The Political Science Reviewer • Volume 42, Number 2 • December 2018
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Why Can't We Be Friends? Hippothales and the Case of Plato's *Lysis*

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O philoi, oudeis philos.
O, my friends, there is no friend.

The tension between amicable social relations and antagonistic interactions is an enduring political problem: Can there be friendship between political rivals? The contemporary divisiveness and increased polarization (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Mason 2015) may appear as evidence of the veracity of Jacques Derrida's assertion that friendship does not exist, and never has.[1] However, scholars less interested in playing messianic games know this is not true (von Heyking and Avramenko 2008; Nehmas 2016; Scorza 2004; Shklar, 1993). Indeed, over the years many have argued that something resembling friendship, whether it be trust (Fukuyama 1995; Warren 1999), civility (Bejan 2017; Boyd 2004, 2006), or social capital (Inglehart 1999; Putnam 2000), is necessary for us to live decently and flourish together. In the same vein, friendships between partisan rivals such as those between Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Antonin Scalia or, more recently, between Senators Christopher A. Coons and Jeff Flake, are held up as important for preserving the smooth functioning of our political institutions (See also Mahoney 1994; von Heyking 2018).

And yet, the exact nature and basis of these "friendships" remains dubious and is frequently defined and measured by the

return it brings: peaceful coexistence, political stability, or foreign affairs. In other words, these modern examples of political friendship seem to focus on the lowest common denominator, what Aristotle calls "friendship of utility." Aristotle famously categorizes friendship into three types. There is friendship of utility, which is most clearly seen between people who regularly do business with each other, each obtaining something from the other; there is friendship of pleasure, which can be seen in drinking buddies, whose connection is found through mutual indulgence; and there is friendship of virtue, which is the highest and most enduring form in which participants share in mutual good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1156a6–1156b30). Self-reflection supports the credibility of the division, for no one finds connections on social media or drinking buddies, though labeled "friends," to be the same as the friendship of a life partner. The unfortunate result of basing social cohesion on these thin forms of friendship is that the ever-changing basis of self-interest rocks, and even topples, these connections. This frequent upending of social relations may lead people to believe Derrida's assertion. Yet, the very existence of society, as a collective, recognizes that something resembling friendship is a necessary condition of political life. Fundamentally, it becomes necessary to address whether a thick relationship found in virtue friendship exists in civil society.

To address this I suggest we turn Plato's *Lysis*, whose narrative and literary style expose the thinness of friendship founded upon individual self-interest, either pleasure or utility, and guides the reader to reassess true friendship founded upon what he calls the akinship (*oikeion*) of nature. Through Plato's education of the interlocuters, the readers are drawn to the conclusion that friendships based upon utility and pleasure provide a poor facsimile of true unity found in the virtue of the friendly love of another's good. In other words, Plato's *Lysis* serves as a reminder that there is room in political life for true friendship.

Considering the centrality of friendship to Plato's *Lysis*, it is surprising that few scholars of friendship have seriously considered the dialogue. One possible explanation is that the *Lysis* has little

positive teaching about friendship (Annas 1977; Guthrie 1975; Price 1989, Vlastos 1973; Digeser 2016).[2] Whether this is because the teaching is incoherent, or because the dialogue appears to fail to reach a firm resolution, these scholars tend to claim that it is not possible to decipher a positive teaching on friendship. Their emphasis on the difficult and sometimes confusing flow of the argument seems to corroborate the warning offered by Hoerber: "A major stumbling block to the penetration of its deeper philosophic content perhaps has been the failure to comprehend the unity of the *Lysis*" (1959, p. 17).[3] Other scholars argue that the *Lysis* does provide a positive teaching, but only if readers approach it with "the firm intention of following the Socrates of the *Lysis every step of the way*" (Penner and Rowe 2005, p. xi). Such an approach allows for the discovery that "there *actually are reasons* for each step he takes" (Penner and Rowe 2005, p. xi). With a careful and painstaking rendering, one might recognize a coherent unity in the work and from this find a positive teaching about friendship (Bolotin 1989; Curzer 2014; Gonzalez 1995; Hardin 1983; Nichols 2009; Pangle 2008; Penner and Rowe 2005; Rhode 2008; Tessitori 1990; Tindale 1984).

While agreeing that there is a positive teaching, these scholars diverge on what exactly that teaching is. In trying to assess the basis of a mutual and reciprocal relationship, these scholars fall into three camps that echo Aristotle's tri-fold division of *philia*.[4] The first interpretive camp argues that *Lysis* presents friendship as a reciprocal relationship rooted in a mutual self-interest. Each party reciprocates friendship to the other because of the personal benefit they receive from the relationship (Ludwig 2010, Vlastos 1981). The second camp, while recognizing the transitory weakness of friendship based wholly upon utility, nonetheless argue that some self-interest in friendship is necessary for reciprocal mutuality. Thus, they agree that friendship is rooted in dyadic self-interest, but that self-interest is not wholly based upon utility (Nichols 2009; Pangle 2008; Tindale 1984; Tessitori 1990). Fewer scholars have argued that the teaching within the *Lysis* is that friendship is a rejection of self-interest and utility found in the dyadic

relationship, proposing that friendship is a triadic relationship rooted in the mutual and reciprocal pursuit of the external good (Curzer 2014; Gonzalez 1996; Penner and Rowe 2005; Rhodes 2008). This third camp interprets Plato's teaching as being consistent with that of Aristotle, who defined *philein* as "wanting for someone what one thinks are good things for him, not what one thinks benefits oneself" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1380b35).

This essay argues that not only is there unity in Plato's *Lysis*, but that this unity only emerges when one puts the interpretive emphasis not on the title character but upon his older admirer, Hippothales. Socrates's paternalistic treatment of Hippothales[5] provides the vehicle of the Socratic teaching for future readers[6] through the careful uncovering of his hidden admiration of Lysis (204b7).[7] Following the laborious interpretive path focused upon Hippothales allows the reader to reflect upon the hidden presuppositions regarding friendship as they are foregrounded by Plato himself. The centrality of Hippothales becomes increasingly evident upon reflection on the movement of the dialogue, for Hippothales is the initiator of the tripartite transitions in the argument. First, he implores Socrates for help in his pursuit of Lysis, in which Hippothales displays three common errors of friendship. This request sets up the second section (207a–211e) in which Socrates, through a tutorial display (206c), corrects the errors of Hippothales. Finally, after this display, Socrates seizes upon Hippothales's request to provide "anything else" (206c2) and engages in the longest and most complex section, where he presents a teaching of the true foundation for friendship (212a–223b).

