

Erôs and Intelligible Desire in Plotinus' *Enneads*¹

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In *Ennead* III.5 *On Love*, Plotinus' discussion of *erôs* is underlined by Plato's discourse on love in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.² Plotinus conceives *erôs* as a purified power, which directs the soul to the intelligible realm of beauty and the world of the Forms.³ Modern scholarship considers the Plotinian *erôs* as an ascending power that is *always* directed to the higher realm of the Forms and never to the lower perceptible realm. Throughout the *Enneads*, the soul is described as purely and originally an intelligible entity in all its manifestations and expressions (ex. *Ennead* IV.8).⁴ Plotinus particularly supports a dual aspect theory of the soul, in which the homogenous *psychê* consists of two interrelated aspects - a higher intelligible part related to Intellect, and a lower perceptible part related to the sensible bodies (Caluori, 2015; Remes, 2007; Stamatellos, 2013; Stern-Gillet, 2009). However, limited attention has been paid to the intelligible aspects of the soul's desire in Plotinus' conception of *erôs*. In this context, this paper aims to revisit the view that Plotinus completely refuted the desire of the physical bodies, and consequently refuted *erôs* as a power directed to the lower perceptible realm (Ferwerda, 1965; Friedländer, 1964; Hadot, 1963; Wallis, 1995). It is argued that in light of the soul's intelligibility, desire also has an intelligible aspect when it is directed, along with the power of love, to the earthly realm and thus the true intelligible beauty of the perceptible bodies is recognized.

– I –

For Plotinus, the beauty of the natural world takes a transitional role as it embodies a manifestation of the higher hypostases (the One/Good) within the region of the perceptible reality (V.8.3.1-9; Kalligas, 2014, p. 509). Crucial is the knowledge that the pleasure taken in natural beauty is merely a byproduct and a reflection of the beauty found

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² Hereafter, all quotations from Plotinus' *Enneads* will solely refer to Armstrong's (1966-1988) translations.

³ See Bertozzi (2012, 2021); Tatarkiewicz (1980); Wallis (1995); Wiitala (2013), Vasilakis (2021).

⁴ For Plotinus' theory of the soul, see his treatises in *Ennead* IV. Also see Blumenthal (1971) and Caluori (2015).

in the intelligible world. Lack of such knowledge leads to the misdirection, misconception and possible entrapment of the soul in the lower perceptible world, estranging it from the true object of its desire of ascending to the contemplation of the Forms (Kalligas, 2014, p. 509; Wolters, 1984, p. 6-9). Indeed, the attraction to beauty, or even its reflections, may acquire positive value if motivated in the quest for the Good (III.5). Nonetheless, modern scholars oppose Plotinus' view and maintain that love for perceptible bodies are not the first degree of the ascent, but merely a term of comparison (Ferberda, 1965, p. 90; Friedländer, 1964, p. 60-62; Hadot, 1963, p. 72). However, Plotinus in his *Enneads* speaks of affective *erôs* as the first step on the road to Intellect and beyond (I.3.20; I.6.1; III.5.1.53-55; V.9.5.1).

Plotinus describes three types of erotic affection (Hadot, 1990, p. 163; Vasilakis, 2021). First (a) is the misleading love of visionless sexual drive which leads to deviance and sin. Second (b) is the mixed love of which the erotic enjoyment of aesthetic beauty may either (i) animate anamneses of sensible beauty and thus embody and convey natural beauty; or may (ii) divert erotic passion solely toward sensible forms by deifying them as if they were gods, thereby abdicating the stance of the intelligible.⁵ Third (c) is the pure type of *erôs*, dispassionate toward sexual drive and directed entirely to the inspection of aesthetic beauty, either (i) with an accompanying impression of its intelligible archetype, or (ii) without the original archetype. Of the aforementioned types, (c) (i) and (b) (i) may be identified as clement versions of erotic affection, as they attune and direct the soul toward the object of its true and inherent desire.⁶

Apart from the pure and unmixed souls, there exist those which affiliate themselves with sensible bodies and vitalize them. The soul of the universe, or the World Soul, is part of them, acquiring a companion of her own, termed the universal love. Although mixed with corporeality, it is an expression of the soul's inclination to higher truths, preserving and continuing the sensible *kosmos*, and thus maintaining it as a beautiful and harmonious whole - representing the cosmic version of the mixed love (Kalligas, 2014, p. 518). This love remains devout to intelligible beauty regardless of its

⁵ Here, the striving toward beauty risks a descent into ugliness, just as the tendency for the Good risks harm and unrighteousness (III.2.4.20-23).

