

Some Critical Reflections on Michel Foucault's Reading of Plutarch's *Eroticus* (*Amatorius*)¹.

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When analyzing Plutarch's *Eroticus*, M. Foucault emphasizes a significant fact: for the first time, masculine love or pederasty and feminine love or marriage are compared and judged. The verdict that Plutarch reaches –because there is certainly a verdict- has nothing to do with the benefits of Greek pederasty –that is, as a sort of institution whose mission was to lead boys towards virtue- and the condemnation of that other pederasty which was really devoted to enjoying their bodies, but with the opposition pederasty / marriage, the former being devalued and the latter praised. Here is, then, a first long quotation, which in my opinion shows quite clearly Foucault's thesis and, at the same time, will serve to present the correction I should like to introduce:

“... il s'agit toujours de distinguer deux formes d'amour et de confronter leur valeur. Mais au lieu que cette comparaison joue à l'intérieur d'un Éros dominé, sinon entièrement représenté, par l'amour masculin, pour y faire apparaître deux formes de relations naturellement distinctes : la relation avec les garçons et celle avec son épouse légitime dans le cadre du mariage); et c'est à ces deux formes données comme distinctes qu'on posera la question de la valeur, de la beauté et de la supériorité morales. Avec ces diverses conséquences qui modifient considérablement la question de l'Érotique : que l'amour pour les femmes et singulièrement le mariage font, de plein droit, partie du domaine de l'Éros et de sa problématisation ; que celle-ci prend appui sur l'opposition naturelle entre l'amour pour son propre sexe et l'amour pour l'autre ; et qu'enfin la valorisation éthique de l'amour ne pourra plus s'effectuer par l'élimination du plaisir physique”³.

As far as I am concerned, I should like to underline that, if we follow the directives given by Foucault, we run an excessive risk of focusing the debate on a theme, pleasure, which might not be so significant or, at least, might not be the only significant one:

“... c'est autour de cette question du plaisir que s'était développée la réflexion sur la pédérastie dans l'Antiquité grecque; c'est autour de cette même question qu'elle va entrer en régression. C'est le mariage, comme lien individuel susceptible d'intégrer les relations de plaisir et de leur donner une valeur positive, qui va constituer le foyer le plus actif pour la définition d'une stylistique de la vie morale⁴ (if I am not mistaken, this thesis, besides, is in contradiction with the last paragraph of the last quotation)”.

Indeed, everything would fit together if he really bore in mind what he himself had

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³ Foucault, M. *Histoire de la sexualité* 3. *Le souci de soi*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984, pp. 221-222. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

⁴ Foucault, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

maintained before, that is: “l’amour pour les femmes et singulièrement le mariage font, de plein droit, partie du domaine de l’Éros”, but he focuses afterwards on pleasure, the only thing through thanks to which according to him *éros kai gyné* can meet”. Frankly speaking, I should not dare to affirm that the ancient Greeks reflect philosophically on pederasty with a focus above all on the theme of pleasure. For instance, it is true that, with regard to it, the “Bible” of masculine love, Plato’s *Symposium*, warns us:

‘For every action it may be observed that as acted by itself it is neither noble or base (οὔτε καλή οὔτε αἰσχρά). For instance, in our conduct at this moment, whether we drink or sing or converse, none of these things is noble in itself; each only turns out to be such in the doing, as the manner of doing it may be (ὡς ἂν παραχθῆ). For when doing of it is noble and right, the thing itself becomes noble; when wrong, it becomes base. So also it is with loving, and Love is not every case noble or worthy of celebration, but only when he impels us to love in a noble manner. Now the Love that belongs to the Popular Aphrodite is in very truth popular and does his work at haphazard: this is the Love we see in the meaner sort of men; who, in the first place, love women as well as boys; secondly, where they love, they are set on the body more than the soul; and thirdly, they choose the most witless people they can find, since they look merely to the accomplishment and care not if the manner be noble or no. Hence they find themselves doing everything at haphazard, good or its opposite, without distinction: for this love proceeds from the goddess who is far the younger of the two, and who in her origin partakes of both female and male. But the other Love springs from the Heavenly goddess who, firstly, partakes not of the female but only of the male; and secondly, is the elder, untinged with wantonness: wherefore those who are inspired by this Love betake them to the male, in fondness for what has the robuster nature and a larger share of mind (τὸ ἐρρωμονέστερον καὶ νοῦν μᾶλλον ἔχον)... They love boys when they begin to acquire some mind (νοῦν) – a growth associated with that of down on their chins. For I conceive that those who begin to love them at this age (νεόν) are prepared to be always with them and share all with them as long as life shall last: they will not take advantage of a boy’s green thoughtlessness (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ) to deceive him and make a mock of him by running straight off to another’ – translations of the *Symposium* by Lamb, W. R. M. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983⁵.

