Études platoniciennes

More than a *Reductio*: Plato's Method in the *Parmenides* and *Lysis*

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Plato's *Parmenides* and *Lysis* have a surprising amount in common from a methodological standpoint. Both systematically employ a method that I call 'exploring both sides', a philosophical method for encouraging further inquiry and comprehensively understanding the truth. Both have also been held in suspicion by interpreters for containing what looks uncomfortably similar to sophistic methodology. I argue that the methodological connections across these and other dialogues relieve those suspicions and push back against a standard developmentalist story about Plato's method. This allows for a better understanding of why exploring both sides is explicitly recommended in the *Parmenides* and its role within Plato's broader methodological repertoire.

1   Plato's *Parmenides* and *Lysis* have at least this much in common: both have been demoted from the ranks of methodologically interesting dialogues. Gregory Vlastos saw the *Lysis* as a prominent exception to his theory of the elenchus in the early dialogues, and Richard Robinson argued that the *Parmenides* was written as a self-conscious Platonic *reductio* of his method of hypothesis. They are usually thought to be written at different periods in Plato's career for different purposes, but they have much more in common than is standardly assumed. I will argue that it is no coincidence that both dialogues have been singled out as methodological aberrations; both in fact employ the very same method that I call 'exploring both sides'. But rather than understanding these as negative methodological paradigms, we should understand both dialogues as highlighting a positive use of this method for encouraging further inquiry and discovering the truth. Plato thematizes

exploring both sides throughout the *Parmenides*, and its connections to the *Lysis* as well as other dialogues suggest that it has a positive role to play in the Platonic system. While it is true that Plato is worried about the misuse of related argumentative techniques, understanding the positive lesson from these dialogues will help us see what is problematic with these nearby methodological cousins as well as what is philosophically useful about the genuinely Platonic method of exploring both sides.

2 Robinson set the stage for contemporary scholarship on Platonic methodology with his influential monograph *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*. Robinson defends a developmentalist interpretation of Platonic dialectic, where Plato simply changed his mind from one period to the next about the best method for doing philosophy: first the elenchus, then the method of hypothesis, and finally collection and division. But what Robinson left out is as influential as his positive picture. The first edition did not discuss the *Parmenides* despite its containing an extended discussion of method and the use of hypotheses. Robinson added a chapter on the *Parmenides* in the second edition only to argue that "the methodological aspect of the *Parmenides*... seems to be, like its other aspects, bewildering, sceptical, and depressing" (280). To the contrary, I will argue that the *Parmenides* has a positive affinity with a striking number of other dialogues. This tells against Robinson's developmentalist picture and illuminates the positive value of the method in the *Parmenides*.

3 Again, Robinson's view is that the *Parmenides* is an elaborate Platonic *reductio* of the method of hypothesis. It marks his abandonment of the method of the so-called 'middle' dialogues and his transition to collection and division in his later works. Thus Robinson gives the methodological counterpart to the standard developmentalist story about Plato's metaphysics, where the *Parmenides* marks a transition away from the old theory of forms. The developmentalist story of Plato's metaphysics has duly received significant pushback, but less so for Robinson's story about his methodology. Methodological developmentalism deserves greater scrutiny, and the *Parmenides* in fact provides a useful case study for uncovering important methodological connections across dialogues that exemplify different stages of Plato's development on Robinson's view. Elsewhere I have argued that the *Parmenides* explicitly recommends the method of exploring both sides, a unique platonic method that has been overlooked in recent Platonic scholarship.[1] This same method can be found across several dialogues, including but not limited to the *Cratylus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Lysis*.

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[1] See E. Rodriguez, "'Pushing Through' in Plato's *Sophist*: A New Reading of the Parity Assumption." *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* (forthcoming). I make this case at greater length in my manuscript "A Long Lost Relative in the *Parmenides*? Plato's Family of Hypothetical Methods."

4   The *Lysis* is perhaps the most surprising on this list and for this reason will be my main focus here. It is often taken as one of Plato's 'early' dialogues, written much earlier in Plato's career than the *Parmenides*. I will not be taking a stand on chronology here, but I will suggest that the difference in method between the *Lysis* and *Parmenides* is much less clear-cut than has been assumed. The *Lysis* is usually thought to showcase the Socratic elenchus, but I will argue that, like the *Parmenides*, it employs the distinct method of exploring both sides.[2] In fact, this may be less surprising than it appears at first; Vlastos flagged the *Lysis* as an exception to his influential take on Socratic methodology.[3] The connections I will be drawing with the *Parmenides* and other dialogues will help explain why Vlastos was right to see the *Lysis* as a poor fit for his understanding of the elenchus but wrong to dismiss the *Lysis* in the same way that Robinson dismissed the *Parmenides*.

