



Love and Happiness

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Introduction:

“We all want to be happy.” This is a simple yet universal and irrefutable claim. It is impossible to find someone in this world who would claim that they don’t want to be happy. Even if they are not happy at the moment, they are living their lives in hope of attaining happiness in the future. So the importance of happiness in our lives seems to be pretty obvious, as all of our actions are eventually aiming at happiness, even if it may sometimes go unnoticed. To put it in Aristotle’s words, “every art or applied science and every systematic investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim at some good” (Aristotle, 1962). For example, we work for the sake of acquiring the good of wealth, we take medicines for the sake of acquiring the good of health, etc. Yet, all the goods, which our actions aim at, merely serve as an intermediate good for the sake of something else, such as wealth for the sake of buying a decent house, health for the sake of living, etc. Thus, according to Aristotle, and as you could probably guess, there is only one single good which is the terminal and ultimate good of human life, which also serves as the final end that all our actions and intermediate goods aim at, and that is happiness or eudaimonia. Of all the things we do, only happiness is pursued for the sake of itself, as we acquire wealth to buy a decent house so that we can live happily with our family in it, we desire good health so that we can enjoy the happiness of living a blessed life longer, etc.

Now that we have affirmed the importance of happiness as the ultimate good of human life, how could we possibly attain happiness in our life. According to Aristotle and many philosophers, the highest form of happiness, which is called eudaimonia, is achieved through the contemplative activities in accordance with virtue. It is quite obvious why they make that claim because as philosophers, contemplative activity is what they do for a living, and as everyone wants to be happy, they definitely want to claim that what they do is the way to happiness. However, for me,

the answer to happiness lies in love, and love is the way that could lead us to attain happiness in our lives.

What is Love?

So, what is love in the first place? Philosophers like C.S. Lewis and Bennett Helm have categorized love, specifically personal love, into four main categories: Eros (Romantic Love), Agape (Godly Love), Philia (Friendly Love), and Storge (Familial Love) (Lewis, 1960). Even though Eros has been traditionally known as the love of desire that is usually associated with a selfish and passionate desire for an object/sex, for this paper, I will treat Eros instead as romantic love, which sheds away its egocentricity but transcends into a love for one's romantic partner/beloved ones, which is selfless and wholehearted as are Agape, Philia and Storge.

Now as for Agape, also known as godly love, it is the love of God for us and our love for God, which is thus unconditional and does not respond to the value of its objects. With God being the omnipotent being, love is his nature and he is loving everyone and everything in a way that is spontaneous and indiscriminate (Helm, 2021). Similarly, for us as human beings, such indiscriminate love of agape has been considered by many as an ideal form of love, and an ultimate end to pursue after. However, as the focus of this paper is on interpersonal love with a depth of relationship, we will not focus on agape as the type of love that could lead us to happiness.

Before we delve deeper into love, let us first consider who we are in the first place as that will help us understand why love is so important to us. We, as human beings, are inherently social animals whose brains are hardwired in a way that makes us seek out the companionship of others((Young, 2008). This is how evolution has transformed us in order to survive. By being social animals, we need to be within a group, a community, or a society, but most importantly, we

need the companionship of other human beings. Hence, our biological necessity has made us extremely fragile in a way that we would fear the loneliness of isolation, of not having someone we can talk to, someone to be with, and someone to love. This is possibly one of the sources of Storge or familial love, we give birth to our children not only to keep the homo sapiens species alive but also to have someone whom we could love. This is why parental love usually represents love as bestowal of value where the bond between parents and their children grants value to the children which makes them exclusively unique to their parents. Such bond of blood sets parents and children free from the loneliness of the world where they could enjoy the companionship of each other.

Just as our biological necessity makes us fragile against loneliness, it also makes us selfish beings. There are times when we would consider the interest of ourselves in the first place over the interest and well-being of others. Yet, love is something that transcends us above our selfishness, because when we truly love someone, we love wholeheartedly and selflessly as we would take the interest of our beloved ones as our own, and together, we would form a shared identity with our beloved.

