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Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

For Plato, a philosopher's journey consists in constant questioning. The heart of philosophy resides in questions rather than in answers. A philosopher is supposed to meet people where they are and lead them in discussion. Plato captures many discussions of this sort in his numerous dialogues. In one of these, the *Lysis*, Socrates inquires into the nature of friendship with two younger interlocutors. Their dialogue leads to aporia. Although some might consider a question without an answer a failure, Plato sees even the questions as progress towards truth. Along the way to defining friendship, the dialogue enlarges its scope and addresses also the topics of beauty, truth, knowledge, freedom and love. That friendship is an important topic is evidenced by the fact that it is encountered in every human life. While a very familiar theme, the nature of friendship is in fact very difficult to define. Friendship involves a specific type of relation, different from a romantic relationship and different also from familial ties or simple acquaintance. Truly taking the time to reflect on the basic elements of a "good" friendship, one might find oneself at loss for words. Plato certainly found an inquiry into the topic of friendship to be a worthwhile task. This is why he wrote the *Lysis*. The present discussion will attempt to gain insight into the nature of friendship through an analysis of the *Lysis*.

In order to ensure that the intricacies of this dialogue are carefully examined, the present discussion will pay attention to both the logic of the arguments as well as the dramatic details of the dialogue. In a discussion of Plato's dramatic style, James Haden writes,

> Plato's skill is such that he paints for us, especially in the earlier dialogues, recognizable, rounded people, not mere two-dimensional silhouettes going through a shadow play of concepts. The individuals in the dialogue are also, of course, representative figures, so that they also stand for types of people, but their specific personalities have to be taken into account in the actual exchanges in the dialogues. Like any great artist, Plato shows us instead of telling us, and hence individualities are worked into the sequences of conversation as well as presented in the descriptive passages which appear in some of the dialogues.[1]

The key is to delve into the characters and the plot in order to flesh out the deeper truths contained therein.

Though one of Plato's shortest dialogues, the *Lysis* is packed full of insights into human relations, which manifest themselves in two peculiar ways. Firstly, Socrates, the narrator and the main leader of conversation in the dialogue, fills his speech with various paradoxes that the common person may find odd. Secondly, the dialogue is aporetic as it ends without a determinate conclusion. All is not lost, for the aporetic nature of the dialogue allows for positive discussion over the notion of friendship and encourages the reader to use the arguments and structure of the dialogue to go beyond the letter of the text. The benefit of the written text is that, after experiencing the dialogue once, the reader may go back and read it again. The second or third readings reveal many things initially unseen, and thus, what was once a confusing labyrinth of arguments, becomes eventually clearer.

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[1] James Haden, "Friendship in Plato's 'Lysis'," *The Review of Metaphysics* 37 no.2 (1983): 338-339.

As we shall see, the main reason why the dialogue ends with aporia is that it proceeds by inquiring into specific features of friendship prior to and independently of investigating what friendship as such is. With no definition of the essence of friendship, we cannot understand how and why various specific features of friendship participate in an overall understanding of friendship.

Throughout the *Lysis*, Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates some unexpected puzzles. The first is Socrates' statement that good people cannot be friends to one another due to their self-sufficiency. Though good people seem to be prime candidates for friendship, they cannot actually engage in friendship, since the purpose of friendship is to improve each of the friends, while they, as good, are already self-sufficient. Thus the first puzzle resides in the fact that friendship seems to be reserved only for people who have some deficiency. The second paradox is that friendship seems to be sought for utility. One needs friends because one is incomplete and always in need of something. It is strange, however, to think that Plato would define friendship in terms of utility since he tends to place value apart from utility, yet he has Socrates stress the utilitarian role of friendship throughout this dialogue. A third puzzle involves the role of reciprocity. Must a friendship involve reciprocity, as Aristotle pointed out [2], or is it rather that one can cultivate friendship even for an inanimate object incapable of reciprocating, like wine, chocolate, or wisdom itself? Finally, is friendship to be understood as *eros* or as *philia*? *Philia* may be defined as brotherly love, or that love which is had between family

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[2] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W.D. Ross, (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 1155b-1156a5.

members or close friends, who seek the mutual improvement of one another, while *eros* may be defined as a deeper love than philia that may include sexual desire and desires directed toward the beauty of one's friends whether in soul or body. Early in the dialogue, one might see the origin of friendship begin with the notion of *eros*. In fact, the discussion of friendship begins with the attempt of an older man to win the affection of a young boy. This apparent origin suggests that friendship involves some sort of courtship, rather than being a relationship free from erotic constraints. Thus, we wonder whether *eros* and *philia* can, and/or, should be kept apart from each other or whether they can somehow enhance each other. In addressing these puzzles, the present thesis will elaborate on the notions of belonging, desire and utility as they emerge from the *Lysis*.

As a whole, the dialogue searches for the essence of friendship. It will be argued that the view of friendship, found in the *Lysis,* is one that involves people that are somewhere in between the completely good and the bad, yet definitely closer to the former than to the latter, desiring and jointly seeking the good through engagement in philosophical reflection and conversation. Friends seek to gain knowledge through conversation in order to improve themselves. Although never completed, friendship is a relationship that frees both participants from the chains of ignorance, and it does so by engaging them in constant dialogue with each other.

The first chapter will illuminate the main features of the dialogue's characters as well as the Greek notion of pederasty. It will discuss the connection between utility, knowledge and freedom by examining three relationships: the relationship between

Hippothales and Lysis, the relationship between Menexenus and Lysis and the relationship between Lysis and his parents.

Beginning with the first relationship mentioned, Hippothales is trapped by his lust for Lysis. He misses the true meaning of friendship due to his enslavement to erotic passion. Hippothales' lust has no direction to it. He sees Lysis as an object rather than a young man who could be given direction and be educated. Hippothales enjoys Lysis' beauty, but only on a surface level. As it will be seen, Socrates' message is that for the older man to love the younger means for him to do everything that he can in order to educate his beloved and not merely to admire his physical beauty. In this way, the older man provides a common goal for their relationship. Concerning the second relationship, chapter one will discuss the ways in which the friendship between Menexenus and Lysis is noticeably different from the merely voyeuristic relationship between Hippothales and Lysis. Menexenus and Lysis have real interaction, whereas Hippothales is far from engaging Lysis in any real way. The former is a relationship between relatively equal peers based upon competition. Socrates engages the two boys in conversation about their relationship, but the discussion is left unfinished. Socrates and the two boys are able to discuss issues of little importance, but when it comes to deeper questions, Menexenus is called away by his trainers and thus needs to leave the discussion.

Concerning the relationship between Lysis and his parents, chapter one will discuss Socrates' opening discussion with the young Lysis about his parents. Socrates points out one of his first puzzles as the relationship between utility and parental love.

Socrates' claim, that parental love is based on utility, seems quite unusual, yet it is, nonetheless, purposeful. Lysis' relationship to his parents is connected and explained through utility, knowledge and freedom. The end of the chapter delves into the notions of use and belonging. It will be argued that friends belong to one another in a way that brings out the best in each of them.

The second chapter will focus on a conversation in which Socrates proposes four possibilities for who is truly a friend: a) the beloved is the friend of the lover, b) the lover is friend to the beloved, c) both the beloved and the lover are friends to each other, or d) neither the beloved nor the lover are friends to each other. This discussion allows for the possibility that friendship can be non-reciprocal. Socrates brings up several examples of non-reciprocal friendship, like, for instance, the parents' friendship for their children from birth (213a) or the philosophers' love of wisdom (212e).

Chapter three returns to the question regarding the identity of the friend (who is the friend), but this time examines it from the angle of likes and unlikes. Are those who are completely alike truly friends, or is friendship rather a complementary relationship between people who are unlike each other? After discussing with Menexenus, Socrates returns to Lysis for conversation. Socrates, again, uses basic examples from his interlocutor's experience. He approaches the discussion with two examples, one regarding those who study the cosmos and the other regarding the poets (214a-215d). These two sources would be familiar to Lysis and easy for him to comprehend. Two extremes, friends completely alike and completely unlike, are put forth, and the solution**,**

as will be shown, falls in between the two, with a friend being someone who is both like and unlike each other. Insofar as they are like one another, friends will not desire each other, but insofar as they are unlike they will be able to complement and benefit each other through their shared desire for knowledge and the good. Another aspect to be discussed in this chapter will be the relationship between philosophy and friendship, which becomes apparent as Socrates points out Lysis' interest in argumentation and philosophy.

Chapter four delves into the character of the friend. Is the friend good, bad or somewhere in between? The completely good seemingly lack nothing, while the completely bad are unable to realize that they are even lacking something. The neither good nor bad rely on the presence of something bad to maintain their desire for the good. The character of the friend resides not in the extremes (complete goodness or complete badness) but rather in the middle, since he is neither completely good, nor completely bad. Socrates argues that friendship is on account of something and for the sake of something. For example, one is friend with the doctor on account of one's disease and for the sake of one's health. Socrates argues that friendship comes to be on account of a deficiency and for the sake of improvement. The presence of the bad or of the deficiency does not always corrupt the nature of the neither good nor bad (217d). This chapter will also focus on Socrates' discussion with the two boys, Lysis and Menexenus, regarding the idea of desire in relation to deficiency and to belonging. Friends belong to each other, yet this mutual belonging does not take away their freedom. The friend qua friend is

never possessed. Friends are freed in this relationship insofar as friendship stimulates their desire for improvement through knowledge. Knowledge frees a person by making them useful in many ways and by improving their moral character. The most challenging, yet the most enlightening part of this chapter will be the exploration of the relationship of the friends to the good, which will reveal that friendship is based on the good belonging to the friends.

