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Galen, Plato, and the Physiology of Eros

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Abstract
Eros and 'the erotic' are terms generally applied to psychological and emotional states, but as most people know from personal experience, it can be small step from the psychological to the physical. From ancient poetry to the pop songs of our own day, the effects of love on the body have been well catalogued and long lamented, and in extreme cases the doctors have to be brought in. Greek medical writers have not left us copious clinical discussions of the physical consequences of eros, but they have certainly aware that an individual's emotional state could be profoundly affect the body, and erotic desire was commonly implicated in a variety of physical pathologies. Just where - or how - these emotional state could profoundly affect the body was a constant puzzle for Greek and Roman doctors, especially those whose materialist orientation encouraged them to map emotional states on to specific organs.

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Galen, Plato, and the Physiology of Erôs

Ralph M. Rosen

Erôs and 'the erotic' are terms generally applied to psychological and emotional states, but as most people know from personal experience, it can be a small step from the psychological to the physical. From ancient poetry to the pop songs of our own day, the effects of love on the body have been well catalogued and long lamented, and in extreme cases the doctors have to be brought in. Greek medical writers have not left us copious clinical discussions of the physical consequences of erôs, but they were certainly aware that an individual's emotional state could profoundly affect the body, and erotic desire was commonly implicated in a variety of physical pathologies. Just where—or how—these emotional forces 'resided' within a person's body was a constant puzzle for Greek and Roman doctors, especially those whose materialist orientation encouraged them to map emotional states onto specific organs.

INTRODUCTION: GALEN'S AND PLATO'S TREATMENT OF ERÔS

As a doctor with an undisguised reverence for Plato, and especially for Plato's notion of a tripartite soul, Galen theorized at length in several treatises about the complex interactions of the emotions, organs, health, and disease within the framework of a fundamentally Platonic psychology. For Galen erôs was an

3 See Hankinson (1991) esp. 198–200, on Galen's assimilation of, and divergences from, Platonic psychology. See also Tieleman (2002).
emotion associated with the appetitive part of the soul, the epithumétikon, it was powerful, difficult to control, and was responsible for all manner of irrational behaviour that could bring ill to oneself and others alike. Galen could have assimilated this position easily enough from various Platonic discussions of the epithumiai, even though it is also clear that much of his Platonism was indelibly marked by the intervening centuries of Stoic discourse about classic questions posed originally in Plato. Erôs as one of the Platonic epithumiai, therefore, becomes in Galen’s works a pathos, a ‘passion’ or ‘affection’—a very Stoic term, but located by Galen specifically in the appetitive (epithumétikon) and (sometimes) spirited (thumos) parts of the Platonic soul.

It comes as something of a surprise, however, that Galen showed no explicit engagement with the broader, more nuanced treatments of erôs also found in Plato, and then in subsequent philosophers up to Galen’s time. And it is perhaps especially surprising that in his monumental work On the opinions of Plato and Hippocrates (= PHP, from here on), where erôs as pathos is repeatedly discussed, Galen takes virtually no notice of Plato’s Symposium and Phaedrus, works that transform erôs into a force far more profound than mere appetite. Galen unquestionably knew both works, as occasional allusions to each indicate, but none of these passages is especially illuminating. Across his vast literary output he alludes to the Symposium only infrequently, and mentions it by name only once, in his commentary on the Hippocratic work, Prorrhetica 1—and there only to make a small philological point about a particular term in Hippocrates. He mentions Phaedrus six times, all in PHP, but his interest there was largely in the section of Phaedrus on division and classification, not the metaphysical parts that attempt to assign a positive role to irrational forces such as madness and erôs in a philosophical life. In fact, the one place in PHP where Galen mentions the famous passage in Phaedrus where the soul is likened to a chariot pulled by two horses and

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4 For Galen’s understanding of the Platonic epithumétikon, see De Lacy (1988).
5 See below for fuller discussion.
6 See Gill (1983) and esp. 187 on Galen’s adherence to Plato’s tripartite soul (in contrast to Chrysippus’ notion of a unified, fundamentally rational soul). See also Donini (2008) 188–90.
7 See Donini (2008) 194 with n. 59. Also Gill (this volume).
8 See e.g. Nussbaum (2002) 55–94, Renaut (this volume) with his n. 2, and Gill (this volume).
9 Translations from PHP throughout are from De Lacy (2005).
10 Nor, for that matter, does Galen seem much interested in subsequent Stoic notions of erôtikê aretê, on which, see Sorabji (2000) 281–2, and Gill (this volume). On erôs in Plato’s Phaedrus, see Calines (this volume).
11 De Lacy noted that Galen PHP 4.6.31, a quotation from Chrysippus, may allude to Pl. Symp. 183a–b (Pausanias’ invocation of the popular notion that the gods forgive lovers even if they break their vows). For discussion of this passage, see below.
12 The word at issue is κυράδες (‘tresses’), at Galen Hipp. Prorrh. 5.9.2 (ὅταν ὁδὸν ἀνίον πόσει πλέον κεκαραμμένον τινά λέγωμεν, ὧσπερ ὁ Ἱπποκράτης ἐπί τοῦ Πλάτωνος κατὰ τὸ Συμπόσιον εἶπεν).
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drawn erotically to beauty. Galen does so only to say that he likes the simile Plato uses in Republic 4 and 9 better. Galen thereby forestalls any engagement he might have undertaken with the most grandiloquent section of Phaedrus (e.g. 248–56), where Plato describes in poetically charged narrative the soul’s attempt, spurred on by the madness of love, to return to an original state in which it consorted with absolute being.

