

Leone Ebreo on the cosmological nature of love

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ABSTRACT*

This paper examines Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore* (1535), a celebrated Renaissance work of Jewish thought renowned for its syncretic, enigmatic, and encyclopaedic character. The main objective of this paper is to explore love as an ontological principle, a cosmic and universal force that binds together all beings, both animate and inanimate. The analysis begins with Leone's conceptualisation of love within animals and humans, including his classification of the various causes of love. The paper then considers his arguments for the existence of 'love in inanimate entities', examining the similarities and differences between animate and inanimate beings.

* I sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

This article is dedicated to the cherished memory of Karel Floss (1926–2024)

— INTRODUCTION

Leone Ebreo, also known as Don Yehudah Abrabanel, stands out as a prominent intellectual figure at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. His work *Dialoghi d'Amore* (1535) became a renowned masterpiece of Renaissance literature, celebrated for its syncretic and encyclopaedic nature, which resonated with a wide audience (Leone Ebreo, 2008). The work gained fame and high esteem in intellectual and artistic circles during the 16th century, and by the early 17th century it had reached twenty-five editions. Within approximately a century, it was translated into French, Latin, Spanish, and Hebrew. The appeal

and uniqueness of this work stem from the harmonious interplay between its form and content, resulting in a synthesis of allegorical interpretations of both pagan mythology and biblical narratives, alongside commentary on the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical traditions (Veltri, 2000, 55–66). The work, divided into three parts (On love and desire, On the community of love, On the origin of love) presents itself as a philosophical dialogue exploring the ethical, astrological, cosmological, and metaphysical dimensions of eros. Central to the text is a dialogue between feminine and masculine perspectives, embodied in the exchange between Sophia, the beloved woman, and Philo, her lover. The aim of the paper is to focus on the second part of the dialogue (On

the community of love), in the chapter where the author explores love as a cosmic force. Our focus is on how Leone depicts love among inanimate entities. To gain a deeper understanding of “love in inanimate entities”, it is essential first to consider how love is conceptualised within the animal and human realms.

— LEONE EBREO WITHIN JEWISH AND RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

Like Plato, Ibn Gabirol, Giordano Bruno, Jakob Böhme, and Friedrich Schelling, Leone possesses a distinctive talent for synthesising various expressions of the spirit into a unified whole. This remarkable phenomenon allowed the artistic aspect of their work to convert philosophy into a form of poetic theosophy, where myth, allegory, and symbol are seamlessly woven into the entirety of thought. The dialogue-based structure of the text enabled the author to vividly convey the fusion of philosophy, rhetoric, and poetry (Olmedo, 2001, 213–21). Marcelino Mendéndez y Pelayo asserts that Leone’s work is part of the tradition of idealistic thought (Mendéndez y Pelayo, 1918, 10). Various interpretations of his work reveal the intricate and nuanced nature of Leone’s views, which developed during a period of significant engagement between Jewish culture and the Renaissance spirit (Lesley, 1992; Lesley, 2000, 3–5; Ruderma, 1988, 382–433). One group of scholars emphasises the profound influence of Arab-Jewish medieval thought on Leone’s philosophical synthesis (for instance Ivry, 1983; Pines, 1983; Lesley, 1993; Idel, 1983). The second and