The concluding part of this exploration into friendship will provide an overview of the themes and arguments examined. Friendship, in the *Lysis*, involves a bond between persons, of neither complete goodness nor complete badness, that belong to each other, while also remaining independent from each other. Friends relate to one another in their common quest for knowledge. True friendship is never completed for it is a continual process of improvement. The common conclusion gathered from the four chapters is that friendship unites people who are in the middle ground between the extremes of like/unlike, good/bad or same/opposite. In the final analysis, it will be shown that what ultimately makes friends is the common pursuit of the good through knowledge.

CHAPTER I

PEDERASTY, KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM (203a-210e)

Plato's dialogues often involve Socrates conversing with various characters. The present chapter will begin with an introduction of each of the characters, then it will proceed with a discussion of the notion of pederasty in ancient Greece and will end with a discussion of the connection between knowledge and freedom.

§1 Introduction of Characters

There are several characters in the *Lysis*. Socrates is the main character in most of Plato's dialogues, and this one is no exception. It is possible that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece in the *Lysis*. He will lead the young interlocutors in philosophical conversations. Another character, Hippothales, who is introduced early in the dialogue, is an older man smitten with the young Lysis, after whom the dialogue is named. Hippothales wishes to learn from Socrates how to gain Lysis' favor. Lysis is a handsome boy of noble family and good education: "He stood out among the boys and older youths, a garland on his head, and deserved to be called not only a beautiful boy but a well-bred gentleman" (207a2-4).[3] He comes from a famous family and is referred to by his father's name, Democrates of Aexone (204e1-7). Socrates converses with him throughout the dialogue, eventually remarking that he and Lys

[3] Plato, *Lysis*, In *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, trans. Stanley Lombardo, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 687-707.

are friends (223b). In Greek '*lysis*' means "loosing" or "setting free".[4] His name hints at the loosing that will come about through philosophical conversation in which Lysis will be involved. Lysis will have his bonds of conventional comforts broken and will be set free to improve himself through friendship. The dialogue introduces to us Lysis as engaged in a trouble-free, though not profound, friendship with another character, a young lad, Menexenus. Menexenus is a bit older than Lysis and is the nephew of Ctesippus[5], who is mentioned early in the dialogue for calling out Hippothales' annoying desire for Lysis.[6]

Socrates chooses to inquire into friendship with young men. He had the opportunity to discuss friendship with Mikkos[7] or Ctesippus, but he chose Lysis and Menexenus. One can assume at the very least that they were inexperienced in comparison to the older characters referenced. Why would Plato have Socrates choose these two? In reference to Lysis and Menexenus, Gary Scott notes: "Their young age furnishes an explicit reason for the inconclusiveness of the dialogue's argumentation, and this apparent inclusiveness forces Plato's audience to piece

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[4] Scott remarks that this translation of Lysis' name reveals the true nature of Lysis, as it is part of Socrates' duty to turn this youth around in reflection; see Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), 53.

[5] Nails indicates that Ctesippus is Menexenus' cousin, not his uncle; see Debra Nails, *The People of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 202.

[6] Bolotin refers to both Hippothales and Ctesippus as "boys". Most commentators take Hippothales and Ctesippus to be peers. Hippothales is seeking the pederastic relationship to Lysis, the younger man. While some may see Bolotin's characterization of Hippothales and Ctesippus as "boys" as a minor point, Hippothales' love-drunk attitude towards the younger man provides a crucial starting point for the entire dialogue. See David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 73-78.

[7] See T.K Seung, *Plato Rediscovered* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 44.

together the undeveloped strands of argument in order to discover the important philosophical problems at issue."[8] In addition, the use of two young men prevents the audience from being overwhelmed or in any way intimidated by the characters. The characters are young men, without a great deal of philosophical experience, characters with whom everyone can connect rather easily. If the characters were older, a measure of trust would be required prior to delving into their conversation.[9] Since the young Lysis and Menexenus are filled with youthful innocence, they follow Socrates and are willing participants in conversation. As will be shown, Lysis and Menexenus also have the advantage of already having what they take to be an established friendship. Their friendship gives Socrates a starting point for his exposition. Socrates meets his interlocutors on their level and does not force them to start with more abstract philosophical notions. He knows that he needs to use examples at an experiential level in order to bring them to a realization of their ignorance.

Hippothales asks where Socrates is coming from and where he is headed next (203a). The question carries implications beyond topography, for the dialogue begins by pointing out to the reader that, throughout the conversations, one must keep in mind where Socrates is coming from and where he is headed with the argument. Specifically, the dialogue begins with Socrates on the road as he is greeted by

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[8] Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, 52.

[9] Bolotin argues that the ages of the boys allow for the issue of trust to be precluded from the discussion. Naturally, he says, a younger male in Greek society would respect Socrates' authority; see Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 67.

Hippothales and others. They invite him to participate in conversation with the gathered youths. Having been caught during travel, he seems to be a bit hesitant to enter. Socrates inquires into the situation at hand, and their conversation begins around questions about the physical beauty of the young men.

§2 Pederasty in Ancient Greece

The foundation of conversation in the *Lysis* is desire. Not long after Socrates enters the conversation, he asks who is the most beautiful boy (204b). Hippothales, caught off guard, blushes due to his love for Lysis (203a5). For the modern reader, the relationship between Hippothales and Lysis may come as a surprise both because of the obvious homosexual undertones and also because of the manner in which Hippothales acts. Unlike today, pederasty was accepted and encouraged in Ancient Greece.

The common understanding of pederasty was that a younger boy would come under the tutelage of an older man. Within such a relationship, the boy was expected to gratify and please the old man, while the boy was supposed to receive no sexual gratification in return, but only educational benefits from the affair. Referring to pederastic relationships, Reeve writes: "[b]y associating with someone who was already a man, a boy learned *aretê* – civic virtue or excellence."[10] The *aretê* relationship would not be considered odd or different as it would be in today's

[10] C.D.C. Reeve, *Plato On Love* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), xvii.

society. It would be looked on as a rite of passage or initiation of the young boy into manhood and adult life. Once the boy would come to be of age, he would in turn gain his own beloved and the cycle would continue. If the boy, while under the tutelage of an older man, sought to be gratified sexually and achieved this goal, he would be looked down upon and labeled a prostitute, thus losing his rights as a Greek citizen.[11] Dover writes: "In the context of the present enquiry the most important aspect of Socrates is his exploitation of the Athenian homosexual ethos as a basis of metaphysical doctrine and philosophical method."[12] Although Dover makes this key remark, he does not elucidate it in any detail. Socrates uses the situation at hand between Hippothales and Lysis as a springboard for his discussion of friendship. Socrates perhaps exploits the situation at hand because it involves desire. Desire will be the stepping-stone for friendship, yet as one follows the conversation, the notion of desire undergoes a transformation. The notion of desire will change, from describing merely bodily urge to designating aspiration for moral and cognitive improvement. Dover's remark shows Socrates' ability to use a given situation as starting point for of philosophical conversation.

Hippothales' actions raise certain questions over his maturity. He blushes and cannot do anything more than that. Upon seeing Hippothales blushing, Socrates quickly acknowledges that Hippothales must be quite infatuated with one of the boys (204b4-c). Ctesippus regales Socrates about Hippothales' affinity for singing and

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[11] Ibid., xvi-xviii.
[12] Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage Publisher, 1980), 153-154.

reciting poetry about Lysis, his family, and their accomplishments (204c2-d6). The reader is thus introduced to the depths of Hippothales' immaturity. He is an older man, supposed to be reasonably in control of his passions, and all he can do is be love-drunk with the looks of the young Lysis. Ctesippus correctly summarizes Hippothales' juvenile behavior describing him as "completely fixated on this boy and totally unable to say anything more original to him than any child could say (205b6-c)." This lack of maturity causes Hippothales to fail to guide Lysis in the pursuit of knowledge. Because, for Socrates, friendship is the common pursuit of knowledge, he will suggest ways in which the older man can achieve friendship with the younger man. If Hippothales is to be a good lover, then he should know how to help Lysis by improving his moral character. He should help the development of Lysis' knowledge through educational conversation. For Plato, education is the same as moral improvement because one who truly knows the good will act in accordance with it.

Before the conversation begins, Ctesippus questions Hippothales: "Do you think what he says really counts for anything, Socrates (205a)?" This provides Socrates with an occasion to question Hippothales. Hippothales' poems and ballads serve to do nothing but annoy the hearers and at best, get a cheap laugh at Hippothales' expense, but Socrates gives him a fair hearing, asking: "Are you denying that you are in love with the one he says you are (215a)?" Socrates takes this occasion to explain to Hippothales the reflexive nature of his poems and songs about Lysis (205e-206a). Hippothales' songs achieve nothing in terms of bringing Lysis

closer to him. In fact, they do quite the contrary. Upon hearing the songs, Lysis' ego would be boosted thus making it harder for Hippothales to love him. The songs merely increase Hippothales' emotional attachment and infatuation, whether he gains Lysis as a friend or fails to do so. Socrates tells Hippothales that the songs have one of two effects: if he achieves his goal of acquiring Lysis' friendship, Hippothales' accomplishment will be that much greater; if, however, he fails to achieve his goal, Hippothales will have inflated Lysis' reputation to such a high degree that no one will consider him responsible for his failure, and will rather have pity on him for having loved and lost.

