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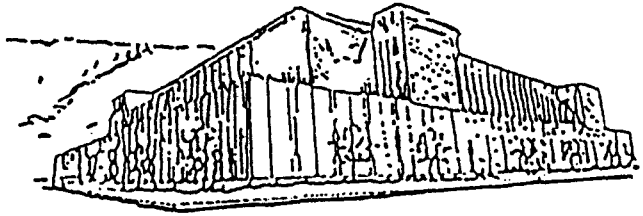
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Friendship and Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*

by Mary Karol Taylor

B.A. Boise State University, 1992

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1996

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

MAY 7, 1996

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Philosophy

Friendship and Knowledge in the *Theaetetus* (pp. 98)

Director: Richard E. Walton *R.E.W.*

Scholars have unduly neglected the relationship between Theodorus and Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. But, this friendship deserves close examination. Plato recognized the difficulty of refuting Protagoras' theory merely by means of straightforward philosophical arguments. By juxtaposing Protagoras and Theodorus and exploiting their friendship Plato shows some consequences of Protagoras' theories (as opposed to asserting these consequences), and, in doing so further repudiates the particular theory that knowledge is nothing but perception. He does this in two ways.

First, Plato emphasizes the implied doctrinal conflict between Theodorus and his late friend Protagoras. If Protagoras' theory were correct then Theodorus' professional work as a mathematician could not be significant. The juxtaposition of Theodorus and Protagoras in the internal dialogue, as it relates to *Theaetetus* in the external dialogue, shows what the consequences would be for *Theaetetus* if Protagoras' theory were correct. By representing *Theaetetus* to be on the verge of death Plato invokes in the reader a desire to have *Theaetetus*' life affirmed, thereby rejecting Protagoras' theory.

Second, Plato exploits the friendship between Theodorus and Protagoras to show that any kind of true friendship is not possible under the Protagorean metaphysics. The *Lysis*, *Symposium*, *Apology* and *Republic* all show Plato's account of friendship to be incompatible with a purely instrumental concept of friendship. For Plato, one of the defining aspects of friendship in the truest sense is that each person wishes the good for the other. Given Protagoras' account, wishing the good for someone is problematic since the good is something different for each person. Furthermore, Protagoreans do not acknowledge the statements of others as true to anyone but the speaker. Ultimately, the only kind of friendships that could exist within a Protagorean metaphysics would be crude utility-based friendships. Either Theodorus was a close friend of Protagoras, and, hence, Protagoras himself did not subscribe to the theory that "man is the measure of all things," or Theodorus and Protagoras did not have a true friendship at all. Thus, by means of this friendship Plato shows the unacceptable consequences of Protagoras' theory, and thereby repudiates it.

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Friendship and Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*

Introduction

Scholars from ancient times to the modern day regard Plato as one of the most careful writers in literary history. “Plato combed and curled his dialogues, braided them at every turn, left not a gap...”¹ How a Platonic dialogue should be read is an important question, one which has recently received much attention. In terms of style, the dialogues closely resemble the drama. Hence, readers must decide what the “dramatic” aspects, if any, contribute to the philosophical content of the dialogues.

I will argue that Plato wrote in the dialogue form in order to recreate living speech; hence, the dramatic content of the dialogue plays a significant role in establishing the philosophical content of the dialogue. Actual conversations, philosophical and otherwise, take place within the circumstances of a particular time and place and involve particular persons. These facts make a contribution to the meaning of what is said. So, too, are the philosophical discussions depicted in the Platonic dialogues set within particular circumstances and places, involving particular characters. Plato took great care to make the circumstances and personages in his dialogues meaningful in much the same way that circumstances and personages are meaningful in live discussions. We should not, then, let any detail in a Platonic dialogue go unexamined. The relationship between Protagoras and Theodorus in the *Theaetetus* is one such detail which has great significance.

Although the main interlocutor of the *Theaetetus* is the boy Theaetetus, Theodorus, the teacher of Theaetetus, is the primary interlocutor during the examination of Protagoras’

1. Dionysius of Harlicarnassus, *De Compositione Verborum*, as quoted by Joan C. Harrison, “Plato’s Prologue: *Theaetetus* 142a-143c,” *Tulane Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 27.

theory. Plato intentionally uses Theodorus, rather than Theaetetus here in order to augment his refutation of Protagoras' theory. He does this in two ways: first, he exposes the doctrinal conflict between Protagoras and Theodorus and draws attention to the question of what Theodorus' accomplishments in mathematics (and also Theaetetus') would be worth if Protagoras' theory were true. Second, he exploits the friendship between Protagoras and Theodorus in order to show some of the grave consequences of Protagoras' theory if it were adopted. Plato's intentions here can be understood only if one appreciates Plato's rich notion of friendship.

Plato's view of friendship and love, in general, has been misunderstood by many scholars as being an instance of strong egoism. One of the primary sources of this confusion has been the misinterpretations of Plato's *Lysis*. Chapter 2 takes up with some of these misinterpretations and offers the correct reading of the *Lysis*. Far from suggesting an egoism, Plato's dialogue on friendship shows that a friend cannot be loved, in any real sense, merely instrumentally. Furthermore, the *Lysis* shows that true friendship is a relationship between two people characterized by the mutually reciprocated effort to bring the good about for one another. The effort to bring about the good for the other most often takes the form of an effort to educate. This makes sense of Socrates' claim to be an expert in the field *eros*, since his aim was to help his fellow citizens learn --most often learn that they do not know what they thought they knew.

Friendship is a theme throughout many Platonic dialogues. Chapter 3 looks at the treatment of friendship in the *Apology*, *Republic* and *Symposium*, all of which confirm the non-instrumental interpretation of the theory of friendship in the *Lysis*. The *Apology* reveals Socrates' condemnation of the traditional Athenian practices of political *philia* which were, for the most part, relationships formed merely in order to further self-interest. Socrates does not want to abolish political *philia*. Instead, he aims to remake it so that one seeks to benefit his fellow citizens rather than seeking to benefit solely himself. This is the

kind of political *philia* seen in the ideal city of the *Republic* and it is, in fact, what binds the citizens together, allowing the city to be just. The *Symposium* takes up where the *Lysis* leaves off; that is, the neither-good-nor-bad loves the good because of a desire for what is one's own, and it gives a fuller account of the proper kind of personal love we can have for individuals. Again, this kind of love takes the form of bringing the good about for the beloved for his own sake. Diotima explains this as a desire to possess the good in perpetuity. This, of course, cannot be obtained through the immortality of one's physical body. Rather it is obtained, she says, by giving birth to beauty. When we give birth to good and beautiful things we are, in a sense, possessing the good forever. One way we can give birth to such things is by engendering in others a desire to strive to possess the good. This is the essential characteristic of the proper kind of love. True friendship, in the platonic sense, is the mutually reciprocated effort to help another possess the good.

With this understanding of Plato's concept of friendship, Chapter 4 considers the dramatic function of the friendship between Theodorus and Protagoras. Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine is a theory which denies that there is any objective good. Since the basis of any true friendship is a wish for and attempt to bring about the good for another, true friendship in a Protagorean context will be impossible. Plato's aim here is to show what the consequences of Protagoras' theory would be if it were true. Plato does this because he recognized the difficulty of refuting theories such as that of Protagoras which call into question so many of our basic beliefs that one is left with no common ground from which to address the theory logically. Therefore, in addition to straightforward philosophical arguments Plato uses dramatic function to refute Protagoras' theory that man is the measure of all things.

