

The Heart of the Matter: Eros and Agápe

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I. Introduction

Over the past three years I've been exploring the nature of love at our Laing symposia (Thompson, 2015, 2016, 2017). The word 'love' means so many things in different contexts that to try a general and all-encompassing definition is probably impossible. So instead I've been obliged to focus on one strand at a time, of this incredibly multi-faceted topic. I'm especially delighted that we decided to explore this very topic – **WHAT IS LOVE?** – this year as our workshop theme. The topic of love is also one of the most pervasive in Laing's published works, as well as his lectures and private seminars. It was Laing's many allusions to Christianity over the years and the way some of its principal tenets influenced his thinking that inspired this paper.

In previous years I explored the relation between love and friendship, love as a form of sympathy, and the phenomenon of falling in love, its erotic edition. For my talk this morning I want to address one of Laing's most frequent allusions to love, *Caritas*, in the context of Christianity. Though I won't be citing Laing explicitly, the title of my talk – **The Heart of the Matter** – was a favorite expression that Laing invoked often. In fact, the *heart* of the matter, when we speak of the

human condition, would necessarily allude to the role love plays in our lives – for what is closer to our hearts than love?

There are at least eight words for love in the Greek language, and probably more. **Eros** is the most familiar, referring to erotic or passionate love. **Philia** refers to friendship, or affection. **Storge** refers to family or familiar love. **Ludus** depicts playful, or teasing love. **Mania**ⁱ is obsessive or mad love. **Pragma** is enduring, or marital love. **Philautia** is narcissistic or self-love, but in the positive sense of the term. And finally **Agape** is selfless, or spiritual love. This morning I want to focus on the first and last of these variations of love.

But before turning our attention to the relation between *Eros* and *Agape*, I want to say a few words about two other closely related kinds of love: *Philia* and *Storge*. These are sometimes conflated. For example, some people refer to *Philia* as brotherly or sisterly love, as Laing himself sometimes did, perhaps because in Christianity friendship and brotherhood are closely related, if only metaphorically. This is not technically accurate. Strictly speaking, *Philia* refers to non-erotic as well as non-kinship love. Unlike familial love, we choose whom we decide to become friends with. We are born into our familial relationships, represented in the Greek idiom as *Storge*. This is why love among siblings, parents and children, uncles and aunts and so on are *familiar* to us. We don't choose these relationships, we're born into them, by blood or marriage.

Aristotle believed that friendship is the most intimate love there is. We're drawn to friends by an attraction that Freud believed is partially erotic, but not sexualized as in the case of genital intercourse. Freud's view that friendships are erotic but not sexual is indebted entirely to Plato. The fact that friendships are not rooted in sex is what makes them so special. They thrive on reciprocity, and embody a capacity for give-and-take that is often missing in sexual relationships, which are governed by passion. As we will see, Christianity reveres friendship and views it as an edition of *Agape*, the love of and for God.

Storge is not exclusively limited to family relations, but refers to virtually any relationship that is familiar (Lewis, 2012, pp. 31-56). In the same way that we develop feelings for family members over time, we also develop feelings for any people or place that becomes an aspect of our daily routine. A city, for example, that I grew up in, has a special hold on me, even though I like to complain about the traffic, the cost of living, or the smog. The stores I shop in, the people who service my needs, the bridge I drive over to work, are all familiar to me, and become increasingly so over time. Eventually, if I live somewhere long enough, my affection for the place sneaks up on me and I can't help but form an attachment, even if I don't especially like the place. In a word, it becomes home to me, and wherever I live I long to feel at home. Familiarity is what makes this edition of love sublime. Just like a marriage or a friendship that lost its magic, I remain attached to it nonetheless. Anyone here who has lived in a variety of places knows what I'm talking about.

Now for the relationship between *Eros* and *Agape*. My talk is divided into three sections. The first concerns the mythology of *Eros* and *Agape*. The second addresses Plato's conception of *Eros*. And finally, in the third section I explore the Christian appropriation of *Agape* and the relationship between *Eros*, *Agape*, and *Caritas*.