largest group of scholars observes the syncretism of medieval and Renaissance elements (for instance Zimmels, 1886; Pflaum, 1926; Nelson, 1958; Damians, 1971; McGinn, 1998; Kodera, 1995; Gershenzon, 2000; Vila-Chã, 2006). Our task is not to resolve which group of researchers best describes or characterises Leone’s work. This somewhat schematic classification of the researchers highlights the complexity of his work, which encompasses a wealth of diverse traditions. However, it is important to note that Leone’s work was generally not regarded as a distinctly Jewish contribution and was not widely accepted within Judaism (Vila-Chã, 2006, 268). According to older scholars such as Gustav Karpeles, Leone simply gave up on Hebrew truth and opted instead for the presentation of what he calls Neoplatonic mysticism (Karpeles, 1909, 219–220). Julius Guttman has pointed out that Leone’s interest in ancient mythology was highly unusual among Jews, but his philosophical concept of love has a Jewish basis (Guttman, 1964, 294–297). Joseph Klausner, who compares Leone to Philo of Alexandria, Ibn Gabirol, and Baruch Spinoza, argues that a common denominator among these authors is their perilous inclination toward pantheism. Klausner contends that this aspect of Leone’s work contributed to its limited appeal within Jewish thought (Klausner, 1932, 495–508). Later Hubert Dethier discusses Leone’s inclination to pantheism (Dethier, 1992, 353–386). One of the reasons for the limited interest in Leone’s work within Jewish thought may lie in the lower level of interest in

Platonism that Leone encounters in Florentine Platonism and the medieval tradition (such as Solomon Ibn Gabirol). The appeal of Platonism for authors such as Philo of Alexandria, Ibn Gabirol, and Leone Ebreo lay in its incorporation of mythology and mythopoetics into the interpretation of the world, which diverged significantly from the dominant medieval Aristotelian approach. As Ze'ev Levy notes, Aristotelianism was not a conducive framework for pantheistic or quasi-pantheistic views, as seen in the case of Solomon ibn Gabirol, the prominent Jewish medieval Neoplatonist cited by Leone (Levy, 1993, 37–38.) The work demonstrates a remarkable blend of ancient, medieval, and contemporary philosophy. His main philosophical influences in the Dialogues include the Italian Neoplatonic tradition – particularly Florentine Platonists – and, on the other side, Aristotle, Halevi, Maimonides, Kabbalah, and Arabic Peripateticism (Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes). Leone blends the rich intellectual traditions of Jewish and pagan thought, Platonism and Aristotelianism, as well as poetry and science, together elegantly, creating a unique synthesis. Written in a masterfully elegant style, this synthesis offers readers a profound insight into the world of this original Jewish thinker during the Italian Renaissance.

— LOVE IN SENSITIVE WORLD

In the second dialogue (On the community of love) significant emphasis is placed on the interpretation of love across the entirety of the universe. The dialogue initiates an inquiry into the

manner in which love serves as the unifying force in the world. The primary theoretical aim of this part of the dialogue is to elucidate the cosmological dimension of love, demonstrating that love functions as the governing principle of the entire universe. The narrative appears to be driven by Philo's unspoken hope that a deeper understanding of love's pervasive presence throughout the cosmos might inspire Sophia to reciprocate his affection. In his discourse, Philo articulates the role of love within each of the three realms of the universe: the sublunary world, the celestial spheres, and the realm of separated intellects. According to Leone, love is a cosmic and universal force that binds all entities, both animate and inanimate. From the primordial, formless substance (*prima materia*) to celestial bodies and complex organic organisms – humans and animals alike – everything exists and is animated by the power of love, which permeates and shapes all forms of being.

Let us observe how love manifests itself within the animal and human worlds, because it helps to understand the love in inanimate (insensible) bodies. Leone elucidates the nature of love in the animal world by distinguishing five specific causes of reciprocal friendship: (1) sexual pleasure, (2) love of one's own offspring, (3) gratitude (benefit), (4) the natural love of one's species, and (5) the friendship produced by association in time.¹ Animals experience love for five

1 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, II, 60. Al-Ghazzali identifies five causes of love, presenting a slightly different classification: 1. love for oneself, focused on

reasons. First, there is the desire (il desiderio) and pleasure (la dilettaazione) associated with reproduction between male and female. This love is evident in the animal world, particularly in the drive for reproduction (la generazione) and in the bonds between parents and offspring.² Second, love arises from the instinct to preserve the species (la successione generativa), as seen in the care that fathers and mothers provide to their offspring. Third, love is inspired by the exchange of benefits (il beneficio), which fosters affection not only in the recipient towards the giver but also in the giver towards the recipient, observable across various animal species. An example is the bond that forms when a female animal, such as a goat, nurtures a human child, cultivating a strong mutual affinity between animal and human through acts of care. Fourth, love arises from the natural affinity between members of the same or similar species (per la naturalità della medesima spezie o d'altra consimile). This can be observed in the cohesion within a herd or flock, where mutual respect and affection exist among individuals of the

