

## A secondary sexual character<sup>1</sup> as *Grundbefinden*

How can we best understand our own paradigmatic experiences of being in love?<sup>2</sup>

You think: I want you. I want you forever, now, yesterday, and always. Above all, I want you to want me.<sup>3</sup>

There is a paradigmatic experience of being in love — manifest in a line of cases from Sappho, Phaedra, and Dido through Stendhal, Rahner, and Barthes down to doowop tunes<sup>4</sup> — which the psychologist Dorothy Tennov has named ‘limerence.’ The distinctive feature of limerence is its ‘jumping-in’ (*einspringende*) kind of *Fürsorge* (‘I want you to want me’<sup>5</sup>) which Heidegger disdained because, he claimed, it sponsors inauthenticity, *Uneigentlichkeit*.<sup>6</sup>

To emphasize the significance of Tennov’s insight—the discovery of an alternative behavioral phenotype—I quote her at length on the circumstances of that discovery:

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<sup>1</sup> “with animals of many kinds in a state of nature, both high and low in the scale, secondary sexual characters, not in any way directly connected with the organs of reproduction, are often conspicuously present.” Charles Darwin, *The variation of animals and plants under domestication* (1868) 71-72:

<http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=87&itemID=F877.2&viewtype=side> .

<sup>2</sup> Iain Thomson, “Thinking love: Heidegger and Arendt,” 50 *Continental Philosophy Review* 453, 478 fn. 66 (2017). Reading Thomson’s article recalled to mind this snatch of dialogue from *The Big Kahuna* (1999): “Well, I’ve known people. I’m not saying you’re one of them. It’s just I’ve known them who were real principled, and then they met somebody else who was real principled, and then the two of them got married, only to find out one day it was their principles that got married. Two of them just kind of came along for the ride.” My impression is that in the case of Heidegger and Arendt ‘it was their thinking that fell in love’ and their bodies just sort of provided transportation.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Tennov, *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love* ([1979] with new preface 1999) xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Leading example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3j9bAVqt3c> . The group’s entire oeuvre concerns limerence in the variety of its aspects—“Tears on My Pillow,” “Hurt So Bad,” “Take Me Back,” etc.

<sup>5</sup> “The truth of the matter is that—by an exorbitant paradox—I never stop believing that I am loved. I hallucinate what I desire. Each wound proceeds less from a doubt than from a betrayal: for only the one who loves can betray, only the one who believes himself loved can be jealous: that the other, episodically, should **fail in his being, which is to love me** [*manque à son être, qui est de m’aimer*]*—that is the origin of all my woes.*” Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (tr. Richard Howard 1978) 187 (my emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> “Concern-for [*Fürsorge*] can be carried out in a way that virtually takes away the other’s care. In concern-for him I put myself in his place: I step in for him, which entails that he give himself up, step back, and accept ready-made the concern I show him, thereby completely freeing himself from his care. In the kind of being concerned-for where care ‘steps in,’ the person on the receiving end becomes dependent and dominated, even though the domination may be entirely unspoken and not experienced. We characterize this first kind of being concerned-for as one that ‘steps in’ and takes the place of the other—takes away and dominates. By contrast there is a second kind of being-with-the-other that does not step into his place (his situation and project) and take it away, but instead carefully steps ahead of him, not so as to take away his care—which is himself, his very existence—but to give it back to him. Such concern-for does not dominate but liberates. The second kind of concern-for is the concern-for of authenticity . . .” Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 187. *Gesamtausgabe Band 21*: 223; <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=21.00&pg=223> . See also *Sein und Zeit* 122.

