

The Selfish Path to Romance

Road Map

Part I: The Basics	1
Chapter 1: What Is Romantic Love?	3
The Visibility Principle.....	6
Chapter 2: Altruism and Narcissism:	
Two Approaches to Love That Do Not Work	12
Altruism	12
Narcissism	20
The “Magical” Affinity of Altruists and Narcissists	24
Chapter 3: True Romantic Love Is Egoistic	27
Chapter 4: Understanding Love	36
Part II: Making Yourself Lovable	47
Chapter 5: Building Moral Character	49
Core Virtues	52
Rationality	52
Honesty	52
Integrity.....	53
Independence.....	53
Justice	53
Productiveness	54
Pride	54
The Immorality of Threatening or Initiating	
Physical Force Against Others	56
Chapter 6: Developing Genuine Self-Esteem	61
Faked Self-Esteem and Defensive Maneuvers	63
Temporary Blows to Self-Esteem—and Recovery	65
Learn to Understand Yourself Through Introspection	66
Chapter 7: Values, Appearance, and Communication	78
Become a Passionate Valuer	79
Care About Your Appearance	82
Learn How to Communicate.....	85

Part III: Finding Your Soul Mate	93
Chapter 8: Achieving Harmony Between Reason and Emotion .	95
Chapter 9: Choosing the Right Partner I	100
Selecting Your Partner	100
Sense of Life.....	101
Values	102
Interests and Tastes.....	104
Personality	105
Chapter 10: Choosing the Right Partner II	109
Habits	109
Attitude Toward Money.....	110
Appearance, Fitness and Health	112
Leisure and Lifestyle.....	114
Visibility	115
Deal-breakers and Trade-offs.....	115
Chapter 11: Choosing the Right Partner III	119
Judging Others: Words versus Actions	119
Look at Your Love Trajectory.....	121
How Do You Know If Your Partner Is “The Right One”?.....	122
What If the Partner You Want Doesn’t Want You?.....	123
How to Search for Potential Partners.....	124
Part IV: Making Your Romantic Relationship Thrive	129
Chapter 12: How to Cherish Your Partner I	131
Show That You Value Your Partner	133
Work to Understand Your Partner	133
Encourage Your Partner to Pursue His or Her Values.....	136
Chapter 13: How to Cherish Your Partner II	141
Communicate Constantly.....	141
Chapter 14: How to Cherish Your Partner III	150
Show Concern for Your Partner’s Welfare.....	150
Show Generosity	152
Make Decisions Together	153
Respect Your Partner’s Need for Private Time.....	153
Chapter 15: Creating a Positive Emotional Climate.....	156
Build a Positive Mood	156
Take Joy in Each Other’s Achievements	158
Grow Together	158

SELFISH PATH ROAD MAP

Show Playfulness and Humor	159
Help Protect One Another Against Stress	160
Chapter 16: Love Destroyers and How to Fix Them	163
Correct Bad Manners and Bad Habits	163
Replace Anger with Positives	164
Replace Repression with the Ability to Feel and Express Emotions.....	168
Replace White Lies with the Truth	169
Don't Let Relatives or Children Undermine Your Relationship.....	171
Don't Let Money Issues Undermine Love	173
Part V: Enjoying Sex	181
Chapter 17: Understanding What Sex Is and Why It's Good	183
Chapter 18: Creating Intimacy and Mood	191
Emotional Intimacy.....	191
Mood	196
Chapter 19: Technique, Afterplay and Feedback	199
Technique	199
Afterplay and Feedback	202
Chapter 20: Prioritizing Sex and Overcoming Subverters of Sexual Pleasure.....	206
Prioritizing Sex.....	206
Overcoming Subverters of Sexual Pleasure.....	208
Anger	208
Fatigue	209
Too Much "Other" Focus	210
Children.....	211
Part VI: Resolving Conflict	217
Chapter 21: Causes of Conflict I	219
Why Some Conflict is Inevitable in All Relationships.....	221
How Differences Between Partners Cause Conflict.....	223
Making Reasonable Differences into Moral Issues	224
Expectations of "Mind Reading"	225
Chapter 22: Causes of Conflict II	227
Violations of the Trader Relationship	227
Insufficient Time Together	228
Gender Differences.....	228

