

Concept of Love from Irving Singer's Perspective

แนวคิดเรื่องความรักจากมุมมองของ เออร์วิง ซิงเกอร์

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Abstract

The research on the concept of love from Irving Singer's perspective is aimed at studying the types of love from several perspectives and the concept of love from Irving Singer's perspective to find out what love is and how it relates to human beings. According to Irving Singer, pluralistic love is the best word to describe his concept of love. He rejected to define love in one definition. There are different kinds of love – the love of things, the love of persons and the love of ideals. He mainly focused on the analysis of romantic love and developed the distinction between bestowal and appraisal; the idea of interdependence rather than dependence. Love is both appraisal and bestowal. Love is an acceptance of another being, a sharing of selves and a contributor to meaning in life.

It is hoped that this study will reflect how we love and how

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to be loved in a more comprehensible way; which will be a guideline for people who are interested in studying or trying to understand the issues about love and other related social issues. This will lead to the creation of knowledge to strengthen people for living lives in a more creative and meaningful way.

Keywords: *Irving Singer, Love, Pluralism*

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเรื่อง “แนวคิดเรื่องความรักจากมุมมองของเออร์วิง ซิงเกอร์” มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาความรักจากหลายมุมมอง โดยเฉพาะแนวคิดเรื่องความรักจากมุมมองของเออร์วิง ซิงเกอร์ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเอกสารมีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาว่าความรักคืออะไรและเกี่ยวข้องกับมนุษย์อย่างไร ผลการศึกษพบว่า จากทฤษฎีของเออร์วิง ซิงเกอร์ ความรักไม่ควรนิยามเฉพาะเพียงหนึ่งเดียวเพื่ออธิบายความหมายของความรัก ซิงเกอร์มองความรักแบบนักพหุนิยม เขาปฏิเสธที่จะกำหนดความรักในคำนิยามใด ความรักมีหลายประเภท ตั้งแต่ความรักในวัตถุ ความรักของคน และความรักในอุดมการณ์ เขาสนใจในการวิเคราะห์ความรักโรแมนติกในฐานะที่ส่งผลกระทบต่อมนุษย์ยุคปัจจุบัน และให้ข้อเสนอที่น่าสนใจว่าความรักเป็นได้ทั้งการประเมินคุณค่าและการให้รางวัล ความรักมีลักษณะของการพึ่งพาอาศัยซึ่งกันและกัน ความรักคือการแลกเปลี่ยนตัวตนและยอมรับตัวตนอื่นนอกจากตัวเอง ความรักคือสิ่งที่ช่วยให้ชีวิตมีความหมาย

ผู้วิจัยมีความหวังที่จะสะท้อนแง่มุมแนวคิดเรื่องความรักที่ครอบคลุมมากขึ้นว่าการรักและการถูกรักมีผลกระทบต่อชีวิตเราอย่างไร การเข้าใจแง่มุมเรื่องความรักจะสามารถทำให้เรามีความเข้าใจต่อการกระทำของตนเองและผู้อื่นนำไปสู่การสร้างองค์ความรู้เพื่อเสริมสร้างให้ผู้คนใช้ชีวิตร่วมกันได้อย่าง

สร้างสรรค์และมีความหมาย

คำสำคัญ : เออร์วิง ซิงเกอร์, ความรัก, พหุนิยม

1. Introduction

There is love all over the world. Love is present in everything we say and do; even a person who is physically and mentally strong can be affected by love. Love can also demand a sacrifice of health, wealth, career and even happiness. Love is the driving force that influences every stage of people life. The ultimate aim of all love-affairs are actually more important than other pursuits in people life. Love, therefore, is quite worthy of profound seriousness in regard to how we pursue it.

The issue about love is taken to study seriously during the 20th century by Irving Singer (1925–2015), an American professor of philosophy who was on the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was awarded a Fulbright research scholar grant, a Guggenheim fellowship and a Rockefeller Foundation grant. He was the author of 21 books in the field of humanistic philosophy, focusing on topics such as the philosophy of love, the nature of creativity, moral issues, aesthetics, and philosophy in literature, music, and film. (Roberts, 2015)

Irving Singer is a philosopher who has spent a long time reflecting on the concept of love which matters a great deal to most of us. He can talk about the concept of love graciously and thoughtfully without dubious fantasizing beyond the limits of our

knowledge. His philosophy of love is tangible based on verifiable assumptions which do not exceed the limits of natural events and ordinary experience.