§1: The Method

5   The method of exploring both sides is thematized throughout Plato's *Parmenides*. This is most explicit when Plato has the character Parmenides recommend to Socrates that he employ the method by positing a hypothesis, exploring the consequences, then exploring the consequences of the *contradictory* hypothesis as well (*Parmenides* 135c5–136a2). At Socrates' request, Parmenides goes on to display this very method in the second half of the dialogue. Exploring both sides, then, is defined by the following features:

  (a) a set of what are at least taken to be exclusive and exhaustive claims
  (b) an independent consideration of each claim
  (c) an aim of seeing which claim is true

6   The method appears not only in Parmenides' display, but also in the first half of the dialogue. Plato thematizes a similar structure in the relationship between Parmenides and Zeno as described in the initial framing and even sneaks in an application of the method just before Parmenides' explicit recommendation. Socrates is ready to give up in light of the serious objections that Parmenides has

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[2] There is little consensus on what the elenchus consists in. I do not believe that the method of exploring both sides can be usefully identified with the elenchus, but that is not to say they are entirely separate; it may be that one is best understood as a part or a species of the other. For examples of interpreters who see the elenchus at play in the *Lysis* (despite their differing understandings of the elenchus) see R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*. 2d ed, Oxford, 1962; H. Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Oxford, 2000, 26–29; D. Wolfsdorf, *Trials of Reason: Plato and the Crafting of Philosophy*. Oxford, 2008, 148–57, and F. Renaud, "Humbling as Upbringing: The Ethical Dimension of the Elenchus in the *Lysis*." In *Does Socrates Have a Method?: Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and beyond*, edited by G. A. Scott, 183–98, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

[3] See pp. 1, 31–32 of G. Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*. Edited by M. Burnyeat, Cambridge, 1994.

raised, but Parmenides stresses that, while there are problems with positing the existence of forms, there are equal if not greater problems with *denying* their existence (*Parmenides* 135b5–c2). This shows at least one reason in favor of exploring *both* sides. If you just follow the consequence of one hypothesis and find problems, you may end the discussion prematurely thinking that you have a clear-cut *reductio* of the hypothesis in question. But if you look to the contradictory hypothesis and find problems there as well, then you no longer have a clear-cut *reductio* for either side. Instead, you are in a well-motivated *aporia* that calls out for further inquiry.

7   Elsewhere I have suggested that Plato thematizes this very aspect of the method at greater length in the *Sophist*.[4] While the method of collection and division displayed at the beginning and end of the dialogue received plenty of attention, the method of the central discussion of being and not-being has been relatively neglected. There too Plato employs the same method of exploring both sides. There is a pattern of the interlocutors using the method with increasing levels of regimentation and increasingly positive results: first as a way of constructing a well-motivated *aporia* and encouraging further inquiry, but finally as a way of resolving that *aporia*.

8   But the method is not just a way of motivating and ultimately resolving *aporiai*. It has a special application for testing candidate first principles. On my view, this is part of the motivation for employing the method in the *Parmenides*. When employing the so-called 'method of hypothesis' in dialogues such as the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* an essential step is finding a 'higher' hypothesis from which the initial hypothesis can be derived. But when dealing with first principles there is nowhere 'higher' to go, nothing more fundamental in the order of explanation that entails the principle in question. For that reason it is useful to employ the 'lateral' move of exploring both sides, looking to the contradictory hypothesis as a way of testing its truth.

9   This, then, is what Plato has the character Parmenides recommend when he recommends exploring the consequences of both a hypothesis and its contradictory. In Parmenides' display this involves exploring the hypotheses 'there is one' and 'there is not one', though it ends in *aporia* with unacceptable consequences found on either side.[5] The hidden application just before this is

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[4] E. Rodriguez, "'Pushing Through' in Plato's *Sophist*: A New Reading of the Parity Assumption."

[5] The method here is sometimes thought to include an eightfold procedure, including instructions for examining several elements of each hypothesis in relation to one another. In my manuscript "A Long Lost Relative in the *Parmenides*? Plato's Family of Hypothetical Methods" I argue that these steps are not a necessary feature of the method, nor are they strictly followed in the dialogue itself, but rather are part of Parmenides' recommendation for systematically testing different candidate principles. Another potential concern addressed in that piece has to do with the language of γυμνασία or training; I argue that the method is intended as more than just a training regimen and is a genuine method of inquiry.

when there are unacceptable consequences for both 'forms exist' and for 'forms do not exist'. Several pairs of candidate principles about being suffer a similar fate in the *Sophist*. For example, the pluralist hypothesis on the one hand, 'being is two (or more)', and the monist hypothesis 'being is one' on the other. The same can be said for the so-called 'Battle Between Gods and Giants' that is ultimately cashed out in terms of the giants claiming 'all things change' and the friends of forms claiming 'all things rest'. They finally find a way of splitting up the alternatives at hand that does not lead to trouble in the positive resolution, one where the options are not only taken to be but genuinely are exclusive and exhaustive; 'all kinds combine' and 'no kinds combine' lead to problems, but 'some kinds combine and some do not' paves the way for a better understanding of being and not-being.[6]

10   The same method plays a central role in the *Cratylus*. The entire conversation is an exploration of the claim 'names are by convention' on the one hand and 'names are by nature' (that is, not by convention) on the other. Here too they do not yet come to a definitive answer on either side, but Socrates does encourage Cratylus to continue the search while he is still young, just as he had been encouraged by the much older Parmenides in the *Parmenides* (ἔτι νέος εἶ: *Cratylus* 440d5, *Parmenides* 135d5–6). And in this context too the importance of first principles is emphasized. Socrates mentions how, in geometrical diagrams, an otherwise consistent figure might be thrown off by one mistake at the beginning that everything else is made to be consistent with. Thus he maintains: "Everyone must reason extensively about the starting point of any affair, and there must be an extensive investigation into whether or not it is correctly taken for granted" (*Cratylus* 436d4–7).[7]

11   Thus, the method of exploring both sides appears in a surprising number of dialogues throughout Plato's corpus.[8] For the rest of this essay, however, I will

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[6] While it is true that, more often than not, this method leads to *aporia* when employed in the dialogues, it is worth stressing that this is not always the case. The *Sophist* is an important complement to the *Parmenides* not only because its final application does lead to a positive suggestion, but also because the earlier progression in the dialogue diagnoses some of the problems that may lead one to *aporia* in the first place (for example, the fact that 'all things rest' and 'all things change' are not in fact exhaustive alternatives as they are initially taken to be). I discuss this point in further detail in "'Pushing Through' in Plato's *Sophist*: A New Reading of the Parity Assumption" and provide a diagrammatic summary of the several applications of exploring both sides in the appendix to that piece.

