Philosophical Eros, tyrannical Eros, and pleasure (*hêdonê*) in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*

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ABSTRACT • Why does Plato call two kinds of love "Eros" which appear to be fundamentally different from each other? The philosophical Eros in *Symposium* leads to the highest vision of beauty and fosters a philosophical life. The tyrannical Eros in *Republic* IX is a destructive force, depriving people of their humanity. A key concept to understand the difference is pleasure (*hêdonê*). The contribution aims to show that Eros, the tyrannical ruler of the soul is different from Eros, the helper in climbing the ladder of love, because Eros itself is an ambivalent neutral force. It depends on its direction towards an object if it turns out to be good or bad, harmful or helpful. To argue for this understanding a few objections of Charles H. Kahn against Eros as a neutral power are ad-dressed.

KEYWORDS • love, Eros, Plato, pleasure, tyrant, ladder, force, beauty

Plato knows two kinds of love which, at first sight, could not be more different from each other—and yet he calls them both "Eros". The more popular one which coined the expression "platonic love" is the philosophical Eros which starts in the sensual realm. Initially appearing as the love of beautiful bodies, it is leading all the way up to the highest vision of Beauty or Good itself. The most prominent passage about this kind of Eros is found in Plato's *Symposium* (Symp. 201d–212c). Philosophical Eros is a helping, positive power which seems to be necessary to lead a good and meaningful life. The other kind of love is the tyrannical Eros which enslaves humans and makes them do terrible things, depriving them of their humanity. This kind is the disturbing, negative kind of Eros whose effects on man are described at lengths in book IX of Plato's *Republic*.

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This begs the puzzling question: Why does Plato use the same term for an apparently different kind of force?[1] How come that Eros can be devastating and harmful? How can tyrants be driven by Eros, while on the other hand, in the *Symposium*, it is the force to ensure happiness and a fulfilled, philosophical life? A key concept contributing to a possible answer is the concept of lust (*hêdonê*). Surprisingly, if we read the *Symposium* closely, *hêdonê* is nearly absent in Diotima's talk—according to Santas a "serious defect".[2] Lust does not play any role when Diotima elaborates on the 'positive' concept of Eros while the tyrannical Eros can only be understood in connection with the *epithymêtikon*, the faculty of the soul which is source of the lowest kind of lust. Lust and tyrannical Eros are inevitably connected, while the positive, philosophical kind of Eros is described without reference to *hêdonê*. And in the end, it looks like a mistake to call the second type "Eros" at all, because it is rather the upshot of uncontrolled desires, a tyranny of lust. However, we can try to understand, even from the *Symposium*, how Plato gets to that idea.

The following first part will elaborate on the philosophical Eros, its functions and effects, the second part will be about the tyrannical Eros in Rep. IX. In part three I will propose an answer to the initial question why these two apparently different phenomena are both called "Eros".

The philosophical Eros in *Symposium* 201d–212c

What does everyone long for? Diotima's *elenchos*

In Plato's *Symposium* Apollodoros tells a friend about a banquet which was held long ago at Agathon's place. It occurred when he was a child, but Aristodemos, an avid follower of Socrates and one of the guests, told him about it.[3] They are celebrating the poet's victory in the dramatic competition. The guests are holding several talks (*logoi*) in order to praise the god

[1] The difference is so striking that despite Plato uses the same word, tyrannical *erôs* has been translated differently (see for a list of examples Scott, Dominic, "Erôs, Philosophy, and Tyranny", in: *id*. (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 136f., FN 1.

[2] Santas, Gerasimos, "Plato's Theory of Eros in the Symposium: Abstract", in: *Nous* 13 (March 1979), 74.

Eros (Symp. 177a–b). When it comes to Socrates' turn, he is not actually presenting his own thoughts, but the ones of Diotima, the wise priestess who talked to Socrates about Eros when he was of a younger age. Which is a somewhat important detail—the *Symposium* took place when Socrates was about 53 years old[4].