Galen’s apparent lack of interest in Plato’s expansive treatment of erôs is, I think, worthy of our attention for a number of reasons. First, Galen was every bit as concerned as Plato with the problem of desire and pleasure in human activity, especially—and here Galen’s medical orientation comes into play—when they are not well regulated and so could lead to disease and physical suffering. Second, like Plato too, Galen did not, as we shall see, repudiate tout court the pathê associated with the epithumetikon, but allowed them a positive role in human behaviour, provided they remained subservient to the rational part, the logistikòn. Since Galen had a strong interest in the interrelations of the three parts of a Platonic soul, it does seem rather odd that he evidently took no interest in Plato’s own attempt to explore an element of human psychology as complex as erôs, which, as the Symposium and Phaedrus make clear, could have profound effects, both positive and negative, on all parts of the soul.

Finally, it is surprising, given his obsession with Hippocrates, that Galen never had anything to say about the Hippocratic Eryximachus’ speech in Plato’s Symposium. Even if we do not take this speech altogether seriously, Eryximachus’ startling statement (186c6) that ‘medicine…is knowledge of the erotic affairs of the body in relation to filling up and emptying’ touches closely on Galen’s own interest in how medicine intersects with ethics, and

13 On this passage, see Cairns (this volume).
14 PHP 4.1.2. The image of the soul in Republic, which likens the three parts of the soul to two animals (the epithumetikon to a many-headed beast, the thumos to a lion) and a man (the rational part), Galen says, is more fitting than the one in Phaedrus (ὅς ἐκλαυσίστερα τῆς κατὰ τὸν Φαίδρον), by which he seems to mean that the simile in the Republic does a better job of specifying how the parts of the soul differ from one another in function and location in the body. See further in De Lacy (1988) 45 with n. 4.
15 The programmatic opening of Galen Quod animi moras (QAM) illustrates his position on the interrelationship between the condition of the soul and the body, although he is most concerned in this work with the effects of nutrition on behaviour: ‘since in fact…through food and drink and our other daily activities we accomplish a good bodily mixture, and from this mixture, we effect virtue in the soul’ (ἐπικαλάθεσιν ἑαυτῆς…καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τε καὶ σώματος ἐπενδυόμεθα ἑπεξεργάσῃ καὶ ἀρατῆς ἐς ἄρτιν τῇ ἐκλαυσίστερᾳ ἀστυπλόσειν). Much of Aff. Dig. reverses the perspective of QAM, highlighting problems of temperament and habit rather than bodily mixtures, and urging a therapy of self-control. The rhetoric of this treatise is largely ethical, but the many vices Galen describes typically involve the body (especially gluttony and sex) or have bodily consequences (e.g. anger, which can lead to violence). See esp. e.g. chs. 7 and 8—Magnaldi (1999) 41–53.
16 Galen often used the Stoic term, ‘the governing part’ (hégemonikon); cf. e.g. PHP 2.3.4 or 3.1.8–15, and Donini (2008) 180.
Eryximachus' subsequent claim (188) that a 'good' erōs lies behind the 'harmony' and balanced 'mixture' of the hot, cold, wet, and dry is not so far off from Galen's own fundamentally Hippocratic notions of humoral mixtures. If nothing else, Eryximachus' speech (and indeed the other speeches of the Symposium as well) encourages the reader to consider what it even means to speak of erōs in these terms—whether it makes sense in the first place to divorce it from sex, for example, and from there to transform it into an abstract philosophical principle. And if we are willing to think of erōs as a cosmic principle, or simply as a positive psychological force (both of which are broached in the Symposium and Phaedrus), rather than as a mere unreflective animal instinct, how can we really say that it resides in the desiderative part of the soul—typically, in Platonic, Stoic, and Galenic terms, a place that requires continual external restraints against its natural propensity for excess? In short, whereas Plato has offered us a sophisticated and subtle disquisition on erōs as a rich, but deeply ambivalent, principle of the human condition—part appetite, part catalyst, part physical, part intellectual—for Galen, we might say, it was a missed opportunity.

It would be an empty exercise, and a risky argument e silentio at that, to speculate too much about why Galen failed to take his cue from Plato and address the problem of erōs in Plato's nuanced terms. The most banal explanation may, after all, end up the truest: perhaps he found Plato's treatment of erōs in the Symposium and Phaedrus just a bit too fanciful for his scientific tastes. Galen certainly thought of himself as a philosophical doctor and even wrote a treatise arguing that 'the best doctor is also a philosopher'. But he had little interest in the more purely speculative aspects of the Greek philosophical traditions because they offered little practical utility, and he remained agnostic about the famously intractable dilemmas of philosophy, such as the immortality of the soul or the origins of the universe. So it could simply be that Socrates' description in the Symposium of the soul's ascent to absolute beauty, propelled by various forms of erōs, or his description in the Phaedrus of how the erotic attraction of the soul to a beautiful boy encourages the soul's wings to regenerate and ascend again to heaven—thrilling narratives though they may have been—might just have been too much for the hard-nosed Galen.

19 Galen’s remarks at the end of PHP 9 are typical; cf. e.g. 9.7.9: ‘To inquire also into matters that are not useful for ethics and political action is appropriate only for those philosophers who have chosen speculative philosophy… But such inquiries as these contribute nothing to managing one’s own household well or caring properly for the public interest, or acting with justice and friendliness towards kinsmen, citizens, and foreigners; or 9.9.9, where Galen says that the question of whether or not the soul is immortal is ‘of no use at all to medicine or to the philosophy called ethical and political, and physicians and many philosophers have with good reason omitted it’. 
to take seriously. A passage in his treatise On prognosis (ch. 6) suggests that Galen had in general little interest in anything but a physicalist attitude towards erōs. There he debunks the notion of an ‘erotically motivated pulse’ on the grounds that ‘there is no pulse indicative of love, and that the pulse rate changes . . . when the mind is in any way disturbed’.

Even though Galen seems to have shown little overt interest in Plato’s philosophically enhanced treatments of erōs in Symposium and Phaedrus, however, he was not uninterested, as we shall see, in the power of erōs and, given his commitment to a fundamentally Platonic psychology, the question remains whether his own analysis of the soul allowed any room for the more capacious view of erōs that we find in Plato. What we would really like to know is whether Galen would have at least been ‘sympathetic’ to Plato’s famous accounts of erōs, but since that is an unanswerable question, we can simply ask here how exactly Galen’s far more limited view of erōs squares with Platonic psychology, and whether he found in erōs anything that might distinguish it from the other emotions he also located in the epithumētikon.

