

Eros and Friendship in Marriage

Abstract:

Through erotic love human beings are born while through friendship, a person becomes the kind of being that he ought to be. This paper will explore the importance of these two concepts in marriage, the basis of the family. The thoughts of Wojtyla on sexual urge and Aristotle's notion of friendship will be the basis of exploring the significance of these notions in the basic institutions – marriage and family- that are under fire due to forces that try to undermine them. Such forces are fuelled by ideologies that seem to separate the corporeal from the spiritual, the individual from the social. Such is the consequence of man's fragmentation, a remnant of the Cartesian dichotomy. In this essay, the seeming chasm that dichotomize the human being would be examined historically and see how Eros and friendship could bridge that gap to make man whole again. Related controversial issues on homosexual rights will be explored from the anthropological, ontological and ethical perspectives. The study will unfold in three parts: first, an exposition on the present situation of marriage and family and its ideological roots; second, an account of the notion of sexual urge as explained by Wojtyla on his book *Love and Responsibility* and Aristotle's notion of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*; lastly, the integration of the two to address the issues laid out in the first part.

I. Present situation of marriage and family

United Nations (UN) proclaimed 1994 as the Year of the Family. Lights and shadows characterized the Western families of the latter half of the 20th century. Gary Becker noted interrelated phenomenon; a rapid growth in divorce rates with the consequent increase in the number of households headed by women and the number of children growing up in household with only one parent; a large increase in labor participation of married women with fewer contacts between children and mother is noted that contributed to an increase in the conflict between the sexes in employment and marriage; and a rapid decline in birth rates that reduced family size.¹ A decade William Bennet noted the dissolution of the family in the United States. He attributed said phenomenon to divorce, rise of out-of-wedlock births, an increase of single-parent families usually headed by the mother, an elevenfold increase in cohabitation, and declining fertility.² Both authors pointed out that the aforementioned factors are correlative. Stephanie Coontz in her celebrated work has declared that marriage as the exclusive and life-long union between a man and a woman for procreation is a thing of the past. Aligning herself with the advocates of homosexual marriages, she championed the cause of the homosexuals arguing that historical and sociological data showed that developments in the West have prepared the grounds for the validity of the homosexual claims. According to her gone are the days that marriage ties are forged for political and economic reasons. Love between the contracting parties has been the rule of the day. The procreative end of marriage as the long held primary end of marriage was foreshadowed by the need for companionship. Science and technology enabled the man and the woman to render the marital union unproductive; hence, there is nothing that would distinguish the heterosexual union and the homosexual union.³

A decade and a half has passed and the reasons that prompted UN to make that declaration still remain. The cultural war still rages on what should be called “family.” Simultaneously the notion of marriage came to the fore. Whereas for ages the term has been exclusively applied to the union between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation, changes in lifestyle and the notion of love occupying central place in the union, called for a reexamination of the term and its application. Clamor for the recognition of unions between homosexual be elevated to the status of marriage with the consequent benefits and privileges afforded to heterosexual couples be accorded to them. The main argument is that marriage aim has been reduced to companionship thanks in part with the widespread contraceptive mentality among the heterosexual couples that rendered their union childless. Ironically, the same homosexual couples’ petition for privileges akin to heterosexual couple’s marriages is not limited to the economic benefits that could be derived from the union. Part of the privileges that these couples are earnestly lobbying for and are careful in assuring that the laws are not against them is the adoption of children that they could call their own. Love became the main reason for two persons to come together. It has also been argued that persons in the relationship define the meaning of the union.

Utilitarianism and liberalism fuelled the above.⁴ Utilitarianism gave premium to the utility value of the persons in the relationship. A person formed and remained in the relationship because of the benefits he/she derives from the other in the “affair.” The persons in the relationship used each other as means to achieve personal happiness. Liberalism, on the other hand, while it joined hand with utilitarianism in prioritizing the individual’s interest gave free rein to licentiousness equating such attitude and its consequent behavior to freedom. Moreover, liberalist expanded personal autonomy freeing his/her personal acts from societal pressure of conformity to social norms. A great divide between the private and the public spheres ensued. What happened in the private sphere is untouchable. Said division reflected the persons’ fragmentation between his/her bodiliness and spirituality; the individual and the social dimensions that could be traced to the Cartesian split of the person into the *res cogito* and the *res cogitans*. Consequently, interpersonal relationships forged showed a split between personal gains and its societal value. With liberalists triumph in economic sphere, social pressure is exerted in the political sphere to redefine marriage and its importance prioritizing the personal gains; hence, marriage could be redefined by the persons in the relationship and its value reduced to its personal dimensions.

