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Eros as Soul's 'Eye' in Plotinus: What does it see and not see?

Lela Alexidze

In memory of Professor Werner Beierwaltes

I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss those aspects of Plotinus' understanding of Plato's Eros, which refer to Plotinus' definition of love as an 'eye' of a desirer. In Plotinus' interpretation of Plato's *Symposium* (*Ennead* III 5 [50], "On Love"), desirer is a soul and, consequently, Eros is soul's 'eye', its 'activity' (*energeia*), by means of which the soul strives toward its origin, parent, and cause – the intellect and, by means of the intellect, toward the supreme One. In the *Ennead* "On Love" Plotinus discusses different kinds of souls: the universal / divine soul, the cosmic soul, and individual souls. All of them have their own Eros. We shall analyze the possible differences between Eroses of different kinds of souls while answering the following questions: What does Eros as soul's eye see and not see in the case of (a) the divine soul ("heavenly Aphrodite"), which is independent of a body: (b) the world-soul, and (c) various human souls?¹ Are the objects of 'seeing' different for different kinds of souls, or the object remains the same but the results of 'seeing' are different? Moreover, we shall try to understand, whether there is a difference between soul's ability to be close to the intellect, on the one hand, and love, as soul's 'eye' and its activity on the other, or not. We base our discussion mainly on Plotinus' above-mentioned *Ennead*, and, occasionally, in those cases, when this treatise does not provide us with sufficient material for finding an answer to our questions, we

¹ On the different abilities of 'seeing' well or badly by different kinds of souls, including those of 'true lovers', see Plot. *Enn.* I 6 [1], 1-2; 5, 1-17; 32-38. On the 'gaze' of souls see Ousager (2005) 42-44.

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refer to other texts of Plotinus, as to a supporting material for our theme.²

II. Short synopsis of the *Ennead* “On Love” and love’s designation as ‘eye’

Before we discuss the characteristic of Eros as soul’s eye, we make a short synopsis as a reminder of the *Ennead* III 5:

(1) *III 5 [50], 1, 1-2*: Eros is an affection (*pathos*) of a soul and also a daimon. This means that it is not an affection arising in a soul but a kind of existence (*hypostasis*) too. Its existence is caused by soul’s desire to be joined with beauty of some kind.

(2) *III 5 [50], 2, 15-41*: Plotinus discusses the difference between twofold Aphrodite: the one is “heavenly” and “the other, ‘born of Zeus and Dione’, is involved, as patroness, with sexual union here below”. The heavenly soul is directly derived from the intellect and does not participate in matter (this is the reason why it is called “motherless”). Thus, attached to its begetter – the intellect (Kronos), the heavenly soul, in its passion for the intellect, “has given birth to Eros”, together with whom it now looks toward the intellect. Therefore, Eros is, as Plotinus says, “an eye to the desirer. To the lover it provides a medium through which to see his beloved.”³

² For Greek texts of Plotinus, I used Henry-Schwyzler (ed.) (1964-1982), 3 vols, and Beutler-Theiler (ed.) (1956-1978), 6 vols. For English version of Plotinus’ treatise “On Love” I used Wolters’ translation, supplied with a thorough study and commentaries: Wolters (1984). I consulted also the new translation of the *Ennead* “On Love” in: Gerson (ed.) (2018) 13; 291-304, and the commentary on this *Ennead* by Kalligas (2014), vol. I, 501-534. For all other *Enneads* I used Armstrong’s translation: Armstrong (ed.) (1966-1988), 7 vols. For Plotinus’ theory of love in context of the relationship between Eros and vision, French editions by Hadot of the *Enneads* III 5 [50], VI 7 [38], and VI 9 [9], supplied with the commentaries of the editor, are very useful (Hadot (ed.) (1990); Hadot (ed.) (1987) 25-30, 37-41, 49-69; Hadot (ed.) (1994) 177-181; 194-201; 203). Among the studies of Plotinus’ philosophy of soul and self, in which his theory of love, including characteristic of Eros as the ‘eye’ of the soul, is discussed, see Yhap (2003), 72-96, and Mortley (2013) 6-11, 55-67. For the relationship between Eros and vision in Plotinus see the detailed study by Vasilakis (2014) 33-40; 48-52. On the *Ennead* “On Love” see also Wurm (2008) 119-140, and Vasilakis (2015) 68-75. For the thorough analysis of Plotinus’ theory of love the monograph of Bertozzi (2012), with a detailed bibliography, is very helpful.

³ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXI-XXII. As in different translations and studies the capitalization of such entities as divine soul, world-soul, individual soul, intellect, love, etc. is quite variable, I decided not to use the capital letters for them in my text, except the supreme One and proper names. Moreover, I apply the neuter

(3) *III 5 [50], 3, 6-37*: Eros is hypostasis - an existence, produced by soul's activity while soul is looking intensely toward its cause "as to its own good. The object seen is such that the seer must "by the intensity of its gaze bring forth something worthy of herself and of the object seen. It is therefore out of that which is strenuously active towards the visual object and out of that which 'streams off', so to speak, from the object, that Eros is born, an eye that is filled".⁴

(4) *III 5 [50], 4, 9-25*: "The All-soul has an All-Eros, and [...] the partial Souls have their own Eros. But just as the relation of the microcosmic Soul to the All-soul is not one of separation, but of inclusion, so that all Souls constitute a unity, in the same way each microcosmic Eros stands in this relation to the All-Eros." Whether Eros is god or daimon, depends on that to what kind of soul it is attached: "Eros is Soul's activity as it strains toward good. Since therefore it is this Eros which 'leads' each microcosmic Soul towards the good, the Eros of the upper Soul may be considered a god, which keeps Soul eternally attached to that higher Reality, but the daimon is the Eros of mixed Soul."⁵

(5) *III 5 [50], 5, 15-18*: Eros of this world is a daimon; but though it is of this world, it is not identical to the world itself.

