



## The Art of Loving

*Erich Fromm, Peter D. Kramer (Introduction), Rainer Funk (Afterword)*

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# The Art of Loving

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**The Art of Loving** Erich Fromm , Peter D. Kramer (Introduction) , Rainer Funk (Afterword)  
The fiftieth Anniversary Edition of the groundbreaking international bestseller that has shown millions of readers how to achieve rich, productive lives by developing their hidden capacities for love

Most people are unable to love on the only level that truly matters: love that is compounded of maturity, self-knowledge, and courage. As with every art, love demands practice and concentration, as well as genuine insight and understanding.

In his classic work, *The Art of Loving*, renowned psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm explores love in all its aspects—not only romantic love, steeped in false conceptions and lofty expectations, but also brotherly love, erotic love, self-love, the love of God, and the love of parents for their children.

## The Art of Loving Details

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## From Reader Review The Art of Loving for online ebook

### Trevor says

If my mate George hadn't recommended this book there is no chance at all that I would have read it. I've a strange relationship with LOVE – in that I think it is grossly overrated by our society. You could get away with thinking that if you were not 'in love' in our society then there is something terribly wrong with you. Never mind that the notion of being constantly 'in love' – in a world where this is all too frequently confused with being infatuated – would be a nightmare not worth living.

As I said to George – I can see why people settle for sex, rather than love. Fromm's idea of love sounds far too hard.

This is what I would generally call a 'white-board' book. A book in which someone has picked a term rich in meaning – in this case love, but other's I've read have been on Lust or the parts of the human body - and run with it. Germaine Greer has one out at the moment called *Rage* I believe, although she could just as easily have written one called mock-outrage.

All sorts of love are covered, Brotherly Love, Romantic Love, Religious Love, Motherly Love... Like I said, a white-board book where a huge mind-map has been padded out into continuous prose.

This all makes the book sound much less interesting than I actually found it – but I want to give you an idea of some of my dissatisfactions too. I mentioned that I was reading Fromm to someone at work and he asked who is Fromm. I said, "I guess he is a bit of a Freudian-Marxist with an interest in Buddhism." My friend looked at me quizzically for a moment and said, "Well, it isn't exactly saying, 'pick me up and read me' just yet." I didn't dare tell him what the book was called.

When I was separating from my wife a very dear friend of mine suggested that I read a book called, *Pulling Your Own Strings*. I worked at the City Council and had the luxury of being able to turn to the computer on my desk, order a book from the city library and have it appear on my desk the very next day. There are few nicer pleasures in life. Anyway, the book appeared and it had a rainbow in the cover... I told her that I didn't think I could read this book. The problem being that I would need to read it mostly on public transport – and a rainbow, I mean, Jesus. I said to her, "Look, the title is bad enough, but at least I can pretend that I thought it was about masturbation, but a rainbow...there is no excuse for a rainbow unless the book is called something like, *Classic Gay Shortstories*."

There is a very similar problem with a book called, *The Art of Loving*. One expects it to be written by Hugh Heffner or Dr Shagalot.

The question is what is love? Is it a rather pleasant sensation or an art and therefore something one learns and gets better at over time? Fromm points out that mostly we act as if love were a sensation – something that happens to us and we have mostly no control over. We believe that love is something that just is. We can't help who we fall in love with, we can't help who we fall out of love with and we fundamentally believe that there is someone out there that is just right for us. There is no effort involved in loving – in fact, effort implies the two people weren't really 'made for each other' and that effortless love is the only 'real' love. We look down on other cultures where marriages are 'arranged' and although I won't be arranging my daughters' marriages, I'm not quite so smug about the 'self-evident' superiority of marrying for 'love'.

The main problem with arranged marriages, for me, is not the impossibility of love in these types of marriage – the arranged marriages I've witnessed in my life have involved much more 'choice' than we generally consider possible in our standard Western interpretation or plots for dozens of Disney cartoons. The real problem is how women in such marriages tend to be traded like chattel. It is hard to see how this could possibly be avoided in 'arranged marriages' – although, in the large grey area between the black of arranged marriages and the white of marrying for love there are 'blind dates organised by friends' and 'marry anyone you can get your hands on so as not to end up on the shelf' and other such shades.

