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## Love and Essence: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideas of Plato and Abai

This article explores the philosophical continuity and differences between Plato's concept of love and Abai's concept of love. Despite most researchers being familiar with love in Turkic Islamic thought, few recognize the continuity between Plato's concept of love and Abai. Plato emphasizes that love reveals the cause of Being, affirming its truth and primacy. This aligns with the essence of Sufi love in Abai's philosophy, where love for God is the foundation of all existence. Abai sees love as a realistic concept: each person shapes their own essence, while a general concept of essence defines the existence of all beings. In contrast, Plato views love as a singular conceptual term striving toward Abstract Beauty. Thus, we highlight not only the continuity but also key differences between Plato and Abai's interpretations, reflected in the ontological stance of the former and the existential stance of the latter. It was concluded that for Abai, love characterizes a personal experience requiring individual engagement, whereas for Plato, love is the meaning of existence. The research also reveals Abai's understanding of God's Being through love for humanity, offering a new interpretation of love in his philosophy.

*Keywords:* Plato, Abai, love, being, existence, Sufism, gashk, magrifat, philosophy, spirituality.

### Introduction

The history of mankind was not devoid of thinkers. According to Abai, the tradition of acknowledging the interconnection between being and love originates from ancient times. However, during this period no philosopher — neither in the West nor in the East — explicitly defined the essence of being as love. Such a spiritual insight is a distinctive feature of Sufi thinkers in the history of Islamic civilization, such as Hallaj Mansur and Khoja Ahmet Yassawi. Abai was deeply influenced by this Sufi worldview and embraced it profoundly as well. Especially Plato and Aristotle regarded love as a “cause” in explaining the world. If we explain this issue in simple terms, on one side stands the active and eternal (azali) God, and on the other, the passive primordial matter (hayula). Matter, influenced by the activity of the deity, also acquires activity, falls in love with it, and is given to feelings. Through this feeling, “primordial matter” moves. The Lord also gives it “form” in order to be active. This is how the world and creation appear. Thus, love is only a means of providing creation — a reason. In this context, love is neither the essence of God nor the essence of primordial matter. This issue is explored within the framework of idealistic philosophy. In the history of human thought, starting from Plato and Aristotle and followed by Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, up to later Western thinkers like Kierkegaard, all are considered foundational figures of idealistic philosophy. According to their worldview, being consists of two components: mind (substance) and existence (or phenomenon). However, in almost all of their systems, the mind is regarded as a principle that precedes being. Yet when it comes to the question “What is the mind?” they tend to explain it as a form of being — often understood as a universal concept or as a totality. In line with this principle, the essence of being is not seen as residing within being itself, but rather outside of it — in the mind or in thought. In other words, essence is perceived as a set of ideas existing in the soul, consciousness, or intellect of God. In this regard, thinkers such as Plato, Plotinus, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and many Islamic Sufis and Christian mystics were unable to move beyond the framework of the “grand concept” based on mind and essence. Yet Abai differs from these currents of thought in that the Creator himself is the essence — the root. Shakarim's idea that “man was created by the same essence” also echoes this cognitive platform. This is a Sufi educational platform in the history of Islamic philosophy.

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The main way of understanding the meaning of providential existence in the cognitive platforms of the Greek philosopher Plato and the Kazakh thinker Abai is to determine the degree of love, thereby revealing the essence of love, which seeks to unite with God, freeing itself from the feelings of the elite and the masses. In this regard, Plato proposed a system of reflections on love and considered the manifestation of love for God to be true love, while Abai tries to show the connection between existence and love, love between God and man through the concept of “love.” If Plato accepts falling in love as a conceptual term, then Abai interprets love as the essence of life. Theological dogmas such as love, virtue, and the unity of being are explained in Abai’s views through the Platonic worldview and, where necessary, through the prism of Islamic philosophy.

Existentialist philosophy which originates with Kierkegaard, does not associate the origin of being with consciousness, on the contrary, it adopts an opposing view. In this school of thought, being is regarded as a primary reality that exists prior to consciousness. From this perspective, being is fundamental, whereas consciousness is secondary — it emerges later and develops throughout the course of existence. Based on this methodological foundation, representatives of existentialist philosophy are generally divided into two main branches. The first is religious existentialism, whose prominent figures S. Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel interpret consciousness as absolute faith in God and as a form of spiritual experience. The second is atheistic existentialism represented by thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Friedrich Nietzsche who associate consciousness with the heaviest burden of human existence concepts such as “death” or “nothingness.” However, in Abai’s philosophy, consciousness, spirit, essence, and pure mind are all the creator himself [1]. Man’s reflections on the reality of death lead him to recognize it in God. The meaning of human life is to know God by loving Him. As in the existentialist current, he never accepts the fact that consciousness is created subsequently. Therefore, we think, before comparing Abai with Plato, it is better to pay attention to their civilizational, philosophical, religious positions and thinking systems.

The aim of this article is to identify the similarities and differences between Platonic love and the concept of love in Abai’s philosophy, as well as to establish a connection between the existential and ontological understandings of the essence of being and existence. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been set: analyzing the concepts of Platonic love and Abai’s love; exploring love with a focus on the interpretation of Abai’s philosophical and theological ideas; comparing the key concepts related to the essence of love in the works of Plato and Abai; analyzing the role of love in the spiritual practice of achieving the Absolute and personal development; and examining the existential and ontological understandings of being in the context of the works of Plato and Abai, highlighting the place and significance of love within them.

