Willing the Good

Willing the Good:
Empirical Challenges to the Explanation of Human Behavior

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

GABRIELE DE ANNA

How do we humans choose what to do when we act? The simple observation that we are rational beings, that is that we (at least) have language and are capable of abstract thinking, can easily lead us to recognise that we must act for reasons. Indeed, since we are rational, when we plan an action we can anticipate what impact it might have on reality, and we are led to judge whether the foreseen changes in reality are going to be for the better, for the worse, or indifferent. Our judgments about the foreseen consequences of a possible action constitute reasons for or against that action. Hence, if we take a certain course, being rational, we must have judged that that course was for the best. Sometimes we fail to attain what we judged best, because of our weakness, or bad luck, or a misjudgement about (or a misapplication of) suitable means. Still, even in those cases, our actions must be guided, albeit unsuccessfully, by what we judged best.

On the basis of this consideration, a longstanding and leading tradition of western philosophy answered the initial question by claiming (i) that we humans must have a faculty, the will, which inclines us to choose what we judge best, and (ii) that reality must be so constituted that we can both recognise a partial order in it and imagine possible ways to improve it through our actions. In short, we humans, at least sometimes, will the good. From this perspective, the will is the highest volitional faculty, which rules all the others, and its acts are acts of love. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Avicenna, Maimonides, Aquinas, Kant, just to mention some of the greatest minds: they all rehearsed this idea in order to make it consistent with the entirety of our experience, as it grew in depth and extension throughout history. The human capacity to know and choose the good has been seen, in this tradition, as the ground for the normativity of human action, and as a constitutive element of personhood, a characteristic of humans which gives them a special dignity, above all other species.

This tradition is not the only one, in western philosophy. According to another longstanding tradition, we humans just do what our desires and

instincts push us to do. Our reason could at best serve as an instrument for a more efficient satisfaction of our desires. We do not will what is in itself good, but whatever we happen to desire is good. This position, which was common among sophists and ancient naturalist philosophers (e.g., atomists), became prominent in modern philosophy, through the work of Thomas Hobbes, the empiricists, and the sensualists. If this line is taken forward, it is hard to account for the normativity of human action, and the notions of personhood and human dignity are severely undermined.

In several current debates, the view that we are driven by desires and instincts seems to be the most prominent, and its success is certainly due to fact that its metaphysical assumptions are compatible with current scientific naturalism, whereas the alternative view, according to which we will the good, seems to require a non-naturalist metaphysics. The will can *choose* the good if it is free, but how can we account for freedom in a world, which is dominated by the total causal closure of the physical, as current naturalism claims? How can something be good in itself, if goodness is not a natural property and only natural properties can exist, as scientific naturalism suggests? Desires and instincts, by contrast, can be thought of as natural events occurring in biological organisms, which can be described in fully physical terms. Hence, owing to the current dominance of scientific naturalism, the view that we are driven by desires and instincts seems to be the only plausible account of human action.

The current success of scientific naturalism rests on the wide following received by two empirical research projects, viz. neuroscience and evolutionary theory. Since neuroscience deals exclusively with some highly specific functionalities of the neural system, which are taken to be products of evolution anyway, evolutionary theory is ultimately going to take the most fundamental explanatory role. The common assumption among contemporary naturalist philosophers is that evolutionary theory can explain *everything*, namely all aspects of the reality that we can have experience of. These include human behaviour, and, in particular, our most sophisticated volitional faculty, the will, and its acts of love. If this assumption were to prove correct, the allied view of human action (that according to which we are driven by desires and instincts) would also be right. Since that view is not congenial to a normative conception of human action and to the recognition of a special dignity to humans, our traditional understanding of ourselves would be challenged. Hence, the total success of the above mentioned empirical projects would constitute a challenge to our traditional conception according to which human behaviour has to be accounted for in terms of humans willing the good, being subject to normative constrains and having a special dignity.

But is the common assumption of current naturalist philosophers correct, i.e. is it reasonable to expect that neuroscience and evolutionary theory can explain *everything*? This is not a scientific, but a philosophical question–a question which forces us to make some further considerations about the relation between the empirical projects and their allied view of action. The view that we are led by instincts and desires follows from the above mentioned common assumption. If that view were to be proven wrong, the common assumption would also be challenged. Moreover, if that view were proven wrong because a non-naturalist view of action (like that according to which humans will the good) turned out to be correct, the common assumption would be rejected, by excluding the possibility of allying it with some third, scientific naturalism-friendly conception of action. This explains why, in face of current empirical research on human behaviour, the ancient problem concerning the correct way to account for human action–which is the focus of this collection–is still open and interesting.

It is worth stressing that this philosophical problem does not question the interest and the importance of current research in neuroscience and in evolutionary theory. That research is interesting in itself, since it allows us to discover many details of our organic constitution. It is also important for our lives, in many respects. To take just one example, by knowing the details of the functioning of the brains of patients, brain surgeons can now reach tumours in ways that minimise damage to the functionalities of patients. No one questions the existence of the correlations between human faculties and functions and their neural underpinnings, which are assumed by those empirical projects. The philosophical question is about the natures of those correlations, and about what metaphysics is implied by a comprehensive account of our experience.

An alternative way to frame the philosophical question I am introducing is to think about it in the terms of Wilfrid Sellars, i.e. as a competition between the scientific image and the manifest image of man-in-the-world (that is, of the world taken as including also human subjectivity and self-reflectivity). According to Sellars, the scientific image tries to account for all aspects of our experience, including human subjectivity and self-reflectivity, in the terms of entities that are taken to exist beyond our experience. The manifest image, by contrast, takes the objects that populate our experience at face value, and does not attempt to reduce them to something lying behind experience. Both are sophisticated, philosophical articulations of worldviews: the former originating from the scientific revolution at the dawn of modernity; the latter dating back to Greek philosophy. They both contrast the naïve image of the world of everyday

experience. Sellar's formulation of the distinction is problematic and calls for qualifications. For example, it is problematic since the manifest image also typically postulates entities beyond experience (e.g., Aristotle's pure forms, or prime matter). And it calls for qualifications, for example, about the nature of entities that can be beyond experience in the scientific image (for example, they have to be "physical" or "natural"). But we do not need to clarify these issues here. The distinction is clear enough and it is a useful tool for conceptual clarification.

