dominant, can serve a progressive function when deployed by or in the name of a subordinated identity: a love of the subordinated race, for instance, that serves a defensive function. My position, however, is parallel to Luxemburg's. My sense, in other words, is that the progressive function of any political project animated by the love of the same and unification, even when conducted by or in the name of a subordinated identity, is very limited and constantly runs the danger of becoming reactionary. For Lenin's argument, see *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951, pp. 9–64.
2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 242. For a more extended reading of Arendt on love, see my in press essay "Red Love." A substantial

engagement with Arendt on this topic must also consider her doctoral thesis, *Love and Saint Augustine*; Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, eds.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

3. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Early Writings*; Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, trans.; London: Penguin, 1975, p. 379, see pp. 279–400.
4. On Marx's notion of crude communism in relation to love and his odd invocation of a "community of women," see again my "Red Love."