The Progression From Eros to Agape at the Mouth of Plato's Cave

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"Love of wisdom" is the definition of philosophy that has underpinned all others. Therefore, to engage in philosophy or the study of philosophy is, before it is anything else, an act of love. What does it mean to love, and how does one love his or her beloved (in the form of a person, ideal, object, etc.)? Are there types of love or only degrees of one love? The two greatest conceptions, or attitudes, of love to have influenced Western civilization are eros and agape. Modern philosophers of love have addressed these cornerstones in three ways: (1) present one as more valuable, practical, or moral than the other; (2) dichotomize them as incomparable answers to the same question; or (3) reconcile them without properly accounting for the implications of their distinctive qualities. Each of these positions exhibits one or both of two tendencies: mistaking different degrees for different kinds of love or allowing the historical disconnects of Hellenistic and Christian cultures and values to eclipse the intimate philosophical connections between eros and agape.

An individual is often simultaneously, yet appropriately, directing both conceptions of love toward different persons, ideals, or objects. This paper will demonstrate that a progressive relationship exists between these two types of love and will present evidence for why agape is not a departure from eros but its possible fulfillment. Sections of the Johannine gospel and Plato's *Symposium* will be explicated to further identify their philosophical relation and show

that the current disparity between heavenly eros and earthly agape has been grossly—and perhaps deliberately—embellished.

Because Plato had no contact with the Gospels or the Pauline epistles which have given rise to our current conception of agape, many have asserted that his philosophy of eros necessarily precludes agape. However, analysis—no matter how adroit—of the historical correlations or lack thereof between these ideas and their originators, does not guarantee relevance in an analysis of their philosophical constitutions. If early Christian culture and values are compared to Hellenistic culture and values, it can only be argued that they are mutually exclusive *historically*. But it is a *non sequitur* to permit the social and religious consequences of these doctrines to speak for and spoil the philosophical fruits of eros and agape. Plato's parables (the divided line, the sun, and the cave) contain descriptions that suggest that the journey to acquiring a realization of the Form of the Good, or Absolute Beauty, is mysterious. Because agape shares particular qualities with these descriptions, his philosophy of heavenly eros is, at the least, open to the contributions that agape has made toward its upward journey.

On Kinds and Degrees of Love

The litany of writings on the nature of love is significantly greater than, say, on the nature of gratitude, worry, and other emotions and desires. However, when most people are stirred with gratitude, they might say, "I was *very* gracious for his service," or "I am not worried *as much* about him now *as* I was before the surgery." They do not typically say or mean:

"The type of worry I had for him after the surgery was much better than the kind I had beforehand."

Nearly all other emotions and desires are referred to in varying degrees of intensity despite the different kinds of situations or beloveds involved. With love, these differences in degree are commonly assumed to be differences of kind. Admittedly, such a deconstruction of love makes the subject more agreeable to purposes of scholarship, but it does not account for why "types of love" is a sufficient assessment.

Until advocates of distinct categories of human love have identified phenomena within experiences of love itself that are not reducible to different kinds of behavior or beloveds, these conceptions, agape and eros, will be measured as part of a singular range of intensity of one love. From studying Plato's *Symposium* and the Johannine gospel, I have concluded that the range of intensity by which the one love is measured reveals four main degrees (others are not considered due to the scope of this paper). These are earthly eros, heavenly eros, earthly agape, and divine agape.

The Commitments of Eros and Agape: Conditional to Unconditional

People love in order to form a distinctive *we* with another person, object, or ideal that recognizes the value of the lover's qualities and generates a commitment from the beloved.[1] Another way to introduce eros and agape without typifying them is to measure the degrees of commitment they inspire and how the progression of commitment is experienced.

[1] Delaney, Neil. "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating A Modern Ideal." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1996): 340.

