P. It is not present possession which fails us, but is continuation in the future; and he who enjoys riches in the present loves and desires their continued possession in the future. For it is present possession which gives pleasure and future possession which is desired and loved. Thus whether our love be for an object we possess or no, it is synonymous with desire, but other than pleasure, just as grief and sadness are other than hatred and abhorrence. For we grieve over the present possession of an evil, and our hatred is roused that we may be rid of it in the future.

S. In what order, then, do you range these affections of the soul?

P. The first is love and desire of good, its opposite being hatred and abhorrence of evil. Hope succeeds love and desire, and is for a future good or for one which we lack, while the object of fear, its opposite, is a future evil or one that we are as yet without. And as when hope is joined to love or desire, we pursue the good which we love, so, when fear is joined to hatred and abhorrence, we flee from the evil which we hate. The end of our affections is joy and pleasure in a present and acquired good, and its contrary, grief and sorrow, at a present and experienced evil. The affection of joy and pleasure in a good thing, though the last to be consummated, is the first in intention; and all a man's love, desire, hope and pursuit is but to attain pleasure and joy. In this affection, therefore, the soul finds peace and rest, and having achieved it in the present, loves and desires it for the future. Thus true philosophy, whatever its method, shows love and desire to be essentially one and the same, although in a manner of speaking one species of love is more properly called desire, and another, love. And these two words are not alone in denoting this same affection: for in truth, that which is loved may be the object of affection, tenderness, choice, appetite, and will, and so too of desire. And although these words and others of a like nature are each applied more particularly to one species of love than to another, yet in substance they all have the same significance, to wit, the desire of things which are lacking. For [although in one sense] we have neither appetite nor love for an object once we have gained possession of it, yet something which is conceived to be good is ever loved and desired: either that it may have being in reality, as it has in the mind, and exist in actuality as in potentiality; or if it already has actual existence and is lacking in us, that we may come to possess it; and if we have it in the present, that our enjoyment of it may be eternal, since future enjoyment does not yet exist and is lacking in the present. Such is the love between father and children, who wish to have enjoyment of each other in the future as in the present; and so he that is whole loves health, and the rich man possessions, for he not only wishes that his wealth may increase, but that his present enjoyment of it may be continued in the future. Love, therefore, like desire, must be of things which are in some sense lacking; wherefore Plato defines love as the desire of the everlasting possession of the good, and this everlasting implies a perpetual lack.

S. Although love is associated with continual privation, yet it presupposes the existence of its object: for our love is always of things which are, but our desire is undoubtedly of things which we lack and which very often do not exist.

P. You speak truly in saying that the object of love must have being, for nothing can be known which does not exist, and without knowledge there is no love. It is not, however, absolutely true to say, as you do, that we sometimes wish for the existence of something which is non-existent; for that which has no kind of being cannot be known, and that
which cannot be known can never be desired. The object of desire must therefore exist in the mind; and if it is in the mind it must also exist outside it, in reality, if not actually, yet potentially in its causes, for otherwise knowledge would be fallacious. Love, therefore, is in every respect none other than desire.

S. Skilful, indeed, is your explanation of how all love is desire, and how its object, though possessed of some mode of being, lacks it either in the present or in the future. One difficulty, however, I still cannot solve: although all love is desire, I would not therefore say that all desire is love; for we only seem to love persons who are alive, or objects which contribute in some way to our perfection, such as health, virtue, riches, wisdom, honour and glory (for men are wont to love and desire these things). Yet there are many other things, accidents or actions, which, though lack them, we should never speak of as objects of love and desire.

P. Do not be deceived by the uses of the vulgar tongue. Often a name which signifies a whole genus is applied to one of its species only, and this happens in the case of love.

S. Give me an example.

P. The literal meaning of the word cavalry is persons riding a four-footed animal, but it is only applied to those who are trained and skilful fighters on horseback. The word merchant literally signifies one who buys anything, but is only used to denote those whose particular profession it is to buy and sell goods at a profit. So love, though the generic name for every species of desire, is only applied to persons and objects of supreme importance whose existence is more stable, and other things are said to be desired rather than loved because their being is more ephemeral. In reality, however, they are all objects of love; for although we do not say that we love something which is as yet non-existent,

we do say that we should love it to exist, and if it is not ours that we should love to possess it. And this is our true intent in desiring an object: if it does not exist, that it may come into being, and if it is not ours, that we may acquire it. Nevertheless, love, as being a more excellent word, is applied chiefly to persons who exist, or to virtues which contribute to our perfection, or to possessions; and other things we regard as objects of appetite, preference and desire rather than of love, affection and tenderness, and the latter are usually inspired by objects of a nobler and more lasting character. And love is generally applied to objects themselves, and desire to their coming to be, or to their possession, although in substance the meaning of the two words is the same.