One of the things I found most interesting, and perhaps one of the most illuminating ideas in the book, was his talk about the love of God. Quite early on he says, "In conventional Western theology the attempt is made to know God by thought, to make statements *about* God. It is assumed that I can know God in my thought. In mysticism, which is the consequent outcome of monotheism ... the attempt is given up to know God by thought, and it is replaced by the experience of union with God in which there is no more room – and no need – for knowledge *about* God."

Love for another person – particularly love for a life-partner (as I guess it would be called today) – is fairly similar to this love of God, love as atonement with God. Fromm repeatedly says that our highest desire (whether we recognise it or not) is unity with another. For Fromm this is the ground of love of all people and true love of another is premised on our being able to love everyone. There are all manner of qualifications for this unity – not unlike the line from *The Prophet*:

*Sing and dance together and be joyous, but each one of you be alone, even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.*

The big downer – to use an Americanism – is that Fromm barely feels that *true love* is possible in Western Capitalist societies. Our obsession with consumerism; our ideas that love is a sensation, rather than an art; our alienation from our essential selves; our inability to concentrate and focus – all of these work against us truly 'being' in love.

This, then, is the Buddhist aspect of Fromm. The point is to learn how to be in the present – and being in the present implies truly being 'with' your partner. I think I finally got the point of sex once I realised it wasn't about what I was feeling, but about understanding and anticipating the feelings of the person I was with. When I was too young to understand I heard Dave Allen tell a joke on TV about a newly married couple who rolled over to go to sleep rather than finish having sex after one of them asked, "Can't you think of anyone else either?" I'd have preferred to have never been old enough to understand that joke. Shakespeare makes a similar point when he has Edmund (why do his 'bad-guys' so often get the best lines?) say in King Lear about the lecherous begetters of bastard children when compared to most 'married sexual partners', "Who, in the lusty stealth of Nature, take more composition and fierce quality than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed, go to th' creating a whole tribe of fobs got 'tween a sleep and wake?"

Gods, stand up for bastards indeed.

Or as Fromm himself would have it: "The main condition for the achievement of love is the *overcoming* of one's *narcissism*".

But it is not just about being present in bed for Fromm. Loving is about being alive – and being alive is about being truly conscious. Fromm is concerned that many of us think life is somehow supposed to be about 'relaxing' – to Fromm the only time one should relax is when one is asleep. He is a man well aware that time, and therefore life itself, is not to be wasted – that we are better to wear out than to rust.

More than once I experienced a ‘shock of recognition’ in reading this book, particularly towards the end when he was discussing dysfunctions based on experiences of parental role models. Although I found his division between maternal and paternal love all a little simplistic, some of this did make me question my relationships and how they may have been based on my own experiences and learnings from my parents and also to wonder about the examples I’ve given my daughters. Never pleasant thoughts.

I didn't enjoy this book nearly as much as *The Art of Being*, but there are more 'thoughts per page' here than in your typical book on this subject and if it is a 'whiteboard book' it is a particularly full and rewarding one.

**M.rmt says**

## **Hoda Elsayed says**

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

## The Art of Loving, Erich Fromm

The Art of Loving is a 1956 book by psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm, which was published as part of the World Perspectives Series edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. In this work, Fromm develops his perspective on human nature, from his earlier work, Escape from Freedom and Man for Himself – principles which he revisits in many of his other major works.

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**Carlo says**

One of my favorite books. I've read it three times now, and i'll probably read it several more times in the future. I really appreciate what a "down to earth" way of dealing with his subject matter that Fromm has. He recognizes that no book can make you a more loving person, but he does recognize that by calling our attention to the myriad ways that we misunderstand, and deceive ourselves about love, we can begin to approach a better understanding of what it might take to become better lovers. He implicates everything from our philosophical assumptions to the way we work in a capitalist society to the way we endlessly pursue idle

amusement over the development of the kind of character that energizes a person to act more lovingly in the world. Being principally a psychoanalyst, Fromm is also extremely helpful at helping us see the connections between how we act, how we think, and what we learned early on about the meaning (or illusion/delusion/frustration) of love. Another book I think I could benefit from reading every other year.