Eros is a conditional degree of love that increases or decreases depending on the value of its object. Its level of commitment fluctuates according to the level of value of its object's qualities. Agape is an unconditional degree of love independent of the value of its object's qualities and modeled by man after God's love for mankind, which is embodied by the life of Jesus. It creates and bestows value where there is none. An individual initially loves another because that person has proven to be capable of directly advancing and securing their interests, desires, and needs, which inspires a purely conditional commitment. It entails an initially conditional commitment that lover *A* will love beloved *B* until *B* no longer satisfies or accommodates *A*'s interests, desires, and needs. These interests often begin as physical: Is this person physically attractive to my tastes? Does this person like where I live, the type of car I drive, the friends I hang out with, or the movies and music that I watch and listen to? Eventually, the conditionality is focused into the appetites of the spirit, while still based in physical and worldly pursuits. Lover *A* begins to desire that partner *B*'s love will embrace those particular properties that he or she considers to be central to his or her identity, and in turn, that *B* will invite him or her to embrace those properties of *B*.[2]

Commitments do not become less responsive as they become less conditional. Neil Delaney asserts that unconditional love misrepresents an ideal by allowing for the complete surrendering of one's future in a solemn declaration that an individual's love will remain regardless of the circumstances.[3] He equates unconditional love with unresponsive love. However, his argument does not account for how the grounds of the responsiveness have changed. The progression from conditional to unconditional commitment does not parallel a

[2] Delaney, "Romantic Love," 342.
[3] Ibid., 354.

shift from responsive to unresponsive love; it marks a shift in the properties to which the love responds. When the commitment is more conditional, the temporal appetites for uncontrollable properties that are uncreated by lover and beloved comprise the grounds for responsiveness; if the commitment is less conditional, the created appetites for controllable properties bestowed by the *we* become central grounds for responsiveness. Eventually, the *we* creates an appetite between the lover and the beloved for a responsiveness grounded by property-less or indefinable aspects of their persons.

What is Agape?

Despite his narrow conclusion that they are "fundamentally different attitudes of life," and that any connections drawn between them are not credible due to the historical convergence of Christian and Hellenistic cultures, philosopher and theologian Anders Nygren gives an excellent account of agape and eros. He identifies primary qualities for each conception of love that I argue are present in each of the four degrees: earthly eros, heavenly eros, human agape, and divine agape.

Nygren says that agape is "spontaneous and unmotivated and . . . indifferent to value."[4] Another aspect of agape is creativity; it creates or bestows properties and value on its object. It has value because God loves it.

Nietzsche aptly described agape as "the transvaluation of all ancient values," yet Nygren fails to acknowledge the weight of that first term.[5] Transvaluation identifies a progression from one set of values to another set that casts or represents the object of the former

[4] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 81.
[5] Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 86.

aim in a new light. It does not imply that eros and agape have nothing to do with each other. Agape was not a philosophical devaluation or avaluation of ancient values as much as Christianity may have been of the cultural consequences and deeds indirectly based on those values; the religion necessitates the concept, but the concept does not necessitate the religion. Because Nygren holds that there are types of love, he is unable to address eros and agape as anything other than extremes in isolation.

Agape is also the "initiator of fellowship with God."[6] The implications of this quality on the progressive relationship between eros and agape are profound. If divine agape is the initiator, and agape comes down to man from God, what is there originating in us which allows us to sustain our fellowship with God? If all of man's ways to initiate fellowship with God are futile, are the ways of sustaining that fellowship fruitless as well? Nygren states that fellowship with God can be thought of in two ways: the raising up of the human to the Divine which he attributes to the egocentric religion of eros or the gracious condescension of the Divine to man attributed to the theocentric religion of agape.[7] In the former, a person is continuously immersed in a type of enlightenment whereby each act of love is seeking and initiating a higher level of spiritual attainment until that person becomes one with the Divine. In the latter, it is God that initiates fellowship with a person by bestowing his love down upon an individual and inviting that person to engage in a type of salvation or enlightenment that is described as a more responsive relationship. The highest level of spiritual attainment or mystical union is less dependent on the will of an individual than on the grace of God.

[6] Ibid., 89.
[7] Ibid., 91.