THE SELFISH PATH TO ROMANCE

Chapter 23: Communication Methods That Do Not Work	232
Attacks Using “You” Language.....	233
Global Language	235
Faking “Niceness”	236
Chapter 24: Communication Methods That Work	238
Nip Escalating Tensions in the Bud.....	238
Healthy Assertiveness	239
How to Actively Listen to Your Partner.....	243
Chapter 25: Compromise and Dealing with Your Partner’s Resistance	246
When Should You Compromise and How Do You Do So Fairly?	246
Dealing with Your Partner’s Resistance	248
Epilogue	254
Appendix: How to Part Ways and Start Over If You Cease Being Soul Mates.....	257
1. Identifying Reasons You’re Considering a Divorce	259
2. Identifying Barriers Keeping You in an Unsatisfactory Relationship	260
3. Making the Final Decision: Tying All the Relevant Evidence Together	266
4. Breaking the News to Your Partner	266
5. Setting up an Atmosphere of Respect—Even When There Are Disagreements.....	267
6. Helping Your Children Through the Divorce	268
7. Going Public with Family and Friends	272
8. Making an Action Plan for Your Divorce	273
9. Learning to Live Independently and Taking New Steps Toward Romantic Happiness.....	275

What Is Romantic Love?



Romantic love is not based on the need for approval, but on the need for visibility.

Ross, a bachelor, met Olivia, the divorced mother of two young boys, at a science museum. She was taking her boys through an exhibit about the Wright brothers, the first men to achieve powered, manned flight. He loved the way she explained what a great achievement it was and how many difficulties and failures the Wrights had to overcome before they succeeded. Ross saw the boys' eyes glowing with excitement as Olivia talked about the origin of manned flight.

Ross was so impressed that he went up to Olivia and said, "Excuse me, but I overheard you explaining the exhibit to the boys and they seem really excited about it. You're a wonderful mom to do this for them." Olivia was completely shocked, and for reasons she could not fathom, almost burst into tears, but managed a "Thank you." Her husband had deserted the family some years before, and she had felt totally invisible to him. When her husband abandoned her, he left the responsibility of child rearing in her hands. She obtained

a full-time job but struggled financially as well as emotionally. Nevertheless, she had sworn to make up for the loss of the boys' dad by being a conscientious, benevolent mother. Out of the blue, Ross had made her feel visible in a way that was very important to her and in a manner she had never experienced before.

Ross himself felt visible because he saw how his remark had moved her. He wanted to find out more about her, so he asked Olivia if he could show the boys a space exhibit in the museum he knew well. Olivia agreed and they all had a great time. Then Ross asked if he could buy them all some ice cream in the cafeteria. They sat and talked, and he learned that Olivia was a single mom. He complimented her further on how happy and secure the boys seemed to be.

Olivia learned that Ross worked for NASA tracking space probes and that he had worked to get a PhD in aeronautical engineering. He paid his way through college because his parents refused to help; his father thought construction work, which he had done all his life, was good enough for his son. Ross passionately loved his work. Olivia told Ross how much she admired him for his ambition and his struggle to do what he wanted. Now it was Ross's turn to feel teary-eyed. His father had never appreciated his achievement and thus never made him feel visible for all that he had accomplished and for what he valued in himself.

"We seem to have a lot in common," Ross observed.

"What do you mean?" asked Olivia.

"We've both had to struggle against tough odds but we were determined to do what we thought was the right thing and to do it without bitterness—to keep joy in our lives."

"Yes," said Olivia, "you're right."

They both smiled and were aware that a bond was growing between them.

Ross said, "You're a lovely lady, and I'd love to do more with you and the boys—maybe a tour of NASA, and I would love to take you out alone too."

Olivia blushed. It had been many years since a man told her she was attractive and she suddenly felt visible as a woman. This was

the beginning of a promising romance. In the short time they were together in the museum, both Olivia and Ross felt seen, or visible, in important ways.

Ross took Olivia and the boys on a tour of NASA, which they all loved, and Ross began to date Olivia. They were strongly attracted to one another and each date over many months strengthened their bond. When they made love they felt a joyous ecstasy unlike anything they had ever experienced.

Olivia and Ross fell in love. What exactly does that mean? What is romantic love?

Romantic love is a strong, emotionally intimate relationship between consenting adults that combines an intense valuing of a partner on the deepest level and the enjoyment of sexual pleasure with that partner.

Both the strong degree of intimacy and the element of sexual pleasure set romance apart from other types of human relationships. A close relationship with another person that does not combine profound intimacy with sexual desire is not a romantic relationship. Many successful romantic relationships end in marriage, though not all (some couples choose to live together).

At some point in life almost everyone longs for romantic love. Romantic love is a never-ending subject of interest in novels, movies, paintings and sculpture, popular magazine articles and history books, as well as thousands of books and professional articles written by psychologists and other mental health professionals.

A subject that receives so much attention must involve an important human need. What is the nature of the need for romantic love? Why do you need and want it for yourself?

One flawed answer is that it is based on the need for approval stemming from children's dependence on their parents. If this were true, however, then mature, self-confident, independent people would be indifferent to romantic love—which is obviously not the case. In fact, confident people are the most likely to have successful romantic

partnerships. People who are seriously psychologically dependent or needy have troubled relationships because others cannot fill their profound feelings of emptiness.