S. I am also content with this explanation, and I am ready to accept that, in mortals, all love is desire and all desire love. But what am I to believe of irrational animals? For it is clear that they desire what they need, whether it be food or drink, enjoyment, or their freedom when it is taken from them; yet they only love those things with which they are in immediate contact, as the male the female, the mother her young, or as domestic animals love those who feed them.

P. Even the animals love to have what they desire, and desire that they should not lose what they love, so that love is in everything one with appetite and desire.

S. Nay, Philo, I can tell you of a species of love which cannot be called desire.

P. What is this?

S. Divine love.

P. Even this is more rightly desire; for God is desired above every other thing by him who loves Him.
S. You misunderstand me: I am not speaking of our love towards God, but of His love for us and for all the objects of His creation. For I remember in our second discussion, you spoke of the great love which God bears for all His creatures. You surely will not say that this love presupposes privation, for the Divinity is all-perfect and lacking in nothing. If, therefore, we can postulate no lack in Him, His love cannot be desire; for desire (as you yourself have said) is always of something which is lacking.

P. I see that you would launch out into deep waters! You must know that everything which is ascribed to us, when predicated of God, is no less different in form and significance than His exalted state is far removed from our lowly position.

S. Explain your meaning more clearly.

P. Goodness and wisdom can be ascribed to both God and man; but as God is more excellent than man so is His divine unity, goodness, and wisdom more exalted. In the same way the love which God has for His creatures is no: of the same species as human love, nor is His desire the same: for in man they are both affections and presuppose something which he lacks, whereas in God they connote the perfecting of all things.

S. I well believe what you say, but your reply does not entirely solve my difficulty. For if God feels love and desire, you must admit that he loves and desires; and if He desires, He must needs desire that which in some sense is lacking in Him.

P. It is indeed true that God loves and desires; but, however, what He Himself lacks, for there is no fault in Him, but that which is lacking in the object of His love. For He desires that all things produced by Him may come to perfection, and more especially to that perfection which they can achieve through their own works and deeds, which, in the case of mankind, will be virtuous acts and wisdom. Thus divine desire is not an affection of the Divinity, nor does it presuppose any lack in Him; nay, rather, is it His unlimited perfection which causes Him to desire that His creatures may reach the highest degree of their perfection, if they as yet fall short of it, and if they have achieved it, that they may enjoy it in lasting happiness. And for this end He ever gives them unceasing help and encouragement. Are you satisfied with this account, Sophia?

S. Pleasing is your explanation, but not entirely satisfying.

P. What further would you have?

S. Tell me why love and desire must necessarily be predicated of God because others are defective; for nothing is wanting in Him, and truly I find this but tough justice.

P. You must know that this was why Plato maintained that the gods do not love, and that love is neither a god nor an Idea of the Supreme Intellect; for love, according to his definition, is the desire of something beautiful that is wanting, and cannot be ascribed to the gods, who have all beauty and lack for nothing. He therefore makes love to be a great spirit, intermediate between the gods and men, who conveys to the gods the good deeds and pure spirits of men, and to men the gifts and blessings of the gods, for all is carried on through the medium of love. And Plato's meaning is that love is not actually beautiful, for if it were, he would neither love nor desire beauty (since we do not desire what we already possess); but that love is potentially beautiful and loves and desires actual beauty. He is therefore a mean between the beautiful and the ugly, or compounded of both, as potentiality is composed of being and privation.
S. And why do you not approve of this opinion and reasoning of your master, Plato, with whom you are wont to be on such good terms?

P. I do not agree with him in this matter because, as Aristotle, his disciple, said of him, although I am the friend of Plato I am a greater friend of the truth.

S. And why do you not consider his opinion to be true?

P. Because he himself contradicts it elsewhere, affirming that those who contemplate divine beauty intimately become the friends of God. Did you ever see a friend, Sophia, who was not loved by his friends? Again, Aristotle, in his Ethics, says that the virtuous and wise man is happy and becomes the friend of God, and God loves him as Himself; and in Holy Writ it is said that God is just and loves just men, and also that God loves His friends, and that the righteous are the sons of God who loves them like a father. How, then, will you have me deny that there is love in God?

S. Your authorities are good, but they will not satisfy me unless they satisfy reason also; and I did not ask you who attributed love to God, but rather why it must be attributed at all. For it seems more reasonable to maintain, with Plato, that no love can exist in Him.

P. A reason can be found which impels us to attribute love to God.

S. I pray you, tell it me.

P. It is God Who created all things.

S. Certainly.

P. And He continually supports them throughout their existence, for if He were to abandon them for one instant they would all be changed to naught.

S. True again.
In the same way the master desires that his pupil may increase in virtue and wisdom, which qualities are wanting in the pupil but not in the master; and one friend desires that the other may find and continually enjoy that happiness which he lacks. It is true that when the desire of these lovers for the good of their beloved is realised, since they are but mortal they are rewarded by joy and pleasure which they did not experience before; and God is not subject to this affection, because the increased perfection of His beloved creatures can produce no new happiness, delight and other affection or change in Him, since He is free from every passion, constant in His immutability, and filled with gentle happiness, sweet delight and eternal gladness. There is, however, this distinction in His happiness, that it is reflected in His perfect children and friends, but not in those who are imperfect.

