

RE-POSITIONING LOVE AS A VALUABLE PART OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Love is under threat because it is no longer something precious. In a culture steeped in capitalism, love becomes a commodity. Love turns into an instrument or tool for the achievement of something else. Love is considered something that cannot be found in real life and only remains in fiction and literature. Alain Badiou's schema of mathematics as ontology demonstrates that it is still possible to put love back as part of life and that love has value. Badiou reveals that initially, love is related to the self and is not a tool or instrument for anything outside the self. Love gives value to the human appreciation of life concerning its existence.

ABSTRAK

Konsep cinta berada dalam bahaya karena cinta tidak lagi dianggap sebagai sesuatu yang berharga. Dalam budaya yang sarat dengan kapitalisme, cinta kemudian berubah menjadi komoditas. Cinta berubah menjadi instrumen atau alat untuk mencapai sesuatu yang lain. Cinta dianggap sebagai sesuatu yang tidak dapat ditemukan dalam kehidupan nyata dan hanya ada dalam fiksi dan sastra semata. Menggunakan skema matematika sebagai ontologi yang digagas oleh Alain Badiou menunjukkan bahwa cinta masih mungkin untuk ditempatkan kembali sebagai bagian dari kehidupan dan bahwa cinta memiliki nilai yang berharga. Badiou mengungkapkan bahwa pada awalnya, cinta berhubungan dengan diri sendiri dan bukan alat atau instrumen untuk sesuatu di luar diri. Pada akhirnya cinta mampu memberikan nilai pada apresiasi manusia terhadap kehidupan mengenai keberadaan atau eksistensinya.

I. INTRODUCTION

French philosopher Alain Badiou says that love is under threat. He says love no longer has deep meaning and significance in today's contemporary culture. The existence of online dating sites makes love no longer a moment to look forward to; it has turned into a risk-free love because people can plan love, and even love turns into a kind of game (Badiou & Truong, 2012). Whereas love begins with falling in love, it is a spontaneous moment rather than planned, let alone considered a game in an internet application.

In addition, love also undergoes a process of commodification due to acute capitalism in the culture. This condition makes love always related to material things. For example, Valentine's Day, which is considered a day of love, has become synonymous with shopping for chocolates and flowers. As a result, when

someone does not give flowers and chocolates on Valentine's Day, they will be considered to have no affection for their loved ones. Love has then turned into a fetishised commodity (Mažeikis, 2015). When a man asks his girlfriend's parents for permission to marry her, the girl's parents ask their future son-in-law: "What do you do for a living?" rather than: "Do you love my daughter?". Nowadays, many parents do not even think that true love will be able to overcome all the trials of married life. The longevity and happiness of a household seem to be measured by economic security. If the man does not have a job that the girl's parents consider worthy, then there is an imagination that the fate of the household will face many difficulties.

Love becomes something like nonsense. Love only remains in fiction, literature, films, and television shows, but we cannot find love in the real world. Love has become a fantasy and a dream far beyond reality that cannot be real.

"A global society based on an ethic of solidarity and love as the primary human existential is an impossible dream." (Hartwig, 2015)

Love, along with trust, sharing, and solidarity, is the underlying order of all human social life (Hartwig, 2015). Roy Bhaskar, a British philosopher, even said that unless love prevails, humanity will cease to exist (Hartwig, 2015).

Then, is there a way to restore the "dignity" of love in human life? Is there a way to make love a valuable part of life again? Alain Badiou says love can still be part of human life and even give meaning to appreciating human existence. People tend to forget their presence in the world because they are immersed in their daily lives, leading to the inaugural forgetting of their existence (Badiou, 2005). Heidegger stated that the anxiety and fear of death would awaken people from forgetting and make them reflect and re-live their lives (Blattner, 2006). However, Alain Badiou says it is not only the fear of death that will make people rethink their presence in the world. Love can also awaken people from their forgetfulness. When falling in love, people will experience a different world. The world is then perceived as something new, and people can rethink their lives because of love.

Alain Badiou says that we must understand mathematics as an ontology to recover love as a meaningful thing. Ontology is the basis for understanding everything that exists because ontology is a prerequisite for understanding everything (Norris, 2015). In the simplest terms, ontology is a device for people to grasp and comprehend the reality in the world. Traditionally, language has been chosen to explain ontology. Nevertheless, Badiou says mathematics, rather than language, is most equipped to explain reality. Therefore, mathematics is ontology rather than language.