“What I have come to look back on as a kind of ‘theoretical breakthrough’ took place during a transatlantic flight from Paris to New York. I had just finished filming an interview with the French writer Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>7</sup> My friend and traveling companion, Helen Payne, was considering writing about the lifelong relationship between Beauvoir and existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Since Beauvoir had written romantic novels and essays that dealt with love, it seemed an appropriate topic of conversation. I must confess that Helen gave evidence of considerably less interest in romantic love than I. . . . As I recounted the details of some of my interviews and compared them with characters in Beauvoir’s novels, I became increasingly aware of Helen’s distaste for the topic. . . . Finally, unable to tolerate it longer, she blurted out what had been troubling her. This person, whom I had known for many years and with whom I had had many conversations on topics of common interest, had never experienced a reaction that resembled what I had been describing, and this despite two marriages, several children, and an active sex life with various partners following her divorce. She said that she had always found puzzling what appeared to her as extravagant exaggeration in the media portrayal of romantic love. Furthermore, she had on many occasions been annoyed and inconvenienced by pressures on her to conform to the demands for attentiveness and exclusivity of husbands and lovers [“takes away and dominates”]. . . . Describing the intricacies of romantic attachments to Helen was like trying to describe the color red to one blind from birth. . . . She described her confusion over the strange ‘positive’ behavior of persons in love with her. Their claims of ecstasy were as incomprehensible as was their obvious suffering. . . . Had Helen not been a person with whom I had many times before held serious, honest, and problem-solving conversations, I might never have recognized the implications of what she told me. What Helen described was for me at that time inconceivable: a person who showed no signs at all of having experienced a complex reaction that others had described in very similar ways. The ‘interview’ with Helen rendered suspect much other data that had been collected, but, above all, by discovering someone who admitted to no experience whatsoever with what would be called ‘limerence,’ I discovered the state itself. It was not the first time in human thought that the existence of an entity was clearly revealed for the first time under the special conditions of its absence. Actually, Helen’s failure to experience the phenomenon of romantic love, even in a mild or partial degree, turned out not to be rare at all. In the months to follow, such individuals began to appear regularly among interviewees. That they had not done so before was the joint result of my having been blinded by my expectations and of the problem of terminology. What I really discovered was a certain state that some people were in much of the time, others in some of the time, but still others never in, or at least not yet.”<sup>8</sup>

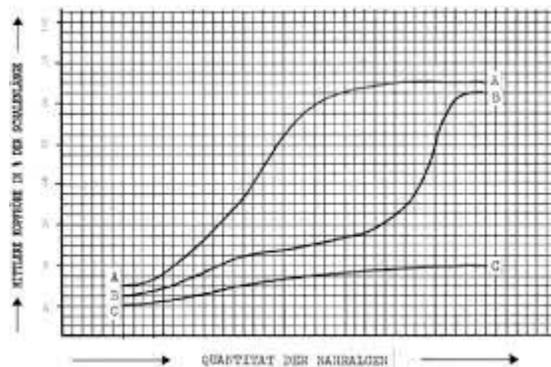
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<sup>7</sup> Here: [https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip\\_81-623bkb9v](https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_81-623bkb9v) .

<sup>8</sup> *Love and Limerence* 13-15.

In other words, Tennov discovered limerence and non-limerence to be alternative phenotypes.<sup>9</sup> So ‘failure’ is merely Tennov’s slip of the pen. Just as Rh-negatives are not failed Rh-positives, non-limerents are not failed limerents. And limerence is not sexually dimorphic; it occurs in both males and females<sup>10</sup> (and also, I presume, in intersex and transgender persons although I have not come across such an account).

Limerence as ‘extravagant exaggeration’ seems plausibly analogous to the allometric response of Woltereck’s two *Daphnia* strains which developed marked increase in head size relative to body size in nutrient-rich environments, whereas a third strain did not; viz.:<sup>11</sup>



But in the phenomenon of limerence, exaggeration of what?

The consensus of research on Heideggerian love follows that philosopher’s low valuation of limerence as an *einspringende* kind of *Fürsorge*, and therefore unworthy:—a feeling, not a passion; *ein Affekt, keine Leidenschaft*. As he says in the Nietzsche lectures, *Liebe ist nie blind, sondern hellichtig; nur Verliebtheit* [‘lovestrickeness’] *ist blind, flüchtig und anfällig, ein Affekt, keine Leidenschaft*.<sup>12</sup> This remark is itself a formal indication of alternative phenotypes.

<sup>9</sup> “Alternative phenotypes—Two or more forms of behavior, physiological response, or structure maintained in the same life stage in a single population and not simultaneously expressed in the same individual.” Mary Jane West-Eberhard, “Phenotypic Plasticity and the Origins of Diversity,” *20 Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 249, 250 (1989).

<sup>10</sup> “In white-throated sparrows, both sexes appear in two morphs, with females preferring to mate with a male of the opposite morph from their own.” Marlene Zuk and Leigh W. Simmons, *Sexual Selection: A Very Short Introduction* (2018) 113. “[A]s in the antlers of reindeer [not to mention the pubic hair of humans], the secondary sex characters [can] occur in both sexes.” Michael T. Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method* ([1969] 1984) 226; citing Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (2d ed. 1889) 506: [http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1889\\_Descent\\_F969.pdf](http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1889_Descent_F969.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Image from Richard Woltereck, *Weitere experimentelle Untersuchungen über Artveränderung, speziell über das Wesen quantitativer Artunterschiede bei Daphniden* (1909).