Chapter 1

A.E. Taylor calls the *Theaetetus*, “the best general introduction to the problem of knowledge ever composed.”² This dialogue has been the topic of much scholarship because it sets forth fundamental epistemological questions. The first half of the dialogue considers Protagoras’ theory that sense is infallible and therefore any person’s perception is true and constitutes knowledge. Many scholars have written about Plato’s presentation and refutation (or attempt at refutation) of Protagoras’ theory. Within this body of literature, little attention, if any, has been given to the friendship of Protagoras and Theodorus.³ The dramatic function of the friendship between Theodorus and Protagoras has been overlooked even by Friedländer and the astute Jacob Klein. But, as I will show here, Plato juxtaposes Protagoras with Theodorus and emphasizes their friendship in order to strengthen his refutation of Protagoras’ theory.

The neglect of this dramatic element in the *Theaetetus* may, in part, be due to a lack of attentiveness given to Plato’s account of friendship. Many scholars who have, in general, attended to Plato’s theory of friendship have misinterpreted Plato. In the light of these misinterpreted accounts (which I will discuss in detail later), it is not surprising that scholars have not found Plato’s emphasis on friendship to be a significant theme in the

2. A.E. Taylor, Platonism and Its Influence (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1924), p.56.

3. For example: M. F. Burnyeat, “Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” *The Philosophical Review*, 85, April 1976. James Haden, “Did Plato Refute Protagoras?,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1984. Richard J. Ketchum, “Plato’s ‘Refutation’ of Protagorean Relativism: *Theaetetus* 170-171,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) p.73-105. Edward Lee, “Hoist with His Own Petard: Ironic and Comic Elements in Plato’s Critique of Protagoras (Tht. 161-171),” *Exegesis and Argument*, 1973. Jay Newman, “The Recoil Argument,” *Aperion*, Vol. 16, 1982.

Theaetetus and certainly not a refutation of Protagoras' theory. However, quite recently there have been several scholars who argue for a much different account of friendship in the Platonic dialogues. It will be argued that this new look at friendship in Plato is the correct interpretation, and one which makes sense of Plato's use of friendship in the *Theaetetus*.

1.1 *Theaetetus* 142a-169b

In the usual Socratic manner, the conversation with Theaetetus begins with Socrates asking the seemingly simple question, "What is knowledge?" Theaetetus answers that knowledge is all the things he learns from Theodorus, such as geometry and astronomy, and then there are the crafts, such as cobbling. The implication of this answer is that Theaetetus regards what he learns from his teacher, Theodorus, as knowledge. However, Socrates finds this answer unsatisfying as a definition because it is just a list of various sorts of knowledge. The list tells us about the objects of knowledge, but tells us nothing about knowledge itself.

Having been encouraged by Socrates' description of his skills as a midwife Theaetetus attempts to answer the question again. This time he answers that "knowledge is nothing but perception."⁴ This is a better answer; it is not a list of types of knowledge, and it purports to say something about knowledge itself. Furthermore, it is quite like an answer given by Protagoras, who says, "man is the measure of all things--alike of the being of things that are and of the not-being of things that are not" (152a). Protagoras is known to be a wise man, Socrates surmises, and it would be nonsense not to examine his answer. Another way Protagoras has been known to describe the nature of knowledge is that "any given thing is to me such as it appears to me, and is to you such as it appears to you" (152a).

4. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 151e, trans. F.M. Cornford. All quotations of the *Theaetetus* are from Cornford's translation.

What he must mean, they decide, is that perception is infallible; hence, however a given thing appears to a person is true for that person. For example, the same wind may feel cold to one person, yet hot to another; that is to say, one person perceives it to be cold, while another perceives it to be hot. Therefore, the wind is not in itself either cold or hot, but it is cold to the one, and hot to the other.

Having understood just what is meant by ‘man is the measure of all things’ and located the “secrets” underneath the doctrine, Socrates and Theaetetus are ready to examine the notion to see if it is worth keeping. This examination takes up the next 25 Stephanus pages of the dialogue and is largely in the form of a conversation between Protagoras (represented by Socrates) and the mathematicians. Throughout this section of the dialogue Plato repeatedly draws attention to the friendship between Protagoras and Theodorus. Perhaps it is the subtle way in which we are informed that Theodorus and Protagoras were friends that has led scholars to overlook the significance of this friendship.

When Protagoras is initially brought into the conversation at 152a, ten Stephanus pages into the dialogue, it is not as Theodorus’ friend, but as one who held a theory about the nature of knowledge similar to that of Theaetetus. It is not until 161b that we find Theodorus was a friend of the late Protagoras, and even then it is mentioned rather in passing. Socrates says, “Well then, Theodorus, shall I tell you a thing that surprises me in your friend Protagoras?” The most explicit disclosure of the relationship comes shortly after this, at 162a when Theodorus replies, “Protagoras was my friend, Socrates, as you were saying, and I would rather he were not refuted by means of any admissions of mine.” This statement implies not only that Theodorus and Protagoras were friends, but that their friendship was an earnest relationship. Given that Theodorus’ loyalty to his late friend inhibits him from questioning Protagoras’ doctrine we can infer that their friendship was a close, if not an abiding one, at least in Theodorus’ mind.

As “Protagoras’ s” speech unfolds the peculiarity of this friendship is exposed; for, there

is a conflict between Theodorus' doctrines and the doctrines of Protagoras. Theodorus, a skilled mathematician, has spent his life studying and teaching mathematics. Fourth century mathematicians took for granted that mathematical propositions were characterized by necessity and strict universality. That is, mathematical propositions actually say something about the world; and such propositions can be effectively asserted or denied. Mathematical propositions are universally true or false. This is evident from Euclid's *Elements*, in which he brings together the work of his predecessors. Euclid "always formulates his geometrical laws in universal form."⁵ And it is more than likely that his predecessors, one of whom was Theodorus, thought of mathematical activity in the same way.

On the other hand, Protagoras' theory of the nature of knowledge, as we get it here, is based on his formula, "Man is the measure of all things." The only truths that exist are individual truths based on individual experiences. However any given thing appears for a person, is true for that person, which amounts to saying there is no such thing as truth, in the ordinary sense of the word. In particular, there would be no true mathematical theorems. By maintaining that however a given thing appears to a person is true for that person, Protagoras denies there is any reality that is common to everyone. When something *appears* to a person, on Protagoras' account, it actually *is* for that person. Reality, then, is something different for each person. The only 'reality' that exists, if any exists at all, is actually a collection of many independent realities. If Protagoras' theory accurately describes the nature of knowledge, then the products of Theodorus' professional efforts, to which he has devoted his whole life, are nothing more than wind eggs. His life will have been spent in vain.

Yet, ironically, Theodorus is concerned that a good defense be made for Protagoras.

5. Stephen Barker, *Philosophy of Mathematics* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 16.

After his longest impersonation of Protagoras, Socrates states, “Such, Theodorus, is my contribution to the defense of your friend,” as if he had made the defense in part for the sake of Theodorus. This shows us that Theodorus was so loyal to Protagoras that his loyalty overflowed from Protagoras himself to his doctrines, and that Socrates was well aware of this. Having already attempted, unsuccessfully, to engage Theodorus in the conversation, Socrates finally resorts to using this loyalty to get him actively involved. Socrates tells Theodorus, “So don’t imagine that you have no duty to your departed friend...” (169). This persuades Theodorus to abandon his initial inclination, and he takes up defending Protagoras. When Theodorus is unable to defend Protagoras’ theory against Socrates’ criticisms he says, “I think we are running my old friend too hard,” again showing his loyalty to Protagoras and his doctrines. One cannot help but wonder why a distinguished mathematician would actually defend Protagoras’ theory rather than attempt to refute it.