At first glance, the answer to this question might seem fairly straightforward: Galen never singles out erōs for any kind of discrete theorizing when discussing the soul’s various desires and appetites, and on the relatively few occasions when he does bring up the topic (when he uses the word erōs explicitly), it is usually part of a more general discussion of other pathē, either of the desiderative or the spirited part of the soul (thumos). He will often speak in terms familiar from Plato, for example, of the anger paradigmatic of the Platonic thumoeides (‘spirited part’), and of the various bodily desires—food, drink, sex, love—typically associated with the epithumētikon. He endorsed Plato’s metaphor of the epithumētikon in Resp. 9 (588c) as a many-headed beast, and that image sums up his suspicions about the activities of these wild, untamed creatures of the human psyche (e.g. PHP 6.2.4). Unlike many Stoic thinkers, with whom he was in continual conflict on this point, Galen followed Plato in envisioning the discrete parts of the soul as entities capable of operating independently from one another and, unless reason steps in to manage the irrational parts, always at risk of endangering both body and soul.

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20 None of it could be scientifically demonstrated, after all, and that was the chief criterion he looked for in the philosophical principles that he felt most comfortable embracing. See Tiedeman (1986) 8–37 on Galen’s scientific methods.
21 Galen De paren. 6.16 (trans. Nutton (1979)). As Nutton notes, Galen’s point is not to deny the psychosomatic effects of emotional states, only that love in particular would affect the pulse differently from any other mental disturbance (197). See also Jackson (1969).
22 Discussed well e.g. in Gill (1983) and Hankinson (1991).
23 See e.g. PHP 5.7.42–3, where, in endorsing the Platonic notion that ‘it is not within the province of the same power both to reason and to desire food or drink or sexual pleasure’, Galen notes that this is a ‘fact that somehow escaped Chrysippus and many Stoics’. 
EROS AS EPITHUMIA IN PLATO

Before we consider Galen’s treatment of *erōs* as one of the soul’s *epithumiai*, a brief discussion of Plato’s attitude to this same topic is in order, for, as it happens, the nature of *erōs* as *epithumia* in Plato is complex and inconsistently treated across his works. The classic discussion of *epithumia* as a bodily appetite is *Resp.* 436a–439e, where *erōs* appears alongside other appetites such as thirst and hunger. At 436b1, Socrates refers euphemistically to the ‘pleasures of food and procreation, and things that are related to them’ (*ἐπιθυμομοια... τῶν περὶ τὴν προφήν τε καὶ γέννησιν ἕδωκαν καὶ δᾶα τούτων ἀδελφάκα), but in reiterating the point that the appetites reside in the ‘third part of the soul’ at 439d4, he uses the verbal form *erōi*; ‘(we call the third part of the soul) with which it feels *erōs*, hunger and thirst, and with which it gets excited over all the other desires, irrational and appetitive, the companion to various satiety and pleasures’ (τὸ δὲ φ’ *erōi* τε καὶ πεινὴ καὶ δίψη καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιθυμεῖας ἐπινόησαν ἀλλοιματῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμησικῶν, πληρώσεων τῶν καὶ ἕδωκαν ἔταιρον). In these contexts, Plato is clearly thinking of a basic notion of *erōs* as sexual appetite, not the more elevated, relational notion of desire he explores in *Lysis, Charmides, Symposium*, or *Phaedrus.*25 But even in *Plato* *erōs* never entirely loses its association with the appetites, and even when he entertains the idea of an *erōs* tamed by reason and re-oriented towards virtue, there always looms the threat that it will spin out of control. His fundamental suspicion of *erōs* is vividly on display in his description of the ‘tyrannical man’ in *Resp.* 9 (571–80), a man Socrates there imagines to be devoted first and foremost to gratifying his bodily appetites, with *Eros* orchestrating everything (573d2); ‘for I think that next there are banquets, revels, celebrations and girls, and all things of that sort for people in whom *Eros* resides as a tyrant within and directs all aspects of their soul’ (οἷς γὰρ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο ἑρωταὶ γέγονοι περ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ κόμοις καὶ θάλατα καὶ ἑταίραι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, δὲ ἃν ἦν Ἑρως τύμβων ὕδων ὁλείων διακεφαλεῖς τὰ τῆς ἰδιότητος ἀπαντά). At 573e3, when Socrates describes the rabble of desires that afflict the tyrannical man, he singles out *erōs* as the most powerful: ‘and [such

24 See above, n. 5.
25 See Lorenz (2006) 45, who stresses the importance of distinguishing between translations of *epithumia* as ‘appetite’ and ‘desire’ in Plato—certainly Plato’s widely differing notions of *erōs* across his works is a case in point. For *erōs* as a form of non-bodily desire in Plato and the Stoics, see Leontsini (this volume).
men] driven on by other desires, as if by a goad, and especially by *Eros himself* (γοῦς δ’ ἄστερ ὑπὸ κέντρων ἐλαυνομένων τῶν τε ἄλλων ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ διαφερόντως ἃν’ αὐτῷ τοῦ Ἔρωτος). Indeed, in a strikingly impassioned paragraph, beginning at 574c5, Socrates invokes *erōs* three times, each time conceptualizing *erōs* as the ultimate tyrant over the appetites in the tyrant’s soul.  

**Galen on the Psychological Effects of *Eros***

When Galen looks to Plato to affirm his argument about the desiderative part of the soul in *PHP* 5.7.40–1, he cites Resp. 4.439–40, where Plato speaks of it as διαφερόντως τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν, the part that ‘loves, feels hunger, thirst, and flutters around the other desires’ (ἐρατεία τε καὶ πεινὴ καὶ δυσφημία καὶ πειρὰ πάντα ἄλλως ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐπιτύημα). In such passages *erōs* is just another one of the standard components of the irrational part of one’s soul, Plato’s ‘many-headed beast’. But not all the many heads of that beast are equivalent, and Galen does seem to see *erōs* as a particularly powerful and dangerous *pathos*, usually working at cross purposes to a person’s better judgement and very difficult to master. Let us look more closely at how Galen addresses the effects of *erōs* on human psychology and physiology.