(6) *III 5 [50], 6, 9-20*: Plotinus explains the difference between gods and daimons: gods are free from affections "but we attribute affections to daimons, and say that they are everlasting. Next in order after the gods, they are now close to us men." Eros of the pure soul is a god, while Eros of the souls which are in the sensible world should be called daimons. Plotinus supposes that "it is preferable to say that there is no daimon in the intelligible, but that, even if there is an Idea of daimon, this, too, is a god."⁶

(7) *III 5 [50], 7, 1-24*: Plotinus discusses the philosophical meaning of "nectar": Plato's words that in the birth of Eros it was with nectar that Poros was drunk, "since wine did not yet exist",⁷ "indicate that Eros' birth was prior to the sensible, and that Penia shared in the nature of the intelligible [...]. The meaning is that it is out of Form and Indetermination - an Indetermination characterizing Soul when it has

gender to the entities like soul, intellect, Eros, using for them the pronoun 'it', and not 'she' or 'he'.

⁴ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXII.

⁵ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXIII.

⁶ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXIV.

⁷ Plat. *Symp.* 203 b 5-6.

not yet achieved the good [...] that Penia gives birth to the Existence Eros.” Consequently, Eros is always needy, “it is neither perfect nor self-sufficient, but deficient, being born out of indeterminate desire and self-sufficient Reason. (This is not the Reason which is pure, since it contains within itself a desire which is indeterminate, irrational and infinite. For it will never be fulfilled as long as it contains Indetermination within itself.)” Thus, Eros is by its nature *aporos* - deficient: “even in the act of achieving its goal, it is again needy. For it cannot be fulfilled because its mixed nature forbids it [...]. Even if it does achieve fulfillment momentarily, it does not retain it.”⁸

(8) *III 5 [50], 8, 14-20*: According to Plato, Poros entered into the garden of Zeus.⁹ Plotinus expresses the relation between Zeus (male) and Aphrodite (female) in the language corresponding to the ontological entities: Zeus is intellect and Aphrodite is soul of the intellect (Zeus).

(9) *III 5 [50], 9, 1-48*: Plotinus gives a detailed and final philosophical interpretation of the myth of Eros, commenting on the ontological roles of almost all actors of the myth. Thus, Poros is the reason (*logos*) - representative of the forms in the intelligible realm; the reasons together constitute Poros. Saying that “Poros is drunk with nectar” means that it gets its fulfillment from outside, as reasons fall from a higher hypostasis (intellect) into a lower one (soul). Otherwise is in the case of the intellect: “it possesses itself in satiety and it is not ‘drunk’ in its self-possession, for it does not possess anything extraneous.” As for the relationship between the intellect and the soul, Plotinus explains it in this way: “Soul exists in union with Intellect, comes to independent existence out of Intellect and then again is filled with Reasons.” As for Eros, it “accompanies” eternally soul, coming “into existence out of the longing of Soul for the higher and good”. Thus, the unity of Poros (reason) and Penia (matter) - possession and memory of reasons, combined with lack of them - produces an active orientation of the soul towards the good, and this is Eros.¹⁰

Now we pick out those fragments from Plotinus’ treatise “On Love”, in which Eros is characterized as soul’s eye:

⁸ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXIV-XXV.

⁹ Plat. *Symp.* 203 b 5-6.

¹⁰ Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXVI-XXVII.

III 5 [50], 2, 32-46

Being intent, therefore, upon Kronos (or, if you like, upon Kronos' father, Uranus), Soul has come alive with activity and a feeling of affinity for him, and in her passion for him has given birth to Eros, together with whom she now **looks** toward him. Her activity has produced an Existence or Substance, and now the two of them **look** upward: both the mother and the beautiful Eros, he who is born as an Existence that is eternally set towards Another that is beautiful, and whose Being consists in this.

Being in the middle, as it were, between desirer and desired, it is **an eye** to the desirer. To the lover it provides a medium through which **to see** his beloved, while **the eye** itself precedes **vision**, that is: prior to making possible this instrument-mediated **vision**, the instrument itself is **filled** with **the image seen**. It **sees** earlier, to be sure, but by no means in the same way, since **the eye** does impress **the visual image** on **the seer** but itself only enjoys **the vision** of the beautiful one as it runs past. (Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXII)¹¹

III 5 [50], 3, 3-15

For the pure Soul, too, had sprung as a Substance from the activity of the one preceding it, and so lives – from the activity, that is, of the Substance of true beings, the Substance that also **looks** – and **looks intensely** – towards that Other, which is primary Substance. It is the former that is **the first object of Soul's vision**, and she **looks** towards it as to its own good, and rejoices in its **seeing**. **The object seen** is such that the **seer** cannot behold casually but must, by a kind of its **gaze**, bring forth something worthy of herself and of **the object seen**. It is therefore out of that which is strenuously active towards **the visual object**, and out of that which “streams off”, so to speak,