According to Harry Frankfurt, love has four distinctive features, 1. It is a disinterested concern for the well-being of the beloved one, such as it is not driven by any ulterior purpose but seeks the good of the beloved as something for the sake of itself. 2. Love is ineluctably personal. i.e. the beloved is loved by the lover for his/her unique individuality, not because he/she falls into the instance of a particular type. 3. The lover identifies with his beloved: that is, he takes the interest of his beloved as his own. 4. Love entails constraints upon the will. It is a volitional necessity beyond our immediate voluntary control such that we cannot help loving when the time comes (Frankfurt, 2009).

For example, Joe loves Jill. Joe loves wholeheartedly and selflessly such that his love for Jill exemplifies the four features of love Frankfurt describes. When Jill is sick, Joe would desire that Jill gets better and restore her health as soon as possible. Such desire has nothing to do with Joe's own interest as an employer would desire of Jill's good health so that she could work more efficiently and produce more revenue for him or as a playmate would desire Jill to get better so that she can continue to go to the party with him on the weekend. Rather, Joe's desire of Jill's good health, stemmed from his love for her, is a disinterested concern where the Jill's well-being is the ultimate end itself.

You might think that Joe is just a nice person who would wish for the best of everyone he meets as a philanthropist would do. Yet, Joe's love for Jill is ineluctably personal and exclusive as "there can be no equivalent substitute for his beloved" (Frankfurt, 2009). Joe does not love Jill just because she is a girl with silky black hair and luminous eyes, who is pure, caring, and walks in beauty like the night. All those characteristics might be what makes Jill attractive but that does not mean that Joe will fall in love with someone who has silkier black hair, brighter eyes, who's more beautiful, more attractive than Jill. Joe loves Jill because she is Jill, who is unique and irreplicable in Joe's eyes. Joe loves Jill not only because of her silky black hair, her starry eyes, her pureness and kindness, but also because of her little tempers, her change of tone when talking with animals, and all the wonderful idiosyncrasies about her that makes her Jill.

After Joe has fallen in love with his unique Jill, he would find himself taking on a shared identity with her such that it is no longer the separate Joe and Jill, me and you, but a unified "we". Jill's concern would become Joe's concern and vice versa. When Jill gets home exhausted and frustrated from a long day of work, Joe would feel equally frustrated and would want to cheer Jill up the same way he would want to cheer himself up when having a bad day. Similarly, when Joe

is excited about going to the concert of his favorite singer this weekend, Jill will be equally excited even though she might not have heard of the singer before. Yet, she is still excited and happy because Joe is happy.

Lastly, it is not up to Joe that he falls in love with Jill. The necessity by which Joe is bound to love Jill is not “a cognitive necessity generated by the requirements of reason” where Joe’s rationality lists all the benefits outweighing the cons and thus compels him to love Jill (Frankfurt, 2009). Rather, it is a volitional necessity consisting of a constraint upon the will which operates from within our own will itself and directs it towards loving the beloved willingly. Through this, Joe is motivated to love, care for and act upon the interests and well-being of Jill where such motivations belong to the most fundamental nature of Joe.

As Joe’s love for Jill represents the four distinctive features of love outlined by Frankfurt, any ideal form of love, let it be eros, philia, or storge, should also exhibit those features and thus make love something wholehearted and selfless, which would eventually lead us to happiness. While some may find such committed and wholehearted love as a volitional path towards happiness intuitive and attractive, others might prefer a more rational approach where reason and control is what predominates the path towards happiness, and that approach is most exemplified by Stoicism. Stoics believe that the ideal of happiness lies in the exercise of virtuous activities within our control, and love is, for Stoics, something beyond our control. Thus, a rational stoic would reject the idea of having something outside of our control constitute our happiness.