II. The Myth of Eros and Agape

Where does *Eros* belong in Greek mythology? And *Agape*? First we have to account for *Aphrodite*, the goddess of love. In fact, there are two Greek goddesses of love, *Aphrodite* and *Agape*. *Aphrodite* is the goddess of sexual love and *Agape* is the goddess of divine love, which we know very little about. But first *Aphrodite*. She is the goddess of sex, beauty, pleasure, and procreation. In Greek mythology, *Aphrodite* was married to Hephaestus, the god of blacksmiths and metalworking. Yet, *Aphrodite* had many lovers. Among them was Ares, the god of war. Other lovers include the shepherd Adonis, another shepherd, Anchises, and many, many others. It was *Aphrodite's* feud with two other goddesses that started the Trojan War. *Aphrodite* was stunningly beautiful, but the Spartans also depicted her as bearing arms, so she was prayed to when they went into battle. Perhaps this is where the phrase, "all is fair in love and war," originated? *Aphrodite* was also the patron goddess to prostitutes, and many Greek courtesans wrote poems to her.

Now *Aphrodite* had a special relationship with *Eros*, who in mythology was sometimes depicted as the god of lust and sexual desire. From a cosmological perspective, Hesiod describes *Eros* as one of the four primeval forces at the beginning of time. First there was **Chaos**, or the Void, the first thing to exist. Then came **Gaia**, the Earth. After *Gaia* came **Tartarus**, where souls are judged after death, also known as the Abyss that became the dungeon where the Titans were imprisoned. And finally there was **Eros**, love, the fairest of the gods who ruled over the minds of both gods and mortals. *Eros* was one of the fundamental causes in the formation of the world and brought order and harmony to the conflicting elements of which **Chaos** consisted. In Plato's *Symposium* he is referred to as the oldest of the gods.

Later, the Greek poets humanized *Eros* by suggesting he was one of the youngest gods. In this context he was sometimes described as the son of *Poros* and *Penia*, resource and need, respectively, and was begotten on *Aphrodite's* birthday. Others suggest he is the son of *Hermes* and *Aphrodite*, while others still insist he is the son of *Ares* and *Aphrodite*. This is what is maddening about Greek mythology: there are so many versions of virtually every mythological figure, none of which are definitive. But since love finds its way into the hearts of humans in a manner that no one can fathom, it stands to reason his origin is mysterious.

In art, *Eros* is always depicted as a handsome youth. He is the god of sensual love and passion, which is much broader than sex. His arms consist of arrows, which he carries in a golden quiver. Some are golden and kindle love in the hearts they wound, while others are made of lead and destroy a love that already existed. He is sometimes represented with golden wings, fluttering like a bird. At other times he is depicted with his eyes covered, when he acts blindly. He is usually the companion to *Aphrodite*, unreservedly devoted to her, always at the ready to carry out her instructions, for good or ill.

Finally, a few words about the goddess *Agape*. She is virtually ignored by Plato and Aristotle, as well as every other Greek philosopher, so all we know about her in the specifically Greek context is her mythology. As I noted a moment ago, she is the goddess of divine love. She is also *Aphrodite's* sister. *Agape* was idolized by all the women in ancient Greece because she refused to give in to any man's orders. Perhaps she was the first feminist? Greek women never saw themselves as very important, even in marriages. This wasn't so for *Agape*. She knew that men felt superior to women but she saw no evidence of their alleged supremacy. She vowed to be an independent goddess and to never let any man or god lie to her. As years went by *Agape* became lonely, but discovered that she had stopped aging and became increasingly sensuous and beautiful. The gods took notice and tried to seduce her, but they only made fools of themselves in the process. Mortal women began to realize that men weren't the only power in the universe, and that women could make decisions of their own. Greek women began to achieve a higher marital status and were treated more fairly. This only made Greek men more attracted to them and less likely to break their marital vows. One wonders why Greek philosophers – all men – have so little to say about her?

