

“Content Analysis of Love in the Context of Plato and Avicenna”

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Abstract

Recognized as the first philosophers who innovated some philosophical approaches to love in the Greek and Islamic traditions, Plato and Avicenna included love among the jewels of philosophical issues, and wrote some treatises on analysis of love that became the precursors of a novel philosophical approach. Inspired by those who followed Plato's Symposium to explain love in the Islamic tradition, Avicenna in his Risalah fil-'Isbq (A Treatise on Love), presents some ideas that are almost parallel to those of Plato's. However we should not ignore the differences that distinguish both treatises from each other. The resemblance often lies in their ontological analysis of love and their discrepancies can be found in their semantic and methodological analysis of love. Within both philosophical masterpieces, the position of knowledge in true love, interweaving of love and need as well as the objective of love are all exposed to serious scrutiny. But their conceptualizations of love and explanation method are thoroughly distinctive. In this comparative content analysis of the two treatises, we hope to reveal latent nuances in both thinkers' approaches to love.

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Introduction

In addition to *Phaedrus* and *Lysis*, Plato puts forward his deepest words on love in the treatise named *Symposium*. In this treatise, Plato's descriptions along are carried over with explanations by Socrates' mentor named Diotima. Although Plato wrote the treatise in a strenuous and eloquent style, it cannot be regarded as a merely literary one. Although he starts with unanimity with the mythical world, he gradually takes distance from that world, approaching instead the philosophical realm in order to portray the love -particularly as it is in its perfect stages- as a philosophical or rational category. The treatise has been influential and attractive to thinkers in the western world in terms of its literary form and writing structure, and its peculiar content.

Avicenna, one of the first Islamic philosophers to comment upon love from a philosophical perspective, sets out his views on the subject eloquently and effectively in his *Risalah fil-'Ishq*. Now, the question that comes to mind is whether Avicenna was influenced by Plato's teachings while writing the treatise or not? According to historical evidences, the answer is "Yes", because there are some certain proofs of Plato's *Symposium* having partly been translated into Arabic at the time of Avicenna and his being acquainted with it, and therefore his decision to propose the philosophical study of the Islamic doctrine of love was not a novel action. In other words, Avicenna's *Risalah fil-'Ishq* has had predecessors (i.e. Kindī and Fārābī) in the field of Islamic philosophy.

As a drop from the abundant literature on the transmission of Plato's works into Arabic (here we deal only with *Symposium*), we sketch out only two scholarly works fully relevant to justify the possibility of such transmission (as a succinct historical contextualization):

Dimitri Gutas, in his paper entitled "*Plato's Symposium in the Arabic Tradition*", rightly holds that *Symposium* was little known in the medieval Arab world. He points out that there was no direct translation of the full Greek text. But he agrees the fact "*Symposium has made its entry into Arabic literature indirectly and unofficially- incognito, so to speak- in two independent ways: in a paraphrase of some extent apparently by Kindī, and in gnomic fragments currently in Greaco-Arabic wisdom literature*" (Gutas, 1988: p.37). There are

few quotations which provide us with some details of Kindī’s knowing of Plato’s *Symposium*. Fārābī is the next philosopher who mentions only a subtitle, “On Pleasure, Relating to Socrates”, which is presumed to refer to the *Symposium* (Ibid)¹.

Emil L. Fackenheim, writing an introduction on *Risalah fil-'Ishq*, strives to show the development of the philosophical Arabic doctrine of love. “*Al-Kindi wrote a special treatise on love although that treatise itself is not extant.*” (Fackenheim, 1945: p.208). Moreover, the thirty-sixth treatise of the *Encyclopedia* of the Brethren of Purity is entirely devoted to the subject of love (Ibid)^{2&3}.

However, by reading Avicenna in light of Plato, we will be able to shed new light on each thinker's individual perspective on love.

I. Semantics of Love:

Plato and Avicenna’s conceptualizations of love are not the same. Unlike Plato’s philosophy, Avicenna's doesn’t bring forward a variety of concepts and terms. Seemingly Avicenna considers the meaning of love to be self-evident and defines it only once; this definition is not set forth at the beginning of the treatise, but within its given discussions. His definition of love is as follows:

“... *Love is in truth nothing but whole-hearted approval of the pleasing and suitable.*” (Rasāil, p.377)

It is quite obvious that the definition is not intended to qualify the entirety of love. He also defines it as ‘The Origin of Movement’, ‘The Creator of Movement’ and ‘The Good’ (Ibid). In the above-mentioned definitions, appreciation of wellness (or beauty) and coordination are two main elements. Understanding beauty and appreciation thereof is restricted to rational entities and understanding coordination is also confined to other creatures. He associates movement with love on a physical level and implicitly speaks of some kind of affectionate movement; that is, the very movement that holds an important position in mysticism. He defines the love of immaterial or abstract creatures as motionless and the love of corporal creatures as love in motion. Contemplating what Avicenna’s words reminds us of the substantial movement, as he sees love to be a feature of existence and movement to be specific to love. Hence, it can be deduced that in this philosophical conceptualization, love is coincident to existence¹ and movement,

therefore movement is the essential concomitant of existence and this is the substantial movement.