The relevance of this topic lies in how exploring the philosophy of love through the interpretations of Plato and Abai enhances our understanding of the philosophical and theological contexts in which these ideas developed. Today, the examination of how philosophical traditions and classical concepts of love can address the existential crises of modernity is increasingly significant, as it can infuse our lives with meaning and spiritual fulfillment. Investigating love within the framework of spiritual practice can highlight its importance as a catalyst for personal growth and comprehension of the world. This exploration is particularly pertinent given the rising interest in spiritual practices and philosophical inquiry in contemporary society.

### *Methodology*

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach that allows for a deeper understanding of Plato’s influence on Abai. We chose a phenomenological approach, focusing on the study of the meaning of love as presented by Plato and Abai. The study involved 14 respondents selected based on purposive sampling, 10 of them are teachers at Ahmet Yasawi University and 4 are employees of the Institute of Turkology. At the time of the study, all participants consented to take part and were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between September and November 2024. The interviews were conducted offline and lasted 15 to 30 minutes, creating a comfortable environment for respondents to express their views openly and sincerely. During the research, a pre-prepared questionnaire with open-ended questions was used. This approach allowed participants to freely and fully share their experiences and perspectives. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. We followed the steps of familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme searching, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing reports. Data analysis provided us with a list of topics, which we grouped into the following themes: The concept of divine love in Sufi philosophy and the mystery of love; the existential relationship between the philosophies of Plato and Abai; the conflicting viewpoints of Plato and Abai.

All necessary ethical standards were considered in the study. Participants were provided with full informed consent, as well as guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality of the results. The study was approved by the ethics committee of our university.

### Results

#### *Divine love in Sufi philosophy and the mystery of Abai*

We have discovered that not only is the “language of lovers,” as mentioned by Abai, a “language without words,” but that love itself is also an ambiguous concept. This is because it is impossible to define the concept of love with a single word or a single sentence, as it encompasses the entirety of Abai’s ideas. Love represents all existence; it is everything. All is God, creation, nature, the phenomenon of nature, humanity, human states, religion, faith, disbelief, pride, life and death, paradise and hell, being and non-being — all is love [2]. So, all this world is made up of love. In short, the essence of all things is infatuation, that is, the consequence is the fruit of love. What did Abai mean when he said, “A world without love is empty, add it to the beasts?” On what concepts, understanding, and sources did he base this profound thought? On this matter, Mukhtar Auezov, the founder of Abai studies and the scholar who established the “Abai ata” concepts as a means of preserving national spiritual identity during the Soviet period, extensively elaborates in his works, including the article *The Life of Abai* [3]. Appealing to the spirit of the Eastern classical poets whom he deeply revered, Abai writes:

“Fuzuli. Shamsi. Saykhali,  
Nawai, Saadi, Firdawsi,  
Khoja hafiz all of them  
I shall strive, aspire,  
To follow in their footsteps!”

In this poem, Abai reveals his spiritual orientation and literary direction, expressing his aspiration toward beauty, wisdom and particularly the philosophy of love through emulation of the great figures of classical Eastern poetry. This work starts firstly with the remind of the tradition of love for God in Islam, which originated in eastern world. Without religious cognitive values formed on the basis of eastern sufi culture, recognized as love literature, it is impossible to recognize Abai’s worldview and philosophy. However, at one time Mukhtar Auezov, in order to accept “Abay studies” into the Soviet ideology and purposefully to show Abay far from Islamic-Sufi knowledge, said that “the religion of Abay is a religion of reason and critical thought...” But today, it is worth looking at a figurative-hermeneutic meaning in this thought of M. Auezov.

We drew the following conclusion from our interviewee: in the legacy of Islamic and Eastern poets (particularly Sufi poets) love is categorized as “divine” and “human.” Divine love is considered the truest and most genuine form of love, whereas human love is seen as transient and fleeting. In Sufi thought the theme of divine love is the most frequently praised and celebrated. It is a core value extensively promoted both in Sufism and in Islamic philosophy. Overall, the concept of love in Islamic literature is so deeply and comprehensively developed in a moral and ethical context that it has even given rise to a distinct literary genre known as “literature of love.” Abai was also inspired by this rich literary heritage and began his spiritual journey within this tradition. His expression “Medet ber, ya shari faryad” reflects the very essence of this phenomenon.