III. Eros and the Divine: Plato

I could say more about the other Greek gods that are associated with love, but given the time I should move on. I now turn to Plato and what he taught us about love, a composite of *Eros'* philosophical, psychological, and spiritual aspects.

Plato is generally regarded as the most important philosopher. That status could arguably go to Socrates, Plato's teacher and central character in Plato's many dialogues. But Socrates wrote nothing and most of what we know about him comes from Plato. Consequently, separating which portion of Plato's dialogues belong to Plato and in turn Socrates is virtually impossible. This is why you sometimes hear Socrates invoked and other times Plato when describing our debt to the Greeks. Plato not only invented philosophy as we know it; he was also an essential inspiration for Christianity, located in the Christian conceptions of love and the hereafter. Plato was also Aristotle's teacher, the other Greek philosopher who altered the course of history and who founded science. Whereas Plato focused on *Eros*, Aristotle turned his attention to *Philia* and taught us nearly all that

we know about friendship. Plato and Aristotle each had a fundamental impact on Freud and are the source for most of Freud's theories about the human condition.

So who, according to Plato, was *Eros*? *Eros* is not only passionate, or romantic love, but desire in all its aspects. To desire anything is strictly speaking "erotic." Plato explores *Eros* in two of his most famous dialogues, *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. *The Symposium* (1991) details a gathering of Socrates and some of his friends and students who met to debate the nature of love – in much the way we are this week – in both its beautiful and darker aspects. According to Sophocles, "Love is unconquered in battle, sleeps on the maiden's cheek and roams in savage places, whom neither men nor immortals can flee; and who introduces madness and forcibly turns the minds of just men to injustice and their disgrace." (Allen, in Plato, 1991, p. 7)

In the *Hippolytus*, Euripides tells us how "Eros bewitches the heart of those he would destroy. He is the author of ruin, tyrannical in violence, destruction on his breath." (Allen, p. 7-8) And even Plato, who organized this gathering to sing *Eros*' praises, has to admit that "*Eros* is also the master passion of the tyrant . . . and of unsatisfied longing, allied to drunkenness and a source of insanity." (p. 8) So *Eros* is not all lovey-dovey. There is a dark side to *Eros* as well, which explains why love can be so painful and make us so crazy we may be driven to murder.

According to Plato, *Aphrodite* represents sex, whereas *Eros* represents love, broadly speaking. According to Aristophanes, one of the guests at the *Symposium*, *Eros* is the desire for wholeness, embodied in sexual intercourse. This explains why we crave proximity to those we love: we want to be with them and enjoy their company, always and in all ways. Love is possessive and, in that respect, egocentric, a pervasive theme in Freud's theory of narcissism, in both its good and pathogenic aspects.ⁱⁱ

Keep in mind that the fundamental purpose of philosophy, according to Plato, is to acquire happiness, or *eudaimonia* – literally to be with your *daimon* spirit. In other words, to be with your *daimon* and not banished from his favor will bring happiness. In this context, love is essential to happiness, not just sexual love, but the love of friends, of work, of the seasons, of life itself. This brings us to *Eros*' origin, and whether he was in fact a god or a *daimon* spirit, an entity somewhere between god and man.

The key figure in *The Symposium* is a woman, Diotima, who doesn't actually attend the meeting, but whose wisdom about the nature of love is invoked by Socrates, who professes to know little about love himself. So it's a woman who Socrates – or Plato – turns to as the ultimate authority on the nature of love. According to Diotima, *Eros* is a *daimon*, an intermediate between gods and mortals. When *Aphrodite* wants to reward a mortal with love, she dispatches *Eros* to make it so. *Eros* is also a philosopher, the first lover of wisdom.