Singer's many books are essential for the study of philosophy of love including *"The Nature of Love"* (1966–1987), a three-volume exploration of the idea of love in Western philosophy, as well as a second trilogy, *"Meaning in Life"* (1992–1996), which addresses the creation of value, the pursuit of love, and the harmony of nature and spirit. Other works focus on the nature of creativity, moral issues, and aesthetics. Singer has also explored philosophy in literature, music, and film. Moreover, there are still lingering problems about the relation between love and imagination, idealization, consummation, and aesthetics. He has grappled with them in the books, notably *"Feeling and Imagination: The Vibrant Flux of Our Existence"* (2001) and *"Explorations in Love and Sex"* (2001), which are organically derivative from the earlier studies on the nature of love. Last but not least, he made a brief of his philosophical thought about love in the *"Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up"* (2009).

The intention of this study is to find out what love is and how it relates to human beings from Irving Singer's perspective. It is hoped that this study will reflect how we love and how to be loved in a more comprehensible way; which will be a guideline for people who are interested in studying or trying to understand the issues about love and other related social issues. This will lead to the creation of knowledge to strengthen people for living lives in a

more creative and meaningful way. By starting from the concept of love from the perspective of Irving Singer which is the key of this study.

2. History and Development of the Concept of Love

Love is an issue that has been studied extensively; love is also the analyzing study as the meaning in language and the comparing study with other issues, such as love and religion, love of science, etc.

For love that has been studied by the scientific method, scientists have progressed to a study conducted by the love through the work of the human brain that is trying to explain human behavior when they are in love.

Helen E. Fisher (1945-), an American anthropologist and human behavior researcher, has spent her academic life trying to figure out what is going on in the brains of those who are in the ‘butterflies-in-the-stomach’ throes of passionate romantic love. She has scanned the brains of young lovers and found that when they are focusing on the object of their affection, a whole host of brain parts start lighting up. One of the two most important regions was initially a little surprising. First, she found that the caudate nucleus – part of the primitive reptilian brain – is highly active in these amorous individuals. She also saw the brain areas associated with dopamine and norepinephrine production light up. Both are brain chemicals are associated with pleasurable activities and excitement. She notes that other parts of the reward system areas, like the one

that activates when you're eating chocolate, plays a role during this phase of love. She supports the hypothesis that like chocolate, being head over heels in love is addictive. (Slater, 2006)

While scientists are trying to answer questions about love, the Evolutionary Psychology has assumed that the trend and the ability to love is what we have inherited genetically. Our thoughts and mind are already prepared for love and it could well mean that love is part of human nature.

Human beings have increasingly developed special kinds of beliefs and desires which focus not upon the world but mental items. We have attitudes toward our belief and desire. The point is desires do not automatically guide actions; they only guide actions in connection with a surrounding set of beliefs and in concert with or opposite of other desires. The experience of love will depend upon features of the culture and the individual.

In terms of religion, there are extensively studied of love from the perspective of important thinkers as in *Sathya Sai Baba's concept of Love* (2013) studying concept of love described by Sathya Sai Baba. The findings show that, according to Sathya Sai Baba, love is pure and exists in every one's heart; is loving-kindness (metta) without selfishness and stability all extended to others without limitation or boundaries. Love has two characteristics, first, love as god was regarded as the goal of spiritual practice. Second, love as devotion was regarded as an important qualification for the devotee. In order to realize their inner self, Atman, firm love is a necessary condition. (Chuenchom, 2013)

The philosophical treatment of love transcends a variety of sub-disciplines including epistemology, metaphysics, religion, human nature, politics and ethics. Often statements or arguments concerning love, its nature and its role in human life for example the connection to one or all the central theories of philosophy and it is often compared with, or examined in the context of the philosophy of sex and gender as well as body and intention. The task of a philosophy of love is to present the appropriate issues in a cogent manner drawing on relevant theories of human nature, desire, ethics, and so on.

