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## ***A Necessary Conflict: Eros and Philia in a Love Relationship***

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1.

I wasn't a student of Flavio's long enough to profit from his academic teaching, since I was enrolled in the Genoa PhD program only one year. Furthermore, in the first years of my doctoral research I was very uncertain about the topic of my dissertation, and this fact made our few meetings less productive. Only after visiting the University of Michigan, I realized that what I was trying to articulate was my amazement at the nature of love, and my desire to investigate it philosophically.

So I ended up writing on a topic that Flavio would have loved to discuss. But he was already sick, and we never got a chance to talk about it.

Not explicitly, that is. I sense we have always spoken of love, at some level or other. As friends, I wrote to him about my sentimental troubles, and he often joked about who was the new boyfriend, without taking my dramas very seriously. Our relationship itself has also been very passionate: I passionately disliked him when we met, since I was scared by his brusque demeanor, and misled by it. The initial lack of sympathy quickly transformed into its opposite. Our friendship was as intense as it can be between two people of different age and gender, living in two different cities, sometimes in two different continents. (I was in Italy when he was in the US, and vice versa.)

Then his illness progressed, and his struggle got harder. I remember a fight we had at his country house, both captives of our temper and of the hard times. He came to talk to me, the older, wiser one, and we made peace. I feel a sweet sadness when I think of it.

But one of the warmest memories of him lies within my computer, where I keep our correspondence. In particular, there was an exchange on being in love, on what loving a person is, at various levels, in different circumstances. It was before my decision to work on love, and the exchange was more personal than philosophical.

This correspondence has come to my mind often in these last months in which, while coping with other deadlines, I was loosely reflecting on what to write for this symposium. I didn't want to use the content of his thoughts, though, since I thought it would be disrespectful of the implicit commitment to confidentiality that characterizes friendly correspondence.

I thought about writing on pedagogic love, of how it can be thought of in our age, when the requirements of equality and professional ethics rule out any sexual element, but not all the features that render a relationship erotic.<sup>1</sup> But in the end I realized there was a much better subject, one that was the dearest inheritance that Flavio left me: his wife.

Flavio was a person who loved much. And Annalisa has been a privileged recipient of his love for many years. He didn't tell me much about his marriage, but the few things I know provide me with enough inspiration for a short reflection.

Flavio was quite a character. He was an advocate of the politically correct use of language, and he wrote two beautiful books that articulated his opinion about it, but at the same time he had a fierce distaste for hypocrisy and rhetoric. He also had a sharp wit and loved being provocative. If you didn't know him well, it was easy to misunderstand him, and judge him as misogynist and disrespectful.

His appreciation of women's beauty could be easily mistaken for underestimation of their intellectual value. As one of his female students, I was initially embarrassed by his way of teasing and complimenting me, and it took me a while to accept it, and to see that he was also aware of my status as a young scholar.

I could also see how his wife was his accomplice in many situations. She was ready to join him in his remarks on the attractiveness of a certain young lady, with the same ironic detached appreciation that he had. At the same time, Annalisa was the main object of Flavio's sincere admiration, and deep love. Although in a joking way, Flavio was often complimenting his "Titta". I am sure there were also less idyllic interactions, and I would be surprised if this wasn't so. There are many things of their relationship I don't know, and will never know. But I have an image of it, and it's one I like.

I will therefore draw inspiration from Flavio and Annalisa as I imagine them, not as they really have been. Therefore, from now on, I will borrow their names to depict a purely fictional, though hopefully plausible, love story.<sup>2</sup>

2.

The main interest of this brief investigation will be the interaction of two different kinds of loving attitudes in a long-term romantic relationship.<sup>3</sup> One is what is commonly called "erotic passion", love *par excellence*, the kind of love that has been the topic of innumerable poems, songs, novels, plays, and movies. The other is instead the kind of love that we refer to, I think, when we say "my partner is also my best friend". These two forms of love are generally called in the literature *eros* and *philia*.

There has been some investigation of the analogies and differences between the two, and of how they related in the ancient Greek culture. But, as far as I know, less attention has been dedicated to how they relate to each other in a modern couple relationship.<sup>4</sup> Are they two different attitudes that coexist in the partners' mind and behavior? Do they affect each other or co-exist without any reciprocal influence? If they influence each other, do they co-operate or clash?

Before addressing these questions, we have to clarify the relevant concepts. Let us begin with the names we will use. I will adopt a taxonomy that is not mine: C.S. Lewis has written an insightful essay on personal love, called *The Four Loves*, which is, as far as I know, the first systematic modern account of this classical distinction.<sup>5</sup> The four loves are *eros*, *philia*, *storge*, and *agape*. In English translation they are, approximately, referred to as erotic or romantic love, friendship, affection, and divine/neighbor love.

I believe that using the Greek terms helps to avoid some ambiguities. I will briefly say why, without having the ambition of a rigorous philological presentation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, I will present a general picture of these forms of love. It will later become evident that the boundaries between them are thin and ever changing.

*Eros* is a much better term than "erotic love", or "romantic love" or "sexual love", which are the main candidates for its English translation (besides

“love” tout court, of course, which can’t be used when there are other forms of love being discussed).

“Erotic love” is the best translation, although in some contexts it is associated with a sort of malice that we do not want to attach to a concept that can be lofty and divine (although undoubtedly it *can* also be low and demeaning). “Romantic love” risks bringing to mind historical and cultural categories, and puts an excessive emphasis on sentimentalism. Eventually, “sexual love” risks being conflated with sexual desire, and puts too much emphasis on the role of sexual attraction in *eros*: how sexual *eros* is, is a matter of debate.

*Eros* is what we think of, when we think of “love”. It is what we all want and need, our main worry and source of concern, but when it comes to defining it we are surprisingly short of apt words. Very tentatively, let’s think of it in terms of the passionate attachment we feel for one special individual, who is seen as beautiful, desirable and valuable. This will suffice for now.

Then there is *philia*, which is a better term than “friendship”. The modern conception of friendship, assuming there is one, is very different compared not only to the Greeks’ idea of it, but even to that one possessed by many authors at the beginning of the past century. Lewis’ discussion of friendship, for instance, is very influenced by the classic conception of a male relationship as an almost sacral bond between educated and noble souls. He seems to have adopted the Aristotelian conception of *philia* articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>7</sup> with a further touch of romanticism. But in antiquity this notion was wider: it could refer to people in the same family or mere acquaintances, fellow citizens, and sexual partners, and, more importantly for our discussion, spouses.<sup>8</sup>

A tentative and provisional conception of *philia* is that of an attachment toward a person who shares with us an important feature or activity of our life. Other definitions will implicitly be discussed later.<sup>9</sup>

Then there is *storge*. In the contemporary discussion of love philosophers prefer to address one specific form of it, that is, parental love. I don’t know how this began, but it seems to be a restrictive step. The way Lewis investigates affection makes clear that parental love is an instance of a form of love as rich and complex as the others, and that is felt by children toward parents, by siblings, and by people who just become attached to each other in this peculiar, habit-influenced, way. Also, modern investigation presents parental love in a stereotypical way, or, on a charitable interpretation, in an ideal perspective, focused on a notion of altruistic self-sacrifice that is supposed to be at the core of this form of love. I refer to Lewis for a convincing alternative picture of what parental love is.<sup>10</sup> Let the following be a provisional definition of *storge*: a caring attitude toward someone we have a personal bond with, either in virtue of a family relationship, or of an acquired one. It varies in intensity, ranging from a strong attachment that can even result in self-sacrifice, to a light one, a sympathy toward those who we are acquainted.

