
Breaking Up is Hard to Do: A Philosophical Discussion of the End of Love¹

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ABSTRACT: This paper begins by distinguishing between two levels at which ethics has been applied in the past half century. Typically, ethics gets applied at the level of public debate and policy. Much less often, applied ethics centers on the personal level. As a literature search reveals, this is true of recent philosophic discussions of divorce. This paper seeks to begin an alternative philosophic discussion of divorce and separation by considering it at a personal level. I begin this discussion by analyzing two different conceptions of love—eros and agape—and suggest a synthesis of the two. The conception of love that I endorse suggests that the value of the parties in a loving relationship is constructed within the relationship itself. It is this feature of love that helps to explain why so many feel such a sense of worthlessness when experiencing a divorce or separation. Namely, that much of the positive value they had within their relationship has little or no value outside the context of that relationship.

DIVORCE IS A FACT OF LIFE in the contemporary world. Although precise statistics are surprisingly hard to come by, in 1996 approximately 40-50% of marriages in the United States ended in divorce (Krieder and Fields 2002). Given this, in combination with the fact that divorce and separation are deeply meaningful, and often painful, experiences for the people involved, it would seem to be a subject

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that would generate considerable philosophical discussion. Oddly, however, this is not the case, as I detail in Section I below. Very few philosophers have discussed the subject of divorce or separation and when they have, they have done so in a curiously *impersonal* way. Indeed, this is typical of applied philosophy within the Anglo-American tradition. For while applied or practical philosophy has garnered a considerable amount of respect within this tradition, its practitioners have tended to discuss issues at the level of *public* debates and discourse, not the *private or personal* level. Consider a controversial issue such as euthanasia: although applied philosophy has had a great deal to say about whether euthanasia is ever justified (or obligatory), and how we might distinguish between cases of just and unjust euthanasia, philosophy has remained relatively silent with respect to the personal choice one might make with respect to euthanasia; i.e., to the question: 'Is euthanasia a good (or the right) choice for *you* (given your particular circumstances at this particular moment in time)?' Questions such as this have been mostly abandoned by philosophy in the modern era. In Section I, I suggest that the reason for this may have to do with the dominance of liberalism in Anglo-American philosophy.

In Section II, I begin my analysis of divorce (or separation) by examining several different conceptions of love, from the Ancient Greek notion of love conceived as Eros to the Christian conception of love as agape. Following Irving Singer and Robert Nozick, I argue in favor of a conception of love that synthesizes Eros and agape, particularly in what Nozick calls the creation of a "we." This discussion of love is a necessary first step to understanding divorce, and particularly its associated feelings of pain and loss of worth, because over time in loving relationships much of our concept of self worth emanates from the identities we have created *within* the relationship, which of course no longer exists when the relationship ends.

In the last section of the paper, I explain in greater detail why the end of relationships is often so painful and why the ideal of liberalism, where the self is conceived as a completely independent entity, is of little help in understanding the pain of separation. However, replacing a liberal notion of the self with one provided either by communitarianism or feminism, where the self is seen as embedded within a community, and constituted by the relationships therein, is problematic as well. For while such a notion of self represents much more accurately the experience of being in love and of falling out of it (as happens in divorce), such a notion threatens to create a passive and dependent self which can't find value by itself. I shall conclude that an investigation of love and divorce leads us to the heart of a paradox regarding our natures as both social and independent beings. Striving to be independent leaves us open to the risk of not living a complete life while being in intimate, loving relationships with others leaves us dependent upon that other for some of our value.

Before proceeding to the main body of the paper, however, let me first deal with a couple of issues. First, although I use the terms marriage and divorce, and relate them to the notions of love and separation, respectively, I realize that these terms are not synonyms. In this paper, however, while I note the semantic difficulties my approach has, I simply want to bracket them, and speak of love and

marriage on the one hand, and separation and divorce on the other as closely related concepts.

