

EROS IN PLOTINUS

It is undeniable that Eros is the strongest of all the powers in the world. Its effects are exquisite, even prodigious, sometimes, catalytic or destructive. In its ideal form it joins, creates, develops and keeps its creations united. This is its general idea, almost the same in every conception of love throughout history. In *Ennead* III.5 we have the chance to view Plotinus' considerations of Eros in relation to that of Socrates and to the related myths which take place in Plato's dialogues. Plotinus adapts these myths in such a way that they contribute to shaping his own theory of Eros, sometimes supporting and sometimes rejecting their various aspects. Consequently, we will deal with Eros in its various forms either as an affection or a divinity: god or daimon.

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Even if *Ennead* III.5 deals with Eros, everything in it revolves around Plotinus' hierarchical system of reality. Eros seems to have its own specific part within this special cosmic order which includes the One, the Intellect, the Soul and the Matter. According to Plotinus, these are the four levels of reality which are held together by a two-way process of interaction between them. This interaction consists, first, of the procession which is a kind of derivation of the lower from the higher. The whole process starts from the One which, according to Plotinus, is the first principle. It is the absolute beauty and it is absolutely perfect. Because of this perfection, it overflows and produces something new, which is logically lower than itself, and constitutes a new level of reality. Then the new level itself creates by referring to its source¹. This conversion is the second way of the interaction and takes place due to the product's need to reach the beauty of its source which is always superior. At this stage, we can place the function of Eros as the power which is responsible for this need and longing for beauty.

However, in order to specify the function and the position of Eros, Plotinus analyses and explores its nature following Plato's guidelines, who considers Eros both as a passion² and as a divinity³. According to these qualities, Eros can

1. Cf. *Enn.*, III. 5, 1, 21: Καὶ γὰρ ἡ φύσις πρὸς τὸ καλὸν βλέπουσα ποιεῖ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὠρισμένον βλέπει.

2. Cf. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 251 c - 252 c.

3. Cf. IDEM, *Symposium*, 203 a.



be interpreted as a subjective experience or as a substantial superhuman reality: a god or a daimon, responsible for producing the affection of love in the human soul⁴. The ultimate end of the Soul is self-completeness, which leads to self-sufficiency and immortality, and Eros is the means to this end. Completeness is obtained through satisfying the most important personal needs. These needs differ from individual to individual. Nevertheless, they always have a common starting-point: beauty. Beauty is the object of love and, through bodily and moral beauty, the Soul comes to the recollection of Ideas, a vision of which it had already during a previous life. Thus, beauty is, for Plato, a bridge between the two realms, those of the material and of the ideal worlds. Love is the means thanks to which, starting from beautiful bodies and through the medium of forms the Soul is led to absolute or ideal beauty.

Virtuous men, whose love is pure, are satisfied with beauty alone. They love beautiful bodies, with a view to sexual intercourse, because precisely these bodies are beautiful. In other words, their erotic desire for a beautiful body is a desire for the beautiful as existing within the body, rather than for the body itself⁵. Other human beings pursue both perpetuity and beauty⁶. In this case their love is mixed. Men and women love each other in order to perpetuate themselves especially in beauty, but they fail in their second purpose if their partners are not beautiful. Thus, pure love is more self-sufficient than the mixed one, although both are supposed to be good and chaste⁷. However, there are cases of deviant love; this is unacceptable because it is against nature and law, but even in this case the ultimate motivation comes from a desire for true beauty⁸. At this point, it is important to notice the vindication of sexual love which was a very sensitive subject in ancient Greek society. From Plotinus' point of view, sexual love belongs to the order of nature and becomes a moral fault only when it deviates from the proper paths and becomes unnatural.