Eventually, there is *agape*, or *caritas*. Although Plato uses the term in different contexts, the use we generally make of it traces back to Christian tradition. The Christian notion is very comprehensive, since it can refer to at least three loving attitudes: that of God toward us, that of us toward God, and that of us toward humanity. *Agape*, however, is the only form of personal love that will not enter into our discussion.<sup>11</sup>

Although I believe that Lewis’s taxonomy is a very plausible one, and I find the use of Greek names both aesthetically pleasing and conceptually stimulating, I see a risk in it.

When Plato and Aristotle spoke of *eros* and *philia*, the historical context in which they lived was quite different. As we will see later, the *erotic* paradigm was a homosexual one, structured in a hierarchical and conventional way. Also *philia* was analyzed by Aristotle in an exclusively male context.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that heterosexual *eros* was impossible or that female friendship, or even male-female friendship, wasn’t a common experience. It is likely that these interactions and consequently some forms of affective heterosexual relationships occurred. But attitudes, emotions, belief, desires, are all shaped culturally, and it is hard to imagine how, for instance, heterosexual *eros* could exist in a society where women were secluded in gynaeceums, love in marriage was considered ominous, and married men’s relationships with both boys and *heterai* was the norm. It is important to bear in mind, as we use the terms “*eros*” and “*philia*”, the difference between our cultural context and that in which Plato and Aristotle were writing.

Lewis uses them as words to distinguish shades of love, different experiences that are given this common modern label “love”. He will be my model, although I will, at some point, refer to the original Greek conception of *eros* and *philia*.<sup>13</sup> But this nonchalant way of using these labels generates a further problem. Lewis seems to think that there is an underlying phenomenon to all his forms of love. That there is what we could call an “Ur-Liebe”, which takes different forms in different contexts.<sup>14</sup> Now, in our culture we do tend to use only one word, love, even for addressing love between friends or relatives. This is especially true in English, whereas other languages, like Italian, have more choices; still, even in Italian and other Romance languages, it is possible to use the equivalent of “love” in a generic way or when we desire to put a particular emphasis on our feelings.<sup>15</sup>

There is clearly something in common among the different forms of love. Indeed, it is tempting to think that they are actually the same thing, the same emotion, or the same attitude, or the same kind of desire, depending on what definition of love we choose. Recent empirical psychological findings might be interpreted as a confirmation of this hypothesis.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the paper I will tentatively propose a different ontology, but I do not think that we need to commit either way in order to see how *eros* and *philia* relate to each other.

3.

Flavio and Annalisa fell in love when they were in their twenties, and have been together for forty years. Their marriage created a deep bond of affection (*storge*) between them. After many years, the spouses, who had once not known each other and were unrelated, became more like relatives. Their bond was blood-like, and this was augmented by the shared experience of parenthood.<sup>17</sup>

Notice that *storge*, in general, can take many forms. In the familial sphere, we can think of at least three: parental love, love for parents, siblings love. We might think that the kind of affection spouses feel for each other after years of marriage is of a peculiar kind, and dissimilar from any of these. But this is proven false by our everyday experience, by psychoanalytical theories and even by empirical psychological studies: the relationship between romantic lovers is often tainted with mother-son, father-daughter or siblings features.<sup>18</sup>

Compared to the other kinds of love, *storge* is the most emotional in nature, especially in its basic, primitive stage (the attachment that babies feel for their mothers). I do not want to face now the issue of the ontological nature of love—what love is—and I will come back to this point at the end of the discussion. For now, just notice that *storge* seems to be an emotional attachment that happens to connect people, who generally have not chosen to be related, as it happens in the family. In our case, Annalisa and Flavio did choose each other, but *storge* is somehow a side effect, not the expression or cause of this (romantic) choice. In other romantic relationships, *storge* can come before any other loving attitude, as in the case of people who have known each other (without necessarily being *philoï*) for a long time before getting involved at a romantic level. But also in that case *storge* is not characterized by the orientation toward a particular individual that is typical of *eros* or *philia*.<sup>19</sup>

*Storge* is therefore importantly different from the other forms of love involved in a romantic relationship. Moreover, it characterizes many different human (and non-human, or human/non-human) relationships: it actually seems what distinguishes a personal from a professional interaction between living beings (although of course it can happen to feel affection for someone with which we have a primarily professional relationship). This is why it will not be at the center of the discussion, as *eros* and *philia*: it seems a secondary feature of a romantic relationship, rather than a defining and motivating feature of it. It was important to present it, though, because it often gets confused with *philia* and we will see later a couple of cases in which it happens.

4.

Besides this emotional, primitive tie, which comes from a life together, from shared memories, and from having a son, Annalisa and Flavio's relationship is then shaped by two other forces: *eros* and *philia*.

Not every marriage includes both. After all, some marriages may lack even a basic affection. But remember we are considering marriage not in the legal sense, but as an example of a long-term relationship based on love. Flavio and Annalisa did love each other, and their love can be spelled out in these two attitudes (plus the third one, *storge*, that we just saw).<sup>20</sup>

*Eros* is what made them marry, causing their decision of living together and having a common life project. At least, *eros* is the most likely responsible of this decision. *Eros* intrinsically aims to "being together", to a physical and spiritual union, to a form of exclusive intimacy. The lover aims to have a special role in the beloved's life, a special place in her mental landscape.<sup>21</sup>

The creation of this aim goes hand in hand with the creation of a huge value: the beloved becomes immeasurably valuable to the lover. This value is more important than personal happiness. It is even more important than moral values. *Eros*, I take, is amoral as every love is, including love for God (if God asks to kill your son, you'll do it). This claim is of course not unproblematic, since many traditions have seen love as something possible only between morally good agents (like in Aristotle's conception of the best kind of *philia*). Notice that, however, this perspective does not account for many cases in which we would be ready to talk about genuine love. However, we will consider the connection between moral goodness and love toward the end of this article.

So far, I have claimed that a romantic relationship will be the natural expression of *eros*, in the ideal case. It is true that some romantic relationships and some marriages lack *eros*.

However, if we understand *eros* as an aim to union with the beloved, as I am proposing, then it must be the main cause of the relationship. This does not rule out the possibility of other causes.

