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Egoism, Utility, and Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*

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Abstract: Many scholars consider that Socrates in the *Lysis* holds that friendship and love are egoistic and utility-based. In this paper, I will argue against those readings of Plato's *Lysis*. I will analyze how Socrates treats utility and egoism in the many different kinds of friendship he discusses in the dialogue, from parental love, like-to-like, and unlike-to-unlike relationships, to the accounts of friendship

rooted in the human relation to the good and the ways in which we can belong with some other human beings. The upshot of my paper is twofold. I endeavor to prove that some of these relationships, as Plato's Socrates discusses them, are not egoistic and that Plato represents and valorizes a particular type of friendship having to do with philosophy and philosophical way of life, which is for the sake of another.

Keywords: Plato's Socrates , Friendship , Love , Utility , Egoism.

1. Introduction

The *Lysis* is one of the most controversial and puzzling of Plato's dialogues. It treats friendship differently from the way it is generally understood both in the ancient Greek tradition and now. We assume that friendship is a kind of relationship based on mutual affection, concern, and respect between persons who are in some ways compatible. Socrates does not provide any definition of *philia*.¹ Instead, he undertakes a challenging inquiry into the various relations between parents and children, animate and inanimate entities, human beings and animals, similar and dissimilar people, doctors and their patients, people and abstract phenomena, and any other persons who belong with one another. Plato's Socrates wants to show how complex and sometimes paradoxical all of these relations are, as well as how we should assess them. He also dares to question the relationships that most of us value positively, such as parental love or the friendly affection between good persons. Are they valuable in themselves or merely instrumentally good?

¹ Plato employs the word *philia* to denote a wide spectrum of relationships: with or to children, horses, and dogs, as well as those involving non-sentient things, such as gymnastics, wisdom, or wine. In his recently published paper, Giménez (2020, p. 2) rightly notes the term *philia* is employed in the *Lysis* to denote symmetric and asymmetric relations.

Scholars have frequently alleged that Socrates was committed to a frankly egoistic and instrumentalist account of friendship in the *Lysis* by promoting, as it seems, usefulness as an important precondition of *philia*.² In this paper, I will argue against those interpretations of the *Lysis* which read it as promoting the egoistic and instrumental model of friendship and love. In terms of utility and egoism, I will critically discuss all views of friendship and love in the dialogue, as well as the roles of the interlocutors. My interpretation has two aims: (i) to show that some of these views are neither egoistic nor instrumental, (ii) to argue that Plato promotes a particular type of friendship having to do with philosophy and a philosophical way of life, which excludes an egoistic and instrumental model of *philia*.

Before entering into my discussion, I would like to define—albeit knowing that these distinctions are a matter of nuance—how I conceive egoism, selfishness, utility-based friendship, and altruism, necessary for my treatment of Plato’s Socrates’ view of *philia*. I take “egoism” to refer to cases in which an agent first and foremost intends to benefit himself, and “selfishness” to refer to the cases in which one is concerned for no one but oneself, even to the point of harming others. Utility-based friendship is a kind of relationship in which one is a friend to another solely to gain some advantage for oneself (cf. Roth, 1995, p. 6). These concepts are very similar, although not entirely the same. In what we call instrumental friendship, the other as an *instrument* is highlighted, while in egoistic and selfish friendships an agent’s motivation is emphasized. When I pursue some benefit both for myself and my friend, I would characterize my action neither as egoistic nor as selfish. It is both egoistic and selfish only if it is for my own sake, without taking into account my friend’s benefit(s). Additionally, I would not characterize the love of an agent for something inanimate, such as goodness or wine as egoistic, since the possibility of an altruistic alternative in

² The main authors who argue for the instrumentalist conception of friendship are: Vlastos, 1973; Irwin, 1977; Adams, 1992; Penner and Rowe, 2005, etc.; and those who argue for the non-instrumentalist view are: Gadamer, 1985; Wolf, 1992; Roth, 1995; Bordt, 1998; Dancy, 2006, etc.

such relationships is moot. For this reason, I will treat egoism as applying only to relationships between human beings.³ I take “altruism” to refer to cases in which the agent intends to benefit someone other than the agent for that other person’s sake. When we seek to benefit others, our motives “remain altruistic even when they are performed from a mixture of motives, some of which are self-interested” (Kraut, 2016).

Plato emphasizes mutuality in his account of friendship. In this paper, I will endeavor to show that most of the friendships discussed in the *Lysis* are neither instrumental nor egoistic. Socrates’ pedagogical friendship with Lysis and Menexenus, as well as parental love, are primarily altruistic.

2. Do Parents Love Their Children?

The outset of the dialogue is controversial. The *Lysis* begins with the scene of some young men⁴ who sit in front of the “wrestling school” voyeuristically looking at handsome boys (203a3-5). Among them is Hippothales, composing verses and poetry to seduce a young, pretty boy, Lysis, by worshiping and prizing him (204b5ff.). Socrates, who is called to join them, quickly recognizes Hippothales’ real intentions and the nature of the relationship he wants to establish with his beloved. Albeit Hippothales talks and sings only about his beloved, forcing others to be his audience (204d1–9), he does not intend to do anything good for Lysis or to improve the young lad. Socrates shows that what Hippothales wants is not the welfare of a

³ I thus set aside questions about whether human beings can have egoistic or altruistic relationships with other sentient beings, such as non-human animals. I assume they can be, but such relationships are beyond the scope of my project herein.

