

# **The Relationship between Love and Being against the background of Béla von Brandenstein's Ontology and Metaphysics**

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*According to Béla von Brandenstein's ontology, love represents a complex relationship of being that encompasses several levels or dimensions: 1) The trinitarian unity of love subject, love act and love object; 2) The trinitarian unity of love giver, love gift and love receiver; 3) The unity of the dynamic-dialectical circle of love; 4) The trinitarian unity of self-affirmation, self-illumination and self-unification in love. It will be shown that these structures of love can be related to the trinitarian basic structure of being.*

*Keywords: Inner Structure of Personality, Dynamic-Dialectical Circle of Love, Trinitarian Ontology, Constitutional Intersubjectivity*

«Amare l'amore» (Sant'Agostino)

## 1. The meaning of the question of the relationship between love and being

When we talk about love – amore, amor, amour, Любовь (ljubov), Liebe, agape, caritas, eros, “Minne” – we are usually referring to topics such as relationship, feelings, devotion, happiness and rarely to topics such as being and thingness, existence and essence. The reason for this may simply be that love is experienced as something eminently concrete, living, vivid and even sensual compared to the very abstract concepts of “being”, “existence” and “essence”. So what can be meant by the relationship between being and love?

Before this question is dealt with in more detail below, I would like to list the objectives that this essay aims to achieve by clarifying this relationship:

- Firstly, it will be a matter of demonstrating that love itself is already a true, indeed creative execution of being, in which being is constituted, created or endowed: *Love as a phenomenon of overflowing giving being*<sup>1</sup>.
- Secondly, it will be shown that being itself in its (divine and human) origin is a *self-affecting, vitalizing process, i.e. loving life*<sup>2</sup>.
- Thirdly, against the background of the ontology and metaphysics of the German-Hungarian philosopher Béla von Brandenstein (1901-1989), I want to show that *being* has in its temporal structure *a timeless and unbreakable basic structure*<sup>3</sup>.
- Fourthly, it is shown that this basic structure is essentially *relational and, more precisely, relational in a triune, trinitarian or triadic way in its very origin*<sup>4</sup>.

1 - The French philosopher of religion Jean-Luc Marion speaks of “saturated phenomena” in these cases. Cfr. J.-L. Marion, *De Surcroît. Études sur les phénomènes saturés*, Presses univ. de France, Paris 2001. But love is even more than saturated – it is of itself giving being, overflowing, creating being, “supersaturating”.

2 - The French philosopher of religion Michel Henry emphasises the self-effectiveness of (absolute) life like no other. Cfr. M. Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*, Seuil, Paris 2000; Id., *Affekt und Subjektivität. Lebensphänomenologische Beiträge zur Psychologie und zum Wesen des Menschen*, aus dem Französischen von Rolf Kühn, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2005.

3 - On the trinitarian basic structure of being, cfr. Béla von Brandenstein, *Grundlegung der Philosophie*, Bd. 1-6, Anton Pustet Verlag, München/Salzburg 1965-1970 and *Der Aufbau des Seins*, Minerva, Saarbrücken 1950, pp. 8-17.

4 - On the relationality of being, cfr. E. Levinas, *Die Spur des Anderen. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Sozialphilosophie*. Übersetzt, herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Wolfgang Nikolaus Krewani, Karl Alber, Freiburg i. B. 1999.

- And fifthly, it should be made clear that one component of this triune-living structure of being is love itself, and in the timeless-simultaneous order of this structure the third, unity-creating component that completes and fulfils being at all: *love as the phenomenon of unity-creating completion or perfecting of being*.

## 2. The dynamic-creative nature of love: a poem

Since love is not something abstract, but rather something eminently concrete and alive, I am placing a work of art, indeed one of the greatest German poems, at the beginning of my remarks on love and the structure of love's being, the poem "The Roman Fountain" of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825-1898)<sup>5</sup>.

### *Der römische Brunnen*

Aufsteigt der Strahl und fallend gießt  
 Er voll der Marmorschale Rund,  
 Die, sich verschleiern, überfließt  
 In einer zweiten Schale Grund;  
 Die zweite gibt, sie wird zu reich,  
 Der dritten wallend ihre Flut,  
 Und jede nimmt und gibt zugleich  
 Und strömt und ruht.