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Carlos says

La típica pregunta *¿Qué es el amor?* Erich Fromm lo explica en este libro, pero claro, es muy difícil que una sola persona sea dueña de la verdad a un tipo de respuesta como en este tema.

Sus hipótesis y también afirmaciones son interesantes. Varios tipos de amor y sentimiento puro, algo que en esta sociedad contemporánea hemos perdido, quizás debido a la globalización, la carga de trabajo, la falta de tiempo, o lo que sea. El amor, al ser arte, tiene un valor también histórico, cultural y social, entre otras cosas. El amor mirado desde diferentes perspectivas. Hay algunas cosas en las que no concuerdo o me parecen demasiado extrañas, pero siempre es interesante mirar otros puntos de vista.

¿Recomendado? Sí, hace ver al amor como quizás no lo vi antes y a partir de eso, analizarlo fríamente.

## **Mohammadreza says**

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**Soheil says**

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**Raha says**

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**John Kulm says**

I went through this book again partly because it has so much to say, and partly because I wanted to re-read

Erich Fromm's instructions on how to meditate. I like the way he puts it, on pages 101 - 102:

"If I am attached to another person because I cannot stand on my own feet, he or she may be a lifesaver, but the relationship is not one of love. Paradoxically, the ability to be alone is the condition for the ability to love. Anyone who tries to be alone with himself will discover how difficult it is. He will begin to feel restless, fidgety, or even to sense considerable anxiety. He will be prone to rationalize his unwillingness to go on with this practice by thinking that it has no value, is just silly, that it takes too much time, and so on, and so on. He will also observe that all sorts of thoughts come to mind which take possession of him. He will find himself thinking about his plans for later in the day, or about some difficulty in a job he has to do, or where to go in the evening, or about any number of things that fill his mind – rather than permitting it to empty itself. It would be helpful to practice a few very simple exercises, as for instance, to sit in a relaxed position (neither slouching, nor rigid), to close one's eyes, and to try to see a white screen in front of one's eyes, and to try to remove all interfering pictures and thoughts, then to try to follow one's breathing; not to think about it, nor force it, but to follow it – and in doing so to sense it; furthermore to try to have a sense of 'I'; I = myself, as the center of my powers, as the creator of my world. One should, at least, do such a concentration exercise every morning for twenty minutes (and if possible longer) and every evening before going to bed."

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### **Jeruen says**

My goodness, what is this dude smoking?

Someone close to me made me aware that this book existed, and so out of curiosity, I decided to borrow the book from the library and read it. It took me 2 days, and really, I hated every bit of this book, for several reasons that I will delineate below. But first, let me tell you what this book is about.

Obviously, this is non-fiction. This is written by Erich Fromm, a prominent German social psychologist who happens to belong to the Frankfurt School, also known as the proponents of Critical Theory. And in this book, Fromm outlines his theory of love, and how it is an art. As with other arts, such as painting and sculpture, he claims that love has two parts: theory and practice. The book is divided accordingly.

In the theory section, he goes over five different types of love: brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, self-love, and love of God. He explains the different functions of these different types, and its various characteristics. And in the practice section, he basically gives various factors that affect and influence the practice of love.

So, where do I begin criticizing this work? First of all, I deeply hated the fact that his arguments are all along the lines of speculation. I am all for empiricism, and he has all these grandiose claims that were never proven with evidence, all throughout the book. He has claims for example about the difference between motherly

and fatherly love, about the importance of the male-female divide, about mothers and instinct, but all of his arguments are conjecture, and not actually supported by empirical evidence. I being a scientist have big problems with that.