Therefore, love –at least the noble one- seems not to have any connexion with sex, although, when we read on, we enter very soon that ambiguous zone where pederasty, that which also implies sex, is in fact accepted on account of its noble objectives:

‘Even in the passion for boys you may note the way of those who are under the single incitement of this Love: they love boys only when they begin to acquire some mind... you remember we said that by itself it was neither noble nor base, but that it was noble if nobly conducted, and base if basely. To do the thing basely is to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι) a wicked man in a wicked manner: ‘nobly’ means having to do with a good man in a noble manner. By ‘wicked’ we mean that popular lover, who craves the body rather than the soul: as he is not love with what abides, he himself is not abiding. As soon as the bloom of the body he so loved begins to fade he ‘flutters off and is gone’, leaving all his speeches and promises dishonoured: whereas the lover of a nature that is worthy abides throughout life, as being fused into one with the abiding. Now our law has a sure and excellent test for the trial of these persons, showing which are to be favoured

⁵ Pl. *Smp.* 181a-c.

(χαρίζεσθαι) and which to be shunned’⁶.

Plutarch, for his part, decides to speak quite clearly. Indeed, Protogenes has already begun his radical defence of masculine love against marriage, and Daphnaeus, who has become angry, replies to him:

‘Boy-love denies pleasure; that is because it is ashamed and afraid. It needs a fair pretext for approaching the young and beautiful, so it pretends friendship and virtue (φιλία καὶ ἀρετή). It covers itself with the sand of the wrestling-floor, it takes cold baths, it plays the highbrow and publicly proclaims that it is a philosopher and disciplined on the outside because of the law. But when night comes and all is quiet, *Sweet is the harvest when the guard’s away*’ –translations of the *Eroticus* by W. C. Helmbold. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969⁷.

Let us notice, then, that we would be wrong if we believed that the philosophical reflection on pederasty speaks mainly –as Foucault maintains- about pleasure. On the contrary, pleasure, in spite of the remarkable degree of ambiguity of many texts, must be simply discarded in the noble relationship between an *erastés* and his *erómenos*; if not, both may become the target of harsh criticism. Noble pederasts know perfectly well that they must renounce pleasure in order to gain general acceptance and those who go in pursuit of pleasure also know that they had better deny their “sweet harvest”. In any case, Plutarch also dismisses pederasty as being a relationship in which there is no room for a true interchange of pleasure. Why “also”? Because, first of all, Plutarch, in accordance with his very well-planned distribution of arguments throughout the dialogue, will attack pederasts for having maintained for centuries that marriage and women have no connection with *éros*, *philia* and *areté*.

Let us consider this in detail or, in other words, let us listen to those protagonists involved in the controversy. In the first place, here is Protogenes, the main *erastés* of Plutarch’s *Eroticus* who defends masculine love so enthusiastically. Daphnaeus has just warned him that he is not going to tolerate any negative valuation of marriage, but Protogenes replies energetically:

‘Since it is necessary (marriage) for producing children, said Protogenes, there is no harm in legislators talking it up and singing its praises to the masses. But genuine Love has no connection whatsoever with the women’s quarters (τῆ γυναικωνίτιδι). I deny that it is love that you have felt for women and girls any more than flies feel love for milk or bees for honey or than caterers and cooks have tender emotions for the calves and fowls they fatten in the dark. In a normal state one’s desire for bread and meat is moderate, yet sufficient; but abnormal indulgence of this desire creates the vicious habit called gluttony and gormandizing. In just the same way there normally exists in men and women a need for the pleasure derived from each other; but when the impulse that derives us to this goal is so vigorous and powerful that it becomes torrential and almost out of control (πολλὴν καὶ δυσκάρηκτον), it is a mistake to give the name Love to it. Love, in fact, it is that attaches himself to a young and talented soul (εὐφυοῦς καὶ νέας) and through friendship (διὰ φιλίας) brings it to a state of virtue (ἀρετήν); but the appetite (ἐπιθυμία) for women we are speaking of, however well it turns out, has for net gain only an accrual of pleasure in the enjoyment of a ripe physical beauty (ἀπόλαυσιν ὄρας καὶ σώματος) ...

