

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LOVE AND EROS AMONG PLATO, IBN HAZM AND MODERN PHILOSOPHERS

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The problem of love is so complex that from the Greeks until now, many philosophers and scholars have made it the subject of their study. The early Greek philosophers like Plato tried to explain this complex matter. He compiled a book, *Symposium*, on its various aspects. In the medieval ages an Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm wrote a unique treatise *Tawq al-Hamamah* which contains thirty chapters and are divided into three sections. In the modern ages a number of scholars treated this issue from different angles. If they agree on one point, they disagree on the other. My concentration in this paper is to compare Ibn Hazm's point of view with the others, especially with Plato and Tillich's ideas.

Before entering the discussion, it is worth knowing the origin of Eros. The word Eros in the Greek literature is used for physical and sexual love. The basis for this use is that the Greeks combined the god of love and the god of wine into one deity to avail full pleasure of love.¹ Since that time the Eros became synonymous to sensual love.² Though Plato gives it a philoso-

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phical turn to make it beneficial for spiritual life, he does not touch upon 'chastity' in love. He has the notion of gradual rise to achieve "beauty". Ibn Hazm³ clarifies "chastity" on several occasions while describing love.

In the *Symposium*, during the dialogue, Phaedrus considers love (Eros) as a great god.⁴ On the other hand, Agathon disagrees with him and says "Love (Eros) is the youngest of the gods."⁵ As for Socrates, he completely rejects both of the notions and says "Love is neither beautiful nor good ... he could be something in between. He is great spirit who works as a messenger between men and gods."⁶ The reason for rejecting the divinity of 'Love' (Eros) is that it characterizes gods with happiness and beauty, while Eros does not have any one of them. In fact, Socrates thinks that Eros is a kind of desire and appetite for something one is missing. When desire is fulfilled then Eros tries to possess beauty though the thing is not beautiful itself.⁷ Diotema explains the issue and says that every one has the desire for good and happiness and "They want the good to be theirs for ever."⁸ As "beauty" wants immortality, it gives birth to another "beauty" whether in body or soul.⁹ In other words, Plato gives Eros another serious role that is craving for the beautiful which is capable of leading the soul upward to the philosophical appreciation of ideal beauty. For him love moves in two directions: one temporal/horizontal, the desire to engender bodies for the sake of society; the other vertical, soars towards ecstasy and eternity.¹⁰

Ibn Hazm's approach of love is mostly the same as of Plato. Talking about its nature he says that he considers love as unification between scattered parts of souls that have become divided in this physical universe, a union effected within the substances of their original sublime element.¹¹ He refutes the notion of his predecessor Muhammad Da'ud,¹² who quotes Greek philosophers that spirits are segmented spheres. Ibn Hazm supposes that "an affinity of their vital forces in the supernal world, which is their everlasting home, and a close approximation in a manner of their constitution."¹³ This idea is closer to that of Plato in *Symposium*. However, Ibn Hazm sees its

roots in the Qur'an rather than in Plato's work. He mentions the following Qur'anic verse as foundation of his theory:

It is He who created you of one soul, and fashioned thereof its spouse, that he might find response in her.¹⁴

Ibn Hazm responds the question, if love is the same as described by the Greeks, then it would be exactly equal in both of the parties concerned. He says that because of the earthly atmosphere, soul of the beloved is restricted. If there were no restrictions the two would have been equal in their experiences of union and love.¹⁵ He proves his theory saying: "you will not find two persons in love ... without some likeness and agreement of natural attributes between them."¹⁶ He confirms it with the tradition of the Prophet where he says: "Spirits are regimented battalions: those who know one another remain at variance."¹⁷ Ibn Hazm further examines Love and says that the cause of love is not physical beauty. If this is true then no defective person would attract admiration. Supporting his idea with general observation he says: "We know of many men actually preferring the inferior article being aware of their inferiority but they cannot turn away heart from it."¹⁸ Concluding his point Ibn Hazm says that love is something within the soul itself.

Writing about the attraction of beauty Ibn Hazm says that Love chooses beautiful form to delight upon. Therefore, it is evident that soul itself is beautiful and is affected by all beautiful things.¹⁹ Here, again, the author of *Tawq al-Hamamah* represents the idea of Socrates who considers Eros beautiful.