S. It is indeed pleasant to talk of these matters; but what comfort can you give me for the fact that Plato, with all his genius, denies the existence of love in God?

P. The species of love which Plato discusses in his Symposium is only that which is found in men, and he says truly that it cannot exist in God; but it would be false to deny that the universal love, of which we are speaking, is not found in the Divinity.

S. Explain this difference to me.

P. In the Symposium Plato only discusses that love in men which has its final cause in the lover but not in the beloved; for this is principally called love, and that which has its end in the beloved is called friendship and beneficence. Plato defines correctly the former kind of love as the desire of beauty, and declares that it is not found in God, because he who desires beauty neither possesses it nor is beautiful himself, whereas God, Who is the supremely beautiful, has

no lack of beauty, nor can He desire it. His love, therefore, cannot be of this first kind. We, however, who are discussing universal love, must consider equally both that which has its end in the lover, presupposing some lack in him, and that which has its end in the beloved, who therefore suffers some privation. For this reason, we have not defined love as the desire of a beautiful thing (like Plato), but only as the desire of something, or as the desire of a good thing, which may be wanting in the lover or only in the beloved. Such is a part of the love of the father for the son, of the master for the disciple, and of one friend for another; and such, too, is the love of God for His creatures, the desire of their good but not of His. Both Plato and Aristotle allow the existence of this second form of love, and declare that the most virtuous and wisest of men are the friends of God and much loved of Him; for He loves and desires eternally and dispassionately their perfection and happiness. And even Plato said that the word love may be universally applied to every desire of anything whatsoever, and of any desirer whatsoever, but that it is peculiarly applicable to the desire of beauty; he did not therefore exclude all love from God, but only that species which is the desire of beauty.

S. I am content that Plato holds to the way of truth, and that his statements tally one with another. However, the definition he gives of love does not seem to exclude the love of God, as he would infer, but rather to include it no less than the definition which you have given.

P. In what way?

S. Just as you, in defining love as the desire of a good thing, understand some deficiency, either in the lover or in some other person whom he loves; so I, in defining love as the desire of a beautiful thing, as Plato holds, understand that this beauty is wanting either in the lover, or else in the
beloved and not in the lover, and therefore my definition will also include the love of God.

P. You are deceived if you believe that the beautiful and the good are in everything the same.

S. Do you then make some distinction between the good and the beautiful?

P. Certainly I do.

S. And how?

P. In that a man may desire the good for himself, or for another whom he loves, but the beautiful he may only desire exclusively for himself.

S. What reason have you in support of this?

P. The reason is that the beautiful is the peculiar [property] of him who loves it; for what seems beautiful to one does not to another, and therefore what is beautiful to one is not beautiful to another. The good, on the contrary, is universal in itself, and a good thing is more often esteemed as good by many people. Therefore, he who desires the beautiful always desires it for himself because it is lacking in him; but he who desires the good may desire it for himself or for a friend who has need of it.

S. I in no way understand this distinction which you make between the beautiful and the good; for as you say that a beautiful thing may seem beautiful to one person and not to another, so I say, and with truth, that a thing may seem good to one person and not to another. And you must have observed how the wicked man esteems evil to be good, and therefore follows it, and how he shuns good because he holds it to be evil, and his actions are accordingly the opposite of those of the virtuous man. What is true of the beautiful is, therefore, also true of the good.

P. All men of sane judgement and upright and well-balanced character recognise the true nature of good and evil, just as all who have the normal faculty of taste find sweet food sweet to their palate and bitter food bitter; but to those of diseased and corrupted character and distempered appetite, good appears as evil and evil good, just as sweet tastes bitter to the sick man and bitter is sometimes sweet to his palate. And as sweetness, although it may seem bitter, to the sick is no less sweet in reality, so good, although esteemed as evil by the diseased intellect, does not therefore cease to be truly and universally good.