Specifically, this article will elaborate on how to reinstate love into life as something valuable by using Alain Badiou's scheme of thought. Alain Badiou is one of the philosophers who tried to recover love as something valuable. He proposes a counter-narrative to the concept of love, which has been attached mainly to capitalism, such that love turns into commodification and objectification of material for the sheer interest of capital accumulation.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative method with a narrative-descriptive approach was chosen to answer the research problem. The narrative-descriptive approach intends to explain a topic of discussion together with its characteristics. The explanation should be in a way that does not distance the researcher from the object of

investigation. The approach includes temporality as a part of the enquiry process (McAlpine, 2016).

In this method, the researcher is also allowed to experience the process of self-formation. The narrative-descriptive method allows for the construction and reconstruction of the self between the research subject and the object of the research. Primary sources in this research utilise three main works written by Alain Badiou. The original texts of the three books are written in French, but the English version is used throughout this research. While the primary sources used are translated from the original language, these translated texts are still considered acceptable and authoritative to be the source of the study.

The translated texts in English were translated by translators who were also students of Alain Badiou. It is assumed that the translation process will have very few mistakes (lost in translation) because the translator has sufficient knowledge of the topic discussed in the translated book. Furthermore, the translation was also given a preface and acknowledgement by Alain Badiou himself. Thus, it can be concluded that the author has authorised the translation.

The first primary source used is a book entitled Being and Event or, in its French version, *L'Être et l'Événement*. This book was first published in 1988. Oliver Feltham's translated version, published in 2005, is used in this research. The second primary source is a book entitled Conditions. The French version was first published in 1992. The English version was translated by Steven Corcoran and published in 2008. The third primary source is the English version of In Praise of Love, translated by Peter Bush and published in 2012. The original French version of this book is titled *Éloge de l'amour* and was first published in 2009. Other than the three books by Alain Badiou that are used as primary sources, other works of literature are also used as additional materials to complete the analysis.

A text analysis process was chosen to answer the problems that are the focus of the study. Text analysis aims to study the logical concepts of Alain Badiou's thoughts to carry out a reflection process to solve research problems.

The qualitative method, which uses a narrative-descriptive approach through text analysis, has its weaknesses. The method presents limitations in the experiences that the researcher can tell because the story is entirely based on the source of the story (in this case, the primary source of Alain Badiou's book). This method also allows the researcher, who acts as a storyteller, to provide interpretations most comfortable from the researcher's subjective side (McAlpine, 2016). Overcoming this drawback requires the researcher to engage in the process of reflection to provide space for critical analysis and not just act as a storyteller who copies and pastes from the source.

III. DISCUSSION

3.1 The Thoughts that Influenced Alain Badiou

Many philosophical ideas have influenced Alain Badiou's system of philosophy. Nevertheless, in general, two thoughts are considered dominant influences they are (1) Mathematics and (2) Marxism. Badiou would later say that mathematics is ontology and proclaimed himself a Marxist.

As understood by Badiou, Marxism is interpreted by Louis Althusser. Althusser was one of the professors who lectured Badiou while studying at ENS France. Althusser categorised Marxist thought into several periods. According to Althusser, in his works, Karl Marx underwent a significant process of change,

which Althusser called an epistemic break (Althusser, 2005). Further, Althusser said that humans as agents are not entirely independent but are influenced by the socio-political structures in which they live. From there, Badiou formulated a concept called situation.

A situation is an arrangement or structure in which people perceive *Being*. All the things that are present, visible, and able to be perceived by humans always appear in a situation. Without a situation, humans cannot perceive *Being* (Badiou, 2005). Consequently, the reality humans perceive is always a reality within a structured system. Even though humans often capture reality as something random, what appears random is (actually) present in a structured situation. People would never be able to capture anything (including reality) if they were not in a situation.

Alongside Marxism, Badiou's system of philosophy is also built on the logic used in mathematics. In this regard, Badiou uses the axioms of set theory. Badiou's background is as a mathematician; for him, only mathematics can explain everything. Mathematics is a discourse of thought that provides instruments for humans to understand everything, including reality.

