Article Review: Ayn Rand’s Theory Of Selfishness In Love

That was the first few weeks of my elementary school. Being in a new place, I realized I need to meet more people. “Do you want to go to lunch together?”,I took my first step to the girl sitting next to me, overcoming the nerves of … . After all these years, when Nichole, the girl I had lunch with that day, asked about the reason why we became best friends, neither of us could not come up with an answer. As we started to think about it, although hard to admit, the answer might be the mutual companionship we both longed for. Interestingly, though we became closer after learning about each other’s hobbies, personalities, and stories, it still took us some effort to figure out how our long-lasting friendship began. This complexity in the origin of our friendship triggers me to question people’s motivation to start the connection with others. Are People’s selfishness and conditions in their connection with others inevitable? And whether this kind of love with needs is much more natural and reasonable for people? Comment by Xiaotong Lim:

As I kept thinking about all the people and their connections with me, I realized my intention to connect with them always relates back to my self-interest. Later, I found Ayn Rand, a Russian-American writer and philosopher, who enlightens me on this topic.

In the article “Ayn Rand on Love and Selfishness--In Love, Be selfish”, the author Olga Khanzan analyzes Ayn Rand’s theory of selfishness in love. As she considers Rand loved her husband with conditions, which she took self-pleasure along with his pleasure, Khanzan provides the interview between Ayn Rand and journalist Mike Wallace in 1959 to give readers a deeper understanding of Rand’s theory.

Ayn Rand mentioned in the interview why she supported her husband Frank O’Connor to pursue his passion in art. Her answer strongly supported her theory of selfishness in love: “ because you see, I am in love with him selfishly. It is to my own interest to help him if he needed it. I do not call that a sacrifice because I take selfish pleasure in it.” She was not only supporting her husband, but also helping herself to have a husband who pursued his passion. To her, her own selfish desires -- her love and her obsession with a passionate husband -- plays a more important role than her willingness to sacrifice. It comes clearer to me that Ayn Rand considered the selfishness in love to be a virtue and a nature. As Khanzan reports,“ The objectivist philosopher once defended supporting her husband financially because, as she saw it, the benefits accrued to her.” When Rand offered her financial help, she wanted her husband to be happy and to pursue his career without worry. At the same time, she took satisfaction and happiness from it. In addition, Ayn Rand added, “It’s immoral to place love above oneself, it’s more than immoral, it’s impossible because when you are asked to love everybody indiscriminately, that’s love people without any standard and conditions… You are asked to love nobody.” It can be easily referred from Rand’s words that, when people consider themselves in a relationship, it’s moral and reasonable to think about self-interest. If one does not take benefits and get his/her needs fulfilled, or even get hurt from the connections, it would become harmful and impossible to sustain these connections. There are thousands of strangers walking by us everyday, and obviously, we are not connecting with everybody. It’s natural that people only treat those who treated them well back. And these reciprocal balance responses are the invietable conditions for connections to exist.

According to Ayn Rand, love comes with conditions. Good deeds that would make the doer happy. People who put conditions and standards to love are not even evil, and it's natural and more reasonable to have the so-called " conditional love". In Mark Mason's article, " Maybe You Don't Know What Love Is", he identifies the concepts of unconditional love and conditional love. Mason compares that conditional love is that people inherently prioritize something else, self-interest, above the relationship, while unconditional love is relationships where each person is accepted unconditionally for whoever he or she is, without any additional expectations. As Ayn Rand mentioned in her interview, if a man told the woman he married that " I'm marrying you just for your own sake. But I'm so unselfish that I'm marrying you", "would any woman believe that?" That's the situation with Mason's unconditional love. The men devoted himself into this relationship without expecting his wife to do anything for him. However, in Rand's views, this is impossible. When a man marries a woman, they love with conditions. The conditions are they have attractions on each other, they could gain happiness, satisfaction, a sense of safety and a person they could count on when they encountered trouble in this relationship. Love without these conditions makes the relationship unreasonable and deceptive. The power of those exaggerated selfless words is to make the man sound more persuasive in his proposal, but once the passion and interest go, unconditional love goes accordingly.