⁶ Pl. *Smp.* 181d; 183d-e.

⁷ *Eroticus* 752, translated by W. C. Helmbold, *Loeb Classical Library*, 1969. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

The object of desire is, in fact, pleasure and enjoyment (ἡδονὴ καὶ ἀπόλαυσις); while Love, if he loses the hope of inspiring friendship, has no wish to remain cultivating a deficient plant which has come to its prime, if the plant cannot yield the proper fruit of character to produce friendship and virtue (φιλίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν)⁸.

In spite of my true admiration for M. Foucault's work, I think that, after this first pronouncement, everything is quite clear. If one wants to recover women as true friends and comrades as well as to proceed together, men and women, on the way towards virtue enjoying each other's real love and friendship -which is the result of sharing both objectives and personal talents⁹-, it is absolutely necessary to leave behind forever the centuries-old Greek misogyny. And, in order to reach this state, the most important thing is not to point out that men do obtain pleasure from women –even torrential pleasure according to Protogenes- but to prove that, unlike what had been affirmed by pederasts for centuries –or perhaps better, by the philosophical reflection on pederasty-, there is nothing in their nature which prevents women from giving love and friendship.

Indeed, Eros's borders had been fixed in both a rigid and exclusive way. Let us remember, for instance, that Stoicism still chose a quite Platonic definition of *éros*. I am not going to repeat here what is in my opinion the true meaning of the words by the leaders of the Stoa¹⁰. However, we should mention the Stoic definition of *éros* upon which Plutarch's criticism against masculine love is based: "Eros is an impulse to make friendship (ἐπιβολὴ φιλοποΐας) which is provoked by beauty when appearing"¹¹. "When Chrysippus says that Eros is an impulse to make friendship, he is referring to becoming friends with youths who are in their blossoming (νέων ὀραίων)¹². Nevertheless, the love of a wise man is not an impetuous love (σφοδρὸς ἔρως), incapable of obeying the reason (ἀπειθὴς λόγῳ), which must rule his acts; on the contrary, it is a beneficial love (σπουδαῖος ἔρως) and, therefore, "the wise man will fall in love with youths who by their countenance seem to have talent for virtue (τῶν ἐμπαινότων διὰ τοῦ εἶδους τὴν πρὸς ἀρετὴν εὐφυΐαν), as Zeno says in the Republic, Chrysippus in the first book of the Lives and Apollodorus in his Ethics... and it has nothing to do with intercourse (συνουσίας), but with friendship (φιλίας)"¹³. "Eros is a sort of chase for an undeveloped adolescent who has talent (εὐφροῦς) for virtue"¹⁴.

It is quite obvious, then, that Protogenes is using Stoic terminology in Plutarch's *Eroticus*, and his opponent, when refuting him, will attack in his turn not only the Platonic nature of the Stoic definitions of *éros* but also pederasty in general. At any rate, however, it is still far more evident that that long tradition which had made *éros* and *gyné* oppose each other for centuries must be left behind forever, since, if not, the origin of friendship and virtue, i.e. *éros*, will never reach marriage.

⁸ *Eroticus* 750C-E.

⁹ See, e.g.: Gilabert, P. "¿Mujer, matrimonio e hijos en el Estoicismo Antiguo bajo el amparo de Eros? (Woman, marriage and children in Ancient Stoicism under the protection of Eros?). *Emerita* 53, fasc. 2 (1985) 315-345.

¹⁰ See e.g. my doctoral dissertation *Amor Estoico (Estoicismo Antiguo) (Stoic Love –Ancient Stoicism)* and the introduction of my edition in Spanish and Catalan of Plutarch's *Eroticus*, Barcelona: PPU, 1991 and 1999.

¹¹ Stobaeus *ecl.* II 91, 10. *SVF* III, 395.

¹² Sextus *adv. math.* VII 239. *SVF* III, 399.

¹³ D. L. VII, 129. *SVF* III, 716; Cicero *Tusc. disp.* IV 72; *SVF* III, 652; Stobaeus *ecl.* II 115, 1 W. *SVF* III, 650.

¹⁴ Plutarchus *de comm. not.* cp. 28 p. 1072f. *SVF* III, 719.

