

**“Desire is the Mark of the Creature”**

The Influence of Platonic Divine *Eros*  
Upon the Augustinian Theological Construction of Love  
Noah Nathaniel Neiber  
Rockford University

The conception of love is an issue of intense discussion in Western culture. This was as true in the ancient world as in the modern. Perhaps the most influential and most misunderstood contributor to this debate was Plato. Platonic *Eros* was the expression in the philosophical context of the wider Greek idea of love. The idea was sustained through centuries as Greek ideas spread from Spain to Afghanistan, largely due to the conquests of Alexander.

It was in this time that Greek ideals became known to a then insignificant people called the Israelites. When the two worlds collided, their religion of Judaism began to reject and accept Greek learning including the ideas of Plato. A partial result of this meeting was an initially small sect of Judaism which became Christianity. This new sect began in Jewish orthodoxy but began to adapt to Greek ideals. Throughout the first centuries of its existence however the terms of this adaptation was fiercely debated. That was until one man was able to synthesize Christianity with Greek, specifically Platonic, thought. That was Augustine, the bishop of Hippo and one of the most prolific writers of early Christianity. Across his works, he synthesized various ideas from Plato with his own faith. Included in this synthesis was Divine *Eros*.

The synthesis of the Greek and Christian ideals of love required a balance between two elements. The first was Divine *Eros* piety and the second the Christian ideal of *Agape* or selfless love. By Augustine’s time both had become critically important to the movement and reconciliation of the two ideals was required. By the Middle Ages there was no major conflict between the two ideals. It seems that Augustine accomplished the first synthesis of *Agape* and Divine *Eros* accepted within orthodox Christianity.

Before any discussion of Platonic love, we must situate it within the larger context of Platonism. The doctrine of the *Forms* is central to Platonism and most definitively elaborated in *The Republic* which argues that all things in physical reality emanate from their perfect or ideal essence. Idealism dominated Platonism; in the Third Century when Origen wrote, Middle Platonism dominated the Greco-Roman world. Some things had evolved, yet the idealism of Platonism persisted.<sup>29</sup>

Given its idealism it is not surprising that Platonic philosophy proposes

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<sup>29</sup> Also in the Third Century Origen's contemporary Plotinus's Neo-Platonism grafted more mystical elements onto Platonism, a further development of Platonic Idealism.

an ideal form of love. The discourse on Platonic love occurs primarily in three dialogues: *Lysis*, *Phaedrus* and, most notably, *Symposium*. These dialogues posit that love is Divine *Eros*. Divine *Eros* is a love described throughout the dialogues as ascension, that is, it is a desire which elevates its devotees from love for earthly things to love for heavenly things. The dialogues posit that the end goal of Divine *Eros* are to gaze upon the Forms of the Good and Beautiful, to see them as they are. This is what makes it a love of ascension from a lower state to a higher one. All three dialogues contribute to this argument in some fashion with the *Symposium* laying it out in clearest terms while the *Phaedrus* goes into further detail and the *Lysis* focusing on the aspect of friendship.<sup>30</sup> His word choice is important to note: *ερωζ* instead of *φιλια*. Richard Kraut notes that *ερωζ* more precisely means a desire for physical contact leading one to think obsessively of another person and to mourn their absence. On the other hand, *philia* exists only as a close relationship between cooperative groups of people, be they family or friends.<sup>31</sup> This distinction is crucial to Plato's *Eros* theory. It both distinguishes him from Aristotle who wrote extensively on *philia* in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, and it points to the sexual component of human relationships as a path towards the good.<sup>32</sup> *Eros* implies an aspect that *Philia* cannot reach. *Eros* is passionate and draws us towards an end. *Philia* lacks that sort of passion, focusing instead on the bond itself.