It is probably no mere chance that most of the explicit occurrences of the words *erōs* and *erōda* in Galen are found in *PHP*, where so much of the focus of this meandering work is on the *epithumētikon*. Much of Galen’s energy in this work is spent sparring with the views of the Stoic Chrysippus on the soul, both on the question of its physical location in the body and, even more urgently for Galen, whether it is a singularity (as Chrysippus believed) or divided into parts as Plato held.  

Galen takes a good bit of pleasure throughout *PHP* in pointing out how often Chrysippus is either wrong or inconsistent, and this is especially evident on the question of the causes of the affections (pathē), about which Chrysippus had written a treatise (*On the affections, Peri pathēn*). At *PHP* 4.5.4 Galen accuses Chryippus of failing to ‘anchor to any one doctrine’—’He tosses continually as on a stormy sea’—and, more specifically, of wavering on the question of whether the passions arise ‘apart from judgment’ (χωρίς κρίσεως) or because they are judgements. It is in this context that Galen has occasion to bring up several examples—all taken from by-then classic Greek

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literature—that fasten on eros as illustrative of the autonomy of the 
epithumetikon.

The first example is one he found discussed in Chrysippus, who had 
adduced two lines from Euripides’ Andromache (629–30), supposedly to 
show that passions are judgements. Galen finds Chrysippus’ thinking on this 
issue muddled and inconsistent: while Chrysippus claims to hold that the 
affections of the soul are caused by bad judgements (μωχθηρά κρίσεις, 4.6.2), he 
also speaks (according to Galen) of a ‘power beyond the rational’ (ἀρετὴ 
δυνάμεως ἐπέρας παρὰ τὴν λογικήν, 4.6.3), to which he gives the name τόνως, 
which influences these judgements and so our behaviour: ‘there are times 
when we abandon correct judgements because the tone of the soul yields and 
does not... carry out fully the commands of reason’ (4.6.3). This is how he 
would explain what happens when people find themselves in situations in 
which their former resolve to act in one way is defeated by some other, 
presumably non-rational, part of their psychology. Euripides, says Chrysippus, 
‘has presented Menelaus as this kind of person’:

οπεσάμενος γὰρ τὴν μάχαιραν φέρεται ἐπὶ τὴν Ἐλένην ὡς ἀναιρήσων, ιδὼν δὲ καὶ 
kαταπλαγεὶς [εἰς] τὸ κάλλος ἐξέβαλε τὴν μάχαιραν, ὁδὸν ταύτης ἐπὶ δυνάμεως κρατεῖν, 
kαθὼς καὶ ἡ ἐπίπλησις αὕτη ἔφτασε αὐτῷ ἀφὸ δὲ ὡς ἐδείξει μαστῶν [ἐκείνης] ἐξειλαὶ 
ἐξοφιο [φίλης], ἐθέξει πρὸς δὲ ἀλλῶν κάινα’ (PHP 4.6.9)

He drew his sword and rushed at Helen to kill her, but on seeing her and being 
struck by her beauty he let the sword drop, no longer able even to keep his hold on 
it. He was accordingly rebuked with these words: ‘When you caught sight of her 
breast you dropped your sword | and took her kiss, fawning on the shameless 
traitor.’

We need not enter into the particular points of disagreement Galen had with 
Chrysippus in this section about the exact psychological cause of Menelaus’ 
lack of resolve. More interesting for our purposes, rather, is the way in which 
eros is talked about here, originally by Chrysippus, of course, since Galen is 
largely culling texts for discussion from him. How negative are these 
examples? Are they morally equivalent to the other examples of potentially dangerous 
passions that one might bring up in such cases? 

The quotation from Euripides’ Andromache does not actually use the word 
eros, but this is clearly the background he has in mind: the lines mention the 
erotic effect on Menelaus of seeing Helen’s breast, kisses, and the kind of 
fawning one associates with lovers. Galen describes Menelaus as ‘smitten by 
her beauty’ (ἐκπλαγεὶς τοῦ κάλλους) and a few paragraphs later speaks of him 
as ‘bewitched by his desire’ for her (4.6.19: ψυχῆ δέλεασθείσα πρὸς τῆς 
ἐπιθυμίας). In the course of the ensuing discussion, also peppered with

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28 Galen notes at 4.6.16, e.g., that there are ‘thousands of individual things that induce people 
who live by the passions to depart from their original judgements’.
ample quotations from Chrysippus, Galen describes erōs, along with anger, as the most intense, and so most emblematic, of the passions that can afflict a soul. A phrase he cites from Chrysippus makes this clear (4.6.27), where lovers are paired with 'others who have extreme/violent desires' (διό καὶ τοιαῦτα ἐστιν ἀκούσασι φωνᾶς ἐπὶ τῶν ἐρωτικών καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οἰδίπορα ἐπιθυμοῦντον καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν δραματίκων).

Our disappointment begins to mount: how can Galen engage with the topic of erōs, base his entire treatise on promulgating a Platonic conception of the soul, and fail to show any appreciation for Plato's own nuanced perspective on the subject? As if to torment us even further on this point, Galen proceeds to quote Chrysippus again at length (4.6.28-34) on how lovers behave with one another, and what social norms have evolved to accommodate them.