The manifest image accounts for all aspects of experience that we describe through mental language, when we engage with each other by referring to propositional attitudes, intentions, responsibilities, desires. The scientific image accounts for all results reached by man through the sciences. The problem is that often the two images do not match, and this tears apart our vision of reality. The task of philosophy, according to Sellars, would be to find a stereoscopic vision of the two images, by redefining them in a way in which they can match.

The two conceptions of action mentioned at the beginning compete for a role in the manifest image. If the view that we are led by desires and instincts turns out to be right, the manifest image can easily match the scientific image and the stereoscopic vision can be settled. Indeed, the scientific image and the ontology it presupposes will be fundamental, and the manifest image will be granted an autonomous language and, maybe, some form of independent, emergent ontology, which, though, will be thought to be completely reducible to those of the scientific image. In this way, normativity and human dignity will tend to fade out of the picture. If, on the other hand, the view that we humans will the good turns out to be right, then reaching a stereoscopic vision will be more difficult. The scientific image will not necessarily be the most fundamental, and the manifest image will be granted a genuine ontology of its own, at least for those aspects of reality which science cannot consider (freedom and values). Consequently, we will need to look for a more fundamental ontology, capable of encompassing at the same time both the empirical findings of the sciences and the entities, states, and relations, to which the manifest image refers.

In current debates, the view that we are led by desires and instincts has received sophisticated formulations, which account for much that is required from a satisfying manifest image of human action. For example, it is now customary to describe human actions as being individuated by intentions, in accordance with the analysis of the other tradition of thinking about human action, but intentions are then reduced to a combination of either desires and beliefs, or other primitive mental states. In all cases,

though, actions are taken to be liable to being individuated in the terms of mental states, within a *naturalistically conceived* view of the mental. Hence, the hope in the viability of an evolutionary explanation of human action. The view that humans will the good makes intentions a central notion in a very different sense. From this point of view, actions are individuated by the concurrence of both states and dispositions, which are hierarchically ordered. The will, a faculty the inclination of which is love, is often given the leading role in the process of ordering all volitional faculties, in making decisions and executing actions.

In connection with this state of things, two related orders of issues arise. The first concerns what a correct account of the manifest image could be. We can wonder whether the thesis that human action is motivated by desires and instincts is more or less satisfying than the other way of accounting for human action. In other words, can human action be fully accounted for in terms of mental states, or is a richer conception of human capacities and dispositions needed? Faculties such as the will, and dispositions like love can be ruled out in an explanation of human action, or do they need to play a part? The second order of issues concerns the relation between the manifest image and the scientific image. If the view that we humans will the good turns out to be correct, and there is more to action than current mental-states based accounts suggest, we can wonder whether human action can still be wholly described and explained in naturalistic and evolutionary terms. In other words, if the will and love cannot be ruled out by an account of human action, can they be explained in evolutionary terms, or do they represent a challenge to the common assumption? What is the correct metaphysics that can host at the same time the entities presupposed by the manifest image and those discovered by empirical, scientific research?

This volume is a collection of original essays that aims at addressing just these two orders of issues. Although the topic of the volume is well defined in its content, it presents many facets and, hence, requires expertise in many fields of philosophy and history of thought. Hence, contributors to the volume cover a wide spectrum of fields, even if they have been invited to interact and to consider inter-related issues. These essays are the result of long interactions and discussions among (at least many of) the authors.

The book is divided in three parts. Essays in the first part (entitled "Will and Love. Reviewing Reasons for Classical Concepts") deal with the views of classical philosophers on the will and on the related notion of love, and discuss whether and how their arguments are still relevant today. The essay by Christian Schäfer ("*Eros*, *Philia*, *Agape*: Does 'Love' Have a

Focal Meaning?") offers a semantic analysis of the concept of *love*, by focusing on its Greek antecedents (*eros*, *agape* and *philia*), especially in relation to Plato. His discussion of Solovyov's considerations about the centrality of *eros* shows both that the Platonic analysis is still valuable and that human action cannot be either disentangled from or reduced to its physical realisation. The essay by Antonio Donato ("Forgetfulness and Human Behaviour in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*") deals with the notion of human action supported by Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius's purely philosophical reflections on the goal of life suggest, according to Donato, that action cannot be reduced to mental states, and that habituation and the will play an irreducible role. The following essay, entitled "Love, Intellect and Will in Thomas Aquinas", is by Fulvio Di Blasi, who exposes the reasons laying behind Thomas Aquinas's account of human action and shows that such a comprehensive account must grant an agent both the universal faculty of reason and the capacity of choosing freely in concrete situations. Di Blasi explains how, with the ensuing view, Aquinas makes the notion of love central, and–following Boethius's footsteps–grounds the dignity of human beings which is part of the common concept of *personhood*. The last essay of the first part ("Love as Recognition in Antonio Rosmini's Theory of Action") is by Markus Krienke. Krienke shows that the Eighteen-hundreds Italian philosopher Antonio Rosmini had a twofold preoccupation: to address the problems about subjectivity opened by modern philosophy, and to re-establish a metaphysically objective ground for morality, in the classical tradition. This allowed him to offer a novel interpretation of Aquinas's theory of action, which he developed in original ways by clarifying the role of love in the operations of the will and of practical reason. Krienke claims that Rosmini's theory is better suited than contemporary naturalistic versions of Aristotelianism (like Foot's) to account for our moral experience, although that theory calls for a revision of contemporary naturalistic assumptions.