<sup>12</sup> GA 6.1: 45: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=6.1&pg=45>. For a review of the literature on Heideggerian love see Christos Hadjioannou, “Love: the hidden mood in *Being and Time*” in *Phenomenologies of Love* (ed. Iulian Apostolescu and Veronica Cibotaru; Brill, forthcoming).

We might conjecture then that limerence is an outlying variant of garden-variety *einspringende Fürsorge*, sexual-affective subtype. Consider the bowerbird:

“Bowerbirds, a group of birds found in Australia and New Guinea, have some of the most impressive [exaggerated] courtship displays in the animal kingdom, but they are not part of the male [anatomy]. Instead, male bowerbirds construct marvellous structures—sometimes several metres tall—out of branches and twigs, and then decorate them with colourful fruits, flowers, or stones. These bowers are used as staging areas for the complex dances and songs the male gives when a female alights nearby.”<sup>13</sup>

I.e., “the male himself is not decorated, but he uses his environment to put on an extravagant show.”<sup>14</sup> So far as I can understand him he is not signaling to the females (as Heidegger did signal to Arendt) *volo ut sis*:—‘I want you to be you.’<sup>15</sup> The male bowerbird instead insists with all his strength and art ‘Want me.’ But if the bower and the performance are the drug what is the mechanism of action in the counterpart organism; how does it work?

Plato describes the limerent phenotype through Diotima’s tale of Eros in *Symposium*. On the day of Aphrodite’s birth the gods throw a big party to celebrate. Needy (Πενία) hangs around outside, hoping for a handout. Able (Πόρος, son of Metis), woozy from drinking nectar, wanders into Zeus’s back yard for a nap. On account of her own want of ability (διὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ἀπορίαν) Needy devises (evidently not altogether without resource) the plan to sleep with Able and conceive a child by him, which she accomplishes forthwith. Thus that same day is born Eros, who has inherited the traits of both his mother and his father.

Eros, as his mother’s son, is a far cry from soft and pretty, as the many believe, but is instead tough-skinned and dry, barefoot and homeless, roaming about without even a doss-bag, sleeping rough in doorways and alleys, or on Dearth’s couch. Like his father, though, he’s gutsy, vigorous, and focused, with an eye for—and a fierce stalker of—fine beauties, always contriving

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<sup>13</sup> *Sexual Selection: A Very Short Introduction* 20. Of limerence as display Barthes comments: “Charlotte is quite insipid; she is the paltry character of a powerful, tormented, flamboyant drama staged by the subject Werther; by a kindly decision [*une décision gracieuse*] of this subject, a colorless object is placed in the center of the stage and there adored, idolized, *taken to task*, covered with discourse, with prayers (and perhaps, surreptitiously, with invectives); as if she were a huge motionless hen huddled amid her feathers, around which circles a slightly mad cock [*un mâle un peu fou*].” *A Lover’s Discourse* 31-32 (emphasis in original).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See Tatjana Noemi Tömmel, “Love as Passion: Epistemic and Existential Aspects of Heidegger’s Unknown Concept” in *Heidegger on Affect* (ed. Christos Hadjioannou 2019) 229; see also Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, “Heideggerian Love” in *Phenomenology of Eros* (ed. Jonna Bornemar and Schuback 2012) 142, 151: <http://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?dswid=1428&pid=diva2%3A524777>.

lures, able and keen to live by his wits, a friend of wisdom all his life, a skilled and formidable shaman and medicine-man.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly Eros lives a yo-yo life, *flüchtig und anfällig*. In the course of just a single day he lives and thrives while he's got it together, then next moment he's wasting away, then again he revives by virtue of his paternal endowment; yet even so his coping is always waning, such that Eros is never either rich or poor, always in a pickle between insight and ignorance.<sup>17</sup>

From Diotima's tale it's a short hop to Aristotle, who uses an analog of the formula Πενία + Πόρος → Ἔρως as the *archē* of *phusis*. Matter, *hulē*, inherently lacks, is immanently aporetic. Lack-in-matter, *sterēsis-in-hulē*, is the general-purpose capacity of *phusis* to take form, *eidōs*. Matter in Aristotle's physics "inherently yearns for and stretches out toward [form] by its own nature [τὸ δὲ ὁ πέφυκεν ἐφίεσθαι καὶ ὀρέγεσθαι αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν]."<sup>18</sup> Matter procures the form it lacks, and this union results in the manifold entities of pan-erotic *phusis*.