'ότας μάλιστα φόρος καὶ οἱ ἀρπαγοῦν ἄξονας πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ἐχειν τοὺς ἔρωτας, ἀπεραιοπτέρον καὶ ἄκεν ἐπιτροπῆς λογικῆς ἱστημένους καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ παραπλάνους λόγου αὐτοῖς ἀπεραιοπτέρον δύνασα, μᾶλλον δὲ ὅλος ὑπομονητικῶς ἀκοῦσα τινος τοιοῦτος' καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὰ τοιαύτα πάντα τῇ παλαιᾳ δέξῃ μαρτυρείται, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἐρείπεσα αὐτῶν πάντα, ὅταν τε μακρὰν ἀπέχουσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ λόγου, ὥσιν οὐκ ἀκοῦσσι ή προσέχει τινι τοιοῦτο, ὅπιω μετὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀπὸ τρόπου ἐξελθον 'αὐτοῖς λέγονται ·

'Κύπρος γὰρ οὐδὲ νουθετουμένη χαλῆ· ἢ γὰρ βιάζῃ, μᾶλλον ἐπιτείνειν φωτεί.
νουθετούμενος δὲ 'Ερως μᾶλλον πέζει.' (28-30)

'καὶ οἱ ἀπεραίοτοι ἀκαίρῳ ἐπιτροπήν καὶ οὐκ ἐπηρεάζω καὶ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐν τῷ ἐρωτικῷ ἀποκλίνουσιν τοῦ λόγου, καθάπερ ἀπεραίοτοι ἀκαίρως δοκοῦνται νουθετεῖν, ἡτέκα δὴ καὶ οἱ θεῖοι δοκοῦσιν αὐτοῖς ἐρέων ἐπιτροπεῖν' (31)

'λόγῳ δὲ οὗτος ἢν ἐν τούτῳ οὐγκιν ἐν ἄλλῳ τινι τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἀκούσαντι προσέχει τοὺς ἐν πάθει καθαρικότατα, ἀλλ' ἀπεστράφθαι διὰ παρατησίας αὐτοῦ καὶ φιλέοντα καὶ μὴ προσέχοντας καὶ πάντων δοκοῦντα.' (33-4)

'Loved ones especially expect that the conduct of their lovers towards them should be of this kind, that their attitude should be rather uncalled for and without much concern for reason, and furthermore, that they should defy the discourse that gives them advice, or rather, have no patience whatever with any discourse of that kind.' All such statements support the ancient view, and his [Chrysippus'] next words do also: 'They keep so far away from admonitory discourse, from listening or attending to anything of the kind, that it is not out of place to say to them such things as these.'

'Even when censured Cypris does not let go;
if you use force she loves to strive the more.

Eros, when admonished,
presses more heavily.'
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'they reject the discourse as an untimely censor, unsympathetic to the affairs of love, like a man who is held to admonish unseasonably, at a time when even the gods are thought to permit them to swear false oaths.'

Neither here nor anywhere in the subsequent discussion will he [Chrysippus] say that persons in an affected state follow reason. But that they reject it entirely, flee from it, do not admit it, and every expression of that kind.

Galen here wants to make the relatively simple point that people in love, when in the grip of that pathos, flee rational thought, and in doing so he seems to have Plato's Symposium on his mind, if only mediated by Chrysippus. Section 31 is not quite a verbatim quotation of that work, but it does seem to allude to Symposium 183a–b, the part of Pausanias' speech where he too mentions the special divine dispensation offered to lovers for their notoriously unbecoming behaviour—obsquousness, swearing questionable oaths, and in general any kind of indelicate behaviour (b2). Pausanias himself is not so much endorsing bad behaviour, of course, but he does point out that the matter is not simple (183a4):

οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἔστιν, ὅπερ εἶ ἀρχὴς ἔλεχθη οὔτε καλὸν εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό οὔτε αλεξοῦν, ἀλλὰ καλὸς μὲν πραπτόμενον καλὸν, αλεξοῦν δὲ αλεξοῦν, αλεξοῦν μὲν οὖν ἔστι παραχθῇ τε καὶ παραφρόσχεσθαι, καλὸς δὲ χρηστῷ τε καὶ καλὸς, παραχθής δὲ οὐτὸ ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἐστὶν ὁ πάλινος, τὸν σῶματος μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄρως καὶ γὰρ σὰρξ μόνιμός ἔστιν, ἢ τε σὲ μοῦν μόνιμον ἔρως πράγματος.

As I said from the start, it is not simply beautiful in and of itself, nor shameful, but beautiful if done beautifully, and shameful if done shamefully. [Something is done] shamefully when one gratifies a base lover basely, but beautifully when one gratifies a wholesome lover wholesome, that vulgar lover is base who loves the body more than the soul; for he cannot be stable since he doesn’t love a stable thing.

Despite the fact that both Galen and Chrysippus had evidently consulted Plato’s text at some point, each here seems oblivious to the grander import of Pausanias’ speech as a small sample of the work’s sustained problematizing of erōs as both a positive and negative psychic force. Other examples in PHP where passages from Classical poetry are cited specifically to illustrate the psychic properties of erōs29 add little more to the basic picture of erōs in Galen as an unwelcome distraction from an orderly, moral life.

29 e.g. PHP 4.6.38, quoting Eur. Alc. 1079–80, where Admetus speaks to Hercules of his erōs for Alcestis; Galen comments: ’It is clear that his love, being an affection of the desiderative power, not of the rational, distracts his whole soul and leads the man to act contrary to his initial judgment.’ Cf. also e.g. PHP 3.4.23–5, where Galen again adduces the Euripidean Medea—a favourite Stoic exemplum (cf. Gill (1983))—overpowered by her erōs for Jason: ‘Sufficient indications of the magnitude attained by the immoderate movement in the desiderative part of her soul are the things she did because of her love for Jason’ (νὰ πεῖν τὸν ἵππον τοῖς θύσιοις).
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Galen on the ENERGÉIA OF ERŌS

If we dig a little deeper in Galen’s PHP, however, we find some scope for a more nuanced view of erōs and the other desiderative drives in the soul. We may begin by considering how Galen distinguished the soul’s pathē, which are by definition unwelcome, from instantiations of those same psychological drives that are well regulated and do no harm. Or to put this another way, when does one of the soul’s drives become an actual pathos? Can Galen imagine, as Plato could, any circumstance in which erōs is a positive force, or at least not something categorically harmful or undesirable? Or did erōs imply for him only biological desire for sex unregulated by reason, mere animal appetite that had little to do with more complex forms of human relationships and sociability? 30