⁴ According to Jan Szaif’s contribution to this volume, Hippothales and Ctesippus “might belong to the ephebes (aged about 19 or 20), who mix with younger boys at wrestling schools during the Hermaea, celebrated on the day of this conversation” (2022, n. 42).

very young Lysis, but an utterly selfish wish to (sexually) use a boy and to become a victor in his own and others' eyes (205d6–206a5). Furthermore, he does not praise Lysis because he thinks that the boy has an extraordinary character or developed intellect. The outset of the dialogue indicates that friendly and erotic affections—however honest they might be—can be very instrumental when these affections are for the sake of the lover, and not the beloved. The case with Hippothales serves as a negative example⁵ of what *philia* never is, which I will elucidate in the course of my paper.

The first human relationship that Socrates discusses in the *Lysis* is parental love, exemplified by the relationship of Lysis' parents to him. Parental love is frequently given as a representative example of unconditional love, a love that has no requirements for it to obtain. Nevertheless, Socrates questions parental love, which has provoked many scholars to interpret Socrates' examination of this kind of love as advancing a utilitarian model of parental love (for example, Vlastos, 1973; Adams, 1992; etc.).

A very consistent and detailed instrumental reading of parental love is offered by Don Adams. For example, the fact that Lysis' parents, as Socrates says, will hand over their property to Lysis when he grows up (209c3–7) is explained by Adams as only their intention to keep “business in the family” (Adams, 1992, p. 5), which is neither said in the text nor implied by the context of the discussion in the *Lysis*. Emphasizing that people always give preference to someone's expertise and usefulness, Adams concludes that whoever is useful will be loved, and generalizes his conclusion about parental love to all love and friendship: “instrumental usefulness is a necessary and sufficient cause for all friendship” (Adams, 1992, p. 6).

Adams' interpretation thus saddles Socrates with a jarringly implausible view of parental love, but then applies this understanding to all kinds of loving relationships. In evaluating this interpretation,

⁵ His case is a negative one, not only because he is unsuccessful in seduction; this makes him rather preposterous. More seriously negative are his intentions, which would be harmful if he were to succeed in his designs with Lysis.

however, we would do well to pause and ask ourselves why Plato has Socrates offer the arguments that are given in this section of the *Lysis*, and also about whether what is said in this section is intended to generalize in the way Adams supposes it does. Does Socrates think that parents should teach their children how to be used in the future, and should we suppose that this was the way that Socrates acted concerning his own children? Since I do not think that parental love is accurately represented in this interpretation, and also think that it does not fit with how Plato depicts Socrates in his actions, another way to understand the arguments in this section of the *Lysis* is preferable.

Socrates and his interlocutor Lysis agreed that his parents love him and want him to be as happy as possible (207d8–e1). Happiness requires freedom to do what one wants to do. Because parents desire their children to be happy, they are anxious to secure their happiness (207e4–7). Socrates seems to argue that parents, on the one hand, want their children to be happy, but, on the other, they often limit their children’s freedom, which would seem to be a necessary condition of their happiness. This apparent paradox can be solved by saying that parents limit their children’s freedom if what they do is irrational, dangerous, and could be harmful. The point of this part of Socrates’ argument is not the limitation of freedom as such, but the importance to parents that their children become knowledgeable, wise, and useful for dealing with complexities of social and other relationships –precisely so that in acting autonomously, they can achieve happiness. This way of preparing their children to become free is an essential part of what it means for parents to love their children for their children’s sake. It is noteworthy that wisdom, as Socrates says to Lysis, will not only make him useful (*chresimos*) but also good (*agathos*) (210d2). Here, Plato’s Socrates employs the Greek word *chresimos* often translated in English as “useful.” When this word is attributed to a person, it means, above all, that this person is capable of producing good and valuable things for other people in a *polis* (Liddell-Scott, 1996, p. 2006).

Given that parents' motivation for teaching their children how to deal beneficially and virtuously with other people is primarily for their children's sake, parental love seems not to be characterized in the *Lysis* as egoistic. For Plato, parental love is not utility-based, since parents do not use their children as instruments for gaining something which is not in the children's own interest. They advise their children to become helpful and supportive to others, which is the basis of establishing mutual trust in a society and consequently friendly relations. In addition, Socrates' argument highlights how important intellectual training and education are for gaining respect, genuine love,⁶ and friendship. It is also true, of course, that parents may have mixed motives when they act for the sake of their children: parents may help to improve their children, and by doing so also hope to become proud of them. Such cases, however, would still count as altruistic behavior, as I said above, insofar as the aim to benefit the children for their own sakes is included in the parents' motivation.

Scholars have often overlooked the fact that Socrates' discussion with Lysis about parental love might be read as a way of "humbling" Lysis. This is what Socrates tells Hippothales is the proper manner to deal with immature, sometimes arrogant boys. Socrates seems to humble Lysis by calling attention to what he does not know: how to ride chariots, drive a mule-team, or take care of himself, which is the job of his slave-guardians and his teachers, and he is not allowed to interfere in any important work that his father and mother do (208a2–e3). The upshot of this enumeration of what Lysis is ignorant and incapable of highlights how significant attaining knowledge through upbringing and education is. Intellectual development is needed to have genuine friends and to participate in the mature world. Hippothales' approach to Lysis is seductive and instrumental. By contrast, Socrates highlights that Lysis should be mentally trained to become wise for Lysis' own sake. This understanding is supported by what Socrates said to Hippothales immediately after the ending of

⁶ Parental love is not always reciprocal. As for children, they do not always love their parents in return. There are some cases, albeit rare, of parents who do not love their children.

this discussion: “This is how you should talk with your boyfriends, Hippothales, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do” (210e3–6).⁷

3. Why Similar and Dissimilar Persons Cannot be Friends

Socrates introduces his argument about what *philia* is by arousing doubt in what Lysis and Menexenus take for granted. Both young boys assume that they are friends because they have much in common and their relationship is reciprocal. This reciprocity is relevant for our discussion about selfish friendship and utility-based love, because if the friendship is a reciprocal relationship, then genuine friends who indeed love each other are not likely to use each other in ways that are either purely instrumental or selfish. The strategy of Socrates’ *elenchus* here is to shake Menexenus’ view about friendship rooted in his belief that friends are only those who have friendly feelings or love each other. Socrates draws attention to our love for animate and inanimate objects, such as horses and wine, as well as for certain kinds of achievement, for example, wisdom (212d6–e1). No matter how much we love them, they do not love us in return. This, however, seems to be only a verbal problem, which Aristotle solves by claiming that we say we love these objects just in an analogous sense, while we are friends in the primary sense only for those who consider us friends (cf. *EN* 1155a15 ff.). Paving the way for his discussion of friendship, Socrates seems to endorse the problem of reciprocity when love and friendly feelings are at stake.

