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NOTES ON EROS IN MIDDLE PLATONISM

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The Platonic Eros and the history of its interpretation is an inexhaustible topic. In this paper, I shall take up the relatively rarely raised question of what happened, within Platonism between Plato and Plotinus, to the idea of Eros as a sublime, awe-inspiring, and ennobling force, the daimonic Eros, "Eros Ouranios".¹ I am not concerned, principally, with *φιλία* or *ἀγάπη* or other forms of emotional inclination, or with ordinary sexual love. Perhaps surprisingly, there does not seem to have existed a separate Platonist theory of sexual love, distinct from the Aristotelian, Stoic, or Epicurean theories of emotion where sexuality is a risky appetite or passion to be kept in check, but friendship is a recommendable attitude.² And Platonists after Plato, and before the Renaissance, show little or no interest in homosexuality.³

Though the evidence is very fragmentary, I shall try to focus on two problems: did a doctrinalization of the theory of Eros come about before Plotinus; and how did the notion of love (*eros / amor*) of God arise?

It is important to keep in mind the visionary, poetic, sometimes auto-

¹ Middle Platonist ἔρως οὐράνιος vs. πάνδημος (cf. Pausanias in *Symposium* 180d) has not attracted much attention even among theologians engaged in the Nygren controversy (references below, n. 33 and 36). J.M. Rist, *Eros and Psyche* (Phoenix Suppl. 6), 1964, concentrates on Plato, Origen, and Plotinus.

² Sexuality is principally a base passion in Platonism too, and the potentials of Plato's imagery were not developed into a theory of sublimation of sexuality; cf. Philo, Plutarch, and Alcinous (below; also Galen, *Plac.* 4,5, V 393 f. Kühn). – In the platonizing Ps.-Pythagorean texts, chastity is recommended (esp. Okkelos 135-138 Th) though ἔρως, being an ἐπιθυμία, is part of the συναρμογὰ of soul and the universe (Aresas 49,5, cf. Kallikratidas 103, Theages 190 Th); *φιλία* is rather intellectual (e.g. Aresas 50,10, Hippodamos 97,14 Th). It is only *στέργειν* and *ἀγαπᾶν* that comprise the entire soul: Metopos 117 Th, cf. Arist. EN 3,2,1111b.

³ It is ventilated, rather repudiatingly, in some of the speeches of Plutarch's *Amatorius*. For Plotinus' attitude, see Porphyry, V.Plot. 15.

biographic, and often somewhat playful character of Plato's erotic imagery in the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and elsewhere. The hyperbolic byplay of one of the notorious passages in the *Republic* (6,490ab) suggests that eros, even here, is not merely a metaphor for non-sexual "desire" (as ἐρῶν and its derivatives are occasionally in classical Greek outside Plato). Shorey translates, with slightly misleading decency, "... nor would his (sc. the philosopher's) desire (τοῦ ἔρωτος) fail till he came into touch with the nature of each thing itself by that part of his soul to which it belongs... and through that approaching it, and consorting with reality (μιγεῖς τῷ ὄντι) really, he would beget (γεννήσας) intelligence and truth, attain to knowledge and truly live and grow, and so find surcease from his travail (ὀδίνος) of soul, but not before. - No plea could be fairer." Philosophy is here turned into 'love of Being' and, in a desperate tour de force against vulgar detractors, into 'making love to Being'. We can imagine Socrates' amused mien at this bizarre thought. I am inclined to think that ἔρως is nowhere in Plato a metaphor devoid of sexual overtones, though in moods and different contexts he plays differently with these overtones. It is τὸ καλόν that arouses love, and it is the proximity of the Fine to the Good, and the Forms' character of true Being, that make the play with Love of Being possible.

But whatever philosophic problems Plato may have faced in and through his conception of Eros, he surely did not intend it to be part of a consistent doctrine.

The next generation of Platonists, however, had a different sense of humour and a different need of decency and dogmas. It seems that Xenokrates, the most influential one of the Academics after Plato's death, considered the Platonic Forms as inherent in cosmic Nous, and included Eros the daimon in his demonology. Hence he could have explained philosophy as sublimated daimonic love for Nous.⁴ A reflex of the Academic discussion of Nous-directed Eros may perhaps be seen in

⁴ The most comprehensive discussion of this complex is H.J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistesmetaphysik*, 1964. Here the emphasis is on the doctrine of Principles and Nous after Plato, but Eros is considered in passing (esp. 127 ff., 178). Krämer gives some support to Heinze's view of the demonology of Xenokrates (1892); cf. also Krämer, *Platonismus und hellenistische Philosophie*, 1972, 175 f. Philip of Opous wrote a Π. ἔρως (Suda s.n.) and probably prepared for Xenokrates' conception (cf. *Epinomis* 984de). A daimonic love for Nous is perhaps implied in the mystifying end of the Platonic *Epistle* VI. We do not actually know how Xenokrates explained philosophy; the Platonic *Definitions* (414b) resorts to the idea of ὄρεξις taken over by Aristotle.