Yet, there is at least one other way by which man engages in fellowship with God. Nygren is adamant that the righteous man's conduct and the sinner's repentance and amendment are incapable of moving God to *initiate* love, but he does not account for its continuation and reciprocity by man. He does not concede how the love from man to God continues after the initiation and, if it is upward-seeking like eros, how that affects his conclusion that eros and agape are fundamentally different concepts moving their energy in opposite directions. For if the love from man to God after the initiation is upward-seeking like eros, then the means or process by which we engage in both eros and agape are the same, which allows for their relationship to be thought of in progressive terms.

Another characteristic that Nygren favorably attributes to agape is its downward motion; it comes down from God whereas heavenly eros is upward seeking and goes up to God. But how does earthly agape factor into the equation? The two greatest commandments in the New Testament are to love God and to love thy neighbor. Agape's transvaluation lies in its creative relationship to the neighbor and its renewal of a theocentric upward-seeking love of God. These characteristics of earthly agape require a greater logical interface between them and heavenly eros than Nygren is willing to admit, or is able to dismiss with mere historical developments.

In all of the gospels, but especially the gospel of John, it is evident that laymen and the disciples are frequently going "up" to Jesus, and He is often coming down to them. Fellowship is understood to be a *responsive* relationship both on the part of man and God. In the book of John, Jesus tells a group of Jewish Priests with whom he has already initiated fellowship, "You

study Scripture diligently, supposing that in having them you have eternal life; their testimony points to me, yet you refuse to come to me to receive that life."[8]

What is Eros?

Eros is acquisitive about a present need and strives to find satisfaction for it in a higher state. Beautiful things awaken it and focus the soul beyond the particular onto the continual ascent, which invokes the Absolute Beauty, or Form of the Good, according to Plato. Eros is an intermediate between having and not having, ignorance and wisdom, and poverty and wealth. It is a desire wherein love and value converge, and only that which is considered valuable is worthy of its direction.[9] It has essentially two degrees: that of earthly eros, which desires to acquire sensual objects that bind the soul closer to the temporal; and that of heavenly eros, which desires to acquire things that detach the soul.

Eros, like agape, is a religious-based love developed from the Hellenistic religion to which Plato adhered. Eros is man's way to the Divine, though the gods do not feel eros because they are in want of nothing and can only be objects of man's love. It is man's denial and way out of the sense-world and into the spiritual world. Hellenistic religion conceived of a dualistic experience and desired the immortality that awaits the individual in the next world; eros is the path toward this achievement. Because of this religious quality, eros is as much about salvation and redemption as agape. Eros is the mediator between Divine and human life.[10] Jesus, whose essence and gift was agape, is also the mediator between the Divine and human life. What

[8] John 5:39–40.
[9] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 176.
[10] Ibid., 90.

separates eros and agape is that which they require from the individual to achieve their object. Eros requires the soul to break away from that which binds it to the sense-world.

The third quality of eros is its egocentricity. An individual engaged in eros determines whether to pursue and desire an object or beloved by whether the qualities of that object or person will act as stepping-stones for the upward impetus of his or her soul. If that potential does not manifest, or should it fade from its former state of attraction, then an individual engaged in eros does not find personal value or attraction in pursuing the relationship further; the lover is not content with becoming a stepping-stone. Eros is a love that is equal with a "will-to-possess" the good and possess it eternally.[11]

It will later be shown through explication of Plato's parables of the divided line, the sun, and the cave, that Nygren is too quick to claim that "even in its highest form as yearning for the Divine, [eros does not] shed its egocentric habit of mind."[12] A better assessment of Plato's description of the Form of the Good, which is the highest point or object of yearning, will hold that the egocentricity can be shed and that many of the qualities of agape are compatible with Plato's mitigated understanding of the Form of the Good.

Love as God in the Symposium

The content and form of a discussion of eros in the *Symposium* exhibits two major shifts from *Phaedrus*. The content revolves around love as a god and praising it with epideictic rhetorical speeches from each member of the feast. The discussion is without the dialectic that

[11] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 180.
[12] Ibid., 181.

typically carries the majority of Plato's work. The struggle to resist the downward pulls of earthly eros and to embrace the upward pulls of heavenly eros is one of the central themes.