In the treatise *Al-Mabda' val-Ma'ād (the Origin and the Return)*, he makes benefit of two other terms to describe love: one is beauty and the other is pleasure. He defines pleasure as understanding of coordinate good (*Al-Mabda' va l-Ma'ād*, p.17), and introduces the highest level of beauty as rational beauty and describes it to be equivalent to absolute good. From this, he concludes that the necessary existence is absolute beauty and value and is the origin of any equilibrium, and therefore can be called 'unity in multiplicity' (Ibid).

This interpretation by Avicenna of unity in multiplicity and his other belief that beauty, good, perception, existence, liking and love² are all coincident, is exactly the same as what is seen in the transcendental philosophy of Mullāh Sadrā. By applying these principles, Avicenna demonstrates the union of reasoner, reasoned, lover and beloved, enjoyer and pleased and deems god as the possessor of both aspects of these attributes:

The Necessary existence that is at the highest level in terms of value, beauty and perfection, in virtue of these attributes, has a complete self-consciousness [is rationally aware of itself], and although it is a unity, it is both reasoner and reasoned, lover and beloved, enjoyer and pleased; and always possesses such rationality, love and pleasure at their highest level. (Ibid, pp.17-19)

Plato sets out love in a different way. He discusses issues related to love in *Lysis*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* and in the treatise *The Laws* in the last years of his life. He sometimes divides love into earthly and heavenly and sometimes he defines it as a kind of madness. According to his illustration, there are two kinds of madness: one stems from human sickness and the other is the result of a divine release from common habits. On the other hand, there are four kinds of divine madness each of which are linked to one of the gods according to the ancient Greeks' view: prediction or augury to Apollo, mystical madness to Dionysus, poetical madness or creative madness to Muses, and love madness that is the same as love passion and that is the most honorable kind of madness inspired by Aphrodite (goddess of beauty) and Eros (see Khorāsānī, 1379/2000: p.570).

Plato sees the origin of love as being the human soul which is reminded of the true beauty when encountering a beautiful object, and

seeks to wing its flight upward thereunto (*Phaedrus*, 250b-d). Hackforth, in his translation and commentary of *Phaedrus*, points out that love is the restoration of the souls' wings, in other words the regaining of its divine purity (246 d), via the contemplation. Eros is in fact a perpetual mediator between life and death. “*He occupies middle ground*” as “*he lies between morality and immorality*”; hence the universe becomes an interconnected whole thanks to it (*Symposium*, 202d-e). According to Harrison-Barbet, “*it is suggested in the Republic (see 502-509) that the Forms themselves are not isolated essences but are linked by virtue of their common origin in the Absolute Idea of the One, which Plato identifies with the Good and (in Symposium) with Beauty.*” (Harrison-Barbet, 1990: p.24). Eros which is the goddess of love and is a kind of Demon (which is semi-godly and semi-mortal) has a masculine nature.

Greeks believe that men are more beautiful than women. Such masculine love is rooted in ancient Greek culture and especially in immigrations and decamping of Greek tribes; however, they do not come to an agreement concerning this kind of love. Some of them accept it absolutely and others reject it absolutely and the rest like Athenians impregnate masculine love with feminine love (Borman, 1375/1996: p.100). In *Symposium*, Plato describes love as beauty and assumes it as the effect of love and applies different terms to giving utterance to this idea.

Terms expressing love in Greek include ‘Agape’ (i.e. loving soul), ‘Philia’ (absolutely loving), ‘Estaurge’ (a fundamental love that is present at the foundation of being), ‘Chunia’ (gratitude), ‘Kalon’ (absolute kindness, beauty and friendship) and finally Eros. Whilst defining Eros, according to Price, two possible senses of the word can be grasped: one is generic eros, within which the lover desires to possess beauty (which is love’s *goal*). And the other is specific eros, within which the lover is inspired by somebody else who already possesses beauty (which is love’s *occasion*). To define the latter, the concept should be analytically divided into two possible senses of the phrase ‘Pioesis or generation in beauty’: it might mean begetting upon a beauty, or else bearing to birth in the presence of beauty (Price, 1990: p.15).

In *Symposium*, Plato explains to us that beauty as it is discussed in the context of love is not caused but an effect, and frequently expresses beauty as the effect of love.