Consequently, it is now and not before when one should pay attention to the fierce attack of Daphnaeus when he refutes the claimed purity of the relationship between an *erastés* and his *erómenos*, being always conscious that his true aim is to transform Eros into the “patron saint” of marriage:

‘If union contrary to nature with males does not destroy or curtail a lover’s tenderness, it stands to reason that the love between men and women, being normal and natural, will be conducive to friendship (φιλία) developing in due course from favour (χάρις). For, you see, Protogenes, a woman’s yielding to a man was called by the ancients ‘favour’. So it was that Pindar declared that Hephaestus was born from Hera ‘without favour’. And Sappho addressed a young girl not yet ripe for marriage: *You seemed to me a small child without favour*. And Heracles is asked by some one or other, *Did you persuade the girl or take your favour by force?* But to consort with males (whether without consent, in which case it involves violence and brigandage; or if with consent, there is still weakness and effeminacy on the part of those who, contrary to nature, allow themselves in Plato’s words ‘to be covered and mounted like cattle’), this is a completely ill-favoured favour, indecent, an unlovely affront to Aphrodite... If, then, Protogenes, we have regard for the truth, excitement about boys and women is one and the same thing: Love. But if, for the sake of argument, you choose to make distinctions, you will see that this boy-love of yours is not playing fair; like a late-born son, an aged man’s bastard, a child of darkness, he tries to disinherit the Love that is his legitimate and elder brother. It was only yesterday, my friend, or the day before, in consequence of young men’s stripping their bodies naked, that he crept furtively into the gymnasia. At first he merely caressed and embraced; then gradually he grew wings in the palaestra and can no longer be restrained. He rails against and vilifies that great conjugal Love which co-operates to win immortality for the human race by kindling afresh through new generations our being, prone as it is to extinction... If, on the one hand, as Protogenes maintains, there is no sexual partnership in paederasty, how can there be any Eros without Aphrodite, whom it is his god-given function to serve and wait upon, as well as she bestows? But if, on the other, there is an Eros without Aphrodite, then it is like drunkenness without wine’¹⁵.

From now on –Plutarch must think- there is no doubt about the real meaning of “doing the thing nobly” –since he is perfectly familiar with erotic Platonic language- or, even better, about the real meaning of “yielding to”, “favour”, etc. We have just read Daphnaeus’s thesis on the advantages of intercourse and favour in the realm of marriage, which is far more exciting than the noble masculine love without sex or its unforgivable “sweet harvest”, but Plutarch is focusing in fact on friendship in spite of presenting it in association with *cháris*. In my opinion Plutarch is too talented, subtle and at the same time skilful to propose such a simple and pragmatic strategy –and I am not saying, of course, that this is exactly Foucault’s view: “Boys or women? Women, certainly, since men obtain from them not only pleasure but also friendship, whereas from boys men obtain only friendship and not pleasure”. The thesis of Plutarch’s *Eroticus* is far more complex and has to do with what was already well-known by that time. That is to say, given that: a) society appears for many reasons divided into two separated and opposed “watertight compartments”, men and women, b) that, very logically, friendship also springs up between true comrades and colleagues, and c) that men arrogate intellect to themselves, given all these circumstances, as soon as the human mind started searching for absolute Beauty or Good, men believed that they had discerned its traces in the beautiful countenances of male adolescents and not in those of maidens, who had not been prepared to become rulers. Notwithstanding, by

¹⁵ *Eroticus* 751C-752B.

that time youths' beauty had given up playing any role regarding the attainment of the Good, although the Stoic terminology about *éros* seems to indicate just the opposite. Platonism had already left behind its great admiration for physical beauty¹⁶. Virtue is no longer the ultimate vision of any "mystic" philosopher but a science with own rules to be learnt. There are teachers – and not lovers, then- who teach it and talented disciples –and not beloveds- who learn it. Only men? Certainly not. Stoics and Cynics, for instance, have already dreamt of ideal republics where all citizens, men and women, are true comrades and companions far from any discrimination. Shall we mention the well-known example of Hipparchia following Crates in order to live philosophically according to the dictates of Cynicism¹⁷? Shall we also mention Plutarch's criticism of Stoic *éros*, which was so absurd that Stoic sages had to pursue unhandsome boys and abandon them after they had become beautiful?¹⁸ To sum up, the new science of virtue no longer needs youths' beauty and will depend only on the talent of boys and maidens, of men and women¹⁹, who thus become true friends and comrades through sharing the same skills.