According to the documents aforementioned, it has been found that love is a wide concept and has a lot of aspects. The previous studies are in depth and done point by point, or by comparative study without a clearly seen and easily understood connection. It mainly focuses on the question what is love and its nature, in order to define love or focus on the study of behavior and brain system.

Additionally, apart from Evolutionary psychology and other branches of scientific knowledge, we have to recognize that the experience of love changes as the surrounding culture of beliefs changes, particularly the beliefs which articulate what we think another person is, what we think is good or right, what we think are our duties to ourselves. Love is a cultural construct which depends on various features of a society.

3. The Concept of Love from Irving Singer's Perspective

Western thinking about sexual love may be categorized in terms of two basic approaches. There is the idealist tradition from Plato which Christianity merges with Judaic thought, that courtly love humanizes and that romanticism redefines in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, there is the realist tradition that from the very beginnings has rejected the pretensions of idealism as unverifiable, contrary to science, and generally false to what appears in ordinary experience.

Irving Singer's study of love has shown that the concept of love was developed from ancient Greek transcendental love until Christianity religious love—love of God, then was democratized from God to ordinary people from the emergence of courtly love, which is later developed into a romantic love which is currently influential. He questions that romantic love as a recent idea was mistaken and find out whether his doubt would be accepted. Most of his discussions about love focus on romantic love between people. His discussion spends proportionate time on romantic love. He suggests that to study the philosophy of love completely we would have to investigate the ways in which developments of mind are capable of altering behavior while also following a course of evolution within their own domain.

For the idealistic tradition, Singer begins his thought with Plato, who suggests the idea that love is an instinctual which human beings transcend their limitations in time and space. He concludes that two majors theme of Plato's philosophy are transcendence

and merging. Singer describes his interpretation of Plato's sense of love as a striving toward the Good, starting with overindulgence in sex (to remove earthly desires) and proceeding from there in stages toward the ultimate goal in life, full perception of the Good. He criticized the tradition of transcendental love. He recognized the importance of transcendental love as it falsifies the way in which love is related to normal responses that belong to human as part of nature rather than reach beyond nature. He rejected the idea that we transcend ourselves when we are in love and bring down a worldly concern about love. Love has to be understood in terms of what happens to ordinary relationship.

From this beginning in Plato, Singer steps back and remarks on the way the dialectic of ideas proceeds—Plato's idealism. He avoids the attempt to find a single key to the universe and instead allows us to see love in its diversely plural manifestations. Pluralistic standpoint is an important aspect of his thinking on various concepts, particularly, concept of love. He believes that instead of looking for one answer, like Plato, we should ask questions about reality and what is valuable in it as persons who recognize the variegated character of their involvement in nature. Love is not just love of persons; it is the love of things and ideals as well, and each of these categories can have unlimited variations within it.

“When love succeeds, it is a transcendent good but there is no transcendental object that necessarily defines its beings. The relationship of love is something that people,

men and women, establish in their day-by-day experience with each other—assuming they have learned how to do so.” (Singer, *Explorations in Love and Sex*, 2001, p. 78)

Singer claims for the pluralistic character of love. Pluralistic love according to Singer is the idea of indiscriminately loving other human beings and other species, the idea of loving the love that all living creatures do or want to feel for themselves, their love of love. The most prominent meaning of the pluralistic is love can have many different objects. The religious love which he discusses in his works will fit into his categories of the love of people, things, and ideals, or whether he would add a fourth category. In separating these three types, Singer characterizes himself as a maker of distinctions, claiming that the best we can do as philosophers is explore a vast subject matter and try to clarify it with ever-finer analysis or dissection.

“What matters most is doing what you can for the sake of living most fully in the present, while you are still active and in command of your faculties. Only by exercising a vital effort of this type can you love the life in others and in yourself.” (Singer, *Philosophy of love: A partial sum-ming-up*, 2009, pp. 96-97)

Ideas alone never create a feeling and by themselves feeling never amount to ideas because each of them must be

processed cognitively as well as effectively. He believes that we need a completely new lexicon and analytic approach to understand the affective side of love in all its glory and messiness: emotions, intuitions and instincts, sexual desires, and so on. He expresses a worry that the humanities are undervalued in the name of technological advancement and pragmatic values. Still, he offers little in the way of concrete suggestions as to how the collaboration between them would look. He does mention that his work on love and sex is an effort in this vein.