Now a long jump from Aristotle to Heidegger. Human existence is care, *Sorge*; ***Die Sorge ist der Terminus für das Sein des Daseins schlechthin***. The structure of care is being-in-want, lack, need:

"The structure of 'being out for something' [*Auf-etwas-aus-sein*] which I do not yet have, but being-out [*Aussein*] in an already-involved-in which *eo ipso* is being out for something [*Aussein auf etwas*], brings with it the phenomenon of not yet having something which I am out for. The phenomenon of not yet having something that I am out for is called *being in want* [*das Darben oder die Darbung*]. It is not merely a pure and simple objective not-having but is always a not-having of something that I am out for. It is what first constitutes being-in-want, lack, need [*die Darbung, das Entbehren, das Bedürfen*]. . . . this basic structure [*Grundstruktur*] of care will lead us back to the constitution of being which we shall then come to understand as *time*."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 203c-d: πρῶτον μὲν πένης αἰεὶ ἐστὶ, καὶ πολλοῦ δεῖ ἀπαλός τε καὶ καλός, οἷον οἱ πολλοὶ οἷονται, ἀλλὰ σκληρὸς καὶ αὐχμηρὸς καὶ ἀνυπόδητος καὶ ἄοικος, χαμαιπετὴς αἰεὶ ὦν καὶ ἄστρωτος, ἐπὶ θύραις καὶ ἐν ὁδοῖς ὑπαίθριος κοιμώμενος, τὴν τῆς μητρὸς φύσιν ἔχων, αἰεὶ ἐνδεῖα σύνοικος. κατὰ δὲ αὐτὸν τὸν πατέρα ἐπίβουλος ἐστὶ τοῖς καλοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, ἀνδρείος ὦν καὶ ἴτης καὶ σύντονος, θηρευτὴς δεινός, αἰεὶ τινας πλέκων μηχανάς, καὶ φρονήσεως ἐπιθυμητῆς καὶ πόριμος, φιλοσοφῶν διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου, δεινὸς γόης καὶ φαρμακεύς καὶ σοφιστῆς.

<sup>17</sup> 203e: ἀθάνατος πέφυκεν οὔτε ὡς θνητός, ἀλλὰ τοτὲ μὲν τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας θάλλει τε καὶ ζῆ, ὅταν εὐπορήσῃ, τοτὲ δὲ ἀποθνήσκῃ, πάλιν δὲ ἀναβιώσκει διὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς φύσιν, τὸ δὲ ποριζόμενον αἰεὶ ὑπεκρεῖ, ὥστε οὔτε ἀπορεῖ Ἔρως ποτὲ οὔτε πλουτεῖ, σοφίας τε αὖ καὶ ἀμαθίας ἐν μέσῳ ἐστίν.

<sup>18</sup> Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (1995) 45. *Physics* 192a.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (tr. Theodore Kisiel 1985) 295. GA 20:406, 408-409 (emphasis in original): <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=20.00&pg=408> .

Thus *Sorge* is Dasein's Πενία, and human life the varieties of being-out-for. Dasein's Πόρος is the as-structure, the onto-prehensile organ for taking something as something, *entwerfen etwas als/auf etwas*. So *Sorge* + *Als-Struktur* → *Weltbilden*.<sup>20</sup>

*Sorge*, Heidegger tells us, is the *Urstruktur des Seins des Daseins*, and, he emphasizes, it is 'being-out-for.' It's important to see *daß in diesem Dasein so etwas wie ein Aussein auf etwas liegt; das Dasein ist auf sein eigenes Sein aus, auf sein Sein selbst, um sein Sein »zu sein«*. ***Sorge ist als solches Sein-um dieses Aussein auf das Sein, das dieses Aussein selbst ist.***<sup>21</sup>

If *Ausseinheit* is human being's ineluctable modality, then we can speculate that limerence originated as an attempt to exploit *Ausseinheit* in the limerent object; inasmuch as "sensitivity to particular signals—sensory bias—means that sexual selection can favour males that exploit such biases." Consider a tiny aquatic arachnid, the water mite:

"Water mites are sit-and-wait predators. They adopt what is referred to as a net-stance in which they grip aquatic vegetation with their hindlimbs and raise their forelimbs into the water column where they can detect water-borne vibrations from their copepod prey. When a prey item swims past they will orient towards it and grasp it with their forelimbs. During mate searching, on encountering a female, a male will first tremble his forelimbs in front of her. The tremble frequency corresponds to the beat frequency of copepod swimming legs and attracts the female's attention such that she will orient to the source of trembling. Having attracted the female's attention, the male deposits packages of sperm on the substrate before continuing his trembling. The female continues to orient to the source of trembling, walking over, and thereby picking up, the male's sperm packages as she does so. Starved females are more responsive to trembling, and are inseminated more frequently than sated females, which shows us that female foraging and male mating success are linked. Importantly, when researchers looked at the evolutionary origins of these traits, they found that net-stance evolved before trembling, consistent with the idea that male sexual displays can arise to exploit a pre-existing sensory bias in females."<sup>22</sup>

As noted above limerence is not sexually dimorphic. And just as ants are said to go about their lives 'foraging for work'<sup>23</sup> so too human beings of all sexual orientations go about 'foraging for

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<sup>20</sup> Well, okay, the as-structure is Dasein's *proximate* Πόρος. Its ultimate Πόρος is disclosure of entities as entities (the matter for taking-as) in the first place.