Could we redefine marriage simply in terms of companionship? Why the clamor for marriage and having children? To answer this questions require an understanding of what a person, why persons marry, what keeps persons together and what is that love worthy of persons. In this paper the answers would be culled from two philosophers who have dealt with these issues: Wojtyla and Aristotle.

II. Wojtyla and Aristotle on persons, love, marriage and family

Wojtyla defines the person as “an objective entity, which as a definite subject has the closest contact with the whole (external) world and is most intimately involved with it

precisely because of its inwardness, its interior life”.⁵ The person’s ability to interact with beings outside of the self comes from his/her inner world that spiritual faculty that is bidirectional – inwardly and outwardly; inwardly as he gets to know more himself, what he/she is and who he/she is and outwardly as he/she gets to know other beings that complete his/her life. The inward dimension shows in reflection; by reflecting on one’s action the person discovers his/her personal attributes; those that make him person and sets himself/herself apart from the rest of the universe. The person becomes aware that in his/her actions, he/she is the author of that action. Even if the act falls among those that are connected with his/her biological make up, he/she realizes that he/she has the full control on setting that act into motion and more so between the spontaneous surge of the organic reaction to the perceived stimuli, whether it be present or imagined, and the response there is that gap that enables the person to evaluate the stimuli and his/her corresponding reaction. Such awareness, applied to the sexual urge, could be – Wojtyla claims- the basis of love. Why could such happen?

Sexual urge, for Wojtyla is an attribute of the person that orients him/her to the person of another sex. The sexual urge is “a natural drive born in all human beings, a vector of aspiration along which their whole existence develops and perfects itself from within.”⁶ The urge impels him to be united to another person of the opposite sex to complete oneself existentially.⁷ The attraction is indicative of the value present in the present, which is not limited to the psychological and physiological attributes of the other sex that would complete what the person attracted to the other lacks. The attraction is directed to the person as such that possess the attribute.

The sexual urge, as Wojtyla emphasized, is connected with human existence; the preservation of the human species not necessarily with self-preservation.⁸ Note that the sexual urge is important for the species not necessarily for the individual. “Procreation is a function of the collective life of mankind (because) the very existence of the species *homo* is at stake.”⁹ The significance of the act is supra-personal. Human kind can only be maintained in being only so long as persons, individual men and women, obey the sexual urge. Moreover, the sexual urge exists within the framework of social life. It follows that the rules governing the coexistence and association of opposite sex are part of the general code regulating the life of human beings in society.¹⁰

The urge, which arises spontaneously in the presence of the stimulus, - be it physical or imaginary-is noticed in the bodily reaction to the stimulus. The response could be instantaneous or delayed with full or partial attention. While the sexual stirring could be a biological reaction, it is not simply physiological and psychological, as stated above. The gratification of the stirrings could be governed by reason and the person’s power to choose. The act could not be simply compared to that of the animal because of the person’s inner life. Unlike the urge present in animals, human beings are not determined by the natural purpose of the sexual urge – the perpetuation of the species- because of the person’s power of self-determination. Thus, even if the urge simply happens in the person, he/she does not necessarily succumb to its attraction; the person not only chooses to give in or not at that moment but also selects from among the available persons who to perform the corresponding act- with this person or another. Moreover, the person could

ignore the urge and with his/her reason redirect his/her energies in pursuit of other aims, as in the case of those who have decided to give up the possibility of biological fecundity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The person could also thwart the end of the sexual urge; thus he/she could remain in the level of gratification and brush aside the specific importance of the act.

Sexual urge provides material for love between a man and a woman but only accidentally because love between persons is essentially a creation of human free will, not something that happens in the person but something that a person makes happen, says Wojtyla.¹¹ Love, in Wojtyla, is a complete integration of the subjective and objective elements found in any human love that assumes the character of it being an ethical relationship. In all loves the body and the soul are involved. Both feelings and intellect play a part in love's genesis and development from attraction to commitment to the good of the person.