(7. Version, 1882)

### *The Roman Fountain*

Up springs the spout and, falling, fills  
 To brim the marble basin's round,  
 Which, under veiling, over spills  
 Into a second basin's ground;  
 The second one, too rich now, runs  
 Into the third its falling waves,  
 And each one takes and gives at once  
 And streams and stays.

(tr. by Rolf-Peter Wille)

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<sup>5</sup> - C.F. Meyer, *Der römische Brunnen*, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 2, dtv, München 1976, p. 88. The Roman Fountain is a poem by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer from 1882, in which he describes the Fontana dei Cavalli Marini in the Villa Borghese.

*La Fontana Romana*

Il getto sale e scende  
 Riempie la vasca di marmo rotonda,  
 che, velandosi, trabocca  
 in una seconda vasca di terra;  
 La seconda dà, diventa troppo ricca,  
 alla terza il suo fluente fiume,  
 E ognuno prende e dà allo stesso tempo  
 E scorre e riposa.

This perfect music in words reflects the essence of love like hardly anything else and reveals that love is truly moving, creative-vibrating and flowing life, in its core neither a merely objective nor a merely being in state. Its fundamental gift character also establishes its transcending nature, i.e. a dynamism that – transcending all boundaries – aims at something or someone else<sup>6</sup>. So, love surges like a flood from its non-objectal-creative centre and flows through everything that borders on it, first the experiencing psyche, then the body, our sensual aura, the interbodily space and finally the entire mimic-gestural-linguistic intersubjectivity. But it is precisely this that entitles us to speak of love as an overarching reality that unites and fulfils everything it permeates in a living way, and it does this, as the poem shows, through its unique unity of giving and taking, rising and falling, flowing and resting, emanating and leading back<sup>7</sup>.

This extraordinary dynamism could lead to believe that love is diffuse, structureless, anarchic, vague, incomprehensible and infinitely remote from conceptualisation. But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, a fundamental and fundamentally fixed structure, an “entity” or essence, can certainly be found in the dynamic, moving nature of love. But which one exactly?

### **3. The intentional-subjective structure of love: the first triunity of lover (intentional initiative), act of love (intentional reflection) and beloved (intentional unification)**

On the psychological level of acts or subjective fulfilments, we recognise that love comprises three deeply interwoven or correlative components, namely:

- the lover firstly as the origin and initiative of the act of love,

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6 - To the matter of gift see M. Enders (ed.), *Selbstgebung und Selbstgegebenheit. Zur Bedeutung eines universalen Phänomens*, Karl Alber, Freiburg i. B. 2018.

7 - J.-W. v. Goethe (1749–1832) speaks of systole- and diastole-movement in all living and being.

- secondly the act of love as the active-subjective and reflective execution of love and
- thirdly the beloved as the goal, the object, the content of love (which can be also the lover himself) and the unification with it.

The latter implies that love is essentially intentional in nature<sup>8</sup>, as it always loves something resp. someone, no matter how dark and unknown, intangible and indeterminate it may be. This trinity of initiative lover, reflective act of love and unified object of love is well known and forms the first triunity or triad of love, as treated, for example, by Richard of Saint-Victor in the twelfth century<sup>9</sup>. This triad does not comprise three different things, but three distinguishable, not separable aspects, which together form in one moment one reality, one thing. That's why we call it a triunity.

#### **4. The act of giving in love: the second triunity of initiative giver, reflected gift and agreeing receiver**

On a more substantive or content level, we recognise a second triad that is closely linked to the first triad. In the act of love, something is always given by someone to someone else. This gift can be a material gift of some kind, but in essence the lover, if he truly loves, always gives himself, and of course he gives the most valuable of himself or something that he considers valuable to someone.

#### **5. The dialectic of the love circle**

This valuable-good and therefore appreciated gift, which the lover gives, only realises its gift nature if it is also taken, and above all gladly accepted. A rejected gift that is unable to actualise its inner meaning throws the act of love back onto the lover, plunging him into loneliness. The cycle of love breaks off, pain and grief set in. This proves that the acceptance of the gift on the part of the beloved only does justice to the act of love if he appreciates the gift, i.e. if the acceptance of the gift is carried out lovingly. But this means nothing less than that the beloved bestows the first lover with his self-gift, i.e. a second gift, whereby the beloved in turn becomes the lover and the first lover becomes the beloved. What is revealed here is the essential cycle of love as a dialectical alternating process in which the

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<sup>8</sup> - On the concept of intentionality see Franz Brentano *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Leipzig (1874), Neuauflage, Ontos, Offenbach 1911.