⁶ Thus, in Plotinus' philosophy, there is a place for both the helper of inspection and the seeker of beauty through the continuation of its embodiment in sensible forms (Kalligas, 2014). For in fact the desire of good often involves the fall into evil. So much then, for the affections of the soul produced by evil (III.5.1.63).

impurity, and is protected against bewilderment or perversion, as can occur with the corresponding human passion. The World Soul remains separate and unitary, nonetheless, regardless that its concern for bodies, in a way, makes it divisible - authorizing one part to control the cosmic body and the others to vivify the individual ensouled beings present within it.⁷

Thus, each individual soul, with the inclusion of the World Soul, holds a distinct love of their own, relating to their particular desire (*orexis*). The cosmic *erôs* directs and enriches all of the natural world, but also leaves room for the fulfillment of the incomplete, particular desires of distinct ensouled beings (Kalligas, 2014, p. 518). The imperatives of the two loves are as follows: the first love belongs to the unmixed intelligible soul and is purely introspective and offers her access to the Good through the intelligible beings - thus being a God. The second love, although approaches the Good through sensible images of the Beautiful, remains subject to the limitations of natural necessity - thus being demonic (Kalligas, 2014) and as such, the All-Soul has an All-*Erôs*, and the partial souls each have their own *erôs* (Wolters, 1984, p. xxiii).

Moreover, Plotinus establishes the nature of the *daimōn* (the demonic *erôs*), as taken from Plato's *Symposium*, that is, born during Aphrodite's (Vulgar) birthday, from Plenty (*Poros*) and Poverty (*Penia*).⁸ Ultimately, due to their mixed status, *daimōnes* are distinguished by internal instability that manifests itself in a constant striving for plentitude, and are of second-rank nature in between gods and men (VI.7.6.26-29).⁹ The demonic *erôs* in its simplest form is a product of the combination of the two opposed tendencies of the unlimited and imperfect fondness for psychical matter toward its overlying truths, and the resourceful, way-finding plentitude of the intelligible rational principle (*logos*), which persistently directs him toward the Beautiful and, thus, the Good.

Plotinus clarifies that *erôs* has eternally and necessarily come into existence out of the longing of soul for the Good, and from the moment there was soul, there was eternally *erôs* (III.5.9).¹⁰ This *erôs*, like the soul, is a hybrid being, partaking to deficiency

⁷ In Plotinus, we solely speak of ensouled bodies (bodies belonging to souls), not embodied souls (souls as properties of bodies). See Clark 1996.

⁸ An allusion to Empedocles' *daimōn* should not be excluded, see Stamatellos 2007, p. 117-119, 166-169.

⁹ Plotinus' theory of intelligible matter and how the *daimōnes*' material dimensions came into existence is presented in *Ennead* II.4 On Matter, chapters 2 to 6.

¹⁰ "Soul is not the mother of *erôs* in the sense that Nous is father of soul. Rather, *erôs* represents soul's own activity towards the intelligible. Furthermore, this activity, i.e. *erôs*, is self-

by lusting replenishment, however, not without part in wealth, in that it searches for the missing part of its possessions.¹¹ Plainly, as it has been suggested, what is without the Good would never seek the Good.¹²

Thus, as it derives from the above analysis, *erôs* seems to be originally an intelligible entity (and thus not matter-like); but as the soul which manifests in the body (downwardly), it is the desire of the bodies, due to the soul's part to ascend to the divine (upwardly). Thus, *erôs* is a *daimōn*, which derives from the higher intelligible soul, insofar as the soul lacks the perfection of transcendent goodness (the One) and so desires it (III.5.9.83-85; Wolters, 1984, p. xxvii).