Second, while I concentrate on the feeling of loss that people who ‘divorce’ often feel, I realize that for some, perhaps many, divorce can be a liberating experience and a way for a person to acquire a sense of value that was lost in the relationship. Hence, divorce or separation can be a good thing for many people, at least in the long term. Despite this, I believe that very few people experience no feelings of remorse or pain or worthlessness as their relationships come to end, and it is this phenomenological fact that I want to analyze in this paper.

Divorce, Philosophers and the Liberal Context

A literature search in the *Philosophers’ Index* on the subject of divorce is revealing. First, philosophers have written relatively little on divorce in the recent past (at least in journals listed in the *Philosopher’s Index*). Depending exactly how one counts ‘discussions of divorce’, there are approximately only ten such discussions over the past thirty years. Second, these analyses have discussed divorce (and marriage) almost exclusively as a matter of public policy or public morality. The reason for this can be found by examining a couple of discussions of divorce by philosophers in the early twentieth century: Bertrand Russell’s *Marriage and Morals* (1929) and Rebecca West’s 1930 article “Divorce” (In Sommers and Sommers 2000). Russell argued for several positions that were extraordinarily controversial in 1930, such as “trial marriage” and the idea that adultery might not always be wrong. Indeed, these views probably cost him a position nine years later at the then College of the City of New York (Houlgate 2000). Yet his position on divorce was, by today’s standards, quite severe: Russell claimed that “parents who divorce each other, except for grave cause, appear to me to be failing in their parental duty” (Cited in Houlgate 2000, 756). Despite what we might today think of as a fairly conservative point being made here, Russell’s argument is actually completely liberal in its essence. The immorality of divorce for Russell emanates entirely from the *harm* it causes the children involved: hence, what would normally be, from a liberal perspective, a private matter between two consenting adults becomes public by way of the harm principle first detailed by Russell’s godfather, John Stuart Mill. Absent the harm, and divorce would be a private matter, outside the legitimate reach of state interference. Rebecca West extends Russell’s points. Divorce, she suggests, “is nearly always an unspeakable calamity” for both children and adults. It can cause children from ‘broken homes’ to engage in improper behavior and it can “warp their character” in such a way that it will make it more difficult for them to achieve a fulfilling and happy life (In Sommers and Sommers 2000, 733). However, West goes on to suggest that there are even *worse harms* brought about by people remaining in a marriage where children and spouse are “brought up in close propinquity and at the mercy of a brutal and vicious parent” (In Sommers and Sommers 2000, 735). Like Russell, she mentions cases of cruelty and drunkenness as legitimate reasons for divorce, and she adds that in countries where divorce is disallowed, men can commit adultery with impunity. Indeed, she suggests

that such countries tend to have higher rates of prostitution, and this practice is harmful to its practitioners.

What we find in subsequent philosophical literature on this subject has been framed, by and large, by this liberal paradigm no matter how much individual discussions differ in their particulars. Brian Trainor (1992), for example, argues against “pure” no-fault divorce laws because of the harm they cause. More specifically, he maintains that the state has a duty to ensure that justice prevails in interpersonal interactions. Since pure no-fault divorce laws fail to do this, they are unjust and in fact an abnegation by the state of its duty vis-à-vis justice. Following in a similar vein, Lawrence Houlgate (2000) presents what he calls the “Divorce Child-Harm Argument (DCH):

- (a) Parents have a duty to behave in ways that promote the best interests of their young children. In particular, they ought to refrain from behavior that causes or is likely to cause them harm.
- (b) Divorce is a type of behavior that harms some young children. Therefore,
- (c) it is morally wrong for the parents of some young children to divorce (Sommers and Sommers 2000, 753).

Houlgate then considers, and rejects, some arguments that have been made against DCH in order to conclude that reasons often put forward for divorce in our age – e.g., ‘I’ve found someone else with whom I have fallen in love and want to spend my life’; ‘We’ve grown apart’; ‘We are unhappy with one another’ – are *bad* ones, in a strong moral sense of that word.