Perhaps Theodorus avoids examining Protagoras’ theory because he feels inadequate in such philosophical discussions. He expresses as much in several places. At 164e Socrates refers to Theodorus as one of the appointed guardians of Protagoras’ intellectual offspring. Theodorus responds that it is Callias, rather than he, who is Protagoras’ appointed trustee, saying, “My own inclinations diverted me at rather an early age from abstract discussions to geometry.” If Theodorus’ inclinations diverted him from “abstract discussion” (διάλεικτος), is he even aware of the antipathy between his friend’s doctrine and his own? This is not the only place we hear Theodorus talk about his diversion from “abstract discussion.” From the moment Socrates brings up the nature of knowledge, Theodorus tries to keep his role in the discussion limited to that of a bystander. At the very outset of the discussion about knowledge, Theodorus says, “Please ask one of these young people to answer your questions. I am not at home in an abstract discussion of this sort”

(146b).⁶

When Theodorus again tells Socrates to ask Theaetetus the questions, rather than him, Socrates asks him if he were to go to a wrestling school in Sparta would he expect to look at the naked wrestlers and not strip himself? Theodorus responds that the limbs are stiff at his age and that they would all be better off if Theaetetus were to continue on in the discussion (162b). Socrates goes along with this suggestion, but not for long. He tries again to draw Theodorus into the discussion, and again Theodorus declines, this time saying “let the younger man answer your questions. It will not be such a disgrace to him to be caught tripping” (165b). Since Theodorus has repeatedly professed to being inept in “abstract discussion” maybe he is, in fact, not aware of the antipathy between his doctrine and the doctrine of Protagoras.

But what if Theodorus were aware of the conflict? Quite possibly Theodorus was aware of the doctrinal conflict but saw that as only secondary to his friendship with Protagoras. Perhaps Theodorus’ professed incompetence is really just an excuse to avoid having to put his friend’s theory to the test, so that he could thereby remain loyal to him. Recall Theodorus’s first excuse to avoid examining Protagoras’s theory: “I would rather he were not refuted by means of any admissions of mine. (162a)” Given Theodorus’s other intellectual achievements it seems likely that his real reason for avoiding examination of Protagoras’s theory is his desire to remain loyal to his friend. Whether or not Theodorus is honest about his aversion to “abstract discussion,” what Plato is doing in effect is drawing attention to the doctrinal conflict between Protagoras and Theodorus.

Socrates is content to let Theodorus be a bystander for a while, but once Protagoras is brought into the discussion Socrates seems to be quite interested to have Theodorus take on a more active role. In a final effort to engage Theodorus in the discussion Socrates says,

6. The phrase Cornford renders ‘abstract discussion’ is τῆς τοιαύτης διάλεκτος. This might be better understood simply as such parlance.

Please come with us a little of the way - just until we know whether, in the matter of mathematical demonstrations, you cannot help being the measure, or everybody is just as competent as you in geometry and astronomy and all the other subjects you are supposed to excel in (169a).

Socrates' point here is that if Protagoras's theory is correct, then Theodorus's mathematical propositions are no more true than any mathematical propositions anyone else might construct. Any person's perceptions which directly contradict Theodorus' perceptions will be just as 'true' as Theodorus's. In other words, no mathematical propositions will be true, in the common sense of the word 'true.' Clearly, Socrates wants Theodorus, rather than Theaetetus, to be the one to discuss the merits of Protagoras' theory with him. He seems to think Theodorus, in particular, has something to learn from this discussion or something to contribute to it. Socrates tells Theodorus that the discussion will be "for your own benefit as well as mine" (169b). In what way Theodorus will benefit from the discussion is not explicit. However, an examination of the dramatic function of the juxtaposition of Theodorus and Protagoras may illuminate the benefits to him.

Theodorus agrees to join Socrates in the discussion just until they find out if the maxim "man is the measure" is true. He sticks to this agreement. As soon as they determine that Protagoras' theory is incorrect Theodorus becomes a silent bystander and remains so for the rest of the dialogue. His name is mentioned only twice in the remainder. Socrates mentions him once at 192d, using him as an example to make a point about perception, and then again, at 210d, the very end of the dialogue, saying "tomorrow morning, Theodorus, let us meet here again." Thus, Theodorus' role in this dialogue is primarily restricted to the juxtaposition with Protagoras.

One might argue that the relationship between Theodorus and Protagoras appears in this dialogue merely coincidentally, and to make much of it is to misconstrue Plato's aim. After all, the dialogue is about knowledge, not friendship. However, it is hardly likely that any

of Plato's words are incidental--here, or anywhere else in his works.⁷ The first half of the *Theaetetus* shows that Plato intentionally uses Theodorus in this dialogue and that the fact that he was a mathematician and a friend of Protagoras is essential to his role. That assumption, however, depends to some important extent on a theory of interpretation of the Platonic dialogues.

1.2 The Dialogue Form

“Why did Plato write dialogues?” and “How are we to read a Platonic dialogue?” are two important questions that have been debated since antiquity. In the introduction to a book of essays addressing just these questions Charles Griswold, Jr. says modern scholars have not given these issues the attention they deserve.⁸ This book, he says, is an attempt to provoke scholars to reflect on their interpretive techniques and assumptions and to initiate a “full-fledged debate about the reading of Plato.” In short, the debate Griswold is concerned with is whether Plato's dialogues are should be read with an eye to the dramatic content (perhaps solely on the dramatic content) or whether the dramatic content is merely ornamental and not an integral and important part of the philosophical content at all, but is there just for the sake of entertainment, or palatability. The two questions, “How should we read a Platonic dialogue” and “Why did Plato write dialogues” are separate questions, but questions which are tightly connected; if we knew why Plato chose to write in dialogue form, then we would have some kind of guide as to how we should best read his dialogues.

7. Leo Strauss is entirely correct when he says, in *The City and Man*, “Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs.” As quoted by David L. Roochnik in “Terence Irwin's Readings of Plato” in *Platonic Writings / Platonic Readings*, (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1988), p. 187.

8. Charles Griswold, Jr., ed., *Platonic Writings / Platonic Readings*, (New York, Routledge: 1988), p. 3.

However, Plato did not make it easy for us to understand his motives. In all the dialogues he refers to himself only three times, and each of those only in passing in the third person.⁹ The *Letters* give us a more personal look at Plato, but there is some question concerning their authenticity. There is, however, a general agreement within the community of experts that the *Seventh* and *Eight Letters* are authentic. Taking the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* as a hypothesis, we will find it a fruitful source of answering these questions.

The passage in the *Seventh Letter* from 342a-344b is commonly referred to as the “philosophical digression.” At 341b Plato gives evidence Dionysius had not, in fact, become a philosopher. Plato says that he has heard that Dionysius has written a handbook on philosophical subjects. This, in and of itself shows that Dionysius has not become a philosopher; for if he had, he would not have attempted to write about fundamental truths, since “there is no way of putting it in words like other studies” (341c). Furthermore, Plato states here that he himself has never written about such things. Why is it not possible to write about these fundamental truths, and why is an attempt to do so contrary to being a philosopher? The philosophical digression answers these questions.

There are three classes of objects through which knowledge comes about, the digression begins (341d). First, there is a name, second a description, and third an image. A fourth class is the knowledge itself, and the fifth class is the true reality of the object. The first three classes are written images. The image of an object can be drawn, and the name and the description of an object consists of words. Language is inadequate for grasping the true reality of an object because the meanings of words are unstable. There is not a secure connection between the first class, the word, and the thing itself. “Nothing prevents the things that are now called round from being called straight...” Socrates says,

9. *Apol.* 34a; 38b. *Phaedo* 59b.