Hippothales's Problems and Seeking Socrates's Help (203a–206e)

Oddly, of the four interlocutors—Hippothales, Ctesippus, Lysis, and Menexenus—many scholars seem to overlook the central role of Hippothales within this dialogue. It must be remembered that it was Hippothales who called out to Socrates to "come here then . . . straight to us" (203b3).[8] The vehemence of the invitation indicates

the desire is not merely for the philosopher's company in the abstract but specifically to have him engage and offer his wisdom as the young men pass their "time with speeches which we would be pleased to share with you" (204a3). This shared *logoi* indicates a necessary mutual interaction among people in conversation, which suggests that Hippothales invites Socrates to join their conversation as an interlocutor to participate alongside the boys in their reasons (Bolotin 1989, p. 53). Socrates apparently understands the implications of this request, that he would come to teach, and takes the opportunity to turn the speeches toward the subject of education. He immediately asks "who teaches here" (204a5) and soon after demands the precise "terms [he is] to enter on" (204b). Yet, since his full statement is "I would be pleased to hear, first, what terms I'm to enter on *and* who the good-looking one is" (204b, emphasis added), there is a strong suggestion that Socrates is aware of the topic and what the boys are asking him to do.

The lesson that Hippothales seeks from Socrates becomes clearer when the old philosopher asks the young men who is the most beautiful (204b5). At this question, Hippothales's shyness, or perhaps fear (207b9), becomes apparent: he blushes and refuses to respond. Ctesippus, instead, stepping in to share what Hippothales does not, states, "How refined that you blush, Hippothales, and shrink from telling Socrates his name! And yet if he spends even a short time with you, he'll be tormented by hearing you speak it so frequently. Our ears, at any rate Socrates, he has deafened and has filled them full of Lysis" (204c5–d). In other words, Hippothales knows that, somehow, he is wooing his beloved wrongly but cannot understand why his emotions are not reciprocated and is embarrassed about his unrequited infatuation. After being told his failures, Hippothales states, "It's because of these things, Socrates, that I'm consulting with you" (206c). Because Socrates "has somehow been given . . . from a god [the ability] to quickly recognize both a lover and a beloved," (204c2) Hippothales hopes that his divine gift can provide helpful insights into his desired relationship with Lysis. Hippothales, then, understands himself as *the* recipient of a Socratic education on courtship, while the reader puts himself

in the position of the anonymous listener so he may receive his own Socratic education.

Through this distinct understanding of the centrality of Hippothales, the division of the conversation into three distinct sections assists in guiding the overall interpretation of the *Lysis*. The first section of the book is the opening meeting between Socrates, Hippothales, and Ctesippus (203a–206e). Within this section, Hippothales's request for assistance from Socrates lays out the rest of the dialogue as well as the primary Socratic teaching, for Hippothales states, "It's because of these things, Socrates, that I'm consulting with you. And if you have anything else, give your advice as to what to say in conversation or what to do so that someone might become endeared to his favorite" (206c1–4). Hippothales recognizes that his method in pursuing Lysis is ineffective and "because of these things" (206c), he needs Socrates's help. The recognition of his erroneous attempts lays the foundation for Socrates's discussion of friendship by exposing common misconceptions people have about friends. For Hippothales, as the immediate audience, Socrates will address these concepts as they apply to his specifically desired relationship with Lysis. While the reader can clearly see these errors in Ctesippus's account of Hippothales's methods to woo Lysis and Socrates, subsequent discussion of these errors leads to a larger cache of common misunderstandings about friendship.

The first error that Socrates notes is Hippothales's lack of *philia* in his *eros*. Hippothales is so myopically focused on *eros* toward his beloved that he does not recognize that there can and must be other ways to interact. Socrates, seeing Hippothales's *eros*, states, "I know not only that you love (*eros*), but also that you are far along the way in love (*eros*) already" (204b10). While Hippothales's passionate love is evident, it becomes apparent after just a few moments of conversation with Socrates, that this is only half of the equation. Socrates subtly indicates the missing component of *philia* when, talking about himself, he indicates he is "quite passionately in love (*eros*)" with the "acquisition of friends" (211e3). Here, according to Socrates, there is a necessary relationship between *philia* and *eros*, and the desire for friendship requires the

passionate pursuit, as one would a lover. Hippothales, however, fails to recognize this. He believes wrongly that *eros* is a sufficient basis for his courtship of Lysis.

Hippothales's second error is that he does not base his praise of Lysis upon Lysis himself. As Ctesippus notes, Hippothales praises Lysis's grandfather, family wealth, horses, ancient chariot race victories, and "things still more antiquated than these," such as the time an ancestor hosted and entertained Heracles, a son of Zeus (205c1–4). In his effort to honor Lysis, Hippothales praises nothing private about his beloved, but only extols his ancestry, which he possesses by mere accident. This attempt to praise Lysis via his ancestors is further evidence of Hippothales's *eros* without *philia*. One can passionately love something that he only has a glimpse of, or does not know well, but to have *philia*, one must know the individual to whom it is directed. Thus, the significance of attaching *philia* to *eros* is rooted in knowledge. If Hippothales appropriately understood this connection between *philia* and *eros*, he would cease praising only those things that are publicly known about Lysis. Rather, he would find a way to know Lysis more intimately and praise his distinct personal characteristics, but only those that are truly good.

The third error in Hippothales's songs to Lysis is his motivation. While Hippothales believes he is praising Lysis, Socrates shows that his praise is, in fact, self-adulation. As Socrates states, "Ridiculous Hippothales . . . these songs are directed most of all toward you" (205e). Socrates criticizes Hippothales's narcissism, aggrandizing himself through the object of his desire. Hippothales exhibits "his failure to recognize any good beyond the selfish possession of Lysis" (Gonzalez 1996, p. 85). This criticism insinuates that a relationship necessitates something beyond single-sided self-interest; somehow friendship cannot be based on the sole considerations of one side's selfish benefit. Therefore, to teach and guide Hippothales, Socrates enters a new discussion.