Diotima tells us that *Eros* is the child of *Penia*, meaning want or need, and *Poros*, meaning resourcefulness. This explains love's need, its aim to possess, its love of wisdom, and its cunning. Despite the adage that only fools fall in love, Diotima argues that only the wise are able to love fully and unreservedly, to give themselves to love's call completely. She suggests that, if love makes us happy, only the wise are capable of genuine happiness, when compared to its inferior cousin, pleasure.

But what is happiness? Diotima explains that happiness consists in the possession of good things. The lover loves beauty, for example. For Plato, the good and beauty are the same principle. Happiness is not an episodic experience of pleasure – the way we typically invoke this term – but a state of well-being that persists. The happy individual may also experience suffering from time to time, but as a fundamentally happy person. Happiness doesn't inoculate us from suffering, but it does make it bearable. In the English language, the root of the word happiness is *hap*, meaning luck or chance. But good fortune isn't blind. For Plato, it only comes to those who earn it, by aspiring to become wise and valuing the good. It was Plato who gave us ethics and who combined the ethical with our capacity to love.

In fact, Plato insists that all desires are ostensibly good, and that we only desire bad things out of ignorance, when we mistakenly believe that wishing someone ill, for example, will make us happy. But ultimately it won't, because to wish such a thing would be envy, not love. The satisfaction we derive from vengeance is only momentary and corrupts the soul. This means that *Eros* is both sensual and divine. It begins in sexual attraction, but aims at something higher. The love of beauty, sexual desire, the aesthetic perfection of the athlete, art objects, or ideas, experienced sensually and examined rationally, leads us to the divine. This is the essence of erotic love, and, borrowing heavily from Plato, it is also how Freud conceived psychoanalysis: a process in which we submit to the dark side of our soul by recounting our sins, and then examining them without judgment for the truths they tell us about ourselves. Armed with this knowledge, we have the opportunity to make ourselves better, by becoming less defensive and loving more fully.

In distinguishing between love and desire, Plato explained that love is simply a desire that we want to treasure forever. To lose someone's love is the most grievous pain possible, but to lose one's passion for living is even worse. This is why it's in our nature to love, and if we can parse out the obstacles that stand in our way our capacity for love will only increase. Plato also believed in the hereafter, a notion adopted by Christianity, and argued that if we die as loving creatures we will go to heaven, and live there forever. This is why love, or *Eros*, is also divine. After all, it leads us to heaven. But for the Greeks, we must find this heaven on earth, before we die.

We can see from this brief description that Plato conceived *Eros* as all-encompassing. Yet Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (2000), thought there was something missing. He turned his

attention to *Philia*, which he thought was an even more loving, more giving, edition of *Eros*. This love is not different in kind from *Eros*, but rather an extension of it. Because it is inherently reciprocal, it is due to our capacity for *Philia* that we are willing to forgive others for their trespasses against us. Any person we love is also capable of wounding us, and often does. The good friend overlooks these intransigencies and remains loyal. A friend doesn't judge harshly, but feels sympathy for the shortcomings of those he or she befriends. This is the element in marriages that insures their longevity. We will see how this conception of friendship had just as great an impact on Christianity as did *Eros*.

IV. Agápe and Caritas

During the early period of Christianity, from the death of Christ to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church in the Fourth Century, Christianity was comprised of competing churches that were influenced by both Plato's conception of *Eros* and the teachings of Christ, as articulated by the four Gospels of John, Mark, Luke, and Matthew, but especially St. Paul's *Corinthians*. Christ himself was schooled in Greek thought as all educated Jews were. Yet St. Paul, who lived in the first century after the death of Jesus, was singularly opposed to sex as well as any aspect of *Eros* that was even tangentially erotic. This is why many of the early gospels were excluded from official Christendom when the *New Testament* was collated, especially the Gospel of Thomas that was thought to be too Platonic.

It was Paul who introduced the language of *Agape* into Christ's teachings as epitomizing Christian love, though the word employed in the King James translation from the Greek is either love or charity, a corruption of *Caritas*. In the original Greek, the term *Agape* is employed.