II. Ontology of Love:

II-I. Connection between Love and Knowledge

Knowledge is the firm element of Plato and Avicenna's philosophies. Dividing the universe into two material and abstract realms, Plato regards true knowledge as belonging to the world of ideas, and the quasi-true knowledge to the material world, but Avicenna, however, doesn't recognize Platonic ideas and takes another path into consideration to attain knowledge. He introduces acquiring knowledge as an action to be well-reached through abstraction and the natural universal of kinds rather than the world of ideas. Naturally, such knowledge is of a rational nature under both systems, but what about the sense perception?

Both philosophers considered sense perception to be an empirical one originating from sense faculties, and an unambiguous and noncomplex knowledge that can be achieved by everybody; nonetheless, Plato and Avicenna's approaches are different with respect to the validity or invalidity of such knowledge. Plato regards the material world as the world of shadows, and views the senses and sense perceptions as being epistemologically worthless. On the contrary, Avicenna treats the senses and sense perceptions as valid and sees them as the route towards rational knowledge. So it can be possible for us to generally compare Plato's epistemology with Avicenna's. Plato not only invalidates sense perception, but also explains rational knowledge to be derived from the world of ideas. On the contrary, Avicenna, respecting the senses and sense perceptions, recognizes this type of knowledge as the basis and foundation of any knowledge, which is the route to imagination and subsequently rational knowledge.

These two epistemological systems have inevitably brought forth two different interpretations of love, because both of them consider knowledge and perception to be essential necessities of love. In other words, the resemblance of these two giant philosophers lies in establishment of connection and harmony between love and knowledge in two different ways and from two different perspectives. Plato, as a result of his epistemological approach, does not attach so much importance to earthly love, but he despises it as though it is a kind of deviation from true love and entitles any lovers possessed by such a love a wandering and unsatisfied one on account of contradictions essential to the material world (*the Laws*XI, 837b-d).

Bad man or bad lover is a person who loves body rather than the mind

and “*this makes him inconstant, because there’s no constancy in the object of his desires*” (*Symposium*, 183d-e). On the contrary, Avicenna composing a chapter titled *‘Ishq ul-Zorafa’i val-Fatiyan* (On the Love of Those Who Are Noble-Minded and Young) (see *Rasāil*, pp.383-389) not only avoids dispraising such a love but also praises it in two aspects: first because it is the consequence of ‘Reason’ and second because among the levels of love, this level is the highest before the Divine one.

That is in this interpretation that Avicenna distances himself from Plato and puts down reason and wisdom -or Logos- as being united with love (Ibid, p.386), and appreciates it even at its earthly level. In evolutionary course of love, the higher we go, the more manifest the element of knowledge becomes until we reach absolute beauty which is reason itself. In such an epistemological attitude, love is coincident to knowledge and lover is coincident to philosopher.

II-II. Intervowenness of Love and Need

Love is tied up with knowledge on the one hand, and is correlated with need on the other hand. The god of love which Plato introduces as Eros is the primal cause of creation on the one hand, and completely human on the other hand; therefore, it is at the same time both needy and free from want. It is free of want because the telos of Platonic love is the idea of good and supreme forms, and for this respect it is the primal cause of creation, but also needy because it is imperfect. Plato was the first to shift the position of love from desire to need after abstracting love from a sexual attraction in two of his treatises *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. This shift can undoubtedly be considered as one of Plato's innovations. In the platonic analysis of love, we face a concept of love that is neither completely Divine nor completely human instinct, rather one that is an oscillation between human being and the idea of good. Plato refers to eros as the most humanitarian god, “*since there is no god who looks out for mankind’s interests more than Love*” (*Symposium*, 189c-d).

Eros was born of both poverty and remedy seeking; because he is the child of marriage of Poros (Plenty), which is the symbol of remedy seeking, with Penia which is the symbol of poverty. Poros is his father and Penia his mother. “*He takes after his mother in having need as a constant companion. From his father, he gets his ingenuity in going after things of beauty and value,...*” (Ibid, 203d). Thus the main paradox of Plato’s analysis of love emerges, which is as follows: the mythical god of love- or Eros- which is the creator of love and beauty is not free from wanting love itself.

Rather, it has both the identity of lover and beloved.

Naturally, neither Plato nor his commentators tried to gloss over this superficial paradox because the discursive nature of love requires such a paradox. A similar paradox appears in a different way in Avicenna's analysis. Avicenna's paradox appears at the level of love of cause for effect. Unlike Plato who tries hard to introduce need -sometimes madness- as the origin of love, Avicenna finds out this as approximately self-evident and announces through a simple syllogism that any effect is in love with its cause so as to remove its defect and reach its highest level of perfection. However, Avicenna in the last chapter of *Risalah fil-'Ishq* speaks of a reverse love, that is, love of cause for its effect and names God the lover of all of its effects. If love and need are interwoven and God is superior to any defect and demand, then how could it be a lover? This is the starting point of Avicenna's analysis which is differed from other peripatetic thinkers'.