Notice that there are many possible strategies in order to define *eros* and distinguish it from *philia* or *storge*. The one I proposed might be defined "consequentialist", or "pragmatic", since it is interested in the practical purpose of the loving attitude. Another one pursues a phenomenological path, and concerns the way the beloved is seen by the lover. This is the case of Martha Nussbaum, who considers crucial to the beloved's description, in the case of *eros*, two features: the beloved is seen as divine and beautiful and this generates reverence and admiration in the lover.<sup>22</sup>

I think that when people are in the grip of *eros*, they do experience these features to various degrees. But I am not sure this experience can't happen with *philia* as well, for instance in the case of intense, adolescent friendships. I acknowledge that these are borderline cases between *eros* and *philia*: many young women and men are sort of "in love" with their best friends, even when sexual attraction is out of the question. But these can also be genuine cases of *philia*, as we can see in the following example.

Let's imagine that when Annalisa was 23 she had a friend called Giulia. They were deeply attached to each other, and, although always sweetly teasing the other's small flaws, they revered each other and were grateful for the other's presence in their life. But they were capable of allowing also other people to be part of the friend's life (therefore they weren't exclusive, as *eros* would require them). Their *philia* was strongly affected by the fact that they shared two important features of their emotional, spiritual and artistic experience: they both danced and were Buddhist. This sharing enhanced the beneficial aspect of their relationship because they supported each other in the artistic and spiritual quest to the beautiful and the good. Although these cases are not common, they are possible; relationships dominated by *philia* can be illuminated by these emotions.

In a different way, even *storge* can. A mother will typically see her child as the most beautiful, awe-inspiring thing in the world. And she will be grateful for her to be born (at least until puberty!). It seems that what defines the forms of love more distinctively is their practical side, what we do with them, rather than only their phenomenology, which is an important distinguishing feature in most cases.

5.

Flavio and Annalisa, as I am picturing them, are also friends to each other. They enjoy sharing activities, talking about politics and arts, and going out—all in a way that it is not exclusive of a romantic relationship. More deeply, they are *philoï* and this is what accounts for many moral aspects of their relationship. Being friends implies, paradigmatically, a caring attitude for the beloved's welfare.

It is useful to remind that I am not talking of friendship as a social relationship. People who are friends can be competitive, jealous, or more interested in their own welfare than the friend's one. So we have to consider not people who declare to be friends, but those who are actually *philoï* to each other, whatever they declare.

I am also talking of an ideal notion of *philia*. Real cases can fall short on it. *Philia*, I will claim, places a characteristic emphasis on a disinterested concern for the beloved in the context of a romantic relationship. This doesn't mean that actual *philoï* always succeed in suppressing their egoism or in overcoming their insecurities, their envy, their egoism or whatever else can obstruct their reciprocal beneficence.

An example might help in showing what I have in mind. Flavio, as *erastes*, wouldn't let Annalisa go out with her male friend Franco on a dinner, because he's jealous of him. On the other hand, he will try to overcome his jealousy, and let her go, because, as a *philos*, he cares about her happiness more than he cares of their unity at every cost.<sup>23</sup> This sort of disinterested concern, present in many romantic relationships, best characterizes *philia* rather than *eros*.

This claim is far from being unproblematic. A long-discussed topic, from Plato onward, is how much *philia* is connected with personal interest. This is not the place to settle a question that has seen not only early Plato's commentators (among which, the most authoritative of all, Aristotle) but also modern ones such as Gregory Vlastos debate whether utility can ever be involved in genuine *philia*.<sup>24</sup> It is a fascinating topic, both as a historical thread in Greek philosophy and as an intrinsically interesting philosophical argument, but it would take us too far away. What matters, though, is that even in the most utilitarian conception of friendship, as allegedly in Epicurus, the practical outcome is that *philoï* care about each other's welfare in a way that *eros* does not. In Epicurus, for instance, the originally egoistic hedonistic motivation (the pleasure that the friends' happiness provides to the wise) has as a result an altruistic and genuine worry for the friend's well-being.

There is also another feature of my presentation of *philia* in marriage that could be considered idiosyncratic. I have emphasized the elements of affinity and sharing in Flavio and Annalisa's *philia*. Although this element is clearly present in the Greek conception (e.g. fighting together in the same battle, or discussing philosophy in the "Garden") and it is also very prominent in Lewis, there is another important intuition, already present in Plato: that it is not similarity, but difference, and its acceptance, which grounds *philia*. Richard Wollheim writes "The essence of friendship lies. I suggest, in the exercise of a capacity to perceive, a willingness to respect, and a desire to understand, the differences between persons. Friendship lies in a response to the singularity of a person, and a person's friendship extends only as far as such singularity engages him".<sup>25</sup>

I think this is very well expressed and very true, but it seems to portray an ideal of *philia*, rather than a description. It seems that many friends would fall short of this description. This is not a definitive objection, though, since I myself proposed that actual friends may fail to be true *philoï*.

A more convincing objection to this portrait is that it neglects the features that make *philia* so important to the Greeks: sharing educative, artistic, spiritual experiences, which are so prominent also in the romantic tradition, and which seems to play a very important role especially within the context of a modern couple relationship.

Now, once again, we might attribute some features that the ancient considered to belong to *philia* to our modern *storge*. It is an important feature of affection to love the beloved blindly. I am a good friend of my crazy auntie; after all, she used to bring me candies when I was little. But the kind of love Wollheim is advocating is not blind: it is understanding, respectful, and vigilant.

There is also an age difference involved here.<sup>26</sup> Younger friends, as Annalisa and Giulia in my example, are more focused on sharing because in that period of formation friends have a role in shaping one's own identity. But later, we learn to be friends to people who are very different from us, and that is not only refreshing (the pleasure of difference!), but also a sign of maturity; we learnt to accept that other people can and ought to be different from us.

We might be tempted to account for this feature denying again that this is proper *philia*. We are often friends to people whom we met when we were younger and more similar. We therefore developed a strong attachment to them, which persisted in the face of other relevant changes in our lives. The prevalent form of love in these relationships would be, once again, *storge* and not *philia*.

Secondly, we might think that differences are superficial, and mask deeper, i.e. spiritual, affinities. I like soccer, you like literature; I am a businesswoman, you're a kindergarten teacher; I am married with children, you're happily single; and so on. These differences are not such that they don't allow us to conceive that you could be my *philos*. But it would be harder to think of a friendship between a finance shark and a missionary.

And yet, why not? We might think that both the shark and the dove think that the other is radically wrong in her conception of life's priorities and goals, and yet love each other, care for the other, hope that the other will "convert" to different beliefs, maybe, but still choosing every day to remain friends, and with respect, rather than with the inertia typical of *storge*. These two *philai* do not happen to love each other, they actively pursue this relationship.