(434b). The same is true for descriptions, since they consist of words. The symbols, or words, themselves are unalterable, but what characterizes them as unstable is the fluidity and instability of the meanings of those unalterable symbols. The meaning of written words is embedded within the context of when and by whom they were written. Once words are written down the living context in which the words were used is lost, and hence the meanings become alterable. The words are no longer tied to the speaker and the context within which he spoke them. This means that an author's words could take on a meaning entirely different from what the author intended. Therefore Plato warns,

...no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable--which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols (343a).

Words of speech differ from written words in that they do not lose their context. In fact, words of speech are context dependent; the words occur at a particular time and place and are spoken by a particular person. Within speech the meanings of words are even tied to the way the words are delivered--the inflection of one's voice, and one's facial expressions affect the meanings of one's words. Words of speech, then, are much more stable than written words. The speaker has much more control of the meanings of his words. If his words are misinterpreted, or not understood he can clarify and restate his claims, making sure his words retain the meaning he intends.

Acquaintance with true reality is obtained through words of speech, the dialectic.

Plato says,

Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining (341).

This is a compact description of the dialectic. Plato repeats it at the end of the digression:

...after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up...(344c).

It is through dialectic, speech, not written words, that one grasps the fifth class. The

experience of glimpsing true reality is not something that one can obtain simply by reading. Aside from the fact that it cannot be set out in words, true reality is something that one experiences within one's soul. Understanding is obtained only when one actively participates in the search, rather than passively reading a book about it, or listening to a lecture on it.

Seeing the written word in this way, Plato must strive for a form of writing that is least like writing, and most like living dialectic. He must write in a form that captures the vital characteristics of speech; that is, he must incorporate into his form of writing the circumstances of the speech, the conceptions of the audience or participants, and the historical background of the speech. The form in which he writes must be one in which the reader is allowed to participate.

The *Seventh Letter* is not the only place Plato expresses his reservations for written words. In the *Phaedrus*, at 275b he says the only purpose writing serves is to remind us. We cannot really learn simply from reading. Written words are like a painting which, Socrates goes on to say, "stands before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence" (275d). The painter, or author, has no control over his work once it is completed. The meanings of his work may be completely lost, or misconstrued, and the author cannot speak up to clarify, or rebuke. Socrates says, "And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place..."(275d). In the *Protagoras* Socrates condemns the Sophists on the grounds that they are like books, "but if one asks any of them an additional question, like books they cannot either answer or ask an additional question." Clearly, Plato is making the same arguments that are made in the *Seventh Letter*. Even if the *Seventh Letter* were found to be spurious, our answer to questions "Why did Plato write dialogues," and "How should we read his dialogues?" would remain unchanged.

So, Plato writes in the dialogue form in an effort to recreate living speech. He uses

every resource available to him by which to embed his words in context. He does not seek to set out any philosophical truths clearly and matter of factly. Rather, he seeks to engage his reader in the dialectic. Clearly, then, the proper way to read a Platonic dialogue, in part, must be to take account of the “dramatic” element. We should pay attention to the circumstances of the dialogue, to the particular personalities of the interlocutors, to the historical and intellectual context within which it was written, what the characters do and the manner in which they speak, and the rhetorical structure of the dialogue as a whole.

1.3 The Rhetorical Structure of the *Theaetetus*

One of Plato’s intentions for juxtaposing Protagoras with Theodorus may be better understood if we remind ourselves of the rhetorical structure of the dialogue. The dialogue begins with Theaetetus, no longer a boy, at the threshold of death. Eucleides tells Terpsion he has just seen Theaetetus being carried away from the battle camp, barely alive. The thought that death is encroaching upon Theaetetus moves Terpsion and Eucleides to reflect on Theaetetus and his life. “How sad that such a man should be so near death!”, Terpsion exclaims. “Indeed” Eucleides agrees, Theaetetus is (was) “Καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός”--a noble and good man. Eucleides credits Socrates for having predicted, when Theaetetus was just a boy, that he was sure to become a remarkable man. Eucleides says that Socrates made this prophetic remark to him after recounting a conversation he had had with Theaetetus. Terpsion is curious about this conversation between Socrates and the young Theaetetus. “I wrote the conversation down”, Eucleides tells Terpsion, “and it is well worth hearing (142d).” They agree to have Eucleides’ servant read the book to them; with that a conversation within this conversation begins.

It is Theaetetus’ being at death’s door and their commendation of him that gives rise to the recollection of the earlier conversation between Socrates and the mathematicians. In this respect the entire discussion about knowledge is intended to show just what a

remarkable man Theaetetus is (or was). The praises of Theaetetus are also praises of the life he has led. Theaetetus was a noble and good man because he led a noble and good life. It is a pity that such a man should die so young, in part at least, because his life's work was so worthwhile.

We see Theaetetus in the internal dialogue as the young protege of Theodorus, his life ahead of him. The Theaetetus in the internal dialogue grew up to be a distinguished mathematician, just like his mentor Theodorus. Thus, the person whom Terpsion and Euclides are praising is a distinguished mathematician. In respect to the work of their lives, the Theaetetus in the external dialogue must be regarded for some purposes as a stand-in for the Theodorus of the internal dialogue, and the Theodorus of the internal dialogue a stand-in for the Theaetetus of the external dialogue.

In the internal dialogue Theodorus is contrasted with Protagoras in such a way that if Protagoras' doctrine is validated then that to which Theodorus has devoted his whole life amounts to nothing more than something that is true only for himself. On this account, thinking all along that his work in mathematics was an important contribution to society, Theodorus and his life's work will have been full of 'sound and fury, signifying nothing'. The juxtaposition of Theodorus and Protagoras, in the internal dialogue, threatens the worth of Theodorus' life, and, thereby, in the external dialogue, threatens the worth of Theaetetus' life, even as he lay on his death bed. By representing Theaetetus to be on the verge of death Plato invokes in the reader a desire to have Theaetetus' life proven to have been worthwhile. But, if Protagoras' theory is validated then the lives of Theaetetus and Theodorus alike will have been wasted. On the other hand, with the affirmation of Theaetetus' life as the very occasion for the discussion of knowledge, we are compelled to affirm Theodorus' life, thereby rejecting Protagoras' theory.

Thus, at least part of Plato's intention in juxtaposing Theodorus and Protagoras is to expose the ramifications of Protagoras' theory. We are shown through this juxtaposition

what the consequences would be for Theodorus, and, hence, for Theaetetus. The image of Theaetetus on his death bed impresses on us the question what one's life is worth and leads us to ask what Theodorus' life is worth if Protagoras' theory is true. Plato intends that we recognize that Protagoras' theory, if correct, nullifies the worth of the lives of Theodorus and Theaetetus. If such consequences in themselves do not make us reject Protagoras' theory, it at least makes us feel that Protagoras' theory somehow must not be correct, thereby motivating us to examine it closely. Socrates, no doubt, hopes that Theodorus will, upon examination, find Protagoras' theory to be incorrect, and, hence, benefit from the examination in that his life's work would not be a wind egg after all.

1.4 The Emphasis on Friendship

Although Plato juxtaposes Protagoras with Theodorus to show some of the consequences of his doctrines, that does not fully account for the exploitation of the friendship between the two men. Had Plato intended to use the friendship between Theodorus and Protagoras as simply an effective means of exposing the consequences Protagoras's theory would have on mathematical concepts then he would not have needed to emphasize their friendship in the manner that he does. Plato clearly seeks to accentuate the fact that Theodorus thought his friendship with Protagoras to be a close one. He does this by stressing Theodorus' loyalty to Protagoras. Perhaps Plato, in addition to his straightforward philosophical arguments against Protagoras' theory, intends to show (by means of this friendship) that there are other problems for the holders of such a view.