§3 Knowledge and Freedom

After concluding his discussion with Hippothales, Socrates engages Lysis and his friend Menexenus in a discussion about their friendship. He begins with a number of simple questions and uses these questions to progressively arrive at the heart of the matter. Socrates first asks which of the boys is older. It seems, however, that the boys are unable to agree as to who is older (207b). Menexenus responds: "We argue about that (207c)." Socrates subsequently follows up with questions concerning the nobility, the wealth, and the beauty of each of the boys. Each of the answers comes with a bit of tension since Menexenus and Lysis continue to disagree. Though the boys cannot agree on these subjects, they do admit to being friends. With this agreement, Socrates makes one of his first assertions concerning the nature of friendship. He says:

"[F]riends have everything in common, as the saying goes; so in this respect the two of you won't differ, that is, if what you said about being friends is true (207c)." Through this inquiry, it becomes apparent that Socrates wants to bring the boys from superficial topics to more substantial matters. After beginning with these questions about nobility, wealth and beauty, he attempts to move to a discussion of justice and wisdom (207d).

But just as Socrates is about to delve into the issues of justice and wisdom, Menexenus is forced to leave the conversation and tend to practical matters (207d). Menexenus' departure at this crucial moment in the dialogue indicates a lack of maturity in Menexenus and Lysis' friendship. Plato has probably arranged the drama in this way to suggest that the friendship between Menexenus and Lysis has not progressed sufficiently for them to discuss matters like temperance and justice. Gadamer insightfully writes: "To be specific, one hears, if one listens closely enough, that with the question of justice and temperance Socrates' inquiry is moving into a realm where one can no longer make these naïve comparisons meaningfully since now what is truly shared and binding for each alike comes into view, i.e., that which perhaps makes real friendship possible in the first place."[13] Friendship involves discussion about real values and concerns, rather than superficial competition.

Menexenus leaves, and Socrates questions Lysis alone. He begins with a treatment of Lysis' relationship to his parents. He remarks that Lysis' parents love

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[13]Hans-George Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic, Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 7-8.

him and want him to be as happy as possible, but his parents trust him with very little (207d-209b). He expresses his argument by highlighting Lysis' parents love for him and their desire for him to be happy (207d). Socrates reveals to Lysis that his parents entrust the slaves with tasks they can knowledgably handle, while they would not entrust Lysis himself with these. His parents' distrust does not have to do with his age, as Lysis supposes, but rather with his incompetence due to ignorance (209b-c). The issue of trust and freedom concerns primarily knowledge, not age. Lysis, as it turns out, is trusted, but only with those things of which he is knowledgeable. Up to this point in the discussion about Lysis' relationship to his parents, most people would agree that parents do not and should not entrust their children with things about which they are not knowledgeable. After Lysis admits that he is trusted even less than a slave, Socrates declares: "If you don't become wise, though, nobody will be your friend, not even your father or mother or your close relatives (210d)." If we fail to be useful, then our own family will reject us. Though Socrates' statement may seem too harsh, he does attempt to guide Lysis towards increasing his knowledge in order to expand the things with which he is trusted. Socrates' outrageous claim allows him to gain Lysis' attention. Socrates' remark emphasizes the importance of knowledge in a relationship, for, once Lysis becomes knowledgeable, he will be trusted with many things and will be entirely free from the control of others (210a-d).[14] Moreover, if Lysis is knowledgeable, he will also be able to lead others through friendship to

[14] Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 103.

wisdom. Gonzalez writes: "Knowledge is thus made the basis of freedom because it alone defines what is strictly ours and what is not."[15] Through knowledge, we come to be able to use and to be trusted with many things, and it is this that frees and prepares us for all kinds of opportunities.

If one derives use from something, then that thing belongs to him in a new way. Gonzalez uses an excellent illustration involving a musical instrument to highlight this point.[16] If one purchased a cello, it could enhance the theme of a room or give the interior an appearance of loftiness, but without someone able to play it, it would be of no use. If one could play the cello, one would be able to unlock the wondrous sounds, the true nature of the cello. In the hands of a trained musician, the cello becomes more than a stagnant possession. It then becomes something used with knowledge. One can understand friendship in a similar way. If two people "belong" to each other in friendship, but are of no use to each another, their sense of belonging to one another would be lessened. Gonzalez writes: "[f]riends belong to each other through a knowledge of those things concerning which the one friend can benefit the others."[17]

Gonzalez comments that Socrates proves his knowledge to both Lysis and Menexenus and makes himself known as someone who can be a friend, due to his usefulness, whereas Hippothales has shown just the opposite, namely his inability to

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[15] Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Plato's Lysis: An Enactment of Philosophical Kinship," *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995): 73.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 74.

function or to benefit a young boy in any way.[18] This contrast between Socrates and Hippothales is essential. Socrates arrived ready for conversation after being implored to help the swooning Hippothales. This shows his constant readiness to engage in philosophical discussion, and thus his ability to participate in friendship. Hippothales, on the other hand, is lost in lust. He cannot even speak the name of his beloved (204a-c). Because he searches only for erotic friendship, he is prevented from even beginning the pursuit of true friendship.

[18] Gonzalez, "Plato's Lysis", 74.

CHAPTER II

LOVER OR BELOVED: WHO TRULY IS A FRIEND? (211A-213D)

In any discussion about friendship, one must take into account the notion of love. Some might say that there is no greater love than that developed between friends. Socrates and his interlocutors wonder whether the friend is the lover, the beloved or both. We begin this chapter with a consideration of the importance of philosophical conversation to friendship and will then continue with a discussion of who truly is a friend.

§1 The Importance of Philosophical Conversation

The consideration of the importance of philosophical conversation is prefaced by a conversation between Socrates and Lysis. When Menexenus returns to the group, Lysis whispers a request to Socrates, asking him to question Menexenus as Socrates questioned him (211a). So far in the dialogue, Socrates has brought Lysis to a greater awareness of his own ignorance through his elenchus. Lysis must feel shamed by this older educator, but he must also feel intrigued by this mysterious old man, and perhaps wishes also to see the same dressing down done to another. Socrates, feeling that he had accomplished his intention, namely of bringing about the awareness of ignorance in another, wants Lysis in turn to become a teacher and guide to self knowledge for Menexenus. If Lysis succeeds in guiding Menexenus, philosophical conversations leading to knowledge will truly improve their own relationship. Education for Socrates is never a stage fully achieved,

but rather a continuing pursuit. In their elucidations of the *Lysis,* Penner and Rowe remark that Socrates appears to be setting up a mini-Platonic dialogue of his own by suggesting to Lysis that he engage Menexenus in philosophical conversation.[19] Socrates is trying to train Lysis to bring others to an awareness of their ignorance and eventually to lead them in the pursuit of knowledge. It is now becoming clear that friendship is developed in the moments during which knowledge is being sought. By making the participants aware of their own ignorance through philosophical conversation, friendship brings about a deeper self-understanding for all of those involved, and this is exactly what Socrates tries to do as he engages Lysis and Menexenus. In asking Socrates to put Menexenus through the same trial that he just experienced, Lysis is looking to have Menexenus acknowledge his own ignorance.[20] Socrates uses the situation at hand in order to continue his mission into the inquiry regarding friendship. He has seen that Lysis has the ability to converse and to discuss challenging topics. He obliges Lysis' request to educate Menexenus in order to further the discussion about friendship.

Socrates begins to question young Menexenus by saying: "Lysis here doesn't quite understand something I've been saying, but he says he thinks Menexenus knows and wants me to ask him (211d)." [21] By his remarks, Socrates is trying to make Menexenus feel more confident. If Menexenus feels that he is up to the challenge, he will

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[19]Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, *Plato's Lysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46.

[20]Bolotin would agree that Lysis exhbits this character trait; see Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 106-107.

[21]Penner and Rowe comment that this quotation is truly ironic and the opposite meaning is the real one, namely, that Menexenus actually is not more knowledgeable than Lysis; see Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 48.

be more willing to participate fully in discussion (211b). Socrates remarks that many regard the important things in life as possessions but, as he reveals to the boys, he values friends most of all (211d-212a). Since he values friendship, Socrates desires to understand friendship especially between these two young men. Menexenus and Lysis are very young, yet they have already acquired each other as friend, which for Socrates seems to be quite the feat (211d-212b). By remarking how extraordinary Lysis and Menexenus' friendship is, Socrates attempts to draw the boys' attention to their relationship because there is room for development.

§2 The Friend: Lover, Beloved or Both?

After encouraging Menexenus by indicating that he might have the answers and indirectly urging him to reflect on his friendship with Lysis, the conversation turns to Socrates questioning Menexenus about who is truly a friend: the lover, the beloved, or both the lover and the beloved (211a- 213d). Scholars frequently describe this discussion as the most challenging and potentially incoherent passage in the *Lysis*. In reference to this passage, Penner and Rowe write: "It is baffling because it is difficult to see what it accomplishes philosophically, and so also because it is difficult to see how it accomplishes anything that is of the slightest use to the forward motion of the dialogue."[22] The discussion between Menexenus and Socrates will reveal the breadth of friendships through a presentation of the possibility of non-reciprocity in friendship. In this brief conversation, Socrates will lay the foundation for latter points and criticisms of

[22] Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 39.

friendship. This discussion will yield a twofold result: a basic explanation of the type of belonging to be found in friendship as well as an ironic answer to the question of who is a friend, i.e. the lover, the beloved, both or neither.