– II –

Plotinus distinguished theoretically, but not ontologically, the perceptible from the intelligible realm.¹³ It is within the intelligible realm that the soul derives from, but the perceptible in which it thrives and relishes. Like this, it acts as a *link* between the "above" and the "below", as the soul's union with the body is merely an association of an intelligible entity (the *psychē*) with the body (Blumenthal, 1971, p. 8). Plotinus' dual theory of the soul is one of dual-aspect monism, supporting the ontological unity and homogeneity of the one *psychē*, that is, that both the higher and lower elements of the

constituting of soul in that it expresses the formation of soul's inherent *Penia* by *Poros*, in other words soul's discursive apprehension of *Nous*, in the way that inchoate Intellect erotically reverts upon the One and constitutes itself as the proper hypostasis of *Nous*. This is the way to understand how *erôs* has "eternally and necessarily come into existence out of the longing of soul for the higher and good, and from the moment there was soul, there was eternally *erôs*". For more see Vasilakis, 2021, p. 15, 19.

¹¹ Thus, *erôs* is born out of *Poros* and *Penia* in that the souls desire and lack, and the anamneses that formulated the Reasons, are united in soul and produce an active direction towards the Good, and this is what Plotinus defines as *erôs* (Wolters, 1984, p.xxvii). Its mother is *Penia*, because it is neediness that leads to desire, and it is matter that is utterly needy, and the Indetermination of the desire for the good makes the desirer more matter-like the more he desires. But Form remains directed to itself, and remains solitary within itself, but when it craves to receive, it causes the would-be recipient to be matter for that which comes upon it (III.5.9).

¹² "For the desirer to be in a condition to desire (presumably the Good), it must already have the traces of the Good" (Vasilakis, 2021, p. 18).

¹³ Plotinus understood Plato's intelligible realm as consisting of three hypostases - the One, the Intellect, and Soul. Soul, part of the third hypostasis, acts as a genus (a Form to the particulars) to the two kinds of individual soul - the World Soul, and the human individual souls - both of which acquire an equal status, but with the World Soul relishing in a senior status (IV.3.6.13).

soul are two parts of the same and homogenous soul (Stubenberg, 2016).¹⁴

Plotinus seems to agree with Plato in that the human soul is tripartite, and particularly that the highest part is immortal, the most rational, can commune with the divine, and at times may descend into bodies (Fleet, 2012, p. 19; Stocks, 1915). Plotinus demonstrates the necessity of the soul's descent to appreciate that which it did not prior to the journey - how one must search within himself, just as he found the answer by searching it out by himself (Fleet, 2012, p. 54). The experience attained from the journey itself leads the soul towards interiority (internal exploration), wherein admirable and magical things take place and greatly affect one's perception of the self (Kalligas, 2009, p. 619).

In *Ennead* IV.8, Plotinus disagrees with the notion of a fallen soul, and instead asserts that the soul has a 'mission' and embarks on a journey to achieve "supreme actuality" (IV.8.1.7),¹⁵ and thus it has an intelligent *desire* to return to itself (Kalligas, 2009, p. 633). However, the soul must be careful not to lose sight of its true desire.¹⁶ Indeed, the *hamartia* of the souls is not their associations with earthly bodies per se, but their consumption with them - their obsession with the material world.¹⁷ For the souls' descent is a descent in itself, but when infused with the below, it becomes an abjection (Kalligas, 2009, p. 629). Plotinus ascribes desire as a 'need' of the soul. It is actually soul that is in need and, thus, produces the activity towards the Good, which is *erôs* (Vasilakis, 2021, p. 18).

As the "realization of its divine origin allows the entity to realize its Penia state in relation to its source", then it acts as a "receptacle for the reception of higher-level forms"

¹⁴ The distinction between the higher intelligible and lower perceptible self in Plotinus should not be mistaken as a mind-body Cartesian type dualism wherein they are distinguished as two separate entities (Stamatellos, 2013, p. 55).

¹⁵ The former implements and suggests an unplanning, a mistake, an accident - something punishable, whilst the latter suggests *purpose*.