“Like the world itself, love is an emanation grounded in matter, and comparable to its parental origin. It is a dynamic and always changing process. At the same time, it can empower us to live our brief lives with significant fulfilment, sometimes with joy, and often with a sense of residual satisfaction.” (Singer, Philosophy of love: A partial summing-up, 2009, p. 105)

Singer also criticizes about the way to study philosophy. It is an interesting phrase that shows us how he understand various concepts, especially, the concept of love:

“If you are a philosopher, you can only make a personal portrait that may be true to yourself, to your times, to your style of thought or writing, and thereby proffer imaginative and possibly genuine insights into the nature of

human experience. If what you write is both lucid and suggestive, it may excite the imagination of other people, and that's marvelous." (Singer, Philosophy of love: A partial summing-up, 2009, p. 94)

4. Results

The ideology of love was mainly a historical and critical investigation. People have felt its influence. It is not surprising that the word is used so loosely in everyday language. Love is a variety of different feelings, states and attitudes that range from interpersonal affection to pleasure. It can refer to an emotion of a strong attraction and personal attachment. It can also be a virtue representing human kindness, compassion, and affection. It may also describe compassionate and affectionate actions towards other people, material things or animals. However, the main question when we talk about love is; what is love? Which leads us to ask other questions such as what is the nature of love and how can we justify it.

4.1 Love as Appraisal and Bestowal

From the first volume of *The Nature of Love*, Singer laid a foundation for his concept of love by distinguishing appraisal and bestowal. Appraisal is the ability to discover value in oneself or in other people. Apart from appraisal, no love would exist—we would not even know what the other is like. Bestowal is a way of creating new kind of value apart from the same kind of appraisal. We do experience people, thing or even ideal at every moment in terms

of some appraisive value we care about. Bestowal is an engendering of value by the relationship we have established, by one's appreciative attitude toward the person, thing or ideal to which we attend. It is a kind of projection. It is a creating of affective value, both in oneself and in the other, which reveals why appraisal alone cannot clarify what love is. We are able to transcend all appraisive attitude through bestowal without eliminating the unavoidable presence of appraisal. We do so by creating the new kind of relationship that is essential for love. In bestowal, there will always be a concomitant appraisal, but you go beyond appraisal itself and may even disregard it. To bestow value on someone is a kind of attachment and commitment to the beloved, in which one comes to treat him as an end in himself and so to respond to his ends, interests, concerns, etc. as having value for their own sake.

Some of the philosophers such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) have assumed that all love is a device for getting someone else to give us the love we desire. It would follow that love is just a search for goods one values because of their utility to oneself. Singer called it as an appraisive attitude. For appraisal, others matter to us and affect our emotions because of benefits we hope to derive from association with them. The appraisal seeks to find an objective value that things have in relation to one or another community of human interests. In other words, appraisal is a branch of empirical science, specifically directed toward the determining of value. It is more than estimate objective value. We decide what is worth to us—a subjective appraisal. It determines

a purely individual value and it may opposed to any objective value. Subjective and objective value depend upon an object's ability to satisfy prior interests that motivates us toward one object.

Singer tried to go beyond love as the appraisal. He offered that love is the bestowal as well. Bestowal is created by the affirmative relationship itself, by the very act of responding favorably, giving an object emotional and importance regardless of its capacity to satisfy interests. Insofar as love is bestowed, it creates a kind of value in the beloved that goes beyond appraisal. In loving another, we make things or people we love valuable in a way that would not otherwise exist. Singer suggests that love creates a new value, one that is not reducible to the subjective or objective value. It is both of them. Love is related to both; they intertwine in it. Unless we appraised we could not bestow a value that goes beyond appraisal; and without bestowal there would be no love. For the effort to succeed, it must be accompanied by justifiable appraisals, objective as well as subjective. Love is more than just an appraisal or a desire to be loved. Therefore, human love is both appraisal and bestowal.