The second part of the book is entitled "Will, Love, and Evolution: Naturalism and Transcendentalism." It contains essays, which, in different ways, claim that the manifest image must include the view of human action according to which we humans will the good, and try to reconcile that image with the scientific image without renouncing to the idea that the ontology of scientific naturalism is in some sense fundamental. From this point of view, the rich account of human action does not add anything to the scientific image on a metaphysical level, but adds only the possibility of thinking of action in non-naturalistic terms, i.e., in a transcendental way. The first paper, by Helmut Pape ("Agape and The Causality of Love")

discusses Pierce's theory of evolution based on love. Love, for Pierce, is a basic principle of reality which allows him to give both a fundamental reason of the truth of Darwinian evolutionism based on natural selection, and an account of non-Darwinian forms of evolution, like cultural evolution. Pape points out the difficulties of this position and discusses some possible solutions. Some of these seem to purport a rejection of Darwinism as a basic account of reality, and, to that extent, they are not transcendental solutions but metaphysical alternatives to the scientific image. The second paper ("On the Alleged Incompatibility between Transcendental Ethics and Evolutionary Metaethics") is by Andreas Spahn, who claims that one can be a faithful Kantian ethicist and a faithful Darwinian at the same time. Spahn's arguments involve an analysis of ethical fictionalism, which has recently been presented as a metaethical view compatible with (or even implied by) Darwinism. By discussing ethical fictionalism, Spahn argues that debates in metaethics happen on a transcendental level, and are not decided (either pro or contra) by empirical discoveries. Christian Spahn, in the following essay ("Altruism, Egoism and Altruism Again: how to Properly Reduce Human Ethics?"), argues that a rich notion of human action, including both articulated forms of altruism and the employment of universal norms, is compatible with a Darwinian outlook. His argument is based on a review of debates on the evolution of altruism, which challenges the exclusivity of the alternative between group and individual selection, and underlines the fact that gene-identity across replication calls for a non-ordinary ontology. That ontology offers a new way of conceiving identity and universality of traits and opens a new prospect about the continuity between biological and cultural evolution. The fourth paper of the second part ("Action Theory and Foundation of Ethics in Contemporary Ethics: a Critical Overview") is by Christoph Bambauer and discusses four transcendental accounts of human agency and normativity. All these accounts link normativity to action theory and thereby call for the account of action according to which we humans will the good. At the same time, these views are supported on purely transcendental bases and are, hence, claimed to be compatible with evolutionary theory and with a full-bodied naturalism. Bambauer raises some problems in connection with these views, and suggests ways in which the theories could be improved.

The third part of the volume, entitled "The Will, the Good and Freedom: the Limits of Scientific Naturalism", contains essays which argue that the manifest image should include the view that we humans will the good, and suggest that this calls for a revision of the fundamental role that the scientific image currently normally plays. In other words, these

essays suggest that, if we recognise that humans will the good, the reconciliation between the scientific and the manifest image cannot be attained through a transcendental manoeuvre, but requires a revision of the metaphysical assumptions of naturalism. The revision does not need to go in the direction of supernaturalism, but it may more simply purport a relaxation of physicalist assumptions and the acceptance of a more pluralistic form of naturalism. The first two essays address the claim according to which the manifest image must include the view that humans will the good. The second three essays suggest that, when properly laid down, the manifest image challenges the primacy of the scientific image. The first essay ("Practical Reason and Human Agency"), which is by Christopher Tollefsen, focuses on the notion of the good, and claims that goods are irreducible and incommensurable, and can only be known and judged from the first-personal perspective. The following essay ("Desire, Perception and Deception"), by Matteo Negro, suggests that the very notion of desire cannot be "naturalistically" explained, since, in humans, it presupposes the deployment of higher cognitive faculties, including abstract thought, and the relationship with a metaphysically ordered reality. Gabriele De Anna (in "Evolutionary Metaethical Scepticism and the Problem of Justification") suggests that the most promising version of evolutionary ethics, i.e., evolutionary metaethical scepticism, fails to reach a stereoscopic vision that reconciles the manifest and the scientific image. Nicholas Teh (in "Anscombe on Non-Reductionistic Accounts of Human Action") supports Anscombe's views on causal pluralism, causal irreducibility, and determination, in connection with the explanation of human action. Teh suggests that this view is attractive since it overcomes some objections that have plagued other "non-causal" and "non-reductionistic" theories of action, it can account for the continuity between the causal powers of humans and those of animal and inanimate substances, and it has the resources to embed the results of empirical investigations, like physics and neuroscience. The closing essay ("Naturalism, Mysterianism and the Agential Concepts") is by Mario De Caro, who discusses McGinn's transcendental naturalism, a form of mysterianism. Mysterianism is the view that, although we must recognise that scientific naturalism fails to offer full scientific explanations of the whole manifest image, whatever is left out is an intractable mystery, rather than a genuine philosophical problem. McGinn's transcendentalism, then, claims that we should not give up all our beliefs concerning the manifest image (e.g., the belief in human freedom), but we should be aware that they cannot be possibly justified. De Caro praises McGinn's acknowledgement of the explanatory limits of scientific naturalism and of the need to maintain the

manifest image, but he objects that McGinn should reconsider the premises which lead him to mysterianism, i.e. the assumption that the only genuine form of explanation is scientific explanation. By contrast, De Caro suggests that we should consider "liberal naturalism", a pluralistic form of naturalism according to which the stereoscopic vision can be attained if we recognise that scientific explanations cannot be contradicted, but should not even be taken as exclusive.

It is my hope that this collection will contribute to bridging a common, current division between naturalists and anti-naturalists within the literature on human action, a division that is unfruitful and damaging for both sides. Anti-naturalists tend to ignore the results of neuroscientific and evolutionary explanations and go on with their analyses, as if those explanations had nothing relevant to say. Naturalists, especially scientists, on the other hand, promote neuroscientific and evolutionary explanations of human action, but they do not worry to what extent those explanations address the objects discussed by traditional philosophers, or implied in common sense talk about human action. The case of the will is particularly significant in this respect: traditionally, it is taken to be the highest human volitional faculty, which is further from body urges, but has also deep bodily implications. In discussing the will, traditional analyses offer highly elaborated accounts of the entrenchment between mind and body. But this complexity is ignored in current debates. On the one hand, anti-naturalist, traditional philosophers tend to overlook the significance of biological discoveries for this topic. On the other hand, naturalists tend, in their reductions, to confuse the complexity of the will with simplistic reductive concepts, like *human sympathy*, or thin descriptions of desires.