Aristotle's famous remark in *Metaphysics* Λ (1072b4) on the Prime Mover: it moves as being an object of love (κινεῖ ὡς ἐρώμενον).

If Eros Ouranios was on the verge of being doctrinalized in the Old Academy (this is rather conjectural), he was soon forgotten in "official" Platonism: the Sceptical Academics did not concern themselves with such topics, as far as we know.⁵ We should expect Eros to reappear with the metaphysical and religious trends that were reintroduced by Antiochos and Eudoros in the 1st century B.C., and in fact he did so, but very hesitatingly and ambiguously.

The orientation towards the Divine is henceforth in Platonism the ultimate aim of man at his best, the philosopher. The aim is to "become like god", according to the formula taken over from the *Theaetetus* (176b), or "follow god", with a more Pythagorean formulation.⁶ God is mainly understood as Nous. But Middle Platonism operates with a divine hierarchy that requires some comments here.

On the whole (though there are many variations and some controversial points), it seems to me possible to distinguish three main levels in the hierarchy: a somehow transcendent Supreme God who at the same time is one (but not The One), pure Good, and pure Intelligence; the Demiurge God (variously interpreted) whose active νοῦς comprises all Platonic Forms; and the World Soul with two aspects, a better and a worse one. The difference between the levels, especially between the First and the Second God, is not categoric: it tends to become blurred into mere aspects (cf. Plotinus' chain or continuum of Being). The three levels can be derived, chiefly, from three confluent sources: Old Academic interpretations of the *Timaeus*; interpretations of the Platonic First Principles, ἓν versus ἀόριστος δυάς (a contribution apparently made already by Xenokrates); and a new interpretation of the Pythagorean tradition concerning the Monad procreating or generating Kosmos by means of the (feminine) Dyad.⁷ This

⁵ And Cicero does not take up the concept of *amor*. For *caritas* and *diligere* (corresponding to φιλεῖν), see de fin. 3,19,62 f., 5,23 ff., 65.

⁶ Stob. 2,7,3f, Iambl. V.Pyth. 86, 137; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 1977, 122 ff. R.E. Witt, *Albinus and the history of Middle Platonism* (*Transactions of the Camb. Philol. Soc.* 7), 1937, is still helpful, in fact more so than Festugière's much-used conspectus in *La Révélation IV*, 1954, 102 ff.

⁷ See in general Krämer 1964; cf. the papers in *Entret. Hardt V*, 1960; J. Whittaker, *Vigiliae Christianae* 23, 1969, 91 ff., Dillon 1977 (esp.117 ff.) and id., *The Golden Chain*, 1991 (esp. IV, on female principles). Though the Dyad is a principle that comes in

last-mentioned idea of generation received secondary support from Greek and non-Greek procreation myths variously introduced by various authors. The feminine level is often represented by cosmic Psyche or semi-mythic figures associated with it (such as Dike or Sophia in Philo, and the Moon or Isis in Plutarch). And then there are the daimons (or angels in Philo), moving more freely between the levels than a human incarnate psyche can.

As in ancient philosophy generally, it is trivially obvious to a Platonist that the human individual, whose soul is tied to the body, is nevertheless able to ennoble it or its faculties. To a Middle Platonist, this is possible by striving (somehow) via the World Soul toward Nous and God. The aim of the striving is Nous, of course – not The One as yet: ἔν is a divine principle, not a god.⁸ The process of reaching the level of Nous is (relatively) unproblematic so long as the striving is seen in terms of, say, the λογιστικόν, the higher, cognitive aspect of soul which is naturally cognate to the World Soul and the Nous. More Stoically, the process may be said to be a ὁρμή with the help of λόγος, led by the ἡγημονικόν of man. Or to put it in Aristotelian terms, the striving toward Nous is basically an ἔφεσις or an ὄρεξις (cf. the opening words of the *Metaphysics*). Sometimes Platonists resort to the idea of οἰκείωσις in this connection.⁹ And terms such as φιλόθεος occur in religious contexts, implying an "inclination" (as in φιλοσοφία), a "pious attitude", but not primarily "love".

Given the religious, archaizing and dogmatic features of the model

with the World Soul, it is associated with matter. For the 'Pythagorean' Monad, cf. references in the Index of Pythag. Texts, ed. Thesleff, 1965, and below, n.8. It should be noted that the source of DL III 67-80 is Old Academic rather than Middle Platonist.