So how does Paul conceptualize *Agape*, and how does he distinguish it from *Eros*? In Paul's opinion, *Agape* is the opposite of *Eros*. Whereas *Eros* is epitomized by man's love for God and situated in a split between the carnal and the divine, which can be elevated through good deeds and self-development, *Agape* is epitomized by God's love for man, *in spite of his sinful ways*, which God accepts as his nature. Because many early Christians remained influenced by Platonic love, Paul set out to oppose it in a variety of edicts.

Whereas Plato taught that the universe is of one substance, Christianity teaches a radical disjunction between man and God. Whereas Plato emphasized that man can employ reason to examine and improve himself, Jesus preaches that salvation comes from faith. Whereas *Eros* values sexual energy in its various forms, and teaches that desire for a lover can train the soul to love more magnanimously, Christianity treats sex with suspicion and advocates the control of our sexual urges. For Plato, evil derives from ignorance and can be corrected; for Christianity humans are fallen creatures who rely on God's forgiveness for their salvation. For the Greeks, ethics derives from

shame and one's place in the community. For Christians, ethics is rooted in the guilt of having been born in sin, from the consequence of Adam and Eve. Only God can forgive us for this original sin.

Plato implies that *Eros* contains elements of *Agape* within it, in the guise of *Philia*. As we saw earlier, *Eros* was never supposed to be exclusively sexual. It wasn't until Christianity that *Eros* was separated from *Philia* and *Agape*, demeaning *Eros* as self-centered and lustful, while elevating *Philia* and *Agape* to a selfless, sexless conception of love.

How have these changes in its conception of love impacted the history of Christianity? Three centuries after Paul, Augustine, a North African Greek born in Carthage in the fourth century, tried to integrate the competing visions of love that were still being debated: *Eros* derived from Plato, *Agape* derived from Paul. Augustine is responsible for bringing Plato's conception of love into Christianity as a legitimate and enduring presence.

Because many fourth century Christians embraced Paul's conception of *Agape* and resisted efforts to include any mention of Plato's *Eros*, Augustine cannily introduced a new term, the Latin *Caritas*, to sneak in Plato's concept of love. By replacing *Agape* with *Caritas* Augustine was able to avoid the appearance of relying too explicitly on the Greeks. The central idea, following Plato, is that all humans seek *eudaimonia* as their goal in life and their quest for the "highest good." Rejecting the notion that humans are rooted in sin and rely exclusively on God's grace, Augustine argues that we have a more active role in our salvation. He suggests that all love is acquisitive, and that we desire to possess the object of our love in order to insure happiness. This conception of love is Platonic in its essence. So how does he reconcile this interpretation of *Eros* with Paul's notion of *Agape*?

As with Plato, Augustine says it all depends on the *object* of desire as to whether that desire is good or bad. But because we all aim for what is good in life, the ultimate good must be God. Because we are composed of both body and spirit, we are capable of loving worldly objects – *Cupiditas* – which is sinful, as well as those that are divinely sanctioned. If our love for God is strong, and we are able to receive his love in turn, we will embrace *Caritas* instead. This will lead to redemption – Augustine's term for happiness. Even when we desire evil, there is nonetheless a small element in that evil that is good. Following Plato, Augustine suggests we have merely misled ourselves when succumbing to evil desires, but have it within us to correct our folly and seek the good instead. True happiness depends on seeking the "right" good. In this formulation God's grace, so essential to the Christian conception of *Agape*, is retained, though diminished in importance. Whereas Christians emphasize God's love of mankind as the source of their salvation, Augustine, following the Neoplatonists, emphasizes man's love for God, rooted in a passionate and egocentric love for himself as well as for other human beings. And because we are mortal, we are assured that our love of God will persist after we die for all eternity, when we join him in Heaven.