There is a tension between the sentiment of affinity and sharing by which *philia* is nourished and the cultivation of diversity that it commands. Price offers a way to resolve this tension, and he proposes it as the correct interpretations of Plato and Aristotle's accounts of friendship. Aristotle's conception of friendship, which is more articulated than Plato's, would seem to be explicitly against a view à la Wollheim. His conception is that the best kind of friendship is between similar souls, equally good. *Philia* "points towards to an eventual assimilation".<sup>27</sup> But Price invites us to conceive of this assimilation as one in virtue, not in personal development: "two friends who are playing different roles, even if they are equal in virtue, may share their choices and yet make contrasted contributions towards a common achievement"<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, Price's proposal is analogous to the idea I just sketched that differences can be superficial, masking an underlying affinity. Therefore also Price's solution might be still considered inadequate in explaining the case of friendship between the villain and the hero. I think it is revealing that this case is often popular in the movies. It reflects the modern sensitivity, which tends to see relational values as different from moral ones and which certainly does not equate *kalos* (or its modern version: "cool") with *agathos* (think of the success of TV shows like *The Sopranos*).

However, we might have gone too far in our investigation of *philia*. We do not need to commit to an account of *philia* in every case. In general, it would be unfair to deny that at least in many central cases affinity and interest in sharing meaningful activities play a large role. This is enough for what I am trying to show here and it is particularly apt to describe a case of *philia* between lovers who choose to engage in a long-term relationship. In Annalisa and Flavio's marriage, sharing ideals and activities is very important, by assumption. My claim is simply that we have to ascribe this feature of their relationship to *philia*, rather than to *storge* or *eros*. I don't need to commit to the claim that sharing is a necessary condition for *philia* in every context.

6.

Back now to our original question: how do *eros* and *philia* interact in Annalisa and Flavio's relationship?

For sure, they collide sometimes. We already alluded to one reason: a common corollary of *eros* is jealousy. I am not thinking of unjustified jealousy, or of the pathological desire of possession that is the source of so many tragedies (and by this, I am not just referring to Othello or Medea, but to bloodless and still atrocious daily suffering that is experienced by many lovers). I am thinking of the reaction to the violation of the exclusivity that *eros* typically requires, and that *philia*, in its best form, explicitly forbids.

*Philia* likes being in two, but it is importantly characterized by the possibility of "promiscuity". A company of three friends is not just acceptable; it is better than being just two. Furthermore, one can be a good friend to one person, but also to another one, totally unrelated to the first friend. (Notoriously transitivity doesn't always work with friendship.)

Being capable of accepting that our best friend has another best friend, whom we might not even know, is an important requirement of being a good *philos*. Notice that I am again considering an ideal or normative condition: *philois* need not be always perfect, and can have moments of intolerance for the friends of their best friend, but this doesn't mean the ideal allows or even prescribes that intolerance as much as the erotic ideal does.

*Eros*, on the other hand, prescribes to rule out every other lover.<sup>29</sup> But achieving this purpose, which is fundamental for the flourishing of *eros*, can clash with the flourishing of *philia*.

Think of the following example, slightly different from the previous one. Flavio has many female friends. One of them, Elena, is particularly close to him and they spend a lot of time together. Annalisa suspects that Elena is romantically interested in Flavio. *Philia* commands to her to let Flavio thrive with his dear friend. *Eros*, on the other side, urges her to not let the situation slips out of control. Of course, it is ultimately up to Flavio to decide to do everything she can to prevent a risky outcome. Whatever her possible actions, there are two different motivations at stake. One is against Flavio's friend; the other one is in favor of her. After all, Flavio has a good time and he is *not* romantically interested in Elena.

At this point, one might think that there is no conflict at all. If the relationship is not seriously threatened, there is no reason for Annalisa to worry, hence no motivation to be unfriendly to Flavio. However, even if the relationship were not threatened, it could still be that there is a real conflict, but it is won by *philia*. If Annalisa realizes that there is no problem and inhibits any unfriendly behavior toward Elena, it means that *philia* has silenced *eros*. Therefore, it seems hard to deny that there is an important source of tension between *eros* and *philia*, based on the different level of inclusion they allow for.

7.

In addition to the conflict from jealousy, where *eros* endangers *philia*, there can be other sources of conflict between them. For instance, we might think that *philia* endangers *eros* as well. We might think that *philia* inhibits the passion, takes away the thrilling, the uncertainty, the fighting, and the drama, all of which make *eros* so exciting. Erotic desire seems to be relevantly dependent on a list of factors that are antithetic to what brings to *philia*—reciprocity, above all. *Philia* is a mutual relationship, before anything else. Whereas I can be madly in love with you without you even caring about me, I can't be your *philos* without you thinking the same.<sup>30</sup> Of course, I can say that, but the likely effect will be that people will pity me for my delusion. In this respect, the modern and the ancient notion do not seem to differ.

But even when *eros* is reciprocated, it is aroused and stimulated by different degrees and modalities of rejection and lack of reciprocity.<sup>31</sup> It is a well-known paradox: we chase the beloved when she shines from faraway, and once we catch her... she seems a bit less shining. We hate the fact he always arrives late at dates and makes us jealous, but when he finally becomes a nice guy we are a bit disappointed. There seems to be a particular charm in girls who say no, and I don't think it's only a cultural consequence of gender roles since it applies equally to men.

Of course, extreme cases of rejection rule out any possibility for a long-term relationship. Annalisa and Flavio could have not been married for many years if one of them has constantly been fleeing and the other one chasing. But I don't think that *philia* is a silent spectator in this process. I believe that when the process ends with a pacified and still emotionally engaged couple, the merit is of *philia*. But although happy, the couple will



possibly feel less erotically engaged. Instead of two loves at stake here, one might think that there is only a development of *eros*. We will come back to this suggestion later.

Others might think that even after many years of marriage sex is an important feature of the relationship. They should remember that *philia* does not exclude sex at all. Still, sexuality will have different modalities. I doubt that sexual desire will have the same sense of “hunger” that it possesses in *eros*, but this doesn’t mean that it’s less satisfying. (It is in fact quite the opposite. When erotic desire is very strong, its fulfillment is often disappointing, especially if the sexual relationship is not supported by communication and attention for the partner’s needs).

Again, what I am describing now can be seen at the same time as a conflict as much as the resolution of a conflict. If we care about the social relationship, we are happy with whatever conclusion that preserves it. But if we care about *eros* (as much as we cared for *philia* before), we will consider this conflict a genuine one.

8.

Martha Nussbaum faces the problem of reconciling *eros* and *philia* in a different context.<sup>32</sup> She is interested in the tension between love and beneficence in the homosexual relationship that was the paradigm of *eros* in the fifth century Athens. This tension could be summarized as follows: *eros* has two aspects, a beneficent and a violent one. The *erastes*, driven by his reverence and the desire to look good in front of his beloved, can provide many benefits for the *eromenos*. On the other hand, since *eros*’s madness is unpredictable and sexual desire seems one of the reasons why it is so, the *erastes* can well hurt the *eromenos* if his desire is frustrated or if jealousy takes possession of his mind. In general, *eros* seems often exploitative and guided by the lover’s desires and expectations, which are not always virtuous, and are often unstable.