S. And is not the beautiful the same?

P. Certainly not, for the beautiful is not the same for all men of sane judgement and virtuous character. For although a beautiful object is universally recognised as good, it will appear of such beauty to one virtuous man that he will be moved to love it, whereas to another it will seem good but not beautiful, nor will he be inspired to love it. And just as good and evil in their relation to the mind resemble sweet and bitter with respect to taste, so the beautiful and the non-beautiful are to the mind as the savoury or delectable and the non-savoury to the taste, and likewise the ugly and deformed to what is abhorrent and nauseous to the palate. Therefore as a dish which is sweet to everyone with a normal power of taste may yet be relished by one and not by another, so a person or object may be recognised as good by every virtuous person, but to one will be so beautiful that its beauty incites him to love, and to another will have no beauty whatsoever. Thus you must understand that passionate love, which is the lover's bane, is always of a beautiful thing. And Plato speaks of this alone in defining love as the desire of the beautiful, that is, the desire for union with a beautiful person, or for the possession of a beautiful
object, such as a beautiful city or garden, a fine horse or falcon, a beautiful robe or a splendid jewel. For either we desire the possession of these things, or else their continual enjoyment once they are ours; and this species of desire always presupposes some deficiency in the lover, either in the present or in the future. Plato, therefore, does not affirm that there is no love in God, but that this form of love is not found in Him, because it is associated with potentiality, affection and privation, which things are not found in God. And further, he calls it a powerful spirit, because he holds the spirit to be midway between the purely incorporeal and perfect, and the wholly corporeal and imperfect: just as the potentialities and affections of the soul are the mean between purely corporeal activity and divine intellectual activity, and also between beauty and ugliness, for potentiality is the mean between privation and actual being. And because love is the greatest among the affections of the soul Plato calls it a powerful spirit. However, this may be, universal love is not only concerned with good things which are beautiful, but also with good things which are not beautiful; and its object is universal good, whether it be beautiful, useful, virtuous or pleasurable, or any other species of good which might be conceived. Accordingly it happens that the object of love is sometimes a good which is wanting in the lover, and sometimes in the beloved or in a friend; and it is this second species of love that God bears for His creatures, that they may be made perfect in every good thing which they lack.

S. Did any of the ancient philosophers define love in general as the pursuit of all goodness?

P. Who better than Aristotle in his Politics? For there he says that love consists solely in wishing good for somebody, to wit, either for oneself or for another. You see how his definition, in order that it may include every species of love, specifies not the beautiful but the good, and thus with brevity, yet not unmindful of the claims of Eros, it comprises every form of love. For if the lover desires the good for himself, it is he who stands in need of it, and if for another whom he loves, it is lacking only in this beloved object or friend, and not in the lover; and such is the love of God. Aristotle, therefore, in defining love as universally for the sake of the good, included divine love. Plato, who defined it with particular reference to the beautiful, excluded it, because the love of a beautiful object implies deficiency in the lover only, to whom the object appears beautiful.

S. Aristotle's definition does not satisfy me as it does you.

P. Why not?

S. Because it seems to me that the true nature of love is always to wish for one's own good, and not for that of another, as Aristotle implies. For the true and ultimate end of every man's actions is to attain his own good, pleasure, and perfection, and every activity is directed towards this end. If he desires the good of another, it is on account of the pleasure he takes in that man's welfare. His own pleasure, therefore, is the motive of his love, and not another man's good, as Aristotle maintains.

P. Your reasoning is no less subtle than it is true; for the real and ultimate end of any action is the perfection, pleasure, good and final happiness of him who performs it. And a lover desires the good of his friend or beloved, not only for the sake of the pleasure he obtains from that good, but also because he receives the same good as his beloved, for he is not merely a friend but a second self of his friend. Hence the good of his friend is truly his own, and in desiring his friend's good he desires his own. And you know already that the lover is transformed and converted into the beloved;
therefore you may believe me when I say that what appertains to the beloved is more truly the lover's than his own possessions, and belongs more essentially to him than to the beloved, if the latter reciprocates his love. And then the good of each will belong to the other, and not to himself, so that two people who love each other mutually are not really two persons.

S. How many then?

P. Only one, or else four.

S. That two people may be one, I can understand, since all lovers are united and become one in love; but how can they be four?

P. Each one being transformed into the other becomes two, at once both lover and beloved; and two multiplied by two makes four, so that each of them is twain, and both together are one and four.

S. I like this conception of the union and multiplication of the two lovers; but it seems thereby all the stranger that Aristotle should make one species of love to be the desire of another man's good.

P. Aristotle assumes that the end of love is always the good of the lover; but this is his either directly, or indirectly through the good of his friend or beloved. And he declared that a friend is another self.

S. I will allow you this interpretation of Aristotle's definition. But when understood in this way, it does not include the love of God, as you said.

P. And why not?

S. Because if God loves the good of all His creatures, as you say, He must thereby love His own good, and this not only presupposes a lack of the desired good in His creatures, but also in Himself, which is absurd.

P. I have already explained to you that a defect in a created object casts the shadow of a defect on the creator, but only in his relation to the object as the maker to the thing made. Thus God in loving the perfection of His creatures may be said to love the relative perfection of His work; any defect in the creature would induce the shadow of a defect in this divine craftsmanship, and the perfection of the creature would testify to its relative perfection. Wherefore the ancient teachers said that the just man makes perfect the splendour of God and the wicked man sullies it. In this way, I can grant you that God, in loving perfection, loves the perfection of His divine action, and the lack which this love presupposes in Him is not in His essence, but in the shadow of the relation of the Creator to His creatures. And since this can be sullied by a defect in them He desires that they may be made perfect, thereby desiring that His own perfection may be immaculate.