<sup>9</sup> - In his book on the *The Trinity*, Richard von Saint-Victor, for example, deals with it in detail: See in: R. of Saint-Victor, *The Trinity*, Johannesverlag, Einsiedeln 1980.

first triad and the second triad are intimately intertwined – by the way a structure without which love for oneself is not possible at all, and is also characteristic and essential for the inner life of God.

## **6. The spiritual ontology of love: the third triunity of initiative self-setting (power), reflective self-evidence (illumination) and comprehensive self-unifying (unification in love)<sup>10</sup>**

### ***6.1 Initiative self-acceptance and self-setting (self-empowerment, will)***

If we go even deeper, we come across a third triunity. By loving something or someone, the lover affirms something or someone<sup>11</sup>. But this is only possible if the lover first of all affirms and – at least implicitly – wants himself<sup>12</sup>. Wanting oneself, however, means wanting oneself as a being and in being, in the context of love wanting and affirming oneself unreservedly. This willing must not be confused with wishing, desiring or striving; rather, in Fichtian terms, it is a matter of a self-positioning, self-crasping (Karl Jaspers!), a real power, in which the subjective selfhood becomes reality, a real being for itself (Für-sich-Sein)<sup>13</sup>. The cross-check proves what we want to say: Anyone who rejects himself or splits himself, cannot become a full subjective reality – subjectivity remains unreal or semi-real.

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**10** - Similarly see to the subject of trinitarian ontology: M. Raffaelli, *Macht, Weisheit, Liebe, Campanella und Comenius als Vordenker einer friedvoll globalisierten Weltgemeinschaft*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt a. M., 2009. In another way, see H. Beck, *Der Akt-Charakter des Seins. Eine spekulative Weiterführung der Seinslehre Thomas v. Aquins aus einer Anregung durch das dialektische Prinzip Hegels*, Max Hueber Universitäts-Verlag, München 1965.

**11** - In the case of God this first component is the "Father", in the words of Bonaventura: "Est in ipso fontalis plenitudo". (Bonaventura, *De mystero Trinitatis*, qu. 8, Opera omnia, Vol. V, Quaracchi 1891, p. 115).

**12** - In *De Trinitate*, St. Augustine develops a spiritual ontological concept in which the original structure of God is interpreted as the trinity of memoria, intellectus and amor (or esse, nosse, velle). If memoria is not understood too narrowly as mere memory, but as self-awareness or self-presentation, then it could perhaps be equated with self-establishment or self-affirmation. Memoria in the narrower sense of memory, on the other hand, can hardly form the first moment of the Trinity, since the intellect and love also each have their own memory. See E. Schadel, *Sein, Erkennen, Lieben. Grundzüge einer ganzheitlichen Kommunikationstheorie im Ausgang von Augustinischer Trinitätsspekulation*, Zeitschrift für Ganzheitsforschung, 50. Jahrg., Wien 2006, pp. 12-15.

**13** - To the ontological status of self-positioning (Selbstsetzung) see Béla von Brandenstein, *Grundlegung der Philosophie, Gehaltlehre/Totik*, Bd. 1, Anton Pustet, München/Salzburg, 1965, pp. 63-103.

## 6.2 *Reflected self-evidence and identity (self-illumination, intellectus, reason)*

Once this positive self-affirmation has been constituted, a second aspect arises in a correlative manner from it: those who affirm themselves relate to themselves and thus recognise themselves “in the mirror of selfconfidence” as the same person<sup>14</sup>. Only by accepting myself can I truly know myself. In short: from the first and fundamental act component of self-will as self-positioning arises the second act component of self-knowledge, as it were an inner, self-like brightness and light. This emergence does not bring forth a new subject, but the lover himself in the mode of self-illumination. This reveals in the one loving subject two components of subjective being that cannot be separated from each other but are nevertheless easily distinguishable:

- a. the power of the affirmative wanting to be resp. of the initiative self-setting and
- b. the illuminating lighting of reflected seeing resp. knowing oneself, both, power and light, so interwoven that one cannot be without the other.