Some of the essays are reworked versions of contributions presented at two conferences that I organised in the past. The first conference (which I had co-organised with Christian Illies) was entitled *Evolution and the Metaphysical Conditions of Ethics*, and was held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), of Cambridge University, in England, on the 6th and 7th of June 2008, while I was a fellow there. The second conference was entitled *Love in Action– Philosophical and Biological Perspectives*, and was held at Bamberg University, in Germany, on the 19th of September 2009, while I was replacing the First Chair of Philosophy there. The rest of the essays are invited contributions, most of which are by authors with whom I entertained constant discussions on these topics over the past years.

This volume is an expression of research activities, collaborations and discussions on scientific naturalism and human action in which I was engaged over the last few years. Various institutions supported my work in

different ways, and I would like to thank them here: the Center for Philosophy of Science (University of Pittsburgh, USA) where I was a Visiting Fellow in 2005-2006; CRASSH, the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (Cambridge University, England), where I was a Marie Curie Fellow in 2007 and 2008; the European Commission, for a two years Marie Curie Fellowship; the British Council, for supporting the conference I organised at CRASSH in 2008; the First Chair of Philosophy at Bamberg University, in Germany, for supporting the conference I organised in 2009; the University of Udine, in Italy, where I teach, for granting me leaves to carry out my research elsewhere.

PART I:

WILL AND LOVE:
REVIEWING REASONS
FOR CLASSICAL CONCEPTS

Eros, Philia, Agape: Does 'Love' Have a Focal Meaning?

Christian Schäfer

1. Introduction: on *Eros*, *Philia* and *Agape*

In the following, I want to submit a (ridiculously limited) number of deliberations on the phenomenology of natural language(s) on the concept of *love*. My starting point for that will be a look on the one natural language most dear to philosophers of all times, namely Ancient Greek–a language that has not one, unified concept or omnibus term for "love", but many different terms. For this purpose I shall rely and fall back mainly on examples from the Platonic tradition. My hope is that at least at the end of my considerations I may find a way to broaden the view and to contribute to the question of non-naturalistic interpretations of love, especially when I shall talk about the concept of *love* in Vladimir Solovyov.

I take the liberty to introduce the pivotal problem of my intervention by telling a short anecdote. In the late sixties or early seventies of the past century, in a time when patriotism became a very difficult issue in Germany, a well-known journalist asked the acting Federal President Gustav Heinemann: "Mr President"–or rather "Mr Heinemann", as the times were–"Mr Heinemann, do you love your country?" Heinemann replied: "My dear Mr so-and-so, I love my wife." In German, the point made by Heinemann is even more obvious, since the word "liebe(n)" is used three times: "*Lieben* Sie Ihr Vaterland?" is not only denied by or opposed to "ich *liebe* meine Frau", but also contrasted with the polite address used by Heinemann: "*lieber* Herr sowieso."

Heinemann was very cautious and perhaps even politically opportunistic in making this joke. But the pun has something to it, which shows a peculiarity of the multifariousness of our concept of *love*: of course you can love your wife *and* your country at the same time and without betraying one or the other, and Heinemann knew that very well. On the other hand, the journalist, Mr so-and-so, would he have been more quick-witted, could have maliciously asked back: "how often a week?", making a point out of the sexual or passionate implications the love for the

wife allows for and the love of one's country doesn't. You cannot "love" your country twice a month or just twice a month in this sense.

On the other hand, the fact that Heinemann addresses the journalist with "lieber Herr sowieso" does not put Mr Heinemann's marriage in any danger, nor does it put a beloved fatherland in the danger of being betrayed by an unfaithful Mr Heinemann who elopes with a journalist.

It would take a long time to exhaust all the further implications and mutual exclusions that Heinemann's pun can teach us on the different meanings of 'love' employed. Instead, I shall come to the point quickly:

It would be very difficult to explain Heinemann's pun to an Ancient Greek–let alone to translate it properly into Greek. The three different uses of 'love' in this anecdote reflect–at least to a certain degree–what the Greek language distinguishes rather neatly as *eros*, *agape*, and *philia* (to concentrate just on these three, although there are more candidates).

Eros would be the passionate, sexual, frantic, or "romantic" love, a feeling or emotion similar to yearning and bodily craving, and is used predominantly in the sense of the feelings lovers have for one another. It is the meaning of 'love' which Heinemann uses in his response when referring to his wife–and indeed you would be a very sick person if you said that you "loved" (in the sense of *erao*) your country or your grandmother. If you are madly in love, *eros* is what you mean by "love." Accordingly, the standard Greek-English dictionary, Liddel-Scott-Jones (LSJ), renders *eros* as "love, mostly of sexual passion", "desire", "amours", or "passionate joy." *Agape*, in turn, is the caring or compassionate–not passionate–feeling you have for your children when they are small, or for your neighbour (in the Biblical sense), or for your grandmother. It is a kind of feeling bordering with charity, or even with the kind of love a statesman might feel for his country or his country's cultural heritage–except in the cases where *philia* would apply–, or a bishop for his flock. This comes close to the meaning of 'love' the journalist used in his question to Heinemann. Again, it would be very disturbing to hear that it was a feeling of *agape*, and not *eros* that made a person fornicate or spend all his money on an extramarital affair. Not surprisingly, LSJ suggests the translations "brotherly love", "charity", "affection", "regard", and specifies this uses with examples like "of God for man and of man for God." Last, not least, *philia* in its ideal acceptation means primarily the "love" among equals,[1] family members, for instance, fellow citizens, friends, or dear ones; or, even *things* dear to us. It is a fondness of others