Wojtyla states that the attraction is a response to a value present in the person. In the person's psychological life, that attraction begins with an impression accompanied by an emotion from which two possible reactions may take place: a sexual attraction to the sexuality of the person of the opposite sex or a certain attachment to the impression produced by the other person – susceptibility to the quality of masculinity or and the femininity of the man and of the woman respectively. The former, sexual reaction, though related to the sexual urge is not to be confused with it. Both are related to the natural urge for procreation. The urge includes attraction to the sexual attribute of the other person in view of existential perfection, as has been discussed in the foregoing. Attraction, which is the beginning of love, is an emotional response to an impression of the values perceived as present in the person.¹² The attraction is usually accompanied by the bodily reaction to the perceived stimuli. Together with the sexual attraction, a sentimental reaction may be present, which is a certain attachment to the impressions produced by the feminine or masculine qualities of the person. Normally, the woman is attracted to the masculine qualities while the man to the feminine qualities of the opposite sex.

Love progresses from simple attraction to desire born of the need for the other that will fulfill the person's wanting of the good that he/she lacks. In this stage, love is still self-centered. When the wanting for the value is replaced with the desire for the person and not simply his/her qualities then love transcends the emotional response stirred by the sexual urge. Moreover, when the satisfaction for the desire of the self is transformed to satisfying the desire of the other for the other's sake, then love becomes other-centered. Love becomes responsibility for the other person and his/her authentic good. Moreover, for such love to be fulfilling, affection, desires and goodwill must be *between* persons not simply *in* the persons; hence love is an inter-personal reality that transforms the lovers' life to live for the other for the other's sake. Only in friendship that such transformative power of takes place. This led Wojtyla to say, following Aristotle, that friendship is an important element in marriage.

What makes Aristotle's brand of friendship transformative of the persons in love?

Friendship, for Aristotle, is akin to virtue but it is not properly called a virtue. It is similar to virtue because it is a habit and habits are formed by repeating good actions. In the formation of virtues, freedom plays a part because of the act of choosing from among a variety of options, with respect to the means to achieve a desired end. The choice is in favor of that best not the worst. Together with the choice is the decision to carry out that action that will lead the person to the goal. Thus, virtues make a person good and his actions good,¹³ which is the case of those who exhibit what Aristotle calls the perfect type of friendship. Perfect friendship is distinguished from useful and pleasant friendship, the other types of friendship, for its selfless attitude towards that who he/she considers as friend. Whereas useful friendship is characterized by the benefits derived from the relationship and the pleasant by the pleasure that it provides, perfect friendship is characterized by loving the good of the other for the other's sake.¹⁴ Perfect friendship is both pleasant and useful.

As a virtue it belongs to the virtue of justice because it is offering something proportional. It is not called properly virtue because while virtues depend on the person performing the act, friendship as a virtue cannot exist unless there is another person whom one calls as a friend and regard the other also as a friend. In addition, not all friendships are between equals. Between parents and children, is an example of this kind. There could no be perfect justice between them. The friendship between husband and wife also belongs to this category. A requirement of justice includes proportionality as well as reciprocity and equality. For justice to be lived, what is due must be given as it should be given. In the case of friendship, it is not only giving what is due but giving more than what is required. Friendship could be said to accompany the virtue of justice only in so far as virtue is the cause of friendship.¹⁵ The essence of friendship is in loving more than being loved, as stated previously. Love is wishing the good of another for the other's sake. This is another basic difference between virtues *per se* and friendship. Whereas the person performing virtuous deeds has his happiness as his goal for such, friends perform a virtuous deed not for the benefit of the self but for the good. Thus, what one directly wills is not his own good; but the good of the friend. However, as any virtuous act performed by the person has a double effect, that is, the perfection of the person doing the act, indirectly the performance of virtuous deeds among friends make them both good.

Friendship is an important element in social and personal life. "Various institutions of social life – marriage, connections, kin-groups, religious gatherings and social pastimes generally arose in the cities. But these institutions are business of friendship.¹⁶ Moreover, in social life, if friendship prevails, there would be no need for justice.¹⁷ Elsewhere, Aristotle mentioned that friends are needed for a complete life.¹⁸ Friends are means for the person to be good because he/she do could practice virtuous acts with a friend.

As to how friendship is forged, Aristotle alludes to experiencing things together and counting on time spent doing good deeds to one another. Proximity is an important factor in developing friendship but not any type of physical proximity but one in which the person involved are doing the same things with the same end in mind. It could be said

that friends become of one mind due to exchange of ideas and refining one's own together with and through the help of that someone that he/she considers as a friend. Mutual recognition of friendship is a requirement for friendship to exist. "Friends love each other reciprocally by choice. Love for the sake of another is a habit, friends love for the sake of another; therefore, friends love in accordance with habit."¹⁹ Friendship does not simply happen but is made to happen. Persons decide to have friends and with whom to cultivate friendship. Moreover, one cannot call the other as a friend if he/she has not been habitually doing good deeds for the other; hence mutual beneficence is one of its features.