A consideration of the nature of friendship might indicate that the very concept of friendship is problematic within the context of the Protagorean view. For example, as Aristotle observes, one of the defining aspects of friendship in the truest sense is that each friend wishes the good for the other, and that each wishes the good for the other for his or her own sake. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle defines being a friend as "wishing for someone

what you believe to be good things--wishing this not for your own sake but for his--and being inclined, so far as you can to bring these things about.”¹⁰ Most people would agree that this is at least one of the basic requirements for a true friendship: if a person does not wish for us good things, for our own sake, we do not usually think of him or her as a friend. The very idea of friendship entails that two people each wish the good for each other and attempt to promote it for each other.

Indeed friendship, on this account, may be problematic within a Protagorean context; for there is no objective good to which a pair of friends may appeal in wishing the good for each other. But, before addressing the particular problems Protagoreanism generates for the concept of friendship, we must first discern what Plato took to be the essential elements of friendship. Plato, as well as Aristotle, took the notion of friendship to be quite important. That Aristotle devotes two whole books of his treatise on ethics to the subject indicates that he thought of friendship to play a fundamental role in moral and political life. Plato also devotes a significant amount of attention to the subject of friendship, and its closely related topic, love. Plato wrote two entire dialogues devoted to the subject, the *Lysis* and the *Symposium*. The *Lysis*, often referred to as the friendship dialogue, asks the question “who is a friend?” The *Symposium*, starting out as an encomium of Eros, turns into a general theory of love with Diotima’s speech. Friendship is an important theme in the *Republic*; the ideal city is founded on bonds of friendship. It is also a significant theme in the *Apology*; Socrates is condemned to death largely because of the current Athenian practices of political “friendships.” In the *Seventh Letter* friendship is one of the fundamental requirements for gaining philosophical knowledge. There is no question that friendship plays a fundamental role in Platonic thought, but there is no agreement among scholars about what role it has.

10. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1380b35-1381a1, trans. W. Rhys Roberts.

Chapter 2

Far from seeing Plato's account of friendship as similar in significant ways to Aristotle's, many scholars interpret Plato as maintaining friendship to be nothing more than a matter of usefulness.¹¹ Such scholars maintain that the fundamental basis of any kind of friendship, for Plato, is purely instrumental. That is, we love others because of, and only insofar as, we derive some benefit from them. One such treatment of Plato which has sparked much discussion is Gregory Vlastos', "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato."¹²

2.1 Vlastos' Interpretation of Plato's Theory of Friendship

Vlastos compares Plato's notion of friendship with Aristotle's and concludes that unlike Aristotle, Plato did not understand that "to love a person we must wish for that person's good for that person's sake, not for ours..."¹³ Vlastos goes on to say that the cardinal flaw of Plato's theory is that "it does not provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities."¹⁴ Vlastos reaches this conclusion by interpreting Plato to maintain that we

11. For example, Gregory Vlastos, see below. Don Adams, "A Socratic Theory of Friendship," *Int'l Philosophical Quarterly*, Sept. 1995. D.B. Robinson, "Plato's Lysis: The Structural Problem," *Illinois Classical Studies*, Vol. 69, 1986. Laszlo Verseni, "Plato's Lysis," *Phronesis*, Vol. 20, 1975.

12. Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," *Platonic Studies*, (New York: Paragon House, 1987), p. 98.

13. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

befriend someone only in order to benefit in some way from the association with that person. If the friendship ceases to further our own ends then the friendship ceases. Ultimately, what we love, when we love a someone, is not the person himself, but the Good, or the Beauty instantiated in him. The individual *qua* individual is never the object of love in Plato, according to Vlastos.

Vlastos begins his investigation of Plato's account of friendship with the *Lysis*. At 210C-D Socrates tells Lysis, "So now, you see, your father does not love you, nor does anyone love anyone else, so far as one is useless."¹⁵ This is the first instance of the "usefulness" theme. In order for one to be loved one must be useful. Vlastos says this particular passage does not imply a theory of egoism. Egoism is a psychological theory of human motivation which holds that all actions are motivated by self-interest. Here, Socrates does not say for whom the beloved must be useful; I could love someone because he is useful to my sister, irrespective of my own interests. However, Vlastos continues, "the egoistic perspective of love" is implied at 213E ff where Socrates argues that "if A loves [or is friendly to] B, he does so because of some benefit *he* needs from B and for the sake of just that benefit."¹⁶ Socrates gives the example of a sick man who befriends a doctor because of his disease and for the sake of his health. The sick man befriends the doctor only in order that he, himself, receive the benefit of health.

At 219C, Socrates asks Lysis and Menexenus, "Then is health a friend also?" "Certainly," they answer. "And if it is a friend, it is so for the sake of something...And that something is a friend." Ultimately, if we are to avoid an infinite regress, there must be some *πρῶτον φίλον*, some first friend which we love for its own sake. The *πρῶτον*

15. *Lysis*, trans. W.R. M Lamb.

16. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

φίλον is the only true friend and all other so-called friends are merely εἰδωλα, phantoms, or images of it. Here Socrates is undoubtedly arguing for an egoistic theory of friendship, according to Vlastos. It is never the particular individual himself that is loved. In fact, what the lover really loves is the πρῶτον φίλον and the “so-called” friend merely serves the lover as a means to obtaining this. Hence, we never really love others for their own sake. The only thing we ever love for its own sake is the πρῶτον φίλον.

What, then, is the πρῶτον φίλον ? Vlastos says *Republic V*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Symposium* all answer this question in the same way. In this essay Vlastos focuses his attention on the *Symposium*; and there “only with the metaphysical core of the dialogue”-- Diotima’s speech to Socrates. He sums up her speech:

We love only what is beautiful.

In loving it we desire to possess it in perpetuity.

We desire to possess it because we think it good and expect that its possession would make us happy.

The only way in which one can possess the good in perpetuity is to “beget in beauty.”¹⁷

There are different levels of “begetting in beauty,” Diotima tells Socrates. At the lowest level, one can beget in beauty physically by begetting children. On a higher level there is beauty of mind, or virtue. And on a higher level still are beautiful social institutions, or works of art. Finally, though, there is the highest level which is seeing Beauty itself; this, she tells Socrates, “is the final object of all those previous toils” (210E). The πρῶτον φίλον, then, is the Platonic Ideal of Beauty. Summarizing Plato’s theory of love Vlastos’ states, “What we are to love in persons is the image of the Idea in them. We are to love the

17. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful.”¹⁸ The object of love, then, is Beauty (or the Good), and never the individual.

There are two criticisms of Plato here, although Vlastos combines them into one objection. L. A. Kosman recognizes this and differentiates them from one another.¹⁹ First, he says, Vlastos is arguing that Plato holds an egoistical theory of love--we love others only insofar as they are able to provide some benefit to us. If we ever wish the good for someone we do so in order that we may continue benefitting from that person; we do not ever wish the good solely for the other's sake.

Second, Vlastos claims Platonic love does not allow individuals to be loved *qua* individuals. At best, what we love when we love someone are the qualities of beauty and good in him. When our love is directed toward a person, what we are really loving is the Good which is instantiated in our beloved. It is not really the person himself, warts and all.