[1] There is no question that there can be *eros* between a master and a slave. But note how reluctant Aristotle is to admit that there can be *philia* between them: cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161b.

because of shared things, or opinions, or attitudes. This is the kind of "love" expressed in the friendly address "dear Mr so-and-so", "lieber Herr sowieso." Again, you can feel *philia* for your fellow citizens, even for thoroughbred horses perhaps (as the name Philippos shows) or in certain cases for interesting things like stamps (as a philatelist does), but *eros* for horses and *agape* for stamps would be rightly regarded as a very awkward kind of behaviour or feeling. According to LSJ, *philia* means "affectionate regard", "friendship" (specified as "usually between equals"), "regard of dependants towards their superiors", "love in the family circle", "friendliness", "amiability", "fondness", "liking (for things)." It expresses the "delight in something" and the "friendship between States" or "of communities", and *philein* may also be translated as "to approve", "to cherish", or "to give a welcome kiss."

2. Problems of the Terminology

In other words: *eros*, *agape*, and *philia* are–even in common parlance–well defined concepts, some of them mass nouns, other count nouns, each of them definable without using the others as its *definiens*. They differ in extension as well as in intension. And not only do they differ in semantic value–as the German word 'Himmel' differs from the English word 'sky' because, although they both have the same signification, they differ in value, since the German 'Himmel' in addition comprehends what the English word 'heaven' expresses. But *eros*, *agape*, and *philia* fundamentally also differ in the definition of the word–which 'Himmel' and 'sky' do not. I should mention in passing that I borrow this distinction between meaning/signification and value from Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed the distinction between "*sens*" and "*valeur*."

The Greeks obviously avoided creating an umbrella term for *eros*, *apage*, *philia*, and their cognates. As it seems, the Greeks did not feel the need for it, or rather, they found three or more different terms more operable or appropriate–which is plausible, as not only Heinemann's pun can show. In the face of this differentiated Greek terminology, a unified concept like the concept of *love* in most modern European languages seems to pose certain problems or questions. Such a unified or "omnibus" concept must be expected to cover a whole range of separate meanings and semantic functions: 'love' should have to live up to the functions of a mass noun (as the "love" for thy neighbour that forbids to be pluralised into the "loves" of the neighbour) as well as of a count noun (as the "loves of my life" which were very different persons from the "love of my life"). As these examples show, 'love' must also cover the functions of a *nomen*

agentis as well as of a *nomen* (*f*)*acti*. Moreover, a unified concept of that kind faces the task of expressing one-sided feelings as well as mutual feelings, and mutual attraction of the similar as well as mutual attraction of opposites, and so on (all of which the Greek terminology can differentiate quite neatly to a certain degree). As a matter of fact, 'love' turns out to be an umbrella term that just cannot cover all it should cover, or covers too much, most probably at the cost of being watered down too much in intension.

In view of that: do we have a proper explanation that would allow us to account for our use of 'love' as a collective name or an umbrella term for so many different and even divergent emotions and/or feelings? Philosophically speaking: what exactly would allow us to classify all that *eros*, *agape*, and *philia*, plus cognates, can express under a single unified concept of *love*?

3. Solutions Proposed

Attempts have been made to explain how 'love' allegedly functions as such an umbrella term or collective name or to subsume different acceptations of 'love' (as *agape*, *eros*, *philia*) under just one of them. I shall name and very briefly discuss some of these attempts, just to give a phenomenological sketch of some of the solutions proposed to the problem. The selection of these historical examples is not arbitrary, but methodically prepares the tentative solution I shall propose as a viable possibility.

One way of safeguarding the idea of a unified concept of *love* has been to emphasise the fact that emotions like the ones expressed by *agape*, *eros*, and *philia* can somehow transform into one another. This was a frequent deliberation among the ancient Greek thinkers who, despite the lack–in their language–of such an "umbrella term", never denied, but rather stressed and conjured the conceptual connection of their many terms for "love." One such emotion can be born out of the other, and this at first sight seems to suggest that all these feelings must be of the same species or "family", just like canines can only be born out of canines although one of these canines might be a wolf and the other one a poodle. 'Love', then, would be like the name of the species of *eros*, *agape*, and so on. Plato himself seems to have something like this in mind when he says in the *Symposium* that we start out from *erotic* yearning in order to become *philo*sophers in the end: *philia*, to his mind, can be explained through a transformation or an evolution of *eros*–or so it may seem. Similarly, *philia* could transform into *agape*, in certain circumstances, and vice versa. But

then again, *eros*, or *philia*, can as easily transform into hatred, and *agape* into contempt or even disgust, as many examples can show–think of the many anecdotes Montaigne's *Essais* offer for such "transformations." Among other reasons, this is why transformability perhaps does not serve the purpose of defending, and even less of establishing a unified concept of *love*.

Others thought that 'love' simply works like a metaphor, and can therefore cover quite different things, just like a rose can be an artist's metaphor for such different things as beauty, youth, frailty and perishability. Robert Musil, whom I shall mention again later on, seems to have thought of something like this, but with a twist, as I shall explain shortly.

Another solution proposed is to conceive of love as an analogical concept in the Aristotelian sense of an attributional analogy. 'Love' would be similar in this aspect to the word 'healthy', which Aristotle uses to explain analogical designation (*Metaphysics* 1003ab): we call a living organism healthy if it is in a naturally perfect shape and performs its functions properly. But we call other things healthy as well–things that are not organisms: medicine is healthy, for one, your face can have a healthy colour, and sport is healthy, too. Why? Because, as Aristotle says, they have an inner connection or a functional relation with an organism in good shape. Sport maintains this good shape, the colour of your face shows it or depends on it, and medicine restores it. In other words: there is one focal meaning of the word 'healthy', and all other secondary meanings depend on it. As traditional Aristotelian terminology would have it: we deal with one principal analogate (the well-being of an organism) and many secondary analogates (that denote the contributions, dependences or showings of that well-being). But then again: what would be the principal analogate in the case of 'love'? The problem seems to be: we simply cannot tell for sure. If we proceed a *maiore ad minus*, probably *agape* would come first, and *eros* last; or vice versa, if we proceed *a minore ad maius*. If the intensity or the urge of the feeling is our criterion, *eros* must be the focal meaning of 'love', and not *philia*. However, if we consider chronological and causal order, our parent's love or maybe God's love for creation, *philia* or *agape*, come first, and *eros* is entirely dependant on them. In short: an explanation by analogy seems to pose as many problems and questions as it solves–if it solves any.