¹⁶ "They change from the whole to being a part and belonging to themselves" (IV.8.4.15-17) and they each go their separate ways, as if tired of each other. If the soul does this for long - "flying from the All and standing apart in distinctness, and does not look toward the intelligible" (IV.8.4.19-20), it has become its own part and isolated and weak and in its separation from the whole it applies itself to, and solely cares for things outside, and is present and sinks deep into the individual part.

¹⁷ The word *hamartia* in Plotinus refers to the soul losing itself in images of beauty and thus losing their target, without those dark insinuations of moral condemnation and guilt found in sin. *Hamartanein* ("to err") is distinguished from *adikein* ("to act unjustly"), as it asserts "the missing of the mark". For more see Fleet (2012, p. 49, 69) and also II.9.9.12-14; III.2.4.39-41; III.3.5.28; IV.8.4.21-24; IV.8.6.20.

(Vasilakis, 2021, p. 19). This could be construed as the following, if *erôs* is indeed part of soul, then its realization of divine origin, that is, it's true, internal nature, allows the entity to realize it is actually in lack of something. This is the significance and the necessity of the soul's descent in order to act as a 'receptacle', by utilizing the desiring part of *erôs* as a mirror of the true beauty, to receive the higher-level form of what they find down There. It does not fall; it descends by choice.

To be freed from its fetters and ascend, it must contemplate "reality by recollection: for, in spite of everything, it always possesses something transcendent in some way" (IV.8.4.40-43). The turn of focus toward inward awareness is when the souls will discover their godlike nature (Kalligas, 2009, p. 621). This could be acknowledged as follows: if contemplating the beauty of the cosmos brings a desire for the higher beauty and intelligible beings, then, *erôs* for the perceptible (if it holds the intelligibility of the above) is actually an *erôs* for the above - a love which is also true and intelligible through the reflection of self in matter. The souls' ascent is thus possible as this power has forever, and will forever, reside in the most dominant part of the soul, the part which constitutes "us", as opposed to what is merely "our own", which remains constantly in the intelligible realm (I.1.10.7-11; III.7.3.11-27; *Phaedrus* 248a1-b1; Kalligas, 2009, p. 634). With this notion, Plotinus defines the soul as an *amphibian*, living a "double life" (IV.8.4.19) as the producer of the lower realm and a contemplator of the higher one (IV.8.8).

For Plotinus, love could be directed to the lower perceptible realm since the world of discursive reasoning is the result of the higher intelligible soul (III.5.1.26-36; Kalligas, 2014, p. 509). Thus, the beauty reflected in bodies is the beauty which originated from the higher beauty of Intellect. When the descended souls are found to appreciate and subsequently desire the true beauty of bodies (the beauty that lies within, and not that of superficiality), they actually acquire desire for the higher world of *Nous*.¹⁸

Erôs for bodies should not be love for pleasure, but love for internality, thus the true beauty is an inner-beauty reflected in the earthly world (Kalligas, 2009, p. 621). Via the descent, the souls are placed in a position of uncertainty, by which they must free themselves from what they knew and let themselves relish in the new in order to find themselves by looking within.¹⁹ This is the precise moment in which the descended soul

¹⁸ The *demiurge*, to ensure that his creations would possess *noesis*, (and of course that which holds *Nous* must also have soul), created the cosmos as a living being with knowledge of the truth (*Timaeus* 30b1-8; Kalligas, 2009, p. 627).

¹⁹ "Actuality [...] reveals hidden potency" (IV.8.5.45-46), as each soul that witnessed the outer

is freed from chains and through its ability to contemplate *real* beings by recollection, has begun to ascend, setting itself above all else in the realm of Intellect (IV.8.1.3-8; Fleet, 2012, p. 61).

What's more, taking into consideration Plotinus' declaration that *erôs* is Good, filled with Beauty, and is "eternally necessary by law of nature" (see page 7; III.5.1.19-20), then it is plausible to assume that the descent in itself is ultimately good, further implying that desiring and appreciating beauty in the lower perceptible world is good, and actually, necessary. The *psychê* becomes a separate hypostasis and emanates from the hypostasis of Intellect by acquiring desire in its return (IV.7.13.1-6; Wiitala, 2013, p. 651). When a soul comes to reminiscence, it still cherishes sensible beauty (III.5.1.34-35; III.5.1.60-61).²⁰ In light of this position, although it may be inferior to what produced it (soul), Plotinus writes that *erôs* is a hypostasis in itself. Although some scholars take this to mean that *erôs* is a substantial entity, being distinct from and external to soul, Vasilakis (2021) posits that a closer reading to III.5 depicts that *erôs* is actually internal to soul. He argues that *erôs* is the activity that constitutes soul as a proper entity, and could also be considered as soul