The ancient Greeks and Antiquity in general reflect philosophically on pederasty focusing on these key points and not on pleasure *stricto sensu*. Plutarch knows very well how to take advantage of the "sexual limitations" of masculine love; he also knows that nobody will dare to contradict him when he speaks about the benefits of the true union between Eros and Aphrodite in the realm of marriage, and he will be able to embarrass pederasts thanks to a controversial theme: *cháris*, etc. However, in spite of being presented as the origin for men of countless pleasures, women will never be under the protection of Eros –the traditional god of masculine love-, that is, they will never be men's friends, if they are not recovered as true participants in intelligence and virtue. And here is the final proof when the above-mentioned well-planned distribution of Plutarch's arguments throughout his *Eroticus* has finally reached its goal:

‘So it is ridiculous to maintain that women have no participation in virtue (ἀρετῆς). What need is there to discuss their prudence and intelligence (σωφροσύνης καὶ συνέσεως), or their loyalty and justice (πίστεως καὶ δικαιοσύνης), when many women have exhibited a daring and great-hearted courage which is truly masculine? And to declare that their nature is noble in all other relationships and then to censure it as being unsuitable for friendship alone (φιλίαν) that is surely a strange procedure²⁰... they say that beauty is the ‘flower of virtue’ (ἄνθος ἀρετῆς), yet it would be absurd to deny that the female produces that flower or gives a ‘presentation’ of a ‘natural bent for virtue’ (μηδὲ ποεῖν ἔμφασιν εὐφυΐας πρὸς ἀρετήν), is surely right in saying, *An ardent eye betrays the tender girl/ Who once has tasted of the joys of love*. Do the ‘signs’ betokening a flighty, unchaste, and corrupt character overrun women's faces, while no lustre is added to a female's beauty by a chaste and modest character (κοσμίου καὶ σώφρονος)? Or are there many ‘signs’ of the latter which ‘present themselves in combination’, yet nevertheless do not move or evoke our love (ἔρωτα)? Neither position is well taken or true²¹.

¹⁶ See, e.g.: Gilabert, P. “Amor platónico/ Amor estoico, principio y final de una evolución” (Platonic Love / Stoic Love, the beginning and the end of an evolution). *Anuario de Filología* 10, Barcelona 1984, 27-37.

¹⁷ D.L. VI, 7, 96-7.

¹⁸ Plutarchus *de com. not.* 1072f. *SVF* III, 719.

¹⁹ D.L. VI, 12. *SVF* I, 481. Cf. Lactant. *instit. div.* III 25. *SVF* III, 253; Clemens Al. *Strom.* IV 8 p. 590. *SVF* III, 254.

²⁰ *Eroticus* 769C.

²¹ *Eroticus* 767B.

Or, when approaching the theme of physical beauty as a mirror of the superior Good:

‘Furthermore, the causes that they give for the generation of love are peculiar to neither sex and common to both. For is it really the case that visual shapes emanating from boys can, but the same from women cannot, enter into the body of the lover where, coursing through him, they stimulate and tickle the whole mass and, by gliding along with the other configurations of atoms, produce seed? And those beautiful and sacred passions which we call recollections of the divine, the true, the Olympian beauty of the other world, by which the soul is made winged, why should they not spring from maidens and women, as well as from boys and striplings, whenever a pure and disciplined character (ἀγνὸν καὶ κόσμιον) shines through from within a beautiful and charming outward shape (just as a well-made shoe, as Ariston remarked, reveals a shapely foot), or whenever the clearcut traces of a shining soul stored up in a beautiful forms and pure bodies are perceived undistorted, without a flaw, by those capable of such perceptions... it is no less true that the noble lover of beauty engages in love wherever he sees excellence and splendid natural endowment (οὐ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν οὐδε τὴν εὐφυΐαν) without regard for any difference in physiological detail’²².

By the way, if pleasure is the key topic, let us notice that this is the second time that the Platonic Plutarch shows himself extremely prudent. First, it was that ardent eye which betrayed that tender girl, thus probably indicating that he had enjoyed an excessive -?- pleasure, and now we read this call to the restrained desire of human beings which will lead them towards virtue. And I mention it because Foucault says as well:

“On voit le dilemme: ou bien les *aphrodisia* sont incompatibles avec l’amitié et l’amour, et dans ce sa les amateurs de garçons qui en secret jouissent des corps désires sont déçus de la dignité de l’amour ; ou bien on accepte que les voluptés physiques prennent place dans l’amitié et dans l’amour, et alors il n’y a pas de raison d’exclure de ceux-ci la relation avec les femmes”²³.

