

Concluding Remarks

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How do you bring a rodeo to an end?

It's my assignment today to get my arms around what we heard—and, yes, that's a pun on making love—and to help you get your arms around it, too, by doing what journalists do: connecting the dots, to try to make a coherent whole out of different presentations and perspectives on love and its obstacles.

Part of what I heard, however, was how difficult it is to get your arms around even one person, a mother or child, a partner or mate, much less somebody Other in the world. Love is a subject that encompasses so many different worlds of knowledge, thought, and ideas. Every time I heard the word today it seemed a hyperlink to some experience, some memory, some feeling, something I knew or needed to know more about. If it was like that for you—and I expect that it was—then what we really should do is be quiet for a few minutes to allow you to concentrate, and then let you speak from your own hearts and your own experiences of love.

This is a university symposium, however, with its time limits and its form. We talk, you listen; that's part of the power structure of the university that supports the "organized lovelessness" of institutions, to quote the statement by Aldous Huxley that we used as the starting point for this gathering. I can't digest even one bite of the banquet of inspiring insights and illuminations from today's menu of voices—and thank goodness they didn't tell me, most of them, what they were going to say in advance, so I don't have to.

I set myself a simpler task: I listened as though I were doing a word search on the subject of love, and I tried to catalog the many kinds of love we encountered in these talks—and, of course, we also encountered the obstacles. For the subject of love, here's what popped up on the screen: romantic love, divine love, erotic/sexual

Concluding Remarks

love, social cooperation, friendship, love of leaders, of authority, parental love, family romance, affectionate bonding, maternal love, love of power, love as paradise, love as perfection, reciprocal altruism, interdependence, passion about wisdom, shared social love, obligation to someone else—and that's just part of the list. I have to say I did keep score, and the obstacles won: fear, fear of loss of love, fear of not enough love, dependency, domination, persecution, anger, a sense of weakness, powerlessness, interdependence, independence, autonomy, the paradox of the need for power and for surrender, submission in religion, the rarity of cooperation, cross-group conflict, dehumanization, the desire to possess, envy, self-interest, the deconstruction of love, the dissociation of the sexes, 'Sunday-school sex,' the devaluation of each other, and so on and so on.

Today's speakers have contributed to the sweeping range of our conception of love, and the sweeping range of the possibilities of that powerful force that connects and binds us to one another, the counterforce to fear and loneliness that fuses into families, communities, tribes and societies, civilizations that work to support, to sustain, and to ensure the spiral evolution of the human species. We also heard a lot today about the divisions of our society, about the polarization of almost everything and everyone, especially in this post-election season—between the rich and the poor, between different faiths, between different parties with different values. We live in two Americas, at least two—with a divided church; within and without; the "culture wars"; and we still reflect C. P. Snow's divide between science and the humanities. Plus, the university has shown its own divide between science and religion (that is, until Bob Pollack came along)—which is just one example of the schisms in the university.

Each discipline—the arts, the sciences, the humanities—embodies a different way of being in the world and seeing the world, a different way of knowing, and they often cannot address, much less fathom, each other's truths. There is a schism between journalism education and the academic community in which it lives and learns, because the academy prizes its specialized languages, whereas journalism speaks another truth in the popular language. We see object divided from subject, even though science itself now reports that when you zoom in to view the tiniest observable events of basic matter, probing as deep as technology can take us, there is no separation between subject and object; the observer changes the

observed.

What is the ground of our being? This was a core question discussed in Dr. Ethel Person's address. Is power the ground of our being, as Dr. Person suggested, or is it love, as Dr. Forbes suggested? Or is love a luxury in which to indulge only after you are safe and well fed? If so, it is in our self-interest to see that the world is safe and well fed, as Dr. Sachs was saying. Must we be, as humans, forever aware that we are separate and alone, or are we necessarily interconnected, surviving only so long as we can navigate successfully the tension between love and power?

As a journalist, questions are my job. I always begin with them, and just as often I end with them. Here are some of my questions about today's subject. Why is it easier to talk about the obstacles to love than to talk about love itself, especially in a university setting? I wonder, if love is the ground of our being, is there a need for a higher authority? What is the biggest obstacle to love? Is it other people, or is it our own selves?

