

The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love

Humberto Maturana Romesin and Gerda Verden-Zöllner

Edited by Pille Bunnell, Imprint Academic 2008

Appendix 10: Dimensions in Love

We human beings live our daily lives speaking as if there were many different kinds, forms, or levels of love. This is apparent in adjectival expressions such as "mother love", "filial love", "aggressive love", "interested love", "innocent love", and so forth, or in therapeutical practices destined to recover the experience of those forms of love. I think, however, that these many different expressions do not denote different forms, kinds, or levels of love as an emotion, but that they in fact connote only different relational dimensions of our living as loving animals. What happens is that we are not usually aware of this situation, because we generally speak in our culture as if we were referring to whatever we name or connote as some sort of independent entity, and we do not behave differently when we speak of love. In these circumstances, I would like to make the following comments in the terms of my claims about emotions.

1. Love is the domain of those relational behaviors through which the other arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself. Thus, there are not different kinds of love; however, love as a domain of relational behaviors entails many relational dimensions, and there are many different configurations of relational behaviors in which love may take place.
2. Love may involve few or many relational dimensions of coexistence according to the relational space in which it takes place. Thus, for example, in the case of the common use of a street, as we operate in mutual respect few dimensions of mutual acceptance are entailed. In friendship, on the contrary, many relational dimensions are involved, and when we fall in love we want to live with the other in all the possible dimensions of mutual acceptance. In the spiritual experience, which is in fact a spontaneous experience of expansion of love, there is an opening to the total acceptance of the cosmos in unity with oneself. What I want to emphasize here is that in all cases in which love occurs the phenomenon is the same; namely, human and non-human animals relate with another in the domain of conscious or unconscious behaviors through which the other, whoever or whatever it may be, arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself.
3. In terms of configurations of relational behaviors, love occurs in all the circumstances of life as the emotion that makes possible the realization of living through the implicit trust in the coherences of the domain of existence in which actual living takes place. Yet, as we use different adjectival expressions to refer to love under different relational circumstances, we frequently confuse the emotion that love is with the different particular forms adopted by the relational behaviors proper to each of those circumstances.
4. Love, as the domain of relational behaviors through which the other arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself, does not distort the relations in terms of what is expected

or desired to happen. Love lets it be and is, therefore, “visionary,” not blind, and entails seeing (or hearing, touching, smelling, sensing) the other in its full legitimacy. Furthermore, as love is visionary, it entails “seeing” and hence, acting accordingly. The presence of purposes, aims, or expectations in a relationship denies love, as these become the center of attention and care. Such purposes, expectations, and aims generate blindness with respect to the participants in the relationship, whoever or whatever these may be. That is, by attending to what one expects the other to do, the other disappears and the relationship does not take place in love, but occurs in use and manipulation.

5. Love is not blind acceptance. Love is seeing, hearing, touching and smelling the other in his, her, or its legitimacy and acting accordingly. If the other is a child in a mother/child relation, love is the relational behavior through which each arises in its legitimacy in mutual respect and body acceptance. In love the child arises as a child without being denied in the legitimacy of his or her childness, and at the same time the mother arises as a legitimate being as mother in that relationship. If the other happens to be a poisonous spider, love takes place as we behave in a way such that the spider arises in its legitimacy as the kind of animal that it is, and we let it be in its domain of existence in full awareness of it, or destroy it taking full responsibility for the act.
6. A conflict between two persons takes place in love when it is faced through behaviors that do not deny the legitimate existence of the other in coexistence with oneself. In such a case the conflict is lived in mutual respect even when there is a confrontation in violence, because what is denied is the behavior of the other, not its being.
7. As observers we can only make assessments about the emotioning involved in any particular relational situation between living beings. But assessments are not statements of facts, they are distinctions that an observer makes of some relational features apparent to him or her in the circumstances of his or her living at the moment in which the relation is taking place. As such, an assessment reveals the observer in his or her relational dynamics, and not the assessed. No doubt we know in daily life that this is so, as is apparent in the uncertainty that the word assessment entails. Yet once we have made an assessment of the emotioning in the relation in which we are, we live the reality that the emotion that we claim we have seen brings about, and our life follows a path accordingly, regardless of whether or not somebody else may consider our assessment valid.
8. In these circumstances, it is not sincerity that matters in the moment of an interaction between two living systems, human or non-human, but it is the emotional form lived by each of them in it. It is only through what will happen in the course followed by the ongoing life of these two beings that the matters of sincerity and honesty may appear and become crucial. We humans must live in love, trusting each other, to be physiologically and psychically healthy. So if there is no sincerity in the “loving” behavior seen in a human relation, and this lack becomes apparent in the course of living so that a retrospective trust is broken, a physiological or psychic breakdown occurs or may occur. Animal relations in general, and of course human relations in particular, both in their physiological and psychic dimension, are recursively built on the implicit trust in the trustfulness of the apparent emotioning that is being lived. When love comes to an end through loss of trust, suffering arises that can only be cured through the restitution of trust in the reconstruction of the same relational domain in

which it was lost. Furthermore, such restitution is possible only through trust in the sincerity of the participants in the relationship as the fundament for the systemic conservation of the thus reconstructed relational coherences in love that they will henceforth live. And this is so because the identity through which a particular human being is realized as such, whatever this may be, is systemic and systemically conserved, not an intrinsic feature of his or her bodyhood. We human beings are biologically loving animals in the sense that our physiological and psychic wellbeing requires that we live in love all our life. But to live as a loving being is a systemic dynamics conserved systemically through living in love in a loving living, and not an intrinsic condition that we may or may not have.

I think that the greatest difficulty in understanding both the fluid character of the emotional dynamics, and that different emotions as different domains of relational behaviors do not necessarily constitute uniform manners of relations, rests on our classificatory attitude. In our Western culture we act as if every distinction that we make should reveal some well-defined independent entity, and we expect that the borders of the entity that we distinguish should be intrinsically neat. With this attitude we do not see that it is the operation of distinction that we perform that specifies the borders of what we distinguish, and we do not realize that the identity of what we distinguish is systemic, so that it exists only as long as the conditions that bring it forth prevail. In the continuous flow of the relational dynamics of living systems, the different emotions that we distinguish have arisen as different manners of relating that have been conserved in the phylogenic history of the organisms involved, but the form of their occurrence is not fixed.