same kind. Leone notes that friendships can also develop across different species. For instance, he cites the bond between dolphins and humans as an example of interspecies affection, contrasting it with the natural hostility between humans and the basilisk.³ Fifth, companionship (la compagnia) fosters friendships even among natural adversaries, as seen in the relationships that can develop between a dog and a lion or a lamb and a wolf, who may become friends through shared community. Leone's exploration of these five causes of love in the animal kingdom was grounded in direct observation of nature, aiming to highlight the diverse expressions of love and reciprocity that are fundamental to existence. However, animals are not endowed with the ability to understand things in a way that drives them to desire or pursue knowledge. According to Leone, their decision making is guided by sensory impulses (appetito sensitivo), not by rational thought. Animals cannot grasp the essence of a thing, nor can they desire or love it in a meaningful sense. Such knowledge is not rational, as true desire or love involves the will, which stems from reason, a faculty unique to humans.⁴ In humans, rational knowledge and will-based love coexist with sensual

self-preservation; 2. love for what brings benefit to the lover; 3. love for its own sake; 4. love of beauty; 5. love based on a sense of kinship. Although Leone references al-Ghazzali in multiple passages, the extent to which he was influenced by al-Ghazzali's classification of the causes of love remains uncertain (Al-Ghazzali, 1921, 78–91; Garden, 2014, 98). On the reception of Al-Ghazzali's theory of love among Renaissance philosophers (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johanan Alemanno) see Girdner (2018, 683–701).

2 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, II, 60: Ancor in tutti gli animali irrazionali che generano si truova amore, tra femmine e maschi, e tra figliuoli e parenti.

3 Ibid. II, 61: sì come si truovano altri che s'odiano naturalmente, come il basalisco e l'uomo, che con la vista sola s'occideno. Cf. Pliny (1855, 282). For more on the phenomenon of the basilisk in medieval thought, see Gilmore (2003, 39); White, (1954, 55).

4 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, II, 65: Il conoscimento e amor razionale e volontario si truova solamente negli uomini, perché proviene ed è amministrato da la ragione; la qual fra tutti i corpi generabili e corruttibili solamente agli uomini è partecipate.

love. Leone makes it clear that an element of will can only be found in the human form of love (Vila-Chã, 2006, 476). The highest form of love in creation belongs solely to humans, and encompasses both rational and voluntary love. Higher forms of love include the lower forms, but the reverse does not hold true. Humans embody all the layers of the universe, uniting the natural inclination of insensible (inanimate) bodies (l'inclinazione naturale de li corpi insensibili), sensual appetite, and reason.⁵

As demonstrated above, the five causes of reciprocal love observed among animals also apply to humans, but in humans the use of reason and the will creates a fundamental difference. Unlike instinct, reason allows humans to consciously intensify or moderate various forms of love, depending on individual goals. What distinguishes humans from animals further is the heightened intensity of desire and pleasure in the realm of reproduction. Expressions of love in humans tend to be more excessive as a result of their complex emotional nature. For instance, desire is often stronger in men, who may love women with such zeal and passion that it disrupts their eating and sleeping patterns. Leone suggests that love is generally stronger in humans, and mutual love between a man and a woman tends to be more enduring. A sign of the strength of a relationship

