

# Philosophy of Love

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A Partial Summing-Up

Irving Singer

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## Prefatory Note

This book is a partial summing-up in several ways. It is partial because I have written it as an expression of my own preferential involvement with the philosophy of love. Here, as in my other writings on this topic, the philosophers I discuss reflect my personal sense of their importance as well as my individual estimation of what they affirm. While I try to be accurate in my assessments, as in my descriptions, I make no pretensions about definitive objectivity. Though at times I may seem to think of the history of the subject as leading to myself, I do not believe that I or anyone else can be its ultimate destination. I offer my writing only as the embodiment of what I have learned as a contemporary philosopher studying other authors in this field and trying to go a little further.

The present work is a summing-up twice over: first, in being a selective condensation of the ideational panorama that I draw upon and to which I have already devoted many published pages. Readers who may be plausibly deterred by the unpolemical character of this book might be comforted by the realization that more probing and more enlarged treatment of the issues occurs elsewhere in my writings. In places I mention their titles and some of their contents, but I refrain from duplicating what I have put into the original presentations.

The second form of partial summing-up pertains to the fact that I do not consider philosophy to be a subject that can have a culminating outcome or comprehensive solution to the varied questions it poses. No summation can therefore exclude ongoing and more fruitful addenda worth attaining. Reflecting on what I myself have done, I see only a string of approximations and reconsiderations without any reason to think that I am either closer to or more distant from an all-inclusive statement. I do not believe that love, or life for that matter, lends itself to either eventuality.

The text is intentionally more informal and less didactic than other books of mine that are related to it. I have wanted to offer a general perspective that readers without technical interest can readily digest

and possibly enjoy. Toward that end I have avoided the use of footnotes, and references to remarks by other writers are normally reproduced in my own paraphrase rather than being quoted verbatim.

The material for this effort originated in a series of interviews I gave to a radio producer that sometimes turned into more of a monologue than a conversation. The casual setting of these discussions accounts for the colloquial character of what I have now put into words on a page. The unstructured format often elicited ideas that I could not previously bring to the surface. As a result, the book contains, within its occasionally amorphous framework, both new and old ideas of mine whose presentation here may be pleasing to some readers but unsatisfying to others. At the end of the manuscript, I recommend research that would involve cooperation between biological science and various humanistic approaches, yet I offer few intimations about the findings that might occur. This shortfall is particularly notable with respect to women's studies, in which very promising work is now beginning to emerge. I leave these areas to investigators who are more competent than I am, but also with a hope that my ruminations may somehow contribute to their empirical and likely impressive discoveries.

Finally and briefly, I want to place this book in the context of the decades of my personal cogitations that preceded it. As I say later on, I began my labors in the philosophy of love at a time when hardly any reputable philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon world considered that subject professional or even respectable. My working at it cut me loose from the mainstream of American philosophical analysis. Since I had nevertheless been trained as an analytical philosopher, I naturally (and naively) thought I would write a book that systematically examines in very precise detail the elements and the problematics that adhere to the ordinary use of the word *love*. As in almost everything I have undertaken intellectually, I was motivated by anxieties, confusions, unresolved ambivalences within myself as a human being and not merely as a thinker. Idle abstractions meant little to me then, or do so now, and I felt that I could overcome the dilemmas in my own affective life by a careful, albeit plodding, analysis of what matters to everyone.

In making the attempt, however, I found that the chapters I wrote were just dreary and unproductive. In my desperation, I thought that the history of ideas in philosophy and the arts might help me get restarted. What I unearthed was an immensity of speculation and aesthetic output that reached wholly beyond the param-

eters I had been trained to consider truly philosophical. My resultant trilogy, *The Nature of Love*, tried to make sense of this historical progression of thought and inspiration within a framework of distinctions that I myself imposed and that reflected whatever analytical talent I might still have.

By the time I finished the trilogy, I began to feel that my conceptualization was too sketchy, too narrow and incomplete. I realized that understanding love or its related conditions required an investigation into problems about meaningfulness in life as a whole and the human creation of value in general. After another nine years, that perception led to my second trilogy, *Meaning in Life*. All of that deals obliquely with the nature of love, and the second volume in it, subtitled *The Pursuit of Love*, is structured as a more or less nonhistorical treatment of questions about love that I was unable to confront before.

Even so, there still lingered problems about the relation between love and imagination, idealization, consummation, and the aesthetic. In the last few years I have grappled with them in books, notably *Feeling and Imagination: The Vibrant Flux of Our Existence* and *Explorations in Love and Sex*, that are organically derivative from my earlier studies on the nature of love. In their own way, something similar is true of my recent

adventures in the philosophy and phenomenology of film as well as my current writings on the nature of creativity.

The summing-up that you are about to read scans that entire trajectory. It is an *apologia pro mente sua*, and an illustrated miniature of my life as a thinker or would-be philosopher.

I. S.