⁸ On the traditions about One as a principle (and the role of Speusippos), see now J. Halfwasser, *Der Aufstieg zum Einen* (Beitr. z. Alt.kunde 9), 1992. There are some confused reports on the 'Pythagorean' ἔν, cf. Thesleff 1965, 56, 237 (with references); Dillon 1977, 120. According to Eudoros (Simpl. in Phys. 181, Dillon 126 f.), the Pythagoreans postulated ἔν as the supreme principle, to be called ὁ ὑπεράνω θεός; but this is apparently a metaphor on the basis of Old Academic henology, cf. Archytas II. ἀρχῶν 19,25 Th, Moderatos in Porph. V.Pyth. 48 ff., Nikomachos Theol.arithm. 3,1 ff., and the pythagorizing speculations of Ammonios in Plut. de E 393a-c (see esp. J. Whittaker, CQ 19, 1969, 185 ff., SO 48, 1973, 77 ff. who, however, overrates the theological aspect). The Middle Platonists did not operate with the One as a god.

⁹ Both ὁρμή and οἰκείωσις are commonly used in this context by e.g. Philo (see the Index of Cohn-Wendland's edition); for a piece of very 'eclectic' terminology, see the Ps.-Pythag. Kriton 109 Th. The idea of οἰκείωσις is prefigured in *Republic* 6,490b, quoted above.

sketched, and the potential erotic interplay with the idea of cosmic proliferation and male and female concepts, we should, as I said, expect Eros the daimon to come in automatically. The fact that he does not is worth some pondering.

The fragments of Eudoros, Thrasyllus, and some other early Middle Platonists whom we can trace, have nothing to offer us in erotics.¹⁰ But Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch have.

Philo is bound to adjust his stoicizing Platonism to Jewish theology, and so he combines the two first Platonist levels into One God who is also the Demiurge and whose Logos (including Platonic Forms and Number) or Pneuma affects the world through intermediate beings, angels and demons. Sometimes he implies an erotic relationship between Logos and a female cosmic figure (proto-Gnostically) called Sophia or Dike and vaguely corresponding to the Platonist Dyad.¹¹ But ἔρως is not normally found in this context, as if this term were reserved for more Platonistic ideas; an occasional remark such as τὸ γινόμενον ἐρᾶ τοῦ φητεύσαντος (de fug. 97) may, however, reflect a tradition ultimately deriving from Xenokrates.¹² On the whole, the function of Philo's Sophia seems to be to explain the procreative and "downward" influence of God, not to explain or to aid the "upward" striving of man, the ὁμοίωσις θεῶν, which is one of Philo's basic concerns.¹³

This upward striving is often in Philo described as a ὁρμή, but quite often too in terms of ἔρως, sometimes οὐράνιος ἔρως (vs. πάνδημος) or θεῖος ἔρως. Such instances, however, do not seem to be dogmatic at all, or even philosophically doctrinalized. Nothing is said of how Eros is awakened, or of sublimation (Eros is no Angel). The object of Philo's ἔρως is sometimes an abstract concept such as τὸ καλόν, ἀλήθεια, or ἐπιστήμη (or σοφία which, however, is sexualized already in the terminology of the *Septuagint*, cf. e.g. *Wisdom* 8.2).¹⁴ Though there are some reminiscences of

¹⁰ A useful conspectus of the authors in Dillon 1977; cf. also Krämer 1964. For Thrasyllus, see now H. Tarrant, *Thrasyllan Platonism*, 1993.

¹¹ References in Dillon 1977, 163 ff. (with some additions 1991, IV).

¹² Cf. Arist. met. A 1072b, above.

¹³ E.g. fug. 63, virt. 8; cf. the Index.

¹⁴ Cf. LXX Prov. 4,1-9. But it is not the cosmic Sophia that is the object of ἐρᾶν and its derivatives in Philo, e.g. quis rer.div. 14. I can find no sexual implications in the cases listed in Cohn-Wendland's Index. For instance, in Cherub. 20 the Cherubs are inspired by