Nussbaum presents different solutions. Lysias’ solution in the *Phaedrus* would seem to fit our modern case. Lysias suggests to the young *eromenos* to choose, paradoxically, a “non-loving lover”. That is, someone who plays the social role of the *erastes*, but is not possessed by the untamable *eros*, but rather by its more reasonable cousin: *philia*. This is, in our case, like saying that Annalisa should not marry Flavio, who is erotically involved with her, but rather marry someone who is still sexually attracted to her, but not “in love” with her. He will not be jealous or irrational and will take care of her needs and desires, out of a stable, reasonable affection.

The problem with Lysias’s solution, though, according to Nussbaum, is that it is insufficient and, after all, unnecessary. On one side, this mitigated love, with all its virtues, doesn’t seem capable of the great sacrifices that *eros* can motivate on the part of the lover, because the exclusivity of the passion, what makes it “mad”, seems to be a powerful motivating force, which won’t be acting in the case of *philia*.<sup>33</sup>

On the other side, *eros* can actually provide what we are looking for, if we have the appropriate conception of it. Nussbaum recalls Socrates’s distinction between different kinds of madness. Erotic madness can be of a noble kind, as when it produces reverence and gratitude in the *erastes*. The beauty and the excellence of the soul, which is the true source of the physical beauty, produce a sense of awe, which in turn “inhibits greedy sexual aims [...] and prompts a generous and indeed a self-abnegating treatment of the partner”.<sup>34</sup> This marvel is something the lover feels grateful for, because “being in love makes the personality take on a depth and richness that the lover recognizes as good” and “as the relationship develops, he recognizes that the loved one is a vehicle of divinity through whom and in whom he follows up the traces of the god he himself reveres; and this epistemological gratitude increases his motives for virtuous conduct”.<sup>35</sup> Socrates’s solution seems to preserve our pre-theoretical notion of *eros*, since it maintains the longing for the beloved, the sense of need and consequent risk involved in it. In addition it shows how there are positive features in this instability, especially for the good lovers.

9.

We have to see now what this Socratic solution suggests for our case. Annalisa and Flavio’s relationship is quite different from the one the Greeks (and Nussbaum with them) are concerned with, and not because it is a heterosexual one. The main difference is given by the fact that contemporary relationships are, ideally, based on equality. They are not codified, conventional interactions between an active, older lover and a passive, younger loved one. Of course, power interactions and lack of balance are common also today. But the aspiration of the majority of people involved in a romantic relationship is to love and be loved, in the same degree and enjoying of the same status. This difference is only laterally connected with the relationship at issue being heterosexual: inequalities and disparities are often connected with sexual roles and gender issues. This might happen, I think, even in homosexual relationships, if they embed sexual stereotypes.

Annalisa and Flavio, however, although coping with the weight of millennia of gender discrimination, strive for a relationship based on equal respect. This renders their case different from the Greek one. But is it different enough? Even though they are both simultaneously the lover and the beloved, conceptually speaking, they each play one role at a time. Furthermore, they aspire to equality, but it is not given that they succeed. *Eros* doesn’t seem to favor an equal interaction, and the sex difference makes it worse. For instance, many men can’t get passionate about women who are as smart and resourceful as they are. Or, when they can, they sometimes find themselves not supporting, or actively boycotting, their beloved’s aspiration to a fulfilling career.

This is different from the case of the old *erastes* that decides to obstacle his *eromenos*’s ambitions out of jealousy, but the outcome is the same: *eros* fights against *philia*. Therefore Socrates’s solution could apply to Annalisa and Flavio, *mutatis mutandis*.

Furthermore, we can see that, because of their reciprocal and equal ideal, we see the other side of the conflict between *philia* and *eros*: both Annalisa and Flavio are interested in a full-fledged erotic life, and they wouldn’t find very appealing a life dominated by *philia* only. Also in this case, then, the difference with the Greek case seems to play *in favor* of Socrates’s solution. It provides a further argument for it, which wasn’t available in the Greek context.

10.

The differences between the relationship of Annalisa and Flavio and the relationship between the *eromenos* and the *erastes*, although relevant for an accurate comparison of the respective social settings, would not seem significant enough to impede an application of the Socratic solution to the modern case. On the contrary, some differences might even provide a reason to do so. However, I do not think the Socratic solution is a satisfying one.

In the first place, it seems too ideal to be true.<sup>36</sup> As Nussbaum herself recognizes at the end of her article, there is a very high risk of moralization in this picture and the risk is that of reducing the “the surprise and the radiance that we associate with that passion”.<sup>37</sup> (It is not surprising that we ended up associating the notion of “Platonic love” to the picture of asexual love.) But I actually don’t think that what worries Nussbaum is the *main* problem of Socrates’s solution. I can concede that this beautifully depicted *eros* can be as surprising and as radiant as the one we generally live, imagine, or desire.

The real problem of this idealization is that it is unavailable for immoral persons. Or even those who are not particularly good or bad, and who do not look for beauty, but rather for serenity, pleasure, or easy-living. I agree that *eros* can be the wonderful thing that Socrates is talking about, but I

think we would expect something similar, if not exactly the Socratic version, to happen even to the “bad guys”, if they are lucky. When immoral people fall prey of *eros*, they might become better persons, as a side effect. Every kind of love can make people morally better. And it can leave them better even when it’s over, if it is that kind of enlightening opening to the good and the beautiful. But it need not be so, to be *eros*.

We might therefore ask: are we disposed to buy an account that renders impossible to evil or low people to experience authentic *eros*? What about those passionate couples à la Macbeth? It is also possible that *eros* always, not just possibly, makes a person morally better, since it leads to intimacy and openness toward another person, and motivates some sort of volitional commitment, which might be considered valuable in itself. But I don’t think this is enough to believe that it makes people on balance good, nor that, conversely, only moral people can experience true *eros*.<sup>38</sup>

Another related reason why I don’t find Socrates’s conception apt to our contemporary dilemma is that, besides any moralization, it places a lot of emphasis on beauty, physical or spiritual—actual beauty. His concept mischaracterizes the following aspect of love. In love we don’t *discover* a value, above or below the surface.<sup>39</sup> We *create* that value, like when we appoint someone of some important role: here is a medal, now you’re a war hero. Generally we give medals to people who deserve it, of course, but heroic people sometimes don’t get one, and vice versa. Love is like a golden medal. Mostly, at some level, it is deserved because people can be worthy of our love in many ways, and it’s hard to be a failure under *every* respect. But on the one side, if we look only at the gesture, a medal, as a role in a person’s life, is always arbitrary. On the other side, it is always deserved, since the gesture justifies itself.