¹¹ ἐφεπομένη δὴ τῷ Κρόνῳ ἢ, εἰ βούλει, τῷ πατρὶ τοῦ Κρόνου Οὐρανῷ ἐνήργησέ τε πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ᾠκείωθη καὶ ἐρασθεῖσα Ἔρωτα ἐγέννησε καὶ μετὰ τοῦτου πρὸς αὐτὸν **βλέπει**, καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτῆς ὑπόστασιν καὶ οὐσίαν εἰργάσατο, καὶ ἄμφω ἐκεῖ **βλέπει**, καὶ ἡ γειναμένη καὶ ὁ καλὸς Ἔρωσ ὁ γεγενημένος ὑπόστασις πρὸς ἄλλο καλὸν αἰεὶ τεταγμένη καὶ τὸ εἶναι ἐν τούτῳ ἔχουσα, μεταξύ ὡσπερ ποθοῦντος καὶ ποθουμένου **ὀφθαλμὸς** ὁ τοῦ ποθοῦντος παρέχων μὲν τῷ ἐρῶντι δι' αὐτοῦ **τὸ ὄρᾶν** τὸ ποθούμενον, προτρέχων δὲ αὐτὸς καὶ πρὶν ἐκείνῳ παρασχεῖν τὴν **τοῦ ὄρᾶν** δι' ὄργανου δύναμιν αὐτὸς **πιμπλάμενος τοῦ θεάματος**, πρότερος μὲν, οὐ μὴν ὁμοίως **ὄρῶν** τῷ ἐνστηρίζειν μὲν ἐκείνῳ **τὸ ὄραμα**, αὐτὸν δὲ καρποῦσθαι **τὴν θεάν** τοῦ καλοῦ αὐτὸν παραθέουσαν.

from the object, that Eros is born, **an eye that is filled**: like **image-mediated vision**. It is perhaps rather from this that Eros gets its name, because it comes to Existence out of **vision, horasis**. (Trans. by Wolters (1984), XXII)¹²

III 5 [50], 3, 19-21

This, then, is the nature of the Eros of the upper Soul, which itself also **looks upward**, since it attends her and is brought forth from her and by her, and is quite content to **behold** the gods. (Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXII)¹³

III 5 [50], 3, 27-30

Now, since there had to be a Soul also of this world, the other Eros came into Existence as well, this time together with the World-Soul, as **an eye** also to her, and born also of her desire. (Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXII)¹⁴

Before we start to discuss the designation of Eros as soul's 'eye' in the *Ennead* "On Love", and the question, what it can see, I shall try to consider this issue in the context of Plotinus' philosophy of 'seeing'.

III. Soul's 'eye' and Plotinus' theory of vision

The definition of Eros as soul's 'eye' in the *Ennead* "On Love" is interesting for following reasons: First, 'seeing', contemplation, vision, and similar activities are very important issues in Plotinus'

¹² και γὰρ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη οὐσία ἦν γενομένη ἐξ ἐνέργειας τῆς πρὸς αὐτῆς [καὶ ζῶσα] καὶ τῆς τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖνο **ὀρῶσα**, ὃ πρώτη ἦν οὐσία, καὶ **σφόδρα ὀρῶσα**. καὶ **πρώτον** ἦν **ὄραμα** αὐτῆ τοῦτο καὶ **ἑώρα** ὡς πρὸς ἀγαθὸν αὐτῆς καὶ ἔχαιρεν **ὀρῶσα**, καὶ **τὸ ὄραμα** τοιοῦτον ἦν, ὡς μὴ πάρεργον ποιεῖσθαι **τὴν θεὰν τὸ ὀρῶν**, ὡς τῆ οἶον ἠδονῆ καὶ τάσει τῆ πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ σφοδρότητι **τῆς θεάς** γεννησαί τι παρ' αὐτῆς ἄξιον αὐτῆς καὶ **τοῦ ὀράματος**. ἐξ οὖν τοῦ ἐνεργούντος συντόμως περὶ **τὸ ὀρόμενον** καὶ ἐκ τοῦ οἶον ἀπορρέοντος ἀπὸ **τοῦ ὀρωμένου ὄμμα πληρωθέν**, οἶον μετ' εἰδώλου **ὄρασις**, Ἔρωσ ἐγένετο **τάχα** που καὶ τῆς προσηγορίας ἐντεῦθεν μᾶλλον αὐτῷ γεγεννημένης, ὅτι ἐξ **ὀράσεως** τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχει.

¹³ ὁ μὲν δὲ τῆς ἄνω ψυχῆς Ἔρωσ τοιοῦτος ἂν εἴη, **ὀρῶν** καὶ αὐτὸς **ἄνω**, ἅτε ὀπαδὸς ὢν ἐκείνης καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνης καὶ παρ' ἐκείνης γεγεννημένος καὶ θεῶν ἀρκούμενος **θέα**.