the *Phaedrus* myth, and once also of the *Symposium*,¹⁵ Philo's use of erotic terminology appears to me to be rather a de-sexualized literary device. The object of ἔρωσ, mark well, is never God. An extreme case, easily misinterpreted, is a passage in *De Abrahamo* (170) where the ἔρωσ θεῖος of Abraham, going to sacrifice Isaac, is contrasted to family affection; the Loeb translation has "love for God", in my view wrongly. Eros is a metaphor for "holy zeal". On the other hand, Philo often refers to ἐνθουσιασμός, the inspiration of prophets and others which is achieved by God's logos or pneuma, and to silence and rest in the presence of God, but such ekstasis has normally nothing to do with ἔρωσ.¹⁶ Only once does the word occur in a context which, from a Neoplatonic perspective, has a ring of Unio Mystica: *De somniis* II 232 (the Loeb translation) "When the mind (ὁ νοῦς) is mastered by the love of the divine (ἔρωτος θείου), when it strains its powers to reach the inmost shrine, when it puts forth every effort and ardour on its forward march, [then,] under the divine impelling force (θεοφορούμενος) it forgets all else, forgets itself, and fixes its thoughts and memories on Him alone (μόνου τοῦ...) Whose attendant and servant it is, ... But when the inspiration (τὸ ἐνθουσιῶδες) is stayed, and the strong yearning (ἴμερος) abates, it hastens back from the divine (τῶν θείων)..." The imagery is somehow Platonic, and νοῦς here stands for ψυχή. It is not God but τὰ θεῖα that is the object of ἔρωσ (and ἴμερος), though he is the ultimate cause of it. The idea of νοῦς being carried by ἔρωσ has parallels in Plutarch (below). It is taken from the Platonist tradition, but it is not part of Philo's own metaphysics.

Plutarch's approach to philosophy and religion is entirely different from Philo's, but he offers us a broad spectrum of ideas and allusions. His personal religious convictions appear to include a Demiurge God, unseen by

πτηνὸς ἔρωσ, a rhetorical reminiscence of *Phaedrus*, but certainly without 'carnal' undertones. Cf. n. 16.

¹⁵ Vit. cont. 59-60; cf. the implicit references in somn. 1,133-156, a commentary on Jacob's ladder where no point is made of Eros.

¹⁶ Occasionally the idea of 'holy zeal' may occur, as in Cherub. 20 (quoted in n. 14). Sometimes γλίχεσθαι is used of the striving of the sage to come near God, see esp. post.Cain. 18 ff. An interesting case is spec.leg. 1,300 where it is said that man may love God as his benefactor but fear him as his Lord, but here the word for 'love' is ἀγαπᾶν (cf. n. 34). In vit.cont. 90, θεοῦ φιλία 'love of God' is an emendation. The implications of the φιλόθεος / θεοφιλής terminology are often overinterpreted, e.g. by Y. Amir, *Die hellen. Gestalt des Judentums bei Philon von Alexandrien*, 1983, 206 ff.

man but mirrored by the Sun whose mythic symbol is Apollo, and a demonology associated with the Moon. God's providence and the "become like god" rule are taken for granted.¹⁷ Eros quite often comes in, not only in Platonist contexts, but mostly through myths or images alluding to the *Symposium* or *Phaedrus*.¹⁸ However, as also the speeches of his *Amatorius* indicate, Plutarch is more inclined to present suggestive stories about the effects of Love, than to construct a coherent picture, let alone a philosophy, of Eros.

Yet some passages give interesting glimpses of a Platonist discussion of Eros. For instance, Plutarch is prepared to ponder whether the wings of Love in the *Phaedrus* myth stand for anamnesis of divine beauty, or for ἡ λογιστικὴ δύναμις of the soul which is akin to the divine (Plat. quaest. 6,1004cd). In a fragment from the essay *De amore* (135 Sandbach) he mentions various explanations of ἔρως, most of them unphilosophical; but one is δαιμόνιον κίνημα τῆς ψυχῆς. Reflections about the relation of eros to reason occur occasionally, in imitation of Plato.¹⁹

The daimonic aspect of Eros is connected with Plutarch's Moon religion and ultimately, I suspect, with ideas taken from Xenokrates.²⁰ We may note here a passage in *De facie* (944de) where shamanistic ekstasis is presented in Platonist terms: such a state can be achieved "once the mind (ὁ νοῦς) has been separated from the soul. It is separated by love (ἔρωτι) for the image in the sun through which shines forth ... the desirable (ἐφειτόν) and fair and divine and blessed towards which all nature in one way or another yearns (ὀρέγεται); for it must be out of love (ἔρωτι) for the sun that the moon herself goes her rounds and gets into conjunction (συγγίνεσθαι) with him in her yearning (ὀρεγομένην) <to receive> from him what is most

¹⁷ D.A. Russell, Plutarch, 1973, 63 ff. rightly points out the inconsistencies in Plutarch's religious beliefs. One of Plutarch's Platonist sources is Xenokrates, but he was personally engaged in the Delphic cult of Apollo.

¹⁸ E.g. amat. 751f, 756b ff., 764a-766b. Also Presocratic ideas of Love are adduced, e.g. de fac. 926f-927a.