The first part mostly consists of Diotima questioning Socrates. Diotima conducts an elenchus which is similar to the one Socrates just conducted with the fifth speaker and host, Agathon. It turns out that Eros is no god at all, but an in-between being, a *daimôn*. He is a translator or messenger, a helper mediating between gods and humans. And even more, he is the only way how humans can come into contact (*homilia*) with the gods (Symp. 203a2–3). Eros had very different parents: his father is Poros (gr. 'path' as opposed to *aporia*, helplessness; sometimes translated as "Plenty"), his mother Penia (gr. 'poverty'). Thus, his in-between-ness is emphasized once more, he is neither rich nor poor, he is neither wise nor ignorant. Eros is a longing being, the lover, not the one who *is* loved (Symp. 204c1–6). The next question is what the benefits of Eros are for man, which requires to ask what humans are longing for. Diotima claims that everyone desires the same thing, the Good. Everyone loves the Good, because if someone possesses[5] the Good, he reaches *eudaimonia*, happiness. In 205b Diotima states that we only call a certain kind of love "Eros"—what is meant here is likely the erotic relationship between persons—while Eros is in fact much more. Every desire for the Good (*hê tôn agathôn epithymia*) is love, is Eros, and the most powerful kind even. Thus, if something is not love of something good, it is only a defective kind of love.

In one of the speeches being held before Socrates, Aristophanes told the romantic story of everyone searching his missing counterpart or 'half', the 'someone' which belongs to oneself—a classical text still read at contemporary weddings. However, his story is harshly criticized by Diotima. If it is not good, so she objects, it has nothing to do with love. People do not love something just because it belongs to them. They would even get rid of their

[3] This unusual double framework of the story could indicate that the readers should not take everything at face value, since the memory of either the narrators might be fuzzy. However, Apollodoros states that Socrates himself confirmed the things Aristodemos told him (Symp. 173a4–7), which partly revokes this impression.

[4] Most likely 416 BC, which is the first time Agathon was victorious in the dramatic contest.

[5] The Greek word used in Symp. 205a1 is *ktêsis*, 'possession'.

own limb in case it is sick and threatens one's health or life. This is an important passage, because Aristophanes' conception of love is far away from what Plato has in mind. People do love the Good, and the Good alone. They want to possess the Good, not for a while, but forever. And lastly, they long for eternity, which is why they want to procreate, be it in physical or abstract ways (Symp. 208e2–209e5).

The 'ladder of love'

The most famous part of the *Symposium* follows these discussions[6] and describes the way to the vision of Beauty, which takes place in several steps or stages, the so-called 'ladder of love'. The vision of Beauty (*kallon*) can be identified with the vision of the idea of the Good, most prominently described in Plato's *Republic*.[7] On the different stages mentioned in *Symposium* we see 'Eros at work'. His whole power unfolds as a love which concerns virtually all areas of life. What is often overread, is that even the very first stage, the love of beautiful bodies, is not one of merely erotic relationships. The lover addresses beautiful talks (*logoi*), towards the one person whose body he loves (Symp. 210a8). By no means this stage can be regarded, as Charles H. Kahn does, as "prison-house of the carnal desire"[8]. It

[6] Apparently, there were several discussions, spread out over a longer timespan (see Erler, Michael, Platon, in: *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, begr. von Friedrich Ueberweg, Bd. 2/2, Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2007, 192).

[7] Mainly because of structural similarities. See for further arguments Schwartz, Maria, *Der philosophische* bios *bei Platon* (Freiburg/München: Alber, 2013), 287, FN 46. For possible distinctive features of Goodness and Beauty see C. D. C. Reeve, whose analysis is based, however, only on the *Symposium* (Reeve, C. D. C. "Plato on Begetting in Beauty [209e5–212c3])", in: Horn, C. (ed.), *Symposion*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012, 159–163).