Socrates asks a basic question overlooked by most people. Who becomes the friend of whom? There are several options for an answer: one possibility is that two people become friends when either one of them loves the other. Another possibility is that they both have to love each other in order to be friends. A third possibility is that the beloved is a friend of the lover, and a fourth possibility is that the lover is a friend of the beloved. Socrates first proposes that when one person loves another, they both become friends (212b). Menexenus agrees, but Socrates raises serious doubts that this unreciprocated love can actually count as friendship. The lover may even be hated by his beloved and this scenario can hardly count as friendship. To expound on this type of unreciprocated love, Socrates brings in the example of the pederast. Socrates says: “Isn’t this how men are often treated by the young boys they are in love with” (212b-c). The relationship between a boy, who is the beloved, and his older lover can be characterized as unreciprocated love. Hippothales, for example, loves Lysis, but that love goes unreciprocated. Lysis never explicitly states his hatred for Hippothales, but he seems to be unaware of Hippothales’ love for him. Socrates then remarks that both Menexenus’ and his opinions about friendship have shifted away from believing that one party loving another was called friendship.

They move to another possibility, namely that friendship involves both parties loving each other (212d). This answer seems most reasonable for a relationship between friends, but it too is rejected, insofar as it does not exhaust the full scope of friendships. For, as Socrates remarks, there are also friendships involving the love of inanimate objects, like wine, chocolate or even wisdom itself. The example of the lover of wisdom creates a more complicated situation than the other examples due to the nature of wisdom, its rarity and also its vastness (212d-e). One would think that the usage of wisdom as an example would gain more attention, but it goes relatively unnoticed by Menexenus. Wisdom seems to weave its way into the dialogue subtlety. One would think that wisdom would be listed with the blast of trumpets or at least, separate from the other objects listed in this set of choices, but here, it finds itself as just another member of a list. Unlike objects like wine or chocolate, wisdom cannot be bought or traded, and nor can it be quickly acquired. Wisdom is something that always remains in the public domain and open to all. It can never be possessed for it is shared and belongs to all the people who improving themselves through friendship. In friendship, wisdom is gained by and shared amongst friends through philosophical conversation.

The true way in which friends belong to one another is freeing. Through seeking knowledge, friends belong to each other in a way, but also remain independent. The belonging involved in friendship is characterized by freedom, not by possession. This freedom comes through the self-knowledge gained through philosophical conversation. Self-knowledge brings us to awareness of our deficiencies and reveals what we need.

Realization of one's own deficiencies can become a positive feature precisely because it is through this awareness of the deficiency that we are freed and able to pursue wisdom. In this pursuit of wisdom, true friendships never stop developing and growing. Mary Nichols writes: "Friends are always becoming friends. Of them we should use the imperfect tense."[23] Nichols explains that, perhaps the usage of the imperfect should pervade our language when speaking about the relationship of friends. This is a very interesting point highlighting a friendship as something, which is always developing. A friendship is never stagnant or completed; rather it is dynamic and continually perfecting.

Returning to the discussion of who is a friend, Socrates proposes a third idea that the beloved is friend to the lover. Socrates says:"[s]o what is loved is a friend to the person who loves it, or so it seems, Menexenus, whether it [the beloved] loves him or hates him" (212e-213a). If this is true, it seems that the friend could actually be an enemy of the lover. Socrates follows up that if the beloved is a friend of the lover, then the hated is an enemy of the hater (213a-b). He remarks: "Then many people are loved by their enemies and hated by their friends and are friends to their enemies and enemies to their friends –if the object of love rather than the lover is a friend" (213a-b). If one follows this line of argumentation, one will be led to say, as Socrates points out, that one will be an enemy to one's friend and a friend to one's enemy, but this does not make any sense and is therefore impossible (213b).

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[23] Mary Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 168.

After the third proposal is refuted, Socrates directly moves to the final possibility. He proposes that the lover could be the friend of the beloved (213b). This possibility is immediately dismissed: the lover cannot be the friend of the beloved because it is possible that the lover might end up loving an enemy or simply a non-friend (213c). Socrates and Menexenus are left without an answer to the question of who is the friend.

Despite the absence of a final solution to the question regarding the identity of the friend, this section of the dialogue still offers insight into the nature of friendship. Gadamer offers an interesting insight into the reason behind the aporia present in this discussion between Socrates and Menexenus. He writes: "When Plato catches Menexenus in an aporia here, he certainly wants us to sense that in actual friendship it is impossible to distinguish the lover from the beloved in this way and to say who is the lover and who the beloved."[24] In an actual friendship, the question of who is the friend is an odd question to ask because it is clear to both participants that both are friends. Inquiring into friendship from outside of a friendship is a difficult task because each friendship operates differently.[25]

The discussion ends with Socrates wondering whether he and Menexenus have been going about their inquiry in the wrong way. Menexenus and Socrates have been approaching the question of who is a friend before elucidating what friendship is. Without an understanding of the essence of friendship, it is difficult, if not impossible, to

[24] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 10.
[25] Ibid.

decide who a friend is, nor how the mother is friend to the infant or the man is friend to the boy, or whether friendship needs to be reciprocal or not.

Socrates presents his conclusions drawn from his line of questioning. He says (213c): "[t]hen what are we going to do,' I said, "if friends are not those who love, nor those who are loved, nor those who love and are loved? Are there any others besides these of whom we can say that they become each other's friends?" Menexenus is forced to boldly respond negatively with an emphatic "by Zeus" (213c)! In reference to Menexenus' response, Geier writes: "Menexenus is absolutely sure- the negative "No, by Zeus" is a very strong utterance- *he* can do nothing to find something else apart from 'these,' absolutely sure he has no resources at all for such an undertaking and is absolutely helpless to extricate himself or the others from this impasse."[26] This confusing moment is key for young Menexenus for he finally recognizes his impasse: he knows not where to turn next. This inquiry has led him to realize that he is ignorant and unsure of how the discussion should proceed. Now, Socrates has succeeded in bringing both Lysis and Menexenus to this point where they admit their ignorance. Lysis and Menexenus' relationship was highlighted to begin this discussion between Socrates and Menexenus about who is truly a friend.

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[26] Alfred Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought: The Tree of the Unknown* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 102.

CHAPTER III

FRIENDS AND PHILOSOPHY (213D-216C)

Some say that friends are the family one chooses oneself. Why does one choose the friends he does? Perhaps, one's friends are those similar to oneself, or perhaps, on the contrary, friends must complement each other by being different. This chapter will proceed by looking first at the relationship between philosophy and friendship and will then move to a discussion of likes and unlikes as candidates for friendship.

§1 Friendship and the Love of Wisdom

After Socrates asks Menexenus if he thinks that they have been going about the inquiry all wrong, Lysis interjects: "I certainly think so, Socrates" (213d). Through his explosive remark, Lysis reveals his philosophical potential (213d). While Menexenus fades into the background, Lysis comes to the foreground to continue the examination of friendship. During the previous discussion, Menexenus dodged the questions asked by Socrates, while Lysis followed the dialogue closely and even exclaimed that the inquiry had been gone about incorrectly (213d). Lysis blushed after the exclamation, but this blush was much different from Hippothales' blush, which we witnessed earlier in the dialogue (204b). When confronted with the idea of his beloved, Hippothales blushed and could not contain his bodily reaction. On the other hand, Lysis' blush came from an encounter of wisdom. Geier attributes the cause of Lysis' blush to the fact that Lysis forgets that he is not alone with his beloved, namely philosophy, but rather in public with his peers when

uttering his exclamation.[27] After following the argument closely, Lysis has been overcome by his interest in the debate. He has a new found love for wisdom and philosophical conversation. The new love that Lysis has for philosophy is coupled with his love for his friend, Menexenus. At this point, one can gather that philosophy, the search for and love of wisdom, arises in the context of friendship. Philosophy will only serve to help develop the friendship between Menexenus and Lysis not to hinder it or to cause Lysis to abandon it.

Plato attempts to draw out a contrast between Hippothales and Lysis, obviously between their characters, but also between their respective approaches to friendship. Hippothales never actually identifies his specific beloved despite his blush. The reader only comes to knowledge of this when Ctesippus indicates to Socrates the object of Hippothales' infatuation while mocking Hippothales (204b-d). Lysis, on the other hand, participates verbally also, rather than merely emotionally. Bolotin points out that the reader is unsure of exactly what caused Lysis to react in such a way.[28] Lysis bursts out and blushes because he has been brought to an awareness of his own ignorance and wants to be free of it. The conversation between Menexenus and Socrates, occurring in front of Lysis, provides the perfect occasion for him to begin to gain knowledge and to participate in philosophical conversation. The contrast to be drawn is that Hippothales cannot verbalize what the object of his desire is, whereas Lysis bursts out to correct the inquiry concerning his beloved, namely, knowledge.

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[27] Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought*, 103-104.
[28] Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 121-122.

It is apparent from Lysis' actions that he desires knowledge. One comes to knowledge through philosophical conversation in true friendship, not in solitude. If Socrates' goal is to attain knowledge through friendship, he is successful at least with Lysis. Geier, however, argues that Lysis replaces his friendship with Menexenus with his relationship to knowledge.[29] However, contrary to Geier's interpretation, one can understand Lysis' actions as seeking knowledge through friendship with Menexenus, and not at the expense of their friendship. This view seems to be supported by the text. For example, after experiencing Socrates' elenchus for the first time and learning about an initial relation between knowledge and friendship,[30] Lysis promises to engage in philosophical conversation with Menexenus at a later time (211b). In addition to this, Lysis expresses his willingness to engage Menexenus in conversation through a similar dialectical style as he had just experienced in dialogue with Socrates. Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates acknowledged Lysis' excellent nature (207a). When commenting on Socrates' statement concerning Lysis' excellent nature, Geier writes,

> And it is the emergence and visibility of precisely this ability which both justifies Socrates' opinion that Lysis has an excellent nature and fulfills the promise or prophecy of such a nature, for there must be something in Lysis' nature attuned to such a thing and that, furthermore, functions for others as a herald or messenger, as a kind of Hermes of this new and different kind of beloved, whatever it may be.[31]

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[29] Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought: The Tree of the Unknown*, 104-107.