By 'falling' and losing purpose in its mission to fill the below with Intellect, the soul begins to appreciate the surface, which is needed to appreciate the self (Kalligas, 2009) - the outer for the inner. If the outer world reflects the beauty of the inner world, then love for the outer world is an indirect love for the inner, and above to the higher. Therefore, it could be assumed that *erôs* in Plotinus is a desire either directed to the inner-higher beings, or to the outer-lower beings, solely if the latter are manifesting the true beauty of their intelligible origin, from where they derive and spring.²¹ When the souls desire something, it is an intelligible reflection of the World Soul of which they stemmed from, and so, for an entity such as the soul to be, or to exist, is to be erotic, and be directed to the intelligible realm.²²

richness, marvels at the inner reality (Fleet, 2012, p. 64).

²⁰ Thus opposing Hadot (1963) when claiming that sensual love disappears when the Good appears.

²¹ "For final results are referred to the principle from which they spring" (IV.8.5.10-21).

²² "If love takes place in a vertical scheme, where an inferior entity has *erôs* for its higher progenitor, then Plotinus' entire ontology is erotic". For more see Vasilakis (2021).

– III –

Enneads I.6 *On Beauty* and V.8 *On the Intelligible Beauty* provide an enlightened philosophical framework to understand Plotinus' aesthetic philosophy, as well as the relationship of physical to moral beauty, and how both are originated from the intelligible beauty of the world of the Forms and its supreme principle, the Good. In particular, throughout *Ennead* I.6, we understand the souls' encouragement to ascend through all the visible and invisible beauties of derived reality to the source of all beauty, the Good, on the journey of the human mind to the divine Intellect. Plotinus maintains that beauty is a thing of simplicity,²³ acquiring the character of *unitas multiplex* - as beauty for him is related to light, and not as a means of measurement (Gál, 2011; Kalligas, 2014, p. 196).²⁴ The notion that even simple things can be beautiful may be referred to the lower-perceptible realm, of which the cosmos, for Plotinus, could indeed be a thing of beauty, which would thus entail that ensouled bodies are also a thing of beauty.

The soul is not beautiful because of its well proportions, but because of its beautiful separate parts.²⁵ Beauty of the soul is apparent in its ascent, via knowledge and the virtues to the higher intelligible Being (I.3.2.8-13). The primary characteristic of beauty in sensible bodies is something which the souls become aware of at first glance - of which the souls speak as if they understand, recognize, welcome, and adapt to it.²⁶ But, when they encounter the ugly, they abandon it, leave it, lose rhythm and tune and thus become alienated from it and feel pain (I.6.2.2- 8; Kalligas, 2014, p. 199).

Everything different is persistently united into the simplicity of Intellect, which is pure self-reflection (Beierwaltes, 1986, p. 302). This can be correlated with the notion of individual ensouled bodies appreciating one another, that is, something perceived as

²³ In doing so, Plotinus is said to oppose beauty as being symmetrical (the Stoic viewpoint).

²⁴ In support, Tatarkiewicz (1970) suggested that Plotinus opposed the Great Theory which states that beauty is consisted in the proportion of parts, specifically in the arrangements, size, quality, and number of the parts.

²⁵ It is important to clarify that Plotinus did not refute the correlation of beauty with good proportion, rather, according to him, being well-proportioned is a consequence and manifestation of the presence of beauty, not its cause (Kalligas, 2014, p. 197). Namely, that beauty produces good proportions. It cannot be something proportioned and measured, as this means nothing single and simple can be beautiful, but only something composite (I.6.1.34-36).