Kosman says that these are two independent objections; for instance, there could be a theory of love which does not identify the individual as the proper object (perhaps the proper object is God or some abstract universal), but nevertheless, does not delineate the origin of the love as a desire to benefit oneself. On the other hand, there could be a theory of love which is egotistical but does, however, identify the individual as the proper object of love. For instance, a theory may maintain that we love others because of some benefit we receive from our beloved, but still hold that it is the individual that we love.

An objection may be made to this latter theory, to the effect that the individual is not being loved *for his own sake*, since we are loving him in order that we benefit from our

18. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

19. L.A. Kosman, "Platonic Love," in *Eros, Agape, and Philia*, ed. by Alan Soble, (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 150-1.

loving him. We will no longer love the person once he can no longer provide some benefit to us. Hence, we never really loved the individual. This objection is, in fact, a way of combining the two independent objections, which is what Vlastos does. We love individuals because of and on the condition that the good is instantiated in them. And it is precisely because the good is instantiated in our beloved that our beloved is beneficial to us. The individual is not the object of our love, since our love is directed at the good in him, and not him *himself*. What it means to love someone *for himself* is a complicated question. Suffice it to say that, in one way or another, this is a difficulty for theories of love in general. As Kosman points out, the Christian notion of *agape*, loving individuals just by the very fact that they exist, regardless of their qualities, raises this same question. Kosman calls this kind of love an “erotic lottery.” I am loved only on the account that I am a human being. There is nothing in that love that differentiates me as the individual that I am from any other human being. I am loved only by chance, just as I win a lottery only by chance. The fact that I am loved by a particular person means nothing more than that I happened to come across that person’s path. That person loves me merely because I exist, regardless of what kind of person I may be, or if he really even knows me. Just as my lottery ticket was randomly chosen to be the winner, so too was I randomly chosen to be loved. Now, most of us are not bothered by the fact that there was nothing about who we are which elicited our lottery winnings. But, we do, however, tend to feel that being loved merely on the basis of being a human being is not an instance of really being loved. If someone claims to love us, but only knows us from one brief acquaintance we would say that person could not possibly love us, for he does not even know us. We want persons to love us on the basis of something which constitutes who we take ourselves to be. Kosman neatly describes the difficulty of loving the individual *qua* individual: “In so far as I love him for his qualities, the qualities seem to constitute the proper object of my love; insofar as I love him irrespective of his particular qualities, it becomes unclear in what sense I may

be said to love, specifically, *him* .”²⁰

Vlastos lumps these two objections together into one because they are tightly connected. We love others because we benefit from loving them; we benefit by loving them because what we love in them is the instantiation of the Good. This means that our love for them is conditional love; we do not love them if the Good is not instantiated in them. We are motivated to love them by our own self-interest, and what we love in them is not actually them, *themselves*, but the Good.

Vlastos wants a theory of love that allows an individual to be loved for *his own sake* in two senses. First, he wants a theory in which persons love others unselfishly; that is, that we do not love others and befriend them only as a matter of serving our own interests. Second, he wants a theory which holds the proper object of love to be the individual *qua* individual, loved wholly unconditionally. Vlastos seems to think that the Christian tradition of loving persons captures this kind of loving. He criticizes Plato, and Aristotle, for not having any “inkling of a notion” of a kind of love that is “of a Being whose perfection empowers it to love the imperfect; of a Father who cares for each of his children as they are, does not proportion affection to merit, gives it no more to the righteous than to the perverse and deformed.”²¹

L. A. Kosman has rightly pointed out that it is questionable whether the Christian tradition of *agape* love is a theory of love that situates the individual as the proper object of love. Vlastos condemns Plato’s theory for not being a theory of personal love. It is difficult to see how a theory of love that holds that persons should be loved by virtue of nothing other than their existence is any more personal. For this reason the main focus here will be on Vlastos’ first criticism of Plato’s theory of love. In addressing this

20. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

21. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

criticism it will become clear that Plato did not ever think of his theory of love as a theory that was not about personal love for persons. Since Vlastos begins with the *Lysis*, let us begin there as well.

2.2 The Lysis

The *Lysis* is an account given by Socrates to an unidentified listener of an earlier conversation he had with some boys and young men at a wrestling school. Socrates says he was on his way from the Academy to the Lyceum when he was stopped by Hippothales and Ctesippus. Hippothales asks Socrates to join them in the wrestling-school, within which there are many handsome young men. Socrates asks him which one of the boys he is in love with and Hippocrates blushes. Noticing this, Ctesippus remarks that Hippothales is acting quite out of character; usually he is so eager to talk of his beloved that he has deafened the ears of everyone around him from his incessant praises of Lysis. At Socrates insistence, Ctesippus describes to him the way in which Hippothales goes about addressing his beloved. Socrates tells Hippothales two things. First, his praises of Lysis are really just praises of himself. And second, his treatment of the beloved is all wrong. Hippothales does not want to hear anything about the first criticism, but he does tell Socrates he is interested in hearing “any useful advice he can give as to what conversation or conduct will help to endear one to one’s favourite” (206C). Socrates says that is a difficult thing to tell, but that he would show him how one should treat one’s beloved.

The Greek in this section which is rendered as the verb “love” is “ἔράω.” “Lover” is “ἔρῶν,” and “beloved” is “ἔρωμένος.” However, Plato changes words once his discussion with Hippothales ends and his conversation with Lysis and Menexenus begins. What gets translated as the verb “to love” in the remainder of the dialogue is “φιλεῖν.”

“Φίλος” can be used either substantively when construed with the genitive, meaning “friend,” or as an adjective translated as “friendly” or “dear” when construed with the dative. The distinction between “ἔρώω” and its cognates and “φιλεῖν” and its cognates is not a clear one. Most scholars agree that the common Greek usages of the words show that “ἔρώω” implies some kind of passionate sexual desire, which is not implied in the use of “φιλεῖν.”²² D. N. Levin argues that the distinction is not that neat, and that passionate sexual desire is sometimes associated with “φιλεῖν.”²³ Furthermore, he argues, Plato “is no respecter of vulgar norms.”²⁴ W. J. Cummins also argues this point and offers a caveat not to strain to “discover verbal consistency” in Plato’s use of these terms.²⁵

Besides the ambiguity between “ἔρώω” and “φιλεῖν,” one must be aware of the wider meaning of “φιλεῖν” and its cognates in Greek than the terms “love” or “friend” in English. Vlastos points out that maternal affection is one of Aristotle’s examples of “φιλεῖν” and “φιλία” (friendship). Clearly, the colloquial English use of “friendship” does not fully describe the relationship between a mother and her child, nor does “friendly”

22. See A.E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and his Work*, (New York, Meridian Books: 1956) p. 65, n. 2, and Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1933), p. 115.

23. D.N. Levin, “Some Observations Concerning Plato’s *Lysis*,” *Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed., P. Anton, (Albany: 1971),n. 47,

24. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

25. W. Cummins, “*Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato*,” *Aperion*, Vol. 15, 1981,p.16. It is not that Plato could not manage consistency in his use of these terms. As Cummins points out, this inconsistency “reflects his desire to engender in his readers living insights rather than to communicate *dogmata* fixed in a technical terminology.”

describe the feelings the mother has for her child. “Φίλος” is often used in compounds to describe a feeling one has for inanimate objects. “Φιλόσοφος”, “φιλότεχνος” and “φίλοινος” come through in English as “lover of wisdom”, “lover of art” and “lover of wine.” When someone is said to be a “φίλοιμος”, it certainly does not work to say he is a “friend to wine.” Not only does “friend of wine,” or “friend to wine” sound awkward, but it loses the sense of the word. Context, then, will have to determine whether “φίλος” is translated as “friend”, “dear”, “beloved” or “lover.” The best we can do is to keep in mind that these words are, at some level, all connected.