<sup>21</sup> GA 20: 407: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=20.00&pg=407> .

<sup>22</sup> *Sexual Selection: A Very Short Introduction* 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> "Ants often start out working near the place where they eclose from the pupal case and emerge as adults. This means that the first task workers perform will be brood care, because they emerge from the pupal case among other pupae. Later, they may leave the brood chamber and find themselves in a place where another task is being done, such as sorting seeds or repairing the nest. Nigel Franks gave the name 'foraging-for-work' to the processes that shuffle an ant from one location to the next, so that eventually it finds itself near the nest entrance and stimulated to work outside. This idea combines the notion of shifting task as the ant ages, called 'age polyethism,'

*Sein*,’ for intelligibility, meaning: ***es bei seinem In-der-Welt-sein um dieses Sein selbst geht.***<sup>24</sup> No doubt *Sorge*, orientation to meaning, arose much earlier in the history of life than did limerence,<sup>25</sup> just as net-stance arose in water mites before trembling did. Yet all healthy male water mites and bower birds of reproductive age ‘do trembling’ and build bowers, respectively; whereas the limerent phenotype occurs at most intermittently and apparently at random in only a subset of the human population. And it’s hardly credible that limerence is a particularly successful mating behavior, for the reports suggest<sup>26</sup> that it’s just as likely to strike the limerent object as noisome and off-putting than as endearing and attractive.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, homosexual limerence seems proportionally as frequent as hetero and no less intense.

McCullers depicts such an instance by highlighting the index-phenomenon of aberrantly salient *Bedeutsamkeit* and concomitant delusion of reference:

“Captain Penderton on his long walks during the late afternoon was in a state of sharpened sensitivity close to delirium. He felt himself adrift, cut off from all human influence, and he carried with him the brooding image of the young soldier much as a witch would hug to her bosom some cunning charm. He experienced during this time a peculiar vulnerability. Although he felt himself isolated from all other persons, the things which he saw on his walks took on an abnormal importance in his eyes. Everything with which he came in contact, even the most commonplace objects, seemed to have some mysterious bearing on his own destiny. If, for instance, he chanced to notice a sparrow in the gutter, he could stand for whole minutes, completely absorbed in this ordinary sight. For the time being he had lost the primitive faculty that instinctively classifies the various sensory impressions according to their relative values.”<sup>28</sup>

So we come back to the analogy with reaction norms in *Daphnia*. Best guess is that limerence is an allometric excrescence from more usual varieties of human sexual affectivity. It’s implausible that limerence is adaptive, ‘for’ anything. Ontologically it seems to be, in Withy’s term, a *Grundbefinden*, “a variety of finding ourselves called;” an identity or vocation “that we are given

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with the notion that an ant’s task is determined more by its location than by any particular characteristics of the ant itself.” Deborah M. Gordon, *Ant Encounters: Interaction Networks and Colony Behavior* (2010) 34.

<sup>24</sup> GA 20: 406 (emphasis in original): <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=20.00&pg=406> .

<sup>25</sup> See Gary Tomlinson, *The Machines of Evolution and the Scope of Meaning* (2023).

<sup>26</sup> Barthes s.v. *monstreux* cites *Phaedrus* for its ‘catalogue of importunate features.’ *A Lover’s Discourse* 165.

<sup>27</sup> Though even if the limerent phenotype is a ‘hopeful monster’ (in Richard Goldschmidt’s term), “It has never been clear to me what the monster-mating problem is supposed to involve. Is the monster sexually unattractive? Is it that by being obliged to mate with a normal individual the monster’s distinctiveness would be diluted by interbreeding with normal individuals? Or would the variant simply be so different that it would be incompatible with any other individual in terms of ability to pair and/or produce viable offspring? None of these objections is convincing. Intraspecific phenotype divergence is common in the form of alternative phenotypes (polymorphisms and polyphenisms) and sexual dimorphisms in nature. Contrasting morphs of extreme diversity freely breed within the same species without fatal detriment to viability of reproductive success and without loss of distinctiveness.” etc. Mary Jane West-Eberhard, *Developmental Plasticity and Evolution* (2003) 481.