Let's start with the *Symposium*. The basic structure of the dialogue is six speeches given at the dinner party of Agathon. The last, and most important to understanding Divine *Eros*, is Socrates' who relates a conversation he had during his youth with the priestess Diotima on the topic of love. This part of the dialogue begins with Socrates affirming, as the prior men argued, that love is love for something which the lover does not possess.<sup>33</sup> This view is critical to the Platonic view of love and to its interpretation by the Church Fathers. Anders Nygren views Platonic *Eros* in terms of acquisition, “The sense of need is an essential constituent of *Eros*; for without a sense of need acquisitive love would never be aroused.”<sup>34</sup> According to this framework, *Eros* needs an object of desire. According to Richard Kraut Plato's word *επιθυμια* (*epithumia*) means 'desire' which can mean any craving needing fulfilling, not just base desires for

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30 The focus of *Lysis* on friendship thus excludes it from the present discussion since, unlike the other two, it only minimally impacts later views on Platonic *Eros* with regard to love as a means of lifting oneself towards the good.

31 Richard Kraut, "Plato on Love," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 286-287.

32 Kraut, 287.

33 Plato *Symposium*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (London, UK: William Heinemann, 1925), 200A-5B.

34 Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, Trans. Phillip S. Watson (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), 176.

food or sex.<sup>35</sup> Thus the object of *Eros* may be for a Form in Plato's sense.

Plato states that *Eros* is a δαίμων (intermediary spirit) between the gods and humanity who brings the two into communication.<sup>36</sup> Without *Eros* there is no communication between the gods and humanity as it mediates the gods' will and humanity's response to that will. A key distinction here is that the divine does not love because it does not need. The gods possess the good already so it is illogical to say that they do not possess it and also sacrilege.<sup>37</sup> Thus, if *Eros* is the desire for the good then, if a god does not possess the good, they are no god: therefore, the gods do not have *Eros*.<sup>38</sup> The gods do not have *Eros* as they lack nothing. This directly connects to Bishop Nygren's second mark of Platonic *Eros*, *Eros* is humanity's way to the Divine.<sup>39</sup> If the gods do not possess *Eros* but rather the good and beautiful, and it is humanity's goal to possess the good and beautiful, as Plato says, then it is *Eros* that leads to the good and thus to divinity. It is also worth noting that this is not a new thought; according to Nygren the Orphic and Dionysiac mystery cults shared these ideas.<sup>40</sup> The concept of *Eros* as humanity's pathway to the divine existed already in the popular cults of Plato's time. He was echoing a well ingrained Greek sensibility, that the gods were transcendent of humanity. Platonic *Eros*, as it seeks transcendence but has not reached transcendence, is not divine. .

The assertion that *Eros* is an intermediary spirit brings with it many theological claims. As Plato declared, *Eros* delivers the prayers and sacrifices of humanity to the gods and guides, prophets, priests and mysteries.<sup>41</sup> *Eros* is central to Greek religion, both the public religion of the priests and private cult of the mysteries. Stanley Rosen notes that through Diotima, Plato “both accommodates to and revises the traditional religion” by making religion a sort of barter between the gods and humanity which does not lead to wholeness; rather it provides a link to the gods.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the established religious systems are not the ultimate good, rather they are a means to it. The concept will be critically important in the theologies of Clement of Alexandria and especially of Origen as

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35 Kraut, 289.

36 Plato, *Symposium*, 202E.

37 *Ibid.*, 202C-DI 5. This is not stated explicitly yet Diotima's strong language, asking Socrates if he would dare deny the goodness of the gods, and the force of Socrates' response in 202 C1 6 of "Μα δι ουκ εγω, εφην" (translated in Loeb as "'Bless me,' I exclaimed, 'Not I!'") indicates that disagreeing with this assertion is an insult to the gods themselves given the use of the emphatic Μα.

38 *Ibid.*, 202D.

39 Nygren, 177.

40 *Ibid.*, 171.

41 Plato, *Symposium*, 202E-203A.

42 Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 229-230.

both argued for a distinction between basic faith and true contemplation of the divine, the latter being separate from organized Christianity.

The focus on the individual attainment of the desired object leads to the final element of the definition of *Eros* according to Nygren's interpretation. He characterizes *Eros* as egocentric love: its *epithumia* naturally focuses its gaze on the soul's acquisition of the object it desires.<sup>43</sup> The central focus is the individual's desire, not an altruistic love which requires no reward for its actions. Thus, Platonic *Eros* is acquisitive, the means of communication with the divine, and egocentric.