Having all that in mind, perhaps the best explanation would seem to be the one advanced by the famous Austrian writer Robert Musil (cf. Mulligan 1995) when he says in his opus magnum *The Man Without Qualities*:

> The question why we term so many different things with the one word ‘love’, has the same answer like the question, why we thoughtlessly speak of pitchforks, wheel forks, the forks of an antler, and a fork of the road! All these impressions of forkedness rest upon a common feature of forkish shape; this shape, however, does not belong to them as a common quintessence. […] It is not even necessary for them to have any similarity among all of them at all […].

The German original is more explicitly “Platonic” as it toys conspicuously with “eidetic” terminology:

> Die Frage, wie es kommt, daß so ganz Verschiedenes mit dem einen Wort Liebe bezeichnet wird, denkt Ulrich, hat die gleiche Antwort wie die Frage, warum wir unbedenklich von Eß-, Mist-, Ast-, Gewehr-, Weg- und anderen Gabeln reden! Allen diesen Gabeleindrücken liegt ein gemeinsames “Gabeligsein” zugrunde; aber es steckt nicht als gemeinsamer Kern in ihnen [...] Denn sie brauchen nicht einmal untereinander alle ähnlich zu sein, es genügt schon, wenn [...] nur Nachbarglieder einander ähnlich sind; entferntere sind es dann durch ihre Vermittlung.

Obviously, what Musil has in mind, is not an analogy of love with one focal meaning that accounts for all designations. Nor is he talking of a mere metaphor which is based on chance subjective impressions or cultural idiosyncrasies. Nor is Musil thinking of an explanation by means of a Platonic idea all other meanings ultimately participate in. He is not talking about a well-defined and in turn defining *eidos* or type of absolute “forkity”, but of a non-ontological outer similarity, a similarity of appearances, an inevitable impression of common and perhaps rather coincidental “forkedness.” The essential correspondence (that is the correspondence in sharing a common essential feature found in many tokens) which would allow for speaking of an analogical use is missing in Musil’s text. Musil’s proposal comes close to what Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, §§ 65-71)–and elsewhere–calls “Familienähnlichkeit”, family resemblance. This philosophical tenet of Wittgenstein proposes that things which we may consider to be interconnected by one essential common feature–and therefore name with one name–may in truth be linked by a series of–even only partly–overlapping similarities, where no one feature must be common to all. Musil came to think that the concept of *love* is such a “family resemblance concept”: between the different types of love, fraternal, nationalist, erotic, maternal, religious etc., there are only partial similarities. And that indeed seems to be an adequate description in light of what has been said so far about the case of *eros*, *agape*, and *philia*. This is why in the main I would

be quite sympathetic to calling love a "family resemblance concept." However, the theory of family resemblance, though it provides us with a *prima facie* plausible description, does not seem to explain much (as Wittgenstein himself sensed)–and it is explaining that philosophy is basically about–and moreover explaining by giving reasons. This is why I want to advance with still another proposed solution. Just to have an alternative, and maybe a better one. And although the tenets of the *Symposium* have been put under question, in philosophy it is always good and rewarding to take a look, and a second look, if necessary, on Plato and his followers for better solutions.

4. Platonic Proposals

The problem of how *eros*, *agape*, and *philia* might be interconnected, is one of the closely debated topics of Platonic anthropology. Plato himself, in the *Symposium* and elsewhere, proposes that *eros* can transform into *philia* (I have already mentioned that). The Platonic tradition, however, by adopting Plato's writings in a very own way, chooses to follow another path. For the explanation of the coherence of 'love', they had several strings to their bow.

4.1. Augustine

Let us first throw a glance on Augustine. His considerations on love are best introduced, perhaps, by looking at the concept of *interest* and its different implications–for this purpose, I shall rely on some helpful remarks by Rémi Brague in his book *The Legend of the Middle Ages*. The word 'interesting' can have a lot of possible meanings in English. Let us just examine two of them.

> First, there is egoistic, even mercenary, interest. This is the sense of 'interest' we use to indicate an interest in the rewards of a commercial society; it is the contrary of 'disinterested.' To designate things in which we have an interest of this sort–an interest in "what pays"–I will use the adjective 'gratifying' [...]. The reward implied is not limited to a monetary reward or to social climbing: our very survival and our health can be involved as well. (Brague 2009, 74).

In this acceptation of 'interest', we find things or persons interesting, because they are of a certain use or utility to us, they serve us and/or they serve a certain purpose other than themselves, a purpose that is of benefit or convenience for a goal that *we* want to attain, an objective that *we* want

to achieve. However, in a second acceptation, we call "interesting" in a more intellectual manner such a thing that is of no gratifying or mercenary use to us and whose presence or knowledge is an enjoyable presence or

> knowledge for its own sake. Any sort of knowledge can be qualified as "interesting" to the extent that it unveils something beautiful, and we know that nature is rich in this sort of reality, which can range from the delicate structure of a flower to the majesty of a sky constellated with stars.[2] This sort of knowledge can provide a pleasure much like the one we get from a work of art. The comparison is banal. […] This is why common parlance borrows a word from the vocabulary of magic and calls the object of that experience "fascinating." (Brague 2009, 74)

As in the case when someone would ask you: "what do you read that book for?", and you would answer: "I don't read it for any purpose, I just read it because it is interesting"–which means: for no other reason than the self-rewarding reading itself.