The notion that eros moves in a completely different direction than agape meets its challenge with Phaedrus, who gives the first speech. He says that Eros is a mighty god who was unbegotten and is the "ancient *source* of all that is good . . . and great giver of all happiness to men."[13] In the gospel of John, Jesus often refers to His Father as the source of His being, and also, that He was bestowed unto mankind.

Phaedrus also says that Eros gave birth to all the other gods and is the motivation behind all virtuous behavior, for the lover could not stand to be seen by his or her beloved if he or she was known to have committed a dishonorable act, such as fleeing the ranks of war. He believes that nothing but love will make a man sacrifice his life for another, and that this is a virtuous deed.

If divine agape is a spirit representing the pure descent, or bestowal of value, while eros represents the pure ascent, or appraisal of value, then what welds both together is the interaction between heavenly eros and earthly agape. Both are seeking beautiful things that remind them of or invoke the Divine within the soul. The soul is not seeking to *be* divine or to be eternal, but to be loved by what is divine and is eternal if, that is, love is truly the intermediate of having and not having. Heavenly eros is a pre-divine bestowal of love (egocentric) of the good and beautiful for one's self. Earthly agape is a post-divine bestowal of love (theocentric) of the good and beautiful for one's self, but more for one's neighbor and God. The properties comprising its commitment have progressed beyond a need to possess

[13] Plato, *The Works of Plato*, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Tudor Company, 1928), 327. [emphasis added]

immortality and God's love into an appetite that simultaneously wants to ascend and return love to God while modeling and sharing God's bestowal unto neighbors and other beloved persons.

The notion of heavenly eros transcending former notions of beauty and having its aims reinvented is found within Plato's philosophy of love itself. The oracle Diotima informs Socrates that, once attained, the aim of heavenly eros—the vision of the soul of beauty—is transvaluative; the end resets its means, pushing aside what beauty and properties the individual's love was previously based on:

> And once you have seen [the vision of the soul of beauty], you will never be seduced again by the charm of gold, of dress, of comely boys, or lads just ripening to manhood; you will care nothing for the beauties that used to take your breath away and kindle such a longing in you . . . to be always at the side of the beloved and feasting your eyes upon him . . . to deny yourself . . . so long as you were with him.[14]

The Vision of Beauty dwells within the beloved and demands from the lover a new means of progression to transcend its conditional commitment into a degree of unconditional commitment. These means must allow the lover to simultaneously achieve both, and yet also to select which lines of motion (the upward appraisal of eros *or* downward bestowal of agape) are appropriate to design toward its particular objects and beloveds. From the eros line comes a reinvention of self-oriented, value-seeking love, and from the agape line comes a neighbor-oriented, bestowal-seeking love. Therefore, the peak realization of heavenly eros is a gift that, in order to be reaped, requires the type of transvaluation that earthly agape was discovered to promote.

[14] Ibid., 361.

> *I was convinced, and in that conviction I try to bring others to the same creed, and to convince them that, if we are to make this gift our own, Love will help our mortal nature more than all the world . . . every man of us should worship the god of Love.*
>
> – Socrates, *Symposium*[15]

Plato's caveat to the content of the following parables, or myths, states that they are "offspring" of the Form of the Good serving to make it more intelligible from studying them as near resemblances—as higher forms not equal to the Good. In the parable of the Sun, the Form of the Good functions to illuminate objects of rational thought in the world of the forms as the Sun illuminates objects of sight in the physical world. An experience of an object of the senses, afforded by the Sun, fundamentally serves to guide how the body will either seek to possess or avoid its physical value. An experience of an object of thought, afforded by the light of the Good, serves to guide how the soul will either seek to possess or avoid its understanding and knowledge. According to Plato, the soul should not be facing the physical world like the body, because its sight will be dimly observing appearances in a constant state of flux.