¹⁴ ἔπει δὲ καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴν εἶναι ἔδει, ὑπέστη μετὰ ταύτης ἤδη καὶ ὁ ἄλλος Ἔρωσ **ὄμμα** καὶ ταύτης, ἐξ **ὀρέξεως** καὶ αὐτὸς γεγεννημένος.

philosophy, because on the art and method of viewing depends, in a certain sense, not only an ontological, cosmological, or anthropological status of a being, (or *vice versa*: the quality of 'seeing' depends on the ontological status of a being) but also the process and the result of creation or production. Secondly, besides its 'objective' (*i.e.* ontological) significance, 'seeing' in Plotinus' philosophy is an existentially important concept for each of us personally, as far as our spiritual ascension and our descent into the realm of corporeal reality as well, depends, to a certain extent, on our personal ability of 'seeing', or exercising in 'seeing'. This means that our ability of 'seeing' is or can be a very dynamic one: it can either become more 'sharp' or lose its quality. Briefly, our ability of 'seeing' characterizes us all, as human beings, as far as we all possess a rational soul, on the one hand, and it also qualifies each of us individually, *i.e.* differently, depending on our personal choices, characters and abilities, in the various conditions and periods of our lives, on the other. Therefore, the reason, why the definition of Eros as soul's 'eye' and activity¹⁵ in Plotinus' philosophy is existentially interesting for us even nowadays, is that the differences in souls' abilities of 'seeing' are not only to some extent predetermined by the divine providence, our human nature, and our first choice, but they are also caused and can be regulated by our individual ethical, spiritual and intellectual progress or regress during our lives. Therefore, while the 'eyes' of human souls and their ability of seeing are, to a certain extent, differently pre-

¹⁵ Here are two fragments from Plotinus' treatise "On Love" in which Eros is characterized as soul's activity (*energeia*): III 5 [50], 4, 18-23: οἶσθαι δὲ χρῆ καὶ Ἀφροδίτας ἐν τῷ ὄλῳ πολλὰς, δαίμονας ἐν αὐτῷ γενομένας μετ' Ἐρωτος, ῥυεῖσας ἐξ Ἀφροδίτης τινὸς ὄλης, ἐν μέρει πολλὰς ἐκείνης ἐξηρητημένας μετὰ ἰδίων ἐρώτων, εἴπερ ψυχὴ μήτηρ ἔρωτος, Ἀφροδίτη δὲ ψυχὴ, **ἔρωτος δὲ ἐνέργεια ψυχῆς ἀγαθοῦ ὀριγνωμένης**. "But we must also hold that there are many Aphrodites in the world (daimons which have entered the world together with an Eros, having flowed forth from a kind of 'All-Aphrodite'; a plurality of partial Aphrodites in dependence, together with their personal Eroses, on that All-Aphrodite), if it is true that Soul is mother of Eros, Aphrodite is Soul, and **Eros is Soul's activity** as it strains toward good". (Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXIII). III 5 [50], 9, 45-48: ἐκ Πόρου οὖν καὶ Πενίας λέγεται εἶναι, ἧ ἢ ἔλλειψις καὶ ἢ ἔφεσις καὶ τῶν λόγων ἢ μνήμη ὁμοῦ συνελθόντα ἐν ψυχῇ ἐγέννησε **τὴν ἐνέργειαν** τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν, **ἔρωτα τοῦτον ὄντα**. "It is therefore out of Poros and Penia that Eros is said to be born, in that Soul's lack and desire, and the memory that constitutes the Reasons, come together into a unity in Soul and produce **an active orientation** towards the good, and **this is Eros**". (Trans. by Wolters (1984) XXVII).

determined according to the ontological status of human souls, nevertheless, the ability can change according to our own personal intellectual condition and changes, and even achieve a very high level of intellectual ‘seeing’.

However, the dynamic character of the ability of ‘seeing’ makes its analysis quite difficult: it is not easy to ‘grasp’ and to measure the quality or intensity of ‘seeing’ like as it is almost impossible to ‘catch’ (*i.e.* to define) Eros as a daimon or even as soul’s affection, its *pathos*, because it is ‘ontologically’ (due to its birth from Poros and Penia) not ever satisfied (and cannot ever be a such), and is always in some kind of movement, desiring to achieve or even to ‘re-produce’ the aim it wishes to possess.¹⁶ There is one more substantial difficulty related to this issue: the problem is that ‘seeing’ in Plotinus philosophy has many meanings, metaphoric as well as non-metaphoric ones. They encompass a very large spectrum of qualities of seeing, starting from a certain kind of ‘blindness’ (*i.e.* a perfect non-physical art of ‘seeing’, like an intellectual activity of the intellect, which thinks its own self and its own thinking; in such a case, the subject and the object of intellection, and the act of thinking or ‘seeing’ as well, are the same) and ending up with another kind of an almost real ‘blindness’ (*e.g.* a poor ability of seeing, a kind of seeing vaguely the beauty of corporeal figures, or ‘seeing darkness’).¹⁷ Between these two poles of different kinds of quasi ‘blindness’, there is an infinitely wide spectrum of gradation of abilities of seeing or non-seeing, which also makes difficult to make a fixed definition of Eros as soul’s ‘eye’ and its activity. Moreover, there is one more difficulty: the problem is that in the *Ennead* “On Love” Plotinus, though he says that Eros is the ‘eye’ of a soul, nevertheless, does not discuss explicitly what this ‘eye’ can see or not see in the case of different kinds of souls. This is a reason, why for the possible answers on this question, we have to look throughout Plotinus’ other texts.