[7] All translations of Plato are my own from the most recent OCT volume.

[8] Other candidates for exploring both sides include but are not limited to: *Alcibiades* 117d*ff*, *Hippias Major* 294a*ff* & 301d*ff*, *Ion* 542a–b, *Phaedo* 70c–72e, *Phaedrus* 245d*ff*, *Theaetetus* 188b*ff* & 191e*ff*.

focus on his use of the method in the *Lysis* and what this might tell us about the *Parmenides* and about Plato's method more broadly.

§2: Exploring Both Sides in the *Lysis*

12 Robinson does not express any of the same hesitation about the seriousness of Plato's method in the *Lysis*. He readily groups it with the so-called 'early' dialogues and notes its widespread use of *modus tollens* style arguments. The only abnormality he points out is that the arguments are unusually short (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 24–25). And Robinson is not the only one: in more recent studies too scholars have systematically considered the *Lysis* as a paradigm example of an 'early' definitional dialogue that exemplifies the Socratic elenchus.[9] The exception is Vlastos who, as mentioned above, worried that the *Lysis* does not depict Socrates testing his interlocutors' views; as he puts it: "Socrates proposes all the theses which are discussed and refutes all the theses which are refuted" (*Socratic Studies*, 31). In the end, I think that Vlastos is right that the dialogue does not feature a simple elenctic examination. I also think that Robinson and others are right to take the method seriously. The reason, I will argue, is that the dialogue systematically employs the method of exploring both sides, the very same method as the *Parmenides*.[10]

13 The method gets underway in earnest when Socrates begins questioning Menexenus about how to go about acquiring friends.[11] He sets up the discussion as follows:

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[9] See n.2 above. I will not here be taking a stand on how the elenchus is best described, or how many so-called 'elenctic' dialogues contain the method of exploring both sides, but it is worth stressing that the elenchus as traditionally understood does not require an independent examination of both sides, while this plays a systematic role in the *Lysis*.

[10] A. Begemann posits a close connection with the *Parmenides* in *Plato's Lysis: Onderzoek naar de plaats van den dialoog in het oeuvre*. Buyten en Schipperheijn, 1960. To my knowledge, however, the possibility of such a connection has not yet received the attention it deserves in the recent literature.

[11] The Greek adjective φίλος and its cognates (the verb φιλέω and the abstract noun φιλία) are notoriously difficult to translate into English. They tend to be significantly broader and more versatile than their English stand-ins, though each has its own complexities. David Robinson gives a helpful overview in "Plato's *Lysis*: The Structural Problem." *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986): 63–83. He suggests that φιλέω can mean 'liking' in one sense and 'being fond of' in another, that φίλος can have the passive sense of being 'dear' to someone or the reciprocal sense of 'friend', and that φιλία almost always denotes reciprocal friendship. As a result, the types of relations described with this word can vary widely between what we would call friends, partners, lovers, or even inanimate objects of affection. For the sake of consistency I have opted to translate the substantive adjective φίλος as 'friend', the abstract noun φιλία as 'friendship', and forms of the Greek verb φιλέω with forms of the English verb 'love', but the reader should keep in mind the connections and complexities in the corresponding Greek. John Dillon helpfully points out to me that it may not be a coincidence that the method of exploring both sides is used in a discussion of how to go

> So tell me: whenever someone loves someone else, which one becomes a friend of which,[12] the person loving of the person loved, or the person loved of the person loving, or is there no difference?
>
> Καί μοι εἰπέ· ἐπειδάν τίς τινα φιλῇ, πότερος ποτέρου φίλος γίγνεται, ὁ φιλῶν τοῦ φιλουμένου ἢ ὁ φιλούμενος τοῦ φιλοῦντος· ἢ οὐδὲν διαφέρει; (212a8–b2)

14   The way that Socrates sets up the question implies that he is giving Menexenus what are at least taken to be a set of exhaustive alternatives for who becomes friend of whom when one loves another. He goes out of his way to include a third option of there being no difference (which, as the interlocutors soon find, can be spelled out in one of two ways: there is no difference if either both the lover and the loved become friends, or neither the lover nor the loved become friends). He also explicitly raises the question of exhaustivity after raising problems for each option in turn:

> "What then are we to pronounce," I said, "if neither the lovers will be friends nor the ones being loved, nor those both loving and being loved? Are we to say that there are still others beyond these that become friends to one another?"
>
> "No way Socrates," [Menexenus] said, "I at least can't easily think of any."
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> Τί οὖν δὴ χρησώμεθα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, εἰ μήτε οἱ φιλοῦντες φίλοι ἔσονται μήτε οἱ φιλούμενοι μήτε οἱ φιλοῦντές τε καὶ φιλούμενοι; ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ ταῦτα ἄλλους τινὰς ἔτι φήσομεν εἶναι φίλους ἀλλήλοις γιγνομένους;
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> Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐ πάνυ εὐπορῶ ἔγωγε. (213c5–9)

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about acquiring φίλοι; these intricacies allow for Plato to construct compelling *aporiai* that encourage further inquiry on the subject (see the next section for more on this point).