While the Quran and hadiths do not use the word “love” directly, the term “hubb” is commonly found. In early Islam “fear of God” was more prominent than “love for God,” but from the 8th century the concept of “ishq” began to express divine love, especially in Sufi poetry. Hallaj Mansur was among the first to explore this theme deeply, favoring terms like hub, mahabbat and mahbub. Islamic thought distinguishes several types of love: animalistic, spiritual, natural and divine [4]. This stems from the excessive desires of the Ammara nafs and is often associated with natural love — that is, attachment to bodily and worldly things. If this desire is left unchecked by reason, it can become a highly dangerous and destructive force. In contrast, spiritual love reflects the inner journey of the hakims and arifs. It is directed toward true beauty and recognition and mastery of the self [5]. The world of ghakli love is the realm of malakut. It is the love of those who can appreciate the beauty of this world while also experiencing divine love. We identified several distinct forms of love: natural, spiritual, animalistic, intellectual and divine [6, 18–21]. Animalistic love arises from base desires driven by lust and craving. Natural love refers to physical, material attraction often associated with sexual desire. Without the guidance of reason and knowledge, this type of love can become dangerously chaotic, like an atomic bomb. Spiritual love, by contrast, is the domain of the compassionate and the chosen.

It is a deep appreciation for both material and spiritual beauty, including art and higher aesthetics. This reflects the state of a wise and educated person capable of controlling their passions and desires. In Christianity, this status is held by Jesus Christ. Dimitrios A. Vasilakis connects the descent of Christ, as well as the descent of the philosopher into the Cave, with their wise status: “A basic difference is that, in the Christian case, the humiliation encapsulated in the descent is a characteristic of the Sun of Righteousness, i.e., of God himself. In Plato’s case, the sun who illuminates the vision of the philosopher does not descend; it is only the philosopher who descends to the cave, functioning as a mediator between the under- and outer world, between the human and the divine, like eros in Symposium” [7].

During the interview, one of the participants noted: “Divine love is regarded as the highest form of love. Sufis accept all forms of love, provided they remain within their proper bounds and view them as stages leading toward the ultimate goal — divine love. Passion is also a kind of love, but it is shahwati love, influenced by carnal desire and lust. Therefore, Sufis do not acknowledge it as true love, considering it the attachment of those driven by superficiality and curiosity who remain caught at the crossroads of desire. In other words, those who are soaked in passion are indeed those who are separated from God. But this does not mean that this world is worthless [8]. On the contrary, in Sufism, this world is basically the space where we see the most valuable manifestation — “Haq Jamal.” This is because Sufis aim to see the manifestation of God in this world, not in another world. Abai defines this world as all Sufis compare it, as a “veil.” Indeed, the transitory nature of the world, the truth of death, prompts the question of what is the reason for our existence and creation. Abai clearly stated in his work “Kitab al tasdiq” the goal of a person is determined by three recognitions: self-knowledge, knowledge of the world, and knowledge of God. The most important goal of all these is the knowledge of God.

From the interviewee’s words, we found that God created man, the world and the universe to demonstrate his existence. Now, the more man comprehends the mystery of his existence, the more he becomes attached to that world, the more he realizes that he has become alienated from himself, and he strives to break free from the bondage of this world and attain Absolute Being, that is, the existence of God. But men also have within their own being a barrier called “desire,” that is, the existential “I.” This is the power of lust, which imprisons man in the prison of his desires. Abai describes the soul as the essence of the self “mind and soul, I-myself.” In the journey toward the Absolute Being, a person must learn to regulate the desires of the lustful soul. In Platonic thought, it is believed that the soul reconnects with transcendent, ideal beauty. In Islamic thought the concept of love — as it relates to the mind, soul, body — is explored through philosophical, ethical-cosmological and psychological perspectives. The human soul is understood to consist of distinct layers: Nabati, Gazabi, Natiqi. Each layer corresponds to different levels and expressions of desire or passion. The cosmological model found in Aristotle’s metaphysics especially his hierarchical view of the soul and universe — also significantly influenced Islamic philosophers in shaping their understanding of love and the soul [9].

For instance, al-Farabi in his treatise *Madinatul Fadila*, described love as the foundation of the theory of emanation and of all existence — as the unity of “the lover and the beloved.” This theme was also explored by Ibn Sina, who wrote a treatise titled *Risala Fi Mahiyatil Ishq*. According to Kazakh scholars: “The gradual descent of the intellect through the stages of the formation of the universal mind brings Al-Farabi closer to the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. Al-Farabi who belonged to the second generation of Islamic philosophers must be recognized as the true founder of Islamic Neoplatonism” [10].

Love is associated with the concept of perfection, being defined as a passion for attaining it. Man chooses perfection and existence as the highest ideal, in contrast to imperfection and nonexistence. Perfection and existence are found in God. In his article *Abai’s Lyrics*, M. Auezov interprets Abai as saying: “I do not deliberately sing about artificial lovers and *mashuqs*, as many Eastern Sufis do.” This statement was undoubtedly his way of evading the pressures of Soviet scientific atheism. In reality, Auezov approached the study of Abai not merely from a literary perspective but also by adapting it to the Soviet ideological and atheistic framework. He regarded it as a means and platform for resisting that ideology, having already adopted this worldview-based position in advance [11]. Therefore, to claim, in contrast to Abai’s words that the idea of “*Khaliq birlan mahluq*” is unrelated to love is to overlook the fact that God created humanity with love and mercy. He fell in love with a God who acts solely through love. Auezov understood that approaching Abai’s figure purely from a literary perspective served as a suitable model for constructing a positive science compatible with Soviet ideology. For this reason, he placed particular emphasis on Abai’s poetic identity, while deliberately downplaying, religious and theological views by overshadowing them through prose [12; 528]. In his work *Abai’s black words*, reflects on the dialectics of creation and writes that Abai’s views