¹⁶ On Eros and its relationship to Poros and Penia in Plotinus see also VI 9 [9], 9. On Eros / love see VI 5 [23], 10; VI 7 [38], 31; 33-34; I 6 [1], 5. On Penia and Poros see III 6 [26], 12, 13-19. On the limitlessness of soul’s contemplation see III 8 [30], 5.

¹⁷ I 8 [51], 4, 25-33; 9, 15-27. On the different levels of ‘visibility’ and seeing ability according to different levels of reality, see VI 7 [38], 7; VI 6 [34], 18, 10-27; V 8 [31], 9, 1-15. On the metaphoric and non-metaphoric meaning of ‘seeing with eye’, and on ‘darkness’ and ‘light’, see VI 7 [38], 41.

IV. Seeing ability of Eros as soul's 'eye'

Let us start with the divine soul and find out, what it can see or not see. The "heavenly Aphrodite" is the pure soul, free from the inclination toward any kinds of corporeal affections. Thus, it is an existence (*hypostasis*) which is very close to the intellect, though it is different from it. The divine soul strives toward its begetter – the intellect, and, by means of the intellect, toward the supreme One. From the *Ennead* "On Love" we cannot get much information about that what the divine soul can see or not see, but keeping in mind Plotinus' other texts too, we can conclude that the object of seeing of the divine soul can be pure forms, *i.e.* intelligible objects, ideas of *nous*, and not forms *in corpore*.¹⁸ However, there is a substantial difference between two kinds of 'seeing' the forms: the intellect and the soul (even the divine one) see them differently. In the case of the intellect, the forms are identical to the intellect, that means, it 'sees' or thinks itself, while in the case of the divine soul, though it is very close to the intellect, it must, unlike the intellect, at first, appropriate the *logoi* (reasons), 'produced' by the intellect, as its (soul's) own self.¹⁹ However, the act of 'appropriation' in case of the divine soul is, we can suppose, almost simultaneous one, that means, it does not proceed in time, unlike the art of discursive thinking which characterizes an individual soul. This is a reason, why it is sometimes difficult to grasp a difference in Plotinus' texts between the kind of vision of the intellect, on the one hand, and that of the soul, which is very close to the intellect, on the other, because such soul does not need either memory or an 'eye', *i.e.* an organ, an instrument or a mediator for seeing,²⁰ nor does it think in an ordinary discursive manner. Certainly,

¹⁸ On the soul in its pure condition, seeing pure forms, "passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God", when "one sees with one's self alone that alone", see I 6 [1], 7, 8-9 (trans. by Armstrong). If one achieves this, "he will see God and himself and the All". VI 5 [23], 7, 9-14. In the process of ascension, "the contemplations become always more intimate and united to the contemplators, and in the soul of good and wise man the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject". III 8 [30], 1-9 (trans. by Armstrong).

¹⁹ As Plotinus says, in the intellect the objects known and the knowing subject are one, "not by becoming akin, as in the best soul, but substantially, and because 'thinking and being are the same' [Parm. fr. B 3 DK]". III 8 [30], 8 (trans. by Armstrong).

²⁰ Cf. I 6 [1], 8, 5-28: one must "leave outside the sight of his eyes [...] do not talk. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which

according to Plotinus, memory characterizes an individual soul, when something in the corporeal realm reminds it the beauty seen in the intelligible world.²¹ As for the divine soul, we can suppose that while ‘seeing’ or ‘thinking’ one form, it remembers another one, which it has already ‘seen’ or grasped by its thought. This kind of memory and discursive thought do not, of course, characterize the mode of thinking or ‘seeing’ of the intellect at all, but it is also quite different from that kind of memory and discursive thinking which is a feature of partial souls ‘attached’ to the corporeal realm.

But what does the divine soul not see? Certainly, it does not look at the corporeal realm at all. As for its ability of ‘seeing’ the intelligible forms, it must be, as we already mentioned, quite different from that of the intellect. I think that the divine soul ‘sees’ the forms more as particulars, *i.e.* it must ‘divide’ them in order to be able to ‘see’ them, while the intellect grasps the forms or a form by means of its thought as a whole and as its own self. Consequently, the divine soul does not see all forms at once, nor does it see all forms or even each particular form as a whole. Moreover, it does not ‘see’ them from the very beginning as its own self as far as it receives the *logoi* from outside and, therefore, needs a substantial appropriation of the forms in order to be able to ‘see’ them clearly. The question is, does the soul which has already achieved the level of the intellect, still ‘see’ differently (*i.e.* not as intellect ‘sees’) or not? On the basis of Plotinus’ texts, it is not always possible to give a definite answer to this question. For instance, in VI 9 [9], 3 and 7, the difference between the ability of ‘seeing’ by an individual soul, which has reached the level of the intellect, on the one hand, and the intellect itself on the other, seems (almost) to disappear. However, the difference (due to the weakness of vision exercised by a human soul) becomes evident in VI 9 [9], 4.

Now let us think about those souls which are attached to a body. Such is the world-soul (also the souls of the stars and planets), and individual human souls.²² In the *Ennead* “On Love” Plotinus does not

everyone has but few use.” (Trans. by Armstrong). On ascending in contemplation and what the “inner sight sees”, see *ibid.* 9, and V 3 [49], 17.