    [12] Another translation issue arises in interpreting the φίλος + genitive and φίλος + dative constructions that are frequent in the dialogue. A survey of their use throughout the *Lysis* shows that Plato frequently switches back and forth between the two. A given argument usually uses just one construction or the other: Socrates' initial discussion with *Lysis* consistently uses the dative construction (210c5–d3) as does the later discussion of whether like is friend to like (214b3–216b9) while his initial discussion with Menexenus here uses the genitive construction (212a5–d1). But in this case, they switch to the dative construction (212d4–213b4) only to switch back to the genitive (213b5–c5) and then sum everything up with the dative once again (213c8). Similarly, a later proposal that the neither good nor bad is friend of the good is expressed first with the genitive construction (216c2–d5), then with the dative (216e7–217a2), then with the genitive again (217b4–5). I have translated the genitive construction 'friend of' and the dative construction 'friend to' to track the Greek. Since my focus is on the method of exploring both sides and the *aporiai* it brings about (even if a closer reading reveals an implicit resolution within the text), I will not take a stand on the precise implications of either construction or on whether we are meant to understand a distinction between the two. David Glidden is sensitive to this variation in "The *Lysis* on Loving One's Own." *The Classical Quarterly* 31 (1981): 39–59. He notes that both constructions can be used with either a passive or an active sense, and argues that there is no philosophical lapse or intentional slippage here on Plato's part (40 n.17).

15   The first point I want to stress is that Socrates and Menexenus agree that there are no other options for who becomes friend to whom. This shows that the interlocutors do in fact take these options to be exhaustive. Given that, as discussed, they are also exclusive,[13] the conversational setup meets the first criterion for a case of exploring both sides: a set of what are at least taken to be exclusive and exhaustive claims. The second point worth noticing is that we have a different description of the third option this time around.

16   The third option as Socrates first lays them out, the one that Menexenus initially endorses, is 'there is no difference [in who is friend of whom when one loves another]' (212b2–3). Yet at the end the option is 'those both loving and being loved [are friends]' (213c6–7). This is puzzling not only because it is different, but also because it appears to leave out Menexenus' initial answer, that when one loves another both are friends to one another. It could be that this time the option is seen as redundant with the first two, since if both are friends when one loves another, then it will of course also be the case that the lover is a friend and that the loved is a friend. But a closer look at the way the conversation actually progresses shows that the first way of describing the options more closely resembles the actual progression of the conversation, one that does in fact explore each of an exclusive and exhaustive set of claims (conditional, that is, on the possibility of one loving another) with an eye towards which one is true.[14] I will argue that the mismatch in the way that Plato has Socrates characterize the options at the end is just one way in which he draws attention to the importance of considering exhaustive alternatives when exploring both sides.[15]

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[13] Though ambiguous as stated, it is clear from the course of the conversation itself that the first two options are interpreted as, first, the claim that only a lover will be a friend and, second, the claim that only the one being loved will be a friend. This is because they have already ruled out the possibility that both the lover and the loved will be friends (212b3–d1). See below for further discussion of this point.

[14] David Robinson raises an intriguing possibility in "Plato's *Lysis*: The Structural Problem" when he suggests that this description at the end of the argument could be a strategy for highlighting three different senses of φίλος: an active sense, a passive sense, and a reciprocal sense. Plato may in fact be drawing attention to this possibility by having Socrates sum up the conversation in this way. It is plausible that the *aporia* is caused at least in part by a slippage between a passive use of φίλος (best translated as 'dear') that can apply whether or not something is loved in return, and a reciprocal use (best translated as 'friend') that does imply mutual love. My view of the structure and underlying force of the *aporia* is consistent with this diagnosis of the underlying problem and of Socrates' summary but does not depend on it (see below). Robinson himself rejects this reading, though his reasoning is not conclusive; he suggests that Plato would have communicated the ambiguity more straightforwardly if he were aware of it (70–72, 81).

[15] Another possibility for interpreting the third option as described at the end of the argument is that οἵ has dropped out of the text before φιλούμενοι at c7. Then the option would read: "both those who love and those who are loved [are friends]'. A scribe could have easily dropped the οἵ due to the above-mentioned concern that this appears redundant (though again, I will argue below

17   As mentioned above, Menexenus initially endorses the first option, 'there is no difference'. Socrates asks Menexenus to clarify, and Menexenus quickly goes along with his first suggestion: "And I said 'What do you mean? Do both then become friends of one another if only one loves the other?' / 'It seems so to me', he said" (212b3–5). Socrates implies in his question that there are multiple ways to flesh out the 'there is no difference' option and hints at the problem with this first way of doing so. Surely in cases of unrequited love it is a stretch to call both the lover and the loved friends (as in the case of Hippothales and Lysis). This soon leads to a second alternative: perhaps 'there is no difference' in that *neither* the lover nor the loved becomes a friend unless both love one another: "Then it now seems to us differently than it seemed before. For at that point, [it seemed that] if one of them loves, both are friends; but now [it seems that] if both do not love, neither is a friend. / I'm afraid so." (212d1–4). This time Socrates immediately raises a worry about things incapable of returning love nonetheless being capable of being a friend. Thus they abandon the 'there is no difference' idea in favor of the second option, 'the loved is friend to the lover' and finally the first option 'the lover is friend of the loved'.[16] Yet Socrates undermines both options with the same worry, for either way it would be possible to be a friend of one's enemies and an enemy of one's friends (given a few further assumptions of course). He also emphasizes that he is only talking about what we can infer from the fact that one loves another whether or not they are loved in return (212c5–6, e7). This shows that the discussion does in fact involve exclusive and exhaustive alternatives for who is a friend of whom when one loves another: the lover, the loved, neither, or both.