We launched today's exploration with Aldous Huxley's statement: "Our present economic, social, and international arrangements are based, in large measure, upon organized lovelessness." Here is some of the rest of that passage, which helps to explain what Huxley means: "We try to dominate and exploit, we waste the earth's mineral resources, ruin its soil, ravage its forests, pour filth into its rivers and poisonous fumes into its air. From lovelessness in relation to Nature we advance to lovelessness in relation to art . . . set[ting] up various kinds of mass production by machines" to take the place of art. And this sets in motion "a lovelessness in regard to the human beings" who have to perform the mechanical work and the endless paperwork connected with it. And "with mass production and mass distribution go mass financing, and the three have conspired to expropriate ever-increasing numbers of small owners . . . thus reducing the sum of freedom among the majority and increasing the power of a minority to exercise a coercive control over the lives of their fellows."¹ There is more in his progression, leading finally to the sovereign national state as an organization that has the right and duty to coerce its members to steal and kill on the largest possible scale. And we heard about all of this today.

Does Huxley's description, written in 1945, feel like a mirror of our country and the world as we know it today, and maybe more so? And does the world feel like a violation of our innermost personal values and a violation of our soul?

Concluding Remarks

Huxley's words help explain what we're doing here today and why we undertook this project—to look at the subject of love and its obstacles at Columbia. It all began about three years ago. The core question was: Why is the essential subject of love—an organizing principle of life, a force that for most people gives life its meaning—not considered a worthy subject of study on this campus? Why are science and literature and philosophy carved in stone on top of the buildings, but not love?

Three years ago I approached Bob Pollack about the possibility of exploring the subject of love as a discipline at Columbia. Why Bob? Because he's one of the most daring, challenging intelligences on the campus. As former dean of the College he is one of the most respected and valued thinkers, teachers, and writers among us; but more relevant, because Bob Pollack brings bold new ideas to the campus, such as his work as the founder and director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion. He and a community of willing—if skeptical—colleagues are attempting through CSSR to break down barriers between disciplines. I describe Bob as a green shoot growing out of the cement walls that grace—or entomb, depending upon your perspective—the Columbia campus. Bob is a walking minefield of interdisciplinary ideas and action. So I asked him about love. At first he was taken aback; then he gave it about a minute's thought and said, "That is the most radical idea I have ever heard on a college campus. Why? Because the university is an institution of power, the very antithesis of love." And then he said, "Let's try, and let's invite Bob Glick, director of the Psychoanalytic Institute, to join the effort, to triangulate and solidify the base, and give love in an academic setting more credibility." "Psychoanalysis is, after all, all about love," Dr. Glick said.

We adopted the language of new academic disciplines, such as women's studies and environmental studies, as models, and we came to call our effort the Love Studies Project, with the idea that we might eventually introduce a course or a program or a discipline in love. Our very first meeting was half-devoted to the question, How do we get over the giggle factor? Do we mean sex, do we mean romance? And the corollary questions: Why is the subject of love so difficult and so uncomfortable? Because men and women see love so differently? Why does the academy believe that love is not a serious subject for study? Because it's too subjective, not measurable, not tangible and material, like a weapon of mass destruction? Actually, love is probably easier to detect, since we are all, in a way,

natural explorers of love.

We also discussed and debated different definitions of love; we tried to get our arms around that, as we are still trying to today. But then, with the help of the Fetzer Institute in the form of important financial support, surprisingly—or maybe not surprisingly—we found love in every closet of the campus, and hidden under the skirts of many courses, in the sciences, in literature, in medicine, in religion, in art, in sociology, psychology, political science—even in economics, of all places. In fact, it takes a concerted effort to *avoid* love as an academic discipline. And we found individuals doing research on love, both on this campus and on other campuses, who were willing to share their findings with us.

In a series of what were officially designated University Seminars, which made us legitimate by force of a free—that is, university-funded—lunch, we attracted participants from every corner of the campus and from many places outside it. And the Love Studies Project, through our deliberations, led to the linking of CSSR with the Earth Institute, which recognizes the connections of all to all.

To pursue Huxley's observation in one institutional manifestation—the Columbia campus—one can find so many obvious reasons for division, for polarization: the tradition of distinct and different disciplines; the development of private languages within those disciplines that exclude other disciplines and other communities; the tenure system, which establishes hierarchies and competition, dominance and subjugation, oligarchy and oppression. In a university we measure, we judge, we discriminate, we exclude—necessarily, in many situations, but not as much as we believe we have to. Nevertheless, there is love, invisible, all over the campus. Good teachers awaken a student, and a lasting connection occurs; love happens. Good students inspire teachers, and love happens. Friendships form among students that last a lifetime. Friendship can be a common, garden-variety kind of love, even a weed at times, but true, lasting friendship may be the most important form of personal love. Friendship can even happen at a faculty meeting, when individuals find or make common cause.

A good school is not only a community of learning, but a community of love, of giving and accepting, of charity, generosity, connection, trust, and respect, all part of the definition of love. We work together on a common goal, the advancement of knowledge, for the advancement of civilization, for a better world for the generations

Concluding Remarks

that follow. We engage in different ways of knowing, through reason, through the arts, through journalism. We work together in a search for truth, many truths. A university is a Holy City of knowledge, and this center—this Low Library, which is no longer a library, but the locus of administrative power—is an epistemological church. That should not divide us, it should unite us.