What is Stoicism? & Stoic Argument against love

But what exactly is Stoicism in the first place? Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy that flourished in ancient Greece and Rome. It believes that the practice of virtue alone

is enough to achieve eudaimonia in life. Yet, it has taken a more ascetic approach towards attaining eudaimonia. If Aristotle's path to eudaimonia requires a certain extent of external goods, the stoic path to happiness would be the man with virtue alone. For stoics, there are a lot of things in life that are beyond our control, and "the only way to happiness" to use Epictetus' words, "is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will" (Epictetus, 1897). A stoic sage would thus be indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and should suffer pains or problems without a flinch of his eye, or at least, such things would not tamper his happiness in the slightest bit, for those things are beyond our control. The Stoics argue that there are only two things we have absolute control over, and they are our actions and our thoughts. The rest of the world around us is external and beyond our control, so we can only and should only control how we respond to those. Stoics believe we can't control the world around us such as external events, nature, and other people (including beloved ones). Hence, we ought to detach from those things and only focus on what is within our control, which is our "opinion, motivation, desire, aversion... whatever is our own doing" (Epictetus, 1985).

Stoicism has experienced a resurgence in its popularity in modern times, as more and more people become attracted to the Stoic idea of being in control of one's life and happiness. If Seneca has created Stoicism to help him find serenity in the clattering and chattering of ancient Rome, modern-day people have resorted to Stoicism to help them attain stillness amidst the chaos of everyday life. With the development of technology, entertainment has penetrated our daily lives, our phones, computers, YouTube channels, TikTok shorts, messages from friends and family, 24/7 on-call notices from work, etc have all become disturbances and perturbations in our lives that make it chaotic and out of control. Such overwhelming chaos has driven people to mental diseases and depression which are contrary to what a happy life is after. Hence, the call for stillness has

emerged as “an attainable path to enlightenment and excellence, greatness and happiness, performance as well as presence, for every kind of person” (Holiday, 2019). Thus, as Seneca and ancient Stoics strive to achieve *apatheia* where they would develop peace within themselves even with the whole world at war, modern-day Stoics are looking to achieve a stillness of mind where they could be at peace regardless of the vicissitudes of the external world.

However, the stillness of mind of Stoicism does not come without a price, rather, the price is quite high. By focusing on what is within our control, the Stoics are detaching themselves from what is out of their control, which is the rest of the world. Stoics view the external world, let it be other people, nature, or pleasures, as something dangerous and to become attached to those would be to become a slaveowner owned by his own slave. As Seneca mentioned in his discourse *On the Happy Life*, “to live happily and to live in accordance with Nature”, a man shall not “be corrupted by externals, let him be invincible and an admirer of himself alone” (Seneca, 2008). Through detaching from the external world, a happy Stoic would “take advantage of Fortune’s gifts, but not becoming their slave”, such that he will triumph over pleasure and he will triumph also over pain (Seneca, 2008). For example, in Cicero’s Letters, Servius Sulpicius consoled Cicero on the death of his daughter Tullia, by stating that “if she had not died now, she would yet have had to die a few years hence, for she was mortal born”, it was Fortune’s gift for Cicero’s daughter to be alive and so was Fortune’s deed for her life to be taken away (Cicero, 2001). Thus, if Cicero wants to triumph over Fortune, he should withdraw his soul and thought from such things and not become poorer by the frail spirit of one poor girl. Through that, Cicero, and a Stoic person, would achieve his/her stillness of mind and happiness in life, unsubject to the vicissitudes of Fortune.

Stoicism vs Love

- A Loving Stoic

Hence, it makes love intrinsically contradictory to the Stoic view of a happy life. A Stoic sage would claim all that is necessary for a happy life is to act virtuously as virtue is something that is entirely within our control. As our beloved ones always belong to the external world, let it be a person, an object, or an ideal, our beloved ones always lie beyond our control. Thus, to fall into a loving relationship with the “external” beloved ones will inevitably make us vulnerable to something or someone beyond our control, which makes love incompatible with the Stoic view of stillness and thus happiness. Yet, it seems counter-intuitive for someone to have a happy life without the presence of love. So, the Stoics would argue that you could still love someone while being a stoic. In fact, the loving from my end constitutes only of my actions and thoughts and thus aligns with the Stoic view of control. A loving Stoic could love in a way that acts as a disinterested concern and care for the beloved ones, who is exclusively unique, and the love might even impose a volitional necessity upon the loving Stoic at times. Yet, he would reject the idea that to love someone makes you identify with the beloved, such that the two lovers unify into a shared identity. It is against the stoic doctrine to embrace someone from the external world into oneself, as it is impossible for the stoic to take someone beyond control into control. In fact, it is this sense of detachment/being in control that enables the loving stoic to maintain his/her stillness and happiness while loving. Stoics view their beloved ones as external objects lying within the domain of Fortune which is beyond their control. Hence, a loving stoic would love and enjoy the presence of the beloved when possible, however, if the beloved person is gone and love is lost, the stoic’s happiness would not be impacted or diminish, as he maintains his stillness of mind. To use Seneca’s own words, “I will scorn the entire domain of Fortune, but I shall select the better part of it if a choice be given me” (Seneca, 2008). A loving stoic would follow his/her volitional