The next issue concerns the question of who are friends. To explain how one becomes a friend of another, Plato’s Socrates introduces two contradictory proposals about relationships, (i) like is always a friend of like (214b4–5), (ii) “like is the most hostile with like” (215c4–5) or the opposite is the friend of the opposite. These

⁷ All translations are those that appear in Cooper (1997), unless otherwise stated.

models of explanation of friendship in terms of the like and the unlike, employed mostly by poets, allow Plato to explore the unquestioned perplexities regarding friendship. I will discuss them mostly to establish whether or not for Plato's Socrates *philia* is a selfish and utility-based relationship.

The hypothesis that friendship is based on likeness is rejected by two arguments, both of which have consequences for understanding the relationship between friendship and utility. According to the first one, the bad cannot even be a friend of the bad because they will do injustice to one another, while the second one says that the good cannot be a friend to the good. By claiming that the good is the opposite of the bad, which is hostile and unjust, Socrates shows that the good is closely connected with internal and interpersonal justice.⁸ Therefore, one might conclude that good persons are temperate and righteous, while bad people, who are unlike "even to themselves", are immoderate and unjust. If the "hidden meaning" (214d4) of those who say "like is a friend to like" is that only the good is a friend, this seems to suggest two things.⁹ First, a genuine friendship can exist between persons who are similar in goodness and justice. Second, if this friendship is rooted in goodness and justice, then it is unlikely that it is constituted by utility and neediness. For example, two talented musicians who are friends do not need to instrumentalize each other. Instead, they will practice, sometimes together, to develop their talents. In general, persons similar in intelligence and virtue seem to be less inclined to purely self-interested use of their friends for attaining some goals. One may say that they are frequently more

⁸ When arguing against Thrasymachus in the *Republic I*, Socrates says that injustice causes hostilities and civil wars, while justice is linked to friendship (cf. *R.* 351d3–4).

⁹ In his other dialogues, Plato most frequently says that friendship is based on likeness and virtue. In the *Gorgias* (510b2–3), Socrates holds that the closest friendship exists between like and like. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger asserts that when two persons are alike or equals and virtuous, they should be called friends (*Lg.* 837a6–7).

interested in collaboration for achieving common aims if they are alike in virtue, intellect, and social position.

However, what I said above is not the line that Socrates takes in his argument, since he says that the good cannot be the friend of the good. He posits that the good is self-sufficient, implying that it does not need anything, including friends. Plato's concept of the good as self-sufficient applies to Forms or examples of perfection, rather than to human beings. What seems to be implausible is both (i) treating persons as self-sufficient (because their nature is not self-sufficient), and (ii) assuming that humans can never be good.¹⁰ One obvious flaw in his argument is that it takes "good" not to be scalable or gradable –if something that was completely good would be self-sufficient, it does not follow that something that is somewhat good would also be self-sufficient (though perhaps it would be to that same degree self-sufficient). Additionally, self-sufficiency would entail no *need* for friends, but would not rule out enjoying them in non-needy ways. We can enjoy many things that we don't need, like taking pleasure in listening to Schubert's *Das Forellen Quintett* with our friends. So, there are self-satisfied, virtuous, and good persons,¹¹ who do not need but like to share friendly feelings with others. A good person frequently wants to help other, less fortunate persons out of love, and not out of need. By attempting to become friends with less fortunate persons, the good person might want to benefit the less fortunate friends for their own sakes.

The argument in *Lysis* 215c5-216b10 aims to show that friendship obtains only between persons who are opposed, which I call an unlike-to-unlike relation. First, Socrates refers to Hesiod's verses about the animosity of persons who do the same jobs and are thus in competition with each other. Colleagues can indeed be very

¹⁰ Socrates' thesis that good persons cannot be friends due to their self-sufficiency, is more plausible if we interpret it, as Szaif (2022) does, that friendships should not be based on goodness understood as perfection.

¹¹ J. Annas (1977, p. 545) interprets Plato's thesis that the good is "self-sufficient" in a way that a virtuous person does not need virtue which she or he can "gain" from a friend.

envious of each other. Like other empirical generalities, however, it suffers from exceptions. Not all poets or potters are envious of one another, nor is everyone who has contributed papers for this project envious of or in competition with the others who have done so. Plato's Socrates in the first book of the *Republic* offers a very compelling so-called non-pleonexia argument (cf. *R.* 349b-350c). In that argument, Socrates purports to show that experts must not be envious and competitive if they are working on the same project for attaining the same goal. For example, a group of medical experts, who are together operating on a patient, would need to be cooperative to complete the operation. The positive and productive association of doctors is a necessary condition of success. In addition, both in private and in the public domain friendly feelings within a group significantly contribute to the achievement of common goals.