are misguided and erroneous. He also notes that, in the history of philosophy there once existed an old belief that “the world was created for man,” but asserts that this notion has long since fallen out of use. During the interview one of the respondents stated: “In the history of Islamic thought, Khoja Ahmed Yassawi holds a significant historical role. In his teachings, the feeling of love is entirely a sense of self-sacrifice. This feeling is not categorized as good or bad. For the one who possesses it, benefit, interest or reward holds no importance. Complete devotion to the ideal is manifested only through love. A person forgets themselves in pursuit of a great goal, is carried away by the flow of time and does not even know what the outcome will be. The lover loses their “self” and tends toward union with the beloved. They voluntarily surrender themselves into servitude — this is a state that occurs without external pressure. It is an affliction. The body and mind of a person stricken with the disease of love also become ill. In this regard, Plato also says that one must see through the eyes of love [12; 528]. Love is lidded pot: once uncovered, it beings to lose its warmth. Therefore, mystery holds a special place in love. If the mystery is lost authenticity is also lost. Thus, love is profound concept that lies between mystery and beauty, truth and passion — one that has yet to be fully revealed. Abai describes love as: “the language of the lover is a speechless tongue” [13; 336]. He defined not only love, but also God as something beyond the reach of language — “my tongue is too short to describe.” Isn’t love and God the secret of secrets, beyond definition and expression? To me, this too seems to be Abai’s secret. Of course, it is difficult to determine which of the above statements best defines love, as each reflects a deeply personal experience.

#### *Existential love: Plato and Abai’s phenomenon*

We have found it difficult to define love because it requires personal experience. It is true that if we consider love from an existentialist point of view — not as a general concept but as an “individual experience” — our proposals become secondary in terms of meaning, because the importance of experience increases. We see that, as with other personal human experiences, there is no “universal definition of love,” but love itself is an experience that can be understood through personal experience. Love cannot be defined, but it sustains life, gives it meaning and significance, and directs it toward perfection. According to existentialist philosophy, everything consists of “essence” and “existence.” “Essence” refers to what a being is. When I say that I am a human being, I have a human essence, I have expressed my qualities and characteristics that are common to all living beings of the human species. When existentialist philosophers say “essence,” they mean essence defined by this universal essence [6, 21]. Essence is something that can exist. Existence is what makes meaning real. During the interview, a participant remarked: “It is no secret that the question of which of “essence” and “being” came first was the main issue that divided classical philosophers and existentialists. Here, existentialists argue that existence comes before essence and that each person creates his own essence. Classical philosophers, however, have no doubts about the existence of essence as a general concept that determines the existence of all living beings.”

Thus, what is value? Question that existentialists have put forward divided into three main currents: a) religious existentialism: according to this theory, meaning has its origin in God or in a universe beyond this world; b) Conceptualist existentialists: According to this theory, meaning lives only in the human mind; b) Phenomenological existentialists: Husserl’s existentialism [14]. Therefore, according to the existentialist philosophy, the essence of existence is not inside the existence, but outside it, that is, it is either in God, or in the universe outside this world, or in the human mind. One of the philosophers selected for our research topic, Plato, is an existentialist thinker, although he is in conflict with existentialism in certain respects. However, we must say that love, which Abai accepted as the essence of existence, is far from conceptual thinking contrary to existentialists. Let us say that the concept or category of love in Abai is a term with an existential and ontological meaning. One of the participants pointed out during the interview: “It seems impossible to briefly explain this concept which lies at the heart of Abai’s entire philosophy. For Abai, everything — both visible and invisible — is love. God is love; creation and nature are love; human beings and all their emotions, states and actions are love; religion and faith are love; even disbelief and nobility are love; life and death; this world and hereafter, nothingness and existence — all are love. In essence love is the foundation of everything. Everything is born of love. For the “Great Creator” brought all existence onto being through love. These eighteen thousand worlds — the earth, the sky, humanity and the cosmos — are all the result of love, and they continue to exist solely because of love [12; 528]. Because in Abai’s view love has no place where it is not needed and there is no place it does not reach. In his words: “we are not the creator, we are the people who can look at the shadow of the creator. We will be drawn towards that love and justice, and each one will understand the wisdom of God more clearly. I convinced, I believed, does not mean I will convince. The

beginning of humanity is love, justice, feelings. There is no place where they are not needed, and there is no place where they do not enter. This is the work of God who created all” [13; 336].

In other words, it means that a person’s pain, suffering, joy and excitement, all his life is love. That not only man, but also nature and natural phenomena are the fruit of love [15]. There is no place where they are not needed, and there is no place where they do not enter. “Whoever makes love to you, don’t you owe it to him to make love too? Look with your mind’s eye: the sun heats up and brings clouds from the sea, it rains from the clouds, grows many kinds of grains and fruits on the earth, produces beautiful flowers and leaves, trees, sugar canes, grows many kinds of plants and animals. It is preserved, streams flow, rivers become a place for animals, birds, livestock drink and fish. Cotton, hemp, fruit, ore, flowers, bird feathers, meat, eggs, milk, strength, beauty, skin of animals, water fish, fish caviar, bee honey, beeswax, worm silk — everything is made for the benefit of mankind, and none of them has almost a single thing of mine, everything is inexhaustible food for mankind.... a machine made with a million wisdom,” “factory” is made for the pleasure and benefit of mankind, isn’t it because the Creator loved mankind with love? Don’t you owe it to whoever loves you?” means that he created this world and nature for the pleasure and benefit of man and that man will love the Creator with his love [13; 236].