All the above cases concern Eros as a passion which is the strongest of all passions. On the other hand, Eros as a divinity becomes the main subject of Plotinus' thoughts in treatise III. 5 and his first step is to specify the relationship between himself and Aphrodite as it emerges from the Platonic myths, namely, whether Eros is born from Aphrodite, simultaneously with her, or both. The importance of this question lies in the fact that Aphrodite is considered in the Plotinian system as the Soul itself⁹. According to Plotinus, the Soul is the image

4. Cf. *Enn.*, III. 5, 1, 8: Πλάτων... οὐ μόνον ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐγγιγνόμενόν τι πάθος εἴρηκεν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ δαίμονά φησιν αὐτὸν καὶ περὶ γενέσεως αὐτοῦ διεξῆλθεν; cf. A. H. ARMSTRONG, *Plotinus* (translation in English), *Enn.* III. 5, Loeb Classical Library, London, 1966-67, p. 167.

5. Cf. S. ROSEN, *Plato's «Symposium»*, 2d edition, Yale University Press 1987, pp. 215-216.

6. Cf. *Enn.*, III. 5, 1, 44: Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸ αἰδίου συγγενὲς τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἡ αἰδίου φύσις τὸ πρῶτως τοιοῦτον καὶ τὰ ἀπ' αὐτῆς τοιαῦτα πάντα.

7. Cf. *ibid.*, III. 5, 1, 56.

8. Cf. *ibid.*, III. 5, 1, 64: ἡ ἀγαθὴ εὐφροσύνη εἰς κακὸν τὴν ἐκπτώσιν πολλάκις.

9. Cf. *Ibid.*, III. 5, 2, 20: τὴν δὲ οὐρανίαν λεγομένην ἐκ Κρόνου νοῦ ὄντος ἐκείνου ἀνάγκη ψυχὴν.

of the Intellect. Its function refers to the organization of the universe and its action takes place somewhere between eternity and time, the intelligible and the sensible world. However, the unity of the Soul comes from the totality of individual souls¹⁰.

Plotinus, considers Eros as the son of Aphrodite. The same view was held by Plato in *Phaedrus*¹¹. Moreover, Plotinus takes into account what has been supported during Pausanias' speech in Plato's *Symposium*; namely, the distinction between two Aphrodites, (a) the Heavenly and (b) the Pandemos¹²: (a) the former is the daughter of Kronos (Intellect)¹³; she is pure, almost unmixed, transcendent, the most divine kind of Soul, which resides in the noetic world like a solar halo¹⁴. Her activity is directed towards the Intellect, due to her strong affinity to it. As a result of the Soul's passionate love and, consequently, of her intense vision, Eros comes into existence and becomes a kind of intermediary between them. Hence it is a reality always oriented towards a beauty external to it and it is so pure that it almost belongs to the domain of the gods; (b) the latter Aphrodite is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. She is the soul of the universe, World - Soul coined by Plato¹⁵, immanent in it and close to Matter. She is a mixed soul, lower than the pure heavenly one. However, as a soul, she has a strong desire for beauty, too¹⁶, so that she produces her own Eros just like the pure one does. This Eros, the mixed one, arouses the upward desire in souls within the sensible world, through the sexual desire of the human beings, and in the World-Soul itself as well.

The World-Soul consists of all the individual souls which exist in the World and which have their own particular Eros, even the souls of animals¹⁷. Likewise, there is a World-Eros, the Eros of the universe itself, which consists of all the individual ones. Like a lover's eye, the eye of the Soul, i.e. the mixed Eros, may look either upwards or downwards as a mediator between both worlds, the intelligible and the sensible. Such an Eros is a daimon. It cannot be a

θειοτάτην εἶναι...; cf. *ibid.*, III 5, 8, 15: ἡ δὲ Ἀφροδίτη αὐτοῦ οὕσα καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν τετάσσεται κατὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγλᾶν καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄκακον καὶ ἀβρὸν Ἀφροδίτη λεχθεῖσα.

10. Cf. *ibid.*, III. 5, 4, 19; cf. E. MOUTSOPOULOS, *Philosophical Problems*, vol. 2, Athens, 1987, pp. 170-171.

11. Cf. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 242 d.

12. Cf. IDEM, *Symposium*, 180 d; cf. *Enn.*, III. 5, 2, 15: Λέγομεν δὲ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην εἶναι διττήν, τὴν μὲν οὐρανίαν Οὐρανοῦ λέγοντες εἶναι, τὴν δὲ ἐκ Διὸς καὶ Διώνης, τὴν τῶν τῇδε ἐφαπτομένην ἔφορον γάμων.