To put in other, hopefully clarifying, words: if the lover is lucky, her beloved will be as beautiful as she sees her. But love makes the beloved beautiful, first of all.<sup>40</sup> If we are lucky, then, beauty will be there for real, but if we are not, we will be the prey of sarcastic comments such as Lucretius’s: “We often see the crookedest and ugliest woman held in high esteem, somebody’s precious pet; [...] some idiot with a pallid washed-out stare is called grey-eyed Minerva, olive-groved. [...] That speech defect turns out to be the thweeteth little lithp, the one too dumb to say single word is shy and modest, while the gabby hawk who never stops talking, flings herself around all over the place- who can this Sylvia be except the life of the party?”<sup>41</sup>

Notice that seeing someone as beautiful, in a physical and spiritual way, characterizes the phenomenology of both *eros* and parental love, but it comes from different sources. In *eros*, it is a generative moment of love. Part of the process of falling in love is developing a certain vision of the beloved. In parental love, on the other hand, it seems to come as a consequence of it. I love you because you’re my daughter, and therefore you look beautiful to me.

I am also not sure that the main source of *eros*’s madness is physical beauty, and this is another point where I feel that the Greek analysis falls short for our case. There is an excessive emphasis on the bodily aspects of *eros*, which probably depends on the narrow profile of the *erastes*, who is a male lover of a young man. I suspect female lovers to be less selective, if not in their ideal, in the reality of their *eros*. Once again, what matters is seeing the beloved as beautiful: a brilliant man can be the object of the maddest *eros* by many women, even though he is pretty ugly. This, of course, holds for men as well, albeit less commonly.

There are three related reasons, then, why the ancient interpretation of the conflict between *eros* and *philia*, although attractive, doesn’t help us too much. First, it highly idealizes *eros*, making it a business for morally good people only. Secondly, it presents the mischaracterization that we love a person in virtue of the actual value she possesses. Thirdly, this value is often spelled out in terms of physical beauty, which is supposed to explain the madness of *eros*. But this emphasis on physical beauty is heavily dependent on that social context. In our modern case, Annalisa’s erotic madness might depend on quite different factors.

11.

Someone at this point might object that I haven’t yet faced the most important question: what are we exactly talking about, when we say “love”? I assumed that there are at least three forms of love involved in Flavio and Annalisa’ relationship, but what are they? It seems essential to consider a factor I have so far avoided discussing: the ontological nature of love.

Love is plausibly defined at least in three ways: as an emotion, as a volitional attitude, and as relationship. Let’s not consider that fact that “emotion” in turn can mean many different things, it can range from a feeling to a judgment or evaluation, depending on whose account we want to consider I will use it as a primitive term, referring to an intentional mental state, not reducible to any composition of desires and beliefs, which is usually accompanied by physiological bodily and behavioral expressions and plays a role in motivating some actions.

If we think of *eros* and *philia* as emotions, the ways they cooperate or impede each other in a relationship will resemble the way two different emotions are experienced by the same subject.<sup>42</sup> If we conceive of them as different kinds of volitions, we might want to see how desires interact with each other in the agential sphere. If we see them as different ways of relating to each other, we should pursue an analysis of the couple, rather than one focused on one agent, the lover.

In order to show what I mean, let me outline briefly what it could mean to analyze the case of Flavio and Annalisa if love were an emotion. If we look at their emotional life, we can see an extreme richness and varieties of feelings and emotions, which constitute their “love”. Borrowing Martha Nussbaum’s metaphor, we see many different kinds of upheavals.<sup>43</sup>

We see first a smooth plateau: *storge* gives them the sense of “being at home” that is so crucial in human life. Flavio is in the kitchen cooking, wearing a flowered apron on his prominent stomach, and Annalisa can’t help but smile, while feeling a warmth radiating right from the middle of her chest.

Then we see a still sweet, but steeper hill: *philia*. Flavio and Annalisa are discussing a book they’ve just finished reading. Annalisa is showing Flavio a point he missed, and he is getting more and more enthusiastic about this new perspective, which he would have never envisaged. He feels proud and excited about his wife.

Eventually, we see a peak, which overcomes in height all the others (although it might be less vast at its bottom). *Eros* is jagged and pointy. The geological metaphor is particularly fit in this case: often *eros* is like a young, steep mountain, and the harshness of the weather (of life) hasn’t smoothed its angles yet. Even more apt, *eros* might be a volcano, active or dormant, but never extinct.<sup>44</sup> It would be tempting to consider *storge* as the result of *eros* once the rain, the wind, and the other adversities have done their job. But I think interpreting the metaphor this way would be misleading. These forms of love, in this picture, do seem like different emotions with the same object, rather than the same emotion with different intensity.

What I am suggesting, beyond metaphors, is that depending on whether all forms of love are of the same kind or of a different kind, the interaction between *eros* and *philia* will look differently. So far, I have presented a common picture where all forms of love have the same nature. However, we need not limit ourselves to this picture. In the final part of this article, I will suggest that *storge*, *eros* and *philia*, in the particular context of a loving relationship, all have different natures. This distinctive approach will allow me to redescribe the relationship between *eros* and *philia*, in order to show that *philia* is the context in which *eros* plays the protagonist role.

12.

Annalisa and Flavio experience *storge* as a basic emotion, which, at the mature stage of their marriage, has become a firm, large base on which every other loving attitude rests on. It is an emotion similar to what they feel for their parents and for their child. They feel it in their chest. It is warm and calm, and sometimes a bit boring. It doesn’t give surprises, for better or worse.

Then there is the experience of *philia* as a mode of relating to each other as equal individuals bonded in an economic, social, cultural and spiritual context: their marriage. It is experienced, I would say, in their head. It is powerfully shaped by their political ideals and beliefs, and therefore they deal with gender roles and power issues in a very aware and reflective way. Since they're good moral agents, furthermore, it is a relationship full of respect and attentive toward solving conflicts without using psychological violence (not to mention the physical one).

Finally, there's *eros*. It goes without saying, its natural place is their belly (and also a bit below). It's what makes them roll in bed, but also throw dishes. It's what makes their eyes shining, losing into each other's gaze. It is also what occasionally makes them behave badly, as when they are dominated by jealousy. *Eros* is as a desire of a particular kind, a second-order volition: it is the volitional commitment to a liking, a "I want to want you".<sup>45</sup> It is surrounded by emotions, and it triggers many of them (desperation and elation, sadness and joy, and jealousy, anger, awe, fear, and feelings like sexual arousal).