[30] Lysis learns from Socrates that if he becomes wise and useful all people will be friends with him. While this is not the clearest connection, Lysis becomes aware of a connection between knowledge and friendship (210d).

[31] Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought: The Tree of the Unknown*, 104.

Lysis seems to have a special knack or calling to philosophy. He may not be the "herald" that Geier considers him to be, but he does have at least some willingness and zeal to engage in the investigation. Lysis is following the conversation between Socrates and Menexenus closely and longs to be involved with it. He longs to move from passive to active engagement in the discussion. One can see a parallel between passive/active engagement in a discussion and passive/active engagement in friendship.

Now that Lysis has a new understanding of the relationship between philosophy and friendship, one may wonder why he had not previously reflected on the nature of friendship. Friendship, which Socrates remarks Lysis encountered at a young age, had become commonplace for him. Jennings points out that the commonplace, or that which is closest to everyday life, might be that which is most mysterious or worthy of wonder.[32] The ordinary is seemingly commonplace and dull when looked at superficially. For example, Lysis' friendship with Menexenus is at this stage ordinary and involves only superficial conversation, but when common things are brought to the forefront of philosophical investigation, the ordinary reveals that it contains an element worthy of wonder that must be unpacked. Lysis begins to do this unpacking in his response to Menexenus and through his conversation with Socrates. While Lysis was initially taking his friendship with Menexenus for granted, he is slowly coming closer to realizing what friendship is.

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[32] Theodore Jennings, *Plato or Paul?: The Origins of Western Homophobia* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2009), 20-21.

When Lysis says that the discussion between Menexenus and Socrates had been gone about in the wrong way, Socrates agrees with him and acknowledges that it would be a "rough road" if they were to continue that line of inquiry (213e). The "rough-ness" of the road is due, I believe, to undertaking the investigation regarding the identity of the friends prior to addressing the question of the essence of friendship itself.[33] Once an understanding of the essence is achieved, we will have a comprehensive view of friendship, which will help us to identify how different relationships participate in friendship. The previous discussion between Menexenus and Socrates attempted to label the friend in terms of a function or characteristic, as lover or beloved, as like or unlike, but friendship cannot be reduced to just a single characteristic, and in fact all of its characteristics are derivative upon an essence, which in our case has not been elucidated so far.[34]

§2 Friends as Likes or Unlikes

Socrates seeks out the wisdom imparted by Homer in order to guide his conversation with Lysis.[35] He does this in order to bring Lysis away from his preconceptions, this time especially preconceptions regarding the poet's access to

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[33] David Robinson, "Plato's Lysis: The Structural Problem," *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986), 81. See also W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 152.

[34] Robinson, "Plato's Lysis", 81-82.

[35] Garver indicates that Socrates usually prevents or tends to stray his interlocutors from using the poets as a reliable source or starting point for argument; see Eugene Garver, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 24, no. 2 (2006): 141.

wisdom.[36] Socrates is leading the boys to truly question and to seek wisdom through friendship, rather than take for granted generally accepted opinions. By teaching the boys to question, Socrates highlights the importance of questions over answers. Even if one cannot arrive at an answer, constant questioning will bring one to an awareness of one's ignorance. Highlighting this point, Strauss writes, "[t]o know that one does not yet have satisfactory answers to the most important questions, to know that one has only more or less solid opinions (*doxai*) about what is just and noble, is to know that one has progressed from an earlier condition of far greater ignorance".[37] As the *Lysis* progresses, the questions discussed show that the boys are slowly gaining necessary insights into themselves as well as into the issue at hand, friendship.[38]

Socrates turns, first to Homer, whom he quotes saying: "*God always draws the like unto the like* and makes them acquainted (214a-b)." As Nichols points out, while Socrates quotes Homer, he also amends the poet's verse. The line reading "and makes them acquainted: (*gnorimos*)" at 214b is Socrates' own addition to Homer's words. Nichols writes: "Socrates' addition to the Homeric text corrects it and thereby suggests

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[36] Bolotin writes that the poets were esteemed in society and men's opinions were swayed by what they thought. He writes of the importance of Socrates' inclusion of the poets, remarking that if Socrates had failed to reference them, he would have left a big part of Lysis' intellectual comfort zone untouched; see Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 123-124. Adams offers a different approach to Socrates' interpretation of the poetic influences. He sees Socrates as sympathetically understanding the poets and using them as a buoy of truthfulness containing positive insights into friendship; see Don Adams, "The Lysis Puzzle," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1992): 10.

[37] Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 20.

[38] Walhof argues that the self-love (I would argue also self-knowledge) required for friendship is between insecurity and self-sufficiency; see Walhof , "Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity" (*Political Theory* 34, no. 5, 2006), 579.

his disagreement with the poets, who give insufficient scope both to the capacity of human beings to know one another and also to the place of trust in human life."[39] Socrates is critical of the unreflective use of the poets' words in philosophical conversation. Not discounting the beauty of poetry, Socrates shows that poetry can never substitute for philosophical reflection, logical accounts, and explanation. The poet has placed a positive spin on friendship itself through its association with the gods, but only as something that the gods deign, not as something which occurs by the choice of men.[40] The poet cannot offer more than guidance in the pursuit of wisdom, yet the great majority of people take them to be full-blown teachers of virtue. The poet's guidance pushes Lysis and Socrates' debate in the right direction, but can do little more than that.[41] Socrates adds to the quotation to show that the poet was missing that friendship involves both knowledge and self-knowledge. Socrates does not add to the literary merits of the poet, but only to the substance of its content. He adds the line "to be acquainted: (*gnorimos*) with each other" in order to show the importance of self-knowledge and knowledge of the other in friendship. Socrates' addition tells us that it is not just likeness, but also a certain familiarity between friends that is necessary. Each one of the friends needs to know their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of their friend. By recognizing our own weaknesses, we come to acknowledge our imperfections and our need to improve, and by noticing our strengths, we see how we can benefit others. To know how we can benefit

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[39] Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, 171.

[40] W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 131.

[41] Bolotin is missing an explanation of why Plato would have Socrates noticeably add to the initial Homeric quotation; see Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship*, 124.

and how we can be benefited by our friends we need to know also their own strengths and weaknesses.

At this juncture of the argument, a distinction needs to be drawn between the poet and the philosopher. Penner and Rowe write: "'Conversing', or 'discussing', *dialegesthai*, is what Plato's Socrates typically says he does, and not infrequently identifies with the activity of philosophy itself, either explicitly or implicitly using the description to mark the difference between that kind of intellectual discourse and less serious kinds (including any that use writing)."[42] Philosophy inquires through discussion, and attempts to gain self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the subject being discussed. Both philosophers and poets deal with wonder at the ordinary and proceed to a greater understanding of truth.[43] The philosopher wonders at the ordinary and common and contemplates the ultimate principles and causes of the universe, and in so doing, gains a comprehensive view of reality. On the other hand, in approaching everyday things, the poet highlights an artistic view of reality, which, from a philosophical point of view, will always be fragmentary and partial. The poet needs the philosopher to help uncover the reason for his own poetic vision.

Along with poetry's limited view of reality, Homer's view that "like is brought unto like by god" (214a) makes god the active player in friendship and human beings the passive player.[44] This understanding arises from the common view of the gods and also

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[42] Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 76.

[43] Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 69.

[44] Garver, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*", 141.

places a passive quality on human beings' responsibility with regard to friendship. Those who are alike are brought together, not of their own accord or due to their own activity, but because god has drawn them together. Socrates asks whether Lysis has heard Homer's view and the similar testimony of "very wise men" (214b). Lysis responds that he has heard of their testimony and that it might be correct. Socrates says that he thinks it might only be half right, namely that likes are drawn to likes only insofar as they are good, but not also if they are wicked, for two reasons. First, a wicked person's character is such that the closer he would come to another wicked man, the more they would become enemies due to the injustices that each would inflict upon the other (214b-c). Second, wicked people are inconsistent and unstable, and thus, by failing to be even like themselves, are even more unable to be like others (214d). The wicked lack harmony in their souls and continuously change. They are in such a flux that no one, not even a god, could capture the nature of the wicked person long enough to attempt to draw them closer to anyone as their like. Socrates and Lysis are left with the option that the good are drawn to the good in friendship, but their confidence in this answer is, as we see next, also short-lived.

Socrates and Lysis investigate the friendship of the good in two ways: insofar as the good are like each other and insofar as they are good. Regarding the first way, Socrates asks whether a friend who is like another would be useful to the other insofar as they are alike. According to Socrates, insofar as he is like another, a person could benefit or harm the other no differently than he could benefit or harm himself. Thus, likes would

not be valued by each other insofar as they are alike, since neither one can be useful to the other, and thus cannot be a friend (214e-215a). The second way in which the investigation proceeds examines whether a good man can befriend another good one insofar as they are good. It turns out that the good cannot be friends to the good insofar as they are good either. This happens because the good are self-sufficient and lack nothing. The good are not in need of anything. Thus, the good do not want anything. Since the good do not want anything, they would not value anything and as stated above, something which is not valued cannot be a friend. As can be inferred from the text, there has to be something lacking in one so that his friend may be able to help supply what was missing. An example of this is found in the situation between Lysis and Socrates. Through his initial discussions with Lysis, Socrates shows that he can bring the boy past his preconceptions to an awareness of his own ignorance. The boy's awareness of his need or deficiency places value on Socrates' friendship. In turn, Socrates recognizes that the boy may be of use to him in pursuit of wisdom. In the dialogue, he comments on Lysis' fondness for philosophy, which is a recognition of Lysis' use to Socrates (213d-e).