is its resilience in overcoming obstacles or its capacity to sustain love after prolonged separation. Humans also exhibit a greater inclination toward exclusive attachment, desiring a specific partner. Family love can be disrupted by excesses, such as human avarice (l'avarizia umana) or greed, which Leone argues is exclusively found in human society. Greed in the form of the desire to acquire as much property as possible becomes the main cause of the disruption of family and social life. Excessive insatiability reflects a misguided form of love or desire directed toward material possessions essential for preserving life, ultimately destabilising relational harmony (Wells, 2007, 84). Gluttony or avarice is understood as a source of mental and social unrest (Newhauser, 2000) and greed is generally regarded as a significant obstacle to love.⁶ By observing the animal (sensitive) world, Leone concludes that the animal kingdom surpasses humans in many respects. Leone argues that although human love is directed by reason and the will, it is not as steadfast as that of animals, as even the most ferocious creatures refrain from cruelty within their own species. For example, a lion does not hunt another lion, nor does a snake bite another snake (Baraz, 2019, 13–28). Unlike animals, humans cause more harm to each other themselves.⁷ In

5 Ibid., II, 66: ché, cascando uno uomo di luogo alto, tenderà naturalmente al basso, come corpo grave; e negli animali si truova ancor questa inclinazione naturale, ché, come corpi gravi, cercano naturalmente il centro de la terra come luogo suo conosciuto e desiato di sua natura.

6 Plutarch writes that true love dispels malice and greed (Plutarch, 2000, 762B–D; Jaeger, 1999, 27). Similarly, in his work *Confessio Amantis* (1390–1392) John Gower identifies greed as a source of disruption in marriage (Bakalian, 2003, 155).

7 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, II, 63: ...più uomini uccide l'inimicizia, l'insidia, il ferro

human society, enmity, deceit, and the use of weapons are the primary causes of death, exceeding the tragedies caused by all natural calamities and disasters. The main reasons for this are the aforementioned greed among people, excessive concern for unnecessary things (le cose superflue), and human superstitions (superstizioni), which foster cruel enmity between individuals. Leone claims that this cruel enmity (inimicizia) permeates all spheres of society, manifesting itself between people of different countries, within the same country, city, or household, and even between brothers, fathers and sons, or husbands and wives.⁸

According to the five causes of reciprocal friendship, love in animals and humans is similar, but the use of reason and the will in humans creates a fundamental distinction from animals. Unlike animals, humans possess noble and higher qualities such as the knowledge of truth and wisdom, as well as the ability to perceive beauty and practise virtues. These noble human qualities, however, coexist with extreme forms of qualities or features such as cruelty, hatred, and violence, which persist on an unprecedented scale in human society. The questions then arise: how does love manifest itself at the lowest level of

the universe (insensible, inanimate bodies), where there is neither sensuality nor reason and will? If we understand the universe as a net of interconnected relationships, can we explain love in non-sentient (insensible, inanimate bodies) entities through the lens of the five causes of reciprocal love?

— LOVE IN INSENSIBLE (INANIMATE) BODIES

The primary objective of the second dialogue is to elucidate the cosmological aspect of love, demonstrating that love serves as a pervasive force that permeates and regulates the dynamics of the entire universe. Love functions as a cosmic and universal force, uniting all beings, both animate and inanimate. From prima materia to celestial bodies and complex organic life forms, including humans and animals, everything exists and thrives through the power of love. Therefore Leone's exploration extends to love within the realms of natural philosophy, zoology, and meteorology, as well as astronomy and astrology. At the core of the cosmology presented in the Dialoghi d'amore is the notion that the earth serves as the recipient of all influences from celestial bodies, including the planets and stars. The earth holds a privileged position among elements; it is the largest, coldest, and furthest from the heavenly bodies, situated at the centre of the universe (Vila-Chã, 2006, 681).⁹ Additionally, the Earth

umano, che tutto il resto de le cose accidentali e naturali.

8 Ibid., II, 63: È cagione de la corruzione de l'amor naturale degli uomini l'avarizia e cura che hanno de le cose superflue: de le quali si genera inimicizia non solamente tra li distanti di diverse patrie, ma ancora tra quelli d'una medesima provincia, d'una medesima città, e d'una medesima casa, tra fratelli e fratelli, tra padre e figliuoli, tra marito e moglie.