Feminists have tended to reject arguments of this sort because, in their opinion, they fetishize our obligations to children at the expense of seeing the genuine harm done to many women within the context of current conceptions and practices of marriage and divorce. Interestingly, however, even these particular feminist arguments, which are often hostile to liberal ideology, occur within a clearly defined liberal context that centers on notions of harm. Hence, in “Marriage, Autonomy, and the Feminine Protest,” Debra Bergoffen (1999) argues that the state ought to conceive of marriage simply as a promise between two people to love one another rather than seeing marriage as a state-sanctioned (and enforced) promise regarding property and/or children. Indeed, she maintains that marriage has been oppressive to women in a variety of ways because we have thought of it in terms of property and reproduction. Meanwhile, in “Feminist Challenges to the New Familialism,” Karen Struening (1996) defends “the freedom of intimate association” against attacks which suggest that the “decline of the intact two-parent family is responsible for our most pressing social problems.” While the state does indeed have an interest in “family stability,” this is but one important good, and it “must be balanced with other goods such as equality and justice within the family, happiness, and individual self-development” (Struening 1996, 135).

These papers all address the issue of divorce and marriage in important ways. Yet we must also note that they do not, except very indirectly, discuss divorce and marriage in personal terms. This is only to be expected, however, given the liberal context of philosophical discussions of divorce over the past century since liberalism eschews discussions of personal and substantive views of what

constitutes someone's good. Hence, so long as harm is avoided, philosophical discussions of divorce from a liberal perspective have absolutely no standing. There simply will not be any discussion, *in terms of their moral legitimacy*, of personal matters that are not construed as public ones because of harms involved. That is why the very few exceptions to the above rule that philosophers currently discuss divorce only in public terms are to be found by philosophers who (1) reject liberalism, and (2) are committed to a teleological position that is, in turn, firmly embedded within a definitive and substantive view of the good. For example, Christian philosophers have addressed marriage and divorce in personal terms (Olszewsky 1979). And there is at least one example of a communist philosopher (Wang Ying 1995) who discusses divorce in personal (as well as political) terms. But these discussions of divorce flow, of course, from their author's substantive view of the good, and their audiences therefore tend to be restricted to those people who share those particular views: they are as a result of limited value to the general populace in the heteronomous West.

This heteronomy is, of course, one reason why the West has been so committed to liberalism since it provides a theory that, on the face of it at least, allows a variety of different conceptions of the good life to exist harmoniously under the rubric of one government. This position amounts in essence, at least on a political level, to saying that we are prepared to allow that it is an individual's own business what she does with her life, subject to the restrictions imposed by the harm principle (broadly construed). Issues about love, marriage, and divorce, then, are outside the purview of liberal minded philosophers unless, as I've said, there is reason to believe that third party harm may be involved and hence is within the legitimate interest of the state.

Critics of liberalism have used evidence such as this to suggest that it is incapable of discussing the self in any depth and as such, is a truncated political theory. I shall return to this issue below in Section III. Before that, I provide a more full account of love to see how the self may get altered in loving relationships, such as marriage.

Love as a Synthesis of Eros and Agape

Plato made love more central to his philosophy than any philosopher before or since. A central feature of Plato's various discussions (and perhaps various views) of love is the idea that love seems fundamentally to be a desire for wholeness, no matter how differently wholeness actually gets conceived. In Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, for example, love is conceived as a desire for personal wholeness. Aristophanes claims that what we now call an individual human was originally only half of our previous, prelapsarian self. As punishment for being hubristic, however, Zeus split us in two – a sort of visceral prototype of divorce. With this splitting came other changes as well: most importantly, Zeus invented sex (by moving our genitals around to the front, and having us reproduce sexually). This was necessary, Aristophanes tells us, because without sex, people simply died of ennui. Sex was required as a partial reprieve for our loneliness by offering us a way

partially and temporarily to be inside (or to engulf) another in a semblance of the wholeness that was ours in our original state of grace.

While Aristophanes' account of love as a desire for our 'other half' is deeply sentimental (and indeed the stuff of Hallmark cards and bad Hollywood movies), it is also a tale with deeply tragic elements (Nussbaum 1979 and 2001, 165-199). This stems from the fact that although love is typically crucial for our happiness, we have no real method for attaining it. For according to Aristophanes there is but one particular person out there for us and yet we have no rational, determinate method for seeking her/him out. Hence, finding our other half, and our happiness with it, is a matter of pure random chance.

