By CAROLYN PORTER

"Plato has little regard for the individual as individual; Platonic love is not love for persons in their ‘brute individuality,’ but in their capacity as placeholders of quality.”

Thus concluded Professor Gregory Vlastos of Princeton University in his lecture Tuesday evening on “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato”.

Dr. Vlastos used Aristotle’s remarks on love in the ‘Nicomachean Ethics’ as a standard against which to measure Plato’s concept of love. For Aristotle a man who loves in the highest sense wishes good for his beloved. Aristotle distinguishes between this most perfect love and love based on utility.

Collectivist

Plato, on the contrary, develops a theory of love based on an ontology which precludes any such love for the individual simply as an individual. The egoistic tones in the Platonic dialogues are too strong to miss, said Dr. Vlastos.

The collectivist utilitarianism of the ‘Republic,’ in which whatever a man may claim depends on the fulfillment of his job, dovetails into the conception of love in which a person is loved only insofar as he produces in and for the community. The deficiency in Plato’s concept of love becomes a sore spot in his moral system.

Social Bond

In Plato’s ideal state, individualization is to be avoided because it destroys the social bond. The ethos of the community is to love producers rather than individuals.

Dr. Vlastos pointed out that individual feeling should not destroy society, for love includes tolerance and respect for the freedom of others. In Plato’s society, however, a citizen who ceases to contribute to the community cannot even claim his right to live.

Yet the ideal state described in the ‘Republic’ is only one outcropping of the Platonic theory of love. Dr. Vlastos pointed out that the theory is an integral part of Plato’s theory of Forms. To love a person for his own sake is to be deceived by the world of ‘becoming.’ Instead, the focus should ultimately be placed on the transcendent Idea of Beauty, in which the objects of this mutable world—both animate and inanimate—only participate.

Platonic love, said Dr. Vlastos, even when it is a love of persons, is not love in the sense in which Aristotle speaks when he terms love the desire for the beloved’s well-being. Yet the Aristotelian term retains the requirement of reciprocity, and therefore cannot itself be identified with the Hebraic-Christian notion of selfless love.