

International philosophical workshop

PHILOSOPHY AND EROS
Conceptual and historical debates

9-10.12.2024

Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

Monday, December 9

10:30 – 12.00 *First session*

Joel Backström, **From love's longing to perverse fantasy: displacing sexuality and moral understanding**

Adriana Zaharijević, **Sexuality and Capitalism**

Aleksandra Knežević, **Reconstructing love: Beyond deconstruction, postmodernism, and neoliberalism**

Zona Zarić, **Can Love Become a Space for Authentic Relationality Rather than a Continuation of Patriarchal Norms? Exploring Love's Emancipatory and Oppressive Potentials in Feminist Theory**

12.00-12.30 Coffee break

12.30-14.45 *Second session*

Niklas Toivakainen, **Dreams of lawlessness: on love, recognition, and incest prohibition.**

Andrea Perunović, **Eros Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy: Drive, Desire, Love**

Milan Urošević, **The Loss of Eros and its Rebirth – Domination and Resistance in the “Self-devouring Society”**

14.45-15.45 *Lunch break*

15.45 -18.00 *Third session*

Natascha Schmelz, **Beyond Desire: Seduction after Eros**

Tuesday, December 10

10.00-12.15 *Fourth session*

Salla Aldrin-Salskov, **The collective game of recognition in our struggles with shame and love**

Igor Cvejić, **Loneliness and Eros**

Olga Nikolić, **Eros and Boredom**

12.15-12.45 *Coffee Break*

12.45-15.00 *Fifth session*

Tamara Plećaš, **Reflections on Love and Logos in Plato and His Successors**

Mark Losoncz, ***Epektasis* as Endless Longing. Contributions to the Phenomenology of Infinite Love**

Aleksandar Ostojić, **Insight of Blindness: Eros, Passion and Reason on the different Playground**

Adriana Zaharijević

The main aim of the talk is to show that sexuality and capitalism are intrinsically related. Such an endeavour demands extracting sex from the domains of nature, reproduction, and the private, and relating it to the intricate world of norms to capitalism. The main part of the talk provides an overview of the historical evolution of capitalism and its relationship to sexuality, focusing on the period of transition from the household family-based economy to a fully developed capitalist free labour economy. The main characters of the talk are *homo economicus* and his economically invisible wife, the producers of valuable social relations, as well as various 'reformable' or 'irreformable' others whose sex is deemed of no value or even against value. I will present social relations as capitalist *and* sexual, and treat the dichotomies social–natural, public–private, and economic–cultural as interwoven in the (de)politicization of both sexuality and capitalism.

Insight of Blindness: Eros, Passion and Reason on the different Playground

Aleksandar Ostojić

In this paper, I would like to examine a dual understanding of passion, Eros, and pleasure in terms of their influence on the knowledge and well-being of the human soul. Although, since antiquity, there has been a well-established narrative of the opposition between pleasure and passion, which belong to the body, and knowledge and rationality, which are the characteristics of the mind and soul (as in the case of Plato's dialogues *Republic*, *Phaedon*, and *Symposium*), there were many places where the idea of rapture or ecstasy calls for a completely different interpretation. For example, in Epictetus, Plotinus, and even Seneca, rapture and passion driven by *Eros*, by the state of "being in love", become a necessary path to bliss. So, not something to be shunned because it blinds reason, and

interferes with the "peace" and "sanity" of the soul, but something that peace and chastity must embrace in order to rise to true well-being, beauty and knowledge. The culmination of this reaffirmation of *Eros* will occur in the Renaissance, with the postulation of the triad *castitas – voluptas – pulchritudo*, the interpretation of which I will try to offer. Although the main supports of this presentation will be Renaissance texts, and Martha Nussbaum's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*, the intention is to offer the modern context of such interpretations, and see where the presented ideas can take us when it comes to today's understanding of Eros, passion and pleasure, and their role in the well-being of human life.

Reconstructing love: Beyond deconstruction, postmodernism, and neoliberalism

Aleksandra Knežević

In my talk, I will explore love and a philosophy of love against the backdrop of contemporary reality. I will argue that the notion of love guiding our actions today is postmodern, shaped by neoliberalism and individualism, resulting in an almost consumer-like approach to deconstructed love. After examining the social ontology that has given rise to such a notion and reality of love, I will speculate on possible directions for a philosophy of love that addresses not only our ideological but also psychological needs. I will propose a claim that challenging conservative views on love requires us to develop normative frameworks, similar to those rejected by many progressive feminist philosophers and social theorists.