Another inadequate answer is that romantic love is based on the desire for the sensation of bodily pleasure. If sexual pleasure were just a physical need, people would not need the romantic aspect and would be fully content with sex toys and self-pleasuring. Again, this is obviously not so. Full, enduring sexual pleasure presupposes a personally valued partner.

The Visibility Principle

Why, then, does one need a romantic partner? An important clue comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's discussion of the nature of friendship.¹ Aristotle noted, "All love for others is an extension of the love one has for oneself. . . . [The good man] has the same attitude toward the one he loves as he does toward himself, for his friend really is another self."² Aristotle reportedly said:

The self-sufficient man will need someone to love ... [For] it is both a most difficult thing ... to attain a knowledge of oneself and also a most pleasant thing.

... And so, as when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at the one we love. For the one we love, as we say, is another self.³

Aristotle further explains: "We are better able to observe our neighbors than ourselves, and their actions better than our own."⁴ What does Aristotle mean here? Probably this: When we are alone, we experience ourselves from the inside, as a flow of mental processes, mental contents, actions, and other characteristics. We experience a continual succession of mental and physical states and actions.

Every mental process has content: we experience specific types of emotions (frustration, anxiety, pride, joy), thoughts about something particular (what the new job project entails), mental images and memories of people or things (recalling our childhood

bedroom), sensory perceptions (of a garden, a wave washing ashore), convictions (“I’m not the type of person who would lie”), and choices (“I am going to admit to my partner that I was wrong in that argument”). We also constantly take action: eat meals, go to work, talk with friends, react to the actions of others.

Notice how much we experience ourselves from the inside. Alone, however, it is impossible to fully integrate these elements into a directly perceivable view of who we are as a total person.

How, then, can you actually see yourself fully as a self? Looking in an actual mirror, as Aristotle noted, reveals your physical self. But your total self is your body plus your mind and your character (virtues), including all your beliefs, values, methods of thinking, and all the choices and actions you take to develop and express your character. What, then, is the alternative to a literal mirror? Aristotle’s answer is: the mirror of another person who is directly perceivable. If a friend shares your basic values and virtues, openly responds to them, and exemplifies them in action, then that friend provides you with a psychological mirror.⁵ You can see yourself in that person. You not only feel understood, you experience your total self more fully, more objectively, as a result of another person’s possessing the attributes you value and that person’s responding to similar attributes in you. You can experience yourself directly as an entity, rather than as an ongoing succession of emotions, thoughts, and memories.

*When you get to know another person very well,
a person whose values are very similar to your own,
you experience a mirror of your own soul.*

Just being in that person’s presence is enjoyable. Not only do you experience yourself more fully, but you also experience that other person as a soul mate (a topic we will discuss in Part III).

A unique feature of romantic love, as contrasted with mere friendship, is that the feeling of visibility is even more all-encompassing and profound: not only does your partner respond to you sexually, as a man or woman, but also to your most intimate, deeply held values.

*The bond with an ideal romantic partner
is the most intimate bond you can experience.*

A business friend might respond to your business expertise, a golf friend to your golfing ability, a socializing friend to your pleasant personality, but only a romantic partner is able to know your total self, including not just your body but also the most intimate aspects of your soul. With a romantic soul mate, you get a “mirror” of yourself that even a close friend cannot provide. When a partner tells you what he or she appreciates about your character, in words (for example, giving you a warm, tender look and saying, “I love your warmth and sensuality”) or in actions (for example, responding to you emotionally, intellectually, and sexually), your partner provides you with a unique and priceless psychological mirror.

Assuming that you are a good, self-respecting person, gaining this external perspective on your own character is more than deeply rewarding and motivating; it is irreplaceable. It gives you a type of self-awareness that you cannot get in any other way. Observe that this is a two-way mirror; you both benefit. Together, as psychological mirrors of one another’s souls, you heighten your awareness both of yourself and of your partner. This intensifies your intimacy and adds joy and excitement to your life. In sum, only a romantic partner can give you total visibility as an individual.

But another person cannot be a mirror to your self unless you have a self to mirror. Melinda was an extremely shy, passive young adult. She had no hobbies and few acquaintances. There was nothing she really valued and no goals that she aspired to. She had an office job in which she spent most of the day doing mundane tasks that meant nothing to her. After work she kept to herself and watched TV to pass the time. She worked with Dylan, who had a crush on her. He assumed that she had a strong sense of herself and that her reticence hid a quiet self-confidence.