3.2 Mathematics as Ontology

According to Badiou, the reality experienced by humans can be explained through mathematics, primarily through set theory. The set theory explains the process of organising and collectivity perceived by humans. The set theory can also simultaneously explain the One, the Multiple, and the Void. For example, when humans understand a bedroom, the bedroom is a reality that is already in a structured form or referred to as a situation. A bedroom, as a situation, is understood as a place that consists of a bed, a wardrobe, and a desk. In mathematics, we would say:

$$\text{Bedroom} = \{\text{bed, wardrobe, desk}\}$$

The bedroom is the set of a bed, a wardrobe, and a desk. In this case, the bedroom is the situation that collects the bed, the wardrobe, and the desk. The bedroom is the structure of the situation, while the bed, wardrobe, and desk are the elements or members that make up the situation of the bedroom. If taken further, a bedroom is also an element or member of a larger set, say the set of houses. Hence,

$$\text{House} = \{\text{bedroom, living room, kitchen, toilet}\}$$

A house is also a member or element of a larger set, say the set of cities. The set of cities is also a member of a larger set, and so on until infinity. It follows here that a member of a set is always a set. For this reason, *Being*, according to Badiou, always appears in multiple forms (Badiou, 2005).

If the *Being* is always present in Multiple forms, then does the One not exist? The One, Badiou says, is the effect of counting when the elements in the set are being counted. Let us take the example of the set of a bedroom. The One is when the bed, wardrobe, and desk are counted as the elements. The bed, wardrobe, and desk become One because each is counted as one. The One, therefore, is not an essence but rather an effect. Therefore, the Multiple and the One can simultaneously represent something that constitutes the *Being*. The *Being* here is both the Multiple and the One simultaneously.

In this way, Badiou addresses Plato's difficulty in explaining ontology as written in the Parmenides dialogue. If the *Being* is One, why is the reality that people always perceive reality in the form of the Multiple? However, if reality is Multiple, then there is no One. Thus, Plato says that reality is essentially One, culminating in the *Idea*. All that appears to be Multiple perceived by humans is only a copy of the One. The One can be found in the ideal world somewhere far away, while the world experienced by humans as the real world only reflects the ideal world (Plato, 1997).

Nevertheless, according to Badiou, the real world perceived by humans is the actual reality, not just a copy. An ideal world does not exist. Everything that humans can perceive is already an ideal world itself. Badiou said that Plato considers that *Being* culminates in an *idea* in an ideal world because Plato does not understand mathematics as ontology. Consequently, Plato has difficulty accepting that the One and the Multiple can exist simultaneously as components that compose the *Being*.

In addition, mathematics as ontology can also explain the existence of the Void, as Badiou commented on Plato's difficulty in understanding the Void. Plato says that if everything exists, how can the Void be explained? Is not what is Nothing, but also something that exists? If Nothing is something that does not exist, then humans would not be able to think about It because the ability of humans to think about something is only possible if it is something that exists. So, Nothing is an existing thing. However, how is that possible? If all things exist, then they cannot be Nothing. If Nothing exists, then it cannot be existent. It would be intellectually unacceptable for the existent and the Nothing to exist simultaneously (Plato, 1997).

The existent and the Nothing are possible to exist simultaneously. According to Badiou, this can be explained if we understand the axioms used in set theory, especially the empty and power set axioms. The axioms of the empty set say that there is a set with no members, denoted by \emptyset . The power set axiom says every set can be broken into subsets. The numbers of these subsets will be much larger than the set elements following the formula 2^n , where n is the number of set elements (Banakh, 2020). As an example, the set of the bedroom has three elements or members, namely bed, wardrobe, and desk or

$$\text{Bedroom} = \{\text{bed, wardrobe, desk}\}$$

This bedroom set can be broken down into subsets. Since the elements of the set of rooms are three, the number of subsets will be eight according to the formula 2^n or $2^3 = 8$. The subsets of the set of rooms are:

1. $\{\text{bed}\}$
2. $\{\text{wardrobe}\}$
3. $\{\text{desk}\}$
4. $\{\text{bed, wardrobe}\}$
5. $\{\text{bed, desk}\}$
6. $\{\text{wardrobe, desk}\}$
7. $\{\text{bed, wardrobe, desk}\}$

All the elements of the set of bedrooms have been divided into subsets. There are only seven subsets, whereas according to the axiom of the power set, it should be eight. Then what is the eighth subset of the set of bedrooms? The answer is \emptyset .

An empty set is always the foundation or base of the entire set. It does not count as an element or member, so the number of elements or members of the set of rooms is 3 (bed, wardrobe, and desk) instead of 4. The empty set is only identified when a set is broken down into its subsets. Hence, the subsets of the set of bedrooms are as follows:

1. {bed}
2. {wardrobe}
3. {desk}
4. {bed, wardrobe}
5. {bed, desk}
6. {wardrobe, desk}
7. {bed, wardrobe, desk}
8. \emptyset

It is here that the Existent and the Nothing are simultaneously present. The empty set is the foundation of every set and is always present. However, the empty set is never counted as an element or member of the set. Therefore, the empty set becomes void. As the empty set is always the foundation of every set whose existence can be identified in the subsets, the empty set becomes existent. Here, the empty set as emptiness simultaneously becomes the Existent and the Nothing.