The nature of desire in *Symposium* becomes central to understanding Divine *Eros*. If *Eros* is the desire to possess the good or beautiful, how does one slake this deep lingering thirst for divine things? Plato answers this by giving a step-by-step process by which the soul may ascend to possession of the beautiful. It begins with the love of one Form leading to love of all beautiful Forms leading to love of the beautiful mind, leading to love for institutions and laws, ascending to the sciences and domains of knowledge, ending with the vision of absolute beauty and absolute good.<sup>44</sup> *Eros* is a chain of desires leading to the ultimate attainment. Kraut says of this attainment that “[T]he life of the lover who reaches this stage is greatly enhanced, so much so that it becomes godlike. Not only can the lover explain why imperfectly beautiful things are beautiful; he has gazed on the greatest beauty of all.”<sup>45</sup>

The above statement brings out two aspects which will be critically important to later discussion. First, the servant of *Eros* becomes godlike. They have reached the truest stage of Divine *Eros*, seeing absolute beauty. Thus, they are akin to the gods themselves. The ties to mystery cults are quite obvious here. A primitive version of Platonic *Eros* seems part of the popular cults of the days. Jon Mikalson notes that initiates of the Elysian cult likely believed that they would enjoy “eternal light, music, and dancing in the afterlife.”<sup>46</sup> This is in contrast to traditional Greek religion which makes no provision for fulfillment after death. To the cultists the physical world could be transcended for eternal light. This seems close to Plato's *Eros* piety leading to possession of absolute beauty and godlikeness. Although Plato makes no reference in the *Symposium* to drawing from these sources, given their popularity at his time it is reasonable to consider them a possible partial influence.

Secondly, *Eros* raises the lover from a lower state to a higher one. The lower states of love, known as Vulgar *Eros* or desire for physical things, are to

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43 Nygren, 179-180.

44 Plato, 210A-211A.

45 Kraut, 296.

46 Jon Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 81-82.

be transcended by Divine *Eros*. Rosen describes the first step as love for beautiful bodies while one is young where the ultimate form of this love is between an older man and a younger boy so that *Eros* will be driven not by procreative desire but rather by valuing beauty itself.<sup>47</sup> This sort of love was common in the Greek context, and the *Symposium* refers to it frequently. It lends itself well to Platonic love as the focus is on conceiving ideas instead of other human beings. It is made explicit in the *Symposium* that the soul can be made “pregnant” with ideas of wisdom and virtue which are deemed more valuable than human children as ideas last longer.<sup>48</sup> This plays into the ancient ideas about women’s roles of child birth and rearing which, despite other passages in Plato arguing for gender equality, are evident in this passage. The direct focus though is on the idea that souls are beautiful in themselves which is the second stage of the soul rising. The physical ascends to the level of human souls. The next stage of the lover’s upward movement focuses on existing systems with Kraut commenting, the pursuer of *Eros* “is inquiring into the ways in which the lives of all citizens may be improved, and in this respect he is recapitulating the transition he has already made – a transition from one to many.”<sup>49</sup> This is a very Athenian ideal. Athenian democratic society focused on communal unity. Parallel to this the pursuer of *Eros* will undoubtedly contribute in love to the community, seeing the beauty in politics. Next, knowledge is sought -- Rosen describes this as ascending from the practical into the theoretical.<sup>50</sup> No longer would *Eros* reach for physical things at this stage, rather it would reach for ideals considered true achievement in Platonism. As was the pattern for individual love, the empirical is transcended by the abstract. The final step is the view of beauty itself, which Rosen describes as the unspeakable of which only reflections can be generated.<sup>51</sup> This ineffable mystical experience is seeing the highest of any Form. The Christian Theologians who saw *Eros* as piety could and would insert God in place of beauty. The ultimate ascension to true beauty later is taken to mean being raised to the divine.

This central argument of the *Symposium* occurs in other dialogues as well, most notably, the *Phaedrus*. This text makes one central contribution to the Platonic argument for *Eros* that rises towards the good and beautiful: the chariot allegory. The soul has three parts, the rational, spirited and appetitive, represented by a charioteer pulled by an upright horse and a crooked horse respectively. Of course the rational element is supposed to lead the soul on its

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47 Rosen, 265.