Eros is also controversial among the modern scholars. Tillich calls Eros a "higher form" of love and that it takes place between two persons on equal bases.²⁰ Ibn Hazm, though, does not neglect equality in love between two individuals, rather he extends it saying it could be one sided and the other person may not be aware of it. To confirm his theory Ibn Hazm mentions several adventures. In one incident he says that "a secretary of state was smitten with love for a person namely Aslam, son of a chamberlain (al-Haajib). Aslam was not only handsome but also brilliant, cultured, expert in many sciences as well as a lawyer

and a penetrating critic of poetry. The secretary, because of his passionate love, fell sick until he died." After his tragic death Aslam was told that he was the cause of his death. Being very sorry Aslam said: "Why did you not inform me? I would have kept myself even more closely with him ... (and) that could have done me no harm."²¹

In the *Symposium* we do not find anything that differentiates between lust and love. Ibn Hazm, however, makes distinction between them. He says that the soul has yearning for perfect symmetrical images. Whenever the soul sees such images it fixes upon it. Then, if it discerns behind that image something of its own kind it becomes united with it and then true love is established. If the soul does not discover anything of its own kind behind the image, its affection goes no further than the form, and remains mere carnal desire²² (*shahwat*).²³

As for the power of Love, Tillich describes it as "moving force of life"²⁴ which plays dynamic role in human life. Ibn Hazm also recognizes its power and authority over the soul. He writes:

Love exercises as affective authority and decisive sovereignty over the soul. Its commands cannot be opposed, its ordinance may not be flouted, its rule is not to be transgressed, it demands unwavering obedience, and against its domain there is no appeal.²⁵

Thus, there is agreement between Ibn Hazm and Tillich about the power of love.

Agape is another kind of love in which a person loves another person in God. Tillich defines it says: "We love the other person in God and through the love of God installs and awakens in us. Thus agape can be described as a 'type of love which seeks the other because of the ultimate unity of a being within the divine grounds.'"²⁶ It is clear from the writing of Tillich that Eros plays an effective and powerful role in human societies. Thus he sees agape inferior to Eros or agape as offshoot of it. Contrary to Tillich, Ibn Hazm asserts that agape is the noblest type of love. He writes:

The noblest sort of Love is that which exists between persons who Love each other in God, either because of an identical zeal for the righteous work upon which they are engaged, or by virtue of a common possession of some noble knowledge.²⁷

On the other side Origen is completely against the bodily love even it is with the legitimate wife. According to him, the "outer man" can make this sort of illicit and unlawful love; and such a person actually loves not his wife but an adulteress.²⁸ But Ibn Hazm permits bodily love (if it is with his own wife) and considers it demand of human nature. At the beginning of his book Ibn Hazm clarifies that "love is neither disproved by religion nor forbidden by law, for heart is in God's hand."²⁹ He takes the middle position and also warns against the unlawful carnal desires. He writes:

Many men obey their carnal soul and disobey their reasons; they follow after their random desires, rejecting the ordinance of religion, and scouting God's commandments. Allah has put into all healthy minds to be decent and self controlled and to abstain from sin and fight against temptation.³⁰

Keeping these limits in mind, when a person joins his beloved, he celebrates supreme pleasure and everlasting joy. In Ibn Hazm's words, "truly that is a miracle of wonder surpassing the tongue of the eloquent and far beyond the range of the most cunning speech to describe."³¹ He also refutes those who think that love in separation is powerful, while to long union fatal to love. According to him, this is vile doctrine, and advanced only by those who quickly tire of sweet romance. Ibn Hazm concludes that "the longer the union lasts the firmer the attachment becomes."³² He also considers separation as a mean of passionate love and calls it *ishq*.³³ Ibn Hazm, though, admits bodily love but at the same time prefers and glorifies spiritual love. He considers it more fine, more tender, more fresh, and composes verses in this regard:

For if I slumber, then my soul
 Shall have thee only, have the whole;
 No body gross shall come between
 Our spirit, sable and unseen.
 This spiritual unity
 More sweet a thousand-fold shall be,
 More fine, more tender, and more fresh
 Than the hot intercourse of flesh.

(Trans. A. J. Arberry)

Contrary to the modern popular trend, Ibn Hazm believed that real love is that which is with one. He calls it *shahwat* (carnal desire) when a person claims to love more than one person. For him, it is called love metaphorically, not in its real sense. He says:

He lies, and perjures all that's true
 Who swears he is in love with two:
 He shares in falsehood equally
 With that demand miscreant, manichee.

The heart had not too sufficient place
 To hold two sweets in one embrace,
 Nor may the second love-after
 Claim with the first an equal share.

(Trans. A. J. Arberry)

CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussion we see that Ibn Hazm keeps his middle position in all issues relating love. He, in general, represents Platonic thoughts but he sees them in the light of Islam. He, like Plato, thinks love as unification between scattered parts of souls.

Like Plato, Ibn Hazm also stresses on the beauty of quality rather than physical beauty and says it is something related to the soul. Love is beautiful for him too as considered by Socrates.