The distinctive feature of Augustine's conception of *Caritas*, which embraces both *Eros* and *Agape*, is its giving, generous nature. To love fully is a giving of oneself to the other, suspending all judgment and criticism, while blinding oneself to any sinful qualities that reside in the love object. It is a love that is both forgiving and altruistic, reflecting the love God feels for mortal creatures, but *passionately*. Unlike Paul, Augustine insisted that to love God fully must contain elements of passion. Otherwise it would be love without a soul.

Nearly a thousand years later, just as Augustine sneaked Plato into Christianity, Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century monk, ushered in Aristotle. It was Aquinas who emphasized the "brotherhood" of Christianity and defined *Caritas* explicitly as a friendship between man and God. Now all Christians were "brothers-in-arms" and friendship became something inherently divine. During the thousand years between Augustine and Aquinas, Europe endured a period of history known as the Middle Ages, the era between ancient and modern history. There was perpetual chaos and intrigue as competing monks, priests, popes, and other believers fought over the definition of Christianity. Yet Europe flourished until the Dark Ages, when Islam displaced the Roman Empire and eventually ended Byzantium, when the Muslims took Constantinople. The competition between *Eros* and *Agape* persisted throughout this period, but for the most part the Platonic influence prevailed. This culminated in the *Renaissance*, a period of unsurpassed prosperity and secular enlightenment, that brought Europe into the Modern era. Obviously this couldn't last.

A backlash finally occurred when Pietro de Medici fled Italy and the Italian Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola seized power. In four brief years he wrecked havoc over Florentine society and set fire to paintings, books, and other treasures that he insisted were tainted by Greek influence. This was thankfully short-lived, and after Savonarola was himself burned at the stake the Medici's returned to power and sanity again prevailed. Though the *Renaissance* survived, the damage that Savonarola generated left its mark. The Catholic Church suffered one disaster after another with a succession of corrupt Popes that culminated in reforms both within and outside the Vatican. The Reformation was around the corner, and *Agape* would once again gain ascendancy.

Something had to give. Disgusted with both a corrupt Vatican and a version of Catholicism that embraced *Caritas* over *Agape*, Martin Luther broke with the Church to form a new one: the Protestants. Once more, orthodox believers, like Old Testament Jews, quivered as sinners before an angry God who loved them despite their worthlessness. Encouraged by Savonarola, Luther set out to rid Christianity once and for all of any vestige of *Eros*, Plato, and Aristotle.

Luther's attack on the Vatican also questioned the Pope's claims to temporal authority. His message was compelling: Christians no longer needed a Pope to mediate their relationship with God. By employing the more primitive *Agape* version of Christianity, one could commune directly

with God and ask for his forgiveness themselves. This idea was revolutionary, and resulted in Luther's breaking away from the Catholic Church and founding a new one, the Lutherans.

Though Luther saw his reforms as modest, they unleashed a plethora of competing protestant religions, each claiming to possess the only true reading of the Bible. Among them was John Calvin, who argued that humans are worthless sinners whose fate was predestined by God even before they were born. Calvin advocated a return to the Old Testament God, and delighted in depicting hellish tortures awaiting the vast majority of sinners in the afterlife, going beyond even Savonarola's fire and brimstone. Calvin's bleak vision spread throughout Great Britain, especially Scotland, and North America, generating capitalism, the rise of democracy, and entrepreneurship. Advocating a radical *Agape*-based notion of God's absolute control over one's fate, the thinking went that one might as well make hay while the sun shined and devote oneself to making as much money as possible, resulting in the so-called "Protestant work ethic." There is no better example of this spirit than the American evangelical right, driven by material wealth, worship of the stock market, and championing the likes of Donald Trump as their savior. This is an ironic consequence of the marginalization of the Catholic Church, which has always been associated with sexual repression.