I also think that he suffers from a cultural bias, in that in Eurocentric cultures, at least, love as a concept actually refers to various different things, which roughly corresponds to the different "types" of love. However, I think that it is just an accident of language that English has one word to refer to all of those, which gives the illusion that all of these concepts are inter-related and compose a superset of human emotions. However, one simply has to look to other cultures, and one will realize that there are actually different words that refer to these "types" of love. Greek for example has four different words for what the English language refers to as "love". C. S. Lewis actually has a book discussing the Four Loves as seen in Christianity. Thus, I fear that this book, which is in a way a typology of "love" may actually be resting on the false premise that there is something in common will all manifestations of love, and that Fromm is just undergoing an endeavor that is ontologically faulty. This can be seen by the various differing assumptions that he makes regarding the different types of love.

Speaking of assumptions, this is another part in which I have problems with. He makes all these assumptions about the various characteristics of various "loves" but I can think of so many counter-examples to prove him wrong.

One assumption he has is the instinct of the mother to her offspring, and how that is the defining factor in motherly love. He claims that mothers by virtue of giving birth of her child, are predisposed to love her child unconditionally. I believe the contrary. I think I can re-explain every phenomenon he tackles with a simpler rule, without resorting to various other assumptions, and that is by claiming that "love" as we know it is simply a matter of constraint satisfaction and selfishness. We show love to a target because we need something from the target: whether it be one's child, one's brother, one's sexual partner, or one's God. If the need goes away, then we stop showing love. Thus, in the case of motherly love, when there is another need that is present in the mother, that runs counter to the need pertaining to the infant, then the mother will sooner or later give up the child for adoption, abandoning the infant in one way or another. If motherly love were instinctive, then we won't actually be witness to the grave number of orphanages around the world.

Another assumption he makes is the centrality of the male-female opposition. He claims that these two poles are necessary for real erotic love to happen. By implication, he explicitly claims that homosexuals are incapable of love. I tend to disagree. Personally, I believe that humans can be post-gendered and has the ability to be attracted to another person, regardless of the other person's gender, if one's constraints are set up that way. Thus, gender variation for me is just a matter of constraint setting. I do not like the fact that Fromm categorically eliminates the ability to love from non-heterosexual people. Perhaps it is just the sign of the times he was living in (the book was published in 1956), and important studies by Alfred Kinsey and Evelyn Hooker were not around yet. As of 1956, homosexuality was still listed as a mental illness according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and wasn't removed from the list until 1974. Alfred Kinsey published two seminal volumes on sexual behavior of the human male and female, and Evelyn Hooker did several series of experiments providing evidence that self-identified homosexuals were no worse in social adjustment than the general population. I actually found her experiments rather neat, where she took two groups of samples: homosexuals and heterosexuals. She conducted three tests across the two groups: the Thematic Apperception Test; the Make-a-Picture-Story Test; and the Rorschach Inkblot Test. She then asked other specialists to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two samples based on their test performance. In all tests, the specialists' ability to differentiate was no better than chance, suggesting that there are no significant differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals when it comes to social performance.

Fromm also has a section on love of God. Again, I can explain this by selfishness. Love of God for me is simply another term for therapeutic delusion. Humans sometimes need to feel that they are not in total control of their lives, to the point that they construct an entity "higher" than them. This in effect removes the blame from themselves, whenever there is a tragic event that has happened. Things that are seemingly beyond their control are given an explanation by invoking the notion of God. This for me is a selfish act, because it's basically a form of a survival mechanism. The human basically victimizes oneself and removes the responsibility and reassigns it to God. Having belief in God also has a second function, and that is to give hope, hoping that the afterlife is better than the present, which again is a survival mechanism, because otherwise, people may not be able to survive the present.

Now, I have tried to explain the concept of love by recasting it in terms of selfishness. I do believe that human behavior can be reduced to two terms: selfishness and curiosity. Love is never self-sacrificing. Someone told me that we only continue to love if we are loved in return: we love our mates as long as our mates love us. If not, then the relationship breaks down.