Now we can see that even though *eros* was responsible of Annalisa and Flavio's union, it was *philia* who made them *remain* united. *Philia* tames *eros* in the long-term relationship and it provides a stable and safer environment in which *eros* can flourish. It keeps the partners together, even when *eros* is momentarily gone, seeking for a new adventure, or when *eros* renders the situation too unstable and endangers the relationship. When Flavio is jealous of Annalisa, and *eros* is inciting him to get revenge, *philia* reminds him that he doesn't want to see her hurt, and that he will regret if he does anything hurtful because of his jealousy.

*Eros* can be intermittent, especially in a lifetime. People may well be sincere when they say "I fell in love with my wife again". (The real Flavio would add "for the 23<sup>rd</sup> time".) *Philia* is more constant, although not eternal, and permits Annalisa and Flavio to face many hardships of life, including those provoked by *eros*. It does so in a more exciting way than *storge*, which might keep them together, but as family members or parents, rather than as lovers. Remember that *philia* is not chaste. It enjoys sexuality, especially a less turbid one, based on mutual respect and attentiveness for the other's need. It is also enhanced by esteem and intellectual exchange. As I said, it might be that a good description of *philia* in a romantic long-term relationship is what people call "mature love", meaning the love a couple experiences in a later stage of their relationship.

But we don't have to render *philia* too appealing either. Would Annalisa and Flavio's relationship be easier if there wasn't *eros*? Probably yes. Would it be worthwhile to pursue it? Probably not. *Eros* is the first motor. It is what put them on the track in the first place. Then, as the journey continues, many things can happen, and new ways of loving, more or less harmoniously, develop. In less lucky cases, *eros* and *philia* will conflict in such a way that there will be no way out: either *philia* will not succeed in taming *eros*, in which case the marriage will end, or it will succeed too much, in which case *eros* will disappear. In the best cases, though, both will support each other, and so will do Annalisa and Flavio.

Anyway, a conflict of *some* kind, even and especially in the lucky case of a successful relationship, will be not only unavoidable, but also necessary. It will be unavoidable because of the different defining motivations of *eros* and *philia*. It will be necessary since a successful relationship needs both. The conflict between *eros* and *philia* is a healthy one insofar as none of them dominates.

However influential romantic literature might have been in shaping our beliefs about erotic love, everyday experience and empirical findings suggest a different reality. "True love" doesn't seem to combine well with living happily ever after. *Eros* of the most genuine quality necessarily entails some madness, some tension, and some unhappiness. But fortunately Nature equipped us with the capacity of forming meaningful bonds, friendships that are not so self-destructive and violent as erotic passion can be. On the contrary, they emphasize our shared traits, cultivating the pleasure of affinity, the preference for availability over longing, the joy of taking care and nurturing the person who is responsible of making your life brighter. Furthermore, taking into account Wollheim's suggestion, we can see how *philia* also consists in the capacity of relating to the beloved's "otherness" in an accepting way, where *eros* would take that otherness as an obstacle to a complete intimacy. *Eros* often confuses intimacy and union with merging, and *philia* can help prevent that mistake, letting the beloved free to pursue her own, autonomous life.

On the other hand, it is good that *eros* is never totally tamed, that it will resist against *philia* and remain a bit mad. When the lover is in his grip, he will never totally accept that the beloved go out with friends and not with him only. Even when the conflict between the two loving attitudes will provoke a fight between the lovers, it will be good, if it is followed by a passionate reconciliation. Continuous amiable compromises are good between friends (in the modern sense), not between lovers.

My redescription of a love relationship is importantly different from Socrates's. His *eros* is mad in a good way because it is tainted by awe and gratitude. I deny that awe and gratitude constitute erotic phenomenology exclusively and argue they might well characterize other loving attitudes. Furthermore, I don't distinguish between "good" and "bad" madness. *Eros* is mad, period. Hence, my redescription does not suffer from the overmoralizing problem that plagues Socrates's solution. Think of the Macbeths, or Bonnie and Clyde, who stayed together until the fatal end of their lives. Callous criminals, as a matter of fact, can love each other erotically and share their criminal activities, therefore supporting each other as *philo* do.<sup>46</sup> Conceptually, the connection between inter-relational values and moral values is complicated, but it seems plausible that they are not necessarily co-extensional.

My solution rests on an ontological account of *philia* such that it is the relationship that takes place between lovers, rather than another *pathos* competing at the same level with *eros*.<sup>47</sup> The advantage of my redescription, I hope, is to do justice to the peculiarities of each form of love. As a secondary point, I aim to suggest that looking at the interaction between the different loving attitudes in a romantic relationship can also tell us something about how to look at the ontology of love (and vice versa).

Certainly, further reflection should be devoted to these issues. But after all, this is just the line of thought I would have followed chatting with Flavio, at Piana, in front of the fireplace or under the trees of the garden. His contribution would have made my reflection more insightful, and his jokes more funny. While regretting that this never happened, I am grateful his memory is and always will be inspiring.<sup>48</sup>

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[1](#) Of course, some current pedagogic relationships, also between people of the same sex, may well include a sexual and/or overtly sentimental relationship. But it is far from being standardized, as it was in classic Athens.

[2](#) The choice of a heterosexual couple will unavoidably affect some parts of my analysis in that it will not account for features specifically related to a modern homosexual relationship. But I hope the majority of what I will say holds also for homosexual long-term relationships, which nowadays mimic in many respect the heterosexual ones (think for instance of the- legitimate- aspiration to civil unions, religious marriages, and adoption). However, I am aware some features will differ. My choice of a heterosexual couple is not to be meant, in any way, as a normative one. I do not believe it is the best paradigm, but it is simply the one I know better.

[3](#) Marriage is the first example that comes to mind but it need not. In this article I use "marriage" interchangeably with "long-term loving relationship".

[4](#) This might be due to the fact that the modern concept of "romantic love" embeds both. This is why I don't like it very much. Keeping these two attitudes separated permits to see what happens in a romantic *relationship* more clearly. Of course, a relationship can be based exclusively on either *eros* or *philia*.

[5](#) Lewis 1971.

[6](#) In the course of the discussion, though, I will refer to the Greek authors when they can suggest us a way of dealing with our contemporary problem.

[7](#) Books VIII and IX.

[8](#) Anthony Price, to whose detailed, elegant and brilliant work on love and friendship in Plato and Aristotle I will refer often, notices how three usages of *philos* are in play in the Platonic dialogue *Lysis*: what we would translate with "friend", "dear" and "fond". See Price 1997, pp. 3-4. Aristotle's conception of *philia* is more articulated than Plato's, but still the usage of the word is more extended than ours. See again Price 1997, chapters 4 to 7.

[9](#) For a convincing use of *philia* in a romantic context see Rorty 1986.

[10](#) Lewis 1971, p. 31.

[11](#) I suppose some romantic relationships are infused with *agape* if the partners are very religious or very involved with humanitarian issues. I will not consider this case here.