Socrates's Display: Conversing with Lysis (206e-211e)

Because of these erroneous actions by Hippothales, Socrates offers to "display for [him] what [he needs] to say to [Lysis] in

conversation" (206c5). This is critical to understanding the second section of the dialogue because, here, Socrates offers to "play" the lover, a position corresponding to Hippothales's. Thus, though he was only planning on "consulting" with Socrates, Hippothales may have gotten more than he asked. Socrates seems to want more than to teach just Hippothales. It appears that he also wants to display particular truths to a larger audience of how one is to talk to one's beloved and understand their relationship. This display for the benefit of Hippothales concludes with Socrates almost saying to Hippothales "this . . . is how one needs to converse with his favorite" (210e).

We should note that Socrates uses the term "converse with" even though, within Hippothales's songs about Lysis, there is no actual evidence of conversation between them, which is itself a suggestive lead on how Hippothales should treat Lysis. Because Hippothales forgets the necessary component of *philia* in his pursuit of Lysis, he needs to be reminded to converse directly with him—something Hippothales may never have done. Unlike Hippothales's relationship with Lysis, friendship requires mutual interaction and must involve conversations in which both parties are engaged as participants. Socrates further emphasizes the necessity of friendship through his display by beginning his conversation with Lysis and Menexenus, talking about their friendship. Because he will display to Hippothales how to converse with his beloved, Socrates is showing not only how one is to converse, but also about what one should converse. By beginning the conversation on friendship, he subtly shows Hippothales that this is, in fact, absent from his interaction with Lysis. In the third section of the dialogue, Socrates makes it clear that Hippothales is in error by stating, "Now is it possible for one who desires and who loves passionately (*eros*) not to love [as a friend] (*philia*) that which he desires and loves passionately?" (221b7–9). Clearly, Socrates is attempting to correct Hippothales's failure to combine friendship with love by showing that these concepts are related.[9]

In the second error, in which Hippothales believes that his praise of Lysis's family is synonymous with praise of Lysis himself, Socrates takes up the important topic of the role of family in his

discussion with Lysis. In particular, he notes that children are often treated worse than slaves (208b9). With this distinction, Socrates seeks to place a divide between Lysis and his parents.[10] He begins by equating friendship with one's desire for the other to be happy (207e7). Happiness, then, seems a possible goal of friendship. This hope, of course, raises yet another question: what does it mean to be happy? For his discussion with Lysis, Socrates equates happiness with "do[ing] what you wish, and . . . [not] prevent[ing] you from doing what you desire" (207e8–9) or complete lack of restraint. Lysis should immediately question this premise. While men, especially boys, often choose actions that are detrimental to their long-term happiness, they somehow also appear to fulfill short-term desires. Socrates brings out this distinction for Lysis by questioning why his parents prevent him from riding chariots (208a3), whipping mules (208b3), ruling himself (208c1), educating himself (208c13), and sewing (208d5). And at this, the attentive Hippothales learns the danger of praising his beloved via his beloved's family. If the family treats Lysis as a slave, any songs that praise his parents tacitly support Lysis's subservience to them. A lover/beloved relationship based on subservience is detrimental because it causes that relationship to be void of a type of equality that makes conversation possible.

Lysis himself seems to recognize that subservience may lead to the absence of *philia* because, in his conversation with Socrates, he maintains that he has a friendship with his parents. In particular, he argues that although slaves rule him, he also has a part in their rule. When Socrates asks if the attendant who rules Lysis is a slave, Lysis responds, "But of course. He's ours" (208c7). In this case, the plural possessive "ours" shows that Lysis, at least in his own mind, retains some type of equality with his parents by claiming joint ownership of a slave, even of the slave who rules over him. This is his attempt to claim independence through self-rule, for if it is his own slave who rules him and he rules the slave, then, in reality, he rules himself. Hippothales sings Lysis's praise with the assumption that all things should be understood as "ours" between Lysis and his parents. Thus, all praise of the parents is also meant to be praise

of Lysis. Socrates, however, seems to indicate that Hippothales and Lysis should not understand ownership of slaves as "ours" because only Lysis's father "voluntarily sets over [Lysis]" these rulers (208d3).

Finally, in Socrates's demonstration to Hippothales of how one should talk to a beloved, he addresses whether self-interest is a proper basis for such relations. Socrates does so by turning Lysis's thoughts to the reasons his parents do not grant him complete freedom and notes that, in some areas, such as music and writing, Lysis does have freedom. But, perhaps to get Lysis to deny the earlier definition, the freedom Lysis has, is, in fact, structured and is not "do[ing] what you wish, and . . . [not] prevent[ing] you from doing what you desire" (207e8–9). There is a right way and a best way to engage in one's desire. For example, writing does not truly involve "writ[ing] whichever letter you wish first and whichever one second" (209b4). Rather, writing is structured so that it sets conventionally appropriate boundaries for the author. While there are levels of freedom of a narrative, there also are structural rules that a narrator must follow. This same restriction applies to music. To make what could be called music, one cannot pluck any note in any order. Rather, a musician must follow a necessary structure and order of notes. Thus, Lysis's comment that he has freedom in these things because "[he] understand[s] these things" (209c4) is only correct if he understands the inherent structure and boundaries of these things. Only when one understands the rules can one successfully play music or write coherently.[11] This is reflective of friendship because it, too, has boundaries and rules that must be understood which, at times, seem contrary to one's freedom—e.g., sometimes self-sacrifice for the good of the friend is necessary. The commonality in each of these examples is that Lysis is unknowledgeable in these arts. Thus, Socrates's examination of Lysis attempts to show that knowledge is the basis of freedom and that knowledge includes the boundaries of the various areas of rule. Freedom in the cooking art entails knowledge of the appropriate amount of seasoning to add—i.e., not adding as much as one wishes, but as much as one knows is appropriate for the desired end of good food (209e7).

