

The Possibility and Significance of Love for Transcendence Existence in Avicenna's Perspective

Zahra Hosseini¹ 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy, Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, Shahid Madani University of Azarbaijan, Tabriz, Iran. Email: z.hosseini@azaruniv.ac.ir

Abstract

Divine love stands as a pivotal aspect of the intricate relationship between humans and God. Despite its multifaceted presence in theological and mystical traditions, achieving consensus on its nature remains challenging. The inherently personal essence of divine love introduces a level of ambiguity when considering it in the context of an impersonal God, as exemplified by Avicenna's Necessary Existent Deity. Avicenna portrays God as a metaphysical entity characterized by pure transcendence, devoid of personal emotions and passions. In contrast, he positions love as the pinnacle of the human-God connection. This article seeks to elucidate the significance and realization of this love through a semantical lens. While Avicenna provides a comprehensive definition of love as a "propensity for goodness," constructing a cohesive semantic system, the culmination suggests that human love for The Pure Good ultimately sheds any personal attributes. Instead, it transforms into a form of inner metamorphosis, encompassing rational-practical perfection. Hence, articulating divine love in a literal sense seems implausible for The Necessary Existent. Avicenna, in his elimination of dialectics, metaphorically applies divine love to convey a metaphysical rationality and an inner transformative process.

Keywords: Divine Love, Necessary Existent, Avicenna, Transcendence, Interpretation.

Introduction

The approach to connecting with God has fundamentally rested on the conception of God, giving rise to a cascade of conceptions and theories within this framework. For instance, in pantheism, where there is no distinction between the Holy and the world, the nature of the relationship differs significantly from theism, which involves a transcendent God. One of the most ubiquitous theological concepts is divine love, with multiple, and at times conflicting, interpretations. Numerous questions have arisen regarding its possibility, the appropriateness of applying this term to the divine, and its meaning—whether literal or metaphorical.

In Avicenna's works, God is depicted as absolutely transcendent, eternal, infinite, unchangeable, and pure actuality devoid of all passions. This portrayal presents God as a metaphysical existence separate from the physical world. Consequently, the challenge arises when considering love for God alongside such a transcendental concept, where any address to God is interpreted at a metaphysical level. What, then, does it signify to discuss love for God in this context? Does its usage align univocally with the conventional meaning close to common sense, or does it exclusively pertain to a subjective mental state?

This article aims to extract the fundamental elements of the philosophical concept of love and its applications in Islamic culture. Subsequently, employing a semantic approach, it delves into the meaning and possibility of love for Avicenna's Necessary Existent Deity.

Research Findings

Avicenna's conceptualization of love is based on a triad of the Platonic-Plotinian philosophy and Islamic mysticism. The wrong attribution of The Enneads to Aristotle caused him, unconsciously influenced by Plato and Plotinus, to present the love with the elements of the platonic concept of the Eros, a deep desire to acquire, mania and exclusive attention to the adored. Plato's definition of love as "propensity to good", the cosmology of Plotinus and the "Manifestation" theory of the mystics, make him to find all the existents having an instinctive tendency and love to their perfection. In addition to such an incognitive tendency, he presents another type of love among the conscious perceptual existents. Human love, basically, is the result of attention and imaginative perception of beauty; meanwhile, the body and bodily emotions play strategic role in this regard. Love for God is actually a mere tendency towards His Goodness, based on the perception of His Goodness. Transformation of identity and resemblance to the adored is one of the central effects of love and Avicenna applies it for redefinition of divine love. Therefore, love for God is only resemblance to Pure Goodness, which might be achieved through the abstract universal intellection and actual attainment of the virtues.

Conclusion

Avicenna's perspective on existence is rooted in the dualism of The Necessary Existent and The Possibles. He characterizes the Necessary Existent as entirely transcendent and fundamentally distinct from the world, making it impossible to address directly or pray to. Consequently, his analysis of love exhibits a reductionist approach that strips away dialectical and personal aspects, omits imagination and imagery, and reduces love to an impersonal, metaphysical concept. This concept is anchored in perceiving the First Cause as The Pure Good and being akin to The Good through intellection and virtues. While metaphysicalizing divine love aligns with his thinking and the impersonal nature of God, Avicenna engages in a metaphorical tension by selectively incorporating elements and omitting others from the concept of "love." Furthermore, recognizing God's causality as The Good becomes a theoretical matter linked to the realm of "being," whereas practicing goodness (moral perfection) is a practical concern tied to the realm of "ought to." Avicenna introduces a potential fallacy of four terms by employing the term "good" in two distinct meanings and deriving conclusions from it. In conclusion, by defining divine love within this assimilation, Avicenna removes it from its conventional dialectical meaning, resulting in God's absence in this romantic relationship.

References

- Avicenna. (2003). *The Book of Scientific Knowledge (Daneshnameh-ye Alai)*, Hamadan. Bu Ali University. (in Persian)
- . (1999). *The Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun fi'l-tibb)*. ed. Mohammad Amin al-Daznawi. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah. (in Arabic)
- . (1983). *The Book of Healing (Kitab al-Shifa')*. ed. Saeed Zaed, Qum: Maktabah Mara'shi. (in Arabic)
- . (2000). *The Book of Salvation (Kitab al-Najat)*. ed. Muhammad Taghi Daneshpajouh. Tehran: University of Tehran. (in Arabic)
- . (1979). *The Treatises (Rasa'il)*, Qum: Bidar. (in Arabic)
- Brümmer, Vincent (2009), *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology*, Cambridge University Press.
- Farley, Edward (1963), *Transcendence of God*. Philadelphia. the Westminster Press.
- Webb, C.C.J. (1918). *God and personality*. Michigan: University of Michigan Library.

Cite this article: Hosseini, Z. (2024). The Possibility and Significance of Love for Transcendence Existence in Avicenna's Perspective. *Philosophy and Kalam*, 57 (1), 13-32. (in Persian)

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

© The Author(s).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jiltp.2024.369024.523456>



Article Type: Research Paper

Received: 2-Dec-2023

Received in revised form: 24-Jan-2024

Accepted: 6-Feb-2024

Published online: 13-Mar-2024