Explicitly expressing the theory of unification of lover and beloved, he rejects contrast of God and the globe. Avicenna considers existence to be God's essence manifested and views God to be in love with its manifestations: *"If it could happen that the Absolute Good [i.e. Allah] did not manifest Himself, nothing could be obtained from Him, and if nothing were obtained from Him, nothing could exist. Thus, there can be nothing if His manifestation is not present, since it is the cause of all existence. Because He, by his very nature, loves the being of what is caused by Him, He desires to manifest Himself. And since the love of the Most Perfect for His own perfection is the most excellent love, it has as its true object the reception by others of His manifestation"* (Rasāil, p.396).

II-III. Position and Objective of Love

Although one can find the doctrine of love in the ancient Greek mythology, the principle of love and friendship was first applied by Plato for philosophical and metaphysical purposes and nobody in the field of philosophy and metaphysics had considered love as a motivational force preventing elements of the world from mutual aversion and dispersion before he did. One of the primary preoccupations of the ancient Greek philosophers was to seek a unifier origin for being and the universe so that they could achieve a justification for diversity in the universe on the basis of such an origin.

Plato like his predecessors sought to provide a new explanation of creation. His predecessors such as Thales (550-640 B.C.), Anaximander (547-610 B.C.), Anaximenes (550 B.C.), or Heraclitus of Ephesus (500

B.C.) believed in the fundamental element of the universe to be water, an indeterminate faculty called ‘Apeiron’, air, or fire, respectively (see Copleston, Vol.I, Part.I,1963: pp.13-18). However, Plato -who had inherited his predecessors’ metaphysical scientific discernments - provided a new explanation of unity and multiplicity in the universe. He takes the forms or ideas into account as the unifier origin of the universe and places the idea of good or beauty presiding over all others.

Plato knows very well that contradiction and dispersion exist both in the world of matter and the perceptible and in the abstract world of forms or ideas and even there are aversions and contradictions in the realm of the perceptible, between a perceptible object and another one, and on the other hand, even in the world of ideas, there are aversions and contradictions between the idea of one thing and another's. At present, the question is what makes the whole universe look consistent in a way that we could presume some kind of order for it and what prevents the general breaking apart of this concrete and consistent universe?

According to Plato, this is the power and motivation of love which keeps the universe uniformly and gives it coherence, harmony, symmetry and order. This love is always flowing in all parts of being, and the idea of ideas or the idea of good and beauty is the initial creator of it which functions as the sun for the earth and its inhabitants, and rays and light of this sun are the very bringing into existence and universal love.

Plato's explanation distinguishes him from his wise predecessors. For him, the reason why each idea signifies an object and vice versa is that they are all in compatibility and in love with each other, because such a congruity and resemblance brings love and friendship, and the congruity of matter placed in perceptible world with its idea placed in the world of ideas is only in terms of image and appearance. Therefore, Plato regards the origin of the universe to be the idea of ideas or the idea of good and beauty, and considers the secret of order giving present in the universe to be love and friendship that exists between it and its creatures.

Avicenna also considers love as being flowing and existing in the whole universe and explains the universe such that from the lowest level, that is, ‘*materia prima (hyle)*’, to the highest level, the necessary existence possesses it. He does not deem love to be restricted to human beings and declares it to be the cause of existence (*Rasāil*, p.375)³. He tries to explain his claim by making an a priori argument (demonstration from cause to effect). He argues that every cause by its nature as a cause is considered to be the perfect form of effect and every effect essentially

seeks its perfect form, that is, it does love its cause. On the other hand, cause is also in love with itself because love, as said before, is the origin of existence and every creature is in love. In other words, In Avicenna's ontology, love is attributed to everything which exists; if that existent is contingent, it loves its own existence on the one hand and its cause on the other hand, but if an existent is necessary, its love will be for itself, that is to say, is in love with its perfect existence specific to its existential level. He recognizes such an existent as pure good and introduces it as follows: "*In fact, the essence of good is the real beloved of all things*" (Ibid, p.377).

Two points can be understood from Avicenna's account: first, conscious and unconscious intelligences that are present in all creatures, second, some kind of gradation in love. Namely, the higher the level of existence is, the more perfect the love is, and because beauty results from love, the most perfect creatures are the most beautiful and loving ones. Accordingly, when speaking of love of divine souls in his treatise's last chapter but one, Avicenna introduces them as truths with the highest resemblance to the essence of god, possessing the best knowledge and love. The ultimate starting point of love in Avicenna's philosophical literature is also the essence of god.