When appraisal occurs alone, our attitude develops in the direction of science, ambition or morality to do the right thing. We need not bestow value upon another person. All we need is just recognize the truth about his or her character and act appropriately. Love would not be love unless appraising were accompanied by the bestowing of value. Every appraisal may lead on to a further bestowal. Once bestowal has occurred, you may

hardly care that your beloved is not deemed desirable by other people. Love is a way of compensating for and even overcoming negative appraisals. Love as bestowing differs from related attitudes such as gratitude, generously or condescension. It bestows value without calculation. With love, we bestow not just because we received. It confers importance no matter what the object is worth.

In all communities people have individual value for one another. We are means to each other's satisfactions, and we constantly evaluate one another on the basis of our individual interests. We are always setting prices on other people and on ourselves. But we also bestow value in the manner of love. We respond to another as something that cannot be reduced to appraisal. The lover takes an interest in the beloved as a person, not as a properties. You bestow importance upon your beloved's need and desires, even when they do not your own satisfaction. Whatever their personality, you give a value it would not have apart from your loving attitude. In relation to the lover, the beloved has become valuable for her own sake.

In the love of persons, people bestow value upon one another over and above their subjective or objective value. The mutuality of love occurs when each participant receives bestowed value while also bestowing it upon the other. Mutuality has always been recognized as a desired outcome of love. The lover makes the beloved valuable only by attracting and committing themselves to the beloved. Though the beloved may satisfy their needs, they refuses to use their lover as just an instrument. To love someone

as a person is to desire him or her for the sake of values that appraisal might discover, and yet to place one's desire within a context that affirms him or her importance regardless of these values.

The person we love is generally one who satisfies our needs and desires. They may do so without either of us realizing the full extent of these satisfaction; and possibly all individual value is somehow based upon unconscious effects. Our experience of another person includes a large network of individual evaluations continually in progress and available to consciousness. At each moment our interests are being gratified or frustrated, fulfilled or saddened, strengthened or weakened in relation to the other person. Individual value is rarely stable. It changes in accordance with our success or failure in getting what we want. And as this happens, our perception of the beloved also changes. The attitude of love probably includes more individual appraisals than any other.

4.2 Love is an Acceptance of another Being, a Sharing of Self

Mapping the relationship between love and autonomy, caring may make us find new and more satisfying ways to sustain the relationship. At the same time, the object achieves a kind of autonomy. Singer expands his distinction between appraisal and bestowal by portraying love as an acceptance of the autonomy of some other person. He argues that love is a means by which one respects and sustains another's autonomy while also affirming one's

autonomous relation to that person. This is an act of freedom regardless of the other kinds of freedom a lover may thereby renounce.

When we love no matter what is the object of love, it have special value to us, it is ours. Singer said that it is not merely as a possession but just something we cares about, a part of the affective life. We also care about its utility. We need it for the benefits it provides. But in the process of loving, we establish another kind of relationship. It is important beyond its subjective or objective value. It becomes a focus of attention and possibly an object of personal commitment. We bestow a value it could not have had otherwise. We might say that it is valuable for its own sake. For the value that we bestow will not depend upon the capacity to satisfy.

4.3 Love is a Prime Contributor to Meaning in Life

Human being is characterized by the creation of meaning. Meaning is therefore linked with a need to love and to be loved. In the need to love and to be loved is the need to have a meaningful relationship with people that matter to us. Love is a principal form of life by which we seek meaningful relationships to persons, things, or ideals that matter to us. In itself, love is widely bound up with the relationship between the abstract and the concrete which establishes an extensive portion of what it is to be a human being.

In the Meaning in life, Singer said that love is a prime contributor to meaning in life. For a person in love, life is full of meaning. The beloved matters the most to him or her, even if

nothing else does. Love is not only a contributor to meaningful life but also may underlie all other forms of meaning. He explores that by very nature love is the principal means by which people seek affective relations to persons, things, or ideals that have value and importance for us. Therefore, meaning in life is equally the pursuit of love.