48 Plato, *Symposium* 209C.

49 Kraut, 298.

50 Rosen, 267.

51 Rosen, 269.

path<sup>52</sup> however the *Phaedrus* narrows the focus to the personal level of the lover. G.R.F. Ferrari notes that the goal of the *Symposium* is to show lovers cultivating the intellectual virtues that lead to absolute beauty whereas the *Phaedrus* portrays the lover's interior struggle to maintain control over appetitive urges.<sup>53</sup> Plato is describing the war within the soul between striving for the good and attraction to vulgar *Eros*. The danger is that the path towards Divine *Eros* will be halted by an immoderate attraction to any of the prior stages of *Eros*. Thus, Platonic *Eros* must be regulated by the rational nature so that it will not devolve into love of bodies alone. The charioteer must **rise** to the beautiful and take hold of it. The pious and rational coming to the face of beauty marks the Platonic conception of Divine *Eros* more than any other aspect.

The Platonic system dominated Greek thought for the next several centuries. Plato's most famous disciple, Aristotle, took up this model. Aristotle, the first, great naturalist philosopher and tutor to Alexander the Great, would be an influence as great as Plato on Greek intellectual culture. While they disagreed on political philosophy, epistemology and methodology, Aristotle was faithful to Plato's *Eros* philosophy.<sup>54</sup> The two best-regarded minds of Greek thought concurred on this issue. Both systems of thought remained strong through the expansion of the Macedonian Empire. This was a central moment of syncretism between Eastern spirituality and Greek philosophy. Within the areas conquered by the Greeks was the fiercely independent kingdom of Israel. Much of their independent spirit was tied to Judaism, their monotheistic religion. Their denial of the pagan gods would lead to the incorrect presumption that they would reject Greek learning with their gods yet, despite a movement within Judaism to resist Greek thought, it permeated Jewish scholarship. The Age of Alexander also led to the founding of Alexandria in Egypt, the largest center for Greek learning in the Hellenistic and later Roman world. It was there that the Greek and Jewish world interacted most. Most famously Philo, the great first century C.E. Jewish scholar born in Alexandria, combined Jewish monotheism with the spirit of Greek philosophy, mostly Plato's.<sup>55</sup> This unity of Greek and Jewish belief would prove to be important to the offshoot of Judaism: Christianity.

Christianity came out of the first century C.E. atmosphere of Judaic despair. They had fought off the Greeks in the Maccabean rebellions of Second Century B.C.E. but were conquered by Rome around a century later. Rule by non-Jews, who were considered culturally inferior, was a dire humiliation. This

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52 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler (London, UK: William Heinemann, 1933), 253 C 2-254 E 1.

53 G.R.F. Ferrari, "Platonic Love," In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1992), 265.

54 Nygren, 184-185.

55 Nygren, 349.

trauma produced a context where Jesus of Nazareth could arise and claim to be the Messiah, the deliverer of the Jewish people. The tie between the newly formed belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Judaism was contentious in the early Apostolic period and it only became more contentious after the fall of the second temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the death of a sizeable portion of the Jewish population. After this, Christianity began to stand on its own. To remain successful however Christians had to claim ties to an existing system. This is where Justin Martyr entered Christian thought.

Justin was the first to attempt an intentional union between Christianity and Platonism. Justin was a man who sought out meaning in life through various philosophies until he converted to Christianity in the Second Century.<sup>56</sup> In it he found the answers he was seeking. Yet he did not lose his philosophic inclination. While he would not be as influential or renowned as later Fathers, he built the foundation upon which they would further their arguments. He was the first to claim that Plato took inspiration from Moses and Justin led Greek thought to an imperfect alignment with the Judaic conception of God.<sup>57</sup> Hellenistic and Judaic thought merged at the latest after the conquests of Alexander and although the latter took from the former, Justin argued it was the Judaic conception of God that influenced Plato. This would lend authority to Christianity as it could claim that its background, Judaic thought, created the intellectual culture of the day. The ideas that it was claimed that Plato derived from Moses and even other Old Testament figures were of no small matter either. Most importantly, it was claimed that Plato’s doctrine of Forms was derived from *Exodus 25* which says the tabernacle was created in the form of what Moses saw on the mount.<sup>58</sup> This claim posits that Plato took his most central doctrine from Judaism from which Christianity sprung. Thus, Christianity was also part of Greek culture. This was an important connection to make both in face of the persecution of the Church by Rome and for establishing a culture independent of Judaism.<sup>59</sup> Justin’s introduction of Platonism into the

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56 Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (Peabody MA: Prince Press, 2008), 52.