²⁶ "The soul, since it is by nature what it is and is related to the higher kind of reality in the realm of being, when it sees something akin to it or a trace of its kindred reality, is delighted and thrilled and returns to itself and remembers itself and its own possessions" (I.6.2.9-14).

different in their primary nature, and by freeing themselves to find beauty in the opposite, and thus, desire - coming to love it, consequently coming to love themselves (self-reflection). Hence, once again desire could be directed to the lower perceptible bodies, solely if they are beautiful in the Plotinian sense (internal beauty, not that of superficiality).

This is a secondary byproduct of that essential ontological relation between the higher intelligible and lower perceptible that the soul has the ability to recognize instantly, independently of its estimation of specific proportions, “through an experience of *erôs* for the supra-sensible archetypes, the Forms” (Kalligas, 2014, p. 194, 509; Wolters, 1984, p. 6-9).²⁷ Hence, Plotinus views the Beautiful as manifesting the intelligible world as a whole (Kalligas, 2014; Tatarkiewicz, 1980, p. 137), with the perceptibles being beautiful as a refracting image of the cause of their being due to their participation with the Forms, and the intelligibles being beautiful in themselves as an inherent quality and activity of theirs (Kalligas, 2014, p. 199-200).

The special nature of Intellect, of which “each of its parts is like the whole and the whole is like each of its parts”, has led them to conclude that Intellect per se is the ultimate and primary face of beauty, but not the only one (Beierwaltes, 1986).²⁸ The form “within the soul,” just as is the sensible one, is different from the intelligible Form, even though it resembles it (I.2.1.40-43; Kalligas, 2014, p. 201). This clearly indicates how the beauty outside reflects the beauty inside. Desire for the outside *true* beauty is a desire for the inner beauty from which the outer beauty originates. In other words, if desire becomes contemplation, then *erôs* for the bodies is an *erôs* for the souls, and higher, for the Forms. To achieve internal progress and go from here to “There” (1.6.8) one must be able to see the beauty that informs and outshines superficial beauties that are accessible to human senses.²⁹ Vasilakis (2021) portrays this by clarifying that “an entity is fulfilled, insofar as

²⁷ For Plotinus, what is ideally “Beautiful” (*to kalon*) is merely a collective term for the set of intelligibles, the perceptible figurations of which is also “beautiful” (*kala*) to the extent that they faithfully correspond to the former, insofar as in them the resistances of matter have been successfully subdued (Kalligas, 2014, p. 194).

²⁸ “The house outside, apart from the stones, is the inner form divided by the external mass of matter, without parts but appearing in many parts” (I.6.3.9-14). The soul ‘outside’ with the Form ‘inside’ will concern relations of ‘resemblance’ and ‘communion’ (Kalligas, 2014, p. 201).

²⁹ When lovers assemble themselves by turning away from the influence of the body, and gather themselves together (ascending as “coming to be alone”; V.1.6.11-12) by turning away from unreasoned belief, is when they finally see their inward beauty and they long to be with themselves (I.6.5.7-9; Kalligas, 2014, p. 203). This is when they see in themselves, or in others, a “greatness of soul, a righteous life, a pure morality, courage with its noble look, and dignity and

it actualized its capacity to see”. Through this, he posits that during the first beautiful ascent toward the Good, Plotinus assures us that, when one has ‘already ascended’, he ‘has already become sight... For this eye alone sees the great beauty” (p. 22).

Sensible beauty is merely the starting point for the good life,³⁰ since it is the departing from selfishness in the interest of seeing the real internal beauty (Kalligas, 2014, p. 212; Miles, 1999, p. 43; Murdoch, 1970, p. 64).³¹ Only the self-disciplined souls can see it, and thus ascend to the intelligible beauty.³² When seeing bodily beauties one must reject them, knowing that they are images, traces, shadows, and immediately hurry to what they image (Intellect). This is the first pure path of looking inside the beauty of the higher beings,³³ and another point in which Plotinus does not consider the downward notion of the soul as ugly, but indeed as a required mission in order to achieve supreme actuality.³⁴

The Good is the primary source of beauty (I.6.9.49-50), and Plotinus makes it clear that true beauty is in the intelligible world, not in the perceptible (I.6.9.50-55). Those in the lower perceptible realm are therefore said to see the Beautiful³⁵ as being situated along the path leading to the Good (V.9.2.24-26), whilst those in the higher intelligible realm (from the supreme vantage point of the Beyond) contemplate beauty as something

modesty advancing in a fearless, calm and unperturbed disposition, and the godlike light of intellect shining upon all this” (I.6.5.16-20).