18   Because it does involve an exclusive and exhaustive set of claims it meets the first condition for exploring both sides. It also meets the second two conditions: each alternative is considered independently, and the aim throughout is seeing which claim is true. One effect of the mismatch in the final summary, then, is to draw the reader or listener's attention to this application of exploring both sides. It raises the question of whether or not these are in fact all of the options and, if so, where the discussion might have gone wrong. Taken in the context of the dialogue as a whole, it draws attention to this very method of exploring both sides that is employed throughout. The initial discussion with Menexenus ends just after this

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that it is not given the way the conversation actually proceeds). Yet if this were the case, then Socrates would still be leaving out the second option discussed in the text, that neither the lover nor the loved becomes a friend (for instance, if one thought that reciprocal love were required, as the third option without the οἴ seems to suggest). Either way, then, an option as discussed in the text is left out of this final recap and there is a mismatch between the actual conversation and the way it is summarized.

[16] 212e6–7 and 213b5–6 respectively. Note the chiastic structure as is common in Plato. Thornton Lockwood argues that chiasmus or ring composition plays an important role in the dialogue as a whole in "Do Lysis' Parents Really Love Him?: Non-Argumentative Arguments in Plato's *Lysis*." *Ancient Philosophy* 37 (2017): 319–32.

point; Socrates suggests that they may not even be going about the conversation in the right way and an intensely focused Lysis blurts out his agreement. But rather than abandoning the method of exploring both sides in what follows they apply it to a new set of exclusive and exhaustive claims.

19   First they decide to examine a saying from Homer that 'god always draws like to like' as a statement about who is a friend to whom. Socrates' question is whether Homer and others who say similar things "speak well" (214b6). But in what follows, the options considered are more intricate than a simple 'yes' or 'no'. They begin by investigating whether the statement is always true, but then consider the possibility that it is only sometimes true.[17] They finally consider another saying by Hesiod suggesting that the Homeric statement is *never* true and that only the unlike are friends to one another (215c3–216b9). Once again each claim is considered independently with an eye towards which one is true, and once again they encounter significant difficulties on each side. As before, Socrates' solution is to split up the space of possibilities in a new way.

20   This new, and final, division of the possibilities at hand stems from the observation that they might need to consider the neither good nor bad in addition to the good and the bad. This leaves the interlocutors with the following set of what are taken to be exclusive and exhaustive alternatives, some of which have already been covered in the discussion:

   i.   The good is friend to the good (said to have already been ruled out at 216d7–e1)
   ii.   The bad is friend to the bad (said to have already been ruled out at 216d7–e1)
   iii. The good is friend to the bad (said to have already been ruled out at 216d7–e1)
   iv.   The neither good nor bad is friend to the bad (ruled out at 216e4–5)
   v.   The neither good nor bad is friend to the neither good nor bad (ruled out at 216e5–7)
   vi.   The neither good nor bad is friend to the good (examined at 216e5*ff)*

21   These six claims are in fact exhaustive as long as being a friend is taken as a symmetric relation.[18] But they are at least taken to be exhaustive, as is clear after they finally rule out the sixth claim above and are at a loss. If they took there to be another possibility, then the next step would simply be to explore that one in turn.

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[17] For example, only true for the good (214b7–c6, though they ultimately decide that the bad are not in fact like one another), or only true for the like (in goodness) insofar as there is some difference (215a4–c2).

[18] If it is not symmetric, as countenanced in the initial discussion with Menexenus, then there will be at least three more possibilities (depending on further assumptions).

Just as he did at the summary of the initial discussion at 213c5,[19] Socrates asks what they are to do with the argument:

> What then can we still do with the argument? Or is it clear that there's nothing left? I need to go back over all that's been said, then, just as clever men in the courts. For if neither the loved nor the loving nor the like nor the unlike nor the good nor the familiar nor however many others we have gone through—for I at least don't still remember on account of the sheer number—again if none of these is a friend, I no longer have any idea what I should say.

> Τί οὖν ἂν ἔτι χρησαίμεθα τῷ λόγῳ; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι οὐδέν; δέομαι οὖν, ὥσπερ οἱ σοφοὶ ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις, τὰ εἰρημένα ἅπαντα ἀναπεμπάσασθαι. εἰ γὰρ μήτε οἱ φιλούμενοι μήτε οἱ φιλοῦντες μήτε οἱ ὅμοιοι μήτε οἱ ἀνόμοιοι μήτε οἱ ἀγαθοὶ μήτε οἱ οἰκεῖοι μήτε τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα διεληλύθαμεν—οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἔτι μέμνημαι ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους—ἀλλ' εἰ μηδὲν τούτων φίλον ἐστίν, ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκέτι ἔχω τί λέγω. (222e1–7)

22 For a third time, then, we see the same structure of exploring both sides with a new set of what are taken to be exclusive and exhaustive possibilities. Each time Socrates introduces new ways of complicating the picture and bringing in new possibilities. In fact, in the lengthy discussion of (vi) above he goes on to develop more ways to qualify that claim, that the neither good nor bad is friend to the good because of the presence of the bad, though a presence that has not yet made it bad, and for the sake of the good.