More importantly, from the perspective of this paper concentrating on separation or divorce, is that on Aristophanes' view of love, we have no way of knowing whether the person we are with is the right one for us. This can lead to some difficulties since, on the one hand, if the person is actually 'our other half', then divorcing them would be sheer folly because it would literally be a form of separating from ourselves. Without knowing definitively whether our beloved is actually the correct match for us, however, we sometimes can remain in relationships that are damaging to us, in terms of our lowered self-esteem, lost potential, and in general, decreased happiness and fulfillment. Most of us, I suspect, know couples such as this – the ones who have been married for a long period of time but who have fought their way through most of them. Anne Tyler, whose oeuvre of sixteen novels over three decades has been a recording of married life, has a couple as described above in her most recent novel, *The Amateur Marriage*. The couple finally split on the evening of their thirtieth wedding anniversary when they realize that their marriage has been hell, at least according to the husband. He comes to this realization while reminiscing about their years together at their anniversary celebration with their children: "All our remember-whens," he says, "were quarrels" (Tyler 2004, 192).

While this marriage has been an ill fit from the very beginning, there are also marriages that begin as good fits but change over time, either because only one person has changed or they have each changed, but in different directions. We should note that this is inconsistent with Aristophanes' account of love, which assumes little change in a relationship over time, and indeed has a fairly static view of people's identities. Hence, as Robert Solomon observes, Aristophanes at best gets only half of the story correct. "The other half begins with the fact of our differences and our stubbornness, and how we may ill fit together even after years of compromise and cohabitation" (In Stewart 1995). In his speech in the *Symposium* Socrates offers us a way to avoid this riskiness in love by placing it on more secure grounds. Doing so, however, requires that we redirect our desire away from the personal and sexual to the abstract and transcendent; i.e., away from particular, embodied people to universal, abstract Forms. Hence, whether we speak of the lower or the higher mysteries of love, as Socrates (and his teacher, Diotima) calls them, we move from the physical and particular to the intelligible and universal. Consider, for example, the move between the first and second levels of the 'higher mysteries of love.' At the first level, one falls in love with the physical beauty of a particular body. This moves the lover to a love of "noble discourse" which, in turn,

allows the lover to come to the realization that it is “absurd to deny that the beauty of each and every body is the same” (*Symposium*, 210b 3-5). This is an extraordinary claim: Socrates maintains here not only that physical beauty is exactly the same wherever that beauty is instantiated, but that it is “absurd” not to see this.

If this extraordinary claim were true, we would indeed be saved from some of the difficulties love presents. Not only would we be saved from the difficulty of finding our true love, since, through proper education, all of us can attain some (at least limited) knowledge of the Beautiful and the Good (or their effects – see Nussbaum 1979).

Most importantly for our purposes, if Socrates were correct in his account of love, then at least for the select few who are capable of attaining the upper echelons of the higher mysteries of love, it would be possible to be saved from separation (or divorce) from our beloved. This is so because, on Socrates’ view, love gets redirected from the particular where all the instability of love rests to the stable realm of unchanging Forms. And so the Form of Beauty is something that we can with some assurance discover, if we are both intelligent and diligent; moreover, it is something that, once found, cannot be lost. For while particular beautiful people may be fickle, Beauty itself is not. Hence, loving the Form of Beauty is completely secure in a way that personal love cannot be. According to Socrates, then, the life of the philosopher is safe from the possibility of divorce because his love is of a sort that is not subject to the inconstancy, change, and chance of the phenomenal world.