In the course of the interview, one participant observed: “From Abai’s legacy, we have come to understand that the essence of everything is love and its manifestations. For Abai, however, love has no fixed definition, and he states” ... the language of a lover is a tongueless language, see with your eyes and know with your heart. How do we understand that a person in love is speechless? Again, in the poem “If you want to fall in love, you will be immersed and be sick with fever,” even if it depicts the state of love, it shows that it cannot be defined.” So, for Abai, love is not something to be determined, on the contrary, it is defining. It is not a person who gives meaning, but rather a definition that gives meaning to a person. Love is the essence that gives the meaning of existence to all created things in the space of being and feelings. That is why, for Abai, in fact love itself cannot be defined, because it is not defined, and not interpreted [3; 268]. However, the concept of love, indefinable in terms of meaning, despite its wide scope, seems to be defined both ontologically and existentially by “all created things.” Because for Abai, love is everything. So, according to Abai, love is an ontological (essential) principle and essence. That is, in other words, love is the essence (self-core) of existence. That is why Abai’s recognition of love as an essence points to a very important height from the point of view of the history of human thought. So, we discovered that for Abai, love is not something that needs to be defined, on the contrary, it defines.

#### *Contradictory positions of Plato and Abai*

If we go back to Plato, the concepts of love and infatuation are the most important concepts in Plato, as in Abai. Explaining the concepts of love and infatuation in Plato’s works, he was a Greek thinker who deeply influenced Islamic Sufis with some of his views. It can be said that through his *Pir-toi*, *Paidros* dialogues [16; 117] he deeply immersed himself in this topic of love. From the interviewee’s words, we found that Plato and Abai have opposing views on the topics discussed above. Although Abai interprets love as a single meaning, he does not perceive it as a single conceptual term, as Plato does. Because in Abai’s concept of love, there are two phenomenal aspects of truth: the first is the aspect of love that makes being. That is, without love, there would be no absolute being, life, creation. The second is the aspect of love that adapts the essence to life. That is, if there was no love, there would be no absolute being, existence, creation. This means that without love, the world would be empty, there would be no life in existence, especially in human existence.

Now, if we focus on another difference that can be formulated within the framework of this analysis, no matter how important the topic of love in Plato is, it is only a cause and a means that provides life, and does not go beyond that. One of the participants pointed out during the interview: “In Plato’s philosophy, love is not perceived as the essence of God or matter. Love is defined as the expression of feelings and admiration for the perfection of God of the first matter. The primordial matter falls in love with the perfection of God. God also gives it form and shapes it with the aim of making it perfect. This is how creation, life begins. However, despite these fundamental differences in their views, the two thinkers agree on the need to rise to the absolute splendor without being deceived by the greatness of love and the pleasures of the passing world. Plato’s love for absolute beauty within the framework of doctrine of ideas can be understood as follows: It is known that Plato’s metaphysical system consists of the concept of two worlds that are interconnected. Ideas, forms or the world of meanings and the existential world [12; 542]. The word idea means “visible form” or more generally, nature means essence, form means type. And from a philosophical point of view, ideas are

eternal and that is, uncreated and indestructible, beyond time and space, immutable conceptual entities. They create their own worlds. However, the world in which we live, that is, the emotional, existential world, has no absolute, eternal, permanent, unchanging characteristics, everything is transitory, mortal world. According to Plato's point of view, the creations of this world become beings and exist only by taking part from the world of ideas. For example, an artistic thing in this world becomes artistic mainly by taking part from an artistic idea in the world of ideas. That is, it becomes beautiful through the spark of the artistic idea itself.

In the course of the interview, one participant observed: "Plato's love can be said to be the process of perfecting one's personality and reaching the stage of admiration for "absolute beauty" and "idea of perfection." Until a person reaches the stage of being amazed by the beauty, until he gets acquainted with the great secret of love, he is in a state of continuous improvement, that is perfection. Here, according to Plato, it is not some kind of love worthy of praise that is beautiful, but love that directs a person to the great love and the beauty of love. On the one hand, in Plato love is God." The oldest, the most respected, the most powerful of the gods, he brings goodness and happiness to people between life and death. If love in Plato is defined as a process of falling in love with the "idea of beauty," it is clear that there is a direct connection between love and infatuation and beauty. Because in Plato, the God of love, focuses only on beauty, it is known that his main desire is that beautiful thing. In fact, we pay attention to elegance and beauty, admire it, love art. As in the example of "Layla-Majnun" in Sufism, it is not surprising that we admire and fall in love with beauty, surrender to the wisdom behind it, and do not know that we have crossed over to the idea of beauty mentioned by Plato [17].

