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“What is Love? (Baby Don’t Hurt Me)”:
The Argumentation of Eros’ Essential Elements

1. Introduction

Eros, or erotic love, is a highly valued love within society. It is glorified throughout history within the arts, entertainment industry, and in personal life. Philosophers who have discussed a core component of erotic love include Eleanore Stump, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Robert C. Solomon, and C.S. Lewis. These philosophers hold differing philosophical perspectives, which is seen clearly within their work. In using their philosophical works, I will show that even though these philosophers have opposing approaches to erotic love, they are harmonious in agreeing that the essential elements of maintaining erotic love are attraction, mutual goodwill, memories, forgiveness, commitment, and a shared life and identity.

2. Attraction

Within “Love, by All Accounts,” Eleanore Stump discusses the importance of attraction when maintaining erotic love, this is also seen in Søren Kierkegaard’s *The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage*. Kierkegaard discussed the idea of love being based upon beauty, particularly sensuous beauty (Kierkegaard, 83). Stump labels this as the responsive account. In this account, the lover has an attraction to intrinsic characteristics of the beloved (Stump, 25). This can include aesthetic or erotic attraction to either their physical or immaterial traits. This considers the population of people who have aesthetic attraction, which is an attraction towards the beloved’s physical or immaterial traits in a non-sexual manner, whereas those who have erotic attraction would be attracted to the beloved’s traits in a sexual manner.

3. Mutual Goodwill

Another significant segment of maintaining erotic love is mutual goodwill. This idea is also seen in Stump's "Love, by All Accounts," through Aquinas' account and Robert C. Solomon. This account involves the desire of good for the beloved (Stump, 27). In both lovers wanting each other to flourish, they create a healthy relationship that pushes each other to achieve their highest potential in life morally, socially, mentally, or physically. This is seen in Solomon's "The Virtue of Love" through his belief that love "enhances and encourages the other virtues" in the person and in the relationship, and in being mindful of this the lover and the beloved are able to practice mutual goodwill (Solomon, 28)

4. Memories

Eleanore Stump also introduces the value of memories within maintaining erotic love. The account she uses to justify this element is within the relational account. The relational account focuses on the relationship between the lover and their beloved, or more particularly, the "history of interactions between the persons so connected" (Stump, 26). An example of the importance of memories with the beloved seen in this course is an episode of *Black Mirror*, "Be Right Back." In this episode, the lover attempts to replace her dead beloved through Artificial Intelligence ("Be Right Back"). The robot contained all of the beloved's information that was recorded on any digital and social platform, and eventually was able to achieve the beloved's physical form. Yet, because the beloved's memories were not all present online, the AI could not fully fulfill the lover's physical and emotional needs that the beloved left behind ("Be Right Back").

5. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is another integral element in maintaining erotic love, which is supported through Jean-Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, and Eleanore Stump. According to "Condemned to be Social?: A Critique of Sartre's Account of Social Relations," Sartre believes that "genuine

love is a risk” (Anonymous, 18). This risk is the possibility for disappointment or hurt from the beloved. Due to this, forgiveness should always remain a possibility within relationships “because bad faith will always remain a possibility” (Anonymous, 16). This ties into Kierkegaard’s idea that decisions are a risk, therefore the decision to maintain one’s erotic love for the other comes with this inherent risk of harm (Kierkegaard, 98). Love is a risk, a risk to hurt and the risk in forgiving. Stump expands on this idea, through Aquinas’ account. Aside from desiring good for the beloved, the lover should also desire “union with the beloved” (Stump, 27). Therefore, in wanting to keep each other united and in wanting good for their beloved, the lover is required to practice forgiveness. This form of forgiveness is, of course, not valid in certain situations in which the lover is at risk, or in which the beloved put others at risk. For example, if the beloved eats the lovers’ chocolate cake, though the lover was looking forward to the cake, they should practice forgiveness with the beloved. Yet, if the beloved cheated on the lover or physically abused them, there is validity in not forgiving the beloved.

6. Commitment

Another essential element of maintaining erotic love, commitment, is seen through Eleanore Stump’s work as well as Søren Kierkegaard’s work. The volitional account emphasizes the lover’s commitment and the intentional decision to love the beloved (Stump, 26). This is strengthened on the lover’s trust in themselves to stay committed as well as the beloved’s trust in that the lover will be committed. In this intentionality, the volitional account instills a deeper trust within the relationship of erotic love. Another account used to justify commitment is Aquinas’, in which the lover desires union with the beloved. Kierkegaard also discusses commitment within *The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage* through conjugal love. Conjugal love is expressed through marriage. Compared to romantic love void of conjugal love, duty is

emphasized in conjugal love to such a high degree that one cannot easily escape the commitment involved with conjugal love (Kierkegaard, 96). Marriage is the deepening of love through commitment, and if carried out properly, the couple will preserve their erotic love.

7. Shared life and Identity

A key component of maintaining erotic love is the lovers having a shared life and identity, which is seen in Robert C. Solomon and C.S. Lewis' works. In "The Virtue of Erotic Love," Robert C. Solomon discusses the process of unification. In this, the lover and the beloved build their two lives into one. Oftentimes, their personality traits meld, creating a deeper bond between them (Solomon, 25). Another philosopher who supports this idea is C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*. This is seen through the quote, "Love you? I *am* you." (Lewis, 95). What C.S. Lewis conveys with this statement is that the lover loves the beloved so much to where they adopt desired characteristics from the beloved.

8. Conclusion

According to philosophers like Stump, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Solomon, and C.S. Lewis, essential elements in maintaining erotic love include attraction, mutual goodwill, memories, forgiveness, commitment, and shared life and identity. Stump and Kierkegaard discuss aesthetic and physical attraction importance through the responsive account. Mutual goodwill is reviewed by Stump through Aquinas' account and Solomon. The value of memories is argued through Stump's relational account, and supported by *Black Mirror's* "Be Right Back." Forgiveness is examined in writings from Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Stump, in which they discuss the inherent risk in loving and how Aquinas' account supports forgiveness. Commitment is supported by Stump's volitional account and Kierkegaard's conjugal love. Shared life and identity are seen through Solomon's process of unification of personalities and lives and C.S.

Lewis' adoption of each other's characteristics. In conclusion, to love is easy, yet to cultivate and grow that love is harder. But at the end of the day, the lover knows that the ways they would express their love for the beloved is limitless.

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