¹⁹ E.g. virt. 442e, 445c, 447b ff., referring to the *Phaedrus*. The ὁρμή of soul towards Nous is discussed in rather Stoic terms in de gen. 588f-589f, but with the remark that a motivated individual becomes οἶον ἐπτερωμένον (589a). Cf. however the very Stoic discussion of ἐπιθυμία in Ps.-Plut. Libid. ('Tyrwhitt's Fragment' 1), ed. Sandbach (Loeb) XV, 1969.

²⁰ Cf. def.or. 416de, from Xenokrates: daimons have πάθος θνητοῦ but θεοῦ δύναμις; Pyth. 404ef; de gen. 591e: the νοῦς part of soul is really a daimon.

fructifying (τὸ γονιμώτατον)" (Loeb transl.) In one of the *Amatorius* speeches Plutarch presents (764b-766b) an elaborate cosmology of Love, with some "Egyptian" traits: the Moon is like Aphrodite (744d) who aided by divine and wise Eros (θεῖος, σώφρων ἔρως) leads man to τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίων (765a).²¹ Allusions to Plato abound in the context, but the presentation is more literary than philosophical.

Especially in his well-known Isis myth (*de Iside*), Plutarch combines in a remarkably detailed manner Egyptian mythology with Platonistic ideas. Probably this essay reflects more of Plutarch's own convictions than the *Amatorius* speech just quoted. Isis is here associated with the Moon (372e), with the Dyad, and with Artemis (354f, whereas Apollo represents the Monad). She is a cosmic nurse (372ef, with allusion to *Timaeus* 49a), and she has a natural love (σύμφυτος ἔρως) for the First God, here Platonistically identified with τὰγαθόν (372ef, cf. 374f). She produces (γεννᾷ) Horus as an image of the νοητὸς κόσμος (373ab), and she loves beauty (383a). But it is Osiris who is Eros, a primary cosmic force, as in Hesiod (374cd; cf. *Symposium* 203b).²²

Thus it seems to me that Plutarch's Platonic eros remains on the mythic and literary level. His erotic imagery has some religious implications, but no philosophic consistency. Whatever Old Academic and Middle Platonist interpretations of eros he may have encountered, he has not internalized them.

What we know of the more professional Platonists of the second century A.D. does not alter this picture substantially.

The fullest Middle Platonist document we have is the *Διδασκαλικός* of Alcinous / Albinus.²³ Typically, philosophy is defined right at the beginning of the tract (152,2) as ὄρεξις σοφίας, but a little later it is said that the philosopher must be "enamoured (ἔχειν ἐρωτικῶς 152,12) of the truth": this is a Platonistic metaphor which is rooted in the *Republic* passage

²¹ Cf. *Phaedrus* 248b, *Republic* 10, 621a. The Egyptians are said to regard Eros as the Sun (764b), but the Sun is not provided with erotic components here. I doubt that Plutarch wanted to make Eros the 'intelligible archetype' of the Sun (and the Good of *Republic* 6), as Dillon 1977, 200 suggests. Cf. n. 22.

²² By identifying Eros with Osiris, Plutarch seems to emphasize the daimonic character of the former. Isis has much in common with Plato's World Soul.

²³ Now properly edited, translated, and commented on, as Alcinous, by J. Whittaker (1990) and J. Dillon (1993). Cf. Witt 1937.

quoted above, but without any glimpse of humour, to be sure.²⁴ In the chapter on God (10,164,23) Alcinous states that the transcendent First Nous moves the heavens "as the object of desire (ὄρεξις) moves desire, while remaining motionless itself": remarkably enough, and contrary to Aristotle (!), Alcinous here fails to speak of ἔρωσ. Eros is no integral part of his metaphysics. This is evident further on in the same chapter where three methods of reaching God are listed: abstraction, analogy, and the third way which is in fact modelled on the mystery teaching of Diotima, but with the erotic component reduced to a minimum: the beauty of bodies, souls, customs, etc, is to be "contemplated" by the philosopher (θεωρῶν 165,24, certainly not ἐρῶν); and when he eventually experiences (νοεῖ) the Good, after "the sea of Beauty", its description as ἐραστὸν καὶ ἐφετὸν ὡσπερ φῶς φανέν (165,28) looks as mechanically taken from the tradition.²⁵ Eros is also a somewhat embarrassing topic to Alcinous in his chapter on ethics (33) where he in a rather Aristotelian way again, discusses love together with friendship. He tries to cope with Plato's daimonic love by classing it (187,26 ff.) as a median sort of ἐρωτική that yearns (ὀρεγομένη) both for the body and the beauty of the soul, but he goes on to explain that good erotics freed from passion (ἀπηλλαγμένη πάθους) is technical (τεχνική) and belongs to the rational side of the soul (τὸ λογιστικόν); hence it can be used for developing virtue in the beloved, and the aim of such love is the progress from being lovers to becoming friends.²⁶ It seems that Alcinous has not understood the essence of Plato's erotic myths.