<sup>28</sup> Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* [1941] in *Complete Novels* (2001) 387.

and that we must take up—that we must *be*—in one way or another.”<sup>29</sup> Identity and vocation are phenomena of *Seinkönnen*, the ontological norm of reaction. For some portion of the human population limerence is within its ontological reaction norm.

In Diotima’s tale Plato imagines what the limerent norm of reaction is capable of experiencing at the limit of its range. Proceeding upwards from “the correct love [limerent yet chaste] of boys” (τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδεραστεῖν) as if using a step-ladder (ὥσπερ ἔπαναβασμοῖς χρώμενον) the lover of beauty reaches the study of the beautiful itself (αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα). “What would it be for someone,” asks Diotima, “to look on the beautiful itself unadulterated [αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ἰδεῖν εἰλικρινές], pure, unmixed [καθαρόν, ἄμεικτον], not gross with human flesh and hue and all that other mortal dreck [ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάπλεων σαρκῶν τε ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ χρωμάτων καὶ ἄλλης πολλῆς φλυαρίας θνητῆς]; but able to experience the divinely beautiful itself alone for what it is [ἀλλ’ αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν δύναιτο μονοειδὲς κατιδεῖν]?”<sup>30</sup> It would be a delusion. ‘I hallucinate what I desire.’ *Delulu mi amor*.

The power of limerence to induce delusion of *reference* is scarcely more striking than in Karl Rahner, who was able to gaze on “the apathy of the stars” and therein ‘feel the love.’ That the great theologian was a limerent phenotype was not widely known until ten years after his death when Luise Rinser published her letters to him.<sup>31</sup> Yet Rahner’s limerence for αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν is already plain to see in his book of prayers, *Worte ins Schweigen*, published in 1938. (Did he send a copy to the man he called ‘my teacher,’ Martin Heidegger?)

In *Worte* Rahner is Πενία to God’s Πόρος:

“And what is man but a being that is not sufficient to itself, a being who sees his own insufficiency, so that he longs naturally and necessarily for Your Infinity? What is man but the being who must follow the urge to run toward Your distant stars, who must keep up his chase until he has covered all the highways and byways of the world, only in the end to see your stars still coursing their serenely ordered way—and as far away as ever?”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Katherine Withy, “Finding Oneself, Called,” in *Heidegger on Affect* 168,157.

<sup>30</sup> 211b-e.

<sup>31</sup> *Gratwanderung: Briefe der Freundschaft an Karl Rahner 1962-1984* (1994). See Pamela Kirk, “Reflections on Luise Rinser’s *Gratwanderung*,” 10 *Philosophy and Theology* 293 (1997): [https://www.pdcnet.org/philtheol/content/philtheol\\_1997\\_0010\\_0001\\_0293\\_0300](https://www.pdcnet.org/philtheol/content/philtheol_1997_0010_0001_0293_0300); Pamela Schaeffer, “Karl Rahner’s secret 22-year romance,” *National Catholic Reporter* December 19, 1997: [http://natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/1997d/121997/121997a.htm](http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/1997d/121997/121997a.htm); Howard Kainz, “The ‘Balancing Act’ of Karl Rahner and Luise Rinser,” *Crisis Magazine* May 8, 2013: <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/the-balancing-act-of-karl-rahner-and-luise-rinser>.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Rahner, S.J., *Encounters with Silence* (tr. James M. Domske, S.J. [1960] 1999) 47. *Was aber ist der Mensch, als das Wesen, das, sich selber nicht genug, nach deiner Unendlichkeit begehrt und darum deinen fernen Sternen entgegengelaufen beginnt und so – alle Straßen dieser Welt abläuft und deine Sterne auch am Ende aller dieser Wege immer noch ruhig in der gleichen Ferne leuchten sieht?* *Worte ins Schweigen* ([1938] 1973) 47.

Rahner never tires of emphasizing his indigence, “my need,” *meiner Not*. Thus in the first prayer alone (‘God of my life’) he instances “the lowly valleys through which I drag out the paths of my life,” “the poor prison of my little existence,” “the narrow hut of this earthly life,” “the cramped and confining prison of my own finiteness;” *mein großes Ungenügen, mein Nichts, mein fragwürdig Sein, mein armer Geist*.