Furthermore, Socrates cites striking examples: the poor are forced to be friends to the rich, as are the weak to the strong, the sick to the doctor, and the ignorant to those who are well-informed (*Ly.* 215d4-8). This part of the argument seems to support the idea that Plato's view of friendship is "utility-based," as Vlastos purports to show (Vlastos, 1973). Nevertheless, this argument is full of flaws. First, one of the proposed opposites is not an opposite at all. As Roth argues (1991, p. 10 ff.), both Plato and his Socrates are aware that "in no sense" is a doctor the opposite of a sick person. Second, these examples do not support the hypothesis that friends are those who are the opposite of each other. They are supposed to illustrate the non-reciprocal relationships between the two kinds of persons: those in need and those who can help them to satisfy that need. Most of them are not plausibly described in terms of friendship and likeness. Do the poor inevitably like the rich? History shows that the economic inequality between the poor and rich often puts them in conflict with each other. Even if one does not contest that the poor or the weak or the ignorant might have utility-based feelings toward their more fortunate counterparts, it remains unexplainable why the rich or strong or the knowledgeable would feel any sense of love,

particularly utility-based, for their opposites.¹² It is no wonder that Socrates characterizes that argument as absurd (cf. 216a6–7). In the framework of ethical opposites, he shows that the just cannot be a friend to the unjust, nor “the temperate to the licentious,” concluding that “enmity” is “the thing most opposite to friendship” (216a7–b1). So, it seems that Plato holds that purely self-interested and utility-based relationships are not friendships.

4. The Neither Good nor Bad in Relation to the Good

Thus far the discussion in the *Lysis* has argued that both the good and the bad cannot be friends. Thus Socrates comes up with a new candidate: the “neither good nor bad.” This is an example of a familiar conceptual distinction in Plato’s dialogues from the *Euthydemus* (281a1–e6) and *Gorgias* (467e3–468d1) to the *Symposium* (202e5–204c9). “Neither/nor” is endorsed to show that apart from the two alternatives in a conceptual opposition, there remains the third possibility which designates what is between these two opposites. This conceptual distinction was further elaborated in Plato’s Academy.

Who are the “neither good nor bad” in the *Lysis*? What role do they have in understanding friendship? Socrates puts forward a hypothesis that the “neither good nor bad” is a friend of the good (cf. 216c3–4), implying that the beloved must be good and the subject is neither bad nor good.¹³ This thesis seems to be his own because he does not ascribe its authorship to either a poet or a philosopher of nature. Then, Socrates specifies this hypothesis about friendship by claiming that “what is neither good nor bad becomes a friend of the good because of the presence of something bad” (217b3–4). This model of friendship is not a symmetrical relation, since the good, at

¹² Aristotle, too, links utility-based love to the relations between opposites (cf. *EN* 1159b12–14).

¹³ This is highlighted by Giménez, 2020, p. 8.

which the neither good nor bad aims, is not a friend of anything, due to its self-sufficiency. Socrates cites three examples. The first involves medicine and illness, the second concerns the whiteness of hair,¹⁴ and the third has to do with the philosopher. The first and third examples are important for our discussion of whether or not Plato holds that *philia* is a utility-based relationship. While the example of the doctor and the sick body seems to be accounted for in utilitarian terms, the philosopher example seems to point in a different direction.

To explain the role of the “neither good nor bad,” Socrates endorses an unusual example when one talks about friendship. This is an example of the body of a patient, medicine, and her or his health and illness. The body, which is neither good nor bad in itself, is befriended to medicine for the sake of attaining health and avoiding illness. So, medicine is good and beneficial because, with its help, a sick man restores his health and because it is thus instrumental to achieving some preferred good and avoiding corresponding evil. Socrates here highlights the importance of knowledge, in this case, medical knowledge, whose implementation makes it possible to attain the desired good, in this case, health. He also makes the distinction between *because* and *for the sake of*, that is, between the efficient and the final cause, when saying that the sick man is “a friend of the doctor *because of* illness and *for the sake of* health” (218e4–5). The relationship between the sick man and the doctor is caused by some need, but its aim is some good. What makes the relationship between the sick man and the doctor utility-based is something bad (illness), but its aim does not have an instrumental value.

However, Socrates’ example seems to be problematic. We all need doctors, dentists, and plumbers, but it doesn’t follow we will call them our friends. Nor would doctors necessarily regard their relationship with their patients as a friendly one. Additionally, not

¹⁴ For instance, “whiteness” can be present in Lysis’ hair in two manners: his hair can be dyed or it could grow white with age.

only is the sick person neither good nor bad but, as a fellow human being, neither is the doctor. Physicians might not cure their patients in all situations, because their medical knowledge is not complete and perfect. Therefore, the sick person, who is neither good nor bad, is not friend to the good as self-sufficient, but to the doctor who is also neither bad nor good, though having medical knowledge, which is frequently beneficial. This example might be interpreted as a metaphor since a friend might sometimes serve as our remedy, who helps us to overcome certain life problems and difficulties, and without whom it would be sometimes unbearable to live.¹⁵

In the controversial passage on the *proton philon* in the *Lysis*, Socrates argues that medical knowledge is a friend for the sake of health, and health is a friend for the sake of something else, and so on. To avoid an infinite regress, there must be a *proton philon*, which is not loved for the sake of anything further. Scholars have offered a variety of different accounts of the *proton philon*, but whatever it might be, from the fact that something else (X) is loved for the sake of it, it does not follow that X is loved only instrumentally: there may be some things (including especially virtuous friends) who are loved both for themselves and also for the sake of the *proton philon*. The possibility that there are some things that are valued both for themselves and for their effects is explicitly recognized, for example, in the classification of goods offered in Book II of the *Republic*.¹⁶

Socrates often compares philosophy –as improving the health of the soul –with medicine, which aims to restore and maintain the health of the body. The example of wisdom and philosophy, however, seems to be different from the above-mentioned one. Socrates illustrates three types of epistemic conditions. Those who are fully wise will not love wisdom, that is, will not be engaged in intellectual effort of any kind. The ignorant are not aware of their ignorance and

¹⁵ Both the good and a friend can be considered remedies of some evil (cf. 220d4).