V. Conclusion

What can we conclude from this brief exploration of *Eros* and *Agape*? Despite the increasing secularization of modern culture in Europe, America seems just as Christianized as ever. Yet, the Christian conception of *Agape*, characterized as distinct from *Eros*, as an inherently selfless love that accepts everyone, even one's enemies, blindly, is a fiction. *There is no such thing as selfless love.* All love, whatever name we give it, has *Eros* as its foundation, and is a tributary of it. This was Freud's great insight when he recognized that even *Philia*, in the form of friendship, retains erotic elements. And thank God that it does! This is also the insight that both Augustine and Aquinas came to when they integrated *Agape* with *Eros* by calling it *Caritas*. They realized that all love contains pleasurable, erotic elements that were missing in Paul's conception of *Agape*. Paul's notion of love just wasn't real.

So what of the Christian argument that erotic love is egocentric and selfish, and not fundamentally giving? We have just seen that the Christian conception of *Agape* is, ironically, ***narcissistic***. It is even more egocentric than *Eros*, in the passive sense of the term. *Agape* begins, first and foremost, with the love that God has for man, not with the love man has for God. It is inherently self-centered. The closest *Agape* comes to giving rather than taking love is by *imitating* God's love for man, as articulated in Thomas á Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* (2013). According to *Agape*, we don't need to do anything, be anybody, or perform any particular acts, in order to win God's love.

All we need do is pledge our allegiance to him, embrace him as our savior, and when we sin, which we are perfectly free to as often as we wish, all that is required is to ask God's forgiveness, and it is granted. And what is our reward for doing absolutely nothing to deserve it? We die and go to Heaven for all eternity, and enjoy endless and perpetual bliss. No wonder Christianity is the most popular religion in the world. What other religion would promise so much for so little in return?

The impulse to give one's life to save another person, such as a child or a compatriot in battle, is rooted in *Eros*, not *Agape*. This is what passion does to us. It makes us want to give. That is its essential impulse. Love of self and love of other comingle; neither is exclusive. This is why it also thrives on reciprocity, because we cannot love ourselves without someone to love in turn, someone who loves us too. All three: love of oneself, love for others, and feeling loved in return, are inseparable. You cannot single them out, except in the abstract. That doesn't mean we love everyone the same, nor that we should. Some are more deserving of our love, and sometimes we too are less deserving than we might wish. This is why the ability to love, going back to Plato, is something we have to develop, in our own way, in our own time. *Eros* can also be destructive, selfish, vengeful, and insane. That too is in our nature. This holds true whether we are talking about love in a purely secular sense, or whether we choose to imbue it with something divine.

So what can we learn from a conception of *Agape* that omits any reference to *Eros*? That Freud was right. The most destructive force in human history is the repression of our most basic instinct: the desire to love, passionately. This is why the principal purpose of psychoanalysis is to help undo the repressions we have accrued over a lifetime, so that we may gradually, if painfully, become more loving. This not only leads to happiness. It makes us better human beings.

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ⁱ The Greeks emphasized *hubris* as the catalyst for *mania*, or madness. *Hubris* is unbridled desire, which compromises judgment and makes us irrational. The Greeks didn't seem to have a concept for neurosis. As conceptualized by Freud, neurosis is the consequence of *repressing* desire, not giving it free reign. This is a consequence of guilt, which is in turn the driving force of Christianity, whereas the Greeks lived in a shame-governed society, a society that is, perhaps, not as punitive as one's superego?

ⁱⁱ Following Plato, Freud recognized an erotic component to all love relationships, even the love of work, literature, and ideas. But instead of retaining Plato's terminology Freud chooses to substitute "sexuality" in place of *Eros*, for reasons known only to Freud. The effect is nonetheless the same. Instead of the non-sexual edition Freud opts for "non-genital" love, explaining that the explicitly sexual component is "aim-inhibited," as in friendships. This has brought Freud a lot of trouble, but he must have concluded it was preferable to stay with a common everyday word than to bring something Greek into the discussion. It wasn't exactly a secret, but Freud could be cagy about his sources, and rarely invoked the Greeks when introducing his theories.