III. Methodology:

The method applied by Avicenna to draw up the analysis of love, is the same method as was applied to his other treatises, except for small differences. For example, Avicenna mostly starts with definition-oriented issues, that is, the question of nature. Then enters into the discussion of objective existence and its rules (i.e. the question 'Is it'), while in *Risalah fil-'Ishq*, when talking of love, the question 'Is it?' has preceded the question of *nature*.

Avicenna has drawn up the treatise in seven chapters. The first chapter deals with the existence of love at all levels of being. Three ensuing chapters respectively discuss the existence of love and its rules in simple substances, plants and animal ones. Chapter V, titled: *'Ishq ul-Zorafa'i val-Fatiyan lil-'Aujab al-Hisan* (On the Love of Those Who Are Noble-Minded and Young for External Beauty) concentrates upon love in human-centered world, and the man's good and beautiful characteristics. Chapter VI draws out the love of divine souls and the last chapter as the conclusion overlooks the divine love and includes three discussions: first, the whole being love for the necessary existence, second his love for himself and third his love for the inhabitants of the world.

In his ontological explanation of love, Avicenna begins with his philosophical rules, that is, the authentic relation between cause and effect, and explains love at levels of creatures based upon the principles of causality and compatibility. This method is also followed in the treatise *Al-Mabda' val-Ma'ād (the Origin and the Return)* by him, where he has also dedicated a chapter to love and its concomitance with being, and entitled the necessary existence as the lover and beloved, pleased and enjoyer (*Al-Mabda' val-Ma'ād*, p.17).

With all this in mind, it should be deduced that the methodological structure of Avicenna's *Risalah fil-'Isbāq*, according to his own logical remarks, is as follows: At first the question 'Is it' comes up, followed by 'why' of an objective fact, and in the end, the question of nature is discussed. What seems to be somewhat strange is the precedence of 'why' of an objective fact over the question of nature. It can perhaps be explained by the fact that the meaning and concept of love are self-evident or at least approximately the evident, Avicenna didn't deem it necessary to explain it in detail; and therefore discussed the semantics of love marginally between other discussions. Another point is that only 'why' of an objective fact is used and 'why' of an affirmation is not discussed there. In other words, 'why' of an objective fact of love, that is, what is called explanation today is there, but 'why' of an affirmation or justification is not.

Namely, he has notified the existence of love in creatures, but he's not given any reason for the affirmation of love, which may be explained in virtue of his logical approach to demonstration; because causal explanation is related to demonstration a priori, while giving a reason is related to demonstration a posteriori (demonstration from effect to cause), and therefore, what is more valid is a priori one. In any case, Avicenna's method in all seven chapters of the treatise is completely rooted in his logical principles, and his logical pattern is considered to be his methodological pattern. In chapter I, he speaks of a universal love as if it embraces the whole being, through which the emanation of perfections comes to reality. In chapter II, he deals with the simple inanimate essences bringing forth three kinds of love: first, the love of *materia prima* for the pure form, second, the love of form for a particular matter, and third the love of accident for substance.

In chapters III and IV, Avicenna considers love of plants and animals to be the result of perfection seeking of their faculties and pointing to the faculties of nutrition, growth and reproduction - in plants - and two

faculties of perceiver and movement - in animals - tries to provide a causal explanation for love. In chapter V, drawing distinction between two spiritual and physical realms in human being, he mentions two kinds of love. One is love at animal level and the other is love that depends upon rational faculty. Then he points to the superiority of rational love over animal love, and calls those who are in such spiritual and rational love the generous. The interesting point is that all words and proverbs applied by Avicenna in the title and contents of the chapter are in masculine paradigm. He dignifies the chapter with the title of 'On the Love of Those Who Are Noble-Minded and Young' (in Arabic: the generous and gentlemen are used in plural form and are plural forms of two singular masculine words), as if he solely confines love to be limited to masculine gender.

Chapter VI is exactly the continuation of chapter V, in which the reasoning souls are called divine souls which fly upward to the entire rationales and are included in immaterial love, so to finally reach the real origin of love, that is, supreme good. The reader of the treatise is faced by a routine philosophical-logical method as though the writer has taken his pen in his hand and analyzed love in seven chapters based on a single methodology that penetrates all seven chapters. No story, narration, dialogue or anecdote is seen in it.