23 Thus we see three separate applications of exploring both sides that span the entire second half of the *Lysis*. Two more points are worth mentioning briefly. First, the evidence from the *Lysis* also fits with the idea discussed above that Plato develops this method specifically for testing first principles. The general principles they are considering about the like and the unlike among others are not implausible candidates for the starting points of an explanatory system (including an explanation of friendship).[20] Socrates even brings up first principles explicitly in the context of discussing the 'for the sake of' relation. He suggests that there must be some 'first friend' (πρῶτον φίλον) to ground any such claim. And he explicitly calls this 'first friend' a first principle or ἀρχή (219c6).

24 Second, as in the case of the *Parmenides*, once we understand the prevalence of exploring both sides in the *Lysis* we can also see it highlighted in the dialogue's framing. Socrates' very first interaction with Lysis and Menexenus involves various disputes concerning what are taken to be exclusive and exhaustive alternatives. When Socrates asks which one of Lysis and Menexenus is older, they say that they in fact argue about this (ἀμφισβητοῦμεν, 207c2). This implies at least

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[19] Interestingly, these are the only two uses of χράω in the dialogue.

[20] In fact, Parmenides mentions likeness and unlikeness as candidates for the method of exploring both sides at *Parmenides* 136b1–5, and sameness and difference are two of the so-called 'greatest kinds' in the *Sophist* (254e2–255e1).

two independent arguments: one that Menexenus is older and one that Lysis is older. The same goes for the question of which one of them has a nobler family and which one is better looking. For the final dispute, Socrates makes the same move he uses throughout the dialogue of introducing a new option that they might not have considered before: he suggests that neither of the two is richer than the other. Since they are friends and hold everything in common, the two of them must be equally rich (207b8–d4). On a second reading of the dialogue, the effect this has is to once again highlight the problem of finding a truly exclusive and exhaustive set of claims to work with in the first place.[21]

§3: A Methodological *Reductio*?

25   Since Plato has his interlocutors use the method of exploring both sides throughout both the *Lysis* and the *Parmenides* (and elsewhere), we should take this aspect of both dialogues seriously. Again, this tells against Richard Robinson's methodological developmentalism as well as his specific claim that method of the *Parmenides* is Plato's *reductio* of his hypothetical method. Robinson himself is inconsistent in simultaneously maintaining that we should take the method of the *Lysis* seriously and that we should reject the method of the *Parmenides*. But there is another option available: Robinson could suggest that the *Lysis* also contains a methodological *reductio*, in this case a *reductio* of Plato's elenchus.

26   In fact, this is close to Vlastos' own view. He calls the *Lysis* 'post-elenctic' and suggests that it marks Plato's disenchantment with the elenchus:

> Socrates ditches the elenchus. It is a reasonable conjecture that it is Plato himself who has now lost faith in the elenchus and extricates his Socrates from it, allowing him to move out of it quietly, without comment, without saying that he is doing so, and *a fortiori* without explaining why. (30)

27   It is not clear whether Vlastos thinks that the method of the *Lysis* itself is merely non-elenctic or positively critical of Socrates' approach. But in defense of the critical view someone might point to what appear to be methodological criticisms at several points in the dialogue.

28   The first comes just before Socrates engages with Menexenus in their initial conversation. At this point Socrates and Lysis are talking between the two of them, and Lysis encourages Socrates to strike up a conversation with Menexenus. Socrates agrees, though he warns that Menexenus might try to refute him given that Menexenus is 'eristic' or fond of debate (ἐριστικός, 211b8).[22] The term 'eristic'

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[21] This point is also emphasized in the *Sophist* in connection with the method of exploring both sides (see n.6 above).

[22] Socrates also uses the cognate ἐρίζω to describe Lysis and Menexenus debating who is older and of nobler birth at 207c3.

is often thought to carry negative connotations for Plato and might be seen as a warning that what is to follow is seen by Plato as a mere sophistic display. Similarly, one might point to the end of the conversation, after they have canvassed what they take to be exclusive and exhaustive options and found problems with each. After agreeing that there are no other options to consider Socrates asks: "Could it be, Menexenus, that we are conducting the inquiry in an entirely incorrect way?" (213d1–2). This might be taken as another hint that we are meant to criticize the method just employed, the method that I have called 'exploring both sides'. Furthermore, when Lysis goes on to accidentally blurt out his agreement that they have gone about things in the wrong way, Socrates reports taking pleasure in his love of wisdom (φιλοσοφίᾳ, 213d7), and agrees that they would not be left wandering in their discussion in this way if they had gone about it appropriately. Finally, when discussing the suggestion from Hesiod that opposites are friends with opposites, Socrates worries that those who argue both sides (οἱ ἀντιλογικοί, 216a7) will overtake them with an objection that he goes on to describe. Once again one might see this as a Platonic criticism of the method being employed.