Our world is moving into a way that will create new values different from the old period. We live in accordance with multiple idealizations and whatever values that matter to us. So, love which is an enormous category of thought should not be tied with absolute definition or comprehensive solution. Love is a universal feeling, but there is not a “universal” definition of love because everyone has a different nature and we express this feeling in a different way. Since there is much information about love, friendship, sex and all the other relations. We can only make a personal portrait that may be true to ourselves, to our times and to our style of thought. Moreover, we can offer an imaginative which plays an important role in all our experience especially the thinking about love, whether it is the love of God or any form of love among human being. The idea of it is difficult to work with. It is the topic that needs to be studied along with other disciplines. This is the way of pluralistic study which Singer suggest to be the way of study in this contemporary world because a good life requires an awareness and acceptance of diversified prospect.

5. Conclusion

The feeling of love is universal among human beings. It is related to biological forces—instincts. However ideas of love are extremely particular to a culture or historic period. The way we respond, use, interpret or build systems of thought and religion are various through different eras and cultures.

The philosophical question of love has various study methods and answers throughout the ages. Plato's love is an instinctual ways by which human beings transcend their limitations in time and space. Christianity picked Plato's thought and interpreted the transcendence in terms of religious concepts of a divinity who was himself outside of time and space. In medieval courtly love and romantic love of nineteenth century, we get a kind of naturalization or even humanization of love inasmuch as it need not be elicited by an ultimate Platonic form, or the Christian God, but rather issues from the mere experience of oneness between human beings on earth.

Irving Singer is the combination of idealism and pragmatism. Although he suggests us to concern about worldly things, he also recognizes and derives many ideas from the idealism. Therefore, pluralism love is the best word I could think to describe the concept of love from Irving Singer's perspective. These is the distinction between bestowal and appraisal; the idea of interdependence rather than dependence—love as an acceptance of another being. There are difference kinds of love—the love of things, the love of persons and the love of ideals.

Singer studied by collecting information and critical issues related to the concept of love from key thinkers of each period, presented in *The Nature of Love* and connect love to the various aspects of human life in *The Meaning of Life*. He also spoke of the importance of creativity as a key element of love in *Feeling and Imagination*, and proposed the concept of love as appraisal and bestowal which is his interesting concept of love.

From Irving Singer's perspective, when we discuss about love, there are two main concepts of love—appraisal and bestowal. Previous philosophers have assumed that all love is a device for getting someone else to give us the love we desire. It would follow that love is just a search for goods one values because of their utility to oneself. Singer called it as an appraisal. For appraisal, others matter to us and affect our emotions because of benefits we hope to derive from association with them. Singer tried to go beyond love as the appraisal. He offered that love is the bestowal as well. Bestowal is created by the affirmative relationship itself, by the very act of responding favorably, giving an object emotional and importance regardless of its capacity to satisfy interests. Insofar as love is bestowed, it creates a kind of value in the beloved that goes beyond appraisal. In loving another, we make things or people we love valuable in a way that would not otherwise exist. Singer suggests that love creates a new value, one that is not reducible to the subjective or objective value. It is both of them. Love is related to both; they intertwine in it. Unless we appraised we could not bestow a value that goes beyond appraisal; and

without bestowal there would be no love. For the effort to succeed, it must be accompanied by justifiable appraisals, objective as well as subjective. Love is more than just an appraisal or a desire to be loved. Therefore, human love is both appraisal and bestowal.

The issue of love is being talked and studied for a long time. There is no absolute answer for questions about love. Love is a very wide concept. It has special characteristics that it is both objective and subjective. It happens universal but each will have a different experience of love. There should be an applied study of love in accordance with time, situation, cultural and social conditions. In addition, the study of love associated with other branches of knowledge such as neurology or psychology on love will enable us to visualize a different kind of love and create more understanding about love. To understand the love, which is what we encounter at all times, will enable us to understand the possibilities of the world and human society, empathize with others and live together peacefully in society.

From previous studies, we can see that the question of love is not something new. It is also a matter that we pay attention and try to understand it all the time. Whether we know it or not, love has influenced people's lives for a long time. I believe that people will continue to question love, which is a good thing. *"Ask questions like a child and understand them as a rational and experienced adult."* Asking questions is not just for an answer, but for understanding the problem. Make yourself open, accept and understand a variety of ideas that have evolved over time.

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