Plato, on the contrary, pictures love in the format of a story or a play. The main format of *Symposium* is a report of what guests of a banquet utter on love. Socrates, who is the narrator of many of Plato's philosophical teachings, is also present at that circle and unusually looked beautiful and handsome; because he knows well that the circle and its members tended beauty, and speech would merely be a reflection of beauty. An amalgam of comedy and drama can be seen in this philosophical play. Drawing distinction between two types of Eros, Eryximachus considers love and its result, that is, the beauty to exist and flow in all beings even plants and animals. He believes that medicine, music, sport and agriculture all have come into existence thanks to Love. "Any way, as I say, the science of medicine is completely governed by Love, and so are sport and agriculture" (*Symposium*, 186e-187a).

In this part of the play, Plato regards Eryximachus to be the manifestation of power of allegory and a symbol of the natural philosophy that like Pythagoreans juxtaposed natural harmony and cosmic beauty.

Immediately after Eryximachus, Aristophanes scans love from the view point of comedy. He considers Eros to be the closest god to mankind

and believes that human beings should be encouraged to worship gods so that they would not be subject to the anger of gods again. The first anger of gods was raised because of the human being's impudence that had a 'man-woman' or 'male-female' nature and was cut half due to such impudence and thus disabled. Half of it becomes a woman's body and the other a man's, and since then everybody has been looking for his/her lost half to seize it and gain peace beside him/her. Now, if such impudence is reiterated, he/she will be again cut into two halves with one foot, and the only way to evade such a disaster would be obeying gods' commands.

With these words, Aristophanes assumes Eros to be a wish for achieving the main integrity of human nature; exciting desire for an existence that we have not achieved yet, which is nothing but love. The last person who spoke about love before Socrates was Agathon. He was a landlord who hosted this banquet on the occasion of his victory in Athenian Writers Competition. Agathon considers the god of love to be the most beautiful, the youngest and the most elegant one who is soft hearted and of gentle demeanor, who resents harshness and violence and has a poetical manner.

The turn comes to Socrates. Criticizing previous speeches of the guests, Socrates totally narrates love from the viewpoint of a wise priestess named Diotima in *Symposium*, and introduces her as his mentor in love. In *Symposium*, Socrates does not exploit his usual method, that is, dialogue, but the method of narration. This philosophical play is a narration of love narrated by Socrates and written by Plato. Although Plato presents love via narrations of different persons, there is a common spirit in all of his approaches which is a kind of philosophical attraction and instinct that eagerly intends to attain beauty and truth.

The method used for such an attainment is dialectic. In the content of *Symposium*, comedy and tragedy are juxtaposed with poem and eloquence and hand in hand with Greek mythology move forward in company with wisdom and philosophy. The format of this content, however, is nothing but dialectic. Dialectic is the philosophical core to Plato which he considers to be a right philosophical method opposite to Sophists' eristic method, which he calls a wrong one (*Republic*, 454a, p.165 & 499a-b, p.222).

Plato praises dialectic for being a talent granted by gods, which involves rational and abstract aspects (*Philebus*, 16b-c). According to him, dialectics is allocated to men whosoever philosophizes purely and justly (Benardete, 1986: p.49). The true concept of platonic dialectic is that it

should show the necessary movement of concepts rather than resolving it in nothingness, as sophists do. Dialectical knowledge is inseparable from being (see Harrison-Barbet, 1990: Plato's Divided Line, p.18).

As its objective, the platonic dialectic has been arousing imaginations on the one hand, and finding a base for true knowledge on the other hand. In this method, contradictions and oppositions are removed and true meaning of a word emerges. The journey of reason begins with multiplicity and ends with unity. Before starting his speech, Socrates holds a dialogue with Agathon, which is of a half comic and half serious nature, and which is the commencement of dialectics. As the treatise continues, Socrates does not undertake to exaggerate the significance and beauty of Eros via rhetoric, but (as always) attempts to find out the truth about it (Jeager, 1947: p.186).

In *Symposium*, love is criticized and assessed. Therefore, a subjective atmosphere prevails upon the discussion, which is just the same method used by Avicenna. Love does not have an independent external identity by which it could be referred to and known. Greek myths as part of religious and cultural beliefs of the ancient Greeks can be seen in Plato's analysis of love. Resorting to gods acceptable to society, Plato tries to provide his explanation of love in a more understandable and acceptable manner.

Mccabe precisely says that the chain of narrators (i.e. indirect quotation) is another characteristic of *Symposium's* methodology. Plato juxtaposes several narrators artistically. Apollodorus, a friend of Socrates, tells the story— which, however, had been held several years before - to an unknown listener. Apollodorus heard it from Aristodemus, who had accompanied Socrates to the symposium at Agathon's house. He subsequently checked the detail with Socrates, and all these come as we know that *Symposium* is a work of Plato's (Benson, 2006: p.42). So, Plato depicts love from Diotima's viewpoint as narrated by Socrates as a report by a friend of Socrates made to an incognito person.