29   But one need not interpret these points as methodological criticisms. First, the argument put in the mouth of those who argue both sides relies on the very same point that Socrates himself made earlier without any such warning: the worry that it would be an unacceptable consequence for an enemy to be friend to a friend or for a friend to be friend to an enemy.[23] Second, when Socrates points out that something may have gone wrong it may have not have been the method itself, but its specific application, that requires improvement. As we see from Plato's employment of the method elsewhere (for example, the *Sophist*), it may be that one of the problematic results was not so problematic after all, or that they are simply dividing up the space of possibilities in the wrong way. While it is right that, in the ideal case, they would not have found problems on each side, this does not diminish the usefulness of the method for realizing where further inquiry might be necessary. And this is precisely what they do: they continue the inquiry using the same general method of exploring both sides with a new set of exclusive and exhaustive claims. If the problem were really with the method itself, then we should expect them to instead take an entirely different tack.[24]

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[23] Socrates first raises this worry at 213b2–5. See D. Adams, "The Lysis Puzzles." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9 (1992): 3–17 for a sympathetic interpretation on this point. Adams argues that the *Lysis* contains serious philosophical puzzles, not mere sophistic tricks, that serve to encourage further study on the topic. This includes the worry about enemies becoming friends.

[24] Andrea Nightingale helpfully points out how the framing of the dialogue uses the encomiastic discourse of Hippothales (and implicitly encomia by the likes of Prodicus, Gorgias, and Isocrates) as a foil for Socratic discourse in "The Folly of Praise: Plato's Critique of Encomiastic Discourse in the Lysis and Symposium." *The Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 112–30. See also her *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*. Cambridge, 1995.

30   And finally, Menexenus does not actually show any signs of having a particularly problematic conversation style. He seems to understand the points Socrates makes and mostly follows Socrates' lead. The same can be said for Lysis, who is praised for being philosophical. Exploring both sides is in fact a useful pedagogical tool for young interlocutors like Lysis and Menexenus who seem well disposed for serious inquiry. While they are not yet particularly skilled in offering their own critiques, they take Socrates seriously, listen to and understand the arguments he raises, and do not try to show off or to defend their position at any cost. In fact, this very same dynamic is repeated in all of the cases of exploring both sides we have examined so far: in each case there is an older, more experienced interlocutor responsible for laying out the structure of exploring both sides (Parmenides in the *Parmenides,* the Eleatic Visitor in the *Sophist*, and Socrates in the *Lysis* and *Cratylus*) speaking with a much younger, though serious and cooperative, respondent (Cratylus, Lysis and Menexenus, Theaetetus in the *Sophist*, Socrates and the young Aristotle in the *Parmenides*). Furthermore, this very dynamic is emphasized in each case. We have already seen how the *Cratylus* and *Parmenides* both use the exact same language to encourage the respondent to continue the search while they are still young (*Cratylus* 440d5, *Parmenides* 135d5–6).[25] In the *Sophist*, Socrates specifically recommends that the Visitor choose a young interlocutor (217d5–6) just after having emphasized his own youth in his earlier conversation with Parmenides (217c7). And Socrates draws attention to the age difference at the end of the *Lysis* by calling himself an old man (γέρων ἀνήρ, 223b5).[26] It makes sense for a more experienced dialectician to use the method of exploring both sides to help familiarize a young but serious student with the tools of the trade.

31   Someone fully committed to the *reductio* reading on which these are all sophistic elements meant to be avoided may not be convinced by these considerations. But my interpretation can explain the initial pull of this reading. After all, in the *Sophist* Plato has Socrates observe that true philosophers seem worthless to some people, even crazy, and at times appear as sophists (216c8–d1).[27] He also gives a

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[25] Parmenides also specifically requests a young interlocutor for the final deductions (137b6). This is in addition to the emphasis on Socrates' youth at 127c4–5, 130e1, and 135d5–6.

[26] In "Humbling as Upbringing: The Ethical Dimension of the Elenchus in the *Lysis*", Renaud helpfully points out that Lysis and Menexenus' youth has the effect of highlighting the pedagogical aspect of his method (188, 197). Christopher Planeaux also stresses how the frame of the dialogue emphasizes Socrates' pedagogical purpose, including the conversation taking place during the Anthesteria when he could more easily have conversation with the boys unencumbered, in "Socrates, an Unreliable Narrator? The Dramatic Setting of the *Lysis*." *Classical Philology* 96 (2001): 60–68. Planeaux argues that this and other elements of the setting suggest Socrates having purposefully come to initiate Lysis into philosophy.

[27] Cf. also Socrates' hesitation to label the so-called 'noble sophist' as a sophist and his analogy concerning the similarity between a dog and a wolf (231a1–6).

hint in the fifth definition of the sophist that not all instances of eristic and of arguing both sides have to be entirely negative. In the fifth definition, the sophist is identified under the art of disputation (ἀμφισβητητικόν), then the subtype of arguing both sides (ἀντιλογικόν, involving short question and answer rather than long speeches), then the further subtype of eristic (ἐριστικόν). Sophistry is the version that does all of this for profit rather than pleasure (224e1–225e5). But there is another type aimed at pleasure that is given the label 'prattle', the very same label that Parmenides says the many will use for his method in the *Parmenides* (ἀδολεσχία; *Parmenides* 135d5, *Sophist* 225d10).[28] And note that pleasure and profit are clearly not the only two ends for engaging in a two-sided debate; conspicuously absent is the goal of finding the truth. This is precisely the point of exploring both sides as specified in the third condition above (that is, an aim of seeing which of an exclusive and exhaustive set of claims is true).