The next section of the dialogue, 206e3-211b5, is a conversation between Socrates and Lysis. Socrates asks Lysis if his mother and father love him (φιλεῖ). “Very much so,” Lysis responds. And since they love him they want him to be as happy as possible,” Socrates surmises. “Of course,” Lysis readily agrees. And since Lysis’ parents love him very much and want him to be happy, it must be the case that they grant him total freedom to do whatever he desires. Here Lysis disagrees. For his parents hinder him from doing a great many things he would like to do, such as drive the chariot, or mule-cart, or play with his mother’s loom implements. In fact, Lysis comes to realize, they give him freedom only in those matters which he understands, such as reading and writing and lyre playing. Lysis’ parents give him freedom in, and entrust to him, only the affairs about which he is knowledgeable.

The more knowledgeable he becomes, the more his parents will entrust in him. Eventually, his neighbors, recognizing his knowledge and skillfulness, will entrust their affairs to him as well. They will put their estates in the hands of Lysis because he knows, better than they themselves, how to derive the advantage out of their estates. Even the

King himself will entrust to Lysis those affairs in which he is skilled. All these entrust Lysis with their affairs in which he is wise because they will benefit by doing so, since Lysis knows how to derive advantage out of these things. Lysis will not be given any freedom in affairs in which he is not wise because he is not able to derive the advantage from them. Hence, Lysis will be loved by his parents, and anyone else, only in regard to those matters in which he is wise and therefore able to be useful in such matters.

Ultimately, then, we are only loved insofar as we are useful. And even Lysis' father and mother do not love him insofar as he is useless. Given that Lysis is still young, there are few things in which he is wise and therefore useful. This means, then, that Lysis' parents do not, yet, love him very much.

At this point Menexenus, Lysis' best friend, sits down with them, and the conversation turns toward him. The next section of the dialogue, 211b6-213d2, is a discussion between Socrates and Menexenus. Socrates asks him "When one person loves another, which of the two becomes a friend of the other--the loving of the loved, or the loved of the loving?" (212b). Menexenus thinks that both become friends mutually, when just one loves. But this would mean that one could be a friend to someone one did not even like, just because he is loved by that person. So, then, it must be the case that both have to love in order for either to be a friend. But, this too is problematic because we often love objects that cannot return our love. For example, there are people who love horses, or dogs, or wine, or wisdom. And there is also the case of an infant baby who cannot yet feel love, but whose parents love him. The lover thinks of these things as friends, or "dear." So, it must be the loved one, not the lover who is the friend. Yet this allows for the absurdity that one is loved by his enemies and hated by his friends. Perhaps, then, it is the lover that is the friend of the beloved. But the same absurdity will arise--one could be a friend to someone one actually hates. Perplexed, Menexenus admits that he can no longer follow the conversation. Socrates suggests that they may be going about their inquiry all

wrong, and proposes a new line of attack.

The poets have been known to say that “god himself makes them friends by drawing them to each other” (214a). It is their likeness to one another which draws them together and makes them friends. This can only be partially true. For this would mean that the bad would be a friend to the bad. Yet, the bad harm those with whom they associate. We cannot call someone who does us harm a friend. What the poets must mean, then, is that the good are friends. There are two problems with this suggestion. First, there is no benefit that like can provide like, since, presumably, their needs are exactly the same. If they are both in need of the same thing, then neither will be able to serve the needs of the other. Second, the good, in fact, do not need anything. Someone who is good is self-sufficient, and so will not have any needs that he cannot take care of himself. Such a person will not value anyone else highly, since he does not need anyone.

The poets also say that it is opposites who are friends (215d). This suggestion avoids the problem of fulfillment of needs, since opposites have complementary needs. But, this, too, leads to absurdities. One will be the friend of one’s enemy, and the just will be the friend of the unjust, the good friend to the evil.

At 216c Socrates offers his own idea. Perhaps those that are neither good nor bad will be friend to the good. Socrates explains what he means with the example of health. A healthy person does not love a doctor, since he has no need for him. A sick person whose disease has progressed beyond the point of being curable (or treatable) does not love the doctor, since he has no need for him. But the sick person whose disease is curable loves the doctor very much. A body, in and of itself, is neither bad nor good. A sick body has the presence of something bad in it, but it, itself, is not bad. It is the presence of some evil--the disease--that is the cause of the sick person’s love. The object of the sick person’s love, or that for whose sake he loves, is health. The sick man loves the doctor, or medicine, because of the disease and for the sake of health. Whenever we love, then,

we must love because of some evil, and for the sake of some good.

Now, health is a good thing, and it is for the sake of health that one loves medicine. Health is also something we love and consider to be a friend. This must mean that health is a friend because of something bad and for the sake of something good. Lysis and Menexenus are quite happy with this argument. But Socrates is not. For, they have only defined friendship with reference to a more fundamental friendship. If they are to avoid an infinite regress, they must find the *πρῶτον φίλον*, the friend for whose sake all others are to be called friends. This first friend is the only true friend and the other so-called friends are merely images of it.

Instead of investigating just what the *πρῶτον φίλον* must be, Socrates raises another problem. The first friend is necessarily a good. And it was for the sake of this good that we loved all the “so-called” friends. But, the final friend is loved for the sake of the bad. The first friend, then, is quite different from the so-called friends. The phantom friends are loved for the sake of some good, a friend, but, the final friend is loved for the sake of some evil, a foe. The first friend does not, then, resemble the so-called friends at all.

And there is another problem, Socrates points out. If all evil were to disappear some desires would still exist. The desires would not be caused by some evil, but would exist just as part of our makeup. We would still have the desire for drink, but the thirst we feel would not be a harmful, evil thirst. Clearly, we are friendly to that which we desire, so, there will still be things to which we are friendly. We must be mistaken, then, that our love is caused by some evil; for when the cause (evil) is abolished, the effect (love) will be abolished too. But, there will be things we consider “a friend” after evil is abolished. There must, then, be some other cause of love.

When we love, we desire whatever it is that we love. The cause of love, then, must be desire. What is it that we are desiring when we love? We do not desire that which we

already have, so one must desire what one is deficient in, what one lacks. If one is deficient in something, that which one is deficient in must be something that one once had. If one once had something, then that thing must be something that belongs to one. The thing that one desires when one loves something must be something that once belonged to one, something that is one's own. When two people love each other they must in some sense belong to one another. They must be akin to each other by nature. If two people are akin, they must be alike. The possibility of like befriending like has already been rejected. They are right back where they started. Socrates says that if none of these they have discussed is a friend, then he does not know what else to say. Perhaps they should go back over what they have already said. But before they get a chance to do that, Lysis and Menexenus are called away and the dialogue ends in puzzlement.

2.3 Adam's Interpretation of the *Lysis*

Some scholars maintain that Plato does not intend that we should find anything positive in the *Lysis*; the dialogue does not tell us anything about friendship, or the character of a friend. For example, Grote states, "To multiply defective explanations, and to indicate why each is defective, is the whole business of the dialogue."²⁶ However, many scholars argue that the *Lysis* does offer an account of friendship. Within this group of scholars there are two camps. There are the scholars who attribute to it an instrumental theory of friendship, e.g. Vlastos.²⁷ There are, on the other hand, scholars who argue that Plato is

26. Grote, G., *Plato and Other Companions of Socrates* (London, 1865), p. 516, as quoted in Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

27. See note 1.

advocating a non-instrumental theory of friendship.²⁸ This is, it seems to me, the correct reading of the *Lysis*, and it is the reading for which I will argue. But first, I will examine a reading of the *Lysis* from the instrumentalist camp.