It is what Badiou means by mathematics as ontology. Mathematics can explain *being qua being*, the *Being as Being* (Bowden, 2005). Reality can be explained by mathematics as a reason for thought. Mathematics is a discourse of thought. Badiou rejects the identification of *Being* as a totality, as Plato stated that *Being* is a totality that culminates in the Idea (Farrán, 2008). The ontological problems have been difficult to solve. For example, the problem of the One vis-à-vis the Multiple and the Existent vis-à-vis the Nothing is answered by mathematics. Mathematics as ontology does not mean that ontology is composed of mathematical objects, but mathematics as ontology is a logic that structures reality (Daniel, 2016).

In summary, Badiou says that *Being* or the Existing is always perceived by humans in an organised structure or called a situation. If *Being* or the Existent is not in a situation, then humans will not be able to perceive it. The presence of *Being* is always framed by structure, even though what appears often appears in an unorganised manner. Moreover, *Being* is always present in the Multiple. The One is only a counting effect when a process of structuring takes place in which the elements of a situation are arranged. For example, a bedroom situation is created when a process of structuring takes place. The elements of a bedroom situation are arranged to create a set of bedrooms.

Moreover, Badiou says that there is always an empty set in a situation. It is a foundation for every set but is not counted as an element. The empty set is, therefore, the Existent and the Nothing simultaneously. The empty set will also be the site or location where the transformation process of the situation occurs. To Badiou, philosophy means bringing the hidden in the situation to be present and counted as an element. Philosophy is thus an interrogation of the situation's structure to create a new structure within the situation that can make the invisible and uncountable present and countable. This process is called an event (Badiou, 2005).

Therefore, philosophy is a process of abstraction and actual praxis. Philosophy is a process of abstraction because philosophy is an attempt to

interrogate the structure of situations. After all, it is through these situations that humans can perceive the *Being*. Philosophy is also an actual praxis because humans not only carry out the interrogation process but also actively try to bring the hidden from the situation to be present. It means that philosophy is always an effort to make a change. Philosophy is a process of understanding *being* and seeking to bring out the hidden from *being* through an active attempt called an event.

Philosophy as an abstraction and praxis always occurs in an arena or field. Philosophy never takes place in the air but always in a limiting place. It is what is called a condition. Conditions are the world in which philosophy operates. Moreover, according to Badiou, there are four conditions: politics, science, art, and love. These four conditions are the place where all human experiences in the world occur (Badiou, 2008). In these four conditions, the process of subjectification is also possible to occur (Hallward, 2003).

3.3 Re-positioning Love

Indeed, love has always been inherent as an integral part of human life. Over the years, love has always been used as an ideological tool, as a source for all ethical debates, as a way of understanding differences, and as something that has biological, social, and material power (Petö, 2015).

For the conservative, love is not just a private matter between two subjects. More than that, love is also a public matter that must be regulated. Love is also related to socio-political affairs, which can perpetuate the ideal status quo (Szilvay, 2015). Love is the basis of family formation, and the family itself is the basis of the social system. Therefore, love always has a socio-political dimension.

Nevertheless, this is where love loses its dignity. Love is then seen only as an instrument for achieving something else. Love is no longer something precious in life that has noble value. For conservatives, love is an instrument for preserving the status quo. For Marxists, love is an instrument for resistance to alienation (Mažeikis, 2015), and in the capitalist culture surrounding our culture today, love is nothing but a tool for capital accumulation.

It subsequently makes love invaluable and puts love under threat following Alain Badiou's term. Love becomes an illusion that cannot be found in the real world, an unrealistic dream that remains only in fairy tales, literary works, and fictional stories. It becomes a game because love is always seen, not in itself *per se*. Love is always seen from the perspective of something closely related to something else.

Then how do we re-position love as a valuable part of life? As Alain Badiou says, love is a condition. Love is the arena or field where philosophy can operate. Philosophy itself means doing abstraction and doing actual praxis. To restore the position of love as something valuable, recover the dignity of love, and reject the position of love only as something instrumental is understanding the ontology of love. Badiou explains ontology with mathematics, and love can be explained with mathematics.

In mathematics as ontology, Badiou says that *Being* is always present in a situation. Love, as a subjective experience, is always experienced in a situation. Human life experience is always present in a situation because human experience also contains the presence of *Being*.