In Augustine's opinion, *amor*, *charitas* and cognates tend to denote such feelings as we have towards things that are of interest in the second acceptation of 'interesting' that Brague mentions. In Augustine's own terminology: we love things that we disinterestedly "enjoy" (*frui*), whereas we cannot speak of "love" in the case of things or persons that we "use" (*uti*) and that arouse our interest for other purposes than themselves. Or rather the other way round: we experience that our feelings toward such things that we associate with *fruitio*–enjoyment–are feelings of disinterested "love", not only of pleasurable relish. As it seems, an element of *fruito* (in an "Augustinean" understanding), far from being equated with love, is an indispensable prerequisite for "love" in all its different acceptations–or at least, as long as we speak of "real" love. I shall have to come back to that later on. However, Augustine's concept and theory of *fruitio* is a far-reaching affair that would require long and in-depth explanations which I cannot afford to give at this point. Instead, for now I turn to another influential philosopher of the Platonic vein.

[2] This is very much what Augustine says in a similar vein of thought. In *Confessions* II 6, he speaks of actions that are born out of false interest and counters them with a description of disinterested love in the light of the beauty of the universe.

4.2. Dionysius the Areopagite

I am not sure whether Augustine's '*fruitio*', once thoroughly treated, could offer an ultimate solution or basis for a unified concept of *love*. But it certainly offered a path to pursue for Platonic thinking, and it was Dionysius the Areopagite who went along this path about one century after Augustine–and certainly without knowing Augustine's writings, but that does not concern us here.

In a rather dense text of his treatise on the divine names, Dionysius proposes his famous equation of *eros* with *agape*. "One must not be distracted," he says referring to these two, "by distinctions between words, like 'straight or direct, Motherland or Fatherland', when in fact they mean the same thing" (Rorem 1993, 150f.). Dionysius' starting-point is that even in the Biblical usage God's creative and caring love is called *eros*–namely in the Greek version of the *Song of Songs*.

According to Dionysius, what allows us to equate *eros* with *agape* in a certain way of thinking that according to him underlies the Biblical passage in question, is an element of ecstasy that both have in common, and he uses ec-stasy in its literal meaning of "to be carried outside oneself", "to step out of oneself." Whoever loves, steps out of himself, as it were, with the one purpose to share in/to partake in another being's existence, to communicate his own being to another being's being. God does so in the act of creation, Dionysius states, human lovers do so as well, and when human beings love God or children love their parents, a similar yearning to step out of oneself and to deliver oneself to the other seems to be the decisive factor for what is happening. This is why Dionysius feels entitled to state:

> the movements of yearning [*eros* is the word in the Greek original] are several. Through these movements, the superior beings provide for the inferior, the inferior return to the superior, and peers communicate with peers.

4.3. Vladimir Solovyov

But Dionysius's interpretation of the coherence of *agape* and *eros* via ecstasy does not yet furnish us with an entirely satisfactory explanation of what should be the focal meaning of 'love'–if there is any. Despite his preference for the term *eros*, Dionysius simply seems to highlight one of the common features of *eros* and *agape* which accounts for what would still be hardly more than a family resemblance we recognise in both, or to define a common soil that both sprout from; or at least so it seems.

However, Dionysius's tenets on love resound in yet another philosopher, whom I would call, if not a distant descendant, at least an avid reader of the patristic neoplatonic tradition, namely Vladimir Solovyov. For the intellectual history of 19th century Russia, Solovyov in many respects plays a role similar to that of Antonio Rosmini in the development of 19th century Italian philosophy. But whereas Rosmini's interest focuses mainly on Kant's philosophical heritage and on how to reconcile it with the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, Solovyov introduces Schelling to the Russian milieu by adapting German Idealism with the help of platonic concepts.

In his famous little book *Five Essays on the Meaning of Love* (1971), Solovyov points out that when we fall in love, it cannot be solely for the purpose of procreation. Solovyov remarks, and rightly so, that less-evolved species are much more concerned with procreation than human beings are. As a matter of fact, the more intellectual capacities evolve, the smaller the role of procreation seems to be for a natural being. On the other hand, the importance of the emotional side involved in procreation seems to increase with the lessening of the concern for procreation itself. Solovyov observes that most romantic relationships do not necessarily, and not even in most cases, lead to having many children. Romeo and Juliet may seem an awkward and perhaps extreme example, but Solovyov adduces others as well, and even regardless of the best known lovers in literature and world history, there might be something to his interpretation. According to Solovyov, we can regard falling in love as a natural *factum brutum*, as a divine gift or as merely aleatory, but in any case it is a natural process that arises independently of us, and if left to itself, it vanishes. To Solovyov's mind, we are challenged to direct this natural process to higher ends. This is why he compares it to the gift of speech: if our natural capacity to speak had not been developed, language would have never passed beyond the level of signalling objects or communicating states of affair or imminent dangers to others, just like street signs do. Had there not been a development of this natural faculty of language that humans share with many other species, we would have never started to conceptualise and to express meanings or arguments through language. As a matter of fact, during this process, language passed from its baser function of signalling and communicating states of affair to a higher function that most of us would now call the very perfection and true importance of language and the identifying *raison d'etre* of being an animal having the use of speech/reason. Thus, the development of language not only mirrors, but interacts with the development of human consciousness. Following this thought, Solovyov submits his thesis that the true meaning and the truly

important significance of love is not found in the experience of romantic emotion, nor in the explicative natural fact of procreation, but in what is accomplished by means of that feeling. Solovyov reminds us that what we do for this accomplishment will be as important and indispensable for our personal and our community life as the development of human language out of the natural faculty of speech was in the past.