[8] Kahn, Charles H., "Plato's Theory of Desire", in: *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Sep. 1987), 100. His reading seems to be inspired by the *Phaedo*. For dissimilarities between the two dialogues, especially concerning the attitude towards the physical realm, see Frede, Dorothea, "Out of the Cave: What Socrates learned from Diotima", in: Rosen, R. /Farrell, J. (ed.), *Nomodeiktes. Greek Studies in Honour of Martin Ostwald* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 401–403. There is even a "necessity" to start with bodily attraction—without it we would not understand Beauty in all its manifestations, as it is pointed out by Hyland, Drew A., *Plato and the Question of Beauty* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 53.

is a good thing to love someone, only a lesser one than all the following, even better things. The perspective widens when the lover becomes aware that beauty is same in two different bodies (Symp. 211c4). He is no longer fixated on one person but loves all the beautiful bodies (stage two). On stage three he starts to pursue beauty in the souls, which is much more splendid, and he tries to make the souls of young men beautiful, which means to make them good or virtuous. While he is doing this, he recognizes the beauty in activities, actions, customs, and laws (stage four). Finally, he is progressing to the beauty of insights, of *logoi* and thoughts. He strives for wisdom and becomes a philosopher. So far, this whole process seems to be quite controlled. As M. Bordt points out, falling in love with someone just happens to us, but we can very well choose if we start a relationship with this person or not[9]. The second stage starts with an insight, like "Oh, beauty in this body is just the same as in that other one!" and then there is a reaction to this insight, like moving on to value both and finally *all* the beautiful bodies. It can be assumed this decision entails addressing talks to several people, not only one, as well.

However, the climax of the ascent, the vision of beauty itself, is not something actively chosen anymore. It comes suddenly, as a surprise and this experience cannot be put in words even. Diotima uses negative terms—she tells what Beauty is *not*. It is not really an insight (*logos*), but something eternal. It did not come into being nor does it perish. It is beautiful, not regarding only some aspects, but as a whole. It is Beauty itself. All other beautiful things participate in its beauty and all the good and beautiful activities on the other stages do as well.

Next, what are the effects of the vision of beauty? Diotima claims that only at this point of life, where one sees Beauty, it is worth living (Symp. 211d1–3). Which means, on the contrary, if someone does not see it, she or he is missing out on the meaning of life! Furthermore, who experienced Beauty itself will apparently not be content with meditating it, albeit this aspect is mentioned as well. He will begin to produce real or true virtue, not fake virtue or pictures of it (*eidôla*; Symp. 212a4). He will procreate, not in

[9] See Bordt, Michael, "Worauf zielt unsere Sehnsucht? oder: Was wir von Platon lernen können", in: Murillo, J. S. de/Thurner, M. (ed.), *Aufgang. Jahrbuch für Denken, Dichten, Musik*. Bd. 2 *Sehnsucht* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2005), 162. See also Hyland, who emphasizes the rational character of the whole ascent (Hyland, *Plato and the Question of Beauty*, 2008, 54–56).

bodies, but in souls. It is not entirely clear if that means going out and educating others, similar to stage three, or if the philosopher produces virtue first and foremost in his own soul[10]—most likely both.

The vision of Beauty—an unreachable ideal?

It is widely discussed if the vision of the Beauty is even humanly possible or just an unreachable ideal. However, the formerly mentioned "possession" of the Good means to arrive at the vision of Beauty. There is an often-neglected part right at the beginning of the *Symposium* where Socrates holds sudden, long meditations (Symp. 175b2–3; see also 220c3–d5). I follow Thomas Szlezák in his interpretation that the meditations are an indicator that Socrates reached the point where he repeatedly deals with Beauty itself[11]. Diotima is showing us the 'inner' side of this experience while in the story framing the *Symposium* the outer perspective is shown by others wondering about the meditating Socrates. An illustration of the effect of Beauty is presented later in the text, by Alcibiades. Socrates has a different relationship to him than the pederastic one Pausanias advocated in his speech. Which, as a side remark, was not commonly accepted in ancient Greek society, but a highly controversial topic, as we see right from the *Symposium* as well as from other texts[12]. Socrates does not seem to be interested at all in the sexual part, he is interested in *logoi* and virtue. At least that is what the story of Alcibiades tells us[13].