³⁰ “In order for the eye to become fulfilled with the images that emanate from the object of its vision, it is the eye, i.e. the agent, that must act first” (Vasilakis, 2021, p. 22).

³¹ This viewpoint aligns with this essay and opposes modern scholars (Ferwerda, 1965; Friedländer, 1964; Hadot, 1963).

³² “Let him who can, follow and come within, and *leave outside the sight of his eyes* and not turn back to the bodily splendors which he saw before” (I.6.8.5-8).

³³ Indeed, “the subject’s self-reflecting comprises the reflecting subject itself, and that the subject is thus part of the reflected object” (Gál, 2011, p. 176). This activity of self-thinking is enabled via the journey to the lowest rank and the return to the highest one, by means of “unfolding” and “movement”, “process”, or “activity” (Gál, 2011, p. 177; VI.7.13). By uniting with Intellect, the soul enters the realm of beauty, as everything becomes everything else in Intellect, hence Intellect’s simple, dynamically all-encompassing (and thus diverse) nature (Hadot, 1993, p. 37; V.8.4; IV.8.1.58-61). Thus, there exists an *erôs* for the beauty “There” (Intellect), and an *erôs* for here (ensouled bodies which are beautiful).

³⁴ “An eye is filled, an entity is fulfilled, insofar as it actualizes its capacity to see” (Vasilakis, 2021, p. 22).

³⁵ Plotinus emphasizes the active element of the actuality of seeing when stating that “it is perhaps rather from this that *erôs* gets its name, because it comes into Existence out of vision, *horasis*”. If this is the case, as Vasilakis puts it, then “*erôs* himself can be contracted with its bearer, soul”, and thus “*erôs* is soul’s activity as it strains toward good”. For more see Vasilakis, 2021, p. 22.

to be found at the lower level. Thus, to choose it instead of the Good would mean degradation, or even sin (Kalligas, 2014, p. 217).

– IV –

In conclusion, the Plotinian soul is an intelligible entity which belongs to both the higher intelligible and lower perceptible realms (IV.8), and the notion that the perceptible beauty found in bodies is a reflection of the higher intelligible beauty found and rooted in the Forms (I.6), then, desire, and ultimately *erôs*, toward the perceptible bodies would be accepted by Plotinus, if the soul in *erôs* acts in contemplation of the true beauty of the sensible bodies; the beauty which is actually found in the intelligible realm of the Forms. It is suggested that for Plotinus there is no omission of the direct upward love for the Good, the Forms, and the higher beauties. It is plausible to suggest a double path for *erôs* - as a desire directly for the intelligible Forms, but also a desire for bodies, so long as they are contemplated as manifestations of the above, stemming from internal desire. In other words, recognizing the outside is an acquaintance and desire for the inside, and ultimately higher beauty. By recognizing beauty with outer sight, one does not necessarily fall into and chase superficial beauty. Rather, the souls are able to use their inner sight and run to their intelligible roots, because Intellect is true and ultimate beauty. This is another indirect way to find and achieve beauty. This is desire filtered through true contemplation of the inner soul. In support of this argument, Plotinus urges the appropriate utilization of senses as intelligible tools, to not desire, but to contemplate and so attain true *erôs* (Kalligas, 2014, p. 199). Indeed, Plotinus, when speaking of the world outside and below, does not refer to it as ugly, but as something beautiful as it is a production of the World Soul (IV.8). Hence, souls are not lower in actuality, only their material aspects are, and indeed, they remain beautiful. Thus, *erôs* for the lower is *erôs* for the higher, and ultimately, *erôs* for the reflection of the self in matter. This is the principle of love. Perceptible bodies for Plotinus can be redefined as animated entities which reflect the soul; matter can be redefined as a mirror; images as a starting point for desire and love; and ultimately, the universe as an opportunity for the soul to learn. It is reasonable to conclude that Plotinus' attitude towards love for the bodies was not so un-Platonically negative as modern scholars tend to perceive.

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