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Analysis of Love in Four Texts [1373 Words in Paragraphs]

“Love” is such a little word – one syllable, four-letters – that it hardly encompasses its many faces. C.S. Lewis, in his *Four Loves* once delineated “love” as affection, *philia*, *eros*, and *caritas*, but there are many gradations of love even within these four, simple categories. But what is clear, even in the many faces of love, is that the act of love is dialogic, i.e., there must be two in order for love to occur: One must love another. In other words, one is the lover and another is the beloved. Restated in this way, *eros* becomes a major force when speaking of love in human affairs. Often seen as the one love that is in conflict with the other loves, *eros* becomes a force that is either rejected, accepted, or transcended, but is always problematic. Many writers have discussed this conflict of *eros* within Man, from antiquity to modernity. Some of these writers are Plato in his *Republic*, Virgil in his *Aeneid*, Augustine in his *Confessions*, and Dante in his *Divina Commedia*.

At first glance, Plato’s *Republic* seems unrelated to the topic of love and the problem of *eros*. Creating in speech an ideal city with the ideal ruler, the philosopher-king, the *Republic*’s concerns do not seem to be with the concerns of love. But of the three interlocutors – Polemarchus, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon – it is Glaucon for whom Socrates creates the Kallipolis, the Beautiful City. Dissatisfied with the city of strict utility and bare necessity – a City of Pigs, as Glaucon calls it, Socrates adds luxuries and higher goals to this city. But one must always remember that the Kallipolis is only a macrocosmic analogy for Man, and therefore,

what Socrates is actually constructing is the Beautiful Man. Socrates clearly sees that what drives Glaucon is *eros* – the love of body, the love of the sensual. In creating Kallipolis, the Beautiful City, balanced in reason, *thymos*, and *eros* and ruled by a philosopher-king who yearns to be relieved of his sovereign position because of his love for the Idea but remains as ruler out of duty to his people, Socrates taps into the native, unformed *eros* of Glaucon. This is an *eros* which Socrates speaks as the driving motivation behind the tyrant, a ruler whose rule is enslaved by his unformed *eros*, which seeks the grubby, sensuous shadows of his cave-like domain. Ridding such *eros* takes a type of education that is nigh impossible, that is only possible in speech: the segregation of parents and children, the raising of children in quasi-boot camps / academies, the strict curriculum with the goal to create rabidly loyal citizens, the strict censorship of music and poetry, the inculcation of the Noble Lie. But in creating Kallipolis for Glaucon, Socrates does not rid Glaucon of his *eros* but, instead, redirects his *eros* from the shadows of everyday reality for the blinding light of Kallipolis and the philosophic life. In short, Socrates turns Glaucon's *eros*, which remains intact, to philosophy.

**One does not see this gentle conversion of *eros* in Virgil's *Aeneid*.** As seen throughout the epic but especially in the Dido Incident, Aeneas' conflict is between the public love of his people, the future Rome, and the private love of domesticity, especially of wife, i.e., *eros*. During the fall of Troy, Aeneas almost does not escape when he realizes that his wife is dead, but his father, the future of his son, and the future of the last remaining Trojans spur him to leave. At Carthage, his love for Dido nearly overcomes his love of the future Rome. *Eros* literally inflames his heart for love of Dido, and he becomes Dido's consort, building Dido's city and forsaking the future city in Italy. It is only when he is shamed into realizing his uxuriousness does Aeneas leave Dido and Carthage and, one would think, his passionate *eros* for the hard, dry

duty towards his people, his country, and his future Latin wife. But Aeneas' passions, his *eros*, will always be a problem for this future father of Rome, and perhaps for Rome itself, as seen in his irrational, impassioned rage against Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*.

Thus, by the time one arrives at Augustine's *Confessions*, one is not surprised that Augustine's main problem with turning to God is his *cor*, his heart, especially the erotic leaning of his heart. His *eros* only resides within himself and his body – his love of sin, his love of sensual pleasure, his love of a religion that stresses that the universe and its god is only matter, is only body. Even when mentally converted to the idea of the spirit, with the Neoplatonists, and soon after spiritually converted to God, Augustine still struggles with continence. Only when Augustine, exhausted and suffering with fighting his *eros*, submits– puts before the feet of Christ, so to speak -- his *eros* in the Garden in Milan does Augustine finally understand – Christ loves him as he is, sins and all. Christ is the lover, and Augustine is the beloved, and all Augustine must do is submit to this sacred *eros*.

In similar fashion, Dante's *Divina Commedia* narrates the journey of a man from sinful lover to graced beloved. What is notable in this journey, however, is that Dante the Pilgrim has a guide, first Virgil and then Beatrice. In the dark woods of his soul, Dante is so far away from his original love (Beatrice) that the only soul who can guide him from those woods, through Hell, and up through Purgatory is a damned soul, Virgil the Poet. One sees that Dante loves Virgil as a son loves his father, but this love is not enough for the redemption of either Dante or Virgil. Virgil is a virtuous man, but he exhibits no expectation for hope – he has lost hope. Dante, on the other hand, while exhibiting filial love for his poet-father, like a son begins to outgrow his father, to become a man. While in Hell, Dante, naïve and afraid, gawked and asked Virgil many questions. At one point, Virgil covers Dante's eyes before the city gates of

Hell. But as he comes through the dark abyss that is the center of Hell, where Satan resides encased in ice, and arrives at the shore of Purgatory, Dante starts to have the sort of hope reminiscent of the lover, yearning to see and know his beloved. Dante begins to know more as his poet-father begins to know less, and at the Garden atop Purgatory, Virgil crowns and miters Dante – who has outgrown his filial love – and makes way for Beatrice.

One realizes soon enough that it is Beatrice all along which spurs Dante's *eros*. It is Beatrice, spurred by Mary, who sends Virgil to help her earthly lover rise from his sinful *eros*, towards his original love of Beatrice when she was flesh and blood, and from his *eros* for Beatrice the woman towards the love of God, whose love is overpowering, stable, and moves the universe. Dante's love remains *eros* – the higher he and Beatrice rises through the spheres, the brighter and more beautiful Beatrice becomes until Beatrice's beauty surpasses her earthly beauty, which had captured Dante's heart and poetic imagination. Certainly Dante's love moves from the love of another to the love of God, but his love of God occurs *through* *eros*, through the love of Beatrice, who remains a real woman – and not an unsexed spirit – for Dante.

Thus, one sees the treatment of the workings of *eros* in Man. For Plato, it is a powerful drive that must be harnessed towards seeking wisdom and truth. For Virgil, it is an obstacle towards political and public stability, an obstacle which can never be removed from the soul. For Augustine, it is a passion that is intended to be good – as creation is originally good – but by human sin becomes twisted and evil and can only be redeemed by another, by the love of God. Finally, for Dante, it is a force that draws Man to God, if only Man does not mistake God's Creation for God. As said before, "love" is such a small word, and within that small word holds power to move man, peoples, nations, and the universe.

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