A similar lack of interest in the Platonic Eros can be seen in the fragments of Numenius, a rather well informed Platonist, less 'pythagorizing' than Theon, Moderatos or Nikomachos, and apparently intent on presenting what he regards as Plato's true metaphysics.²⁷ There is

²⁴ Later, the intellectual activity of the 'approach to god' is said to be accompanied by a 'happy feeling' (ἡ ψυχὴ... εὐπαθεῖν λέγεται 153,5, a reminiscence of *Phaedrus* 247d, but cf. Stoic εὐπάθεια). An explicit reference to the wings of the soul occurs at 155,34.

²⁵ Similarly ἐράσμιον as an epithet of what is ἀγαθόν, 180,7; cf. Dillon's comment, p. 168.

²⁶ The next paragraph refers in passing to Diotima's love-daimon (*Symposium* 202e). There are also other remote allusions to Platonic passages. In his commentary (p. 200 ff.), Dillon suggests that Alcinous' source operated with an exegesis of *Alcibiades* I; but much of this seems to me to have an Aristotelian and also Stoic ring.

²⁷ Contrary to most ancient and modern critics, I would regard Numenius as a Platonist rather than a Neopythagorean. Dodds (*Entret. Hardt* V, 1960, 3-61), though rightly

a sexual element in his version of the 'Sophia syndrome': his Demiurge God has "lust" (ἐπορεξόμενος fr. 11 des Places) for matter which is dyadic and epithymetic. But nothing of that kind occurs in the lengthy Fragment 2 where Numenius appears to describe a kind of Unio Mystica. The idea of reaching a state of being "alone" with τὰγαθόν may remind us of some Philonic ekstasis passages, and Numenius was indeed acquainted with Jewish mysticism.²⁸ But as is generally recognized, we are here closer to Plotinus. Numenius is concerned with man's striving along the *via negativa*, not with God's revelatory inspiration. Though one might detect reflexes of the mystery of Diotima here,²⁹ it is remarkable that ἔρωσ is totally absent. The θεία μέθοδος recommended at the end of the fragment is rather that of the *Republic*, though without any erotic byplay.

The platonizing sophists of this period, Apuleius and Maximos of Tyre, have a somewhat better understanding of Plato's Eros. Though Apuleius' Platonist position otherwise is close to Alcinous, he has much to say on Eros the daimon (*genius*). But in his *De Platone* (ch. 20-23), the ultimate approach to God comes about rather in the Stoic fashion: the Perfect Sage has practically nothing to do with erotics.³⁰ Maximos, however, tries to popularize a kind of combination of Plato's visions in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* into a single mystic way, to reach a transcendent divine calm (γαλήνη) by means of ἔρωσ (most explicitly in Speech 11,10). We also have four other speeches of Maximos on the Eros theme, with

minimizing the 'Oriental' traits in Numenius, unnecessarily emphasizes his Pythagorean bias. Cf. Krämer 1964, 65 ff. – Theon of Smyrna also inclines to explicit Platonism. He recommends the μαθήματα of *Republic* 7 as a method of initiation into the 'mystery' of Plato's philosophy; the last stage is total εὐδαιμονία, when the ὁμοίωσις is a fact (p. 15, 21 Hiller), but ἔρωσ is not mentioned. Probably Theon's source is Thrasyllus (cf. Tarrant 1993, 98 ff.); and cf. Numenius, below. – The pythagorizing metaphysics of Moderatos is irrelevant here. – In Nikomachos, the cosmic process of emission, reception, and recompense is described in sexual terms (cf. Dillon 1977, 356) with an orientalizing imagery of the 'Sophia syndrome' type.

²⁸ Cf. Dodds, above, n. 27; J. Whittaker, *Phoenix* 21, 1967, 196 ff.

²⁹ The image of the Good as a lonely little ship on the open sea is very odd, but one may speculate about a remote connection with Diotima's 'sea of beauty' (cf. also des Places ad l. and p. 104 f.). The idea of a 'lookout' occurs in Philo spec.leg. 3,48.