S. I like well this subtle reasoning; but in our first discussion you told me that love was a desire for union. This definition [which we are discussing] will include the love of God, which is for the good of His creatures, but not a desire of union with them, for no one desires union save with that which he judges to be more perfect than himself.

P. No one desires union except with an object, to which, being united, he would be more perfect than without that union. And I have already told you that the divine craftsmanship is relatively more perfect when the creatures, by reason of their perfection, are united to the Creator, than when they are lacking in this union. But God does not desire union with His creatures after the same manner as worldly lovers with the persons whom they love; His
desire is that through union with His divinity their perfection may be eternal, and His workmanship as Creator be immaculate in relation to His creatures.

S. I am content with this explanation. But I am still in doubt as to why you make such a difference between the beautiful which figures in Plato’s definition of love, and the good by means of which Aristole defined it; in fact, the beautiful and the good seem to me to be one and the same.

P. Therein lies your error.

S. How can you deny that every beautiful thing is good?

P. I do not deny it, but it is commonly denied.

S. How?

P. It is said that not every beautiful thing is good; for some things which seem beautiful are bad in reality, and some things which seem ugly are good.

S. This cannot be: because if a thing seems beautiful, in so far as it is beautiful it also seems good, and if it is truly good, it is truly beautiful. Again, if a thing seems ugly, that which is ugly in it also seems bad, and if in reality it is good, it is not truly ugly.

P. Your refutation is good, although, as I have told you, the beautiful has more part than the good in appearance, and the good more part than the beautiful in reality. My reply, however, is that although, as you say, every beautiful thing is good, either in essence or in appearance, it does not follow that every good thing is beautiful.

S. What kind of good thing is not beautiful?

P. Sweet and invigorating food and drink, a rare fragrance, a temperate clime,—you will not deny that these are good things, but you would not call them beautiful.

S. Although I would not actually call them beautiful, yet

I believe that they are so; for if good things are not beautiful they must needs be ugly, and goodness and ugliness seem to me to be incompatible.

P. I wish that your reasoning were more accurate, Sophia. It is true that goodness and ugliness cannot exist together in respect of the same [subject or mode of a subject] but it is not true that everything which is not beautiful is ugly.

S. What is it then?

P. Like many good things, it is neither beautiful nor ugly; for you may see that amongst humans who are subject to beauty and ugliness, there are some who are neither beautiful nor ugly. Which is true, a fortiori, of many species of good things, which possess neither beauty nor ugliness; and such as the examples I have given you, which truly are subject to neither of these qualities. There is this difference, however, between persons and things: of persons we say that they are neither beautiful nor ugly when they are beautiful in one part and ugly in another, so that they are neither wholly beautiful nor wholly ugly; but the good things which I named to you have neither beauty nor ugliness in their whole or in their parts.

S. This mixture of beauty and ugliness in neutral persons cannot be denied; but I would have some example and clearer testimony of this neutrality in good things which are neither beautiful nor ugly.

P. Have you not observed that many people are neither learned nor ignorant?

S. What are they then?

P. They are believers of the truth and hold to right opinion. For those who believe the truth are not wise, since their knowledge does not come from reason or learning, nor are they ignorant, for they believe the truth or have a right
I pray you, tell me what is Beauty.

P. Beauty has been defined in various ways, but I think it unnecessary to explain these to you in the context and to show you how to discern the true from the false; for it is not closely divided with our subject and, moreover, at a later stage of our discussion I think shall perhaps give you a better idea of what is involved. In the present I will only give you an idea of what constitutes it.

P. Everyone recognizes the beautiful, but few know what it is to call beauty.

S. What is beauty? Does it add anything else to the good

P. Yes, it makes all beautiful things beautiful, and which is beautiful is more beautiful because it has beauty.

S. And what is this beauty?

P. Every object is beautiful to the extent to which it is a beautiful object, and the more beautiful the object, the more beautiful is the beauty.

S. Who is there who cannot distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly?

P. It is the mean between absolute good and evil.

S. What is this mean?

P. It is the mean between beautiful and un-beautiful, and the mean between the beautiful and the ugly.

S. Which are the opposite terms?

P. Beauty and un-beauty.

S. Did you not tell me that potentiality is the mean between the beautiful and the ugly?

P. Yes, but I did not say that it is the mean between the beautiful and the ugly, but between the good and the bad.
grace or beauty, nor can these [qualities] be transmitted by the three gross material senses to delight our soul and prompt it to love of the beautiful. Beauty is only found in the objects of sight, such as beautiful forms and shapes and beautiful pictures, the perfect symmetry of the parts with the whole, well-proportioned limbs, beautiful colours and clear light, the sun, moon and stars, and the heavens in all their splendour. This grace exists in objects of sight by reason of their spiritual nature, and it is its custom to enter through the clear and spiritual eyes, to delight our soul and move it to a love of such an object; and this it is which we call beauty. It is also found in objects of hearing, such as beautiful oratory, voices, speech, song, music, consonance, proportion and harmony; for in the spiritual nature of these things is found grace which moves the soul to delight and to love through the medium of the spiritual sense of hearing. Thus grace and beauty are found amongst beautiful things which are endowed with a spiritual nature, and are objects of the spiritual senses; but they are absent from good things which are gross and material, and from material objects of sense, which, though they be good, have no beauty in them.