One day, he told her he was very attracted to her; he admired what seemed to be her quiet self-assurance. Melinda at first felt flattered but was then hit by a sudden wave of anxiety. Her mind was swimming with thoughts such as *I’m such a boring, do-nothing*

person—he doesn't know me at all. I'm not full of confidence—I'm just empty. Melinda felt invisible because there was nothing of her self to see.

Nor can you get visibility by being with someone whose character is fundamentally different from your own (a co-worker you despise, a person who totally bores you, a date with whom you have nothing in common). Such a person's way of coming at the world is alien to your own; you will not feel an affinity for them or experience a reflection of yourself, and you certainly won't feel any romantic attraction to this person. To act as your mirror, another person must share important values with you.

It is no accident that one of the most painful complaints you can make about your partner is that "He (or She) makes me feel invisible, unimportant, like I don't exist."

Invisibility is the negation of romantic love and of an important human need. (We'll come back to this issue in Part IV.)

In the story of Olivia and Ross, contrast how they felt about themselves in each other's presence with how Olivia felt when she was with her worthless ex-husband or how Ross felt in the presence of his uncaring father. The feeling of visibility was so important to each of them (though they did not consciously know what the principle was) and they had missed it so much that it brought each of them to the verge of tears when they experienced it through one another at the science museum. They were experiencing the fulfillment of deeply held but frustrated longings.

Observe that unlike Melinda, Ross and Olivia were not selfless. One of the themes of this book is that selflessness destroys romantic love: becoming a doormat will destroy your happiness. Such self-sacrificing has no place in romantic love. You may be thinking, *But that's what I've heard my whole life! To be a good partner, you have to learn to sacrifice . . .* Think again.

We hope we've got your attention, because you will discover for yourself, in the forthcoming pages, that to love and be loved, you need to truly value your self. You need to choose and pursue your own personal values.

Exercises

1. List up to three specific incidents during or after which you felt invisible to a romantic partner. What happened to make you feel this way? (For example, Eric took me to a party with his co-workers and didn't introduce me to any of them. He went off in a corner with his buddies, including his attractive secretary, and left me to introduce myself to a few people. I felt abandoned.)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. Now imagine that you could relive those three incidents. Identify exactly what you wished your partner would have said or done to make you feel visible in each case. (For example, I wish Eric had stayed with me and introduced me to the co-workers he liked the most. I wish he had said a few nice things about me in the introduction. I wish he had made it clear that I was his partner, rather than flirting with his secretary.)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. Notice how different you would have felt had your partner said or done these things. Think about how you can tell your current partner what you want to hear at times when you are starting to feel invisible. (For example, Eric, I feel like a fish out of water here. I would love it if you would introduce me to your friends.)

We will have more to say about visibility, communication, and self-valuing later in the book. For now, let us turn to that oft-touted "virtue" that goes by several names—self-sacrifice, selflessness,

altruism—and see whether being a good “martyr” makes for good romance—or not. Of course, there’s a twist to the plot—with an outcome that may surprise you.

Notes

1. Aristotle, apparently, did write about romantic love, but these writings, along with many of his other works, were lost according to Aristotelian scholar Allan Gotthelf (see footnote 2).

2. Allan Gotthelf, “Love and Philosophy: Aristotelian vs. Platonic”: This lecture was first written in 1975 and revised since; it has been given on more than twenty-five occasions at colleges and universities and to private groups, nationally and internationally. Dr. Gotthelf is a professor in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh. The first part of this quote, “All love for others is an extension of the love one has for oneself,” is from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1166a10; cf.1168b5. The second part, “[The good man] has the same attitude toward the one he loves as he does toward himself, for his friend really is another self,” is from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.1166a30–32. Translations by Allan Gotthelf, sometimes adapted from those by Martin Ostwald and others. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. by Martin Ostwald (New York: Random House, 1962; New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1962).

3. Ibid., Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* II.1213a13–26. (Translations by Allan Gotthelf, sometimes adapted from those by Martin Ostwald and others.)

4. Ibid., Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* II.1169b34–1170a2. (Translations by Allan Gotthelf, sometimes adapted from those by Martin Ostwald and others.)

5. Based on Ayn Rand’s private papers, there is evidence that she and Nathaniel Branden did additional work on the concept of visibility; see James S. Valliant, *The Passion of Ayn Rand’s Critics* (Dallas, TX: Durban House, 2005, p. 219). It is impossible to determine with certainty exactly what each of them added to Aristotle’s original idea, especially because they spent hundreds, if not thousands, of hours in discussions with each other. Ayn Rand used the term “mirror” in *Atlas Shrugged*, a term that Aristotle also used (see his quote above). Aristotle and Rand did not use the term “psychological visibility,” so Branden’s contribution may have been making explicit what was implicit in Aristotle and Rand (ibid., *Valliant*, p. 354).