Certainly “there is no reason”, but the truth is that Plutarch seems to accept only a restrained pleasure which is always under control, since Daphnaeus, replying once again to Protogenes, quotes Solon and adds:

‘Whence I conclude that those verses I quoted were written by Solon when he was still quite young and ‘teeming’, as Plato says, ‘with abundant seed’. Here, however, is what he wrote when he had reached an advanced age: Dear to me now are the works of the Cyprus-born, Of Dionysus and the Muses, works that make men merry, as though after the pelting storm (ζάλης καὶ χειμῶνος) of his love for boys he had brought his life into the peaceful sea of marriage and philosophy (ἐν τινι γαλήνῃ τῇ περὶ γάμον καὶ φιλοσοφίαν θέμενος τὸν βίον)’²⁴.

Therefore, it rather seems that Plutarch, who is Platonic, Stoic, etc. naturally prefers stability to passion or erotomania and, besides, that every quotation we have recollected from the dialogue in order to show his interest in redeeming the woman and presenting her as intelligent, virtuous, strong and courageous is the logical result of the need to contradict the initial thesis of

²² *Eroticus* 766E-767.

²³ Foucault, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 233.

²⁴ *Eroticus* 751E.

Protopogenes:

‘If, however, such a passion (πάθος) must also be called Love, let it at least be qualified as an effeminate and bastard love (θηῆλιν καὶ νόθον), that takes its exercise in the women’s quarters as bastards do in the Cynosarges... there is only one genuine Love, the love of boys (παιδικός). It is not ‘flashing with desire’, as Anacreont says of the love of maidens, or ‘drenched with unguents, shining bright’. No, its aspects is simple and unspoiled (λιτὸν... καὶ ἄθροπτον). You will see it in schools of philosophy (ἐν σχολαῖς φιλοσόφοις), or perhaps in the gymnasia and palaestrae (γυμνάσια καὶ παλαίστρας), searching for young men whom it cheers on with a clear and noble cry to the pursuit of virtue when they are found worthy of its attention. But that other lax and housebound love (ύγρὸν... καὶ οἰκουρὸν), that spends its time in the bosoms and beds of women (ἐν κόλποις... καὶ κλινιδίαις), ever pursuing a soft life (τὰ μαλθακὰ), enervated amid pleasure devoid of manliness and friendship and inspiration (ἡδοναῖς ἀνάνδροις καὶ ἀφίλοις καὶ ἀνευθουσιάζοις), it should be proscribed, as in fact Solon did proscribe it. He forbade slaves to make love to boys or to have a rubdown, but he did not restrict their intercourse with women. For friendship (φιλία) is a beautiful and courteous relationship (καλὸν καὶ ἀστεῖον), but mere pleasure (ἡδονή) is base and unworthy of a free man (κοινὸν καὶ ἀνελεύθερον). For this reason also it is not gentlemanly or urbane to make love to slave boys: such a love is mere copulation (συνουσία), like the love of women (ὁ τῶν γυναικῶν)’²⁵.

Plutarch has already presented –at least in my exposition- the appropriate apology. Indeed, women are neither soft, nor wicked nor false; on the contrary, they are noble, strong, courageous, virtuous, intelligent, worthy of being considered loyal comrades and their friendship is highly appreciated. From now on, having emphasized what in my opinion is the key point of the polemic, I do agree with M. Foucault, especially when he underlines that Plutarch’s *Eroticus* recovers friendship and love for marriage, although he has preferred to focus on pleasure, to the extent of considering it the “stage” where Antiquity had the debate about pederasty:

“Dans le mariage, aimer est un plus grand bien qu’être aimé’. La formule est importante dans la mesure où dans toute relation d’amour, l’érotique traditionnelle marquait fortement la polarité de l’amant et de l’aimé et de la nécessaire dissymétrie entre l’un et l’autre. Ici, c’est la double activité d’aimer, présente chez les deux conjoints, qui constitue l’élément essentiel”²⁶.

One further remark: the fact that Plutarch (I-II century A.D.) had to defend marriage, and so enthusiastically, as a true source of love and friendship for men shows how long a way to go there still was. I am thinking now of all sorts of current data and statistics which continue to confirm the traditional –even classical- difficulties of friendship and comradeship between men and women.

²⁵ *Eroticus* 750F-751B.

²⁶ Foucault, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 241.