Thus, when friendship reached the perfect level, friends begin to be alike; hence one could claim that the friend is the "other self". Such likeness is achieved in conversation that they begin to think alike and in the mutual exchange of good deeds. Perfect friendship tends to be exclusive and could be found only among the few because of the time element involved in cultivating friendships. In addition, perfect friendship is forged when there is a sharing of one's inner life and such dimension of one's life is not shared with everyone but only to that someone a person sees as deserving of trust. Perfect friendship is practiced by the virtuous because it requires a ready will to do the good to the others for the others sake. Such requires self forgetfulness and a constant rectification of intention because it is quite common that persons act for a good that will benefit the self primarily.

Going back to Wojtyla's notion of love, Aristotle's brand of friendship could provide a good condition for eroticism to transcend its purely carnal dimension and become not simply an attraction but a commitment to the good of the beloved. Friendship transforms the love in the person with its selfish dimension to love between persons which are other-centered. As what Wojtyla also advocates, love proper of persons is a virtuous love, not simply an emotion but a commitment to pursue the good of another for that person's sake. A love that will require of those who are in love continuous good acts, a disposition found only on persons who are virtuous; thus transforming also their acts of loving in a virtuous action. Moreover, persons who love in this way become better persons in their effort to fulfill that commitment.

Erotic love then becomes through friendship not only a means of perpetuating the species but also a builder of societies that has the added feature of civic mindedness. Love also transcends the sexual attraction between persons into respect for persons because what is loved is not only the qualities present in the person but the person himself/herself to which one commits the self in the pursuit of that person's happiness and ones happiness is intimately linked to the beloved's. Thus, Wojtyla could say that the love proper of a person for the person is a virtuous love that has become a choice and a responsibility because a friend is chosen from among many. In friendship, there is a deliberate selection of this person over that of another. It is a responsibility that the lover assumes for the sake of the good of the beloved. Such love is creative not only because procreation takes place but also persons are developed into the human beings that they should be in a given inter-personal relationship.

Erotic love if not tempered by friendship could degenerate into a bestial love where pleasure becomes the goal of the sexual act rather than the actualization of the potential generative tendency present in the act. Such love becomes an altar of sacrifice where personal freedom is willingly directed to the good proper of the beloved rather than the pursuit of the individual good beneficial to the lover. Freedom in this love is understood not simply as a power to make choice but more so as an act of determination where the self puts the limit to its natural attractions to the good that the person could limitlessly desire. Thus, in the same paradoxical power to limit the self, its infinity is manifest because that which could limit itself realizes that he/she could do otherwise.

This type of love is not spontaneously attained. Persons who need to be loved as persons and want this ennobling type of love need to be educated to love in this way. What is spontaneous in the person is the immediate gratification of desire. The time element is a necessary factor as in the development of friendship. A certain distance between the stimulus and the recipient of such stimulus gives the affected subject the needed pause to reflect and discern whether satisfaction of desire has to be addressed in the present or could it wait. The delay of gratification gives the affected persons time to value the other as a person and could be instrumental in transforming the desire into a commitment to the good of the beloved. In the process, both learn to value the person and the relationship that developed between them. What could be a casual affair could turn into a lasting one moved not by personal motives but by a force that transcends the person.

Applying the above premise to the fragmentation that took a toll on man and his relationships, one could wager that through friendship what was and could have been simply a satisfaction of carnal desire and could have pulled a person into a relationship that could degenerate into something akin to a bestial mode of existence where the corporeal dimension is given greater importance than his spiritual aspect could make the person whole again.. While consciously recognizing the erotic pull that demands satisfaction friendship elevates the desire into something pleasurable, satisfying and respectful of the beloved. The lover sees the beloved not only as a means for personal fulfillment but also an end of one's striving. The beloved is regarded not an instrument to be used but a person to be cherished not something but someone important. Since in the theory of Wojtyla human actions have that self-transformative aspect, loving with the friendly element makes the person good and makes of his relationship a virtuous one.