If two subjects experience love, then initially, there are always two situations in which humans perceive *Being*. Let us call a situation feminine or SF for the life experience experienced by a female subject and a situation masculine or SM for

the life experience experienced by a male subject. Therefore, love always assumes two positions of experience because love always occurs between two subjects (De Chavez, 2015). Love is always intersubjective. Love always involves the other (Price, 2012).

These two experience positions (SF and SM) are completely disjunct. There is no connection at all between SF and SM. Both have their own life experiences that are different from one another. The connection between SF and SM is established when they meet, or in Badiou's terms, an encounter through an event called falling in love.

An event in Badiou's scheme of thought brings the invisible and uncountable into the present and countable. In the end, there is a change in the situation. The structure that makes up the situation changes due to new elements. Falling in love as an event always happens suddenly, spontaneously, unexpectedly, and unplanned (Badiou, 2008). Falling in love as an event brings something previously invisible into the situation. SF and SM then experience transformation because of the structure of the situation that composes their changes. Being in love presents a new experience for SF and SM, and this experience is shared between them. This experience is referred to as the Scene of Two. The Scene of Two is an experience felt by SF and SM when they both experience falling in love. Before falling in love, SF and SM had their own life experiences. However, when they fall in love, SF and SM share an experience of life. The world previously experienced through an individual gaze is then experienced through a shared gaze. This shared scene completes the experience of SF and SM and becomes the meeting point between them (Jottkandt, 2011). Therefore, love is always present between the two parties involved and does not allow the other party's presence (De Chavez, 2016).

Falling in love as an event then changes the structure of SF and SM to SF(Scene of two) and SM(Scene of two). There is a change in the structure that composes the situation. The situation expands because of the presence of the Scene of Two. The ontology of love explained by Badiou can also overcome the problem of unity and difference in love (Jottkandt, 2011). When falling in love occurs, SF and SM are united in a shared life experience through the Scene of Two. It is here that love, which requires unity, can be explained. However, despite unity, the two parties are still separate subjects. Both remain independent subjects and do not merge into one. Both SF and SM remain present and do not fuse into one. Therefore, love as an intersubjective experience between two different subjects can be explained. Intersubjective experience requires the existence of two equal and independent subject positions without the objectification process of one subject towards the other (Roth, 2018). As an event, falling in love has a reflective, intensive, and powerful character (Watrous, 2012).

Love as a condition where the process of philosophising occurs is then able to present new experiences in human life because falling in love as an event can change the structure of the situation of life experience (in this case, there is an expansion of the situation of SF and SM into SF (Scene of two) and SM (Scene of two)). Love can bring the hidden from the situation and bring it into the situation.

It is the way to re-position love as something valuable in life. Love provides a way for humans to realise their existence because love can bring different life experiences. This is why during a wedding, the bride and groom's greeting is: "Congratulations on your new life" because falling in love as an event presents a new structure in the life experience experienced by humans.

Therefore, first and foremost, love is not an instrument for achieving other things outside the self, such as preserving the status quo, resisting alienation, or a tool for capital accumulation. Love is primarily an appreciation of life. It is reasonable for Roy Bhaskar to state that humanity will become extinct without love because humanity is always related to the search for the essence of human existence. As Sartre said, human beings first exist in the world, and during their life, they always try to find meaning and the essence of their existence (Gardner, 2009). Without love, humanity will become extinct because humans may live without life. Being human but without humanity.

Love is not something that cannot be found in life, but it is close to life. A pessimistic view that human life is based on love as the foundation of existence is impossible to materialise could be because love is only seen as an instrument for achieving other things outside the self.

Re-positioning love as a valuable part of life begins with the awareness that love is related to the self. Love is not an instrument for anything else. Love is an appreciation of life and is as precious as life itself.

IV. CONCLUSION

Over the years, love has become something that is not discussed much (Dixon, 2001). It has even gone through degradation and is considered not close to life. Furthermore, in a culture dominated by capitalism, love is turned into a commodity. It puts love under threat and turns love into something worthless. Love is only regarded as a tool for the attainment of something else.

Similarly, love is not considered to have the power to overcome all the problems couples will face when they decide to live together. It contrasts with the poetry of Virgil, a Roman poet who said that love could overcome everything or *Omnia vincit amor* (Maro, 1916).

Through Alain Badiou's thought scheme, love can be placed back in an honourable position and recover its dignity. With mathematics as ontology, Badiou explains that love is an appreciation of life. Love can bring something new to life that never existed before. Love must be perceived in terms of itself. Love is related to the self and is not a tool or instrument for anything else.

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