Elif Batuman's observation in Japanese rental relative's industries gives more examples for illustrating the concept of conditional love. In her article "A Theory of Relativity", Batuman presents the rental services, which are aiming to provide a substitute for someone missing in life for the clients, and through these services to solve the real-life problem caused by theses people's absences. This kind of service requires the actors to play roles as the clients requested and as real parts of the client's life. While the actual feelings and connections happened in the service are real, this is still a service based on money and contract. Batuman defines that "unconditional love--the kind you don't get, or ask for, from people in your life, because they have needs, too, and you always have to take turns." which she considers the rental service is a one-way relationship with unconditional love. People use money to exchange the unreciprocal love from strangers. Yet, I stand on the opposite side, considering the rental service is a conditional love that two-ways love involved. "The rental wife sometimes 'breaks out of the shell of the rental family' enough to complain about her real husband and Nishida gives her advice," which contradicts Batuman's view that rental service is a unreciprocal love. Also in the case of Airi, who plays as Batuman's mother, Batuman recalls "When she offered to show me around the department store even though our time was up, I found myself saying yes". This connection after service indicates both the client, Batuman, and the actress, Airi, had needs for each other to continue their relationship. Nishida needed the accompany from his rental wife, his "wife" needed advice and response from Nishida; Airi reminded Batuman about her childhood and mother, Batuman also fulfilled Airi's need for her daughter; and even the massage lady got money from the love between her and Batuman, where the money was her need. In return, Batuman got the massage service she wanted. These are all conditions for their love. As Ayn Rand's theory, all the examples of the Japanese rental service have self-interest involved. They all expect something, emotionally or financially, back from others after they gave out their own.

Besides the rental service, which is the connection developed based on service and money firstly, CJ Hauser also utilizes her failure in relationship to present that not only conditional love is inevitable, but also love without conditional eventually does harm for people's identification for their needs and beliefs. In her article "The Crane Wife", CJ Hauser called off her wedding ten days before it and went on a trip of observing crane to find herself. After she realized the

imbalance in her relationship, she decided to live for her own. After long-time of suppression, self-blame, and self-depression, the indifference and ignorance of her fiance eventually triggered Hauser to admit her own needs instead of ignoring and denying them. When Hauser tried on her dress, she desperately wanted some acknowledgment from her fiance: “I wanted him to tell her she looked nice, so she shimmied and squeezed his shoulders and said, ‘You look nice! Tell me I look nice!’ He said, ‘I told you that you looked nice when you wore that dress last summer. It’s reasonable to assume I still think you look nice in it now.’ ” The imbalance in their relationship also showed in the birthday card with a sticky note inside that said BIRTHDAY. After giving it to Hauser, her fiance took off the sticky notes and save it for the next birthday. Hauser’s relationship repeatedly proves that love is coming with conditions, and unconditional love is unsustainable. Hauser has tried to hide her needs and continued in this unconditional love, but eventually she identified her real needs. Hauser needs hear her fiance’s responses, receives the equal love she gives out, while her finance requires a “non-needy” wife that does not have many requests. Their needs are imbalance and different. While Hauser wants an interactive and passionate marriage, her fiance needs a peaceful and independent one. As Ayn Rand’s view on selfishness in love, both of Hauser and her fiance have needs and place self-interest in their relationship. When Hauser found out that what she gave out did not receive the same balance response, she realized the relationship was toxic. Rand said, “people only love who deserves it”, when Hauser understood that she has already sacrificed too much for her fiance, he might not be the person deserved her love anymore.

One might think that loving a person with conditions equals the concept of placing self-interest in the first place instead of love; One might think that conditional love is superficial that this kind of relationship is unsustainable. While Ayn Rand finds personal satisfaction in supporting her husband’s passion since the happiness of her loved one equals to her own happiness, clients and actors in the rental service satisfy each other’s needs for mutual benefit. Hauser ends her relationship bravely after identifying her fiance’s needs and expectations for the marriage are differ from her. She finds herself and escapes from the one-way unconditional love her fiance expected.

The plain expression that unconditional love does not exist might be terrifying. The long-term social bias and stereotypes have shaped people’s default understanding that selflessness is a virtue. And people consider unconditional love, loving others selflessly with total self-devotion, is an ideal state which sounds matching their default standard. When the ideal bubble of selflessness breaks, the seemingly ugly truth, love is selfish, gives people the sense of shame and self-denial. Their needs in connections are then wrongly identified as “selfishness” that contradicts their belief of virtue. Yet, recognizing love comes with conditions is not an untoward thing. This becomes a latent rule in relationship that helps people to protect themselves. With this in mind, When people found out other loved with needs and conditions, they won’t be hurt and experience the self-doubt that they are not worthy to be loved, since they already identified that love with conditions is inevitable.

Works Cited

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