Most of us would suggest that Socrates’ view of love is not what we want. For most of us, romantic love directed toward a particular person is worth the risk. “‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,” as Tennyson put it in *In Memoriam*, a point that seems to be confirmed by the fact that in the United States at any rate, 95% of people end up marrying at some point in their lives (Ferrante 2005). Socrates’ fear of the inconstancy of human love is too severe since his solution is to have us abstain from what most of us consider the essential components of love. Moreover, many of us would suggest that, phenomenologically, Socrates describes the process of falling in love completely backwards. When we fall in love, we don’t move from the particular to the abstract, but exactly the reverse. That is, though I may initially be attracted to someone on the basis of their general characteristics, such as their beauty or humor, as the attraction moves to love, these general characteristics become more particularized: the beauty contained in the shape of my beloved’s forehead or the sound of her laughter is not interchangeable with the same shape or sound instantiated elsewhere. In general, it’s not *any* shape or *anyone’s* sense of humor, but *hers* in particular. Note as well that when we separate or divorce from our partner, it is not the absence of generalized, abstract characteristics, such as beauty or humor in themselves, that cause us discomfort. Rather, it is her particular beauty and humor – her very being in all its particularity in fact – that is missed. Otherwise, the pain of divorce would be very short indeed since there are lots of instances of beauty and humor in the world.

We should note a further, related problem for accounts of love such as those presented by Aristophanes and Socrates. For though their accounts differ in many

ways, they share the traditional Greek view of love as Eros. When love is conceived in this way, it always involves an evaluation or, as Irving Singer has called it, an “appraisal” of the loved object’s qualities (Singer 1984). As an example, think of a house and its value. If real estate agents are correct, then the most important feature of a property’s value is its location. So, one might ‘love’ a house based upon its having a desirable location. It follows from this conception that my feelings (of love) toward the house are dependent upon my and/or others positive appraisal of its features. Notice that on this picture, if I were to find an available house with better features – say a better location -- then it would be irrational of me to prefer the first house to the second. Whether this claim is invariably true of objects such as houses is debatable; however, the claim seems clearly to be false of loving, personal relationships. Let’s say, for example, that part of the reason I have fallen in love with my wife is due to her vibrant energy, gritty determination and astonishingly cheerful attitude. Let’s suppose further that, *in general*, I find these features attractive in all people. Does this mean, as Socrates implies, that I ought to love these qualities to the same extent and in the same manner wherever I find the desired features? Does it not matter at all to what or to whom the features attach?

Robert Nozick answers this question negatively. There is something profoundly wrongheaded, he suggests, in thinking of love as Eros because it entails that “trading-up” is always the rational course of action whether we’re speaking of objects we own, such as our houses, or of relationships we have with our beloved. Surely, personal love based entirely upon the beloved’s characteristics is misguided and we are right to think that people such as Donald Trump and John Derek are superficial when they (appear, at least to) trade in their wives periodically for newer, younger ‘models’ with ‘better’ qualities. Surely, our conception of love ought not to imply that they are merely acting rationally.

One way, conceptually speaking, to rid us of this problem is to conceive of love in terms other than qualities of the beloved. Historically, this transition has been associated with the move from thinking of love as Eros to thinking of it as agape. Associated with Christianity, the agape tradition conceives of love as a “bestowal” or a gift, rather than as an “appraisal” (Singer 1984). God’s love for us is cited as the paradigmatic example of agape since His love for us has nothing to do with our qualities. Indeed, He loves us in spite of our qualities.

There are, I believe, a number of reasons why this conception of love is not suitable as a model for personal, romantic love (although it *may* be for other sorts of love such as a parent’s love of their children). The primary reason is that it seems false phenomenologically. We *do* fall in love with people, at least in part, on the basis of their characteristics. That is, our love for someone is not completely baseless: rather, it is established on the basis of a person’s qualities, as thinking of love as Eros suggests. This is not to say, however, that our love need remain at this level. Singer and Nozick both suggest that while love begins with an appraisal, at some time it must transcend that to become a bestowal. Hence, though we may begin to fall in love with our beloved on the basis of her vibrant energy, gritty determination and cheerful attitude, we come eventually to love *her*, i.e., we come to love the qualities-as-instantiated-in-her. It’s *her* cheerfulness I love, not cheerfulness in general.