²¹ I 6 [1], 2.

²² On the relationship between the world-soul (including its lower part) and individual souls see IV 3 [27], 2. “Each soul remains one and all are one together. [...] the souls spring from one, and the souls springing from one are many in the same way as Intellect, divided and not divided” (*ibid.* 5, 15-17). The ‘higher part’ of our souls is “of the same nature as the higher parts of Universal soul” (*ibid.* 4,

discuss explicitly, what these kinds of souls can see or not see. Again, we must look for answer in other treatises, or try to find an answer by ourselves. I suppose that in the case of the world-soul it 'sees' the forms, though, unlike the intellect, in such a condition when they are, so to say, ready to be 'realized' in the corporeal realm. This might be a difference between the world-soul and the divine soul, which is 'fixed' in the 'upper' world at the side of the intellect and contemplates the forms without their relation to the corporeal realm. In other words, the *logoi* that the world-soul receives from 'outside', are, if we may say so, a step lower and closer to the material world than the *logoi* received by the divine soul from the intellect. However, the world-soul does not see, we may suppose, the material things, though in a certain sense, it too, looks not only 'up', but also 'inside' itself and even 'down',²³ though this kind of 'looking down' does not mean physical seeing with eyes, but is more a kind of a providential activity of the world-soul by means of which it governs the world.²⁴

But what about individual human souls? This issue, I think, is even more interesting than that of the divine soul or of the world-soul, because an individual soul can change more radically from one art of vision to another, starting with the physical, corporeal seeing and ending up with the intellectual 'seeing' which excludes any kind of

31-32). The differences between the soul of the All and the individual souls is caused by the different manner of their looking: "the soul of the All looks towards Intellect as a whole, but the individual souls rather to their own partial intellects". Ibid. 6, 15-17 (trans. by Armstrong).

²³ VI 8 [6], 3; 4; 5.

²⁴ As Plotinus says, when the soul "looks to what comes before it it exercises its intelligence, when it looks to itself it sets in order what comes after it and directs and rules it; because everything could not be stationary in the intelligible, when it was possible for something else as well to exist next in order to it, something less, but something which must exist if that before it exists." (VI 8 [6], 3, 26-30; trans. by Armstrong). On the character of 'looking down' of the world-soul see further, ibid. 7, 26-30: "but that which is called the Soul of the All has not become engaged in the worse kind of work and, having no experience of evils, considers what lies below it contemplatively and remains attached to the realities before it for ever." (Trans. by Armstrong). From this fragment is indirectly evident also the difference between 'looking down' by the world-soul, on the one hand, and individual souls, on the other, because the last ones are not able to remain in the intelligible realm for ever. As Gerson says, "the soul of the universe looks to universal intellect, whereas individual souls look to their own partial intellects (IV 3 [27], 6, 15-17)". Gerson (1994) 63.

physical visualization of an object.²⁵ This may even remind us Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's image of a man as a chameleon, who can change his own self according to his one wish,²⁶ though, according to Plotinus, the differences between activities of the souls are, to a certain extent, included already in the intellect and, therefore, pre-determined by the providence.²⁷ However, in the case of human (individual) souls, exercising in the virtues can also cause the differences in 'seeing'.²⁸ The aim of the progress in 'seeing' for a man is to achieve the status of the true philosopher.²⁹ The question is, whether, in Plotinus' opinion, the love as soul's 'eye' and activity directed toward the unity of the soul with the intellect, and even further, toward the One, does stop functioning here or not? I have no definite answer to this question, though we can suppose that, logically speaking, the more a soul gets 'closer' to the intellect, the less activity is required from its 'eye' for 'seeing'. Thus, we can conclude that in case when a soul achieves the condition when it 'sees' intellectually pure forms and, moreover, becomes almost identical with the objects

²⁵ On the pureness of the 'upper' aspect of a human soul see III 5 [50], 3; 1 8 [51], 4; 1 1 [53], 10; 1 7 [54], 3. On the individualization of souls, their descent in bodies, and concentration on a particular thing instead of the whole see VI 8 [6], 4; cf. VI 4 [22], 16. Eros (in its best form we must suppose), strives toward the whole – this is its aim, VI 5 [23], 10. On the positive and quasi 'didactic' character of the descent see VI 8 [6], 7. Cf. III 8 [30], 5.

²⁶ An amazing parallel with Pico's understanding of man as a 'chameleon' can be found in III 2 [47], 8, 9-12: "man has the middle place between gods and beasts, and inclines now one way, now the other, and some men become like gods and others like beasts, and some, the majority, are in between." (Trans. by Armstrong). On the "amphibious" character of souls see IV 8 [6], 4, 33; 7. Cf. VI 4 [22], 15.

²⁷ III 2 [47], 12; III 3 [48], 3; 4. For the paradox of liberty of the action of men, on the one hand, and the government of *pronoia* on the other, the treatises on providence [47, 48], in spite of their complexity, are illuminating, especially the comparison of our lives with acting on the stage of the theater, see III 3 [48], 11; 15; 16; 17.

²⁸ By means of philosophy we free ourselves from affects, see I 1 [53], 3. However, "if someone is unable to grasp this kind of soul which thinks purely, let him take the soul which forms opinions, and then ascend from this." (V 3 [49], 9, 22-30; trans. by Armstrong. Cf. VI 4 [22], 16).