32   Thus there is Platonic backing for the idea that arguing both sides and even 'eristic' need not always be a bad thing. They can be used for the problematic ends of mere attention or profit (think of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*). But they can also be used as part of a genuine inquiry into the truth. The interlocutors in the *Lysis* continue the search even after their initial difficulties, suggesting that they are indeed aimed at the truth even if Socrates simultaneously uses the method for his own pedagogical purposes.[29] All things considered, this suggests that we are to take a positive lesson from the method of the *Lysis* and the *Parmenides*. Exploring both sides is genuinely aimed at the truth. Even when it leads to problems on either side, it creates a well-motivated *aporia* that serves as a useful pedagogical goad as well as a dialectical heuristic for

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[28] Plato has Socrates use the same word to describe himself at *Theaetetus* 195b10. Cf. also *Phaedrus* 269e4–270d8 and *Statesman* 299b6–8, which also suggest that Plato associates this word with a true expert misperceived by the Many. Natali offers further evidence that the word was associated with philosophy in "Ἀδολεσχία, Λεπτολογία and the Philosophers in Athens." *Phronesis* 32 (1987): 232–41. Cf. also *Republic* 539a11–e1, where Plato has Socrates contrast a more mature approach to arguments that aims at the truth to a less mature approach that treats it as a game. While it may at first appear that ἀντιλογία is associated only with the second, less mature approach, notice that ἀντιλογία itself is not identified as the problem; rather, their folly is *always* engaging in ἀντιλογία (b3) and doing so *for the sake of amusement* rather than the truth (c6–8).

[29] It is worthwhile distinguishing two different types of aim, an internal aim that is a characteristic or definitionally relevant feature of the method (as in the third condition for exploring both sides) and the various external aims that a given method could be leveraged for. For instance, on my view, testing first principles is one sensible external aim for exploring both sides, as is encouraging further inquiry by creating a well-motivated *aporia*. Neither of these aims are essential, however, for making it a case of exploring both sides. Thanks to discussions with Rachel Barney and her unpublished paper "Sextus, Socrates, and Sceptical Inquiry" for this distinction.

discovering where the conversation went wrong.[30] Ultimately this can pave the way for a positive resolution.[31]

33   This helps us understand the very puzzling end of the *Parmenides*. As in the *Lysis*, the interlocutors find problems on either side. In fact, they find *several* problems on either side. Plato has Parmenides sum up these results at the end of the dialogue, emphasizing how a series of contradictions follow both from his own hypothesis and from the contradictory, and the oblivious young Aristotle ends the dialogue with a baffling "most true" (ἀληθέστατα, 166c5). Of course, a more philosophical spectator might maintain on the contrary that the conclusion must be necessarily false. But, as in the *Lysis* and *Sophist*, this need not be imagined as the end of the inquiry. A sophist might use this moment to instill awe in their audience at the formidable sea of argument and attract new fee-paying students. But a philosopher might use it to encourage further inquiry, just as Parmenides did earlier in the dialogue with Socrates and as Socrates does with Lysis and Menexenus.[32]

34   Exploring both sides is not limited to the dialogues and the specific occurrences I have discussed here.[33] But even limiting ourselves to the methodological connections between the *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Cratylus*, and *Lysis* is enough evidence to strongly push back against Robinson's developmentalist hypothesis. The more widespread this method is observed to be in the dialogues, the less likely it is that Plato intends it to serve a purely negative purpose, a mere *reductio* of the method we are meant to pursue. Its appearance in what are traditionally taken to be 'earlier' dialogues as well as 'later' dialogues means that this could not have

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[30] This point is supported by Benjamin Rider's "Socratic Philosophy for Beginners?: On Introducing Philosophy with Plato's *Lysis*." *Teaching Philosophy* 37 (2014): 365–77. Rider shows how the *Lysis* can be used in the modern classroom to introduce students to philosophy. He argues that part of its usefulness for this purpose lies in Socrates' display of philosophical method (370–72). This shows how natural it is to see the method of exploring both sides as having a genuinely philosophical application. See also his "A Socratic Seduction: Philosophical Protreptic in Plato's *Lysis*." *Apeiron* 44 (2011): 40–66 for a positive reading of Socrates' pedagogical aim.

[31] For different readings of some of the positive lessons to be gained from the *Lysis* and its *aporiai*, see MM McCabe (as Mackenzie), "Impasse and Explanation: From the *Lysis* to the *Phaedo*." *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 70 (2009): 15–45; Christopher Rowe, "The *Lysis* and *Symposium*: *Aporia* and *Euporia*?" in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides : Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum*, edited by T. M. Robinson and Luc Brisson, 204–16, Academia Verlag, 2000; and George Rudebusch, "True Love Is Requited: The Argument of Lysis 221d-222a." *Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2004): 67–80 and "Socratic Love." In *A Companion to Socrates*, edited by S. Ahbel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar, 186–199, Blackwell, 2006.

[32] For a discussion of different attitudes towards *aporia* thematized in the *Parmenides*, see Verity Harte, "'*Aporia* in Plato's *Parmenides*." in *The Aporetic Tradition in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. by George Karamanolis and Vasilis Politis, 67–90, Cambridge, 2017.

[33] See n.8 above.

simply been a temporary stopping point in part of a broader developmentalist trajectory. This suggests that Plato developed different methods for different purposes instead of changing his mind from one period to the next. We have seen that exploring both sides is not only particularly well suited for testing candidate principles, but can also be a useful pedagogical tool and can encourage further inquiry when one is otherwise inclined to give up. We should take it seriously as a genuine Platonic method, but this does not mean that it is the only one that Plato countenanced at the time of writing. If we want to tell a story about *the* philosophical method for Plato then it will have to be at a more general level of description.[34]

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