There is a fragmentary portion of the Gospel of Mary discovered in Cairo in the late 1800s and dated by scholars as having been written between the years 90 and 150 A.D. In it, the disciples of Christ are feeling dispirited, confused, and discouraged at the conditions in society and the failure of their message. And then Mary Magdalene reminds them of the words of Jesus when he said, “Be of one heart.” Mary embraces the disciples and says, “Do not be weak and do not make two hearts, for he has made us human being.” The writer Gail Godwin speaks of this gospel in her book titled *Heart*.² She points out that the important part of the message is the use of the singular *human being*, because it points to the possibility of a communal heart, of many acting as one. That is an expression of a love, and it is present in this institution and in other institutions of this society—a love that can be better expressed here and elsewhere by recognizing the love that already exists, communal love.

The communal heart bursts forth, Gail Godwin points out, when we leave our obstacles at the door—our ambitions, our private agendas and desires, and our grievances—and we show our human need for connection. We observed the communal heart in action in this city on 9/11 when citizens, not only in this country but throughout the world, seemed to beat with one heart. In the presence of senseless, shocking loss and exposed vulnerability, what emerged was sympathy, compassion for one another, for those who suffered directly and for the rest of the world, because each individual knows suffering, loss, and vulnerability in his or her own life. If we're open to it, we can see the communal heart, the connections everywhere—in the music of an orchestra, or a choral group, in the trenches of war among a band of brothers, in a church or a synagogue or a mosque, or a grassroots political movement, in a football or a baseball game where the rules of competition are observed, and even in the camaraderie of coaches of opposing teams. We see it when we recognize and respond to the needs of others and our human need for connection to one another, even in a business, the houses of Congress, or in a university.

We can exhume the heart of love from the closets where it is hidden in institutions and invite it into our midst to be discussed, to be studied, to broker the wisdom of many minds in a disciplined way, to give love its rightful presence on the campus, and to put it on the public agenda. There was more wisdom, hope, charity, respect, knowledge, insight, and illumination here today than we would find in ten years of exposure to the popular notion of love that is most of what we see in movies, on TV, and in best-selling books—the idealized and corrupted imperial myth of romance and sex. That's what interests me, as a journalist, about the subject of love. Most journalism concerns itself with power—who's winning, who's losing, who's up, who's down, politically, economically, socially, culturally. If you're winning, you're a news story. If you're not, you're so-called soft news, or a feature, or no news at all—like children and most of the poor. Of course, it is journalism's essential role to be a watchdog of power, especially the institutions of power, but to stop reporting and reflecting reality at the boundaries of power is to leave out much of what is most important in life. Humor is left out, beauty is left out, love is left out—except in wedding announcements. The story of love as we learned about it today in its wisdom and its depth and its complexity and variety is not brokered into the popular culture, it is not brokered into a daily field of vision, and so it is not recognized in our institutional life or our consensus reality.

Journalists tell the story of our time, and part of that story is to have a better understanding of the role of love, not just in our private lives but in our public lives as well. It is up to journalism and to the academy to put love on the public agenda. Through research we know that without love a baby will die, and through observation we are becoming increasingly aware that without love this planet may die. We recognize love as not only an ideal to be pursued, like justice, equality, and freedom, but a reality to be realized, to be made more real in our lives, and not just across a crowded room. We need to do this in journalism, in our stories, and in the academy, as a course, as a discipline, as an interdiscipline, and most especially as an ethic. If we are able to do that, we may become as expert in the daily practice of love as we are in the daily maneuverings of power.

It is our hope that this symposium is a beginning, not an end—an invitation to create a new community that recognizes love for the force and presence it is in our hearts, to take it out of the private bedrooms and institutional closets and bring it into the day-

Concluding Remarks

light of our public life. Difficult as it is to be idealistic in today's environment, we want to put love on the public agenda in order to create a more loving world. We want to be able to recognize more possibilities for love, without giggling. We hope that this conference today helped bring forward what was so evident—that love is a uniter, not a divider. Love is the synthesis, not the analysis. Obstacles exist to be overcome. If we begin to balance the Siamese twins of love and power as the grounds of our being, we may begin to understand what spiritual leaders have been telling us down through the ages, and what modern technology now demonstrates. The world is one, one human community. We are all connected. We live together or we perish together.

Thank you for joining us.

Notes

1. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1945), 93–94.
2. Gail Godwin, *Heart: A Natural History of the Heart-Filled Life* (New York: Harper Perennials, 2002).