²⁹ On the difference between the true philosopher and not true one see III 7 [45], 6. Interestingly, Plotinus uses an expression ἐρᾶν ἀληθῆ ἔρωτα, something like "loving a true love" (I 6 [1], 18). On true lovers and true philosophers see V 9 [5], 2, 2-10.

seen,³⁰ then the love as soul's 'eye' and activity, directed toward the unity with the intellect, may become almost unnecessary.³¹ However, an individual soul cannot remain in this condition permanently, that is why Eros can neither be ever deprived of the role it plays in a soul's life, nor it can be ever completely satisfied with the object(s) already seen. Therefore, we can suppose that at a certain moment Eros has to re-activate its function, even if an individual soul has achieved the highest level of 'seeing'.

V. Conclusion

Thus, Eros (love) is soul's characteristic and its activity, directed toward its (soul's) cause – the intellect.³² Eros, as soul's 'eye', embraces a large spectrum of seeing ability, starting with ordinary physical vision and ending up with intellectual 'seeing' which is a kind of physical 'blindness'.³³ I suppose that the more a soul is close to the intellect, the less it needs to activate the function of its 'eye' as of an

³⁰ VI 6 [34], 18; V 3 [49], 4.

³¹ I 6 [1], 8; IV 7 [2], 10.

³² In some sense, love characterizes also the intellect, but in the case of the intellect it has another meaning, as far as the intellect thinks itself. On the character of thinking and 'seeing' by the intellect see V 4 [7], 2; V 8 [31], 11; V 5 [32], 8; VI 2 [43], 8; 21; 22. V 3 [49], 10. On the difference and interaction between soul's and intellect's thinking and seeing, and, correspondingly, different kinds of knowledge see IV 7 [2], 13; V 6 [24], 4; V 9 [5], 2; 7-8; VI 9 [9], 5; VI 7 [38], 33-35; 39; 41; V 3 [49], 8-9; VI 8 [39], 16; III 8 [30], 7-8. On the difference between thinking self and thinking other see V 6 [24], 1. Another meaning has love in the case of the One, which is, as Plotinus says, the object of love, love and love of itself. (VI 8 [6], 15, 1).

³³ On the hierarchical process of our ascending in contemplation, ending up with a device: "Shut your eyes", see I 6 [1], 8. On the results achieved by such ability of 'seeing' see ch. 9 of the same treatise (one becomes wholly oneself, seeing only "true light not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness." (Trans. by Armstrong). See also IV 7 [2], 10, 25-52. On the highest level of contemplation see VI 9 [9], 4. Cf. VI 5 [23], 7; V 3 [49], 4; VI 7 [38], 35. On the other hand, if souls "are not able to grasp the vision sufficiently, and therefore are not filled with it, but still long to see it, they are carried into action, so as to see what they cannot see with their intellect. When they make something, then, it is because they want to see their object themselves and also because they want others to be aware of it and contemplate it, when their project is realized in practice as well as possible". (III 8 [30], 4, 30-39; trans. by Armstrong). As for the intellect, it does not require a medium for seeing, as it is "a kind of sight, and a sight which is seeing ($\delta\psi\iota\varsigma$ $\delta\rho\omega\sigma\alpha$)." (III 8 [30], 11, 1-2; transl. by Armstrong).

organ for ‘seeing’ the forms, as far as they are already (almost) in soul’s presence.³⁴ We can draw an analogy with Plotinus’ understanding of memory: an intellect does not need a memory, because it does not forget anything,³⁵ and, we can add, it does not need Eros as an ‘eye’ as well.³⁶ In a similar way, the divine soul, which is close to the intellect and not related to the corporeal world, does not need a memory³⁷ and, consequently, we can say that its ‘eye’ (though it still needs it, because it receives the *logoi* from outside, *i.e.* from the intellect) can be less active rather than the ‘eye’ of a soul which is more distanced from the intellect. From this point of view, we can also add that in the case of individual souls, the more a soul has achieved the status of a ‘philosophical’ one, the less activity its ‘eye’ requires for contemplation, being already (almost) able to be in the presence of the forms.³⁸ However, none of the souls can be completely ‘blind’ (in a positive sense of this word), because all of them require an ‘eye’ as a receptacle for *logoi* which they receive from the intellect. Consequently, in cases of all souls Penia as a matter and receptacle of *logoi* (the last ones are personified by Poros) plays important though different roles in each case,³⁹ like as different kinds of souls think

³⁴ In Plotinus opinion, seeing without a medium could be possible for a soul only in case if it stays completely in the intelligible realm. (IV 5 [29], 1, and VI 8 [39], 7). That is why I suppose that more a soul is close to the intellect less active Eros as soul’s eye is. As Plotinus says in the same treatise (2, 16-18), we see less, if there is an intermediary.

³⁵ V 5 [32], 2.

³⁶ “In the intelligible world seeing is not through another [medium], but through itself, because it is not [directed] outside”. (V 3 [49], 8, 21-22; trans. by Armstrong). However, a kind of love (*ἀγαπή*) characterizes also the intellect, though it is love toward self. (VI 8 [39], 16). On love of the intellect which is “drunk with nectar” and also on the “loving intellect” (*νοῦς ἐρῶν*) see VI 7 [38], 35. As for the One, it does not look even at itself. (VI 7 [38], 41).