Socrates's example of a chef uses the verb *boulomai* or "wish" twice. The first mention of the word expresses the desire for the great king's son to be given "permission to throw whatever he wished into the sauce" (209e1). The second instance occurs when Socrates and Lysis give a demonstration and say that the great king would "allow us—though we grabbed salt by the handful—to throw it in if we wished" (209e6). The important point that Socrates is making here is that a truly wise man is one who can be trusted by others and has the freedom to deliberately act toward whatever he wills or wishes. However, such freedom can be destructive because boundaries of propriety found in the goal are necessary to constrain freedom. Thus, true wisdom is not, in fact, the freedom to do whatever one wishes, but rather, the knowledge of an art and the structural boundaries that exist within that art. The wise artisan is one whose wishes correspond to the constraints placed upon his art as necessary to achieve the beautiful form.

Socrates seeks to show that teleological limits are found in the nature of the object by emphasizing that ruling requires the need to think of others, not merely the desires of the ruler.[12] Socrates guides Lysis through this by emphasizing how Lysis lacks both: "But you rule (*archo*) over no one, Lysis, and you do nothing that you desire (*boulomai*)" (209a4). Then, by ever enlarged authority, Socrates shows the futility of unrestrained ambition, saying to Lysis, "As soon as he [your father] considers your thinking to be better than his own, on that day he will entrust both himself and his own things to you" (209c8). Socrates continues to appeal to Lysis's ambition and desire for this possible freedom by stating,

> But what about your neighbor? Doesn't he have the same standard concerning you as your father does? Do you suppose that he will entrust to you his own household to manage, as soon as he considers your thinking about household management to be better than his own? . . . And what about the Athenians? Don't you suppose they will entrust their affairs to you, as soon as they perceive that you think capably? (209c10–209d7)

At this point, one would expect Lysis, if he were thinking clearly, to pause and ponder whether there must be something else to ruling beyond mere knowledge. Socrates emphasizes this unrestricted free reign when he states, "Everyone, Greeks as well as barbarians, and both men and women, will entrust them to us; we will do in regard to these matters whatever we wish, and no one will voluntarily obstruct. Rather, we ourselves shall be free in regard to them and rulers over others and these things will be ours, for we shall profit from them" (210b2–8). Here, Socrates attempts to help Lysis recognize that there may be some natural limits outside one's self-interest, but the young man fails to see them.[13] This oversight leads to the necessary conclusion, "Then will we be friends to anyone and will anyone love (*philia*) us in regard to those matters in which we're of no benefit?" (210c7). Lysis's stark answer of "Surely not" (210c8) seems to lead to friendship of thin utility. To this end, the ability to benefit from something requires only wisdom of one's desires.

Yet, it is reasonable to wonder if Socrates does not intend this presupposition to be questioned. The sufficiency of wisdom, then, must be understood not merely as technical proficiency, but must involve virtue and therefore, as Socrates indicates, cannot be utilized for a selfish purpose. Under such a foundation of necessary benefit or selfishness, friendship would be transitory. A man will quickly exchange one friend for another on the basis of who will help him meet his desires most quickly. Loyalty would be both unknown and unheard of. Further, because both sides expect benefit from this friendship, everyone will deter Lysis from doing whatever he wishes as soon as those people are no longer benefitted. Such interactions would be like thieves and robbers whose loyalty ends when the job is finished, except Socrates recognizes that even that relationship requires some sort of justice beyond just pure selfishness (Plato, *Republic,* 351c7.)

Socrates's argument attempts to persuade Lysis that friendship, like rule, must be tied to the consideration of the other, and not merely to the self-interest of the ruler. In each of the three instances that Socrates presents—father, neighbor, or city—it is

easy for us to imagine the dire consequences involved if Lysis, or anyone else, acted purely in his self-interest. By presenting an argument that ends in the manifestly absurd conclusion that all people will entrust their property, or even themselves, to Lysis so that he may do whatever he wishes with no obstruction (210b5), Socrates hopes that the premise will be doubted and rejected. Socrates "has invited Lysis to betray the power and fantasy of a rebellious child" (Rhodes 2008, p. 31).

Socrates, then, hints of what will be the major teaching—the definition of friendship—when he states, "Then if you become wise, my boy, all will be your friends and all akin to you—for you will be useful and good" (210d1–2). Socrates introduces three critical but previously unmentioned parts to his argument.

First is Socrates's *reductio ad absurdum* of Lysis's naïve belief about wisdom. Rhodes argues that this presentation shows that "Socrates has just said something exceedingly foolish [because] Socrates, who is testing rather than teaching, ironically suggests a facile identification of *episteme* with *phronesis* (or *sophia*). However, the science required to handle animals and tools is not the wisdom needed to live virtuously" (Rhodes 2008, p. 30). Socrates indicates that true wisdom involves qualities that Lysis and Menexenus have not yet recognized nor viewed as important to friendship, as evidenced by their earlier debates on friendship (see 207c and note 20), that of having virtue and being good.

Second, he sets forth the concept of "akin" (*oikeion*).[14] People are friends with those to whom they are most similar in nature. The aim of friendship then is "that passionate love, friendship, and desire happen to be for what is akin" (221e6). It is worth noting that this sentence clearly ties together three different strands: that passionate love (*eros*), friendship (*philia*), and desire (*epithumia*) are combined in their goal. As Penner and Rowe suggest, "*Philia*, *eros*, and desire (desire for good) are so related to each other . . . *philia* and *eros* each have as their underlying structure the desire for good. That is, we will be proposing that *philia* and *eros* are particular forms of, or particular species of, the desire for good" (2005, 211–212). This is critical for addressing Hippothales's

errors, as he attempted to separate *eros* from *philia*. Additionally, this is a critical point in the discussion for it posits that friendship is not created; rather, it is found. Further, because nature is the disposer of the qualities necessary for friendship, nature not only shows that no man can befriend all, but it also provides a measurable standard to determine true and false forms of friendship.