Usually Love takes place between two individuals on equal bases, but for Ibn Hazm it is not necessary. It can be one-sided,

i.e. one may not be aware of the other's feelings. He thinks that real love is that which is attached to the soul not to the body. Loving a physical beauty is lust for him.

Plato and Tillich consider love as moving force, and Ibn Hazm thinks the same. He calls it "affective authority and defective sovereignty". For Ibn Hazm, agape is the noblest form of love, while Tillich and Plato consider it one type of love without any superiority. Ibn Hazm does not negate bodily love as does Origen. Ibn Hazm sees powerful passionate love in union and says that long duration makes love more powerful; while some others think it in separation.

Overall, Ibn Hazm balances between the two extremes of body and soul and take middle position. The most important thing is that Ibn Hazm bases his theory on personal experiences and observations.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Ahmad Fu'ad al-Ahwani, *Plato* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif), 1958, p. 55. See also *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Marcia Eliade (New York: Macmillan Co.), 1987.
- 2 Zakariya Ibrahim, *Mushkilat al-Hubb* (Cairo: Dar Misr li al-Taba'ah), 1970, p. 160.
- 3 His name was Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Ahmad (994-1064 AD), and was born in Cordova. He was skilled in Islamic sciences, Greek philosophy, history, jurisprudence and literature. He had written more than four hundred volumes in various fields of sciences. One of his famous work *Tawq al-Hamamah* (The Ring of the Dove) is equally celebrated both in the East and the West (Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan* [Eng. Trans.], 2: 268-270; See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Qk "Ibn Hazm".
- 4 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hacket Publishing Company), 1989, 178b, 178c.
- 5 *Ibid*, 195c.
- 6 *Ibid*, 202b.
- 7 *Ibid*.
- 8 *Ibid*, 205d and 206a.
- 9 *Ibid*, 206b.
- 10 Jean Guitton, *Essay on Human Love* (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation), 1951, p. 22.
- 11 Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm, *Tawq al-Hamamah* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husayniyah al-Misriyah), 1975, p. 7.
- 12 Muhammad ibn Da'ud al-Zahiri was the son of Da'ud, the founder of the Zahiri school of thought. Muhammad Da'ud compiled a book, *al-Zahrah*, which is about love.
- 13 *Tawq al-Hamamah*, p. 7.
- 14 Qur'an, 7:189.
- 15 *Tawq al-Hamamah*, p. 22.
- 16 *Ibid*, p. 23.

- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Alexander C. Irwin, *Eros Towards the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1991, p. 14.
- 21 *Tawq al-Hamamah*, pp. 125-126.
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 23 According to *Lane's Arabic English Dictionary*, it literally means desire, longing, or yearning of a soul for a thing. It is more significant than *iradah* (intention), and the intelligent agree in opinion that it is not commendable (being either lawful or unlawful ... or appetite or appetence, or lust or carnal lust).
- Shahwat* is of two kinds, true and false. One is that without which body becomes unsound, as *shahwat* for food on occasion or hunger. In the other type body does not become unsound.
- The other synonym or closely related word to *shahwat* is *al-Hawa*, which, according to Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzi, means inclination of nature toward one's needs. This inclination is created in human being in order to survive. If a person does not have inclination toward food, would not eat; or towards drinking, would not drink; or towards marriage, would not marry. Nevertheless, *al-Hawa* (desire) makes attractive for a person what is useful. Therefore, blaming absolute desire is not good. What exceeds is blameworthy. Absolute desire calls for immediate gratification without thinking about the consequences. (Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn al-Jawzi, *Dhamm al-Hawa*, 1st edition, ed. Mustafa Abd al-Wahid (Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha), pp. 12-13).
- 24 *Eros Toward the World*, p. 8.
- 25 Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Lozak and Company Ltd.), 1953, p. 60.
- 26 *Eros Towards the World*, p. 15.
- 27 *The Ring of the Dove*, p. 25.
- 28 Rowan A. Greer, *Origen* (New York: Paulist Press), p. 223.
- 29 *Tawq al-Hamamah*, p. 6.

- 30 *Ibid*, p. 132.
- 31 *The Ring of the Dove*, p. 118.
- 32 *Ibid*.
- 33 Ibn Jawzi refers to several definitions of *Ishq* which are given by other philosophers. According to Plato, passionate love is the force of empty soul without thing. Aristotle said that it is bad choice that met empty soul. In the view of Socrates, love is madness and it is of different types just like madness is of different types. According to al-Jahiz, every *ishq* is called love but every love is not *ishq*, because *ishq* is the name of excessiveness in love. Like generosity, when it exceeds, is called wastage, when decreases the average then it is called miserliness. (Ibn al-Jawzi, *Dhamm al-Hawa* (Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha), p. 295).