

Chapter 1

WHY ANOTHER INTERPRETATION OF LOVE?

This book is the culmination of our over-twenty-year attempt to articulate the meaning of a dialogical love relationship between a man and a woman who are married, but not to each other. We will articulate the meaning of dialogical love throughout this book by reflecting on concrete examples, seeking the meaning of this relationship in light of the thought of scholars, and by dialogue between the authors. For now, we will merely identify dialogical love as love that grows out of personal interaction that is initiated by the presence of the other and responds directly to that presence. It contrasts with “love” in which persons use each other to meet personal and sexual needs and employ cultural prescriptions to dictate the relationship between the sexes. Dialogical love is not a thing that can be used or had but is a “love that is lived in . . . and within the light of which” we live (Eliot 1959, 88).

We are attempting to initiate a way of thinking about relationships between men and women that is already coming into being in our so-called postmodern era. By postmodern we do not necessarily mean the many assertions that are now being associated with the word *postmodern*. Our meaning of *postmodern* comes from the time before most of contemporary postmodern talk. It came from philosophies of history such as those of Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, and Pitirim Sorokin. By postmodern we mean that the modern age is collapsing, and we are

in a period of confusion and promise much like the Renaissance. In our time, many of the traditional ways of being are being challenged and new ways are being envisioned.

The new understanding of women and their place in the world is certainly an example of such change. Looking at women in a new way requires a new understanding of the relationship of men and women. Amazingly, John Stuart Mill and his friend (and later, wife) Harriet Taylor, understood this in the nineteenth century, as did John Macmurray in the first part of the twentieth century. Macmurray developed an interpretation of personal love that called for change in the way we think of the relationship between men and women. Martin Buber and Alfred Schutz interpret ways of being between persons that imply new understandings of the relationship between men and women. C. S. Lewis and Rollo May treat love as a personal relationship and distinguish love from friendship. Caroline Simon and Robert Solomon treat intergender friendship directly and explore its relationship to love. In this book we will share the thought of philosophers who have enlightened our understanding of the relationship between men and women and will explore possibilities they suggest.

We will explore possible nontraditional personal relationships between men and women and give concrete examples of how some of these possibilities have found fulfillment. We will ask our readers to entertain the possibility of developing new relationships with persons of the opposite sex rather than the traditional ones based on sex and romance. The primary question this new direction raises is not, “Are they friends or lovers?” but “Is their relationship personal or impersonal?” Relationships that focus on fitting the designated ways of society are often impersonal—even when they are called personal relationships such as friends or lovers. In personal relationships, as we will show, persons respond to each other as they are present to each other and in ways that presence calls forth, rather than by following the dictates of societal roles. When people attempt to relate to each other personally within the confines of societal structures, they often find their personal relationships restricted and truncated by these structures. Even those who initially do not feel their relationship restricted by traditional structures

often look to their personal relationship as it matures, rather than to society, to define the meaning of that relationship.

Our goals in trying to articulate the way of being that we have called dialogical love are twofold. Academically, we want to issue a call for further exploration of what we designate as dialogical love so that it can be better understood and more clearly articulated. Personally, we want to help others venture out and explore new personal relationships that go beyond traditional structures in their quest for abundant being and deep personal fulfillment.

We can speak of relationships that foster abundant being and deep personal fulfillment because we have been in such a relationship for over twenty years. We have encountered other couples who have experienced similar relationships, some of whom participated in the interviews used in this book. Those we interviewed shared the common experience of developing deep fulfilling relationships that do not fit into the accepted categories of our society—courtship, marriage, affairs, or “just” friend relationships. We did not interview persons whose friendship with members of the opposite sex were not deep personal relationships. For example, when a colleague discovered that we were writing this book, she eagerly volunteered to be interviewed, believing that study of friendship between the sexes was much needed. When we told her that we were interested in relationships that were deeply personal, she said that her relationship with her male friend was not the kind of relationship we were seeking. In our research, we discovered that friendships, such as that of our colleague, have been studied more often than we expected. These studies generally use standard social science techniques and supply quantitative and qualitative data concerning those relationships. While these studies are needed, few were significant for our investigation of the *meaning* of deep personal relationships between men and women outside of marriage.