S. Has man, perchance, another faculty, besides those of sight and hearing, with which he can apprehend the beautiful?

P. The cognitive faculties, which are more spiritual than sight and hearing, have an even greater knowledge of the beautiful.

S. Which are these?

P. The imagination and fancy, which arranges, distinguishes and ponders the things of the senses, and discerns in many other sources grace and beauty, moving the soul to love and delight. And, indeed, we speak of a beautiful fancy, a beautiful thought, or a beautiful invention. The understanding has a far greater knowledge of the beautiful, for it apprehends

universal, [in] corporeal and incorruptible grace and beauty in particular and corruptible bodies, which is far more potent in inspiring love and pleasure in the soul. Such are the laws and virtues and the learning and sciences of man, for study, law and science can all be called beautiful. The most exalted knowledge of man, however, is that of pure intellect, which, being absorbed in the science of the Divine and of things abstracted from matter, rejoices in and becomes enamoured of the highest grace and beauty which is in the Creator and Artificer of all things; and it therein attains to its ultimate happiness. Thus the soul is moved by the grace and beauty which it receives spiritually through the medium of sight, hearing, imagination, understanding and intellect. And this grace which delights the soul and moves it to love is found in the objects of these faculties by reason of their spirituality, and not in the objects of the other faculties of the soul, on account of their material nature. If the good, therefore, is to be beautiful, even though it be corporeal, it must contain some kind of spiritual grace in addition to its goodness, so that, passing through spiritual channels into the soul, it may move it to rejoice in its beauty. In this way, human love, of which we are chiefly speaking, is truly, as Plato says, the desire of a beautiful thing, and universal love, as Aristotle says, is the desire of a good thing.

S. This account of the essence of love will suffice as an introduction to our discussion of its birth. Let us now come to my request, and answer my five questions which I put to you concerning the origin of love.

P. Your first question is whether love was born, that is, whether it took its origin from something else which is its creative cause, or whether it is primary and eternal and not produced by another. To this I would answer that love must be preceded by something else, and can in no wise be
primary and eternal; in fact, we must grant that there are
other things prior to it in the order of causation.
S. Tell me the reason for this.
P. There are many reasons. Firstly, because the lover is
prior to love as the agent to the act, and therefore the first
lover must be prior to and the cause of the first love.
S. This reason seems good, namely, that the lover must be
prior to the love which he creates in loving. Therefore a
person can exist without love, but love cannot exist without
a person. Give me another reason.
P. Just as the lover is prior to love, so is the beloved; for if
there were not a first lovable person or object, it would be
impossible to love, and there would be no love.
S. In this, also, you are in the right: for there can be no
love either in the lover or in the beloved if there is no object
or person to be loved, although the lovable object could
exist without love, that is without being loved. And it
certainly seems as if the lover and the beloved were the
origin and cause of love.
P. What difference in causality do you think there is, Sophia,
between the lover and the beloved, and which of them
seems to you to be the primary cause of love?
S. The lover seems to me to be active, as the father, and the
beloved person or object the recipient, as the mother; and
this is shown by the very nature of the words, for lover is
active and beloved passive. Therefore the lover is the primary
cause of love, and the beloved the secondary.
P. You know better how to ask than to reply, Sophia, and
the very opposite of what you say is true. The beloved is
the efficient cause, engendering love in the mind of the
lover, and the lover is the recipient of the love of the
beloved, so that the latter is the true father of this love
which it generates in the lover. The lover is the mother
who gives birth to this love of which it is made pregnant
by the beloved; and it conceives it in the likeness of the father,
because the end of love is in the beloved, which is its first
procreative cause. Thus the beloved is the primary, efficient,
formal and final cause of love, as its sole father, and the lover
is only the material cause, as the mother who brings it into
the world. This is the meaning of Plato when he says that
love is birth in beauty; and you know that the beautiful
is the beloved by whom the lover is first made pregnant
and conceives love in the likeness of the beautiful and beloved
father. And this love is directed towards the beloved as to
its final end.
S. I was wrong, and I am glad to know the truth. But what
will you tell me of the meaning of the terms which have
deceived me? For does not lover imply active and beloved
passive?
P. Yes and truly, because the lover is active in the service
of love, but not in its generation, and the beloved is the
recipient of the services of the lover, but is not passive in
the causation of love. And if I ask you which is the worshiper,
heto who serves or is served, he who obeys or is obeyed, and
he who hearkens or is hearkened unto, you will assuredly
answer that the servant, though active, is inferior to him
who receives his services. And such is the relation of lover
to beloved, for the lover serves, obeys, and hearkens unto
his beloved.
S. This is true of lovers less worthy than their beloved; but
when the lover is truly the nobler the proposition must be
reversed, and the lover must become the father of love and
the superior, and the beloved the mother and inferior.
P. Although there are lovers who of their own nature are
more excellent than their beloved, as the husband with
respect to his wife whom he loves, the father to the son, the master to the pupil, and the benefactor to those who receive his gifts; or in a wider sense, the heavenly world to the earth which it loves, the spiritual to the corporeal, and finally God to His creatures Whom He loves; none the less, every lover, quia lover, inclines to its beloved and cleaves to it as the lesser part to the whole, because it is the beloved which engenders and inspires love and the lover which is inspired.

