

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Book 1, Section 14 (The Things People Call Love)

~4 minutes

Greed and love: such different feelings these terms evoke! And yet it could be the same instinct, named twice: once disparaged by those who already have, in whom the instinct has somewhat calmed down and who now fear for what they “have”; the other time seen from the standpoint of the unsatisfied, the thirsty, and therefore glorified as “good”. Our love of our neighbors – is it not a craving for new property? And likewise our love of knowledge, of truth, and altogether any craving for what is new? We slowly grow tired of the old, of what we safely possess, and we stretch out our hands again; even the most beautiful landscape is no longer sure of our love after we have lived in it for three months, and some more distant coast excites our greed: possession usually diminishes the possession. The pleasure we take in ourselves tries to preserve itself by time and again changing something new into ourselves – that is simply what possession means. To grow tired of a possession is to grow tired of ourselves. (One can also suffer from an excess – even the desire to throw away, to dole out, can take on the honorary name “love”.) When we see someone suffering, we like to use this opportunity to take possession of him; that is for example what those who become his benefactors and those who have compassion for him do, and they call the lust for new possessions that is awakened in them “love”; and their delight is like that aroused by the prospect of a new conquest. Sexual love, however, is what most dearly reveals itself as a craving for new property: the lover wants unconditional and sole possession of the longed-for person; he wants a power over her soul as unconditional as his power over her body; he wants to be the only beloved, to live and to rule in the other soul as that which is supreme

and most desirable. If one considers that this means excluding the whole world from a precious good, from joy and enjoyment; if one considers that the lover aims at the impoverishment and deprivation of all the competitors and would like to become the dragon guarding his golden hoard as the most inconsiderate and selfish of all 'conquerors' and exploiters; if one considers, finally, that to the lover himself the rest of the world appears indifferent, pale, and worthless and that he is prepared to make any sacrifice, upset any order, subordinate any other interest; then one is indeed amazed that this wild greed and injustice of sexual love has been as glorified and deified as it has in all ages – yes, that this love has furnished the concept of love as the opposite of egoism when it may in fact be the most candid expression of egoism. Here is it evidently the have-nots and the yearning ones who have formed linguistic usage – there have probably always been too many of them.

Those who were granted much possession and satiety in this area must occasionally have made some casual remark about "the raging demon", as did that most charming and beloved of all Athenians, Sophocles. But Eros always laughed at such blasphemers; they were always precisely his greatest darlings. Here and there on earth there is probably a kind of continuation of love in which this greedy desire of two people for each other gives way to a new desire and greed, a shared higher thirst for an ideal above them. But who knows such love? Who has experienced it? Its true name is *friendship*.