So, what is beauty? Plato points out that love is not limited to the desire for beauty in the world of life that the beauty of beings is a spark given from the world of ideas. But the beauty of this world is actually its origin, it is known that it is valuable because it points to ideas. We cannot hide the fact that this idea was the foundation that contributed to the literary and theoretical development of the philosophy of love in Islamic Sufism. During the interview, one of the interviewees mentioned: "The most important point, according to Abai, is that love — recognized as the essence of existence — is not merely a product of abstract thought. It is a reality embedded in life itself, a concept intrinsically tied to existence. In life, that is, existential love is experienced through human nature in the form of both positive emotions — such as love, happiness, freedom and faith — and negative emotions — such as pain, sorrow, suffering and disbelief."

We find that the concept of love in Abai's philosophy is a term that has both emotional, that is, existential, truth and essential, that is, ontological truth in this life. In this sense, similar conclusions in Plato's system of thought are still relevant. Plato says: "... a person first notices beauty in the image of one person and loves him alone." But later, when he sees the similarity of the beauty, he sees in one soul with the beauty of all other souls, he understands that "the source of beauty in all bodies is one and the same," he says [18]. It can be seen that this statement is similar to the verse in the Qur'an: "I created all people in a beautiful image." Further, Plato, who noticed that the origin of beauty in all bodies is the same, is no longer satisfied with this, but appreciates the beauty of the soul in all bodies and further begins to notice the idea of beauty. In this way, he broadened his intellectual horizons after seeing all art in the beauty. This beauty is permanent, existing, unborn, immortal, never increasing, never diminishing. Beautiful at first glance, ugly at first glance, beautiful today, ugly again tomorrow, beautiful to some, ugly to others, beautiful in one place, ugly in another, this is not a beauty. This is a unique beauty; nothing associated with a single body and does not indicate a connection with something. No words, no wisdom not found in any being [12, 483]. An insect, whether on earth or in the sky exists by itself, has a pattern only with itself. All beauties receive a share from him and he himself is not affected by their brightness and fading, does not increase, decrease or change. Here, Plato is a thinker who left Islamic thinkers under his influence through his thoughts about love for absolute beauty and not for the beauty of the mortal world. In addition, it can be said that the idea of the greatness of love clarified by various verses in the essence of Islam came to life. "One of the participants pointed out during the interview: "Abay's indefinable concept of love has two phenomenological aspects as an essence. The first is the aspect of love that makes existence [16; 87]. This means that without love, there would be no existence, no man, no creation. The second aspect is that love makes existence alive and gives life to it. Without love, there would be no existence, no life in existence, especially in human existence." Basically, in Sufi schools of Islam, love is divided into two: "hishq" and "gashq." This is consistent with the classifications mentioned above. In Abai's works, we can see that both classifications are used simultaneously. For example, in the Turkish Sufi school, the concept of "hishq" is much broader in meaning than the word love. There is a qualitative difference between them. "Gashq" that is love often means feeling, mood, profane love, while "Hishk" means divine, spiritual love [19]. The classification was first introduced by Ibn Sina in the history of Islamic

philosophy and later became a widely accepted norm across all Turkish Sufi school. As a result, Turkish Islamic Sufi philosophy came to recognize love as the essence and fundamental principle of all things. We also see that Abai, a prominent representative of 19th and 20th century Kazakh thought, was a sage and philosopher deeply influenced by this stream of Sufi philosophy. In other words, love in its broadest sense, encompasses existence and nonexistence, life and death and natural phenomena. At the same time love is reflected in the spiritual and material dimensions that constitute being — such as love and hatred, good and evil, mercy and vengeance, faith and disbelief. So, in Abai, we can talk about two types of love that are related to each other. The first type of love is ontological and the second is existential. Now if we can explain these two phenomena of love, then we can define Abay's concept of love at least a little. From this point of view, if we conclude within the framework of the relationship between existence and consciousness, there is no trace of humanism or deism in "black words" and poems of Abai. Because humanism does not exist in the name of metaphysics, religion, God, faith, afterlife, spiritual truth and Abay's worldview begins with man and ends with man. In the course of the interview, one participant observed: "Abai recognizes those who believe in loving God and humanity as a true religion and true worship as a friend of the truth and a perfect person. That is, he explains that my religion is love. This also shows that Abai is the inheritor of Yasawi's tradition and Yunis Amire's "my religion is love." The ideas of Abay (self-control, self-mastery) such as "magrifat al-nafs" are mainly derived from the position of "muraqaba" in Sufi knowledge [20]. It also includes changes and phenomena in the human soul in Sufism as a result of psychotechniques. That is, a person must distinguish what level of state and status is going on after a certain psychotechnique. All this is determined by condition in Sufism. Now, the idea of this person's self-mastery, control and defining it by certain measures reminds me of Plato. Plato also has a layer of virtue called "measure." Basically, in Plato's theory, there are four layers of virtue — wisdom, courage, justice and self-mastery. This self-control means that the soul is under the control of the mind. According to Plato, moderation means being able to control oneself and not be driven by desires such as lust. No passion is greater than love. That's why Plato says: all passions and impulses must submit to the most measured love. It turns out that love turns into a "unifying force" only when a person controls his passions. In Plato's words, the desire of a lover who has mastered himself, in other words, renounced the existential "I" is to be reunited with his great creator.