necessities and fulfill all the deeds in a loving relationship. He/she would even experience sadness at the loss of love, it's just that he/she would still judge himself/herself as a happy man/woman, who is not any worse off at the loss of love because his/her happiness does not depend upon the existence of external objects and fortune. As Epictetus suggested in his *Enchiridion*, a loving stoic should treat his/her beloved ones not as one's own but as an outside gift given to him/her similar to how "passers-by treat an inn" (Epictetus, 1985). So that at the loss of love, the stoic would not be disturbed and mourn "I lost it", rather, they would say something like "I gave it back".

This idea might sound appealing at first glance. By treating love as a gift from Fortune and by loving from a detached standpoint, the loving stoics appear to exhibit a selfless kind of love. Their actions of disinterested concern for their beloved ones are performed in a purely altruistic/selfless way without expecting anything in return from the recipient/the beloved. Besides, as we all fear being vulnerable to loving someone and the anguish when we lose them, the stoic detachment on love seems to successfully protect us from the vulnerabilities caused by love.

However, vulnerability is an inevitable and indispensable part of love. The immunity from vulnerability by a loving stoic is only granted because the stoic never truly loves in the first place. By focusing on being in control, which is restricted to our actions and thoughts, the loving stoic is loving in a reserved way and always with some leeway left behind. The stoics are treating love as a one-sided effort with their beloved one as an external being from them. The selflessness from the stoic love is no different than the selflessness from an act of philanthropy. By refraining from being attached in love, stoics will always remain in control when in a loving relationship and be not disturbed/vulnerable at the loss of love just as you wouldn't become personally attached to the recipient of your philanthropy.

- Selfless love and self-love

Thus, just as it is impossible for the Stoics to take someone outside of control into their control, it is also impossible for the Stoics to truly love someone while sticking to the Stoic doctrines. The stoic ideal of one-sided/philanthropic love is not love but a self-centered illusion to satisfy one's need for caring. I'm not saying that philanthropy is a self-illusion. Philanthropy is a very noble act of human altruism. But love is not philanthropy. The so-called selflessness of their actions is the exact evidence of how the stoics are treating the "beloved" as a mere object to fulfill their needs, instead of an individual identity capable of loving them back. Love is a relationship that requires mutual effort from both sides. It is not a relationship that could be maintained through continuous one-sided effort. Just as you won't fall in love with a complete jerk, you won't keep on loving someone if that person does not love you back. Thus, love is "selfish" when you truly love someone. It is not selfish as if you are only caring for your own interests when in a loving relationship. Rather, it is "selfish" because you inevitably take on a shared identity with your beloved ones, such that his/her interests become your own interest, and you would want the best for them just as you want the best for yourself. This "selfishness" stems from self-love, which is likely to be the most unequivocal and unalloyed love that exists, contrary to what people might've thought. Many people, like Kant, tend to view self-love as "a formidable barrier to the advance of morality" as self-lovers are most likely to follow their instincts and natural desires as the motivation for their actions, instead of following the command of duty to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, which Kant praised to be the only way to morality. However, the "self-love" from Kant's view is self-indulgence instead of self-love which are two distinctly different things. Self-indulgence aims to indulge; it follows the natural impulses and desires of satisfaction to achieve maximum utility without caring for the consequences. Self-love, on the other hand, aims