## 6.3 *Comprehensive self-unifying and self-unit (self-appreciation, mood)*

As if that were not enough, we encounter a third moment in this duality, which we have already implicitly hinted at: From the duality of wanting and recognising oneself, of this duality of power and light (*illuminatio intellectus*)<sup>15</sup>, there arises at the same time in a correlative manner in the third place, a gathering of oneself in oneself, a uniting of oneself. This gives rise to a tri-unity from the two-unity, a new self-integration<sup>16</sup>, after the first self-division (into self-will and self-knowledge, of power and light), thus a kind of self-reunification and self-containment. In contrast to mere self-will in its undifferentiated simplicity, self-unification in and through the third component is characterised by its inner differentiation, an inner dialogue and ardent embracement<sup>17</sup>. However, this means nothing less than that the person

<sup>14</sup> - In God this second component is the Logos-son (*verbum, imago, sapientia*). See also Thomas von Aquin, Campanella, Bonaventura, Savonarola (*Triumphus Crucis*, Roma 1961, p. 134) etc.

<sup>15</sup> - See also Savonarola, *Triumphus Crucis*, Roma 1961, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> - See E. Schadel *Sein, Erkennen, Lieben*, cit., pp. 13-15, and his concept of *In-Ek-Kon-sistenz*. *Kon-sistenz* means Self-Integration. In the opinion of Saint Thomas the third component in God is the *amor unitivus* (*Summa theologiae*, qu. 36, a.4, ad 1).

<sup>17</sup> - Platon speaks of thinking resp. of spirit as a soliloquy of the soul: *Sophistes*, 263 e, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 4, Rowohlt, Hamburg 1981, p. 239.

who affirms and knows himself also accepts and appreciates himself. If this is true, we recognise that the third component of this third triunity is none other than the love itself, the force that gives the lover, the beloved and the act of love their differentiated, inner-dialogical unity like nothing else, also in the case of self-love through *velle* and *nosse*, *voluntas* and *intellectus*<sup>18</sup>. Thomas speaks of *inflammatio affectus* in the case of the Godperson, we also can do so in the case of a loving human being<sup>19</sup>.

## **7. The fourth triunity of being (Gehalt), meaning (Form) and value (Gestaltung) and their perichorese**

If we look at the inner modality of the latter triunity of initiatory power, reflected cognition and embracing love, we recognise its connection to the well-known triunity of being or content ("womb of being"<sup>20</sup>) meaning or form (essence) and value or design (*morphé*). While the powerful (self-)being of the subject is constituted in the first place in the initiatory power of self-will and the moment of meaning or intelligibility is realised in the reflected self-illumination of self-knowledge (reason), in the third moment the self-appreciative self-acceptance (feeling, mood, emotion, *affectus*) reveals the value of being. If you, for example, look at Raphael's painting of the Sistine Madonna in Dresden, you come across this unity of being, meaning and value resp. real content, intelligible-ideal form and designed emotion: the painting is a real thing with real "Qualia" like colours etc. whose intelligible structure we can understand and whose emotional value we can sense or feel, all this in one moment.

## **8. The basic structure of all reality and its analogy to love**

If we recognise that every reality – so also the empirical-sensual nature –, when it moves from non-being to being, owes itself to a spiritual-personal cause, be it a creaturely or a divine cause<sup>21</sup>, then the last remarks about being, meaning and value reveal an analogy of its trifold structure to all possible reality, thus also to non-subjective, for example only material reality. According to Béla von Brandenstein's philosophy and his fundamental structural theory of being,

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<sup>18</sup> - See to the idea of love as salvation and unification W. Schubert, *Religion and Eros*, C. H. Beck, München 1966, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> - See Thomas Aquinas, S. th. I, qu. 43, a. 5, ad 3.

<sup>20</sup> - Look for the female "womb of God": P. Sequeri, *Il grembo di Dio*, Città Nuova, Roma 2023.

<sup>21</sup> - See the solution of the causality-problem in the Metaphysics of Béla von Brandenstein, *Der Aufbau des Seins*, Minerva, Saarbrücken 1950, pp. 184-202.



- it is true that every being must first exist in a concrete-qualitative way (existentia, res, Gehalt, tode-ti = haecceitas, protè ousia, substantia prima), before form and shape, meaning and value, essence (deutera ousia) and unity (hen) can be constituted in it. For where there is nothing, nothing can be formed, designed and united, nothing can be valid or be valued.
- It is also true that every being is in a non-qualitative, "formalistic" context of relations (eidos, idea, forma, essentia, substantia secunda, deutera ousia, to ti en einai, according to Hegel also "Begriff"). Everything that exists thus proves to be fundamentally structured and therefore is also determinable and intelligible.
- And finally, every being that exists qualitatively and is formed in the way of a "formalistic" structure creates through this content ("qualitative material") and this form (non-qualitative structure) a unity that arises together from content (protè ousia) and form (eidos, essential, deutera ousia) as an appreciable and "beautiful" resp. a vivid design (morphé, unitas, Gestaltung, hen, unizentia, tríti ousia)<sup>22</sup>.