[12](#) Although Hellenistic philosophers believed in ethical equality between women and men, their approach to *eros* and *philia* seem, *de facto*, to be as male-centric as their predecessors (I am thinking here of Epicurus and the Stoics). Things begin to change in the Roman context, where the paradigmatic *eros* can be heterosexual as much as homosexual. Christianity, of course, will radically change the scenario, banning homosexual love from Western morality and culture for a couple of millennia. Still, *philia* between women doesn't seem to be particularly well represented in literature, not to mention philosophy. It is interesting that in Latin we have only two terms for "love", *amor* and *amicitia*, and these notions are very similar to our "love" and "friendship".

[13](#) As I interpret it.

[14](#) I owe this way of expressing it to Giorgio Baruchello.

[15](#) A dear friend, who was at the time my boyfriend, wrote at the end of a letter to his male best friend, who was deeply troubled, "ti amo", rather than a more neutral "ti voglio bene". Although appropriately jealous, I didn't interpret it as a sign I should look for another boyfriend. (I am afraid this anecdote will reinforce all the clichés about "passionate Italian men")

[16](#) For a review of psychological research on love see Reis and Aron 2008.

[17](#) I am uncertain whether there is a relevant difference between a biological or adoptive parenthood. Marcia Baron correctly remarked to me how in biological parenthood the physical similarities, which children have with their parents, play an important role: seeing the beloved's smile on the child's face. In different ways, this can happen with adopted children, provided they have been raised for a sufficient period: it is possible to see in the child mannerisms that resemble the parents'. Children, in any case, create a very important link between the lovers. It is revealing that in many cultures husband and wife call each other "ma" and "pa" even when they're talking to the partner and not to their children: their relationship has been shaped by being part of a family. Tito Magri suggested to me that there is a peculiar way of loving the partner: love *through* children. As I interpret it, parents love each other in virtue of the fact they gave birth to their children. Their children are the means through which love, as a relationship, is not only expressed, but also experienced. Further reflection is undoubtedly required.

[18](#) I am grateful to Maggie Little for a conversation on this issue.



[19](#) I am in debt to Marcia Baron for a comment on this point.

[20](#) I am therefore assuming that an ideal long-term relationship is based on both form of love. I am not denying that some relationships or marriages are based only on *eros* or only on *philia*, but I think it is more interesting to consider one that is enriched by both.

[21](#) This seems a conceptual feature implied by many different accounts of erotic love, but I will not argue for it here.

[22](#) See Nussbaum 2002, p. 72, 73. Reverence and admiration are the key to solve the conflict between *eros*'s madness and *philia*'s beneficence, as we will see later.

[23](#) The same decision could be motivated also by *eros*, of course, since Flavio knows well that a stable relationship is reinforced by trust and respect of the beloved, and he also knows that rendering something forbidden is the best way to render it more desirable.

[24](#) For a defense of Plato against Vlastos' complaints, see Price 1997. Also the chapters on Aristotle are highlighting about what the relationship between utility and disinterested concern could be in *philia*.

[25](#) Wollheim 1984, pp. 275-6.

[26](#) As Price notices commenting Wollheim, see Price 1997, p. 270-1.

[27](#) Price 1997, p. 272.

[28](#) *Ibidem*.

[29](#) Some might object against the characterization of *eros* I am giving. They might think that not only sexual desire, but also *eros* need not be exclusive. I think this claim can be successfully confuted, but I don't want to do it here. However, in the overwhelming majority of actual relationships people profess exclusivity, at least *prima facie*, and/or at least overtly. So my analysis holds at least in those cases.

[30](#) That *eros* allows for lack of reciprocity does not imply that it allows for whatever kind of fantasy, delusion, or projection.

[31](#) This seems to be connected with the importance of sexual desire in *eros*. It also explains why actual sexual gratification is not an essential element of *eros*, although appreciated.

[32](#) Nussbaum 2002.

[33](#) In the modern case, as Nussbaum notices, it is insufficient also for another reason: in a modern, reciprocated relationship, the lover and the beloved play both roles, and the beloved wouldn't find appealing to be loved tepidly, although steadily. I will come back to this issue.

[34](#) Nussbaum 2002, p. 72.

[35](#) *Ibidem*.

[36](#) I think the real Flavio would colorfully agree with me.

[37](#) Nussbaum 2002, p. 87.

[38](#) Lewis is certainly among those who do not believe in *eros*'s intrinsic goodness: "The love which leads to cruel and perjured unions, even to suicide pacts and murder, is not likely to be wandering lust or idle sentiment. It may well be Eros in all his splendour; heart-breakingly sincere; ready for every sacrifice except renunciation." Lewis 1991, p. 108.

[39](#) Partial support to this claim—which won't be defended here—comes from the problems arising from the so-called "property theory", which I endorse only partially. This theory claims that we love our beloved in virtue of their properties. A sophisticated version adds that these properties are relational and historical. My position is the following: I believe that we are *attracted* by the object of our love in virtue of its properties, but that our love is not grounded in those properties. That is, I deny that love, in its mature and complete stage, is determined by an appreciation of the beloved's properties. Rather, when we love, we attribute a huge value to an object that might well be valueless. We like and desire an object and come to commit to this liking: this is, roughly, what love is. See Frankfurt 2004 for the idea that love is a volitional commitment to a first order desire. See Velleman 1999, for a way of distinguishing between attribution of value and judgment.

[40](#) Although in a previous stage attraction could have been based on a more objectively discerning awareness of the beloved's actual properties.

[41](#) I had to censure Lucretius's perfidy, which I suspect comes not only from the desire to vividly express this idea (heavily influenced by his Epicurean creed), but also by a good degree of misogyny. But I think he is onto something, which holds for lovers of both sexes. The fact that Lucretius, as a follower of Epicurus, considers *eros* a danger to avoid doesn't imply that he is wrong in characterizing some of its features, as Nussbaum 2002 implies at p. 75. The quote is from Humphries 1968, pp. 151-152. For the Latin see Lucretius, *The Way Things Are*, IV, 1155-1165. Luca Canali's elegant, and yet faithful to the Latin, translation is recommended for Italian readers. See Conte 2000, p. 415.

[42](#) An interesting question would be if these emotions, besides having the same target, share also the same intentional object. I erotically love "Samuel", but I am friend with "Sammy", although they ultimately are the same person.

[43](#) Nussbaum 2001.

[44](#) I am in debt to Giorgio Baruchello for suggesting me the eruptive nature of *eros*.

[45](#) See Frankfurt 2004.

[46](#) Of course, people can be labeled “criminals” but not pursue any truly illegal activity, or pursue illegal activities out of necessity or political ideology. I don’t think this is the case of Bonnie and Clyde.

[47](#) From what I say it seems necessary to add that *philia* is also the *desire* to preserve the relationship. This introduces a further complicity in my analysis, which I can’t solve here.

[48](#) I am very grateful to Giorgio Baruchello, Shen-yi Liao, and Marcia Baron for comments and suggestions on this article.

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