Two questions arise from the situation presented by Lysis and Socrates. First, is it possible for someone to be completely like another person? Being completely like another is, theoretically speaking, an interesting possibility, but practically speaking, it never happens: people are always in between completely like and extremely unlike each other. The similarities and differences of people allow for dynamic friendships, which highlight the qualities of the participants. The second question worth asking, then, is: Can

anyone be completely good? The self-sufficient goodness that is presumed to be found in people seems to be extremely rare, if at all possible. Most friends are somewhere in between good and bad. Socrates acknowledges that he too falls short of being completely good and self-sufficient since he loves and pursues wisdom, which means that he does not possess it.

Following the refutation of like being friends to like, Socrates investigates, this time through the use of another poet's words, whether opposites can be friends to each other. Socrates uses Hesiod, who says: "Potter is angry with potter, poet with poet and beggar with beggar (215c)." On Socrates' interpretation, the poet says that those who are most alike are filled with "envy, contentiousness, and hatred for each" (215d), and it is therefore the case that both in nature and in human affairs unlike is friend to unlike. Socrates cites several examples, two of which are that the weak befriends the strong and that the dry desires the wet (215d-e). While this seems to work out on a surface level, a brief inquiry would reveal that it simply would not be the case that unlike would befriend unlike. Guthrie writes: "Enmity is the opposite of friendship, so on our argument the hostile will be friendly to the friendly and vice versa, and the same applies to the just and the unjust, the temperate and the profligate. This is impossible, so we were wrong, and neither similars nor opposites can be friends to each other."[45] For example, the poor would desire friendship with the rich for their own advantage, but there is nothing the rich would desire from the poor to initiate that friendship. We encounter the same kind of problem when the opposites are the good and the wicked.

[45] Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, 140.

It is important to note that despite being wrong in a particular sense, both poets are in a more general sense right by highlighting two important aspects of friendship. Homer highlights the necessity for friends to be somewhat alike. On the other hand, Hesiod shows that friends complement and fill deficiencies in each other. The error that Socrates wants to avoid on the part of the unreflective many is that of taking the poets positions, which are partially right, to be absolutes and universally true. Friends must be both like and unlike each other. Friends are drawn together insofar as they are alike and also, are able to satisfy each other's needs, and to this extent they must be unlike. Once again, the difficulties emerge due to the fact that the quest for a definition of friendship has not been properly addressed. Socrates has become dizzied by the situation and moves on from the discussion of similarity and difference amongst friends. It is significant that Plato has Socrates use two poets whose verses contradict each other, each of which says something true if interpreted one way, but false and unsatisfactory if interpreted in another. This shows the necessity for the philosopher to interpret the poets and to offer a comprehensive view of reality.

Despite the *aporiai* into which they have fallen, Socrates and his two young interlocutors have made several positive discoveries.[46] Socrates shows that friendship involves need and can occur only between those who are neither completely alike, nor completely unlike. Through a discussion of like and unlike, it was revealed that the friend can neither be completely good nor bad. Friendship requires an incompleteness that is based off a deficiency, but not a moral corruption that would make it impossible for them

[46] See also Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought*, 111.

to trust each other. The friend falls in the middle between like and unlike and is valued because he is beneficial to the incomplete person. In the next section, the relationship of the deficiency to the incomplete friend will be discussed in more detail.

CHAPTER IV

FRIENDSHIP: SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN: (216D-223B)

One often gains knowledge of the other's strengths and weaknesses when pursuing friendship. Friends become aware of their similarities and differences through sharing these personal details. By recognizing these traits, the friend may be able to provide for the shortcomings of his companion. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the character of the friend, will then continue with the two causes of friendship and will conclude with a discussion of belonging and of the good in friendship.

§1 The Character of the Friend

The discussion concerning who is a friend continues with a look at friends as somewhere in between good and bad. After settling that the friends are neither complete opposite nor complete likes, Socrates moves to a consideration of the beautiful or the noble (*to kalon*) as a friend. He wonders if the beautiful is a friend, given that it is so difficult to grasp (216c). In reference to the beautiful being a friend, he says, "[i]t bears a resemblance, at any rate, to something soft and smooth and sleek, and maybe that's why it slides and sinks into us so easily, because it's something like that (216c-d)."[47] This remark allows us to contemplate the elusiveness of the true friend. Geier points out that Socrates' remark is an insight into the nature of friendship. He writes that the nature of beauty is similar "to the *character* of the true friend to 'slip through and evade us,' just as

[47] Bolotin comments that Socrates fails to make the connection between the old saying about the beautiful and his comments on the character of the friend; see Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on* Friendship, 144.

it belongs to the character of the true friend to be 'none of these things.'"[48] There is more to this statement about the beautiful or the noble (*to kalon*) being a friend than just highlighting the difficulty of identifying the friend's nature. Immediately after this remark about the beautiful, the good (*to agathon*) is said to be beautiful (216d).

At the beginning of the dialogue, the discussion of friendship used the notion of beauty as its starting point. Awestruck by Lysis' beauty, Hippothales wants to engage in a relationship based on lust. This erotic relationship is filled with frustration as it involves an older man of inferior intellectual competence and interest trying to win over a disinterested boy. The older lover will more than likely never be able to possess the boy's beauty, and even if he does, it will not be as satisfying as his uncouth desire makes it seem. An older man ought to pursue a higher beauty, the good. While the beauty of the boy will fade, the beauty of the good itself never fades for it is and remains the true object of desire. The only way to participate in true beauty is to make his desired boy more beautiful, not as far as it concerns physical beauty, the way that trainers do when give a regimen for the body, but insofar as it concerns his soul.[49]

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[48]Geier, *The Tree of the Unknown*, 114.

[49]C.D.C Reeve, "Plato on Eros and Friendship," in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 302.

After Lysis quickly agrees that the good is beautiful,[50] the discussion shifts to focus on the character of the friend. Socrates examines the similarities and differences of friends as he did with the inquiry into those like and unlike each other. To arrive at the character of the friend, Socrates presents three options for the character of a friend: the good, the bad, and the one who is neither good nor bad. As previously discussed, the good are self-sufficient and have no deficiency, which makes them unavailable for a utility-based friendship. Since they are unlike even to themselves and are wicked, the bad are not eligible for friendship (214d). The third option of the neither good nor bad as the friend resonates with the reader the most. The one who is neither good nor bad is neither self-sufficient, nor totally inconsistent in his ways. Commenting on this passage, Gadamer writes: "He who feels friendship for someone sees in the other something which he himself is not, but the thing which he sees, which he is not, is more like something which has not yet been achieved in himself, something more like a potential in himself, which leads him to look for a model in another."[51] The friend, as Gadamer indicates, looks to friendship for improvement and regards the friend as a better version of himself.

§2 Two Causes of Friendship

Socrates uses the example of the doctor to illustrate his thoughts about the cause of friendship (217a). The sick patient is a friend to the doctor *on account of* his sickness, not of his health. Healing emerges as a result of the relationship, but the relationship is

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[50]George Grote, *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates*. Vol. 2 (London: John Murray, Albemarle St., 1865), 526.

[51] Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 13-14.

based upon the limitation, upon the disease that seeks healing. The bad or disease is present to a person in the same way that the color white is present to a person who has his hair died by chalk. Socrates explains that in that case the hair is not actually white, but only appears that way: the hair, having been dusted with chalk, is by nature no more white than black (217d). Regaining health is based on the awareness of sickness, just as friendship is based on the awareness of deficiency and the desire to improve oneself.

Friendship, however, differs from health in at least two ways. First, unlike health, friendship is not capable of absolute completion, for it involves something that can be attained in principle, yet is bound to always remain incomplete, as is also one's relationship to knowledge or wisdom. Second, in the example of medicine, the body is "forced" into relationship with medicine (217b). Friendship and force do not seem to work together in any way, for friendship requires the active participation of both parties. Awareness of a deficiency is not "forcing" one to seek completion through friendship. It merely allows the friend to pursue improvement. Friendship involves a mutual bond in the pursuit of knowledge. As witnessed in the text, Hippothales wanted Socrates to show him how to gain Lysis' attention (206c), and Socrates did this by engaging Lysis in a free discussion about friendship. Socrates shows Hippothales how to gain a friend by acting and participating in friendship. If the old man were to attempt to force a relationship, the boy would resent the older man (212b-c). If the boy converses and shares in knowledge with the older man freely, the friendship can grow and develop; otherwise, it will not.

After concluding his treatment of the doctor-patient example, Socrates inquires into how the bad is present to the friends. The bad can be present to a person in two different ways. On the one hand, it can be present to a person by corrupting that person's soul, as it happens, for example when the bad is present to the greedy man, who wants more and more, and has no awareness of his deficiency and no desire to change his ways. As Socrates says, "…the presence that makes it bad deprives it of its desire as well as its love for the good" (217e-218a). On the other hand, the bad can be present to a person in a manner that does not corrupt his soul. For example, Socrates has ignorance present to him, but his ignorance has not corrupted his soul. The awareness of his own ignorance protects his soul from being corrupted and maintains his desire for improvement and his love of the good. Socrates' point here is that friendship is possible only when the bad is present to the friend in such a way that it does not corrupt the soul.