It is not possible to prove a fourth moment, like a general substance or essence, which is particularly important in the case of the ontology of the Divine Trinity and the God-Manhood of Christ, which cannot be pursued further at this point, especially because every substance or essence has his content (Gehalt), its structure (Form) and its unity (Gestaltung) without them it is ontological impossible.

## **9. Simply good existence (goodness), luminous-illuminated being-formed/essence (truth) and enchanting-embracing design (beauty as love glamour) as the innermost life of being, from the simplest thing up to God**

The trinity of simply good existence (protè ousia, power), light-filled illuminated essence (forma, eidos, deutera ousia, substantia secunda) and brilliantly beautiful design (morphé, unitas, hen, tríti ousia) thus forms the basic ontological structure of all that exists, including the deficient being. In the rank of subjectivity this is identical with the triunity of good will (power), true understanding (insight) and enchantingly comprehensive feeling of unity (love), a basic structure that exists analogically in a temporally finite way in the matter (and in nature), in man time-connectedly potential-infinite and in God timelessly actual-infinite. Since everything

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<sup>22</sup> - See the basic ontology of Gehalt (qualitative tode-ti), Form (non-qualitative structure/essence) and Gestaltung (vivid design, unity) Béla von Brandenstein, *Der Aufbau des Seins*, Minerva, Saarbrücken 1950, pp. 8-17.

that is potentially infinite (pU = potentialunendlich) like man transcends in principle every finite being (E = endlich), the goal of the creaturely spirit is the longingly aspired actual infinity of God (aU = aktualunendlich), his holy pleroma. This divine fullness in turn is identical with the inner beauty of God and this, in its self-conscious activity, is ultimately identical with love, with love as the self-acting power of the luminous unification of everything (= pulchritudo) – so that, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:28, «God may be all in all» – strengthening, enlightening and vitalizing all dim being.

### **10. Dimensions of love: Sympathy, Affection, Eros, Caritas, Minne, Agape, Empathy**

Love is not just love. Its simplest form seems to be *sympathy*, which comes about through spontaneous, positive-emotional resonance and little deep similarity. When love gains personal depth, desires more closeness and is internalised, *affection resp. attraction* arises between the lover and the beloved as a form of love. If it mixes with a strong and fiery desire of possession that strives for something that is missing in itself but is necessary for its completeness and wholeness, then *eros* (in Plato's sense) arises as a longing for possession, which can take on asexual and sexual forms. If, on the other hand, compassion is combined with a willingness to help practically without being united, this constitutes *caritas*. When love goes beyond sympathy, affection, eros and help and seeks burning union through mutual self-dedication, we speak best of *minne-love*, in which the lover not only positively resonates (sympathy), not looks only for closeness (attraction), not only by taking possession (eros) and not only gives time, support and strength (caritas), but gives himself in a mutual dialectical-polar form of love in order to become a unity as a couple. If he goes beyond this and is prepared to sacrifice his life for the well-being, maturation or salvation of the beloved, I would like to describe this as *agape* in the sense of John 15:13. Finally, a special form of emotional relationship is *empathy*, in which one person feels into the other in order to feel something important from him or her out, a kind of emotional recognition, whether for neutral, selfish or altruistic purposes. It is obvious that this scale is only a rough categorisation and can still be considerably refined and improved.

### **11. The Shadow of Being**

At the end of our remarks on the relationship between love and being, however, we must now cast a great and heavy shadow over this bright image: Since man renounced God and, as the Gospel says, fell into the bondage of sin, he is no longer able to fully appreciate and love himself and others. True self-hatred and ruthless-

ness, blindness and self-deception, abuse and hard-heartedness play a part in everything man does, however well-intentioned it may be. Only a God who descends into the innermost centre of man in the way of kenosis and incarnation, who suffers the cross of human depravity and abandonment by God and thus liberates man from his self-induced misfortune can redeem him from this, as Chiara Lubich impressively teaches with her concept of Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross<sup>23</sup>.

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23 - Cfr. C. Lubich, *The cry of abandonment*, Verlag Neue Stadt, München 2001.