Third, Socrates introduces a form of friendship that transcends mere usefulness, which he says is based upon the "useful and good" (210d1–2). This third point not only emphasizes the good but also subordinates the useful.[15] If one looks at the statements in a sense of parallelism, one sees that Socrates presents two types of relationships and two reasons for those relationships. Additionally, Socrates ties two results to two reasons for those results, if Lysis were to become wise. First, Socrates indicates that "all will be your friends," which is tied to the first reason, "for you will be useful" (210d2). This first pair shows, through a common belief, what is to be rejected, i.e., that utility is not a basis of friendship; thus, we are actually to reject the conclusion that all will be your friends. In the second parallel, Socrates states, "And all akin to you," which is based upon the reason of "for you will be . . . good" (210d2). Here, he is showing Lysis the legitimate foundation, for it is the possession of goodness that makes things akin. This presentation of two types of relationships and two reasons for these relationships indicates that the wise man will have those who find him useful and thus call him a friend. But this dynamic is only one direction of the relationship. The wise man may not find use in the people who call him a friend and, therefore, will not return the sentiment of friendship. However, the highest form of mutual friendship will be found in those who are naturally akin to his soul because they are both good men.[16]

The odd thing is that Lysis seems to grasp the concept of utility, but not of the good. This idea is most apparent when Socrates and Lysis are conversing privately, and Ctesippus asks about what they are speaking. But rather than sharing the true conversation, Socrates states, "this one here [Lysis] doesn't understand something about what I've been saying" (211d1).[17] This ultimate

shortcoming of Lysis becomes apparent to an individual who is learning that selfishness is not the basis of friendship, and, thus, part of the internal teaching of the dialogue begins to emerge as a warning directed toward Hippothales. Although Hippothales is incorrect in his method of wooing his beloved, there are hints that Lysis himself does not understand the higher form of friendship and that Hippothales should seek someone who is a worthy recipient of his passionate love and friendship.

"Anything Else" and the Socratic Conception of Friendship (212a-223b)

The first two sections of the dialogue raise the inherent tension addressed throughout the rest of the dialogue. Socrates sets up this teaching with a reminder of the connection between *eros* and *philia* as he states, "When it comes to the acquisition of friends (*philia*), I'm quite passionately in love (*eros*)" (211e3). By reminding the readers of Hippothales's first lesson, Socrates shows the continuation between the lessons presented and the external teaching that he will now present to the narrated audience. Thus, to enter into this discussion, Socrates poses a question of reciprocity in friendship. Because the final discussion of the previous section brought up the issue of selfishness, this inquiry is an appropriate starting point. The question posed is this: When one loves another, is friendship reciprocated, or unidirectional (212b1)?

Socrates poses the question to Menexenus: "When someone loves someone, which one becomes a friend of the other, the one who loves of the loved, or the loved one of the lover? Or is there no difference?" (212b1). In other words, is *philia* one-sided or mutual? While Menexenus first agrees that "both become friends of each other if only the one loves the other" (212b4), it becomes obvious to the reader that this is an absurd conclusion. There is an inherent recognition in the reader's mind that friendship must be reciprocal, and through Socrates's inquisitiveness, Menexenus eventually rejects the one-sided idea. He admits that a person cannot be a friend to another if either one hates the other. Yet, it is possible that someone is indifferent to another, though

they do not hate another. Through this definition, the indifferent person could still be a friend. Clearly, though, friendship requires activity, within the passions and actions. Therefore, the conversation concludes "neither is a friend unless they both love" (212d4), signifying the necessity of reciprocity on both sides.

At this point, Socrates attempts to question whether mutuality is a sufficient basis for friendship by asking whether someone can be a lover of wine, even if it does not love him or her back. Clearly, this is a straw man, for an inanimate object cannot respond or give love, and even animals cannot love in the way being discussed.[18] While these arguments may initially give an apparent reason for rejecting the conclusion of mutual love as necessary for friendship, they do so merely to show that mutuality is a necessary but not sufficient part of friendship. Socrates concludes that the truth of "what had been spoken escaped him [Menexenus] involuntarily" (213d4). Thus, the arguments presented against the mutuality of friendship may represent a false argument against it, but one will reach this conclusion only if the truth involuntarily escapes those who are intensely applying their minds. This becomes clear at the conclusion of the dialogue. Socrates admits that neither loved nor lover are friends (222e2). Noticeably absent is the idea of mutuality, or reciprocity. Such absence is not a poor oversight in the dialogue; rather, it is a subtle reminder that this argument has not been disproven and forms a necessary foundation for friendship.[19]

Further in the conversation, Socrates tries a new method to seek an understanding of friendship. He examines poetry. In this discussion, he mentions three available options: whether friendship is among likes, unlikes, or neutrals. In addressing friendship among likes, he concludes that the wicked cannot be friends (214c1–6). But Socrates notes that the poets hint not at the wicked being a friend to the wicked but, rather, at the good being a friend to the good (214d6). Thus, Socrates and Lysis conclude that the good cannot be a friend to the good because "those who are good [are not] at all friends to the good, since neither do they long for each other when absent . . . nor do they have any use for each other when present (215b8). This leads them to apparently conclude

"neither is what is like (*homoios*) a friend to its like (*homoioó*), nor is what is opposite a friend to its opposite." (216b10). This is, as is shown below, an invalid premise because it presumes that friends need something from the other to exist, either because of lack, which is fulfilled by the opposite of oneself, or of being the same such that one finds oneself in the other. Having seemingly rejected friendship between the like, Socrates then turns attention to whether "neither good nor bad becomes a friend to the good—that alone to it alone" (217a1). Because someone who is neither good nor bad is not completely opposite of the good, nor like the good, it is possible that such a relationship is the only legitimate form of friendship. However, Socrates recognizes that the inclination between them to be friends must be found in an external source, in some kind of evil (217b8; 219b). In other words, friendship is pushed upon us. As Socrates states, "No one when he is healthy is a friend to a doctor because of his health . . . . Rather, I suppose, the one who is ill because of his disease [would be his friend]" (217a7–9). This statement insinuates that fear is a motive of friendship. However, the dialogue also shows that fear retards friendship. Both Lysis and Hippothales are said to be afraid (207b1, 207b8). And Lysis, though he desired to join Socrates and the others in conversation, "shrank away" from coming until a mediator, Menexenus, first paved the way. Hippothales, upon Lysis's arrival, hid himself, because he was afraid of incurring Lysis's wrath. In these instances, fear inhibits each boy's pursuit of friendship. In this case, the "evil" that compels their actions is the fear of possible rejection. However, Socrates does not mean for this to be taken seriously, nor as the highest form of friendship.