Eros Between Psychoanalysis and Philosophy: Drive, Desire, Love

Andrea Perunović

As it has been already recognized in innumerable examples throughout the history of philosophy, the word, name and figure of Eros possess a very rich multiplicity of meanings. The aim of this intervention will be to give a brief note on three of them: drive, desire and love. In order to sketch a portrait of Eros as a contemporary critical concept, we will engage in a repetitive movement between psychoanalysis and philosophy, thus making connections between the concepts of drive, desire and love. In an intentionally non-linear and anachronistic fashion, we will begin with the Freudian conception of drive (*Trieb*). The Freudian Eros, the life drive, will be exposed as the theoretically most stripped-down conception of Eros. An argument for that claim will be supported by the relation that Eros has with its opposite – the death drive – in the context of the Freud's conception of the pleasure principle. Moreover, we will turn our attention to the notion of desire. In order to grasp Eros as desire, we will expose the Lacanian reading of Plato's *Symposium*, thus giving a comprehensive explanation of Lacan's famous definition of desire as a "lack of being". As a counterpoint to the Lacanian theory and in order to stress the ambiguity of the notion of desire (thus improving our understanding of Eros), we will briefly address the concept of desire such as it is being encountered in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Finally, we will address Eros as love. Against the idea that love is a desire for possession of a loved one (which has been well-rooted at least since Aristophanes) and following the footsteps of Georges Bataille, we will propose the idea of love as loss of selfhood. By elaborating furthermore Bataille's concept of eroticism (which according to him coincides with the supreme philosophical question), we will show how Eros is not only a simple manifestation of love, but a key for a critical re-examination of human existence.

Loneliness and Eros

Igor Cvejić

I will first analyze the experience of loneliness and distinguish it from the phenomenon of solitude (*Einsamkeit*), commonly addressed by existentialist philosophers. Loneliness entails not only the *absence* or *lack* of some social goods or relations (Roberts & Krueger), but, more specifically, the sense of *being unable* to access social and personal possibilities that may still appear accessible to others (Ratcliffe). In strong opposition to solitude, this inaccessibility is connected to impossibility of appearing, lack of self-realization and, thus, the disruption of self-experience. Considering that the experience of loneliness is essentially characterized by longing for meaningful relations, it has some similarities to *eros*. On the other side, the inaccessibility might designate a real opposition to *eros* or its suspension. I will have two concrete aims. (1) First, I will explore the social shapes which contribute to the experience of loneliness. (2) Second, I will argue that the analysis of negative aspects of loneliness, precisely by addressing the lack and inaccessibility, might inform as of the properties of *eros* we easily tend to overlook.

From love's longing to perverse fantasy: displacing sexuality and moral understanding

Joel Backström

This paper sketches a perspective on sexuality, love, and moral understanding, indicating how they can be related by relating them to a contrasting fourth term: perversion. I advance three interconnected claims. First, that the logic of perversion, as manifest in what are ordinarily understood as sexual perversions, also pervasively structures what we consider 'normal' sexuality. Secondly, that moral life and thinking are likewise largely – although, like sexuality, not originally or exclusively – structured by essentially the same perverse logic. Perversion itself I understand as, at

root – and this is the third claim – a defence against, and repression of, love; ‘love’ conceived not in standard romantic terms, but as welcoming the always-already given openness between human beings. Hence, ‘perversion’ refers not to a transgression of moral or other societal norms, but to the desperate dynamics through which we try to limit the openness between us by erecting norms, whether the fantasy and rituals of their enactment are private or collective.

***Epektasis* as Endless Longing. Contributions to the Phenomenology of Infinite Love**

Mark Losoncz

While in earlier paradigms of (romantic) thinking about love, eternity was taken for granted, today we are increasingly witnessing an emphasis on the finite nature of love, the thesis that love, especially in its "flaming", intense form, necessarily comes to an end. This is the position taken by Denis de Rougemont in his classic work, and is supposedly supported by biological-neurological arguments, and socio-cultural trends also show that we are increasingly behaving in accordance with it. Showing resistance to this, the lecture will be about a paradigm of thinking about love that sees love as explicitly infinite/eternal. The starting point will be the concept of *ἐπέκτασις*, first used in a strict sense by Gregory of Nyssa, to mean "the soul's eternal movement into God's infinite being" and "unceasing evolution in eternal happiness". However, this gave rise to an *epektasis* paradigm in Christian mysticism, theology and contemplative traditions, as Bernard McGinn has suggested, which emphasised the infinite, unquenchable, ever-renewing nature of love. The lecture will draw on such examples, as well as inspiration from other Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions and spiritual traditions.