[10] Looking at the dialogues Socrates was not very successful in teaching others to be good, and neither was Plato, for example in Syracuse. However, what unites them both is the urge to at least attempt to do so.

[11] See Szlezák, Thomas A., *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), 253–270.

[12] For the historical background see eg. Dover, Kenneth J., *Greek Homosexuality*. Updated and with a New Postscript (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) or Patzer, H., *Die griechische Knabenliebe* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982).

[13] Alcibiades was lying next to Socrates like a son next to his older brother or father (Symp. 219d1–2), which is reminiscent of Rep. 403b5–c2: The lover (*erastês*) should treat his beloved like a son, and not go any further.

The vision of Beauty—a mystical experience?

Next, can the vision of Beauty be interpreted as a "mystical experience", as it was suggested by, amongst others, Karl Albert and André Jean Festugière[14]? Did Socrates—or at least Plato as author of the passage—experience something the Saints also did, a kind of unity with the Good, which in this case should be identified with God? I think this interpretation is only partly accurate, for several reasons. The climax of the ladder of love which we just discussed sounds very much like Beauty is something unearthly, exceptional, something one cannot even talk about. However, in other places Plato takes back his claim in Symp. 211a8 that this experience is not knowledge or insight. Right after the first introduction of the 'ladder of love' he states that it is a rational insight and knowledge after all (Symp. 211b9). Further, the vision of the Good is referred to as the highest 'insight' (*to megiston mathêma*) in the *Republic* as well (Rep. 504d3–4). This insight is certainly life-changing. However, the change in question looks like an ethical conversion, a turn to virtue, not necessarily to religion or a transcendent absolute. In the *Republic* the aspect of 'bringing about' virtue as a necessary consequence of the vision of Beauty is even more emphasized than in the *Symposium*. The vision of the Good evokes a strong desire to be virtuous, to do good, just because it is good and to motivate others to do same. But this is not the same as a "mystical" experience in the sense of a unification with the "One". This reading of Plato is inspired by Plotinus[15], but it does not follow straight from Plato's dialogues. His central question seems to be how someone can become a good, virtuous person. As shown above this is also the context of the whole 'ladder-of-love' passage in Diotima's talk.

[14] See Albert, Karl, *Über Platons Begriff der Philosophie* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1989) and Festugière, André Jean, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1936). M. Bordt calls the experience 'metaphysical' as well as 'mystical' with reference to W. James (see Bordt, Michael, "Worauf zielt unsere Sehnsucht?", 2005, 166). However, for James a 'mystical' experience is already defined by only two criteria, ineffability and noetic quality (see James, William, *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902, 371). In case the—highly discussed—ineffability is granted, the experience in Symp. 210e1–212a8 could possibly fall under this wider definition.

[15] See Perkams, Matthias, s. V. Liebe (*erôs, philia*), in: Schäfer, C. (ed.), *Platon-Lexikon* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2007), 183f.

Summarizing the role of Eros as depicted in the *Symposium* he is a vital helper to reach the vision of the Beauty or the Good. Eros is a power which affects all areas of life like relationships, activities, proper laws, doing good, talks, science, all the way up to the insight that nothing is worth to be loved if it is not truly good. This insight itself is the highest climax of love, of Eros. Moving on to the second part, we will take a look at the character and role of the tyrannical Eros in Rep. IX.

The tyrannical Eros in Rep. IX

Plato's *Republic* revolves around one central question: Is it better to be good or bad? Is it better to lead a just life, even if no one notices, if it might get you tortured and killed, or an unjust one? Plato develops several arguments why it is best to be a good person regardless of the circumstances. One of the most convincing and crucial arguments takes a psychological approach. If one's soul is not in a proper state, in a good constitution, one cannot lead a happy life. All relationships will fail, because one cannot even live with oneself, one is not even oneself anymore.