In this parable is another analogy between the physical world and the world of forms. Plato says that the light of the Sun enables or bestows vision of actual things; for the Good, light is analogous to truth and vision is analogous to knowledge. Truth enables knowledge and the Good enables truth, but neither truth nor knowledge *is* the Good, and neither light nor vision is the Sun. The Good and the Sun hold higher places of honor.

Hellenistic dualism of the world can be applied to a specific object's properties as they are perceived in each realm. When the soul's gaze is focused upon an object of love (the

[15] Socrates, quoted in Plato, *The Works of Plato*, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Tudor Company, 1928), 342.

beloved) in the world of the forms which is irradiated by truth and knowledge from the Good, the lover gains possession of its higher value and intelligence about love. But if its gaze is focused upon its properties in the twilight of the physical world, its sight of love will be dim and of lesser intelligence.

As previously stated, the model of love that I am using consists of four main degrees: earthly eros, heavenly eros, earthly agape, and divine agape. Plato's parable of the divided line alludes to the peculiar essences of these stages of love and how they are directed toward certain objects or beloveds. His divided line also has four stages; two of them account for the visible world, the others for the intelligible world.

Section A represents images, reflections, and shadows produced by actual things (see fig. 1). From studying these epiphenomena, an individual can conjecture and predict certain qualities about the actual things. Every actual thing can produce a reflection or shadow; every member of section A, however, cannot produce similar likenesses. Section A does not contribute to the sphere of knowledge and benefits the individual least of all, especially those who mistake members of section A for actual things, as in the parable of the cave.

The second section—B—stands for actual things of which the first are likenesses that have been created by works of nature or human construction (see fig. 1).[16] All members of this section contribute to the sphere of knowledge and benefit the individual who chooses to study and become aware of them and how their existence affects his life. But these actual things are also "shadows" of their forms, which mark the third section (see fig. 1). There is no completely identical actual thing, but there are things that share enough properties to be of the same species

[16] W.T. Jones, "Plato: The Theory of Forms," in *The Classical Mind: A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonovich, 1970), 126.

or form. Bob is an actual thing, and so is Elliot, but both Bob and Elliot are "human." The green lizard and the red lizard are both a "lizard." Each particular thing makes its higher form intelligible. Similarly, when a form is realized, it illuminates the individual things and their shadows.

According to Plato, any shadow, thing, or form that makes a higher shadow, thing, or form more intelligible is higher, and those that are illuminated are lower.[17] Higher eros and its objects illuminate earthly eros and its shadows. The former desires actual beauty whereas the latter desires the shadows of beauty. In the realm of eros, as in the realm of the physical world, the means by which its objects are appraised afford a shadow assessment of their value; a person may be physically beautiful and attractive, and this beauty, in turn, invokes and makes intelligible a higher beauty that may or may not exist within that person. In the realm of agape, as in the realm of forms, the higher beauty of its objects is permeable, and therefore, requires a transvaluation of the science, or means, to enable the lover to adequately appraise their higher value.

Here is my variation of Plato's parable of the divide line:[18]

Fig. 1

< Physical World (Appearance) > < World of Forms ("Reality") >

Objects/Beloveds	Shadows Reflections	Actual Things	Lower Forms	Higher Forms
Sections	A	B	C	D
Degrees	Earthly Eros	Heavenly Eros	Earthly Agape	Heavenly Agape

[17] Ibid., 130.
[18] Ibid., 128.

 = Form of the Good/Absolute Beauty/Divine Agape (Ground of Being)
 = Vision of Beauty/Mouth of Cave

If there are two types of the same form, such as love, then one type must be a different form. In the opening of his perennial parable of the cave, Plato identifies that its foremost purpose is "to illustrate the *degrees* to which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened."[19] The cave, like the divided line, represents a range of intensity of enlightenment in relation to the forms and the Good. The closer a person is to the mouth of the cave, the more enlightened they are; the closer a person is to the depths of the cave, the less enlightened they are. Prisoner-like men have been in the farthest depths of the cave since childhood and, because chains limit their volition, they can only see what is in front of them. Further up the cave burns a fire, which casts shadows onto the wall in front of the prisoners, because there are persons carrying things behind a screen of sorts. The prisoners' entire reality is comprised of shadows.