¹⁶ Plato distinguishes three kinds of good: (i) a kind of good for its own sake, such as joy and harmless pleasures, (ii) a kind of good both for its own sake and its consequences, like being wise or seeing, (iii) a kind of good only for its consequences, such as physical training. (cf. *R.* 357b4-c7).

will, hence, never desire wisdom. In this case, philosophers are examples of those who are neither good nor bad. What distinguishes philosophers from those others is the fact that they are conscious of their own ignorance: they are aware of what they do not know, and that is the basic claim of Socrates' philosophy (cf. *Ly.* 218a4–b1). Being aware of the lack of his wisdom makes him desire to become wiser, to strive constantly to become better than he is. In the former example, two humans have a relationship for attaining the desired goal, which is health, while the latter example illustrates the one-sided relationship between the philosopher and wisdom, his ultimate aim.

The relationship between philosopher and wisdom is a dynamic process in which (other things being equal) the stronger one's desire and love for wisdom is, the more unified, comprehensive, and deeper the knowledge to be acquired will be. A philosophical inquiry always has to be supplemented by constant awareness regarding its own merits and, even more so, regarding whether or not a person is knowledgeable and educated. Moreover, a philosopher, as being neither good nor bad, desires the good; the bad in him is not an indication of his soul's corruption, but only of a relative incompleteness in his knowledge. Ignorance is bad, in Socrates' view; but one who is aware of one's ignorance makes that badness less likely to damage his soul. By his own awareness of his degree of ignorance, Socrates is made wiser than others, and also better than others.

Because he is not simply ignorant while pursuing wisdom, Socrates himself qualifies as an intermediate, being always between these two epistemic opposites. He is in between lack of knowledge and wisdom with a strong need to overcome that lack, being at the same time aware that he will never fully overcome it. Persistently inquiring about the truth is the only strategy for a human being to become wiser. The philosopher's pursuit of wisdom is for his own sake, for his own benefit. Even so, since altruism is not even an option when the relation of the philosopher to wisdom is at stake, it seems that we should not understand this relation in terms of egoism either.

5. Why Are Friends Those Who Belong with One Another

The next account given in the *Lysis* conceives of the source of friendship as neediness. Friendship is not the only relationship that is rooted in want. Socrates seems to think that all human relationships are founded upon our imperfect, deficient, and lacking nature. Given that none of us is self-sufficient, we are beings with deficiencies or shortcomings. Humans are biologically deficient as is described in the myth in Plato's *Protagoras* (321c3, 5–6), in which it is said that “the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed,” “completely unequipped”¹⁷ to survive. In Aristophanes' myth in the *Symposium* (191a5–b6, 192b–c4), humans are portrayed as lonely and needy beings, who are constantly trying to overcome their constitutional lack by erotic unions, whereby each of us seeks to find our own *oikeion*. No one alone is capable of satisfying all of one's needs, so we all are compelled to form social and political communities (R. 369b6–7). Aristotle repeats this claim in the first book of his *Politics*.

At *Lysis* (221d3–222a5), Socrates provides his final account of friendship in terms of the *oikeion*. I will just briefly sketch the argument, though for reasons I will explain, I will leave critical words untranslated. (i) Desire is the cause of love and friendship.¹⁸ (ii) One desires and loves passionately or as a friend whatever one lacks (221d2–4); (iii) therefore, lack is the cause of desire, love, and friendship. (iv) One lacks if one is deprived of something; (v) therefore, being deprived (*aphairetai*) is the cause of lack. (vi) What is *oikeion* with one is the genuine object of desire, love, and friendship; (vii) therefore, the *oikeion* causes friendship and love.

¹⁷ See Deretić, 2016, p. 21–36 for a discussion of the origin of humans and their culture as described by Plato's *Protagoras* in the dialogue of the same name.

¹⁸ The first premise, as Rudebusch notes (2004, p. 70), is stated as a hypothesis in the text.

(viii) Friends and lovers are *oikeioi* with one another. (ix) Genuine love is reciprocal.

To understand the argument, it is required to explain what the word *oikeion* means in this argument. This word, as Bolotin says, is “closely related to the word *oikia*—‘house,’ ‘household,’ or ‘home.’ *Hoi oikeioi* are primarily ‘those who dwell with one,’ and the word usually refers to one’s relatives. The meaning of the neuter *oikeion* ranges from something like ‘one’s own’ to something like ‘appropriate or suitable to a thing’” (cf. Bolotin 1979, p. 56, n. 28). But since we are talking about relationships that are for the most part not among members of the same household, some other sense must apply to this concept of friendship. Most English translations render *oikeion* as “belonging to” which seems to be a wrong translation in this context.¹⁹ The expression “X belongs to Y” suggests a relationship of possession: X is possessed by (owned by) Y. Meno’s slave, for example, is a possession of Meno and thus would be a part of his master’s household and thus *oikeion* in that sense. That is the reason why Socrates, in the first part of the *Lysis* (207d5–210d9), when conversing with Lysis, “developed a non-symmetric sense of *oikeion* as belonging-to. On the basis of seven examples, ranging from mule-carting to weaving to household and civic management, Plato has in mind possession, and not friends” (Rudebusch, 2004, p. 74). When Plato’s Socrates talks about friends, as the argument I am now discussing shows, he does not think of them in such a possessive and objectifying sense. Friends are not one’s property, and most