To understand this argument, we recall that in the *Republic* Plato distinguishes three faculties or parts of the soul, the rational one (*logistikon*), the spirited one (*thymoeidês*), a kind of power, and finally the desires (*epithymêtikon*). This tripartite human soul is compared to a political state with a certain constitution. In book VIII of the *Republic* Plato describes what happens if the rational part, which actually should rule, loses control and the other two parts get into charge. First, there's the timocratic man, ruled by spirit, always ready for a fight, eager for revenge. Second, there's the oligarchic man, who follows a certain desire, he strives for wealth. The democratic character is pictured as the third stage of decay. While a timocratic person puts honour above all things and the oligarchic likes to pile up money, the democrat treats all kinds of desires equally. He follows whatever impulse is coming up, except for criminal desires. Now and then the democrat even engages into philosophy, but he does not stick to it for too long (Rep. 561d2). The most interesting character regarding our topic is the fourth and worst state of decay: The tyrant, who originates from the democrat because at one point he does not endure the total freedom and the lack of orientation anymore. The democratic soul flips into its opposite, from free-

dom into slavery, just as democracy turns into tyranny. I will not discuss the decay of the state in book VIII and IX here, which—as an image of the individual person's soul—is discussed parallel to the individual person's decay.

The right way to deal with desires is neither to let them unsatisfied, especially the "necessary" ones, nor to overfill them (Rep. 571e1–2), especially not the ones Plato calls "unlawful" or criminal. Everyone, without any exception has these wild, unlawful desires, which can appear in dreams, but normally we do not pursue them. The tyrant is different. His decay starts when he gets into bad company. His friends tell him true freedom is to pursue any desire, even criminal ones (Rep. 572e2–3). Once he does that, they quickly grow into an overwhelming force which throws out all the good desires which are left in the soul[16]. The tyrant's soul gets taken over by an inner tyrant named "Eros".[17] And while the takeover starts with a decision—the one to follow the advice of his friends –, control is quickly lost after. He might still possess limited technical control like either to kill or to rob or to bribe someone to reach a goal, but not the power to question the goal itself anymore which is set by desires and lust.

Plato describes the tyrant's soul as that of a madman, an alcohol addict, or a deeply depressive person. He can be a nymphomaniac as well, but this is only one facet of his many ways of tragic existence[18]. The tyrant suffers from a variety of strong desires and does everything to satisfy those. He spends his riches and commits crimes, like thievery and murder. He cannot even maintain normal relationships but tries to force others. He wants to control them, just as he is controlled and enslaved himself by Eros. And yet he fails to satisfy any desire, because while trying to do so they only grow stronger, causing constant pains. He is haunted, so Plato, by a big swarm of lust (*hêdonai*; Rep. 574d3). As a side remark, lust (*hêdonê*) is what results from desire once it is fulfilled, but here Plato uses "desire" and "lust" almost as synonyms. Indeed, it is possible to say either a desire is haunting someone or the according lust, a result of its fulfilment. Eros is described as

[16] A purge which seems to be the exact opposite of the one the philosopher-kings are supposed to initiate in the souls of the citizens (Rep. 501a2–4).

[17] Plato might have taken the term from poetry (namely Euripides), noting Eros has been called a tyrant "since the old times" (Rep. 573b7–8).

[18] Eros is no longer identified with sexual desire like in Book IV of the *Republic*. Irwin observes a "non-literal or extended" use of *erôs* in Book IX (see Irwin, Terence, *Plato's Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 302).

a kind of General, the leader of the rest of desires and *hêdonai* (Rep. 573e6). According to my interpretation, "Eros" is the name for the whole faculty of desire (*epithymêtikon*) once things have gone wrong. Giving it a name like that illustrates the fact that this part of the soul now acts like an alien force. The desires are ruling the soul and therefore lose connection to the Good entirely. The latter cannot be avoided, because this vital connection has been established by the now-darkened rational part, which is the only one able to have insights[19]. Now this "Eros" seems to be entirely different from the philosophical one[20]. Why is that so? In the following and last part three I will try to answer the question why Plato calls this enslaving power "Eros" at all, along with suggesting a possible answer to his strange avoidance of lust (*hêdonê*) in the *Symposium*.