S. And how can the superior be inclined and subordinate to the inferior?

P. I have already told you that all love and attraction is for perfection, joy or pleasure; and even if the beloved is in itself not so perfect as the lover, the latter will be more perfect, or at least its joy and pleasure will be increased, by union with the beloved. It is this new perfection, joy and delight which the lover acquires through union with the beloved, whether the latter be intrinsically more or less worthy than itself, which attracts the lover to the object of its love. And it does not thereby become defective nor wanting in nobility or perfection, but rather gains union with the beloved and consequent perfection. Therefore not only he who loves a person is attracted to him because of the perfection and joy which he will acquire in union with the other, but also he who loves not a person, but any object whatsoever, and desires to possess it for the sake of what it may bring him by its acquisition.

S. I understand this; but what do you say of two persons who each reciprocate the other's love, and each of whom is both lover and beloved? You must concede that each is inferior and superior to the other, which would be contradictory.

S. Would each, therefore, be superior to himself?

P. This also is true, for each lover is superior to himself as beloved, and if perchance one were to love himself, he would be superior as beloved to himself as lover. And I have already told you, when we spoke of the universality of love, that Aristotle (on the view of Averroes) holds that God is the motor of the first diurnal sphere, which He moves through love of a more excellent thing, just as each of the other intelligences moves its respective spheres. And since none is more excellent than God, but all inferior to Him, we must say that God moves the highest sphere through love of Himself, and that in God it is more sublime that He should be loved by Himself than that He should love Himself. Even so, His divine essence will consist of the purest unity—but of this subject you have heard me speak more fully. If God, therefore, in His singleness and unity, can be more exalted in being loved by Himself rather than in loving Himself, how much greater will the effect be in two mutual lovers: for each, as beloved, will be more excellent than both himself and the other, as lover.

S. Your reasons would satisfy me if I did not know that Plato clearly asserts the opposite.

P. What does he say to the contrary?

S. I remember that in his book of the Symposium he says that the lover is more divine than the beloved, for in loving he is rapt in divine frenzy. Therefore he holds that the gods bestow greater favours on those who do wondrous things for their lovers than on lovers who make the utmost sacrifices for their beloved. And he gives the example of Alcestis;
who because she was willing to die for her beloved, was brought back to life and honoured by the gods; yet she was not conveyed to the Isles of the Blessed like Achilles, who was ready to die for his lover. 

P. These words of Plato in the Symposium are placed in the mouth of Phaedrus, the young gallant and follower of Socrates. He calls love a mighty god of wondrous beauty, who, because his beauty surpasses all measure, is a lover of beautiful things. And since love is in the lover as a quality in its true subject and dwells within his heart like the child in its mother’s womb, so, according to Phaedrus, the lover, through the divine love which he bears, is more godlike than the beloved, who has no love in himself but only engenders it in the lover. Thus the god of love gives divine inspiration to the lover, which he does not give to the beloved, and so the gods are more propitious to those who serve their lovers, as is proved by the story of Achilles, than to lovers who serve their beloved, as testified by the story of Alcestis.

S. Does not this reason seem sufficient to you, Philo? 

P. It does not, nor did it seem valid to Socrates. 

S. And why not? 

P. Socrates, in a discussion with Agathon, the orator, who also held love to be a mighty god of great beauty, proved that love is not a god because it is not beautiful, as are all gods. [In proof of this], he shows that love is the desire of the beautiful, and that which is desired is always lacking in him who desires it, for that which is possessed is never desired; wherefore love can have no beauty. Socrates therefore says that love is not a god, but a great spirit, the mean between the gods above and men below; and although it is not beautiful like a god, yet it is not ugly like the lower beings, but the mean between beauty and ugliness, for the desirer, though he is not actually that which he desires, yet he is potentially. If love, therefore, is a desire of the beautiful, it is potentially beautiful and not actually, after the manner of the gods. 

S. What would you infer by this, Philo? 

P. I am showing you that it is the beloved who is divine and not the lover: for the beloved is actually beautiful like the Godhead, and the lover who desires the beloved is only potentially beautiful; and although he is made godlike by his desire, he does not partake of the divinity of the beloved. The lover, therefore, contemplates his beloved, and bestows thereon that worship and adoration which he would give to his true god, and his beauty is esteemed as divine by the lover, so that none other can compare with it. Are you not, therefore, persuaded, Sophia, that the beloved takes precedence of the lover, both in excellence and in the cause of love, and in every way more worthy? 

