

Ensaio 44

Topic 4

Introduction

In Plato's Symposium he writes an interaction between Socrates and Diotima. The men discuss the idea of love and its aspects- Is love beautiful or ugly?- The conversation concludes itself with the idea that love is in fact neither, being that not all things must be judged as good or bad, beautiful or ugly. This talk, however, proposes the question: Can a feeling such as love be categorized as beautiful and therefore good?

In this essay, I will conclude how love is, in its core, good. To prove such statement I shall use Descartes Method of Doubts: To answer large, conflicting questions you must first diminish them in size and matter to then create a deeper understanding of all senses of the doubt and create a universal truth. This essay will be divided in three main parts and they respective conclusions: What is Beauty?, Love and its role within society, and finally, a last rebuttal of love's ambiguous essence. In my conclusion, I will have proven that love is, against Diotima's thoughts, truly and solely good.

What is Beauty?

To better understand and refute this conversation's conclusion, we must first analyze the language used in it. Diotima is initially asked if love is beautiful. Following Aristotle's ideas in his work "*The poetics*" we can understand beauty and art are a form for human nature to be expressed and understood. Aristotle claims that art is a form to practice good virtues, how when we are public to a tragic play, for example, we learn to empathize and pity. Aristotle makes the case of a tragic myth, in which a son has to unknowingly kill his father and marry his mother, and upon that realization rips away his own eyes, the myth is of course very entertaining, but its main purpose is to create an understanding that bad things happen to good people, and us as good people must learn to understand and forgive. In the case presented, the beauty of a play is used to serve and strengthen our morals, to help us get a sense of peace and fulfillment from the good deed that is to understand others. We better ourselves through beautiful things.

We can assume, then, that if beauty is a mean to better ourselves and guides the way to be virtuous beings, then beauty is inherently good. Meaning only describing something as the former feeling would be the same as describing something as, in its core, good. Therefore there is no need to evaluate Socrates' question of is love good, because if the feeling is proven beautiful than it must, of course, be good as well.

Following these ideas, we can now understand that beautiful things are those that help us better ourselves and give us a sense of fulfillment, and that if love can be proven beautiful then it has also been proven good.

Love and its role within society

To prove then that love is beautiful we must prove that the feeling's role in society is the same as art: To better ourselves.

When philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer thought of love he saw nothing but a fight for survival. "Der Wille zum Leben" as he puts it, is the key to understanding human decisions and interactions. Schopenhauer claims that love is a form of tricking ourselves into perpetuating a species by procreating, meaning love's role is to copulate. This drastic, naturalistic idea attempts explain love's main role in society with behavioral simplicity: To keep us alive.

Schopenhauer's ideology might have been true if not for the simple sense that not all lovers wish to create and raise children, considering all aspects and forms love can take. In modern society, love is no longer about copulating and yet about companionship. People have this urge, not to raise a family, but to be understood and then allow themselves to change within a relationship. Kant argued that all people should let their lovers change them, not as a sign of weakness, but as a show of bettering and growth of the moral.

In the argument that love is not a drastic cling of hope to make ourselves permanent, and yet a mean to grow as an individual through better understanding others experiences and decisions, we can see that like art, love's role in society is to teach us how to better ourselves. To better demonstrate how this logic plays out, we can imagine it as a formula:

$$X = Z$$

$$Y = Z$$

$$X = Y = Z$$

Let this be named by our own variables:

Beauty = A mean to better ourselves

Love = A mean to better ourselves

Love = Beauty = A mean to better ourselves

We can now conclude that love is, in fact, beautiful since they serve the same purpose and mean to promote the same results.

Why love must not have an ambiguous essence

One may argue that love and beauty differ in the sense that love, much more often than beauty, stirs us away from virtuous deeds. The valid point should make perfect sense, if not only for the following explanation. Revisiting Aristotle's views, we can understand that all humans are born with the potential to be good and to make the right choices, but if they do so is up to them. The same way a tragic play will only truly impact those who are willing to defy their views in sake of immersing themselves in another perspective, love may only fulfill its true essence if both parts are devoted to

change. That of course begs the question: Why is it so much easier to strengthen our morals through a mere fictional tragedy than through love? The answer is tragically simple. When observing beauty, you are not inserted in its reality, it becomes only obvious to be logical and do the right thing. However, when this fictional test becomes a reality the challenge is much larger and it suddenly becomes very hard to go back to our moral and logical selves. To truly be virtuous and good, you must take strong feelings and situations as a mean to better yourself, and that harsh understanding is what people may mistake for love stirring us away from virtuous deeds.

As it shows itself, love is not bad or ugly seeing as that these are both adjectives of things that may be part of our lives only as a form of ill temptation that serve no purpose on the journey to become virtuous. However, love is also not, as Diotima puts it, an in between of points, considering love serves as a way to practice empathy and forgiveness all virtuous acts. Seeing as something that is good – because it allows us to practice the good- can not represent something that is merely neutral or what you make of it, love is not in between good and bad. This logic follows as represented in the diagram bellow:

If X contains Y

Then a result may not be $X \setminus Y$

Meaning:

If love contains good

Then the result may not be love is lesser than good.

This helps us comprehend that love if love contains good then it must be good and the lack of strength to be virtuous is the only mishap of believers that love can be bad, or ugly or something in between two extremes.

Conclusion

As we come to understand all aspects necessary to reach a conclusion, we may finally go back to Descartes ideas and finalize our understanding of the big question initially proposed: Can a feeling such as love be categorized as beautiful and therefore good?

As logically proven above, love is beautiful as it stands in the same societal role as art and other aspects we attribute beauty to. It seems then logical to assume that because love is beautiful then love is also good, meaning only that love can not stand in an ambiguous position when being described, therefore disproving the conclusion Socrates and Diotima come to at the end of their interaction in Plato's work. Now being able to answer our conflicting question simply, yes.