Eros the ruler, Eros the helper and the role of *hêdonê*

There are three final points about Eros which I would like to emphasize.

1) First, as we saw Eros concerns all areas of life, the love towards bodies, souls, activities/actions, knowledge and the idea of Beauty/Good itself—all of this can be passionately loved and hence belongs to the field of Eros.

2) Second, Eros is a motivating, however ambivalent power, it can turn out good or bad. In the *Symposium* it is hinted more than once that Eros is not a naturally good power, but an ambivalent in-between-one. It is a longing for something which is present in every human being and perhaps even naturally directed towards the Good. But this orientation can be lost. Once

[19] The rational part is compared to a person later (Rep. 589a-b). This person cannot see the Good anymore, once it is darkened by the rule of the *epithymêtikon*, which is compared to a colorful animal with many, constantly changing heads (Rep. 588c2–10).

[20] They are not both *mania*, against Scott who refers to *Phaedrus* (see Scott, Dominic, "Erôs, Philosophy, and Tyranny", 2008, 142–146) and Dixsaut: "tyran ou philosophe, il s'accompagne toujours de mania." (Dixsaut, Monique, *Le naturel philosophe. Essai sur les dialogues de Platon*, Paris: J. Vrin, ^{3}2001, 138). There are methodical reasons why Eros is called *mania* at all in *Phaedrus* (see Sheffield, Frisbee C. C., "Eros before and after tripartition", in: Barney, R. /Brennan, T. /Brittain, C., *Plato and the divided self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, 236f.). The only one talking about the *mania* of philosophy in the *Symposium* is Alcibiades (Symp. 218b3–4).

Eros goes rogue and becomes an independent longing, the former place of the Good is not empty, but filled with whatever object a desire prevailing in the soul is aiming at. Eros turns back, it collapses into the selfishness of the human soul's strive for lust and the slavery begins.

The tyrant does not react to insight like the person following Eros in the *Symposium*. He is driven by desires, by the *hêdonai* without ability to deny their requests. And this is probably why Plato avoids talking about *hêdonê* in the context of the *Symposium's* ascent, to avoid evoking the aspect of enslavement and 'being driven'. Plato could have mentioned the philosophical pleasure (*hêdonê*), which is called the best kind of *hêdonê* in the *Republic* (Rep. 581e1–2). In *Philebus* he talks about a pure *hêdonê* as well, a form of lust or joy which accompanies rational activity (Phil. 52a-b). But this reveals a further obstacle. He cannot attribute Eros to one of the faculties of the soul in *Symposium*, not even to the rational, because the soul's division into parts does not play a role at all in the dialogue[21]. The whole soul is engaged in the ascent. None of her good and non-criminal desires is neglected. However, the upshot of this point is that it is not a mistake to call both phenomena "Eros", tyrannical and philosophical one, because they are based on the same ambivalent power.

Charles H. Kahn raised several objections against a, as he calls it, "quasi-Freudian"[22] interpretation of Eros as a neutral power which I will briefly address here[23]:

a) It would not account for the three parts of the soul being independent sources of motivation and thus not explain the notion of psychic conflict in Rep. IV, VIII and IX.

b) It is unclear how reason could control the other two psychic parts.

c) It is incompatible with the view of Eros as a desire for good things in the *Symposium*.

Objection c) is answered in this contribution and summarized below—the object of desire defines if Eros turns out to be a desire for good or bad things. Regarding objection a), psychic conflict could be explained by Eros

[21] As Sheffield remarks, there is no positive 'theory' about a unified soul either (see Sheffield, Frisbee C. C., "Eros before and after tripartition", 2012, 215).