S. Yes, certainly; but what will you say of the example of Achilles and Alcestis? 

P. Alcestis, who died for her beloved, was not honoured like Achilles, who died for his lover: because the lover is obliged of necessity to serve his beloved as his god, even unto death, and cannot do otherwise if his love is true, for he is already transmuted into the beloved, in whom his happiness consists, and his good is no longer in himself; but the beloved is under no obligation to the lover, nor is he constrained by love to die for him, and if he wishes to act like Achilles it is a free action and purely altruistic. Therefore, like Achilles, he must needs gain a higher reward from the gods.

S. What you say pleases me; but I cannot believe that
Achilles, if he had not also been the lover of his lover as he was the beloved, would have wished to die for him.

P. I would not deny that Achilles loved his lover, since he was ready to die for him; but that was mutual love, caused by the love which his lover bore him. Wherefore we can rightly say that he died for this love of his lover, which was the primary cause of their mutual love, and not for that love which he returned to his lover and which was engendered by the former.

S. I am satisfied with the reason which made Achilles worthier of reward from the gods than Alcestis. But how can the beloved always be the god of the lover? For it would follow that the creature beloved of God would be a god for God Himself, which is absurd. And this applies not only to the love of God for His creatures, but also of the spiritual for the corporeal, the superior for the inferior, and the noble for the unworthy.

P. The love which exists between created beings presupposes privation; and this not only in the love of inferior for superior, but that of superior for inferior, for no creature is absolutely perfect, and in loving not only his superior, but also his inferior, he grows in perfection and approaches to the highest perfection of God. And the superior not only enhances his own perfection by doing good to what is lower than himself, but also the perfection of the universe, which is the final cause of love, as I have told you. Through this increase of perfection in lover and universe alike the inferior and beloved is made divine too in his more excellent lover; for in being loved he participates in the divinity of the supreme Creator, Who is the first and highest object of love, and by reason of this participation every beloved is made divine. For since God is the supremely beautiful, every beautiful thing partakes of His beauty, and every lover approximates to Him in loving the beautiful, even though inferior to himself. And thereby the lover increases in beauty and divinity, thus causing an increase in that of the universe; and, eo ipso, becomes a truer lover, approaching more nearly to the supremely beautiful.

S. Your answer only treats of the love which the superior has for the inferior amongst created beings, but not of the love of God for His creatures, wherein lies the greatest force of my argument.

P. I was about to pass to this subject. You must know that love, like many other activities and qualities which we are wont to attribute to both God and man, is not understood of God as of His creatures; indeed, I have already given you examples of certain attributes. And you know that love implies a lack in all creatures, even in heavenly and spiritual beings; for all lack the supreme perfection of God, and their every action, desire, and love is to approach as nearly as possible to this perfection. Moreover, in inferior beings, love not only implies privation, but also, in some cases, affection, as in men and animals, and in others, natural inclination, as in the elements and sentient compounds. But in God, love is said to be neither affection, nor natural inclination, nor privation; for He is free, impassive, and wholly perfect, and nothing can be wanting in Him.

S. What, therefore, is the significance of the word love as applied to God?

P. It means the will to benefit His creatures and the whole universe and to increase their perfection as far as their nature will allow. And as I have already told you, the love which is in God presupposes a lack in the beloved but not in the lover, so that it is the opposite of human love. And God rejoices to see His creatures increase in perfection through their love of Him; and by reason of this gladness, if we may
so call it, His supreme perfection shines forth more brightly, wherefore the Psalmist says: "the Lord shall rejoice in His works". This increase of divine joy and perfection is not absolute in God, but only relative to His creatures; and therefore, as I have explained to you, love in God does not prove any kind of privation in His absolute being, but only in His relative being, with respect to His creatures. This relative perfection of God is the end of His love for the universe and for each of its parts, and is that which fills the cup of His perfection to overflowing; it is the final cause of divine love, and the beloved of God, for the sake of which He creates, sustains, governs and moves all things. And since the Godhead, in its supreme oneness, is necessarily both beginning and end and lover and beloved, its beloved is more divine than the divinity itself, as every beloved is more divine than its lover.

S. This explanation pleases me and I am well satisfied with the priority of the beloved over the lover in the generation of love. Enough of this first question which I put to you, whether love was born, that is, whether it was born of another or uncreate: for I now see clearly that love is begotten of the beloved as its father, and born of the lover as its mother. Will you not turn to my second question, to wit: when love was first born, and if perchance it was produced from eternity, or born of eternal lovers, or if it was created in time, either at the beginning of creation, or at some later epoch, and if so, which?

P. Your second question raises no small difficulties and uncertainties.

S. Why do you find it more difficult than the first?

P. Because the first love towards men is clearly divine love through which the world was created by God, and this seems to be the love which was first born. Since, therefore,