Studies of relationships between men and women outside of marriage take place in a sociocultural context that assumes that the normal relationships of men and women are usually structured on a gender basis. Courtship-to-marriage relationships and affairs have in common that they are based on romance and sex. Relationships between men and women

that do not involve romance and sex are usually referred to as “just” friend relationships. Unlike “just” friend relationships, rich personal relationships between the sexes have been overlooked. Most people are aware that “just” friend relationships can become affairs, but few people seem aware that “just” friend relationships can blossom into relationships of dialogical love. Those of us who have experienced the abundant being that can come from a deep personal relationship with a person of the opposite sex would never speak of our relationship as “just.” Calling these relationships “just” friend is not only misleading; it trivializes the relationship in a way that seems like sacrilege.

Our initial focus will be on the positive fulfillment that we call abundant being that is experienced in relationships of dialogical love. These relationships are often initiated by the many opportunities that men and women have for being together in our time. We met as colleagues and the unusual amount of time we have spent together has been recognized as professionally legitimate. We have coauthored five books and numerous papers and articles in an attempt to interpret nursing philosophically. The foregoing statement can, however, be misleading in that it sounds like a professor of philosophy and a professor of nursing became related to each other in order to interpret nursing philosophically. In fact, we were close friends before we began to investigate together the meanings of nursing, practice, and caring. Our scholarly writing grew out of our friendship rather than our friendship developing from our professional work together.

Over the years, in addition to thinking about the meaning of nursing, we have attempted to make sense of our relationship. Unlike our attempt to discover the meaning of nursing, we have not, until now, published anything concerning our quest to make sense of our dialogical love. Such an exploration is so personal that it is difficult to know how to share it with others. At first, we wondered if we were alone, but we discovered that others have had relationships similar to ours and also have struggled to articulate them. Some were well-educated, some had little education; some were old, some were young; some were from urban areas, some from rural. All shared the common experience of being in a relationship that enriched their lives but had no acceptable place in our culture. We interviewed them in unstructured discussions

concerning the content and meaning of their relationships. The unfolding of the interviews followed the direction given by the interviewees. For example, sexual relationships were discussed only if the interviewees chose to include them. We will include material from these interviews dispersed throughout the book to give insight into the meaning of what we call dialogical love and to make it concrete.

In addition to our interviews, we were surprised to find that some famous literary and philosophical leaders were in relationships that involved experiences and quests similar to ours. We discovered that John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor as well as C. S. Lewis and Joy Davidman groped for the meaning of their relationship in a way that strikes a chord with our own quest for meaning. In addition, Margaret Fuller unsuccessfully sought to develop such a relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Given that Mill, Taylor, and Fuller lived in Victorian times, it seems strange that their quest would strike a chord with those of us who believe we live in a time of great liberation from Victorian restraints. Actually, we are old enough to have grown up under the remnants of Victorian constraints. Most of the younger couples we interviewed have felt few such constraints. Consequently, they initially felt freer than we to develop personal relationships between the sexes outside of marriage. Greater freedom, however, does not of itself draw out and articulate the meaning of these relationships. In fact, it is likely that those of us who have experienced restraint as well as freedom may be better situated to articulate the meaning of what we are calling dialogical love.

Articulating the meaning of relationships of dialogical love involves a personal quest for meaning. It is a difficult quest because the relationship has not been culturally defined. Since this relationship does not fit the so-called tried and true relationships of our culture, our search for the meaning of the relationship requires groping, accompanied by much uncertainty. Those involved in relationships that are not culturally defined wonder, at first, if their relationship is unique.