9 Ibid., II, 70: Se ben la terra, per essere lontanissima dal cielo, è in se medesima la più grossa, fredda e bassa e più aliena di vita, non di meno, per star nel centro unita,

serves as a common vessel (*recettaculo*) for the elemental properties of the heavens, facilitating their interaction and combination to create all things. Because of its density and central position, the Earth becomes the final recipient of celestial influences, integrating and transforming the qualities (*virtù*) of other elements into a coherent unity. The Earth is characterised as the legitimate and primary partner of the sky, being referring to as the “wife of the heavens” (*moglie del corpo celeste*). In contrast, Leone designates the other elements as concubines, implying a subordinate or less significant role in the cosmic hierarchy (Kodera, 2010, 13–46). Leone draws inspiration from Kabbalistic thought, which explores the themes of erotic relationships between humanity and the divine (Idel, 2005; Scrivano, 1986, 123–139; Gluck, 2012). In this framework, Israel is depicted as the feminine counterpart to God, often understood as God’s concubine (Tirosh-Rothschild, 2011, 209). This heterosexual dynamic influences Leone’s cosmological ideas, wherein the heavens are likened to a husband who bestows his creative gifts upon his wife (the Earth), adorning it with an endless array of beauty. Leone, well-versed in medieval Kabbalah, must have been aware that marriage and sex were transformed into a mystery reflecting the higher mystical marriage, whose

success is crucial for both the divine cosmos and the lower universe (Idel, 1983, 208; Idel, 1995, 217–54).

Central to Leone’s concept of love in the universe is an essential understanding of the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. In this metaphorical framework, the spiritual, active, and superior realm is traditionally associated with men, while the physical, passive, and ontologically subordinate realm is assigned to women (Kodera, 2008, 303; Veltri, 2000, 55–66; Ogren, 2016). Traditionally, the intellectual or spiritual realm symbolised the male, active, and superior principle, while the corporeal realm represented the feminine, passive, and lesser principle. However, from Leone’s perspective, this conventional model is not straightforward. Philo appears as a curious and receptive lover, while Sophia frequently assumes the active role, persistently asking questions. As Sergio Kodera notes, Leone challenges the traditional notion of an active male principle and a passive female principle (Kodera, 2008, 304). Leone’s philosophy of love places a strong emphasis on bodily sensuality. His *Dialoghi d’amore* became renowned for its distinctive focus on sensuality and its positive view of sexuality (Idel, 2005, 188–190). However, the sensual dimension of love does not imply that its primary goal is merely bodily pleasure; rather, there exists a higher and more perfect form of love. Heterosexual intercourse and procreation serve as specific forms or paradigms that illustrate the cosmological and theological roles of love and beauty. John Charles

riceve unitamente in sé tutte l’influenze e razi di tutte le stelle, pianeti e corpi celesti; e quivi si complessionano, talmente attraendo in quella la virtù di tutti gli altri elementi, che si vengono a complessionare di tante e tal maniere, che si generano tutte le cose che hai detto [Sophia].

Nelson believes that in most Renaissance treatises devoted to love we find an asexual or even an anti-sexual attitude towards love, i.e. that love is devoid of the physical aspect. In these discussions of Platonic or divine love, doubts often arise regarding the nature of human love (Nelson, 1958, 70.) Leone, much like Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) in *Gli Asolani* (1505), redefines the perception of women by elevating their representation and fostering a sense of “reverence for female beauty” (Bembo, 1989; Ross, 2009; Hanegraaff, 2008, 196). This “reverence for female beauty” should not be understood literally, but rather metaphorically, emphasising the importance of materiality in the universe. Within this framework, *materia prima*, often associated by Leone with Chaos or femininity, emerges as a fundamentally formless substance. Notably, the anthropomorphic qualities attributed to *materia prima* reveal an intense desire and receptiveness to accept all forms, emphasising its dynamic potentiality within the cosmos. Leone highlights the anthropomorphic characteristics of *materia prima*, underscoring its intense desire and inherent receptivity to embrace all forms.¹⁰