Nozick (1989) suggests that in a loving relationship, a distinctly new entity in the world is created, which he calls a “we”. The boundaries that we typically keep very secure as a way of demarcating ourselves from the outside world are let down or made porous in intimate, loving relationships. Although this new entity is not something new physically, it nonetheless brings about several dramatic changes to the self. Suddenly, our well being is now intimately bound with the well being of another, so much so in fact that it is not uncommon to say that my pain and joy are my lover’s pain and joy. Moreover, autonomy gets altered: we no longer make decisions as if we were the only entity affected. Finally, Nozick suggests, we psychologically become part of each other’s identity.

Many examples from literature seem to support Nozick’s point here. Consider, for example, Cathy’s claim in *Wuthering Heights*: “I am Heathcliff – he’s always, always in my mind – not as pleasure, anymore than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being” (Bronte 2000). Or consider Hermione in D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, and her craving for Rupert Birkin, the character modeled on Lawrence himself: “When he was there, she felt complete, she was sufficient, whole. For the rest of time, she was established on sand, built over a chasm [and] ... could never stop the terrible gap of insufficiency” (Lawrence 1960, 11). Indeed, the tale by Aristophanes can be brought to bear on this point as well since what the people split in two by Zeus desire most is a “melting into one another, ... becoming one instead of two” (*Symposium* 192e).

Note that one implication of this view is that the value of a loving relationship is created *within* the relationship itself. The value is not there to be discovered, as it were, as it is in the case of love conceived as Eros. It is a construction, although, unlike what is proposed in the agape tradition, the love is not baseless since it is formed on the basis of qualities that are altered and radically transformed in the process of love.

This is an important point and hence needs to be stressed. In love, we *construct* one another and *create* positive value for each other. That positive value, however, may be considered value neutral or even as disvalue by those outside the relationship. Speaking of houses once again, while one might say that a ‘house’ can be valued entirely through an appraisal, the value of a ‘home’ is bestowed upon it by our relationship with it. Hence, the qualities we come to love in our beloveds have the value they do because we have constructed it in the context of our relationship with him/her.

Separation and Divorce as a Loss of Value

The constructedness of value within a relationship is vitally important to understanding the pain from which people suffer when experiencing the end of their relationship. For when this happens, there arises the possibility that the value of lovers themselves suffers a terrible loss. This is why people going through a divorce often feel worthless. They feel this way because, in a sense, they really have become so. Like an inside joke that is meaningless to those on the outside, the qualities people possess that have positive value within the relationship itself *may* be quite worthless outside the relationship. In this context, think of the following

business example, as Nozick does (1989). Suppose that two companies develop a symbiotic relationship where company A provides a crucial part for what company B produces. Suppose further that this relationship has become valuable enough for both companies that A reformulates itself so that A produces only that essential part for B and B, in turn, buys that part only from A. While this situation may be mutually valuable for some time, it raises risks for A and B. What happens, for example, if C comes along and begins to provide B with the needed part at a higher quality and/or a lower price than A? What if B ends the relationship with A and begins one with C? As we can quickly see, this may put A in a precarious position indeed since what A has to offer was positively valuable only in the context of its relationship with B, and when that relationship ends, A may be unable to change (or change quickly enough) to be valuable to anyone else. Economically, this may mean the death of company A: applied to personal relationships, the situation can be equally dangerous.