God is Πόρος *schlechthin*:

“We had thought to escape by our own power from the strangling anxiety of being frail and transitory. We had hoped by a thousand different methods of our own clever devising to run away from our own being, and thus become masters of an eternal existence. But bitter experience has taught us that we cannot help ourselves, that we are powerless to redeem ourselves from ourselves. And so we have called upon Your Reality and Your Truth; we have called down upon ourselves the Plenitude of Your Life. We have made appeal to Your Wisdom and Your Justice, Your Goodness and Your Mercy. We have summoned You, so that You Yourself might come and tear down the barriers of our finiteness, and turn our poverty into riches, our temporality into eternity.”<sup>33</sup>

(No glimmer of the alternative hypothesis: ‘And so we have dreamt up You, Your Reality and Your Truth. We hallucinate what we desire.’) Rahner hauls himself through “the disillusionment of life,” “a dying life—*prolixitas mortis*,” by a fantasy of *panporia* to come: “the unhampered and limitless Life,” *ewigen Leben, das keinen Tod kennt*.<sup>34</sup>

Rahner yearns to hear from God and speaks into the Silence without ceasing, and without ever hearing in return so much as the time of day:

“When I pray, it’s as if my words have disappeared down some deep dark well, from which no echo ever comes back to reassure me that they have struck the ground of Your heart. Lord, to pray my whole life long without hearing an answer, isn’t that too much to ask? You see how I run away from you time and time again, to speak with men who give me an answer, to busy myself with things that give me some kind of response.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Id.* 82. *Gehetzt von der würgenden Angst unser Ohnmacht und Vergänglichkeit, aus eigener Kraft in immer neuen Weisen diesem unserem Wesen zu entrinnen, auf tausend Wegen eines Ewigen habhaft zu werden. Weil wir uns nicht helfen können, uns nicht erlösen können von uns selbst, darum haben wir deine Wirklichkeit und deine Wahrheit, die Fülle deines Lebens auf uns herabgerufen, darum haben wir appelliert an deine Weisheit und deine Gerechtigkeit, deine Güte und dein Erbarmen, auf daß du selbst kommest, alle Schranken unserer Endlichkeit niederreißt, aus Armut Reichtum, Ewigkeit aus unserer Zeitlichkeit machest. Worte ins Schweigen 73.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* 57; *Worte ins Schwiegen 55.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* 19-20. *Wenn ich bete, dann ist es mir, als fielen alle meine Worte in eine dunkle Tiefe, aus der kein Echo zurückkommt, das melden würde, dass meine Gebete den Grund deines Herzens gefunden haben. Herr, ein Leben lang beten, reden, ohne eine Antwort zu hören, ist das nicht zu viel für mich? Verstehst du, dass ich dir immer wieder davonlaufe und mit Menschen und Dingen rede und handle, die mir Antwort geben? Worte ins Schwiegen 26.*

Yet just as Πενία had enough *poria* about her to get Eros conceived, so Rahner is equipped with *Als-Struktur* in “an uncommonly good ability to find a signal even in total [silence].” (Fischhoff said ‘noise.’<sup>36</sup>) Rahner’s move is proximately Kantian,<sup>37</sup> but sounds ultimately, perhaps, in the structure of Fortunate Fall.<sup>38</sup> Rahner writes,

“If it were all perfectly evident to me here on earth, if Your Love of me were so manifest that I could ask no more anxious questions about it, if You had made absolutely crystal clear the most important thing about me, namely, that I am someone loved by You, how then could I prove the daring courage and fidelity of my love?”<sup>39</sup>

‘The most important thing about me’ is not in the German; the phrase overtranslates *was ich bin*, and yet not without warrant. Rahner’s profoundest need is for God to love him. “This love . . . only You can give. . . . There is only one thing I can beg for, and that is Your most ordinary and exalted gift, the grace of Your Love.”<sup>40</sup>

The ontological limerent is a bottomless sink of *Bedürftigkeit*. Small wonder this reaction norm invents something that needs it back. So God, Rahner feels, needs Rahner as instrument:

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<sup>36</sup> Baruch Fischhoff, “For those condemned to study the past: Heuristics and biases in hindsight,” in *Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases* (ed. Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky 1982) 347.

<sup>37</sup> If God and Eternity stood always present to us then of course we would follow the command of the moral law, but heteronomously, from fear, etc. *Autonomous* obedience, so to speak, is only possible in a state of uncertainty. So our ignorance is a fortunate provision in that it is the condition of the possibility of, etc. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*: [Part I, Book II, Ch. IX] *Von der der praktischen Bestimmung des Menschen weislich angemessenen Proportion seiner Erkenntnißvermögen*; pp. 146-148 of this edition: [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Kant\\_s\\_gesammelte\\_Schriften/GDpPbUdXM9EC?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Kant_s_gesammelte_Schriften/GDpPbUdXM9EC?hl=en&gbpv=1).