13. Or the daughter of Ouranos; cf. HESIOD, *Theogony*, 188 ff; cf. PLATO, *Republic*, II, 377 e- 378 a; cf. IDEM, *Euthyphro*, 6 a-b.

14. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 2, 31: ὅθεν οὐδ' ἂν ἐκπέσοι ψυχὴ νοῦ ἐξηρητημένη πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ ἥλιος ἂν ἔχοι ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ ὅσον αὐτὸν περιλάμπει φῶς τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἰς αὐτὸν συνηρητημένον.

15. Cf. PLATO, *Timaeus*, 37 c sq.; cf. F.M. CORNFORD, *The «Timaeus» of Plato*, Cambridge, 1937, pp. 61 sq.

16. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 3, 37: Πᾶσα γὰρ ἐφίεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

17. Cf. *ibid.*, III. 5, 4, 10: Ἐχέτω δὲ ἡ μὲν ὅλη ὅλον, αἱ δ' ἐν μέρει τὸν αὐτῆς ἐκάστη.

god, because it does not come from pure Soul, but cannot be a mortal¹⁸ either, for it does not come exclusively from human beings. A daimon's nature combines passions and affections of human beings with the eternity of the gods. It is both mortal and immortal. According to Plato, daimons are superhuman, divine entities created by the gods in order to bridge the gap between them and human beings¹⁹. They carry messages to gods after prayers through them. Although daimons are allowed memory and sensation, they react without any conscious policy²⁰, as far as they are just tools in the hands of gods.

Plotinus distinguishes Eros from other daimons. Eros comes from souls which desire the good and the beautiful; the other daimons are produced within the World-Soul by various powers according to the various needs of the Universe and they always function as means between these powers and particular realities²¹. Yet, as a daimon itself, but of different origin, Eros is the subject of Diotima's myth in the *Symposium*²². Plotinus uses this myth in order to further explore the nature of Eros and explain it by interpreting and analysing the protagonists in this myth, according to which the union of Poros and Penia caused the birth of Eros. These protagonists represent totally different powers and, therefore, different qualities: Poros (plenitude) and Penia (poverty), who are presented as Eros' parents. It is obvious that we are no longer dealing with Eros as Aphrodite's son, but as her follower, born on the occasion of her birthday, celebrated by the gods. However, there is still a close relationship between Eros and Soul²³, because Penia is considered at this level as the indetermination within the Soul. Aphrodite is supposed to represent the Soul in its highest sense; specifically, the Soul of Zeus, while Zeus himself is considered as Nous (Intellect)²⁴. Thus, Eros still proceeds from Soul.

According to the myth, when Aphrodite was born, gods held a celebration and, at dinner time, Penia came close to the doors to beg. She then met Poros lying in the gardens of Zeus, drunk on nectar and, due to her own penury she devised a plan to have a child by him; she slept with him and conceived Eros. The whole action is considered as a purely celestial phenomenon having nothing to do with human beings²⁵ and as having taken place before the

18. We must consider δαίμονες as τοὺς ὁρατοὺς θεοὺς δευτέρους μετ' ἐκείνους καὶ κατ' ἐκείνους τοὺς νοητούς, ἐξηρτημένους ἐκείνων, ὥσπερ αἴγλην περὶ ἕκαστον ἄστρον (*Enn.*, III. 5, 6, 22).

19. Cf. C. NIARCHOS, *From Phenomena to Ideas*, Athens, Cardamizza 1989, p. 34.

20. Cf. J. M. RIST, *Plotinus: The road to reality*, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 207.

21. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 6, 28: Ἡ ἔρωτες μὲν, οἱ γεννῶνται ψυχῆς ἐφριμένης τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ, καὶ γεννῶσι πᾶσαι τοῦτον τὸν δαίμονα αἱ ἐν τῷδε, οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι δαίμονες ἀπὸ ψυχῆς μὲν καὶ οὗτοι τῆς τοῦ παντός, δυνάμει δὲ ἑτέροις γεννῶμενοι κατὰ χρείαν τοῦ ὅλου.