The Loss of Eros and its Rebirth – Domination and Resistance in the “Self-devouring Society”

Milan Urošević

The presentation will consist of two segments. The first will be dedicated to defining domination in contemporary neoliberalism, while in the second segment we will address attempts to conceptualize resistance to this form of domination. Following Lacan, we understand the subject as characterized by a "lack" that continuously generates desire. We will define domination as the generation of "phantasms" in the symbolic order that work as narratives that link the subject to the Big Other, i.e., virtual figures of authority perceived as what holds the symbolic order together and, through phantasms, regulate the subject's desire, thus providing it with a certain identity. In the case of neoliberalism, we will claim that this understanding of domination changes, as the subject's desire is regulated by the "self-entrepreneurial fantasy", a narrative that prompts the subject to regulate its desire through the pursuit of certain ideals, such as "happiness", "self-fulfillment", "success", and the like. More precisely, the subject is directed at investing in itself as a bundle of capital that must be regulated in a certain way to fulfill these ideals. Therefore, we can say that domination in neoliberalism consists of guiding the subject to "consume" itself in order to fulfill the ideals prescribed by the Big Other.

In line with this understanding of domination, we will define resistance as an endeavor to articulate "eros", understood as the immanent possibility of desire to question prescribed fantasies. Eros will thus be defined as the subject's immanent drive to transcend the existing symbolic order and the identity it prescribes. In other words, we will present eros as the subject's striving for subjective destitution, i.e., the rejection of existing symbolic mandates. In our understanding of resistance, we will rely on

Foucault's idea of a "critical community" and attempt to conceptualize the form of social bond it generates, which we will see as a precondition for creating political resistance to neoliberal domination. Our claim will be that this social bond is based on the articulation of eros, i.e., on connecting subjects on the basis of the lack that alienates them from any identity prescribed by phantasms. In other words, we will argue that the "critical community" can be seen as a movement based on subjective destitution and the eros-generated drive to transcend the symbolic order.

Beyond Desire: Seduction after Eros

Natascha Schmelz

Freudo-Marxist conceptions perceive Eros as a liberating force, which contains an emancipatory and creative potential, but got distorted by the capitalist mode of production. Especially in Marcuse's thought, the transformation of Eros as non-repressive sublimation plays a crucial role in transforming society and its individuals, allowing the constitution of autonomy and freedom. Marcuse's Marxist optimistic visions on technology and its role in liberating humanity and human desire have been highly challenged by Baudrillard. Baudrillard (as well as Adorno and Horkheimer before Marcuse) points out that immense technological progress under capitalism, not only has not liberated humanity, but has deepened human alienation, commodifying every aspect of existence, including desire. In his earlier works, such as *Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard criticises Marcuse's (and in general Marxist) positing of Eros and desire within the realm of production. As such, Eros remains within the framework of the system which is the subject of critique. In general, Baudrillard questions the posing of the human being into this "productionist shema".

The second part of the presentation aims to analyse Baudrillard's model of

seduction (as presented in his highly controversial book of the same name – *Seduction* as well as *Ecstasy of Communication*) during the turning point in his thought. According to Baudrillard, seduction does not oppose, but seduces production. As a play of signs and appearances, a form of symbolic exchange, it destabilises the system of production, as it brings reversibility into the irreversible (linear) process of accumulation, goal-orientedness and fulfilment. Seduction is understood as a "fundamental principle", whereas desire is still related to the discourse of sexuality and production. Therefore, seduction transcends this realm, as something more profound. It is "not the locus of desire (and thus of alienation) but of giddiness, of the eclipse, of appearance and disappearance, of the scintillation of being" (*Ecstasy of Communication*, pp. 66). Accordingly, seduction is not necessarily a prelude to bodily interactions, but is in constant flux – it does not strive towards an end. As a play of rituals and appearances, closely related to metamorphosis, seduction plays with desire, rather than fulfilling or liberating it. Accordingly, the framework of seduction occurs as an *Other*, as a flash or glare, which transcends the realm of production and desire and challenges the order of hyperreality.

The aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of these topics and to ultimately challenge Baudrillard's claim that Eros is surpassed in the order of neocapitalist hyperreality.

Dreams of lawlessness: on love, recognition, and incest prohibition.

Niklas Toivakainen

This paper will move in a speculative fashion exploring the relationship between love, recognition, and incest prohibition. I start by sketching out how the logic of recognition always presupposes, and responds to, love—what I will call the *address as such*—while simultaneously being irreducible to love, arguing that that the strive to fuse recognition with love, identity with subjectivity, marks the disavowal of love. I then move on to my speculative suggestion that incest prohibition constitutes the primordial event, or manifestation, of the fundamental gap between love and recognition. Following Lacan's claim that incest prohibition in fact marks a structural impossibility, I argue that this impossibility is in fact understandable, its truth, its nature, can only be understood, from the perspective of love, i.e. through a seeing of the reality of the *relation* to the other. Following this, I come with the suggestion that the fantasy of incest can be understood as the (perverse) fantasy to reduce oneself—and one's relation to the other—to partial objects of satisfaction/recognition. I end with the further suggestion that this fantasy is the fantasy of 'pure sexuality', of sex *as such*.