<sup>38</sup> A structure showing up in odd places; e.g. Hell, when Mammon gives his ‘Make lemonade’ speech to the fallen Rebels:

Our greatness will appear  
Then most conspicuous, when great things of small,  
Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse,  
We can create, and in what place soe’er  
Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain  
Through labour and endurance.

*Paradise Lost* II.257-262.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* 56. *Wäre in dieses irdische Leben hinein deine Liebe zu mir schon offenbar geworden, indem mir schon kund wäre, was ich bin: geliebt von dir, wie könnte ich dir dann wagenden Mut und die Treue meiner Liebe beweisen . . . Worte ins Schweigen* 54. Cf. “Delulu’s cousin, the delusion-ship, describes the dating habit of accelerating – or entirely making up – a relationship in one’s head. A crush holds eye contact for just a second longer than normal? [noise] They’re in love with you. A hookup texting you back three weeks later? They took so long [silence] because they didn’t want to bother you, and that was really considerate of them, actually. Ridiculous lines of thinking like these can be very reassuring.” I.e., ridiculous or not they have rescue-power: to make great things of small and work ease out of pain.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/nov/08/delulu-tiktok-trend-manifesting-self-belief>.

<sup>40</sup> *Encounters with Silence* 52. *Aber diese Liebe . . . kannst nur du mir geben. . . . Nur eine Bitte habe ich zu stammeln um deine gewöhnlichste Gabe, die deine höchste ist, um deine Liebe. Worte ins Schweigen* 50.

“You have made me Your priest, and have thus chosen me to be an earthly sign of Your grace to others. You have put Your grace into my hands, Your truth into my mouth.”<sup>41</sup>

Similar vessel-imagery is not lacking in Heidegger. Heidegger’s insight disclosed to him that the Dasein in human being is nothing human.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly he asks, “What makes a call upon us that we should think and, by thinking, be who we are [*und so als Denkende diejenigen sind, die wir sind*]?” Heidegger says,

“That which calls on us to think in this way presumably can do so insofar as the calling itself, on its own, needs thought [*als das Rufende selber und von sich aus das Denken braucht*]. What calls us to think, and thus commands, that is, brings our essential nature into the keeping of thought, needs thinking [*braucht das Denken*] because what calls to us wants itself to be thought about according to its nature [*seinem Wesen nach selbst bedacht sein möchte*]. What calls on us to think, demands for itself [*verlangt von sich*] that it be tended, cared for, husbanded in its own essential nature, by thought [*in seinem eigenen Wesen bedient, gepflegt, behütet sei*].”<sup>43</sup>

In the quoted question that begins this passage *das Rufende* has a *volo ut sis* kind of *Fürsorge*; but as the characterization proceeds it takes on more of an I-want-to-be-thought-by-you cast, *einspringende Fürsorge*.<sup>44</sup> So one ‘after Heidegger’ question is ‘How, if at all, to understand this peculiar unhuman calling in evolutionary terms?’ Opening that can of urbilaterians is for another occasion.

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<sup>41</sup> *Id.* 70, 71. *Du hast mich zu deinem Priester gemacht, hast mich so zum irdischen Zeichen deiner Gnade für andere erwählt. Worte ins Schweigen* 65.

<sup>42</sup> *Aber das Wesen (verbal) des Menschen, »das Dasein im Menschen«* (vgl. *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 1. Aufl. 1929, § 43 [<https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=3.00&pg=234> ]) *ist nichts Menschliches*. GA 9: 397: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=9&pg=397> .

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (tr. J. Glenn Gray and Fred D. Wieck 1969) 121. 8 GA 125: <https://www.beyng.com/gaselis/?vol=8.00&pg=125> .

<sup>44</sup> Cf. “our thrownness means we do not ‘belong to ourselves’ so much as we are at the service of, in thrall to, the possibility of meaning, which is—call it as you will—our *raison d’être*, our *Worumwillen*, our Οὐ ἕνεκα, our Τέλος, our essence, in short: what we cannot not be.” Thomas Sheehan, “Heidegger: πάθος as the thing itself” in *Heidegger on Affect*; also here: <https://www.beyng.com/docs/TomSheehanPathos.html> . So, what is *Existenz*, sense-making, itself ‘good for’ in the economy of nature? Its most salient *effect*, anyhow, has been acceleration of the rate of entropy production over what it would have been in the absence of sense-making biota. ‘Higher than fading away stands burn-out.’