[22] Which would be a misleading term for the model I am suggesting. 'Eros' is not referring to a distinct, Freudian 'psychic energy', but to desires insofar they prevail—in the *Symposium* by choice, in Rep. IX by force.

[23] See Kahn, Charles H., "Plato's Theory of Desire", 1987, 96–99.

being "torn" between several objects of desire, albeit there remains a tension between the tripartite soul in the *Republic* and the seemingly unified conception in the *Symposium*. However, the two models are compatible, there is no need to opt for one and disregard the other. Plato talks about 'Eros' in *Symposium* and *Republic* alike once a desire already prevails, in the sense that it is acted on. The soul is not a static entity, there are processes going on and it does not only depend on the aspect under which these are described, but also on the moment in time if we see 'Eros' at work, reason or the many desires. The multitude of conflicting desires and incentives, springing from several faculties of the soul including the rational one[24], exists especially before a decision to pursue any of them is made. And here reason comes into the picture. Answering objection b), only an orientation towards the Good allows reason to 'control' the other two parts[25], because reason is the faculty which enables us to decide which desire is good for us and which is not[26]. And only once a rational decision is made, a person can really say that "she" desires something instead of just being driven by Eros in its tyrannical form[27]. Further, only at this point, when a choice has been made, the 'channelling model' in Rep. 485d6–e1 applies: The desire which is pursued as well as the lust associated with it (here: the lust of the soul; 485d11) grows stronger, while others, especially the unnecessary ones, become weaker once they are ignored. Now if there's no rational decision at all, a desire can prevail as well, or rather, several take their turns by force, leading to certain behaviour of a person. But all this does not happen willingly, by choice of the whole person.

3) The role of Eros defines if it turns out good or bad. He is either a helper, connected to the Good or a tyrant, an independent ruler.

[24] See Cooper, John M., "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation", in: *id., Reason and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 123.

[25] I would even go further: Reason has to control and acknowledge its own, rational desires as well, because it is not always appropriate to pursue science either (see Rep. 535d6–7 or Tim. 87e7–88a7).

[26] As Kahn rightly remarks, a person orientated towards the Good is not only able to judge for herself—she possesses knowledge of the good for a community and even more, of the good in general (see Kahn, Charles H., "Plato's Theory of Desire", 1987, 84).

[27] This point would require much more discussion, but it could well be that the reluctance to make a rational decision already empowers the harmful Eros, which is only the upshot of random desires taking control.

In Rep. IX, Eros is not a helper. He is a ruler and that he must not be[28]. Once desire rules, as a blind power, it all goes downwards. We understand now that Eros is only good if it is not the overwhelming power which "Love" is in some religious frameworks. Eros in its positive form is a mere helper[29], a guide, whose value stems solely from its orientation towards the Good. There sure is a moment where control is lost, in a good sense. The vision of Beauty is coming over a person, she does not get to choose when and where. But this experience of Beauty is not enslaving people, it does the opposite. When Eros plays its proper, subordinate role as a helper, the affected person is not dragged from stage to stage in a rush[30]. She notices that it is time to go on. There is an incentive, but she freely chooses to follow. This rational choice constitutes the big difference between the seemingly *two* kinds of Eros, which are referring to the same underlying concept after all. Love can guide a person to highest joy as well as push her into deepest devastation. In the end it all depends on the object it is directed to.

[28] Against Agathon, who praises Eros as a ruler over all the other desires in Symp. 196c5–9.

[29] Like the *epithymêtikon* Eros can be good, helpful, and even necessary. Satisfying bodily desires, by choice, keeps a human alive, happy, and healthy (Gorg. 503c8–d1).

[30] A tension might arise if we think about Rep. 515e6–8 where someone is forcefully dragged up all the way out of the cave. However, this part refers to the *elenchus* conducted by another person like Socrates. The elenctic process of revealing one's own misconceptions might be painful, which is also indicated by its comparison with giving birth in Theait. 148e6–7.