10 The emphasis on desire and the openness of the *prima materia* to accepting all forms is similar to the reflections of Marsilio Ficino or Thomas Aquinas’s comments on Aristotle’s *Physics*. Ficino described *prima materia*, which is itself formless, as being *desirous of the good, namely of form . . . because it is open to receiving the good, and because it is necessary for a good world* (Ficino, 2001, 87; Snyder, 2008, 192–221). The extent of Leone’s familiarity with Ficino’s *Theologia Platonica* remains uncertain, as Leone does not provide

Leone explores love at its most basic level, within the realm of inanimate matter and inanimate bodies (Guidi, 2003, 225–248).¹¹ Since love permeates the entire universe, Leone argues that it must also manifest itself in non-living nature. Leone draws on the idea that inanimate objects – such as trees, stones, and elements – act according to their inherent goodness.¹² Just as animals instinctively seek food and pleasure while avoiding pain, fire naturally rises toward the sky, its place of origin, as it strives to escape the cold of the earth. Conversely, the earth seeks to

any explicit references to the Florentine Platonist in his work (Pines, 1983, 365–398; Guidi, 2003, 225–248). In *Commentary on the Physics* (Book I, Lecture XV), Thomas Aquinas, in his interpretation of *Physics* 192a23, explicitly describes the inclination of matter towards form as natural desire (*appetitus naturalis*). In this context, Aquinas also references Plato, who likens matter to a mother or female and form to a father or male (Thomas Aquinas, 1882, 54: *Sciendum tamen est quod Aristoteles hic loquitur contra Platonem, qui talibus metaphoricis locutionibus utebatur, assimilans materiam matri et feminae, et formam masculo; et ideo Aristoteles utitur contra eum metaphoris ab eo assumptis*). Although we cannot determine the extent of Leone’s familiarity with these specific sources, it is clear that he had a strong awareness of the rich tradition of medieval commentaries (Pines, 1983, 365–398; Vila-Chã, 2006, 476–477).

11 Angela Guidi provided an excellent analysis of ancient and medieval sources on *materia* in *Dialoghi d’Amore* (Guidi, 2003, 225–248).

12 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d’Amore*, III, 249:... la cognizione de la natura generante gli serve a dirizzarli ne le sue perfezioni naturali senza altra propria cognizione: onde l’amore e desiderio loro non è intelletivo né sensitivo, ma solamente naturale, cioè drizzato de la natura, non da se stesso.

avoid heat, which would cause its disintegration. These ideas originate from ancient and medieval cosmological and philosophical traditions, particularly within the framework of Aristotelian physics. At this level, the dialogue becomes highly metaphorical, as inanimate entities such as stones and trees lack the capacity for knowledge. Consequently, according to Leone Ebreo's equation of love with knowledge, inanimate bodies cannot be properly described as capable of love or desire. However, Leone tries to demonstrate that the same five causes of love presented among sensitive animal beings can be applied to the different combinations of the four elements. The five causes of love extend to the lower realm of the universe, encompassing individual elements, vegetation, and inanimate nature. Sophia is highly perplexed by Philo's attempt to explain love in the lowest sphere of the universe. She wonders how it is possible to apply the concept of love to inanimate beings, which lack cognitive ability, will, and emotions. Therefore Leone distinguishes three types of love: natural (*naturale*), sensual (*sensitivo*), and voluntary (*razional volontario*).¹³ In individual elements and mixed bodies, such as metals, stones, plants, herbs, and trees (*li corpi misti degli elementi insensibili*), there exists a form of natural knowledge (*conoscimento*), which can be characterised as love. Natural knowledge should be defined as an inherent, almost instinctive form of knowledge that is part of