57 Justin Martyr, *Justin’s Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 281.

58 Justin Martyr, *Hortatory Address*, 285-286. Justin derived this idea from *Exodus 25* in which God described the details of the tabernacle to Moses. The central point of this passage for Justin comes from verse 40 where God told Moses to create the tabernacle from the form which God indicated to him on the mountain. Justin took this idea of a form created for the tabernacle and claimed that Plato created his theory of the Forms from *Exodus 25*.

59 Justin would address the church’s relation to both Rome and Judaism in his writings. To the former, he wrote the first two apologetic documents in church history in which he also brought in elements of Greek religion and philosophy to make his case. To the

Christian world was a matter of great importance. It would spark the discussion of the next centuries until Augustine completed the synthesis between the two.

Augustine was not the first to attempt a synthesis of Christianity and Greek culture, an honor which belongs to the Alexandrian Father Origen. Origen was equal parts Greek and Christian, growing up in Alexandria and born into a Christian household.<sup>60</sup> This mixed heritage led Origen to synthesizing both elements of his upbringing into one system. Like Justin, Origen attached himself to Platonic thought on a great many issues. One of the most notable was Plato’s *Divine Eros*. While this topic is discussed across his writings, it is most prominent in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.

The *Song of Songs* from the Hebrew Bible is a series of love poems between – most scholars including Origen presume – a bride and groom. It contains some of the most graphic sexual language in the Bible making it uncomfortable for early Christian Fathers whose sexual ethics was conservative. Origen rejects a literal interpretation,

But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!<sup>61</sup>

He does not think it wise to interpret this scripture literally as it could, instead of leading to spiritual enlightenment, lead to inflaming unrighteous passions. This is a parallel to Plato’s dichotomy between Vulgar and *Divine Eros*, one which Origen fully intends. He directly parallels Plato when he says, “[W]e ought to understand also that it is impossible for human nature not to be always feeling the passion of love for something.”<sup>62</sup> Just as Plato states that *Eros* is love yearning for its object, so too does Origen. There is no love for its own sake, rather love seeks an end and of the end of this love he writes, “[I]t follows that the only laudable love is that which is directed to God and to the powers of the soul.”<sup>63</sup> The end of his philosophy of love also culminates in the divine. The soul

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latter, he engaged in a dialogue with a Jew named Trypho in which he posited supersessionism, the idea that Christianity was greater than Judaism. This would further divide the two, thus setting a greater necessity for Christianity to unite with Hellenistic culture.

60 Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1973), 9-10.

61 Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, Trans. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957), 22.

62 Origen, *Song*, 36.

63 Origen, *Song*, 36.



is guided beyond the sensory world, God and its own nature. Origen attempted to bring Divine *Eros* into Christianity before Augustine.

Some thought must be given, therefore, to why Augustine’s influence was longer standing than Origen’s. The main reason was their reputation in their lifetimes and beyond. Augustine’s orthodoxy was rarely called into question whereas Origen had to dodge the shadow of accusations of heresy his entire career. More important for the issues of love however was Origen’s idea that *Eros* superseded *Agape*. While some traces of *Agape* remain in his writings, he considers *Eros* far more central; in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* he urges that in scripture the replacement of the word *Eros* by the word *Agape* which he characterizes as fellowship in order not to mislead the carnal individual.<sup>64</sup> *Eros* is superior yet most people can comprehend it only as sensual desire. *Agape* is not inherently valuable according to Origen while Augustine values *Agape* as a manifestation of Christian love as well.