In addition to presenting rhetorical and philosophical beauties, these labyrinthine and complicated anecdotes indicate Plato's talent, while emphasizing the characteristics of master and pupil relationship. Both Socrates and Plato attribute what they say to their master rather than to themselves. The title used by Plato for this treatise shows that contrary to what most of his words suggest no specific person is at the centre of this work. It is not a dialectical play as is *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, nor is it similar to such scientific works of Plato as *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*, but it is an organized research on a certain issue. It is not a usual dialogue, but

a competition of eloquence between a few famous men of the city (Jeager, 1947: p.179).

In the tragic aspect of *Symposium*, the character and fate of Socrates and his suites retells the story of life and living. Some like Aristophanes as the greatest comical poet depict comedy and scoffing, whereas some like Eryxmachus discuss some serious issues. Socrates himself recommends that there is a subtle distinction between tragedy and comedy, and in a sense these are not two separate entities (*Symposium*, 223d)⁴. In fact, Tragedy is the sad story of human beings who are ignorant of their origin and destination, that is, those who have surrendered to the material world and forgotten the world of ideas. On the contrary, comedy is the expression of a lover's happiness and awareness at a time when they have reached their goal, which is enjoying beauty and remembering of the world of ideas. Moral aspects are also expressed through drama; one recognizes the moral role of Socrates as a wise and sublime person in the course of the treatise. This is especially evidenced by the fact that others apologize to him for expressing their opinions in his presence because they consider his opinions as being superior to theirs.

CONCLUSION:

Plato and Avicenna's approaches can be compared in three areas of semantics, ontology, and methodology, and their similarities and differences can be also found. Composing *Risalah fil-'Ishq*, Avicenna initiated a philosophical analysis of love tradition in the Islamic World, and Plato composing several treatises, especially *Symposium* is the most influential philosopher in this field. In this treatise, Plato manifests himself to us with full philosophical and literary power, and this may be the most beautiful presentation of love in a perfect and divine manner. The difference between Plato and Avicenna lies in the semantics discussion and relates to Plato's tendency to diversity and Avicenna's tendency to simplicity in terms of the meaning of love. Avicenna seems to consider the meaning of love to be self-evident and well-known and does not make too much effort to analyze it and bring about a definition for it. But in the philosophical literature of Plato, a variety of concepts can be found and used to analyze the meaning of love.

An Ontological approach to love is adopted by both of these philosophers. According to their analyses of love, love is linked to two things: knowledge and need. As we move from lower levels to higher ones, love's share increases until the highest level, that is, the idea of

good according to Plato and supreme good according to Avicenna. The interweaving of love and need, however, has a different story. Love is not the sign of need, but is the eliminator of it. That is, every creature seeks its perfect form in order to eliminate its demands and defects; therefore, it loves superior level. Avicenna considers love to be coincident to good, knowledge, beauty, movement, pleasure and reason, and introduces the lower beings to higher ones to be dependent on a universal love. For Plato, love proceeds from the material and physical level and reaches its highest level i.e. the world of forms and the idea of good. Thus, love, beauty and good unite in the world of ideas.

Plato and Avicenna's methodologies in analyzing love are entirely different. Avicenna applies a direct method in opening and closing discussion and advances the discussion based on logical principles - that are present in most parts of his books. He presents the question of existence of love and why such exists at the beginning and then proceeds to the question of the nature of love. Therefore, we see in order of appearance the question 'Is it', 'why' of an objective fact and the question of nature in his methodology; Plato's *Symposium*, however - as indicated by its name - is comprised of labyrinthine and complicated narrations by grandees of the city of Athens, which is narrated by multiple narrators rather than one narrator. Plato depicts love in the form of a readable and attractive play, and involves the reader in the play. He encourages him/her to consider the fundamentals of love and its related issues, and in each scene of the play, shows a different portrait of love. In the treatise, fiction and reality are interwoven and myth, history, poetry and wisdom, eloquence and depth of thought are all juxtaposed.

APPENDIX:

1. See Dimitri Gutas, "Plato's 'Symposion' in the Arabic Tradition" in *Oriens*, 31 (1988), pp. 36-60:

(Excerpt One) In a recently published medico-philosophical text on love by Abu Sa'id 'Ubaidallah b. Baxtisu' (d. after 450/1058), a member of the celebrated Baxt'iu' family of physicians, we read the following passage:

Frg. A1 Certain Sabian scholars believe that when humans were first created they were connected [with each other] at the place of the navel, and that Zeus commanded (190B) that they be cut apart on account of their strength and power and the deeds they were committing on earth. Thus, a male who was attached to another

(191D-E) *male now loves males, a female who was attached to another female now loves females and one who was attached to a male now loves males, and <a male> who was attached to a female now loves females. Whoever falls in love, falls in love only with the person to whom he was originally attached and of whose stuff⁷ and substance he is.*