Plato then conjectures that one of the prisoners is first released and turned to walk painfully up to observe the light and what is made visible by the light, and second, is forced to climb the cave's steep ascent and made to witness the sunlight. All the while, this prisoner would be in pain and would want to return to the shadows until he has grown accustomed to its light.

It is perhaps this stage in the parable that is most important. Plato says, "He would need, then, to grow accustomed before he could see things in that upper world . . . Last of all he would be able to look at the Sun and contemplate its nature."[20] The prisoner can certainly, like

[19] Plato, quoted in W.T. Jones, "Plato: The Theory of Forms," in *The Classical Mind: A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonovich, 1970), 135. [emphasis mine]

[20] Ibid., 136.

any person, grow accustomed to light of the Good—the Vision of Beauty. But can he look at the Sun *and* contemplate its nature? Is anyone capable of this? Only the first part is within our potential. He looks briefly at the Sun before having to turn his gaze away, or to the side, because its intensity is so far beyond all human capacity of measurement. Thus, he cannot look at the Sun for long, let alone contemplate or gain truth and knowledge of its nature without sunglasses; and even they will at once extend his capacity so that he may know the Good exists and mitigate his perception of it so that he can never know its nature.

The prisoner did not free himself from the cave of ignorance alone. Someone else who had been freed before him went back into the cave to free him. It is commonly assumed that Plato argues for the freed prisoners to remain out of the cave in the light, which would be consistent with a purely egocentric mindset of love. However, Plato prefers that the former prisoner not return to the cave *suddenly* or return to take his former seat. Those who are free are absolutely allowed to go back to liberate the prisoners and help them in their ascent once they have grown accustomed to the light. When a person goes back into the cave, but not suddenly, it identifies three things regarding love: (1) the individual has witnessed a vision of beauty, (2) he or she has experienced a transvaluation from heavenly eros to earthly agape, (3) the value of this vision is best retained through bestowal (freeing others). If a vision of beauty at the mouth of the cave requires the enlightened to thereafter be constantly going in and out of the cave, then they are simultaneously engaged in a progression from eros to agape that results in a continual invitation to know more about the Good.

The Divided Line as Rope

Another predominant conception of love to have shaped Western thought and civilization is philia, which is Aristotle's notion of friendship. In Book XIII of his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that perfect friendship exists between men "who are good and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves . . . therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good—and goodness is an enduring thing."[21]

What is the difference between heavenly eros and philia? There is very little dissimilarity, if any. Both are still conditional commitments. If a friend discontinues his goodness, then the friendship ceases to exist. In the same way, if the beloved no longer has certain qualities that lift the soul, then a lover in the expression of eros will no longer express it toward his or her former beloved.

Eros, philia, and agape are like the three major threads that comprise a rope, which represents the form of love. One end of the rope has the threads pulled apart and frayed. Here is where our elementary understandings and experiences of love are located. It is full of confusion and disunity. But as we continue to investigate and experience love in its varied intensities, the threads appear closer and closer together until finally we realize they are all part of the same rope.

If each form is understood as its own divided line, then Plato's parable of the divided line is best understood as a rope exhibiting four divisions, or degrees, of intensity wherein the rope becomes more or less intricately woven, and the threads become more or less discernible. Certainly the threads of one rope will appear to be separate ropes at the beginning where they are separated and frayed, but that does not account for the greater intensities of weaving.

[21] Aristotle, quoted in Alan Soble, *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 60.

Agape is like the thread of a rope that is, initially, quite distant from the others. It may not even be able to be experienced or perceived by way of an individual's accord. It bestows itself into the other threads. As the individual progresses in his or her experience of eros and philia and learns how intimately woven they are, he or she moves further along the line and further up the cave toward the Vision of Beauty, which is where agape inserts a thread reflection of itself into the rope and at the mouth of the cave. When we see the Vision of Beauty, it calls us to stay and learn and absorb its light for however long it is necessary, and then, it is wise to return into the cave, or to the beginning where the rope has been frayed and its threads separated, to assist others.