Socrates understands that a kind of deficiency within one man compels that person to seek friendship in another. Yet, the utility of such friendship is not the highest form of friendship. Rather, it is friendship "in name only" because it is sought "for the sake of some other friend" (220a10). True friendship, then, is not that which one uses as a means to some other end. By contrast, a true friend is the object toward which those means are used. Thus, "what is really a friend is that itself into which all these so-called friendships

terminate" (220b3). Friendship is not for mere utility, for if friendships begin by external causes, then as Socrates recognizes, as soon as the evils cease, so would the friendship (221c1). Such conclusion leads to the re-consideration of friendship between the good, for it was rejected earlier because they would not need anything from one another; however, the reader now sees that friendship cannot be based on external fear or need.

A re-examination of this earlier section is in order because friendship between the good may in fact be possible. Socrates himself recognizes the need for reconsidering the earlier argument, stating, "Consider, then, Lysis, where we have gone astray. Are we somehow being deceived in the whole?" (215c4). Bolotin notes that this sentence can also be translated as "or are we being deceived by a certain whole" (1989, 37). If this certain whole is a misunderstanding of "like to like," then the rejection of the friendship of the good may be reconsidered by the attentive reader. Furthermore, the basis for rejection of friendship between the good is that the good, so far as they are good, are self-sufficient (215a10) and those who are self-sufficient do not need anything offered by another. Yet, in the end, rather than asserting that this is true, it is merely said that such reasoning "appear[s]" accurate (215b7). This word choice indicates there may be something missing from the argument that allows the reader to rehabilitate the possibility of like to be friends based upon some commonality, though perhaps not sameness. Further, the basis for rejecting this type of friendship is founded upon a critique of usefulness, for a good man is not "useful to such a one" like himself (214e5). Because each one is self-sufficient, each has no need of the other (215b6). It is interesting that Socrates's criticism of a friendship among the good is based upon usefulness—a concept that he has already sought to question earlier in the dialogue. In light of the idea that the argument against friendship amongst the good is based upon an already weakened premise, the reader should question whether this argument is, in fact, disproven.

We can rescue our misconception about "like" by a better understanding "that passionate love, friendship, and desire happen

to be for what is akin" (221e5). To Socrates, there must be a difference between the like and the akin because "if what is akin differs in some respect from the like, we might be saying something, in my opinion, concerning what a friend is" (222b4). An appropriate understanding of this relation determines a friendship that is not based on utility but, as Socrates showed earlier, on the similarities two people share. To be sure, two friends like Lysis and Menexenus are not wholly alike. However, they are akin in so many ways that they can debate each other over nearly imperceptible differences, such as their ages, wealth, nobility, or beauty (207c).[20]

But we might ask: in what manner are they similar? It is important to realize that Socrates makes a clear etymological distinction between what is merely alike and what is truly akin, for as he says, "If what is akin (*oikeó*) differs from what is like (*homoios*), we might be saying something" (222b4). While shortly after making this statement, Socrates poses that the distinction between alike and akin is arising because they "are drunk, as it were, from the argument" (222c2). This may seem to indicate that the long discussion has left Socrates and the boys arguing in circles without grounding and that such distinction is merely a final attempt to make sense of the nonsensical; however, it is critical to recall the importance of drinking and drunkenness in Platonic dialogues, for drunkenness has a philosophic purpose because it is notorious for lowering man's inhibitions in the discussion of truth.[21] Thereby, the reference to a drunken argument, far from being dismissive, ought to alert us to a key distinction.

Through distinguishing similarity into what is alike and what is akin, Socrates presents three forms of friendship.[22] Two forms, which though called friendship, are not the fullest expression of true friendship because they are based on being alike and focus on transitional external qualities that are subject to change. The first of these forms arises between those who are alike in temporal existence, such as age and habit. Such occurrences bring unity upon an individual's utility of passing interests and are exemplified within the dialogue by the boys who play knucklebones at the Palestrea. Just as interest in games slowly dwindle as other responsibilities

and interests arise, the individuals are drawn apart based upon a divergence in the same qualities that originally joined them together. In the second form, one can also be alike in status, nobility, and outward appearance, as are the families of Lysis and Hippothales. These people are friends because of their station in life, which provides commonality for interests and perhaps interaction based upon mutual self-benefit. Such friendship, however, is based upon utility, and the moment one part of the relationship is no longer bringing sufficient benefit to the other, the relationship disintegrates. This type of relationship can be rooted in something beyond oneself, such as within a family, business, or tribe, or even nationality, but at bottom this is based on selfish utility, which can quickly evaporate.

Finally, Socrates turns to the third form when he asserts that it is "necessary for us to love what is akin by nature" (222a6), establishing that being akin is grounded in something beyond alike in external qualities. Thus, the true form of friendship is grounded, not in these transitional external qualities, but by being akin in "some character of his soul . . . or some aspect of it" (222a4), as evidenced by Socrates and his students of philosophy who are akin to one another in their search of wisdom.[23].In this way, "what is good is akin to what is good" (222c5). Thus, this kind of friendship is beautiful because the good is beautiful (216d2). This type of friendship requires those involved to be endowed by nature with a soul that understands the good and finds beauty in that good.[24] These individuals can be friends only with those who are akin, and possession of wisdom precludes them from being friends with the foolish. However, merely having souls akin (*oikeion*) by nature is not in itself true friendship. Rather, it is only the foundation of friendship. Ultimately, true friendship also requires mutuality between the individuals. Thus, the necessary and sufficient basis of friendship is a mutual desire of the good between two people who are akin to one another.[25] Friendship must be rooted in something outside of each person, but still shared by each person. Penner and Rowe correctly interpret that the first friend in the *Lysis* is the good or the Platonic form of Good (2005, 275–279), because they

share a longing, not for something in the other, but for an unchangeable external good.