¹⁹ The Greek sentence is: ‘Υμεῖς ἄρα εἰ φίλοι ἐστὸν ἀλλήλοις, φύσει πη οἰκεῖοί ἐσθ’ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς. Most translators use “belong to”: (i) Wright, 1848, p. 129: “If, then, you two are friendly to each other, by some tie of nature you belong to each other?” (ii) Lamb, 1925, p. 67: “Then if you two are friends to each other, by some natural bond you belong to one another.” (iii) Lombardo, 1997, p. 706: “And if you two are friends with each other, then in some way you naturally belong to each other.” (iv) Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 349: “The two of you, in that case, if you’re friends to each other, in some way naturally belong the one to the other.” Only Jowett (1892, p. 866) and Bolotin (1979, p. 50–51) render *oikeion* differently. Jowett uses “congenial to;” Bolotin has it as “akin.” These strike me as better choices, though in what follows, I will argue for yet another option.

friends are not members of one's family. They do not belong to their friends in the way a slave belongs to a master.

When Socrates applies the word "*oikeion*" to friendships he rather seems to have in mind the ways in which a person can belong with another. To say that two people belong with each other is to recognize about them that there is a special kind of fit, suitability, or compatibility, between them. This is not about possession at all, but about the capacity for meaningful connection that will make both of them better off than they are by themselves: it means the two people are somehow especially right for each other. Persons belonging with each other do not use one another.²⁰

This reasoning seems to be supported by another expression of the argument which has also been translated in ways that seem to distort Socrates' meaning. In my discussion above, the translation I have offered for the Greek verb "*aphairetai*" is different from some others English translations. Most of them render this verb as "taken away."²¹ Here, too, the translation makes Socrates' point seem to be about possession. When this translation is applied to friends, it makes Socrates' claim senseless: it implies that there can be no such thing as new friendships that come into existence –instead, all friendships must consist in relationships that have somehow suffered from some estrangement, and only when that estrangement is repaired can it qualify as a genuine friendship. Moreover, prior to the estrangement, the relationship could not have been a friendship, since neither party to the relationship has (yet) been taken away from the other one. Better renderings are given by Lamb (1925, p. 67) as "suffer a deprivation" and Bolotin (1979, p. 50) as "deprived of." One can be deprived of something even if one never "had" it before. One might be deprived of justice, for example, or of some opportunity even when or if one never had justice or that opportunity in the first place.

²⁰ I am very appreciative to Nicholas D. Smith who drew my attention to the relevance of this distinction.

²¹ Cf. Wright, 1848, p. 129; Jowett, 1892, p. 866; Lamb, 1925, p. 67; Lombardo, 1997, p. 706; Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 348.

It doesn't have to be "taken away"²² to suffer the deprivation; it might simply be kept from one who should have it from the outset.

This "belonging with" could be understood, as Ursula Wolf suggests, in a way that two persons love each other only if they are akin and so close to each other that their relationship is reciprocal,²³ in which case both "sides" are involved (Wolf, 1992, p. 117). For example, if someone I belong with and who belongs with me is "taken away," I will suffer lack, not because I have lost something that is my possession, but because such friendships enrich both friends.

As good friends, Lysis and Menexenus belong with each other because they have much in common (221e7–8). We might say that they also belong with Socrates because he is such a good influence on them. Moreover, friendship can exist only if a friend or a lover belongs with her or his friend or beloved "either in his whole soul" or in some aspects of the friend's soul (222a1–5). Genuine friendship and love, as seems to be suggested by Plato's Socrates, reveal the inner, psychic characteristics of the other, those which bring us together. Vlastos' objection that Plato's Socrates in both the *Symposium* and the *Lysis* fails to love a person for his or her "uniqueness" and "true self" thus seems not to be apt (Vlastos, 1973, p. 31). What Socrates is talking about here in the *Lysis* are those qualities that are particular to the beloved or the befriended, which makes her or him "naturally belong" with us.

²² Recently, Shigeru Yonezawa has offered an explanation of what that "taking away" might mean. Because Lysis lacked something, a good characteristic that he should possess by nature, he "loved Menexenus who possessed such, and in turn, Menexenus' soul likewise lacked that which Lysis possessed and thus he loved him" (Yonezawa, 2018, p. 9).

²³ The utility account seems to be incapable to explain the ways in which friendly love is required. So, if the genuine friendship is reciprocal, then this relationship is not utility-based (cf. Kreft, 2012, p. 211). Nevertheless, two people can enter into a reciprocal relationship purely for the sake of anticipated utility for each. Many business partnerships function in this way. But if the relationship is strictly about business, it isn't friendship.

We want to have friends because sociability is in our very nature. Friends can indeed be very valuable in terms of bringing distinct benefits to one another. From the fact that something brings a certain benefit, however, it does not follow that the bringing of that benefit is the entire purpose or value of that thing. For example, reading novels might make a person more learned, or more popular at parties, but such results may not be the reason *why* the reader reads novels.

In Socrates' final definition of friendship, friends are those who mutually belong with each other. A friend can have qualities that one does not have, but which can have positive effects on those who love him or her.²⁴ Lysis and Menexenus can become better philosophers by associating with Socrates. The point is that two adolescents who have some intellectual talents can be wiser if they are befriended by Socrates whose knowledge and wisdom both of them admire. Friendship understood in this way originates in the unconscious human need to ameliorate one's own lacks, and so in that way invites an egoistic understanding. But even given its basis in human need, friendships actually function in such a way as to take into account the mutual good and benefit for both friends, which is achieved by being together. Friendship will not exist anymore if this relationship is just for one friend's sake, because the essence of friendship based on the *oikeion* assumes that both friends recognize about one another that they belong together and are both promoting their own and one another's benefits.

