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Plutarch’s Views on Love
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Abstract

Plutarch was an innovator concerning the attitude to the woman and to love. In his view, love is almost to be defined as conjugal love. He was a spokesman of reciprocal and egalitarian relations between man and woman. The woman shall receive an education and thus be fully responsible for her way of living and be entitled to demand respect and regard on the part of her husband.

Plutarch’s views on love led him to a radical revaluation of the Platonic concept of Eros. Not pederastic love primarily but conjugal love is the guide to the vision of the Form of the Beautiful.

Plutarch has much to say about love. This is certainly what we would expect to find in a writer so deeply interested in psychology and different kinds of relations between human beings. The vast number of essays and treatises collected in the *Moralia* provide us with a lot of information about Plutarch as a person. Consequently, Plutarch is one of those writers of antiquity, of whose thinking we are in the position to get the most reliable understanding.

It is well known that, in Plutarch’s view, love is virtually identical with conjugal love. He regarded marriage almost as a sacred institution, protected and furthered by Aphrodite and Eros. There is thus good reason to begin our study by having a look into his own experiences of matrimonial love. We shall see that there is clear evidence indicating that Plutarch and his wife, Timoxena, lived in a very happy and harmonious marriage.

One of the best known and most widely read of Plutarch’s essays in the *Moralia* is his letter of consolation to his wife. In this short writing, improvised at a moment of depression and sorrow, he openly discloses his tender feelings toward his wife and his affectionate concern for her and their children. We here have a look into a happy family. Husband and wife no doubt lived in a loving relation, and both parents obviously were deeply committed to their children. It is thus no surprise to find in this short text frequent words expressing feelings of this kind. For example, there are four instances of each of two of Plutarch’s favourite