

IS THERE AN EMPIRICAL NATURAL MORALITY FOR LOVERS

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Romantic Love is part of human nature, and I won't put down all the data I have seen, but there is a curious distance between general religious prescriptions – for Christianity and Islam and perhaps others too – about rules between men and women and marriages and a natural morality of lovers. I want to make this precise. When I looked at the Virtue-Eudaimonia problem empirically, I could find it for certain types of moral values but not others. For example, stealing and violence and wife beating and child beating, these sorts of things had a strong correlations between 'good moral values' and high life satisfaction.

For 'sexual values' this no longer held, for example those who think casual sex and sex before marriage have higher life satisfaction. But it's not simply that promiscuity and sexual liberality is a panacea here for prostitution is universally reviled as well. The natural hypothesis is of course that sexuality is the wrong thing to look at when considering any notion of virtues here. Instead there is romantic love, and perhaps there are virtues from considering romantic love as the central issue if we seek a natural morality based on human nature.

Now romantic love was not even considered part of human nature for millenia in any serious way. Scientific work on romantic love does not go before the 1960s and there is now some very nice discoveries starting work of Bartels and Zeki in 2000 in neuroscience that finally returned love as part of human nature. And having returned from oblivion, it can be examined as a possible center for natural human morals on these issues of Virtue-Eudaimonia connection of Aristotle.

I personally naturally agree with 'shun loveless marriages like the plague'. I reminds me of the songs 'Better Man' of Pearl Jam and 'Fake Plastic Trees' of Radiohead. We have the deep exploration of Fyodor Dostoevsky in Crime and Punishment, of the impulse to save the prostitute. These are deep issues. Holy matrimony, we find, is not sacrosanct when the love dies between the partners.

I think that we have managed to develop a culture, at least in the modern West, where the population is quite able to detect issues of love – as 88% of American marriages cite love as the reason for the union – while there is a poverty of understanding the morality that actually consistent with human nature.