The provenance of the Symposium passage above raises some interesting problems. Abu Sa‘id explicitly says that he took the essence of the story (but not verbatim: *hdad l-ma‘na*)⁹ from a treatise composed specifically "on this matter" by the philosopher Kindi (d. after 256/870). "This matter" is certainly love, the subject of Abu Sa‘id's own chapter in which this passage occurs, ¹⁰ and we know from Kindi's bibliographers that he did write a treatise on love, entitled, *The Agreement of the Philosophers about the Allegories of Love* (test. 3.1).¹¹ This is a fairly accurate description of the contents of the Symposium, and is in all probability the title of the treatise referred to by Abu Sa‘id. To the same treatise would also belong the other passage from the Symposium reported by Kindi, the Alkibiades speech (217A-219D), which has been known for some time now to exist in the Istanbul gnomological manuscript Koprulii 1608:¹²

Frg. A2 *Al-Kindi mentioned that a handsome young Greek aristocrat named Alkibiades said: "I loved philosophy and I used to go frequently to Socrates. While (217A-B) teaching others, however, he kept looking at me, and so it occurred to me that he might want from me what people want from fresh-faced young boys. I thus contrived to be alone with him and I presented myself to him. He said to me, 'What calls you [here], Alkibiades (218C-219A) ' 'My desire for your wisdom,' I replied. He then came closer and said, 'What do you expect from the wisdom of a person the extent of whose precious wisdom is this contemptible act? My son, he who advocates virtue but commits debauchery is not a wise man [or: philosopher]. Someone else is responsible for the beauty of your face but you are responsible for the beauty of your soul; so don't debase what you are responsible for lest you derive nothing from all your qualities!'" The young man said: "I never remember in (219D) moments of solitude this reprimand without being (cf. 216A) overcome by a sense of shame, or gaining a deeper insight into the nobility of Socrates' soul; and had it not been for the fact that those who hear this story told will love Socrates even more, I would not have mentioned my vile behavior."¹³*

It would thus seem that Kindi's treatise, *The Agreement of the Philosophers about the Allegories of Love*, comprised a summary, apparently of some detail, of Plato's Symposium; that it was in circulation in the 5th/11th century, perhaps in medical circles, as Abu Sa‘id's

quotation from it would indicate; and that it was also used (at which stage?) by compilers of anthologies and gnomologia.

2. See Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sinā" in *Medieval Studies*, 7 (1945), pp. 208-228:

(Excerpt One) *The treatise On the Essence of Love found in the Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity is probably the most explicit and important treatment of love to be found in Arabic philosophy prior to Ibn Sina, a treatise which would well merit a new translation and a detailed analysis. The basis of the doctrine of this treatise, which deals exclusively with love as a quality of the human soul, is the Platonic division of the soul into (i) nutritive-appetitive, (ii) emotional-animal and (iii) rational parts.' Each of these three parts has a specific type and specific objects of love, namely, (i) food and sexual gratification, (ii) victory, revenge and supremacy, and (iii) knowledge and the acquisition of perfection, respectively.*

(Excerpt Two) *But Ibn Sina's psychology is in a yet deeper sense the basis of his doctrine of love. In Ibn Sina's psychology as a whole, Platonic have given way to Aristotelian conceptions. The concept of a harmonious hierarchical order of the parts of the soul has taken the place of a concept leading readily to a doctrine advocating the suppression of the lower parts of the soul in the attempt to reach the perfection of the highest. It is on this basis that some of Ibn Sina's most important doctrines on love are formulated, especially those of the fifth chapter where a great attempt is made to allot to the love of external beauty a role which will remain positive, valuable and honorable even when compared with the most exalted and unearthly love.*

3. For more discussions on Avicenna's *Risalah fil-'Ishq* and the influence of Platonic doctrines upon it, see Majid Fakhri (2004), *A history of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd edition, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 161-163. Theodore Silverstein, "Andreas, Plato, and the Arabs: Remarks on Some Recent Accounts of Courtly Love" in *Modern Philology*, 47 No.2 (1949), pp. 117-126. G. E. von Grunebaum, "Avicenna's *Risalah fil-'Ishq* and Courtly Love" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 11 No.4 (1952), pp. 233-238.

Endnotes

1. "Love itself has a manifest and evident essence and existence." (Ibid, p.378)
2. "Every beautiful, compatible and admirable thing has sense and perception; therefore it understands both kindness and love." (Ibid)
3. (See Ibid): "It shall be required that love be the cause of existence of such things."

4. (See Ibid): “... *Socrates was trying to get them to agree that knowing how to compose comedies and knowing compose tragedies must combine in a single person and that a professional tragic playwright was also a professional comic playwright.*”

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