22. Cf. PLATO, *Symposium*, 203 b.

23. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 7, 8: ἦν (ἀοριστίαν) ἔχουσα ἡ ψυχὴ πρὶν τυχεῖν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

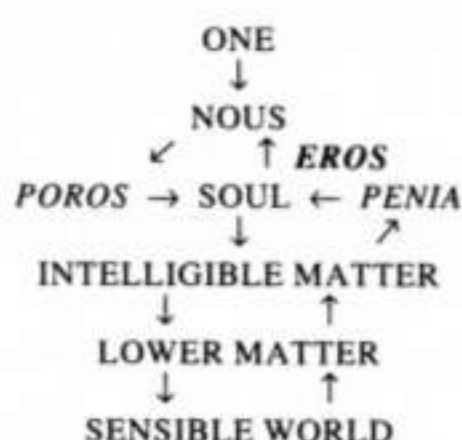
24. Cf. *ibid.*, III 5, 8, 14: ὁ μὲν (Ζεὺς) ἔσται κατὰ τὸν νοῦν, ἡ δὲ Ἀφροδίτη αὐτοῦ οὔσα καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν τετάσσεται.

25. Cf. S. ROSEN, *Plato's «Symposium»* 2d ed., Yale University Press, 1987, p. 231.



sensible world came into existence²⁶. Under these circumstances, Eros appears to be a mixture of two different elements respectively represented by Poros and Penia.

In Plotinus' interpretation, Penia is given the role of Soul which, gradually, goes through successive stages of formation. She represents the indetermination of the Soul and she is closely related to intelligible matter which is a kind of archetype of lower matter²⁷. At this stage, lower matter has not yet come into existence. At this point, the Soul, being something indeterminate and insufficient, directs its activity towards a superior principle (Poros - Nous), so as to satisfy its need for self-fulfilment. Poros represents the determination and the Reason (logos) of the Soul²⁸. He has a divine origin since he proceeds from the Nous and becomes a rational principle himself after receiving another logos from Nous. This situation is connected with the phenomenon of procession, where a rational principle falls from a superior status to an inferior one. In the case of the Platonic myth, this rational principle is represented by the nectar²⁹. The drunkenness of Poros is caused by the excessive absorption of nectar and arouses his desire for external fulfilment. At this moment, the affection of the Soul (Penia) gives Poros the chance and the stimulation to transcend himself and as determination, Poros invaded Penia, the indeterminate part of the Soul. Their union brought forth Eros, but was also the starting-point of the creation of the sensible world since, through the energy that imbues the Soul at that time, form is imposed on Matter. The interpretation of this phenomenon lies in the double, simultaneous action of every level of reality. The whole procedure can be described schematically, as follows:



It follows that Eros came into existence as a result both of the surplus of Poros' richness filling Penias need for fulfilment; a need derivating from her very nature. We thus may consider Eros as a harmony of opposites³⁰, for it contains the elements of both of his parents. Eros is a rational entity like his

26. Cf. *Enn.*, III. 5, 7, 3: ...ὥς πρὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ.

27. Cf. J. DILLON, *Ennead III. 5: Plotinus' Exegesis of the Symposium Myth*, *AIΩN, Journal of Classical Studies*, 3, 1963, p. 34; cf. *Enn.*, II 4, 12, «On Matter».

28. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 7, 9: Λόγος οὖν γενόμενος ἐν οὐ λόγῳ.

29. Cf. *ibid*, III 5, 9, 8: Ἐν οὖν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀπὸ νοῦ ὁ λόγος οὗτος.

30. Cf. S. ROSEN, *Plato's «Symposium»*, 2d ed., Yale University Press, 1987, p. 236.

father, but not a pure one, since he contains indetermination³¹. In other words, Eros is the fusion of the opposite aspects of the Soul which refers to (a) the lack, (b) the aspiration and (c) the memory of rational principles that come into the Soul in order to complete it. In relation to the Soul, Eros contains a boundless, irrational and unlimited striving that renders him incomplete and insatiable. He continues to need the supremacy of beauty even if he has acquired a share of plenitude (due to Poros), as opposed to the inferiority and poverty of the Soul and he craves the enrichment that comes from the «treasures» of beauty. These are the fundamental conditions for the existence of Eros³².