Galen may not have had the philosophical interest in erōs that Plato had, but he was hardly an ascetic, and probably not a proponent of complete Stoic apatheia, 31 the idea that we should rid ourselves completely of the influence of the passions. And however much a moralist he was, he was also enough of a biological materialist to acknowledge not only that the passions have a physical location in the body (more on which below), but that they are in fact ‘natural’ phenomena, with a natural part to play physiologically and socially. This was a position consistent with Plato, and has its own kind of self-evident logic: gluttony may be a vice, but eating and the desire for food is biologically necessary for survival and so, we might say, ‘natural’. 32

Galen theorizes this notion further when he discusses the ‘natural kinship’ that each part of the soul feels towards an object, at PHP 5.5.6–8, using Stoic terminology—an oikeiōsis phusikē—for an essentially Platonic idea. Here,

30 It is interesting that when Galen wanted to refer to sexual intercourse in ethically neutral terms as a purely biological activity, he used the verb ἀφροδίσιαζειν and the nominal phrase τὰ ἀφροδίσια. These words tend to occur in strictly physiological or pharmacological passages, as in Ars med. Kühn l. 339 line 14, or 340 line 15, De usu part. Helwirch ii. 321 line 17, or De simpl. med., where τὰ ἀφροδίσια occurs ten times in Galen’s discussions of drugs. Ερός is not synonymous with τὰ ἀφροδίσια in Galen—the former describes an emotion, the latter an activity ('sex')—but erōs does imply a type of desire that includes, even if only implicitly, a desire for sex. Galen tends to use erōs when he is interested in the relational consequences of the term, which is to say when he is concerned with the moral implications of erotic behaviour. Even the more general term ἀλειπθανοῦς, indicating friendship or other kinds of non-sexualized love, however, although inherently a positive term can in Galen’s eyes become a pathos if carried to excess: cf. Aff. Dig. 3.1: ‘being excessively quick to love or hate any sort of thing is a pathos’ (τὸ φιλάων πᾶν ὀφθαλμὸν ἀλειπθανὸς ἤ μικρὸν ὀφθαλμὸν πάθος ἐστὶν). See now Konstan (2010b) on philē. See also Sorabji (2000) 274–87, on the general pre-Christian separability (he calls it ‘coming apart’) of love, sex, marriage, and having children, although, as his discussion makes clear, the lines between them are often blurry.


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Galen observes a ‘natural kinship’ for pleasure in small children, who have not yet acquired full control of their epithuméttika:

οὕτως οὖν αληθώς εἶναι καὶ τὰ παιδία φαίνεται καὶ πρὸς ἡδονήν καὶ πρὸς νίκην, ὡσπερ ὠστερόν ποτε δείκνυσι, ἐπειδὴ προβαλίσῃ κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν, ὅτι πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ἔχει τινὰ φυσικὴν ὀδελέων. αἱδεῖται γὰρ ἀμαρτάνοντα προσόφησις αὐτοῖς τῆς ἡλικίας καὶ καίρει τοῖς καλοῖς ἐργοῖς καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἄριτῶν ἀντιποιοῖται καὶ πράττει πολλὰ κατὰ τὰς τῶν ἄρτων τοῦτων ἐνοχὰς, ἐμπροσθεν, ἥνικα ἢ ἐτε ομμέρα, κατὰ πάθος ἑλώντα καὶ τῶν ἐκ τοῦ λόγου προσταγμάτων ὀδηγίαις φρονίτεια ποιοῦμενα.

In the same way children also appear to feel a kinship with pleasure and victory, and at some later time, as they grow older, they show that they have a natural kinship with what is right. Thus they are ashamed of their errors as they grow older, they take pleasure in noble acts, they lay claim to justice and the other virtues, and they perform many acts in accordance with their notions of these virtues; but earlier, when they were still small, they lived by their affections and took no notice of the commands of reason.

It is worth remembering, in short, that in the face of Galen’s sustained emphasis on the dangers of the passions, the problem is not so much the existence of the passions themselves as the ways in which they are regulated by reason.

At the beginning of PHP 6, Galen refines his discussion of the psychic pathê and pathêmata with a nod towards their natural functions, and suggests here more complex ways in which to understand the workings of the erotic in human affairs. Here Galen makes a distinction between what he calls the energeta and the pathos of the soul. Energeta is generally translated as ‘activity’, and seems to mean basically ‘what the soul (or the part of the soul) does’. As such, the term is neutral; the spirited part of the soul (thumos) feels anger because that is what that part of the soul is supposed to do; but pathêmata arise, as Galen describes it, in other parts of the soul when ‘our body is forcibly driven to its actions by anger’ (PHP 6.1.7: ἄτε υπὸ τοῦ θυμοῦ βιαῖος ἐγγεῖρῃ πρὸς τὰς πράξεις). Anger is a natural aspect of our souls, in other words, but we must keep it under control, or it easily becomes a dysfunction. Galen sums up his definition of energeta by considering how the parts of the soul actively seek out their objects. In describing this movement, Galen says that energeta is ‘a motion according to nature, and pathos a motion contrary to nature’ (6.1.8: τῆς μὲν ἐνέργειας κατὰ φύσιν τινὰ κίνησιν ἠμῶν νοοῦν, τὸ δὲ πάθος παρὰ φύσιν). A physiological explanation makes it clearer what he has in mind (6.1.11): the natural energeta of the heart is for it to beat regularly; when it beats irregularly, we consider this a pathos.