the natural order, as opposed to learned or abstract knowledge. The mixed bodies possess an innate understanding of their purpose, the natural inclination (*inclinazione*) that guides them towards achieving their goal.¹⁴ The natural inclination (*inclinazione natural*) is defined as appetite and natural love (*appetito e amor naturale*). A higher form of love is sensual love, connected to sensory perception. This type of love is found in animals (*animali irrazionali*), which pursue what benefits them and avoid what is harmful. In the lowest realm of the universe, the domain of material things and bodies (*corpi inferiori insensibili*), there is neither sensory nor rational capacity. The aim is to illustrate the extent to which the functions of love operate within the realm of the elements (Damians, 1978, 75; Vila-Chã, 2006, 776). When questioned about the cause of love in these bodies, Leone explains that they are directed by Nature, which knows and governs all lower things (*la natura conoscitrice e governatrice di tutte le cose inferiori*), or by the World Soul (*l'anima del mondo*). This guiding force – Nature or the World Soul – leads bodies to an infallible understanding of natural phenomena, ensuring the preservation of their essence. The World Soul itself does not directly move lower bodies; rather, in the absence of knowledge and will, it relates to them in much the same way as the soul relates to the body, guiding or directing individual movements through inherent physical principles. Nature directs the body

13 Ibid., II, 76: Il conoscimento e l'appetito e, per conseguente, l'amor è di tre modi: naturale, sensitivo e razional volontario.

14 Ibid., II, 76: Questa inclinazione si chiama, ed è veramente, appetito e amor naturale.

towards an understanding of its purpose and location while also instilling in it a desire to seek and fulfil that purpose. Nature is a universal ordering principle instilled with God's knowledge, which allows even inanimate objects to "know" their place through their inherent tendencies. At the level of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), love is expressed as a natural inclination towards those environments that are most similar in nature. When Leone observes that the earth appears to flee from the heavens and fire, seeking the centre farthest from the sky, he highlights the structure of the universe as shaped by the inherent nature and natural tendencies of each individual element. In bodies, there is a form of "love" for their natural place and "an aversion" or rejection of what is opposed to it, which hinders the body from reaching its natural place, goal, or fulfilment. Similarly, in the animal kingdom, love manifests itself as a natural adaptation to the environment suited to each species: terrestrial animals are drawn to the earth, aquatic creatures to water, birds to the air, and salamanders to fire.¹⁵ Leone explicitly states that the

love of elements for their proper places and the other (l'altre – with the same intent but reordered) five causes of reciprocal love are found in the elements (León Hebreo, 2006, 135n). This arrangement provides an opportunity to introduce a cosmological perspective, focusing on the distribution of elements in relation to each other rather than according to their natural locations. This dynamic representation then serves to explain the blending of elements and the properties that emerge from these mixtures. The individual elements exhibit similarities that draw them together: for instance, air and fire share qualities of lightness and subtlety, while earth and water are united by their heaviness and inertia, exhibiting a certain rigidity. There is, however, a natural opposition between water and fire. Air, positioned between fire and water, acts as a mediator (peacemaker); it seeks closeness to fire, yet maintains an affinity with water.¹⁶ Fire is the subtlest, lightest, and purest of all the elements, with an inherent affinity for air. A defining characteristic of fire is its attraction to

15 Ibid., II, 67: L'amor ch'hanno gli elementi e altri corpi morti a' suoi propri luoghi, e l'odio che hanno a li contrari, è come l'amor ch'hanno gli animali a le cose convenienti e l'odio che hanno a l'inconvenienti; e così fuggono l'uno e seguono l'altro. È ancor quest'amore de la sorte di quel ch'hanno gli animali terrestri a la terra, e li marittimi a l'acqua, e li volatili a l'aere, e la salamandra al fuoco, che si dice che nasce in quello e che v'abita dentro. Tal è l'amor degli elementi a li suoi propri luoghi. Oltre questa sorte d'amore, ti dico che negli elementi si trovano tutte l'altre cinque cagioni d'amor reciproco che abbiām detto trovarsi negli

animali. The salamander was believed to be a creature born from fire. Leone may have drawn upon the rich traditions of both Jewish (Blau, 1906, 646–647; Einbinder, 2002, 60; Trachtenberg, 2004, 305) and Christian thought (Albert the Great, 2010, 27–28; Albertus Magnus, 1920, 1570–1572).