Moreover, the virtuous love becomes a procreative and co-creative love. The love between a man and the woman would not be confined to the lovers but transcends their personal aims to include the natural end of the erotic love, which is the perpetuation of the species; hence the procreative aspect. The love is co-creative because their love brings out, as it were, a new person – the transformed person who no longer lives for the sake of self-preservation and self-gratification but finds a new life of living for others. Such love somehow creates a new “me.”

Could the same be said of other forms of love that seeks personal satisfaction in an interpersonal relationship?

III. Conclusion

The 20th century man has been fragmented due to the varying ideologies that placed an aspect of man at the center of the philosophical discourse. One of them is liberalism that exalts the value of freedom –an attribute of the person that resides in the will. The same path is followed in the recovery of the person’s integrity. In an erotic love coupled with friendship, the person regains his wholeness. The pleasure seeking principle of the erotic love finds its complement and wholeness in that decision of the will to pursue an apprehended good. In that act, the whole person with his body and his spirit together with his intellect and will is engaged.

Going back to the questions posed earlier, “Could we redefine marriage simply in terms of companionship? Why is there a clamor for marriage and having children among the homosexuals?”

Based on the foregoing, using erotic love as the basis for marriage, then defining marriage simply in companionship would not give full justice to the term. In fact the Latin etymology of the word is *mater munus* – the gift of maternity. While the term seems to refer exclusively to the female; however the term always refer to the presence of the male because in the human species, procreation is a result of the egg and the sperm cell meeting – the egg coming from the woman while the sperm form the man. Even in laboratory assisted pregnancies the contributions of the male and the female are needed. Marriage is intended for the establishment of the family. It is not simply for the couples to have a companion.

Homosexual couples clamor to adopt children so that the union could be included in the definition of the family is a proof of that desire. Nature has provided men and women with the sexual urge for the purpose of procreation. To satisfy that urge, the corresponding sexual is fulfilled with the person of the other sex. However, for a person whose sexual orientation is directed to the person of the same sex the performance of the sexual act will not result in procreation. The foregoing discussion does not mean that persons in that type of relationship would not be fulfilled as persons but the desire to have children as extension of the self is not possible in that setup.

Could love and friendship that is procreative and co-creative be applied to homosexual couples?

Applying the above principles to the homosexual relationship, one could safely conclude that erotic love could be present as well as friendship as envisioned by Aristotle. However, one could easily see that the erotic love is not in function of the social end of the love itself, homosexual erotic relationship is not procreative though it may be co-creative. As discussed above, the end of erotic love is the preservation of the species. Homosexual erotic relationship will not produce that desired effect. As to friendship, since friendship is present in the relationship, the persons involved could have authentic concern for the other. In fact, one could surmise from Aristotle’s teachings on friendship that real perfect friendship could be easily found between persons of the same sex

because between a man and a woman equality can not be found because, Aristotle claims, the woman does not possess the perfection of the virtues that man has. However, the friendship between virtuous persons is not mainly erotic rather the relationship is characterized preeminently by engagement in the highest activity proper of human beings, which is that of contemplating the truth and the good. Friends perfect each other through an intellectual activity of exchanging ideas, in philosophical discussion, and in this that the highest happiness of the persons could be found, a self-sufficient activity that friends facilitate in attaining.²⁰

- ¹ Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*, Cambridge: Harwood University Press, 1991, p.1
- ² William Bennett, *The Broken Hearth Reversing the Moral Collapse of the American Family*, New York: Random House, 2001, pp. 17-20
- ³ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, New York: Viking, 2005.
- ⁴ Becker and Bennett, *Ibid.* Becker argues in utilitarian terms the defense of marriage and family while Bennett argues against liberalism.
- ⁵ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1981, p.23.
- ⁶ Wojtyla, *Ibid.* p.46.
- ⁷ For the meantime, the attraction is limited to the persons of the opposite sex.
- ⁸ Wojtyla, *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ⁹ Wojtyla, *Ibid.* 63.
- ¹⁰ Wojtyla, *Ibid.*, p.50.
- ¹¹ Wojtyla, *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹² Wojtyla, *Ibid.*,
- ¹³ *Nicomachean Ethics* II 6 1106a 15
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII 3 1156b 5-10
- ¹⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 2 1155b 17-1156a5.
- ¹⁶ *Politics* III 9 1280b 35-38.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 1 1155a 20-25
- ¹⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 1 1155 5-10
- ¹⁹ Paul Schollmier, *Other Selves Aristotle on Personal and Political Friendship*, New York: SUNY Press 1994, p. 43.
- ²⁰ Lorraine Smith Paingle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Freindship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, 199-200.