Augustine achieved the first successful union between Platonism and Christianity. Augustine’s doctrine of love, known as *Caritas*, was an example of this. He experienced the force of Divine *Eros*, “All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the wisdom of eternal truth. I began to climb out of the depths to which I had sunk, in order to return to you. . . . My God, how I burned with longing to have wings to carry me back to you, away from all earthly things, although I had no idea what you would do with me!”<sup>65</sup> In his dialogue with God in the *Confessions*, Augustine describes his ascension to God through philosophy. It is a bewildering passion, a brutally strong desire. The true emotional power of Divine *Eros* is manifested in his words, love as a desire for something above all else which wounds lovers for as long as they are separated from their beloved. But his narrative also shows the struggle with Vulgar *Eros* as described in the *Phaedrus*, “But I still postponed my renunciation of this world’s joys, which would have left me free to look for that other happiness, the very search for which, let alone its discovery, I ought to have prized above the discovery of all human treasures. . . .”<sup>66</sup> The struggle between the desire for physical things and his soul’s movement towards God is a consistent theme in the *Confessions*. It is most famously summarized in one of Augustine’s most famous statements, “I had prayed to you for chastity and said ‘Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.’”<sup>67</sup> Augustine was torn between divine *Eros* and vulgar *Eros*. To use Plato’s analogy, the appetitive horse feuded with the charioteer. He sought to unite

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64 Origen, *Song*, 30.

65 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1961), 58-59.

66 *Ibid.*, 169.

67 *Ibid.* 169.

himself with the ultimate good and beautiful. In this way, Augustine and Plato are in complete agreement.

Augustine also agrees with Plato that any love is ultimately a love of possession. In *On the Trinity*, Augustine repeats the Ciceronian insight that “We certainly all will to be blessed,” maintaining that Cicero was irrefutably right.<sup>68</sup> This means self-seeking is an inherent part of human nature, perhaps not a bad one. Anders Nygren comments that for Augustine fundamentally “[A]ll love is acquisitive love” which squares with the Hellenistic conception of love seeking its own *eudaemonia*.<sup>69</sup> Augustine did not accept the idea of some abstract love which is completely selfless. Augustinian love, like Platonic *Eros*, seeks some object; in Nygren's words, “Desire is the mark of the creature; it is grounded in God's own will and plan.”<sup>70</sup> Desire, in Augustinian theology as in Platonic philosophy, is an inherently good thing. It leads the soul to possess the good and beautiful.

Augustine and Plato also agree that *Eros* should lead beyond the physical and that the physical could weigh individuals down. Augustine reflects, “For truly our mortal and corruptible part that weighs down the soul shows itself to be, and manifestly is, of Adam; but what in us is spiritual, and raises up the soul, is of God's gift and of His mercy...”<sup>71</sup> The desire for material things is as much a plague for Augustine as it is for Plato.<sup>72</sup> It limits the soul's ability to ascend to the beautiful and perfect. Union is foreclosed to a soul weighed down by lower Forms of *Eros*. *Caritas* draws the soul upwards and *Cupiditas* downwards.

Among these areas of agreement however is one key difference. Love, for Plato, cannot reach humanity from the divine. The gods have no love as they do not need or desire. But for Augustine the love of God directed towards humanity is critically important. In *On the Gospel of St. John* he writes, “For had not God loved sinners, He would not have come down from heaven to earth.”<sup>73</sup> This reflects *Agape*. Augustinian theology achieves a true union between the two models in that it includes *Agape*. God loves the impure that

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68 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. A.W. Haddan, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Volume III: St. Augustine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 170.

69 Nygren, 476.

70 *Ibid.*, 479.

71 Augustine, *On the Gospel of St. John*, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Volume VII: St. Augustine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 137.

72 Desire here is translated from *Cupiditas* which is played as the opposite of *Caritas* throughout Augustinianism.

73 *Ibid.*, 272.

they may ascend in purity to unite themselves with God. *Caritas* is the true synthesis of Platonic Divine *Eros* and Christian *Agape*.

To conclude, Platonic Divine *Eros* and Christian *Agape* underwent a synthesis culminating after a few centuries in Augustine’s syncretic model of *Caritas*. Augustinianism reflects the first orthodox synthesis of Christianity and Plato on the topic of love. This synthesis would hold, and still holds, a considerable influence upon Christendom. This theology traces its origins to Plato. Thus, classical philosophy still moves the world to this day.

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