Socrates highlights the ways that the bad could be present in someone by using an analogy with white chalk being present to a young person's hair (217d). White chalk can give black hair the appearance of whiteness, but it cannot make it naturally white. If a person becomes bad, the presence of the deficiency would not allow for *a desire for the good*. The friend desires friendship *on account of a deficiency*, but the deficiency does not determine the friend's nature; it simply remains present to him without corrupting his soul. The desire for the good is *on account of a deficiency* but is ultimately *for the sake of the good* which is here said to be also beautiful (216d). Gonzalez makes an excellent point when he writes: "Socrates reconciles the correct suggestions made by the two views

previously considered: that friendship cannot exist without the bad and that desire is essential to friendship."[52] Gonzalez acknowledges that Socrates bridges the previous arguments showing the intricate interlacing in the dialogue. The friend can neither be completely bad, nor can he be so good as to be fully self-sufficient. Desire for the good which is ultimately responsible for friendship is at once an indication of one's incompleteness and of one's ability to improve.

Socrates presents the philosopher as the man who is neither wise nor ignorant, but someone who loves wisdom (218a-b). The wise no longer desire wisdom for they have already attained wisdom, while the vicious do not yet desire wisdom, for ignorance has corrupted their natures and has stripped them of their desire for the good. Socrates states that those who love wisdom "are conscious of not knowing what they don't know. The upshot is that those who are as yet neither good nor bad love wisdom, while all those who are bad do not, and neither do those who are good" (218b). Through these remarks, Socrates is likely also referencing himself. He is one who is neither good nor bad and is aware of his own ignorance, for he loves wisdom and seeks it throughout the dialogue.[53]

Socrates, next, turns the boys back to the argument by inquiring into whether friends are friends *on account of* something (*dia ti*) and *for the sake of* something (*heneka tou*, 218d). To explain the kind of causation involved, Socrates establishes that someone is a friend to medicine on account of a disease and for the sake of health (219a). A friend is a friend on account of an enemy for the sake of some good. Socrates identifies two

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[52] Gonzalez, "Plato's Lysis", 78.
[53] Ibid.

problems with his argument. First, if it is the case that the friend has become a friend of a friend, then like has become the friend of like, and, as witnessed already, this cannot be (219b-c)! Socrates allows this first problem to pass. The second problem with the argument is that in the absence of a first principle or ultimate object of desire for the sake of which everything else is desired, the chain of relative objects of desire would continue *ad infinitum*. Socrates reiterates that medicine is a friend for the sake of health, and health is friend for the sake of something else. The pattern of friendship would continue unless some first principle is found. Socrates refers to this first principle as the first beloved (*proton philon*, 219d).

Socrates inquires into the nature of the first beloved, which is desired above all else.[54] He introduces the real beloved as the good (*to agathon*, 220b). The good is the highest aim towards which all friendships aspire. One can make a connection between this understanding of the good as ultimate end and the ladder of love found in the *Symposium* where Beauty itself, rather than the good, is the ultimate object of desire (210a-212e). In the *Symposium*, the lover recognizes the beautiful body of his beloved, as Hippothales has done in the *Lysis*. Unlike Hippothales, the true lover is prompted to recognize next that the beauty found in his beloved is not singular. His recognition of beauty progresses from one body to all the beautiful bodies. Once the lover recognizes all the beautiful bodies, he comes to realize that the pursuit of the body is insignificant when compared with the pursuit of the soul. The true lover will love one of those who are

[54] Penner and Rowe warn the reader to take notice of what is introduced and not to assume that we know what the thing is for this is a difficult section; see Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 126.

decent in soul and will seek to improve him through giving birth to ideas, just as Socrates tries to do in the *Lysis*. The lover will look at customs and activities in a new light and will realize the relative unimportance of beautiful bodies. He will move from customs to different forms of knowledge and will see the beauty of various branches of knowledge. In the final stage, the true lover comes to contemplate beauty itself. Plato writes eloquently: "So when someone rises by these stages through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love" (*Symposium* 211c-b).[55] One is led through relationship to seek to improve another and, in so doing, is potentially led to a contemplation of the beautiful or the good.

As one can gather from the treatment of the *Lysis*, friendship occurs ultimately *for the sake of* the good, and stems from a desire for improvement. The true friend is an end in itself and desirable for its intrinsic goodness and not for something else beyond itself. It is an absolute, not a relative end. Relative ends or "phantom friends" as Penner and Rowe call them, arise out of necessity in certain circumstances, but have no sustaining power. They are valued "for" something else outside themselves.[56] For example, the elixir is valued "for" health but is not always a valued good. Food is a good when one is

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[55] Plato, *Symposium* In *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 457-505.

[56] Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 130.

hungry "for" the sake of satisfying one's hunger, but it is not an unconditional good or friend.[57]

Socrates proposes a hypothetical situation wherein the one who is good and the one who is neither good nor bad remain, and the bad is eliminated (220c). He wonders whether the good would still be of any use in that situation: "For if nothing could still harm us, we would have no need of assistance, and it would be perfectly clear to us that it was on account of the bad that we prized and loved the good-as if the good is a drug against the bad…" (220d). It is unclear how Socrates imagines the bad disappearing, but perhaps, the hypothetical situation of the bad disappearing is used to highlight the two causes of friendship and to show us that both are indispensible. The first cause of friendship is that for the sake of which friendship is sought, namely, the good. The second cause is that on account of which friendship is sought. The desire for friendship comes to be on account of the presence of the bad. As mentioned earlier, the bad is present to the friend, but not in a way that corrupts the soul. The friend is aware of the presence of ignorance and that awareness sparks the desire for improvement. Awareness of ignorance is due to the person's goodness, not due to the presence of the bad. That for the sake of which friendship is sought or, the "final cause" of friendship, as one would put it in Aristotelian terminology, is the good.

Socrates questions the boys further about the causes of friendship, asking: "Haven't we agreed that the friend loves something, and loves it on account of

[57] Gadamer writes that in friendship there is an unconditional being which is dear to the friend constantly not simply based off pleasure or advantage; see Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 16.

something, and didn't we think then that it was on account of the bad that what was neither good nor bad loved the good" (221c)? Referring to the causes of friendship, Gonzalez writes: "When Socrates shows that love depends not on the existence of evil but rather on the existence of desire, which can exist without evil, then desire turns out to be the ultimate cause of loving and being loved."[58] Only those who are neither good nor bad can be friends, yet are good enough to be aware of their ignorance and desirous of the good for their improvement.

§3 Friendship and Belonging

Throughout the *Lysis*, Socrates argues against instances of friendship, but never approaches a general definition of friendship.[59] Finally, Socrates reveals that he and the boys may have something to say about what a friend is if they can highlight a difference between belonging to and being like another. If "belonging to" is the same as "being like," then it could easily be shown that friends could not belong to each other due to the previous argument that like is not a friend to like because a friend does not value another insofar as they are like one another, but insofar as they are different, they complement and help one another (220b). Socrates approaches the difference between belonging and "being like" by showing that the friends belong to one another in relation to a third thing. This third thing does not make them like and, therefore, useless to each other. Unless

[58] Gonzalez, "Plato's Lysis", 81.
[59] Guthrie, *Greek Philosophy*, 152.

belonging and being like are different, the interlocutors would fall into the same refuted possibility, discussed earlier, namely that the like cannot be a friend to like.

After conceding that belonging and being like are not the same, Socrates questions the boys as to whether the good belongs to all or only to those of its kind, insofar as the bad belongs to the bad, the good to the good, and so on (222d). The boys choose the latter that the good belongs to the good, the bad to the bad and the neither good nor bad to the neither good nor bad (222c) and the remainder of the discussion proceeds in light of this option. The problem is that they do not support this claim with any arguments. The interlocutors simply accept the suggested answer at face value and soon enough, this alternative is refuted, as Socrates remarks: "We have fallen into the same arguments about friendship that we rejected at first. For the unjust will be no less a friend to the unjust, and the bad to the bad, as the good will be to the good (222d)." Socrates does not take up explicitly the other alternative that he suggested beforehand, namely that the good might belong to all. The only possibility explored and rejected is that the good belongs to the good. The dialogue ends with Socrates asking the boys to think over what has been discussed that day, and then the three interlocutors are driven off. The end of the dialogue lacks a definition of what truly is a friend. One ought to recall, however, that Socrates and the boys did not consider the possibility of the good belonging to all. It might be that Plato leaves this out purposely to give us a hint as to

what the answer might be.[60] He has embedded in the text a way to come to a positive continuation of the conversation.

Let us then pause for a moment and consider the possibility that Socrates mentions but does not explore in detail, namely, that the good belongs to all. To understand a possible way in which it can be explained how the good belongs to all, one can look to the *Ion* in which Plato has Socrates present the myth of the "magnetic stone", which is analogous to the good sought in friendship. The "magnetic stone" attracts the other rings and, in the case of iron rings, gives them its power (*Ion* 533e). "This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does-pull other rings-so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone" (533e).[61] This is analogous to how the good attracts the friends and gives them the power to attract others. Friends gain this power of attraction through the beauty of their souls. They are able to bring others to relationship with the good, through friendship. Each friend participates in the power of the good by sparking that attraction, which ultimately leads to the good and, in that way, belongs to it.

The image of a chain of friendship leading back to the ultimate good can be connected to the example of the Ladder of Love found in the *Symposium*. As discussed above, the lover, initially, seeks the friendship of a young man based off his physical

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[60] Penner and Rowe suggest that Plato does not want Socrates to hand the reader the answers. One must, like the boys in the dialogue, seek the answers for oneself; see Penner and Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, 186.