In the course of the interview, one participant observed: "In Plato's dialogue, love is said to be a disease of the soul. There are two types of disease: physical and divine. In fact, the lovers themselves do not hide the fact that they are not healthy, but sick. They know that their thoughts are unsystematic, but they cannot master themselves. This is a special kind of love. It is difficult to express in words the passion of a lover or a philosopher for that truth or absolute beauty." We find that Plato's discourses on love, not for the beauty of this world, but for the Absolute Beauty beyond it, had a great influence on the phenomenon of Islamic Sufism. Here we see that this continuity of integration continued right up to Abai.

#### *Discussion*

The ideals of love, both in Plato and in Abai, are transcendent, extending beyond the material world. In the history of philosophy, this theme has been part of idealist philosophy, encompassing ideas from Plato and his followers to Islamic philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna, and Western thinkers up to Kierkegaard. All of them are considered idealists, for whom consciousness always precedes being. When discussing the nature of consciousness, they define it as a generalized concept of thought that represents a single type of being. Thus, the essence of existence transcends existence itself, existing in the realm of thought and consciousness. In other words, consciousness and self-essence imply a connection with God, dwelling in His mind and consciousness. Many Christian and Islamic thinkers, such as Plato, Plotinus, Philo, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, have not deviated from the boundaries of this "great concept" of consciousness and essence. As a successor of Turkic Sufi philosophy, Abai asserts that God Himself is the essence and foundation of all things, which represents a Sufi intellectual platform in the context of Islamic philosophy. Therefore, to study the similarities and differences in ideas between Plato and Abai, it is necessary to consider civilizational, philosophical, and religious shifts, as well as systems of thought. An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the concepts of love in Plato and Abai led to the following assertions: firstly, the ideas of love held by Plato and Abai relate to the position of existentialism, as love can serve as a basis for understanding the meaning of human existence. Secondly, despite cultural differences, the Platonic and Abai ideas of love reflect their relationship to knowledge, truth, and eternal values. The knowledge of God comes through the awareness of love for Him. Platonic love reveals the reason for being, affirming its truth and primacy, and does not contradict the essence of Sufi love in Abai. Thirdly, Plato's metaphysical system consists of the concept of "two

worlds,” which are interconnected: the world of ideas and the existential world. In Plato’s conception, ideas are eternal and unchanging, that is, uncreated and indestructible, existing outside of time and space, and are immutable conceptual entities; they do not possess absolute, eternal, constant, or unchanging characteristics; in the world, everything is transitory and mortal. However, the world in which we live is the sensory, existential world. Hence, love in Plato corresponds to platonic, otherworldly love. Abai’s love, as a striving towards God (mahabbat), stands in contrast to the Platonic idea of striving toward perfect beauty and truth, thus influencing the moral foundations of society. Abai interprets love as a singular meaning; he does not perceive it as a single conceptual term, as does Plato. In Abai’s concept of love, there are two phenomenal aspects of truth: the first is the aspect of love that creates being, life, and creation (existential); the second is the aspect of love that adapts being to life (ontological). In other words, love can be that force which adapts both to the earthly existential world and to the otherworldly. Thus, one can assert that Sufi elements in Abai’s teachings enrich the understanding of love in the context of Platonic philosophy.

The concept of love in Plato implies the existence of an ideal, eternal form of love that transcends sensitive and material manifestations. Today, our society is characterized by a culture of fleeting relationships and a pursuit of material values. A return to the ideas of a deep, spiritual perception of love can promote the formation of lasting relationships. Studying the ideas of Platonic love can help people strive for genuine, profound feelings, which could enrich their lives with new meaning. Abai’s concept of love, emphasizing the spiritual connection with God and the understanding of love as deep friendship, can enrich contemporary ideas about interpersonal relationships. This may lead to the creation of a community where support and mutual aid become central aspects. In conditions of increased social isolation and competitive environments, such an approach can offer an alternative, highlighting the importance of emotional and spiritual closeness. Concepts that emphasize the key significance of love and connection with others can help people find comfort and understanding. Understanding love as a formation that unites souls and creates continuity between the world of ideas and the existential world can inspire people to seek deep connections and values in their lives.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, it can be said that the main theme common to both thinkers regarding love is the love for beauty, which is rooted in Plato’s idea of beauty and Abai’s love for God. As a result, both thinkers agree with this interpretation of love. Thus, by exploring the subjective experiences of these thinkers, we can assert that there is a continuity between them in their understanding of love, beauty, and divinity. Additionally, it is important to point out the contradictions between the thinkers’ views, particularly manifested in Plato’s existential love and Abai’s platonic and ontological love, which combines earthly and divine love. Discussion of concepts such as Platonic and ontological love can aid in understanding the dynamics of modern relationships, as well as developing approaches to resolving conflicts and improving communication among people.

It should also be noted that a critical approach to interpreting Abai’s views aims to avoid oversimplification and incorrect extrapolations of his philosophy within the framework of existentialism. Comparing the concepts of love underscores the importance of education and upbringing in the path to understanding this love and, ultimately, to happiness. Perfection cannot be achieved without education, without knowledge, that is, without the virtue of wisdom, which contributes to the development of a deeper ethical consciousness in society, emphasizing the significance of wisdom, virtue, and education. Discussing these concepts helps individuals gain a deeper understanding of their own feelings and the meaning of relationships, highlighting the importance of addressing this topic.