A point raised earlier with respect to a problem in Aristophanes' account of love is germane here. Recall that for Aristophanes, we discover our beloved by finding our other half; that is, the individual who fits us exactly. As mentioned above, this implies a static view both of people and of relationships that is clearly false. Although some aspects of our personality are indeed fairly well set by the end of our childhood and certainly by the end of adolescence, we continue to change in a variety of ways throughout our lives. Hence, what we found interesting at twenty might be of little interest at forty and completely forgotten or incomprehensible at sixty. As we know from personal experience, this makes long term relationships difficult as we negotiate over the years with our partners the parameters of our likes and dislikes. This is not simply to say that we compromise in our relationships. Although that is indeed true, if perhaps banal, the point I am making here is that through this compromise we reconstruct our likes and dislikes. By way of an example, consider the following scenario. Let's imagine that my wife enjoys the opera while I have always hated it, preferring instead to attend rock concerts. Let us further imagine that I actually come to enjoy going to the opera with my wife to such an extent that I have stopped attending rock concerts, which she loathes. Finally, imagine that this is the case even though I could not think of going to the opera by myself, or even of listening to operas when on my own. That is, the opera for me as a separate individual holds little or no value. Relationships are, in many ways, the reiteration of just these types of scenarios where our preferences and indeed our very being gets radically altered from what it was before we entered the relationship. Zadie Smith makes just this point in her most recent novel, *On Beauty*, by having a character, who has been married for a great many years, say: "I don't ask myself *what* did I live for, ... I ask *whom* did I live for" (Smith 2005, 176). That is, the very *telos* of one's existence can become embedded within the relationship you have with your partner.² Although this may be unproblematic in a relationship that remains solvent, it can be particularly distressing in cases where the qualities

² The character in the novel suggests that this is a woman's point of view and that men do indeed ask themselves what rather than whom they lived for. Whether this is true is beyond the scope of this essay although there is some research to suggest that women do tend to define themselves more in terms of relationships than do men. See, e.g., Gilligan, Noddings, and Sherwin for more on this issue.

that emerge in the relationship are quite different than the qualities one had before the relationship. Citing Smith's *On Beauty* once again, the main female protagonist, Kiki, experiences just this feeling when she considers her life after discovering that her husband has cheated on her. "I *staked my whole life* on you. And I have no idea any more why I did that I gave up *my life* for you. I don't even know who I am anymore" (Smith 2005, 206). In cases such as this, there may literally be little on which to base one's self esteem, at least during the initial period of separation, because there really is no complete person there anymore. They are just like people who suffer from Dissociative Disorder whose various personality fragments, or alters, don't quite constitute a full person. Or, to use an example discussed earlier, people going through a divorce or separation are like the people in Aristophanes' myth who have been torn in two by Zeus: they are two parts neither of which is sufficient on its own to form a coherent whole.

In the example from Smith's novel, the change in the relationship occurred as a result of a particular traumatic event – an affair by one partner and the discovery of it by the other. But the same feelings of loss and disorientation can also occur in the absence of such traumatic events. In *The Amateur Marriage*, for example, Anne Tyler uses the metaphor of "killing the frog by degrees." That is, as the character Michael explains it: "[I]f you put a frog in a pot of cold water and light a slow flame underneath, the water heats up one degree at a time and the frog doesn't feel it happening. Finally it dies; never felt a thing" (Tyler 2004, 198). In other words, some marriages may deteriorate slowly over time, without either partner realizing it. But the end result here, as before, can be just as serious – metaphorically, it not only results in the death of the relationship but of the identities of the people within it.

What, then, can or ought to be done to protect ourselves from the pains of divorce? Presumably, even if many divorces are rooted in the changes partners have gone through during their married lives, we don't want to say that we are all obligated to be static after marriage or to change only in exactly the same ways as our partners. To use an earlier example, I was under no *obligation* to become interested in opera music.

At the core of this issue is personal identity and the various ways in which it can be conceived. Since the Enlightenment, many, including liberals, have followed Kant in thinking that the self ought to be viewed as completely independent. As he said: "*Sapere aude!* 'Have courage to use your own reason!' – that is the motto of the enlightenment" (Kant 1959, 85).