Eros and Boredom

Olga Nikolić

Starting from the idea that a phenomenon can be more fully understood by examining its opposite, this presentation begins with the question: *What is the opposite of eros?* I will argue that boredom serves as this antithesis. I will draw on the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and Arthur Schopenhauer—both of whom consider boredom a fundamental force of existence yet arrive at contrasting responses to it. Schopenhauer's response is to clearly recognize and stoically accept the inevitability of the meaningless cycle of desire. On the other hand Kierkegaard, like Pascal before him, finds answer in the leap

of faith. I want to explore whether the contrasting attitude towards boredom is reflected as well in their attitude towards eros and desire, in order to draw conclusions on how eros relates to the existential question of meaningfulness and meaninglessness.

The collective game of recognition in our struggles with shame and love

Salla Aldrin-Salskov

This paper explores the role of recognition in the context of sexuality and love and elaborates on its role in relation to moral understanding by engaging with the work of Maggie Nelson (*The Argonauts*, and her essay "The Ballad of Sexual Optimism"). In queer theory, shame and recognition are deeply intertwined, shame functioning both as a tool of oppression and as a potential site of resistance (Warner 1999, Munoz 1999, Love 2007). Queer theory has critiqued how recognition is often contingent on conformity to societal norms and has explored the possibility of resisting these norms through alternative forms of recognition, pride, and subversion (Sedgwick 1999, 2003; Butler 1997; Halperin & Traub 2009). By examining the role of recognition and shame both as problems and as acts of resistance, this paper argues that, while issues raised in queer theoretical literature on shame often concern recognition, in the context of sexuality and love what is really at stake is the role of moral understanding in I-You relations. By rethinking shame not only as a negative affect or as a catalyst for social change, but as an inherent part of the collective game of recognition, the paper argues that the antidote to shame is not pride (or recognition), but rather an exploration of the tensions in our relation to phenomena and notions in our life such as love, joy and goodness.

Reflections on Love and Logos in Plato and His Successors

Tamara Plećaš

One of the conclusions from Plato's Phaedrus is that life (of a philosopher) should be aligned according to love and logos (ἄπλῶς πρὸς ἔρωτα μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγων τὸν βίον ποιῆται. Plato, Phaedrus 257b). In my talk, I want to explore precisely this connection between love (i.e. eros and friendship), and logos (i.e. philosophy and wisdom), as seen in Plato and later Hellenistic philosophy.

Philosophical tradition highlights that Socrates, unlike many other Athenians, professed ignorance (as seen in Plato's Apology). Yet it appears—from Plato and other sources—that Socrates does know certain things. In Plato's Symposium, Socrates states, 'the only subject I can claim to know about is love (τὰ ἐρωτικά)' (Plato, Symp. 177d). Diotima of Mantinea, who was known for her wisdom (σοφία) on the topic of love and 'many other subjects as well,' taught Socrates (τὰ ἐρωτικά ἐδίδαξεν) (Plato, Symp. 201d). Moreover, in Plato's Menexenus, Socrates claims that he learned oratory from Aspasia, who 'trained many skilled speakers,' including Pericles (Plato, Menex. 235e). Thus, Socrates is well-versed in both oratory and matters of love, and these skills are intrinsically intertwined with both philosophy and wisdom.

This figure of Socrates left a significant impact on Hellenistic philosophy and its perception of the subjects of love and logos (understood broadly), which will be explored in greater detail.

Can Love Become a Space for Authentic Relationality Rather than a Continuation of Patriarchal Norms? Exploring Love's Emancipatory and Oppressive Potentials in Feminist Theory

Zona Zarić

This talk explores the dual nature of love as both a potential tool for liberation and an instrument of patriarchal control. How can love transform into a space of authentic relationality, fostering mutual recognition and equality, rather than perpetuating

restrictive norms that bind women to prescribed roles and expectations? By examining the writings of bell hooks and Mona Chollet, this presentation will trace how patriarchal structures have historically colonized women's bodies, minds, and emotions through romantic ideals and the idealization of submission that often restrict women's agency. Through hooks' critical insights on the importance of love as a revolutionary practice and Chollet's analysis of how patriarchy sabotages intimacy and relationality, we will investigate love's contradictory roles. Does love hold the emancipatory potential to transcend these limits and cultivate spaces for genuine connection and self-realization, or is it inherently bound to the frameworks of power that subordinate women? By analyzing these questions, the talk aims to outline a path for rethinking love as a means of fostering autonomy and equality in relational life.