



Allurement

Thomas: In order to approach love, we must start with our common context, the emerging universe in which we find ourselves. This realm of existence is our ultimate home. All beings, including humans, have this home in common. If we want to learn anything, we must start with the cosmos, the Earth, and life forms.

Love begins as allurement—as attraction. Think of the entire cosmos, all one hundred billion galaxies rushing through space: at this cosmic scale, the basic dynamism of the universe is the attraction each galaxy has for every other galaxy. Nothing in all science has been established and studied with greater attention and detail than this primary attraction of each part of the universe for every other part.

Youth: The attraction is love?

Thomas: Start here: on the cosmic scale, an attraction exists.

Youth: But isn't that gravity?

Thomas: Gravity is the word used by scientists and the rest of us in the modern era to *point* to this primary attraction. Listen carefully, and I'll clarify my point. For three hundred years, the word gravity meant Newton's theory of gravity. Then Einstein published his own relativistic theory of gravity, so that in our time a scientist can think of gravity as Einstein's theory. The subtle mathematical differences between Newton's and Einstein's theories of gravity are crucial, but both were attempts to say something intelligent about why rocks fall to Earth. Before—and after—any theory, there is the ultimate mystery of the falling rock and the revolving Earth. The mystery remains no matter how intelligently we theorize. Do you see?

Youth: I don't think so.

Thomas: All right. If a rock is dropped, why does it move toward the Earth?

Youth: Because of gravity.

Thomas: And what is gravity?

Youth: A basic force. It pulls things.

Thomas: *What is doing the pulling?*

Youth: There's just this pulling, that's all. It's just there.

Thomas: That's right. An attracting activity. This attracting activity is a fundamental mystery.

Youth: But it's one we understand.

Thomas: We understand details concerning the *consequences* of this attraction. We do not understand the attracting activity itself. Years after Isaac Newton wrote out his equations of the Universal Law of Gravitation, he was still wondering aloud: “Whence is it that the sun and planets gravitate toward one another?” We can never penetrate into the basic fact of this attraction, nor determine why it operates at all.

Do you see that the universe might just as well have been different? Might have included *no* attracting activity? But the fact is that our galaxy is attracted by every other galaxy in the universe; and our galaxy attracts every other galaxy. The attracting activity is a stupendous and mysterious fact of existence. Primal. We awake and discover that this alluring activity is *the* basic reality of the macrocosmic universe.

Youth: Are you saying that this attraction is love?

Thomas: The difficulty with the word “love” is that it has been ruined recently. For the last few centuries the fundamental referent for our language was the human world. We have tried to live in the anthropocentric frame of reference and have thereby crippled many of our concepts and words. When we hear the word love we think only of *human* love, a very special sort of love. So I am certainly not saying that gravity is human love.

I *am* saying that if we are going to think about love in its cosmic dimension, we must start with the universe as a whole. We must begin with the attraction that permeates the entire macrostructure. I’m speaking precisely of the basic binding energy found everywhere in reality. I’m speaking of the primary allurements that all galaxies experience for all other galaxies.

Youth: How does this connect with human love, then?

Thomas: Tell me something you enjoy doing.

Youth: Listening to music.

Thomas: Yes. Now watch. We can not give any explanation for liking music; we simply enjoy music of certain sorts. The attraction is primal. You have awakened to existence and discovered this attraction. Is it clear now that your attraction, your interest and enjoyment, are ultimate mystery?

Youth: I’m beginning to see.

Thomas: There are so many sounds in the world, and yet a very particular sort of sound interests you most deeply. Why should this be? Why not any of the other infinite number of sounds? Why music above all? Well, that is unanswerable, just as Newton never pretended to be able to say why the Sun attracts the Earth. The strangest thing is that this alluring activity permeates the cosmos on *all* levels of being. These allurements permeating you and everyone and everything are fundamentally mysterious. You are interested in certain things, certain people, certain activities: each interest is as fundamental to the universe as is the gravitational attraction our Earth feels for the Sun. We cannot explain why these attractions exist. We can only become aware of them. Am I making myself clear?

Youth: Yes, but it seems that maybe we *can* explain them. For instance, listening to music is relaxing. Maybe that’s why humans---

Thomas: When you first listened to some music you really liked, did you think, “This is the sort of music that will relax me?”

Youth: Well, no.