³⁰ The sage is unmoved by passions, 248, 252 (but there are faint reflexes of *Phaedrus*, notably at 251). For the sources of Apuleius, see Dillon 1977, 311 ff. Amor (Cupido) the genius is discussed in some detail in *De deo Socratis*, but in *De dogmate Platonis* (ch.13-14) love and friendship are treated very much in the same manner as in Alcinous.

many Platonic reminiscences (18-21). Unfortunately his sources are an open question.³¹

Though I have not scrutinized the Gnostic and Hermetic texts, I am rather sure that they do not really enrich our picture of the interpretation of Plato's Eros. It is true that Gnosticism in particular indulges in sexual myth and symbolism. But there seems to be very little of Plato's Eros in all this. It is mainly the procreation idea that is seen as an erotic process, and the background is here Oriental. The desire of Sophia or other Aeons to reach their roots or their Father may look more Platonic, but as far as I can see it is not described in terms of Platonic sublimated ἔρωσ. If I am right, the Sophia syndrome is interesting here chiefly as one of the more remote sources for Plotinus' imagery, and as a parallel to Plutarch's more Platonistic Moon and Isis myths. And note also the fact that Eros is not found among the series of abstract concepts that function as powers, δυνάμεις, in the Gnostic systems; but Ἀγάπη occurs in Valentinianism.³² Possibly, however, there are more distinctly Platonistic elements in some of the Chaldaean Oracles which refer to a πατρικὸς νόος and the ἔρωσ caused by and directed to it (cf. 39, 42, 44, and 134 des Places).

Alexandrian Platonism of the late 2nd and early 3rd century, and above all the enigmatic figure of Ammonios Sakkas, and the question of the

³¹ I know of no detailed study of the platonism of Maximos. Passages such as 21,4, where he distinguishes ἔρωσ which is directed to τὸ καλόν from ordinary ἐπιθυμία, suggest that he was quite well informed on a Platonist discussion about Eros Ouranios which we cannot trace. – For some references to the 'minor Platonists' of the 2nd century A.D., see Dillon 1977; cf. also H.Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 22), 1932. Tauros lectured on the *Symposium* in the 140s; Attikos and Harpokration are said to have written on the *Phaedrus* (see Dörrie & Baltes, eds., *Der Platonismus III*, 1993, 197); but we know nothing of their interpretation of Eros, or of Kelsos's (cf. *Orig. c.Cels.* 8,28, 33, 35 on his demonology).

³² For Gnosticism, I have relied on the references in Koch 1932, Krämer 1964 (esp. 223 ff.), Dillon 1977, and R.T. Wallis (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Studies in Neoplatonism 6), 1992; for Hermeticism, also on A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste, I³-IV*, 1950-54. For instance, the bewilderment and frustrations of Sophia, trying to reach her Father, would provide an almost boundless field for research (for example, have any Gnostics studied the Penia story, *Symposium* 203b-204a?). Very occasionally more manifest traces of Platonic ideas seem to occur: one is the doctrine of Basileides (in Hippol. 7,22,8, cf. Krämer 1964, 235 ff.) that all nature strives (ὀρέγεται) towards the ὑπερβολὴ κάλλους of its God and Father (cf. *Republic* 6,509a). For lists of δυνάμεις, see Krämer 242. – For the 'narcissistic love affair' implied in the *Poimandres*, see Dillon 391.

debt of Christian theology to Middle Platonism regarding the Eros/Amor complex in particular, form a notorious set of problems of considerable relevance to my present theme. With much more reason than in the case of Gnosticism and Hermeticism, I regret that I have not been able at the present time to reexamine the texts. Some notes on the basis of secondary sources may be allowed.³³

Clement does not seem to have an eros doctrine, any more than had Philo, who is one of his principal sources. God's 'downward' flowing providential benevolence is agapistic but certainly not erotic; and approaching God is to Clement an intellectual, 'non-erotic' process, if my information is correct.³⁴ Origen, however, (the Christian, if he is to be separated from the Platonist)³⁵ goes further than Clement. His variety of the Sophia syndrome includes an interpretation of the Song of Songs where the desire of the Bride for her Lord is seen allegorically as the love of man's soul for God in terms of ἔρως (*amor* in the translation of Rufinus, but Origen makes it clear that he operates with Platonic terminology). Also elsewhere he sometimes tends to identify divinely inspired Platonic love with ἀγάπη so as to make the Christian God factually the object of sublimated Eros.³⁶

Now, since Origen (both Origenes, if they were two) and Plotinus had

³³ See again Koch 1932, Krämer 1964 (282 ff.); further, Rist 1964 (195 ff.), and notably S.R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 1971, and H. Pietras, *L'amore in Origene* (Studia Ephem. 'Augustinianum' 28), 1988.