Jesus as Vision of Beauty in Johannine Gospel

The authors of the Gospels and Plato both used parables to intimately resemble God or the Good. The Johannine gospel ends in an atmosphere of mystery, which was a prevalent Hellenistic theme.[22] Jesus, who now moves in the realm of the supernatural (world of forms) and who appears and vanishes from sight without regard to natural laws; Plato's parable of the cave; and the Johannine gospel, through their mysterious conclusions, seek to turn their readers' souls to things unseen and eternal. Plato hints that, "there may well be an art whose aim would be to effect [contemplation of the Good] . . . to ensure that, instead of looking in the wrong direction, [the soul] is turned the way it ought to be."[23] What is this art? If dialectic were an art, then it would be a qualified answer. But dialectic itself is not an art, but its means. Art begins as a motivation to create a particular end, which in this case is the contemplation of the

[22] D. Butleru Pratt, "The Gospel of John from the Standpoint of Greek Tragedy," *The World* 30.6 (December 1907): 454.

[23] Plato, quoted in Jones, "The Theory of Forms," 137.

Good, and dialectic is one of the means employed. The motivation is agape, for what would motivate an individual to risk going back into the cave and turn another person's soul toward the Good after experiencing pure eros? Dialectic is the inherent love of neighbor first and self second, all for the love of the Good, which is agape and theocentric love in a nutshell.

The Johannine gospel ends in dialectic between Jesus and his disciple Peter. The author plays off of the Synoptics' depiction of Peter denying that he *knew* Jesus three times, thereby hinting at a reciprocal relationship between "loving" and "knowing":

> "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others?"
> "Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."
> "Then feed my lambs," he said.
> A second time he asked, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
> "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."
> "Then tend my sheep."
> A third time he said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?"
> "Lord," he said, "you know everything; you know I love you."
> Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."[24]

The sheep that Jesus requests his chosen disciples to feed and tend are analogous to the prisoners in the cave who live a dependent existence. While the lambs are dependent on shepherds for their food and care, and the shepherds dependent on the Christ they have literally "seen" for the meanings (forms) they have learned from by living closely to him much like Plato lived close to Socrates, so are the prisoners' spiritual health dependent on those who, after witnessing their Vision of Beauty, come back into the cave to liberate them. It is evident that eros and agape are redemptive love.

[24] John 21:15–17.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it."[25] Eros, until it actually witnesses the transvaluative Vision of Beauty, assumes that it can be possessed or mastered. Earthly agape is in the darkness too; however, it has an enhanced perception of the darkness's value. Jesus is frequently compared to light within the Johannine gospel, and His interactions with common people often involve an alteration of their sense of sight.

The light from the Good is not the Good or the Beauty itself, but its effect. It enables those who are liberated from the cave to dwell in the Vision of Beauty much like Christ is dependent on the will of the Father and enables His disciples to dwell in love of the Good through loving Him: "Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love, as I have heeded my Father's commands and dwell in his love."[26]

Meditation

To answer Plato's question, I do not, unlike him, believe that the eyes of man's minds are capable of perceiving Beauty or the Good as it actually is. It is too bright and too far beyond the limits of our experience and understanding. No matter how far an individual has progressed from eros to agape in his or her lifetime or consecutive lifetimes, no matter how indelible his revelation is of the Vision of Beauty, and no matter how apt his pair of sunglasses may present it to him, I do not believe that our minds have the capacity to maintain its vision, let alone absorb the thing itself.

We do well to be immersed in the transvaluative expression that is agape. We do well to witness a Vision of Beauty at the mouth of Plato's cave. And we do better, when our Light has

[25] John 1:5
[26] John 15:9–10

been properly fitted, to return into the cave to assist others' find their Light – even if it costs us our own.