[61] Plato, *Ion* In *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, trans. Paul Woodruff, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 898-921.

beauty. If the relationship is to progress to a true friendship, the lover must realize that his desire is ultimately for the good and must lead the young man to become more beautiful in soul. In so doing, the two will contemplate higher things and ultimately Beauty itself. It is in this progression through improvement of soul from the attraction to the lower kinds of beauty to the contemplation of the form of Beauty that the friends show that they belong to each other though the good which belongs to all. As their souls are improved through philosophical discussion, they come to share more and more in goodness. By climbing the ladder of love or the magnetic link to the good, the friends become more like the object they desire, namely, the good. Using these analogies from the *Symposium* and the *Ion*, one may be able to come to a full understanding of how it can be said that the good belongs to all. Through the use of reason, one's soul begins to improve itself. By sparking one's use of reason, the friends improve each other through engaging in philosophical conversation. The friends will begin to become better and become more like the good in their souls. In the analogy from the *Ion*, the other stones receive their power from the magnetic rock which can be viewed as the good. Similarly, as the friends become better, they become more like the good and share in its "power". This power or goodness of soul allows for the friend to attract other friends and, in so doing, make the other friends better. As one can see the chain continues from the good to the friends and is ultimately available to all. The good belongs to the friends insofar as their souls continue to become better and use this goodness to attract others. This understanding of the good belonging to all may leave us with a positive conclusion of the dialogue.

Gonzalez summarizes the results of the positive conclusions of the dialogue. He writes, "…we who are neither bad nor good desire that ultimately loved good of which we are in want, but which belongs to us, while we hate the evil which is present in us, but yet alien to us."[62] Consequently, if Socrates and the boys were to entertain the first suggestion that the good belongs to all, then they would see that the good is like the "magnetic stone" from the *Ion* which links all the friends together.

At the end of the dialogue, the reader may wonder whether Lysis and Socrates could be friends. The answer quite clearly is "Yes." Socrates has brought Lysis through a discussion about friendship and, in doing so, he showed him what is involved in friendship. Socrates and Lysis have been engaged in a discussion pursuing knowledge about friendship, which ultimately culminated in a discussion about the relationship of the friends to the good. The disparity in age between Socrates and Lysis presents an apparent difficulty, but if they both maintain the desire for improvement, age will matter little in the end, if at all. Lysis is a better candidate for a friendship with Socrates than the other boy, Menexenus. Lysis is fully engaged throughout the dialogue with Socrates, while Menexenus is considerably short in his responses and even noticeably absent at times (207d, 212d-213a, 216a-b). Throughout the dialogue, Socrates is able to help Lysis to see his weakness and ignites in him the desire for his own improvement. Lysis pursues knowledge with Socrates and enhances the discussion about friendship. His abilities and

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[62] Gonzalez, "Plato's Lysis", 82.

pursuit of knowledge with Socrates suggest that the potential exists for a continued friendship between the two.

Through the improvement experienced by Lysis, one is led to expect that Menexenus and Lysis will improve their own relationship. The hope of a true friendship between Menexenus and Lysis is supported by Lysis' remark that Socrates can count on him bringing Menexenus through the same argument that he experienced with Socrates (211b). One may gather that Plato is laying the groundwork for Lysis to progress from an infantile relationship with Menexenus, which discusses superficial topics like beauty, riches and power, to a true friendship centered around philosophical conversation about the good and about wisdom.

All three main characters pursue the good insofar as they are aware of their ignorance though each to a different degree. First, Socrates is fully aware of his own ignorance, as he keeps engaging in philosophical conversations and confesses his need for others. He is not self-sufficient. Second, Lysis was brought to an awareness of his own ignorance so much so that Socrates himself commends him for his fondness for philosophy (213e). Third, Menexenus becomes more aware of his ignorance through his conversation with Socrates though he still needs to progress towards a fondness for philosophy. Menexenus is able to affirm what Socrates is saying and to give short responses (211d-213d). Awareness of ignorance will sustain the desire for the good in the three interlocutors. So long as Lysis and Socrates continue and so long as Menexenus and

Lysis begin to engage in philosophical conversations in the future, they will succeed in achieving true friendship (223b).

CONCLUSION

At the end of the text, the reader is left with some positive contributions to an understanding of friendship, but is still without a definition of friendship. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates and his interlocutors discuss different instances of friendship without ever asking what the essence of friendship is. All is not lost for there is a benefit to such an ending in that it allows for the reader to continue searching for answers.

The first chapter introduced us to the character Hippothales, whose lustful desire for Lysis, occasioned the discussion about friendship. Hippothales' request for Socrates to show him how to talk to young Lysis led Socrates to engage Lysis and his friend, Menexenus, in philosophical conversation. By engaging in dialogue and advancing in knowledge friends come to belong to one another through their mutual usefulness. Their friendship just is their joint search for the good.

The second chapter highlighted the importance of philosophical conversation and its relationship to discovering who a friend is. Socrates asks young Lysis to lead Menexenus in philosophical conversation in order that their friendship might grow and develop further. Philosophical conversations seek to come to an understanding of the essence of things. In the *Lysis*, Socrates and Menexenus fail to answer the question of who a friend is because they have failed to elucidate the essence of friendship. They initially try to answer the question by saying that, if one person loves another, the two become friends. This variant fails, since on this account the beloved might even hate the lover, and it is hardly likely that this qualifies as friendship. Socrates and Menexenus try

a second answer by saying that friendship involves both people loving each other, but this suggestion is refuted because it does not cover the full breadth of possible friendships. In particular, it does not account for the friendship between infant and mother nor the relationship between wisdom and a philosopher. A third suggestion is proposed, namely, that the beloved is by default friend to the lover, but this may not be the case as the beloved could in fact hate the lover. Finally, Socrates and Menexenus suggest that the lover is a friend to the beloved. This possibility is immediately dismissed: if only the lover is friend of the beloved, while the beloved is not reciprocating this friendship, it is possible that the lover might end up loving an enemy or simply a non-friend. If Socrates and Menexenus engage in true philosophical conversation about the essence of friendship, they will be able to understand how questions concerning the identity or the character of the friend are related to the overall scope of friendship.

The third chapter was dedicated to an examination of the inquiry into the similarities and differences of friends. Starting from a few verses from Homer and Hesiod, the interlocutors discussed whether the friends were like or unlike. It was revealed that the friends are neither completely alike nor completely unlike, but rather somewhere in between. If the friends were to be completely alike, neither of the friends would derive any use from or have any desire for the other. On the other hand, the friends cannot be completely unlike each other. Friends are similar, yet not completely alike, so that they can remain of interest to one another and continue to challenge and to improve each other. The key to understanding this section is that friends are neither so much alike

that there is never anything new to learn from each other, nor so unlike, that they are completely opposite.

Chapter four focused primarily on friends as incomplete or somewhat deficient and on the friends belonging to each other through their common pursuit of the good. The neither good nor bad friend values different things at different times. For example, when ill, he values medicine, but when healthy, he no longer values it. Most of the goods we desire turn out to be relative goods, which means they are ultimately valued for the sake of something else. Ultimately, however, each one of us, insofar as we are limited or somewhat deficient, values and desires a first beloved (*proton philon*), which is valued in and for itself. This first beloved is the good or that which both friends, and indeed, each and every one of us**,** seek. It is through this common pursuit of the good that the friends ultimately participate in friendship. In pursuing the good, the friends realize their deficiencies and seek to remedy them through engaging in philosophical conversation in order to become better. The friends may be seen as journeying together in order to improve each other by seeking the good. They seek the good which belongs to all. It may be said that the good belongs to us all insofar as we all are seeking it. As we come to gain knowledge and insight into reality, we begin to improve our moral character.

To conclude a treatment of this dialogue, let us return to the four *aporiai* discussed in the introduction for they have become a little less confusing when taken in light of our elucidations. The first *aporia* concerned the fact that completely good individuals cannot partake in friendship. Commonly, we think of the completely good as those who would be most eligible candidates for friendship, but this is not the case. For

friendship requires a mutual desire for improvement and this desire stems from awareness of deficiency. Both friends are lacking in some way and they both wish to fill in that lack. On the other hand, the good, as we have seen, are completely self-sufficient and in need of nothing. Therefore, they are unable to participate in friendship. But are there really completely good people around? Most of us find ourselves somewhere in between good and bad. The second *aporia* had to do with understanding friendship in terms of utility. It is seemingly odd for someone as opposed to a utilitarian understanding of the human person as Plato was to understand friendship in this way. But Plato understands friendship as seeking to improve the other and, in so doing, the friend may receive benefit himself. The Platonic understanding of friendship emphasizes the improvement of the other as the primary goal of the relationship and utility is to be assessed in terms of this improvement. The third *aporia* was about the role of reciprocity in friendship. In particular, it commonly seems that friendship is always reciprocal, yet there seem to be cases where friendship is not reciprocal like, for instance, a mother's relationship to her infant, or a philosopher's relationship to wisdom. By gaining a full understanding of the essence of friendship, one can see how the mother is friend to her infant or how the philosopher is friend to wisdom and how nonreciprocal relations are related to reciprocal friendships. The fourth *aporia* concerned the relationship between *eros* and *philia*. While it might seem at first that the two are very distinct relationships, we come to see that there is a significant connection between them. *Philia*, as we have seen, is based on knowledge and seeks to draw the friends towards the good. *Philia* can serve to transform the erotic relationship and to liberate the friends from enslavement to base pleasures.

Friendship is best understood as improvement through the pursuit of wisdom and love for the journey. In pursing wisdom, the friends ultimately pursue the good, and the good belongs to them precisely insofar as they are seeking it. Friends are not those who are already the best, the wisest, or most beautiful, but those who are in pursuit of the highest good and possess an awareness of their own imperfection.

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