16 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, II, 69: Ed egli è amichevole al fuoco e a l'acqua: per essere questi due fra loro contrari e inimici, egli s'è messo in mezzo di loro come amico d'ambidui, perché non si possino danneggiare con guerra continua.

the heavens and its perpetual desire to ascend and unite with them.¹⁷

In all four elements, there exists l'amor sociale (social love), a form of love characterised by mutual attraction and the tendency to draw closer to one another. Leone aims to convey the fundamental idea that all relationships among the elements are governed by a deeper principle of friendship, referred to as l'amor sociale. This principle illustrates the intricate order and precise arrangement of the relationships existing between the elements themselves. L'amor sociale reflects the natural affinity and interaction between elements, which seek harmony through their inherent qualities of attraction and repulsion, contributing to the balance and structure of the universe.¹⁸ Leone makes a sig-

nificant reference to Empedocles (only once in the entire work), who recognises that everything in the universe results from the creative interplay of four elements (earth, water, air, fire) and two fundamental forces (love and hatred or strife). For Leone, all five causes of love operating among sentient beings also apply to the various combinations of the four elements.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the paper was to show how Leone conceptualises love as a vital animating force in the natural world. Leone's conceptual framework is essentially ontological, and his views ultimately result in a comprehensive delineation of all conceivable manifestations of love throughout the universe. The inherent affection for knowledge (in humans) and goodness (sensuous and inanimate bodies) and the power of attraction in the sublunar realm appear as the primary sources of inspiration upon which Leone's philosophical reflections on the subject of love rest. As shown above, the five causes of reciprocal love observed in both humans and animals are applied to inanimate bodies to illustrate love as a cosmic, universal force that unites animate and inanimate beings alike. Leone tries to express the basic concept that all relationships between elements are governed by the basic principle of friendship or social love (l'amor sociale).

intendere altrettanti gradi d'odio, che son cagioni de la lor dissoluzione e corruzione. Sicché, come ogni male e rovina deriva da l'inimicizia di questi quattro elementi, così ogni bene e generazione viene da l'amore e amicizia loro.

17 Ibid., II, 69: Il fuoco è più sottile, lieve e purificato di tutti gli elementi; e con nissuno di loro ha amore, se non con l'aere, la cui vicinità gli piace, ma il stargli però di sopra. Ama il cielo, e non riposa mai ovunque si truova, fin che non li sia appresso. Quest'è l'amor sociale che si truova ne li quattro elementi.

18 Ibid., II, 76: La complessione degli elementi e la loro amicizia (come è stare li contrari uniti insieme senza litigio né contradizione) non ti par vero amore e amicizia? Alcuni chiamano questa amicizia armonia, musica e concordanzia. E tu sai che l'amicizia fa la concordanzia, sì come l'inimicizia causa discordia. E per questo il filosofo Empedocles dice che le cagioni de la generazione e corruzione in tutte le cose inferiori son sei: li quattro elementi, l'amicizia e l'inimicizia. Perché l'amicizia de li quattro elementi contrari causa tutte le generazioni de li corpi composti di quelli; e l'inimicizia loro causa la sua corruzione. Perché, secondo questi quattro gradi de la generazione d'amore che t'ho detto, ne li quattro elementi, che son causa de la generazione di tutt'i corpi composti ne li quattro gradi di composizione, hai da

This principle clarifies the complex order and precise organisation inherent in the relationships between the elements themselves. The extensive philosophical reflections interwoven throughout the Dialoghi d'amore result in the idea of a truly universal community of love,

which concerns the highest (God) and the lowest (prima materia) worlds. Leone's consideration of love throughout the universe shows that love transcends interpersonal relationships; it is a fundamental aspect of the universal teleology of being.

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