³⁴ The starting point for the Christian theory of 'love of God' is LXX Deuteronom. 6,5 ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου... (Vulg.: *diliges*), with its reflexes in the NT. Nygren argued (since the 1920s) that ἀγάπη was influenced by Platonic ἔρως even before Clement; I do not deny this, but I believe it can be shown that the terms were kept apart at least until Origen. This can be seen in the apologists, too. For instance, Justin dial. 8,1 speaks of the ἔρως of prophets rather in the Philonian manner. The notorious 'crucified ἔρως' of Ignatius (Sources Chrét. 10, 134, cf. Pietras 1988, 45 f.) sounds to me rhetorical rather than dogmatic (cf. the similar rhetorical bias in Plotinus' identification of Τάγαθόν with Eros, Enn. 6,8,15,1-10, though cf. Rist 1964, 78 ff.).

³⁵ An open question to Krämer 1964, 284 n. 357.

³⁶ A problem to A. Nygren, see the references in n. 33. A specific problem, worthy of more scrutiny, is the tendency (admitted by Pietras 1988, 34) of Latin translations to use *amor* for other terms than ἔρως: thus φιλόθεος becomes *amator Dei* (cf. Origen Hom.Ez. 3,3). Whittaker (like Rist), perhaps too anachronistically, tries to harmonize Agape and Eros: see esp. his 1970 essay on the subject, reprinted in *Platonism and its Christian heritage*, 1985.

been pupils of Ammonios Sakkas, and Ammonios was an ex-Christian, it seems to me reasonable to assume that Ammonios had taught something of this kind. More specifically, it can be claimed that Ammonios had made a point of the tradition about Eros of which we have seen some scattered traces in Middle Platonism and which perhaps derives ultimately from Xenokrates: as Plato was supposed to have taught in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, Eros is an elevating cosmic force or a daimon that may aid man in approaching, not only the Form of Beauty, but the Supreme God, Nous. Man may become "enamoured of Nous". It has been rightly remarked, however, that since Origen's God is still a Nous God, and not The One, the Plotinian concept of a supranoetic One cannot plausibly be attributed to Ammonios.³⁷

But the above notes seem to suggest that this interpretation of sublimated Eros was not part of a consistent Middle Platonist doctrine. Since early Hellenistic times, Eros functioned mainly as a mythic device or a literary metaphor in Platonism, whatever had been the intentions of Xenokrates. The Platonic overtones of the term ἔρως suited the imagery of religious authors such as Philo, or philosophizing literates such as Plutarch or Maximos; but Eros did not become "internalized" into philosophy or doctrinalized until, possibly, Ammonios' teaching in Alexandria opened new perspectives. Man's "love of god" had been no Middle Platonist tenet, any more than "love of the One" could have been so.³⁸

It is therefore particularly interesting that Plotinus gives as much emphasis to Eros as he does. Of course he relied on the tradition and its accretions. But it seems to me that he interpreted them, together with the relevant passages in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic*, in the light of

³⁷ On this, see Dodds 1960, 24 ff., Dillon 1977, 382 f. But Dörrie, commenting on Dodds (1960, 43), argues that Ammonios may have taught a ἐνώσις doctrine after all. I am not convinced.

³⁸ Cf. above, n. 8. Middle Platonic ideas of course lingered on long after Plotinus. Longinos, who is usually considered the last Middle Platonist, was pronouncedly conservative in doctrinal matters though he too had been a pupil of Ammonios (cf. Porph. V.Plot. 14, 17 f., 20 f.; Proklos in Tim. 1,322 D). And many later authors, including Calcidius and also Augustine, continue to draw on Middle Platonist sources beside whatever Plotinian ideas may have reached them. The above notes suggest, however, that Augustine's statement (civ. 8,8), *Platonem determinasse ... hoc esse philosophari, amare Deum*, originated in Neoplatonic sources (or Origen, via translations).

an intensely personal experience of *Unio Mystica*. The pointed identification (wherever he got it from) of the First Principle ἕν with the First Form, τὸ ἀγαθόν, and the idea of a concentric system of hypostases forming a continuum (with Ἐν-Ἀγαθόν in a "transcendent" centre) made this new interpretation of Eros possible. I argued this in a paper published in 1980,³⁹ where I drew attention to the many passages in the *Enneads* where Eros is not only the force that moves human psyche towards Nous, and via τὸ καλὸν towards τὸ Ἀγαθόν. There is also a distinct erotic imagery in Plotinus' description of the actual process of ἕνωσις, a vocabulary that later mystics have often found inspiring, and many have found embarrassing.⁴⁰ To Plotinus as to Plato (though surely less consciously), ἔρως is sublimated sexuality. The bewilderment of Alcinous vis à vis Eros is forgotten. Plotinus gave a new status, a new object, and indeed, new wings to Plato's Eros that would have both amused and bewildered 'Socrates'.

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³⁹ *Arctos* 14, 1980, 101-114.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rist 1964 (*passim*) who, however, did not take full account of the evidence.