Studying love as a striving for beauty, as in Plato, and for divinity, as in Abai, opens up opportunities for discussing the broader philosophical topics of truth and ideals that can inspire and guide our lives. The works of thinkers such as Plato and Abai remain an essential part of philosophical and cultural tradition. Their ideas continue to influence contemporary philosophy, literature, and art, and understanding their perspectives can deepen our comprehension of both Western and Eastern cultural thought. Abai’s quote, “Love is the guiding star that leads to truth,” directs us toward the true wisdom created by Plato: “Love moves from love of bodily beauty to love of spiritual beauty, and then to love of wisdom.”

In this article, we have explored Abai’s understanding of love and how it relates to the Platonic tradition. This analysis only touches upon the nuances and specific features of the philosophy of love in Plato and Abai. In future research, we would like to study in more depth other aspects of both thinkers’ philosophies, removing existing limitations, such as expanding the scope of the study and increasing the number of inter-

viewed participants from 14 to 40, as well as applying quantitative approaches and conducting a survey with over 200 respondents.

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## Махаббат және мән: Платон мен Абайдың идеяларын салыстырмалы талдау

Мақалада Платонның махаббат туралы түсінігі мен Абайдың махаббат концепциясы арасындағы философиялық сабақтастық пен айырмашылықтар зерттелген. Көптеген зерттеушілер түрік-ислам ойшылдығында махаббат тақырыбымен жақсы таныс болғанымен, Платонның махаббат туралы түсінігі мен Абайдың түсінігі арасындағы сабақтастықты аз біледі. Платон махаббат болмыстың себебін ашатынын, оның шындығы мен басымдығын дәлелдейтінін айтады. Бұл Абай философиясындағы суфизмдегі махаббаттың мәніне қайшы келмейді, өйткені Абайда Аллаға деген махаббат бүкіл болмыстың негізі. Абай махаббатты реалистік түсінік ретінде түсіндіреді, мұнда әр адам өз болмысын қалыптастырады, бірақ барлық болмыстардың бар болуын анықтайтын жалпы болмыс концептісі басым болады. Ал Платон махаббатты абстрактілі сұлулыққа ұмтылатын біртұтас

концептуалды термин ретінде қарастырады. Осылайша, бұл жерде тек сабақтастықты ғана емес, Платон мен Абай арасындағы түсініктердің айырмашылықтарын да айқындаймыз, олар бірінші ойшылдың онтологиялық және екінші ойшылдың экзистенциалды көзқарасында көрініс табады. Абай үшін махаббат жеке тәжірибені сипаттайды, ол жеке араласуды талап етеді, ал Платон үшін махаббат болмыстың мәні ретінде қарастырылады. Зерттеу Абайдың Алланың болмысын адамзатқа деген махаббат арқылы түсіну тәсілін ашады, оның философиясындағы махаббат концепциясының жаңа интерпретациясын айқындайды. Абай үшін махаббат — бұл жүрекпен тану, рухани ізденіс, адамның ішкі кемелдікке жету жолындағы ең басты қозғаушы күш. Ал Платон болса махаббатты адамды идеялар әлеміне жетелейтін, оны күнделікті материалдық шындықтан жоғары көтеретін метафизикалық құрал ретінде көреді.

*Кілт сөздер:* Платон, Абай, махаббат, болмыс, тіршілік, суфизм, ғашық, магрифат, философия, руханият.

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## Любовь и сущность: Сравнительный анализ идей Платона и Абая

В статье исследуются философские преемственность и различия между концепцией любви Платона и понятием любви Абая. Несмотря на то, что большинство исследователей хорошо знакомы с темой любви в тюркско-исламской мысли, немногие знают о преемственности между понятием любви у Платона и Абая. Платон подчеркивает, что любовь раскрывает причину бытия, утверждая его истину и приоритет. Это не противоречит сути суфийской любви в философии Абая, где любовь к Богу является основой всего существования и духовного развития человека. Абай интерпретирует любовь как реалистическое понятие, утверждая, что каждый человек формирует свою сущность, в то время как общий концепт сущности, который определяет существование всех сущностей, является приоритетным. В отличие от этого, Платон рассматривает любовь как единый концептуальный термин, стремящийся к Абстрактной Красоте. Таким образом, мы не только подчеркиваем преемственность, но и выявляем различия между интерпретациями Платона и Абая, которые выражаются в онтологическом подходе первого и экзистенциальном подходе второго. Было сделано заключение, что для Абая любовь характеризует личный опыт, требующий личного вовлечения, тогда как для Платона любовь воспринимается как смысл существования и путь к высшему знанию. Более того, исследование раскрывает подход Абая к пониманию бытия Бога через любовь к человечеству, подчеркивая новое толкование понятия любви в его целостной философской системе и духовном контексте.

*Ключевые слова:* Платон, Абай, любовь, бытие, существование, суфизм, гашк, магрифат, философия, духовность.

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