Thomas: You discovered that you were drawn to the music, true? Such experiences of interest are the roots of love. You are simply attracted to something or someone, to some activity. You don't find reasons for this attraction until after the fact; *then* you come up with reasons. The Earth does not think, "Well, it'll be a good thing to be attracted to the Sun. That way, humans can warm their tea in black bags and save on electricity." The Earth is simply attracted. The electron is simply attracted. The galaxy is simply attracted. You are simply attracted. This mysterious attraction that we call "interest," or "fascination," is as mysterious, as basic, as the allurements we call gravitation.

Youth: So what you're saying is, a galaxy exists within attraction and so do I.

Thomas: The great mystery is that we are interested in anything whatsoever. Think of your friends, how you first met them, how interesting they appeared to you. Why should anyone in the whole world interest us at all? Why don't we experience everyone as utter, unendurable bores? Why isn't the universe made that way? Why don't we suffer an intolerable boredom with every person, forest, symphony, and seashore in existence? The great surprise is the discovery that something or someone *is* interesting. Love begins there. Love begins when we discover interest. To be interested is to fall in love. To become fascinated is to step into a wild love affair on any level of life.

Then we discover not only that we are interested, but that our interests are entirely our own. We awake to our own unique sets of attractions. So do oxygen atoms. So do protons. The proton is attracted only to certain particles. On an infinitely more complex level, the same holds true for humans: Each person discovers a field of allurements, the totality of which bears the unique stamp of that person's personality. Destiny unfolds in the pursuit of individual fascinations and interests.

Youth: But it almost sounds self-centered. Where do others fit in?

Thomas: By pursuing your allurements, you help bind the universe together. The unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion. Surprised? Let's experiment:

Bring to mind all the allurements filling the universe, of whatever complexity or order: the allurements we call gravitation, that of electromagnetic interactions, chemical attractors, allurements in the biological and human worlds. Here's the question: if we could snap our fingers and make these allurements—which we can't see or taste or hear anyway—disappear from the universe, what would happen?

To begin with, the galaxies would break apart. The stars of the Milky Way would soar off in all directions, since they would no longer hold each other in the galactic dance. Their spiraling arms would disintegrate as stars made their chaotic ways into intergalactic space. Individual stars would disperse as well, their atoms no longer attracting each other but wandering off in all directions, releasing core pressure and thereby shutting down fusion reactions. The stars would go dark.

The Earth would break apart as well, all the minerals and chemical compounds dissolving, mountains evaporating like huge dark clouds under the noon sun. And even if the physical world retained its shape, the human world would disintegrate just the same. No one would go to work in the morning. Why should they? There would be no attraction for the work, no matter what it was. Activity would cease. Did scientists once find the universe interesting, staying up nights to reflect on its mysteries? No longer. Did lovers chase each other in the night, abandoning all for the adventure of romance? Never again. All interest, enchantment, fascination, mystery, and wonder would fall away, and with their absence all human groups would lose their binding energy.

Galaxies, human families, atoms, ecosystems, all disintegrating immediately as the allurement pervading the universe is shut off. Nothing left. No community of any sort. Just nothing.

Youth: That's an amazing experiment.

Thomas: It underlines the primary result of all allurement, which is the evocation of being, the creation of community. All communities of being are created in response to a prior mysterious alluring activity. OK? Allurement evokes being and life. That's what allurement *is*. Now you can understand what love means: love is a word that points to this alluring activity in the cosmos. This primal dynamism awakens the communities of atoms, galaxies, stars, families, nations, persons, ecosystems, oceans, and stellar systems. Love ignites being.

Think of the power of this alluring activity—its immensity. We are barely able to keep our cars pattering about the continent! What would we say if we had the job of getting the stars to rotate and revolve around the galaxies? What if we had to keep all the hydrogen atoms together? Or keep them pressed into stars? Think of the tremendous galactic tasks performed every instant by this universe, and you will begin to feel the magnificence of the cosmic allurement of love. It is this allurement that excites lovers into chasing each other through the night, that pulls the parent out of bed for the third time to comfort a sick child, that draws humans into lifetimes of learning and developing. The excitement in our hand as it tears open a letter from a friend is the same dynamism that spins our vast Earth through the black night and into the rosy colors of dawn.

Youth: So this alluring activity is love?

Thomas: Yes: the activity of allurement, which is simultaneously the activity of igniting being and enhancing life.

Game Instruction – comes with materials

Any questions?

7:45 pm

Let's start!

8:15 pm – warning, ending game in 5 minutes

8:20 – end game, debrief

8:27

Chant commissioning

8:30