If we think of erôs in particular according to this schema, it is likely that Galen would have said that it can be considered part of the energeta of the epithuméttikon. Exactly what term Galen might use to refer to erôs when it is not a pathos is unclear, since pathos is the word he typically used to describe any of the passions in general, whether or not they are functioning
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'appropriately'. But it seems safe to say that, if pressed, he would think of erôs as a natural, not intrinsically unwelcome, feature of human psychology, useful not only for procreation, but perhaps even for pleasure.\textsuperscript{33}

Galen's psychic energêgia is not, in fact, very far removed from the discourse about erôs in the Symposium. To take just one example, we may consider Diotima's account of the force of erôs in human behaviour, as Socrates relates it at Symp. 206c–d:

κινοῦν γὰρ, ἐφ', ὁ Σάκρατες, πάντες ἀνθρώποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν φυσική, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἔν τινι ζυγία γένωται, πίκτειν ἐπιθυμεῖ ημῶν ἡ φύσις. τίκτειν δὲ ἐν μὲν αὐτῷ ὁσά ὄσα, ἐν δὲ τῇ καλῇ, ἡ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων καὶ γυναικῶν αὐσιωταί τόκος ἄστι, ἐστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῖον τὸ πράγμα, καὶ τοῦτο ἐν θυγατρὶ δινὶ τῷ ξαφνίῳ ἀνάπτυχον ἔνεστι, ἡ κύριαι καὶ ἡ γέννησις.

All humans...are pregnant in body and soul, and when they come to the right age, we naturally desire (lit. 'our physic desires') to give birth. It's not possible to give birth in ugliness, but rather in beauty. For the coupling of a man and a woman is a (kind of) giving birth. This is a divine thing, and this is an immortal thing, though it's in a creature that's actually mortal, this pregnancy and giving birth.

This is erôs conceptualized not only as an intrinsic aspect of human nature, but as a glorious, ennobling one at that. All the speeches of the Symposium offer variations on this theme—no one wants to banish erôs from human interactions, even though they all recognize that there will always be some people whose lives are degraded by perverse or excessive forms of it.\textsuperscript{34} While not explicitly interacting with the Symposium in his PHP, Galen does seem to share with Plato, after all, a confidence that the bodily desires can in fact be a positive, productive force in a person's life when properly channelled and ordered.

This is not the most obvious lesson one can take away from PHP, but it becomes more apparent when Galen discusses, as he does at great length, the physical location of the parts of the soul in the body. In taking on this topic, Galen was entering a long-standing ancient debate where the lines were essentially drawn (if somewhat loosely and not always accurately) between

\textsuperscript{33} Stoic influence on Galen's thinking here is clear; cf. Gill (this volume) 150: 'Stoicism maintains what I have described as "psychophysical holism", in which human beings are seen as unified, whole entities, whose functions, including mental or psychological ones, have a physical dimension. Hence, the Platonic tendency to present body-based emotions and desires, including sexual ones, as necessarily lower than mental or intellectual ones, does not hold good in Stoic thought.'

\textsuperscript{34} The contrast Pausanias draws in his speech (Pl. Symp. 181b–d) between the 'vulgar' (τῆς Παυσανία τῆς Ἰφιδίμης) and 'heavenly' erôs (ἐν δὲ τῆς Οδηγίας) is emblematic of this constant tension between a 'good' and 'bad' erôs in the Symposium. In works such as Aff. Dig. and PHP, Galen worried mostly about the 'bad' erôs, of the sort that in Pausanias' description makes people care only about sexual consummation, without any thought for whether they are pursuing such bodily pleasure 'finely' (καλῶς) or not (181b5).
Platonists, on the one hand, and Aristotelians and Stoics on the other, who differed especially on the physical location of the rational part of the soul (essentially, brain or heart, respectively). These discussions, however turgid and derivative they may sometimes appear, are nevertheless fascinating for the way in which they allow Galen to apply medical research and contemporary scientific procedures to these perennially intractable problems of psychology. This would certainly characterize his long attempt at the beginning of PHP 6 to prove, by various experimental procedures and a knowledge of anatomy, that the desiderative part of the soul resides in the liver. We may pass over the many details here, but focus for our purposes on the intimate connection Galen posits between the nutritive function of the liver within the human body and the desires that reside there.

**CONCLUSION: GALEN AND THE PHYSIOLOGY OF ERÔS**

De Lacy highlighted well the importance for Galen of food and drink in this ‘third part of the soul’, since it ‘lies the epitumētikon to the nourishment of the body’. Galen thought he had good authority to make this connection from Plato’s remarks about the liver in Timaeus, and he adopted also from Plato (cf. PHP 6.3.10, quoting Tim. 77b3–4) the notion that humans share the desiderative part of the soul with plants. He put great stock in his plant analogy (PHP 6.3.11ff.), in fact, and was especially interested in the function of roots, the source of nutrients to the parts of the plant that grew above the ground. His argument at PHP 6.3.35–6.4.12 is quite involved, but the main point is that the roots of a plant map on to the liver, as the trunk of the plant maps on to the heart. We might expect the roots to be analogized to the stomach, but Galen deals with this by citing Hippocrates (De hum. 11), who likened the soil that nourishes trees to the stomach of humans. Never mind that this rather ruins the neatness of the plant analogy—the point is that Galen is quite fixated on the centrality of the liver to all physiological functions of the body. The bulk of book 6 of PHP offers in fact a highly detailed account of the liver’s anatomy in an effort to demonstrate that blood originates in the liver, where it processes the nutrients received from the stomach, and then distributes these nutrients to the rest of the body, beginning with the heart. Galen’s ‘proof’ of this process invokes observations from dissection and embryology, which we cannot address in detail here, but his conclusions are powerful: at 6.4.6, he says, ‘For the liver appears not as a servant who prepares

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suitable material for his master, but as the master himself who has the authority to distribute the material’ (φαίνεται γὰρ οὖς ὑπηρέτης ἡγομένων προπαρασκευάζων ἐπιτήδειον ὑλῆν τὸ ἡπαρ, ἀλλ’ ὁς αὐτὸς ὁ ἡγομένων ἐξουσιῶν ἐχὼν τοῦ διανέμειν αὐτὴν). A few sentences later (6.4.9):

οὗτο γὰρ ὑπηρέτου τὸ τοιοῦτον ἔργον, ἀλλ’ ἡγεμόνος καὶ ἄρχωντος, οὖθ’ ἔλησε ἐλλιπῶς παρεκκειμένης τὸ πάθος: ὑπηρέτου γὰρ ἐστι τὸ παρασκευάζων μόνον ἔλησε τ’ ἐλλιπῶς ἐστὶ τὸ μὴ διανέμεσθαι, καὶ μὴν οὖθ’ ὡς ὑπηρέτης τὸ ἡπαρ, ἀλλ’ ὁς ἄρχων, οὖθ’ ὡς ἔλησε ἐλλιπῇ ἔλησε τὸ αἷμα διανέμειν πεπιστευμένον.