The view that a person loves another because they belong with each other seems to be very similar to the refuted hypothesis that like is a friend of like. But that thesis has already been refuted. An intriguing moment in the dialogue is when the like-to-like hypothesis is refuted because it is precisely this that we have in mind when we say that friendships are (at least typically) based on what the friends have in common (cf. 222b7–9). Our friends may well have talents

²⁴ According to Aristotle, dissimilar persons can also be friends. They take pleasure in each other, "as the austere in the witty, the energetic in the lazy." Aristotle explains this by the fact that they are brought by one another into the mean (cf. *EE* 1240a1-4). All translations are those that appear in Barnes, 1984.

and other characteristics that we respect, but these same characteristics may be ones that we also have, and we are attracted to friends with whom we share such traits. It is, as I have shown, a view of friendship that Plato developed in other dialogues, and is also compared to the view of friends as *oikeioi* at the very end of the *Lysis*. But as we have seen, Socrates had rejected this very model of friendship at the very beginning of the dialogue.

My claim is that Socrates calls attention to the similarity between these two views of love, but does not accept that they are identical for a different reason. In the *Lysis*, Plato's Socrates wants to depict and recommend another kind of friendship as a paradigmatic one, a kind that is not between entirely similar or equal persons.²⁵ Instead, he emphasizes the genuine friendship between one who is older and wiser than his friends, but who is willing to share his wisdom with them and to teach them how to philosophize by themselves. This friendship I will call pedagogical friendship, and it is present throughout the entire dialogue.

6. The Pedagogical Friendship

Lysis and Menexenus seem to understand Socrates' "distinction between genuine and pretended love," since both of them nodded. On the other hand, Hippothales, who wanted to be recognized as a genuine lover, "beamed every color in the rainbow in his delight" (222b2–3), showing how little he has understood the dialogue Socrates had with his gifted, albeit younger interlocutors. He understands little because his motives towards *Lysis* have proven to be quite different from what we would expect of the genuine lover, the one who belongs with his friend without possession and self-gratification as the aim. *Lysis* would be his ornament if Hippothales manages to seduce him, or, if he doesn't, he will make himself ridiculous, harming himself in that way (205e5–8). His passion for

²⁵ This is why I did not ultimately agree with Bolotin's translation of *oikeion* as "akin," which connotes similarity. I claim that Socrates is aware that friends can be *dissimilar* in ways that are important to their friendship.

Lysis is an instrumental and selfish one because he does not consider what is best for Lysis. Hippothales potentially harms Lysis by corrupting his soul, a misuse of another human being of the very worst kind. By assessing this example, one may infer the following consequences: true friendship or love requires friends who 1) are not motivated by selfish reasons (one's own pleasure or personal gain), 2) want to love and benefit one another, 3) should not corrupt each other's souls, 4) are honest in their intentions (222a9–11). The same conditions can be applied to erotic love.

Socrates' own relationship with his young friends is contrasted to Hippothales' selfishness. Let us carefully consider the motifs and upshots of Socrates' relation to Lysis and Menexenus. He does not want to use or misuse the youths, but to help them in advancing their moral and intellectual excellence. This aim may not have seemed evident in Socrates' initial questioning of Lysis. By showing Lysis, however, how much he does not know, and how that puts him below his parents' servants and slaves, Socrates' intention is to humble Lysis. According to our pedagogical standards, it is wrong to humiliate students. But Socrates does this, not at all to harm or dominate the young boy, but to persuade all parties to the conversation that Hippothales' inappropriate hyperbolic praise of someone so young puts the boy at risk of vanity and moral corruption. It is far better for the boy—and, indeed, for all of us—to be confronted and have it made vividly clear to us that we are ignorant and that it is thus necessary for us to engage philosophically with all aspects of who we are.

A philosophical inquiry as such should always be supplemented by its constant awareness of its own merits, even more so if a person is knowledgeable and educated. Moreover, a philosopher, as being neither good nor bad, desires the good; the bad in him is not an indication of his soul's corruption, but only of a relative incompleteness in his knowledge. By his own awareness of his degree of ignorance,

Socrates is not only wiser than others, but he is also the one whose mission is to lead others to wisdom.²⁶

The pedagogical friendship is revealed as a model for the relationship between an older man and a younger boy that the Greeks claimed to value so highly. This relationship is not founded upon the purpose of transmitting knowledge from someone who is purported to be wise to someone who is not. Instead, it is the kinship of a teacher who is wholly involved and devoted to his student(s), a kinship that engages both sides rationally and emotionally. To put this in the terms I have discussed in the last section, it is a relationship of those who belong together: the teacher and the student belong with one another: the teacher cannot teach, and the student cannot learn without each other.

Not only does Socrates see himself as a philosopher, but he also felt delighted at any other's love for wisdom. Lysis is said to be a "lover of listening" (206c10) and Menexenus likes to dispute. The development in philosophy and philosophical friendship he has with Socrates is, above all, proven by the fact that Menexenus was there during the last hours of Socrates' life (*Phd.* 59b–c). Both boys, characterized in this fashion in the *Lysis*, are capable of being improved by their intellectual association with Socrates. First, Socrates teaches Lysis by questioning the authority of his parents regarding his own happiness and freedom. Then, Socrates critically discusses with Lysis the model of knowledge as it is feigned by poets and natural philosophers, seeking for a definition of friendship in terms of similarities and opposites –and thus implicitly giving the boys reasons to doubt that poets and natural philosophers can provide the answers they seek. Socrates educates the boys in critical thinking, by training them in the method of refutation. Additionally, he teaches the boys how one should inquire in order to define something.

²⁶ In the *Apology* (21d2–e2), Socrates claims that he is wiser in being aware of the merits of his own ignorance compared with the person who is not aware of it. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, 1994, p. 32–35.