³⁷ More precisely, the divine soul remembers that what is inside it, unlike a soul which is attached to a body. (IV 3 [27], 25). On the memory and forgetfulness of souls see *ibid.* 26-32, and IV 4 [28], 1; IV 4 [28], 3-8; 30.

³⁸ VI 7 [38], 41, 4-5: that one needs eye, what has darkness in itself.

³⁹ An intermediate stage between pure incorporeity and sensible being is the intelligible matter (III 5 [50], 6, 39-45), which is the indetermination (*aoristia*) of the soul (Wolters (1984) 66). On the intelligible matter in relation to contemplation see also III 8 [30], 11.

differently, though no one soul can think permanently in an absolutely non-discursive mode.⁴⁰

Any kind of soul (including an individual one), though it can be like an intellect, at the same time remains itself.⁴¹ Therefore, though it can (almost) surpass the discursive mode of reasoning, a certain kind of 'discursiveness' in 'seeing' (caused by the fact that any soul gets *logoi* from outside) always remains as a fixed characteristic of even an intellectual soul,⁴² though this kind of 'discursiveness' is quite different from that one which characterizes a soul which is 'attached' to the material world. Individual souls, even looking at the same kinds of objects, can 'see' them differently,⁴³ and be differently aware – conscious – of their 'seeing' – thinking.⁴⁴ Thus, looking at the beauty

⁴⁰ On the discursive character of soul's contemplation see III 8 [30], 6, though the soul / seer, which has achieved the status of an intellectual one, does not think in a discursive manner. Moreover, such kind of a soul even wishes to overcome the movement, which is a characteristic of thinking (VI 7 [38], 34-35), though it cannot remain in this position permanently (Hadot (1987), 67). In general, while analyzing the discursive character of soul's cognition, the differences between 'higher' and 'lower' parts of the soul must be taken into consideration. See IV 3 [27], 18, and IV 4 [28], 1.

⁴¹ IV 4 [28], 2. On the union of the soul with the intellect without losing its (soul's) individuality in Plotinus see D'Ancona (2002) 528-529. Cf. also VI 7 [38], 35.

⁴² V 3 [49], 6; 7.

⁴³ On the aim of Eros / love, which strives towards the whole and good, and on "seeing without seeing" see VI 5 [23], 10. As Plotinus thinks, everybody strives toward the same good. However, the objects seen are different in case of different kinds of souls (ibid). On the 'must' of 'seeing' otherwise even looking at corporeal objects see I 6 [53], 8, 6-16: "When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality [...] then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depth where intellect has no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and here." (Trans. by Armstrong). On the different types of men, including differences in their 'seeing' abilities, see V 9 [5], 1, 16-21. The best among them is a kind of "godlike men who by their greater power and the sharpness of their eyes as if by a special keensightedness see the glory above and are raised to it as if above the clouds, and the mist of this lower world and remain there, overlooking all things here below and delighting in the true region which is their own." (VI 9 [9], 4; trans. by Armstrong).

⁴⁴ V 8 [31], 8, 14-15: "...since lovers also, and in general all the admirers of beauty here below, do not know that this is because of the intelligible beauty: for

of material objects, souls can or cannot be conscious of the fact that they strive toward the 'real' (non-material) beauty, that means to the forms or, in other words, to the 'truth' of these objects. Furthermore, 'looking down' at the cosmic body has another meaning in the case of the world-soul or other celestial souls on the one hand (in this case, 'looking' has also a meaning of the providential activity) and of individual souls, on the other. Moreover, the 'products' of the different kinds of looking or seeing might be also different. Thus, the character of 'seeing' can form and determine the seer⁴⁵ and also the objects seen and produced, as in the case of contemplation exercised by the lowest 'part' of the soul – the nature.⁴⁶

The 'seeing' – 'thinking' exercised by a soul and 'seeing' by means of Eros as an instrument (an organ or mediator) of seeing are not the same: Eros is 'quicker' in seeing than the soul.⁴⁷ Does it mean that the soul must 'digest' the objects seen by its Eros, while Eros, never satisfied by the beauty of the objects seen (and, without, so to say, 'digesting' them), rushes forward in order to see more and more? Can we say that the soul which has already reached the level of the intellect, or even more, the union with the One, can be (at least, for a while) satisfied with that what it (the soul) sees or has seen,⁴⁸ while its Eros is never satisfied, pushing also this soul to look further for new beautiful objects in the intelligible and material realm? I have no definite answer to this question. It seems that Eros, at least, in its role of an 'eye' and activity of an individual soul, permanently encourages us to go forward, through the labyrinth of new questions (and this is one of its functions), which are caused by its own person and not only.

it is because of the intelligible beauty." (Trans. by Armstrong). On different kinds of vision among gods, daimons and souls see *ibid.*, 10-11.

⁴⁵ IV 4 [28], 2.

⁴⁶ III 8 [30], and II 3 [52], 18: the creative part of the 'lower' part of the world-soul produces the corporeal world 'looking' toward the intellect.

⁴⁷ III 5 [50], 2, 35-46. For the differences between seeing by the soul and its eye see also IV 3 [27], 28. Cf. III 6 [26], 2.

⁴⁸ VI 5 [5 [23], 12: entering in the whole, we do not search any more.

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