For distributing is not the work of a servant but of a leader and ruler, and being distributed is not what is done to matter that has been incompletely prepared; it is appropriate to a servant that he only begins the preparation, and to unfinished matter that it is not distributed. But the liver has been entrusted with distributing the blood, the liver not as servant but as ruler, and the blood not as unfinished matter.

There are many striking aspects to this passage, not the least of which is the apparent discontinuity between the physiological and the psychological functions of a single organ within a body. In terms of its bodily function, in other words, Galen sees the liver as taking a lead role—all the other major organs depend on its role as producer of blood and supplier of nutrients. Galen was, to be sure, taking his cue (PHP 6.8.51) from Plato in the Timaeus (70a7–b2), who referred there to the liver as a ‘manager . . . [fashioned] for the nourishment of the body’, but his systematic scientific study of this organ in PHP allows him to invest it with an authority, even nobility, that is all his own. Indeed, the language of ruling, leading, and controlling that he applied to the liver in book 6 reminds us of the ways in which Platonists, including Galen, would describe the rational part of the soul, associated with the brain, in contrast to the desiderative part of the soul, associated with the liver. We might well ask, then, how Galen could so readily locate the desiderative part of the soul, with all its potential for excess and anarchy, in an organ that he regards as the supreme, authoritative regulator of bodily functioning.

The shortest answer to such a question is to say simply that for Galen the soul and its ‘home organ’ were different things, and could have different functions within the body. But Galen, like his predecessors, did not just assign the parts of the soul to organs randomly, and here, I think is where we can get a better sense of how he regarded such passions as erôs. It is the liver’s specifically nutritive functions that make it an especially appropriate home for the passions, insofar as the passions that reside there are so often themselves associated with the body’s nourishment—the desire for food, drink, and sex, for example, to cite Plato’s favourites. This is why it made sense for both Plato and Galen to say that the desiderative part of the soul could be found in plants as well as humans: each creature had bodily mechanisms the functions of which were to distribute nutrients to the other parts of the body, but they also needed something to motivate them to seek such nourishment—plants
need to know how and when to take in the nutrients from the soil, and, analogously, humans need to know how and when to eat, drink, or procreate. In each of them, this function, this *energeia*, is performed by the desiderative part of the soul. What is interesting about the relationship Galen imagines to exist between the parts of the soul and their home organs is that each seems to be able to operate more or less independently of one another. This is why he can envision, on the one hand, a liver in supreme control of its blood and nutrient distribution, and, on the other, an *epithumetikon*, located in the liver and in some sense motivating it, but incapable of regulating *itself* without the intervention of reason. Whatever their inherent dangers, therefore, the passions were for Galen one of the fundamental, essential aspects of human existence itself, as elemental for maintaining life as a plant’s ability to absorb nutrients from the soil.

It is likely that Galen, in a different work from *PHP*, might entertain the kind of nuanced discussion of *erôs* we find in Plato’s *Symposium*. Certainly he would be sympathetic to Plato’s view, as it emerges from nearly all the speeches in that work, that *erôs* manifests itself in human behaviour in good and bad ways, and that its effect is best when regulated by other parts of the soul. It also seems likely that Galen would be able to draw physiological parallels to the ways in which Plato makes *erôs* into a motivating force for the pursuit of reason. But we have to concede that none of this is in evidence in *PHP*, and if anything, *erôs*, in this and probably all of his work, is little more than one of the routine examples of a passion that can lead to catastrophe if left unrestrained. Any discontinuity that we may sense between the high praise Galen lavishes on the anatomical liver in book 6 of *PHP* and the suspicion he harbours for the part of the soul that *inhabits* the liver is nowhere to be found in Galen’s own thinking. He ends book 6, in fact, with a final example, Homer *Iliad* 11.578, to illustrate his argument that the desiderative part of the soul resides in the liver.37 There, Odysseus describes Tityos’ punishment in the underworld for his attempted rape of Leto—stretched out over nine acres with two vultures tearing out his liver. Galen notes (*PHP* 6.8.81) that ‘the poet did not portray Tityos’ heart or brain or any other part as being eaten because of the wanton attack he had made *through erotic desire*, but only his liver, saying that his punishment was on the organ guilty of the wanton act, as was reasonable’ (οὐ τὴν καρδίαν ἢ τὸν ἐγκέφαλον ἢ τὸ τῶν ἄλλων μυρίων ἐσθίμενον ἐποίησε τοῦ Τιτίου δὲ ἐρωτικὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐπιθύμησεν ἐπικειμένως, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἕπαρ μόνον εἰς τὸ τῆς δέβρεως αἰτίαν σφάγων κολάζεσθαι φάμενος αὐτῶν, ὡσπερ ἣν ἐποίησεν).

Clearly, Galen is not much interested here in considering whether *erôs* might, in other contexts, be capable of nourishing the body or mind in any

positive or enriching way. But, as I also hope to have shown, he was not on a crusade to demonize tout court the passions of the body either. The symbiotic relationship he envisions them to have with the chief nutritive organ of the body suggests in the end that they too at least had the potential to offer the kind of spiritual nutrition that Plato ascribed to erōs six centuries earlier.
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