Initially, it may appear that Socrates rejects the akin as the basis for friendship because he states not only that "we have fallen back into those accounts concerning friendship which we rejected at first" (222d2), but also that "if we declare what is good and what is akin to be the same, then isn't only he who is good [a friend] to the good? . . . But yet on this point, too, we supposed that we had refuted ourselves" (222d8–11). Yet, the careful reader will recall that the basis of rejecting the good being like the good is utility (214e5). Clearly, then, Socrates understands that if utility were the sole basis of friendship, there would be no ability for the good to be friends to its like or its akin.[26] However, because the good who are akin to the good are friends due to the natural "character of their soul," their friendship remains plausible because it is the only type not based on utility.

Conclusion

Through this careful analysis of the narrative flow with a focus on the centrality of Hippothales, it becomes evident that Socrates uses the opportunity provided by Hippothales's misconceptions of friendship, particularly toward the object of his desires (Lysis), to show what those misconceptions are and that they are not unique and must be solved to understand true friendship. This careful analysis makes an important distinction on precisely what the link is between two friends. Socrates not only indicates that true friendship cannot be linked merely by utility, but it also cannot be linked by an exogenous commonality of being the same (*homoios*). Rather, the link of true friendship is found upon a shared teleology arising from natural akinship of the good. This establishes the basis for a connection, which must also be mutual. True philosophers must find and befriend those whose love of truth and virtue is pure, which in turn produces a soul that is akin to the philosopher. Friends, therefore, constantly encourage each other to pursue such good—"as iron sharpens iron, so one friend another" (Proverbs 27:17). Two people who possess the same nature can strengthen one another.

This has broad implications for the contemporary political community, as it calls for a unity that exists outside the individual actor. True friends mutually aim toward the same goal, which is grounded in their shared understanding of the highest form of good. By attempting to establish social cohesion on teleological goals, rather than base self-interest, the political community could reflect virtue friendship.[27] And even if unsuccessful, as Rhodes concludes, "The genuine philosophers and equivalent characters, if any there be, must keep trying [to follow Platonic *philia*], for no reform can be carried out by a depraved government that rules corrupted or duped citizens" (2008, 49).

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Notes

1. The epigraph is attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Philosophers* (V.I. 1972) as quoted in Montaigne *On Friendship* (I, p. 28), and it provoked Derrida's inquiry into the meaning of friendship (2006, p. vii). The haunting futility expressed in the above epigraph, which opens each chapter of Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, shocks the reader into the important contemplation of the meaning and even possibility of political friendship. The statement presents a stark contradiction, bestowing a title upon the hearer while simultaneously denying the existence of the category. While raising an important question, it is also noteworthy that the phrase itself is a seventeenth-century transcription error of Isaac Casaubon, who in 1616, failed to print the iota of "*Oi philoi, oedeis philos*" (Agamben 2009, p. 27). Agamben notes that he told Derrida the philological omission prior to the publication of *The Politics of Friendship*, and thus concludes that Derrida's own teaching required the preference for the paradoxical phrase (2009, pp. 27–28). Thus, the original version with the iota is recognized by Derrida as a conceivable interpretation, which he calls

the "recoil" version (2006, p. 209), would be more accurately translated as "he who has numerous friends, does not have a single friend." This rendering is more consistent with the broader understanding of Aristotle's teaching on friendship as *sunaisthesis* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1170b10-12; for a detailed analysis of *sunaisthesis,* see John von Heyking, *The Form of Politics*, 2016 pp. 35–57).

2. Digeser may only partially belong in this category; while he argues that the *Lysis* "concludes without any clear answer" (2016, p. 8) to the question of friendship, he does note there is still a lesson discovered through the questions and the quest. He notes that asking the question of friendship, not answering it, is the central theme. Despite "the inability of philosophy to nail down the meaning of friendship" and reaching only "empty conclusions," the inquiry of the dialogue "appears to be instrumental to the creation of a friendship" and thus "all readers of *Lysis* need to take seriously (even if they deeply disagree with) the possibility that philosophy is merely the handmaiden to friendship . . . and that it may be impossible to capture the essence (if there is one) of friendship" (2016, p. 286, fn 7).
3. For a more comprehensive discussion as to why the *Lysis* has not been adequately studied, tracing back to the nineteenth-century position that it was not even a Platonic dialogue, see "Some Observations Concerning Plato's *Lysis*" (Levin, 1971).
4. See Nehamas (2016, pp. 13–25) for an accessible discussion of this idea.
5. For a detailed discussion of the paternal relationship between Socrates and Hippothales, see Lockwood Jr. (2017, pp. 321–324).
6. It is necessary to remember that Platonic dialogues are plays, and that the *Lysis* specifically is a narrated dialogue (203a). Readers ought to derive an interpretive implication from the retelling to an unnamed audience. While the final scene is the apparent dissolution of the discussion (223b), it must be noted that the teachings do not stop, "for Socrates proceeds to tell the story after it happens" (Nichols 2006, p. 18) and "we the readers . . . have the advantage that we can go back over the dialogue . . . and the complexity of the *Lysis* is such that it certainly requires such re-reading" (Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 183).
7. As Rhodes notes "Socrates is practicing the midwife's art . . . [with] the 'pregnant' characters in the play and we ourselves need to be delivered of the virtue of friendly love" (2008, p. 26). It is important to note that Rhodes excludes Hippothales as one of the pregnant souls. Rhodes goes so far as to say that Ctessipus, Menexenus, and even Lysis are pregnant, but "Hippothales is too foolish to be counted among the 'pregnant'

souls" (2008, p. 26). In contrast, Belfiore argues that "Hippothales is represented as someone who has the potential to become a genuine lover." (2012, p. 99). While the debate may be moot if the primary audience is the reader and not a character, Belfiore's argument helps explain why Hippothales is an appropriate vehicle or tool for this lesson.

8. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Lysis* are from Bolotin's *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (1989), and all citations will use the standard Stephanus numbers.
9. This argument is developed further later in this essay.
10. Bolotin notes that "Socrates evidently intends to challenge Lysis's contentment with his parents and to arouse in him the spirit of independence" (1989, p. 88). Further, "[Socrates'] fondness for the young together with his questioning nature led him to become an enemy of sorts to that primary friendship, and primary authority, which is the family" (1989, p. 198). The accuracy of such insights appears evident in the charges that the Athenians brought against Socrates, i.e., corrupting the youth.
11. Bolotin makes a similar conclusion in stating, "Such freedom presupposes the necessity that one read and write in an orderly way" (1989, p. 91).
12. While this essay's intent is not necessarily to examine Socratic teaching on ruling, this author firmly believes that a careful examination of this section of the *Lysis* could be a fruitful endeavor for future study and would point to Penner and Rowe's careful analysis of this section as a good starting point (2005, pp. 12–26).
13. Ludwig notes that "Socrates immediately generalizes his claim in a way that brings out its absurdity" (2010, p. 137), indicating that an astute student would see such error and reject it.
14. The linguistic structure of this section is critical, as Penner and Rowe note, "Whatever else he is doing in this passage, i.e., as part of his strategy to deflate Lysis, Socrates is also making some play on the notion of *oikeites*, or more generally of belonging as a whole. One can presumably be forgiven for imagining that this might have something to do with the prominent role the *oikeion*—what belongs, understood as what is good—will take on in later stages of the argument of the *Lysis*" (2006, p. 24, n. 38). While Penner and Rowe note the importance of this interaction as well as the linguistic play upon the concept of "akin" combined with the later importance and the linking of the akin to the good, they oddly reject this as "imagination" necessitating being forgiven. However, as this essay notes, their first instinct and understanding is the better interpretive conclusion.

15. This interpretation is echoed by Bolotin who notes, "Though it is unclear precisely what he means here by 'good,' he at least suggests something admirable, something beyond the merely useful" (1989, p. 100).
16. Clearly both have to be good, for if they are similar and one is good, then by definition the other must be similarly good. This type of relationship then is not open to people who differ in character of the soul, making the possession of this type of friendship, particularly by the good, rare.
17. While Bolotin interprets this statement as "a friendly concealment of Lysis's fault" in wanting Socrates to inflict punishment on Menexenus for being contentious (1989, pp. 106–107), he also recognizes that the remark must be true, "for he does not say that Lysis confessed to not understanding something, but rather that Lysis did not understand" (1989, p. 107). Socrates could have concealed this fault by saying anything, but to conceal Lysis's fault by saying he did not understand something is not a way to honor him. Thus, there must be critical truth in this accusation against Lysis.
18. The question has been posed whether the love of wisdom, i.e., philosophy, can in fact be loved. While this may on the surface appear to be a difficulty for this interpretation, one must recognize that philosophy itself is what animates man, that erotic love for knowledge. It is, in this sense then, that philosophy can be truly loved and should not be considered an inanimate object.
19. This absence is also noted by Hoerber (1959, p. 21) and Bolotin (1989, p. 196).
20. It is interesting that the boys argue over so many issues, issues which may be petty. A further point to note, however, is they are arguing over things that are both subjective (beauty and nobility) and objectively quantifiable (age and wealth). Thus, it is true that they will debate over anything, even if there is a clear empirical answer. What is odd, however, is that they fail to debate critical virtues of wisdom and justice, and Socrates, possibly because of Menexenus's exit, does not bring the topic up (Gonzalez 1996, p. 71; Penner and Rowe 2005, p. 13).
21. The Platonic use of the discussion of drinking to loosen the tongue and allow opinions to freely flow can also be seen most clearly in *The Laws*. The Athenian stranger argues that allowing people to drink will lead them to display their true character and allow for proper education (Jowett, *Works of Plato*, p. 4.406).
22. It is important to note that, just as Socrates is showing a positive understanding, he is also making a subtle denial. As Bolotin notes, "Now by interpreting natural kinship as a kinship of the soul, Socrates is making an important, if implicit, denial. His silence about the most usual

kinship, which is the kinship within a family, implies that familial kinship is not truly by nature" (1989, p. 184).

23. To be akin means to be similar, but not identical. Thus, those who are akin have high level or even complete correspondence, but they do not have to be identical. The *Lysis* indicates that the plane which possesses "akin by nature" is a proper hierarchical teleology (for a detailed discussion of this concept, please see Penner and Rowe 2006, pp. 54–55, pp. 245–251). While all types of friendship discussed share a teleology, there must be a distinction: "The key is the distinction . . . between wanting/loving things in *themselves*, and wanting/loving them *in certain circumstances*" (Penner and Rowe 2006, p. 257).
24. Pangle echoes this conclusion, stating "the *Lysis* leaves room for . . . a friendship based on kinship between those who have become both wise and substantially self-sufficient, so they could in a clear sighted way cherish one another for what they are (2008, p. 322).
25. Hoerber notes "the highest type of *philia* is mutual (222a) and is developed among individuals who are "similar" (1959, p. 24).
26. My interpretation differs significantly from Penner and Rowe who argue that this section (222e) "is the final pay-off from the argument" (p. 182) recognizing that the radical conclusion is "that the good is what 'belongs' to everyone, and what everyone desires" (p. 181). While they recognize that this line of argument is not continued, they think we can not follow a conclusion that it should be rejected (i.e., "If Socrates, and Plato thought it simply false, why would they have wasted so much time on it?" (p. 181)), this leads them to conclude that *philia* is based upon self-interest. However, as I argue, if self-interest were the basis of friendship, then if we concur with Penner and Rowe's initial conclusion that the good belongs to everyone, then the conclusion would be that no one can be friends with anyone.
27. John von Heyking (2016) does distinguish political friendship from virtue friendship, recognizing that "political friendship, of course, is not so high as virtue friendship" (p. 9); nonetheless, the *sunaisthesis* of virtue friendship is the ideal form or measure of political friendship. Yet, Digeser goes a step further and argues that even political (or civic friendship) is itself an ideal. He notes "civic friendship does represent an ideal of political interaction . . ." and yet he "rejects seeing civic friendship as a way to knit a society together" (2016, p. 106). This would mean that personal friendship is an ideal form that civic friendship should emulate, but civic friendship, even if unachievable, is an ideal that justice should emulate. Thus, justice is the tertiary actualization but an imperfect approximation of personal friendship.