It is not that Socrates knows what the boys do not know; it is, rather, that he is more experienced and more able to engage in inquiry in a way that all of them –including Socrates –must pursue, as a way to remediate their ignorance. This is why it is so much better than how the Greeks promoted pederastic relationships: the older men involved in those relationships had nothing to teach their younger beloveds, for none of them had any genuine wisdom to share with those they loved. Socrates does not claim to have such wisdom, since no human being has it. Instead, he has and can share the one pursuit that can help all of us to avoid the worst consequences of our ignorance: philosophy. By sharing that, he doesn't share what he knows. Instead, he shares the only productive way to behave when one doesn't know.

Socrates became a role model in the lives of the boys. By teaching them how to philosophize, he also shows how significant it is to become a genuine friend. What Plato seems to have in mind while portraying the relation of Socrates with Lysis and Menexenus is a special kind of friendship among non-equals, who have the same end: the quest for wisdom and goodness. From being friends with Socrates, they can learn that humans cannot attain complete knowledge, but only knowledge in degrees. Even that incomplete and finite knowledge of what being a friend is, will enable both a teacher and his students to become genuine friends.

The common goal of this kind of friendship is guiding students to become as good and wise as it is possible for a human being to be. If we look at this model of friendship from the students' point of view, there is an egoistic aim: they seek their own benefit by being taught by Socrates. This specific benefit to the students, however, is not shared by the teacher, who does not learn from the students in the way students learn from their teachers. Accordingly, Socrates' aim as a friendly teacher in the *Lysis* is neither instrumental nor egoistic.

7. Concluding Remarks

In the *Lysis*, Plato's Socrates does not offer an uncontroversial, consistent, and comprehensive theory of friendship. He rather questions the various forms of relationships which we do often take for granted, such as parental love, and the friendship of persons with common traits. Plato seems to intend to draw our attention to problems and controversies one encounters when thinking of the genuine nature of human associations. From what I said, it does not follow that there are no consistent claims²⁷ about friendship and its character throughout the *Lysis*.²⁸

In this section, I would like to recapitulate the results of two issues I have been discussing in this paper. The first one deals with the question of whether the views Plato has Socrates express should be characterized as utility-based and egoistic or not. The second question is about the particular kind of friendship that Socrates makes explicit at the end of the dialogue, but which is noticeable in the dialogue from its very beginning.

Parental love, the first kind of *philia* that is brought into question in the *Lysis*, shows that this love is not utility-based or egoistic, because parents do not (or at any rate should not) treat their children as means for gaining something which is not in the children's own interest. This love is primarily for the sake of their children. Parents want their children to be happy, which the children will be if they become practically wise and knowledgeable. This is how they become useful not only to themselves but also to the other persons with whom they should obtain all sorts of valuable associations. Thus, even when parents seek to benefit their children, but also

²⁷ Some authors hold that the account of friendship according to which the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good should be regarded as supplemented by the *oikeion* account of friendship; cf. Gadamer, 1985; Gonzalez, 1995; Bordt, 1998; Rudebusch, 2004; Penner and Rowe, 2005; Wolfsdorf, 2007; Giménez, 2020.

²⁸ Jennings (2022) in this volume argues that Socrates has accepted only the account according to which the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good.

pursue their own self-interest in doing so, the love they give still counts as altruistic.

In refuting the possibility that friendship could exist between opposites, Socrates shows that the relationships, in which only one side aims to gain some benefit from the other cannot be called friendship. The example of the sick man and his doctor, in which Plato's Socrates illustrates the way in which the neither good nor bad relates to the good, is a relationship that is characterized as utility-based, but no one would regard this sort of relationship as an example of friendship.

The final definition, which couples belonging with a friend or a lover to a way of recognizing and valuing the other's soul seems to be the way that Socrates understands his own relationship as a teacher to his new, young students (cf.222a1–5). A friend belongs with me if I see in my friend character traits that I respect and revere. I may not have those traits, and may even think that I cannot have those traits, but they are nonetheless something valuable –loveable –in my friend. If two persons, for example, are genuine friends who cherish each other and belong with each other, then they help each other when in want. The anticipation of help, however, is not the cause of the cherishing, but a consequence of it. To put it otherwise, friends do not cherish each other because they provide wanted assistance to each other but, rather, they provide such assistance because they cherish one another.

It is because they are *oikeion* for one another that they are friends, and that also explains why friendship is mutually beneficial. But it is not the benefit that is the primary aim of this relationship. Moreover, this friendship is ethically not indifferent in the sense that both sides pursue wisdom and goodness.

I have argued that Socrates wanted to promote a pedagogical friendship, in which Socrates recruits his new and talented students in the philosophical enterprise, and it is this very kind of friendship that Plato has Socrates embody and exemplify in his discussion with the interlocutors in the *Lysis*. Unlike traditional older male lovers,

Socrates actually can and does intellectually and morally improve those he has befriended, and thus does not treat them as instruments for his own selfish interests. But also, in engaging them in such a way, he promotes a growth of affection between himself and his associates that is reciprocal, and not simply in the mode of *do ut des*.

When Socrates taught, he was seeking to create new intellectual partners –new peers –in the quest for wisdom. I am suggesting that when he seeks to engage the boys in a philosophical discussion, it is not only as one who is superior in that activity. I wonder if he does not hope to engage the others not just as a teacher, but as the one who wants as many true partners as possible in the philosophical enterprise. The latter type regards his “recruits” more as (at least potential) equal partners than simply as beneficiaries. Philosophical friendships, particularly by equal interlocutors, are presupposed for leading a philosophical, examined life which for Socrates is the only one worth leaving, because in this life: “the greatest good for a man [is] to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others” (*Ap.* 37a5–6).²⁹

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²⁹ Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, 1994, p. 29 ff.

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