One is confronted again with the duality of Eros' nature as a daimon who combines human and divine elements. After this exploration, Plotinus leads us again to his initial qualification of Eros as the daimon who inspires human beings to love the beautiful, because through the perception of beauty they can grasp immortality, their ultimate purpose. Moreover, Plotinus' extensive analysis of the generative causes of Eros offers a complete profile of him as a principle, and discloses some of his additional qualities, bequeathed to him by his parents.

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Plotinus' conception of Eros is a highly important one. It places Eros at the very centre of creation and presents such a principle as the key to completeness, self-sufficiency and immortality. Plato's influence upon Plotinus is obviously a deep one. However, Plotinus further penetrates the problem of the nature of Eros by examining it thoroughly, while remaining constant to his own principles and consistent with his system as a whole. Even today, some people say that love is beautiful. For others, love causes troubles. Nevertheless, according to the meaning Plotinus attributes to Eros, one may understand it as an exercise. People can still feel the beauty of the energy, the vitality, the knowledge and the experience that a relationship based on Eros offers. This conception of Eros has been transmitted through the ages up to modern and contemporary thinkers, and to the average layman as well.

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31. Cf. *Enn.*, III 5, 7, 13: Καὶ ἔστι λόγος οὗτος οὐ καθαρὸς, ἅτε ἔχων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔφεσιν ἀόριστον καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἄπειρον· οὐ γὰρ μήποτε πληρώσεται ἕως ἂν ἔχῃ ἐν αὐτῷ τὴν τοῦ ἀορίστου φύσιν.

32. Cf. D. KOUTRAS, *The concept of Light in Plotinus' Aesthetics*, Athens, Univ. Press (coll. Saripolos, n° 2), 1968, p. 98.

Ο ΕΡΩΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΝ ΠΛΩΤΙΝΟ

Ἡ περὶ Ἔρωτος ἀντίληψη τοῦ Πλωτίνου εἶναι σημαντική. Ὁ φιλόσοφος τοποθετεῖ τὸν Ἔρωτα στὸ κέντρο ἀκριβῶς τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ τὸν παρουσιάζει ὡς τὸ κλειδί τῆς πληρότητος, τῆς αὐτάρκειας καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας. Ἡ ἐπίδραση τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐπὶ τοῦ Πλωτίνου ὑπῆρξε ἔντονη. Ὡστόσο, ὁ Πλωτῖνος εἰσδύει περαιτέρω στὸ πρόβλημα τῆς φύσης τοῦ Ἔρωτος γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐξετάσει ἐπισταμένως, παραμένοντας πιστὸς πρὸς τὶς ἀρχές του καὶ συνεπῆς πρὸς τὸ καθόλου σύστημά του. Ἀκόμα καὶ σήμερα πολλοὶ διατείνονται πὼς ὁ Ἔρως εἶναι ὡραῖος· ἄλλοι πὼς προκαλεῖ διαταραχές. Παρὰ ταῦτα, σύμφωνα πρὸς τὴ σημασία ποὺ ὁ Πλωτῖνος ἀναγνωρίζει στὸν Ἔρωτα, ὁ ἴδιος εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ θεωρηθῇ ὡς ἄσκησις. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάντοτε θὰ ἔχουν συνείδηση τῆς ἐνεργοῦ ὁμορφιάς, τῆς ζωτικότητας, τῆς γνώσης καὶ τῆς ἐμπειρίας ποὺ παρέχει μιὰ σχέση θεμελιούμενη ἐπάνω στὸν Ἔρωτα. Γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸν, ἀκριβῶς, καὶ ἡ περὶ Ἔρωτος ἀντίληψη τοῦ Πλωτίνου μεταδόθηκε ἀνά τοὺς αἰῶνες στοὺς νεώτερους καὶ στοὺς σύγχρονους στοχαστές, ἀλλὰ καὶ στοὺς ἀπλοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

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