New lovers, traditionally, have assumed that their relationship is unique. It is well established in the literature of love that this feeling of uniqueness is characteristic of new love. New lovers proudly proclaim that their love is like no other love. Those who experience love that is not culturally recognized are not given to such proclamations. They fear

that they are alone and fervently hope that others experience what they are experiencing. They are uncertain about the meaning of their relationship and are reaching out for help in making sense of its meaning. Their quest for meaning is stymied by the language of our culture that tends to falsify more than express what they are experiencing.

Articulating dialogical love requires an unusual way of writing. Most authors who attempt to articulate a new aspect of human experience in a field that has been well treated follow the traditional linear development of a line of thought. These books often begin with the authors stating their conclusion, continue by developing the argument that supports the conclusion, and conclude by testing the soundness and usefulness of the conclusion. This type of presentation is most successful when what is pursued is not highly personal and is in a field that has been treated by many others. The clarity of such articulation is often bought at the price of a loss of freshness and excitement for both the writers and the readers.

We will attempt to keep the vitality and passion we have felt in questing for understanding dialogical love by including much of our own dialogue throughout this book. Dialogue is well suited for reflecting on meaning that is initially unclear. When we began this book, we could not adequately articulate the meaning of our relationship. Only after an intense dialogical quest, involving reflection on the meaning of our relationship and those of others, were we able to articulate these relationships as dialogical love. We hope that our readers, by sharing in our quest, will come to understand why we articulate our relationship as dialogical love and see in its meaning a possibility for themselves and others. Those who want the meaning of dialogical love adequately defined in the beginning of the book and then supported by argument will be disappointed. The meaning of dialogical love will become evident as we engage in a dialogical quest for meaning throughout the book.

Our reflection will be personal in the sense that we will share from our personal quest. It will not, however, be limited to our experience and insights. We will share insights and understandings gained from those who have contributed to our grasp of the meaning of dialogical love: philosophers and other thinkers, literary descriptions and interpretations,

dialogical interviews, and popular media. Our purpose for including this material in our book is to clarify the meaning of dialogical love.

Our way of thinking has been much influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology in which examples are used to clarify meaning. The examples used can be biographical or fictional or some place in between. They are used simply to better disclose meaning. We have chosen to include works that have helped us discover and disclose the meaning of dialogical love. We do not claim to have researched all the literature that could be related to such a quest. Instead we will share understandings gained from involvement in a personal quest for meaning that has evolved through our dialogue with each other and searching out authors, situations, and relationships that have given us insight into the meaning of our own relationship. We have been delighted to discover that we are not alone in living in our kind of relationship. We hope that by sharing some of our insights into the meaning of dialogical love, others may find that abundant being that we have found together.

The obvious answer to the question, "Why another interpretation of love?" is that we want to help others find the abundant being and fulfillment that we have found in a relationship of dialogical love. We offer dialogical love as a challenge to the traditional ways of relating men and women that stress differences between them, romance and sex, and distinctions between love and friendship. Persons pursuing the abundant being of dialogical love will encounter lack of recognition of their relationship in popular culture. Embedded in popular culture is an assumption that love and friendship are entirely different, mutually exclusive ways of being, and consequently, that relationships between men and women who are married but not to each other must be either affairs or "just" friend relationships. Our quest led us from popular culture to C. S. Lewis and Rollo May who interpret friendship and love as personal love relationships. Although their interpretations enlightened our quest, they also stress the contrast between friendship and love and fail to treat friendship between men and women specifically. Then, we explore the specific treatments of friendship between men and women of Caroline Simon and Robert Solomon. Although both contrast friendship with love, Solomon does indicate that a new direction is needed by

asking why there is so much stress on the distinction between love and friendship. The relationship between C. S. Lewis and Joy Davidman and John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor both show that in relationships of dialogical love stressing differences between love and friendship and men and women is untenable. This contention is given philosophical support by Buber, Macmurray, and Schutz. All support our contention that an interpretation of love is needed that does not grow out of the contrast between friendship and love and the differences between men and women. We call this love dialogical love because it stresses personal relationships between men and women in which they respond freely to the presence of each other without regard to categorical cultural prescriptions.