It is important to keep in mind that this holds true even if we concede that procreation gives us the biological explanation for such a feeling as love. Actually, this was Solovyov's starting point in the *Five Essays*. However, when it comes to grasping the importance of the feeling of love in our personal life, this explanation, correct as it may be, does not live up to what an explanation should truly accomplish. At least, it cannot force any reason upon us, why we, who understand and acknowledge such an explanation, should act according to it. What Christine Korsgaard (1996, 14-15) writes about the difference between the first-person perspective and the third-person perspective, holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for what Solovyov thinks about love:

> Suppose someone proposes a moral theory which gives morality a genetic base. Let's call this the 'evolutionary theory.' According to the evolutionary theory, right actions are those which promote the preservation of the species, and wrong actions are those which are detrimental to that goal. [...] But now ask yourself whether, if *you* believed this theory, it would be adequate from *your own* point of view. Suppose morality demands that you yourself make a serious sacrifice like giving up your life, or hurting someone that you love. Is it really enough for you to think that this action promotes the preservation of the species?

In the face of this prevailing "first person perspective" in the explanation of our *human* behaviour: why is this concept of the development of love and the comparison with the development of language so momentous to Solovyov? Roughly speaking, the reason for it is the following. Solovyov proposes that the gift of speech, in its natural function of utterances and communication, corresponds to an egotistic interest in understanding, where I want to gain something, like information, or where at least I want to gain something out of the communication or exchange of information. In this case, in the act of speech, I seek understanding in a serviceable intellectual or semantic sense: it obeys to a notion of understanding that corresponds to the adjective "perspicuous" or "graspable", and that Schelling (whom I shall presently introduce to the discussion), and others would render in German as "das Verstehen." Its proper form of perfection would correspond to the motto "the more the better." By contrast, in the

higher development of language, this form of serviceable interest little by little gives way to a "disinterested" interest–an interest akin to fascination, Brague would say–that focuses on a kind of understanding that draws nearer to comprehension, that perhaps corresponds to adjectives like "sensible" and "insightful." This form of understanding would translate into German as "das Verständnis"–and, therefore, it is a kind of understanding the proper form of perfection of which corresponds to the motto "the deeper, the better." With this, Solovyov states something similar to Karl Popper's distinction of the baser and the higher functions of language in his book *Objective Knowledge* (1972, 119-121). According to Popper, the baser or lower functions of language, and the ones also found in animals, to different degrees, correspond to the exchange of information and the denoting of objects–Popper calls them signalling and expressive functions–the higher functions corresponding to definition, knowledge, and argumentation, that is explanatory, cognitive and evaluative, and therefore even moral functions.

Solovyov thinks of love in a similar fashion. The biological function of love, the biological, natural "interest" in "love", is to secure procreation and/or sociability. But Solovyov is cautious and does not to commit the error to equate the biological and the natural. As a matter of fact, it corresponds to human nature, but not to human biology, to recognise and to cultivate a second form of "interest", and this is where Augustine comes in; it is a "disinterested" interest that serves no gratifying or mercenary ends, not even in the form of a "costly signal", as some representatives of the philosophy of biology have put it. To cut a long story and an intricate explanation short: Solovyov states that man is an egotistic being. Not just in the flat sense of his selfishness, but in the sense that the entire intellectual and spiritual configuration of human beings is inevitably egocentric. As human beings, we cannot but perceive, understand, and interpret the world and all other human beings from the point of view of our Self, or rather: of our ego. There seems to be no escape from this microcosmic ego of the Leibnizean monad that is unable to seriously interchange in essence or in any other meaningful way with other such monads. According to Solovyov, every person's world is by essence a Ptolemaic system of its own, with the ego as the central celestial body. So far, this existential situation corresponds to our biologically natural "mercenary interest" in speech and love.

But Solovyov thinks that this cannot be the end of the story. Not unlike our capacity of speech developed from a utilitarian or functional interest in expression and signalling into another form of interest and into the understanding not only of what others tell us, but of other humans

themselves, love naturally develops to provide us with a "disinterested" interest in other human beings, by teaching us to see the world "with their eyes", to acknowledge and to affirm the first-person perspective in others. Now what we formally know or postulate theoretically, namely that we have to recognise and to admit others as Ptolemaic egos of their own, would forever remain unfertile, sterile, and merely postulational, if there was no corresponding emotion that would carry the subject of this moral recognition outside itself and translate the formal recognition into a corresponding activity and a form of life.

4.4. "I Love It When Things Come Together": Solovyov, Schelling, and the Platonists

It might be clarifying in this context that in his defence of Augustine's anti-pelagian tenets on freedom, Anselm of Canterbury had put forward a similar thought. As far as our biological constitution is concerned, Anselm holds in *De concordia* III, we are determined to, or at least liable to be directed by "tyrannical powers" such as greed, pleasure, and whatever seems to profit us (and therefore is "of interest" to us, in this sense), in short: we have a biological inclination towards what is suitably convenient for us, the *commodum*, as he calls it. Human freedom (or rather human *liberty*) however, consists in the capacity to go beyond this egotic nature and to transcend it (cf. Decorte 2006, 131-132). Anselm speaks of this capacity as of a (divine) inspiration graspable by human beings, a surplus to our barely human energies which is experienced in the special Augustinean concept of *charity*, *caritas*, a not so distant Latin equivalent of *agape*. Thus, it is love that frees human beings from the egotic determination of the *commodum*, the merely or primarily useful or serviceable (if we take *commodum* to be Anselm's word for what Augustine would call that which belongs to the realm of *uti*). As in Augustine himself and in Solovyov, it is the twofold meaning of 'interest' adumbrated above that can illustrate what Anselm is thinking of in this passage.

In this explanation of "the meaning of love", Solovyov follows Schelling in his *Freiheitsschrift* (the writing *Of Human Freedom*). Schelling had hoped to overcome what he held to be the formalistic–even solipsistic–shortcomings of Kant's ethics by understanding "love" as "selfness" (Selbstheit) which can abandon itself ("von sich weg können"), i.e. "selfness" that acknowledges and approves of the other being, the other "selfness", as another being, as a selfness of its own and in its own right (Schelling 1809, Höffe and Pieper 1995). Very probably, Emmanuel