to love, it conscientiously cares for the well-being and interests of the self, for its own good, even if it means constraint or pain. For instance, parents would not buy their children all the candies the children want even if the children really want those candies and may be crying for them at the moment. Such restraint or refusal does not mean that the parents don't love their children. Rather it is because they love their children and know it would be bad for the children's teeth and health that the parents choose to refuse the children's request. Self-love is similar to that in a way that it genuinely cares for the interest of the self instead of letting the self indulge in its desires. As Aristotle put it in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the selfishness is noble when it is focused on achieving virtuous activities instead of on accumulating material goods underpinned by men's irrational nature (Aristotle, 1962). You may not know what are the true interests of the self, and parents may not know what will truly benefit their children, but that is okay. None of us are perfect and omniscient. As long as our intentions are always for the best of the self and would constantly search for the true interests of the self, we are loving ourselves the right way. Thus, there is nothing wrong with loving ourselves most dearly as even the Bible acknowledges the importance of self-love with the statement "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself".

Hence, if we truly love someone, our love would be so genuine and pure that it will transform into self-love as we form a union, a "we" with our beloved ones where the two individual identities become one shared identity with the same interests, roles, virtues, etc as Solomon describes it (Solomon, 1991). It is thus impossible for you to remain in a detached standpoint when loving as a loving stoic would do. Rather, it is because of this creation of shared identity and transformation into self-love that enables all the other features of love such as love as a disinterested concern for the beloved, love as a volitional necessity that cannot be helped, etc. Moreover, this transformation into self-love enables love to be truly selfless. As self-love is the

purest, most genuine form of love in the world, taking someone from the external world into a shared identity with the self and loving that person as sincerely as one would love oneself is truly noble and selfless. With the formation of a united “we”, the self is gone and what’s left is the selfless, disinterested love for the sake of “we”.

Aside from the selflessness of love stemmed from forming a shared identity with our loved ones, the wholeheartedness of love is an equally crucial part of our path toward happiness. The reason happiness is the greatest good in life is because it is the final good, the good that we seek for the sake of itself. Men may easily get lost in the world of uncertainties and ambivalence such that all his actions and wills lose purpose. He no longer recognizes what he’s working for, what’s the worth of all the suffering, and what is the meaning of his life. A lost man could never be a happy man. So throughout human history, people have sought after ways to free themselves from the ambivalences in life, and to find a final end/good for one’s life. Whether it be Aristotle’s contemplative activity, Stoicism’s controlled actions in accordance with virtue, or Kant’s actions stemming from moral duty, they are all paths/attempts men have followed toward finding a final end. It is only by having a final end could men be free from the ambivalences in life and have his actions be defined by confident and settled purposes.

Wholehearted love, thus, provides us with the final end by “making it possible for us to engage wholeheartedly in activities that is meaningful” (Frankfurt, 2009). To be wholehearted means having a will that is undivided, to be fully settled on and committed to what the will wills for the sake of itself, and the purity of heart is to will one thing, so the unity of an undivided will is the path to freedom from an ambivalent/lost soul, and thus a path to happiness.

Conclusion:

The course of our lives has been dedicated to achieving happiness and avoiding vulnerability and pain. This is what makes Stoicism so attractive to people. Its idea of being in control and attaining a stillness in life sounds like a promising path which could grant us eternal happiness unsubjected to Fortune and pain. However, such stoic stillness stems from a detachment in love which makes it contradictory to attaining true happiness because it is through selfless and wholehearted love and the formation of “we” can we attain real happiness.

Thus, we do become more vulnerable when in love because of the risk of losing our beloved ones and breaking the “we”. When it truly happens, it is not just a feeling of sadness as the stoics would suggest. Losing our love is going to be painful because our beloved ones have become a part of our identity, a part of our life, and a part of our self. To lose them is like having a part of our identity vanish into nothingness, having a part of our life suddenly went missing, and having a part of our self being torn apart from us. So it is going to hurt and it is fine to get hurt, because that is how life goes. We, as human beings, are not omnipotent beings as God is, which makes our vulnerability inevitable. But why would we still choose to love if it makes us vulnerable? The answer is simple: because real love enables us to experience real happiness, even if it means the potentiality of losing it in the future. As stated by Aristotle’s famous quote, “Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies”, the selfless attempt to form a “union” with our loved ones is, in fact, the completion of our soul. Only when the soul is complete can we live truly and enjoy true happiness.

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