So the question is, do I believe in love? I guess the answer depends on what that question actually means. If by believing in love, it refers to the act of immediately finding oneself attracted to some other person, with no rhyme or reason, then I have to answer no. However, if by believing in love, it refers to the act of ascertaining whether an individual is beneficial for oneself, that even though one can survive by its own, one has determined that the system can be improved by factoring in the other person, and therefore pursuing that person, then my answer is yes. Love for me is a selfish act: it's an act of system improvement. It is an economic act, getting something from someone else in exchange for something else. Thus, a successful relationship occurs whenever there are two people who mutually satisfies the needs of each other.

So, I have offered here a counter explanation to the phenomenon of love. I believe that it is a simpler explanation, satisfying Occam's Razor. I have fewer assumptions: constraint satisfaction and selfishness. I only assume that those are the two big factors, and the variation on human behavior can be explained by modulating the various constraints that are different across the board. I believe that my thesis here is also testable: I could easily imagine a way to sample this, and one can run a regression model and see whether the factors really are significant or not. Needless to say, I belong more to the experimental psychology camp, than the Frankfurt School.

And needless to say, I was dissatisfied with this book. I am giving it 0.5 out of 5 stars.

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### **Mohammad Hanifeh says**

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### **Roula says**

"Οποιος επιμενει στην ασφαλεια και τη σιγουρια ως πρωταρχικες συνθηκες της ζωης, δεν μπορει

να εχει πιστη.οποιος κλεινεται μεσα σε ενα δικο του συστημα αμυνας, στο πλαισιο του οποιου η ασφαλεια εκπροσωπειται απο την αποστασιοποιηση και την κατοχη, καθιστα τον εαυτο του φυλακισμενο.το να αγαπιεσαι και να αγαπας απαιτει θαρρος"

Αυτο που συμβαινει με τα βιβλια αυτοβελτιωσης δεν ειναι οτι σου ανοιγουν τα ματια ? σου λενε τρομερα μυστικα ? πραγματα που ποτε δεν ειχες σκεφτει.αυτο που μου αρεσει στα εν λογω βιβλια ειναι το ποσο συχνα κουνω το κεφαλι μου με κατανοηση αναγνωριζοντας τον εαυτο μου σε φρασεις τους ? με αποδοκιμασια (προς τον εαυτο μου)σε σημεια που ξερω πολυ καλα οτι ειναι μεγαλες αληθειες τις οποιες ομως εχω ξεχασει..ειναι μια πολυ καλη εμπειρια αφυπνισης του εαυτου μου και βιβλια οπως αυτο με κανουν να την απολαμβανω.

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## Nawal says

This book confirms the idea that reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life, a better one indeed.

Reading the Art of love awoke inside me some long dormant craving to approach the subject matter of love in a Tangible and Lucid way as Fromm did.

In this book, Fromm asserts that love is essential to human flourishing and survival "love is the answer to the problem of human existence" he discusses frankly and candidly his theory of love in all its aspects: not only romantic love, so steeped in false conceptions, but also love of parents for children, brotherly love, erotic love, self-love and love for God. Learning to love, he suggests, requires care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge to master the art of love as he metaphorically puts it.

Fromm also writes about the disintegration of love in contemporary western society; he stressed tirelessly that modern Western society practices "the socially patterned pathology of love", thus, love in the forms he describes is a relatively rare phenomenon in capitalist society, and that its place is taken by a number of forms of pseudo-love which are in reality so many forms of the disintegration of love."

In short, Erich Fromm believes that love is not a noun or object, but a verb or practice, the way you practice love depends on your approach and understanding of the existential problems of your life and at the same time, determines the wholeness you will experience as a human being. In a more practical sense, reading The Art of Loving can give you tools to help you learn the art of living as well.

*"Love is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. A feeling comes and it may go. How can I judge that it will stay forever, when my act does not involve judgment and decision."*

*"Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit, considering his position and the situation on the personality market. He is alienated from himself, from his fellow men and from nature. His main aim is a profitable exchange of his skills, knowledge, and of himself, his "personality package" with others who are equally intent on a fair and profitable exchange. Life has no goal except the one to move, no principle except the one of fair exchange, no satisfaction except the one to consume."*