Interestingly, Rousseau used just this model of an independent self in his fascinating, albeit horribly misogynistic, discussions of love and marriage. Integrally important here is his distinction between "*amour de soi*," or *natural* self-love, and "*amour-propre*," or *conventional* or *social* vanity. The former for Rousseau is a kind of virtue, and it is, indeed, that towards which education aims as he explains it in the *Emile*. As a "natural" man, Emile is one who, as Mary Nichols puts it, "is supposed to be completely independent of the influence of other wills, to possess what later came to be called moral autonomy. When Emile reaches adolescence, however, Rousseau attempts to educate him to live in the society of others and to accept the limits such society imposes. Rousseau thus tries to connect Emile to other human beings while maintaining his self-dependence and freedom"

(Nichols 1985, 536). In order to do this, Emile must be careful *not* to turn away from the natural and self-directed *amour de soi* to *amour-propre*, which is dependently and mimetically based on social conventions and the desires of others. Love, and women, are hence seen by Rousseau as potential threats to the freedom of men because love is always perilously in danger of burdening man in desires that are both outside of himself and based upon values constructed by society. That is, love runs the risk of turning us away from ourselves toward others: it is a way of defining ourselves in comparison to others (Brunt 1988).

Rousseau, then, like Plato, sought to re-conceptualize love in order to save us from it. For Rousseau, this meant that we must rid love of its dependency by making love self-contained. Rousseau's suggested solution comes by way of the imagination. As Mary Nichols explains it, for Rousseau, "[t]he voluptuous sentiment of love that suffuses the lover's heart is aroused not by a human being outside himself but by an internal image Insofar as Emile's happiness lies in his image of beauty that is internal, Emile escapes dependence on other human beings" (Nichols 1980, 552). Hence, it is not his lover, Sophie herself, whom Emile comes to love, it is Emile's represented image of her that is the source of his love.

Unfortunately, Rousseau's proposal for love leaves many just as dissatisfied as did Plato's. Rousseau himself seems to recognize this when he admits on the one hand that "it is not good for man to be alone" (cited in Nichols 1985, 552), while also implying that Emile needs the embodied Sophie herself, not just his image of her in order to be completely happy. Yet, while the *Emile* appears to recognize this, at the end Rousseau gets Emile to postpone his marriage to Sophie on the ground that he has to learn to live without her if he is to not to become dependent on her. Bizarrely, then, the tonic for divorce is never to get married.

Perhaps, however, we ought not to think of dependence on others, or joint identity, as problematic. Instead, we might attempt to construct a different conception of autonomy and the self, which does not perceive us as completely independent from others in the first place. Such conceptions have come from various sources, especially from communitarians and feminists, both of whom see, in their different ways, the self as inherently an embedded entity defined in large part by the communities within which they live and the relationships they have. In this vein, Annette Baier has articulated a view of persons as "second persons:"

A person, perhaps, is best seen as one who was long enough dependent upon other persons to acquire the essential arts of personhood. Persons essentially are *second* persons, who grow up with other persons The fact that a person has a life *history*, and that a people collectively have a history depends upon the humbler fact that each person has a childhood in which a cultural heritage is transmitted, ready for adolescent rejection and adult discriminating selection and contribution. Persons come after and before other persons (Baier, 1985, 84-85, her emphasis)

Susan Sherwin has used this view as the basis for her conception of what she calls "relational autonomy." By seeing the self as relational, we see identity "as an ongoing process, rather than as something static or fixed. Relational selves are

inherently social beings that are significantly shaped and modified within a web of interconnected (and sometimes conflicting) relationships” (Sherwin, in Boetzkes and Waluchow 2000, 78).

From what I have suggested above with respect to the nature of love, relational autonomy and its concomitant view of relational selves certainly appears to capture the experience of people in love much more adequately and fully than liberal theories of unencumbered selves does. For, if I am correct, in love our value gets defined, and is therefore constituted by our relationship with our beloved. But this doesn’t solve the problem of divorce – i.e., the loss of self and value we experience in divorce and separation – it merely provides us with a model that allows us to see the problem in a clearer light.

But perhaps this is all there is to say on this score – that we are dependent entities in some sense and that does open us up to the danger of divorce and separation. The ways to avoid this, as presented by Plato and Rousseau, would have us deny this human reality and to live an inauthentic life removed from others. As humans, we have not only the capacity to form intimate associations with others, we desire to do so and see much of our happiness as dependent on them despite the fact that, paradoxically, this opens the possibility of a great deal of pain should the relationship end. Perhaps this helps to explain why 70% of divorced people end up remarrying (Ferrante 2005).

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