In a recently published article Don Adams sums up the theory of friendship in the *Lysis*:

...we are friends to things not because we value them for their own sakes, but only because of the satisfaction they promise us. It is not the food I value, but the satisfaction I receive when I eat; it is not other persons I value, but the satisfaction they help me attain.²⁹

Adams begins his examination of the *Lysis* halfway through the dialogue. He says he does this because “it is not until the second half that Socrates begins to construct a theory instead of merely criticizing other theories...”.³⁰ Adams sets out two conditions which must be met for something to be valued instrumentally. First, for X to be instrumentally valuable for attaining Y, then it must be possible for Y to occur without X. Second, the state of having Y (without X) must be at least as valuable as the state of having X and Y. “In effect,” Adams says, “X’s causal contribution does not add any value to the state of affairs of having Y all by itself.”³¹ If, then, we are to attribute an instrumental theory of friendship to Plato, he says we must show that friends are valued as a means and that they are dispensable. Given his conditions for something to be instrumentally valuable, that X

28. Some of the scholars in this camp are H. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: 8 Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. Christopher Smith, (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1980), A. Tessitore, “Plato’s *Lysis*: An Introduction to Philosophical Friendship,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1990, R.G. Hoerber, “Plato’s *Lysis*,” *Phronesis*, Vol. 4, 1959, C. Ludlum, *Plato’s Account of Friendship*, 1993, Diss: Northwestern University, L. Kosman, “Platonic Love,” *Eros, Agape and Philia*, (New York: Paragon House, 1989), C. Tindale, “Plato’s *Lysis*: A Reconsideration,” *Aperion*, Vol. 18, 1984.

29. Don Adams, “A Socratic Theory of Friendship,” *Int’l Philosophical Quarterly*, Sept. 1995, p. 282.

30. *Ibid*, p. 269, n. 3.

31. *Ibid*, p. 270.

is dispensable (if X is a means to Y) is merely a consequence of X being an instrument. That X is a means to Y, and that X is dispensable amounts to the same condition. If Adams shows that Plato sees friends as a causal means to something, it will follow only that friends are dispensable.

Socrates begins setting out his own theory of friendship, according to Adams, at 216c1. We love friends in the way that we love medicine; that is, we love friends because of some bad, and for the sake of some good. The friend (medicine) will serve us as a causal means to the goal of some good (health). Once we have reached the goal of health, we no longer need the medicine. The medicine, or cure, is not, itself, part of the state of health. Adams says, “The medicine does seem to give us both aspects of instrumentalism: friends appear to be causal means, and also to be as dispensable as medicine is.”³²

Adams goes on to argue that happiness is the *proton philon*, and that it alone is the only good. He states, “...the only thing that counts as truly good is the *proton philon* [happiness] itself. All other alleged goods, including wisdom, end up being “demoted” to the status of an “in-between.”³³ According to Vlastos this makes Socrates inconsistent with views expressed in other dialogues. In the *Gorgias* Socrates puts not only wisdom and health in the category of goods but also wealth (467e4-5). In the *Euthydemus* Socrates adds being handsome, temperate, brave, of noble birth, having political power and having good fortune to the list of goods (279a-c). But, later in the *Euthydemus* Socrates revises this on the grounds that these “goods” are only goods insofar as they are guided by wisdom (281d2-e5). Therefore, wisdom is the only good and ignorance the only bad. It is this “revision” that leads Adams to think that Socrates is “revising” again in the *Lysis*. At 219d2-5 after just introducing the *proton philon* Socrates says, “So you see

32. *Ibid*, p. 273.

33. *Ibid*, p. 276.

what I am afraid of--that all the other things, which we cited as friends for the sake of that one thing, may be deceiving us like so many phantoms of it...". Adams says Socrates must include wisdom as one of those phantoms, valued not for itself but as a means, since wisdom was cited as a friend at 218b2. Adams says the grouping of goods in the *Gorgias* and the first grouping in the *Euthydemus* were Socrates' pre-reflective views. The revised category of goods in the *Euthydemus* is his post-reflective view, and in the *Lysis* "he takes this reflection one step further."³⁴ Adams maintains that happiness is the only good, the only thing valued for its own sake. We value all things, including friends, merely as instruments to obtaining happiness.

Adams interpretation runs the risk of losing coherency when Socrates dispenses with the doctor example on the grounds that evil cannot be the cause of love since we would still have friends even if there were no evil. Once Socrates modifies his theory, saying that love is caused by a desire to possess what is one's own and that one's friend is akin to and belongs to one, Adams' instrumental interpretation is not so plausible; for how is it that the friend is a means, wholly dispensable? It is not even clear at this point that there is still a *proton philon*. Adams skirts the issue, saying of this part of Socrates' theory that "it is discussed all too briefly."³⁵ He attempts to salvage his thesis by maintaining that Socrates thinks that all of one's desires are "good-dependent." That is, all of our desires are rational. That means, Adams maintains, there must be some *proton philon*, some one principle toward which we can direct all our desires. If our desires did not have some aim, how would we ever be able to decide between two conflicting appetites, other than just arbitrarily? This theory allows us to make a rational decision about which appetites to fulfill. To use Adams' example, if I have an appetite for wine, but I also have an aversion

34. *Ibid*, p. 277.

35. *Ibid*, p. 278.

to hang-overs, I can rationalize that moderation in my wine drinking will be the best way I can secure happiness. Without my primary love for the *proton philon*, my own happiness, I would not have any way to reconcile such conflicting appetites.

Adams understands his interpretation of the *Lysis* to offer a solution to the *aporia* with which the dialogue ends; that is, that we are back to the objection that those who are alike cannot be friends because the bad cannot be a friend to the bad, similar people can offer no benefits to each other, and the good cannot be a friend to the good. Since all our desires are rational we will not love harmful or useless people, which answers the first two objections (according to Adams). Furthermore, Adams states, “good people will indeed be self-sufficient and so will not develop any friendships at all.”³⁶ What is left is Socrates’ suggestion that the neither-good-nor-bad love the good. The only ‘good’ is our own happiness. Friends are a means to this happiness. Adams sums up by stating, “We are friends to all things which help us maintain a maximally satisfied set of desires.”³⁷

Adams last sentence (“We may not find the theory ultimately satisfactory, but its simplicity....”) is an understatement. That the good could not be friend to the good is a very troubling outcome of his interpretation. Equally troublesome is the idea that friends are wholly dispensable. That is certainly not the sense of friendship that comes through in the *Seventh Letter*.³⁸ Nor is that what we would expect, given Socrates’ comment at *Lysis* 211e that the one thing he has desired since childhood and which he desires more than all Darius’ gold is to obtain a good friend. But, then, Adams did not pay much attention to this statement, since he began his examination of the dialogue at 216d, halfway through. He said there was nothing in the first half of the dialogue that undermines his interpretation

36. *Ibid*, p. 281.

37. *Ibid*, p. 282.

38. The *Seventh Letter* will be discussed later.

of the second half. It seems astonishing that an entire part of a Platonic dialogue could be so superfluous. But, it is not. Plato's dialogues must be read as a whole, because each part of the dialogue plays an important part in the overall meaning.

2.4 The Dramatic Content of the *Lysis*

Adams seems to be of the persuasion that the dramatic content is not an important consideration when interpreting a Platonic dialogue, and his interpretation wholly ignores this aspect. Yet, he himself insinuates that the account of friendship which he attributes to the *Lysis* is unsatisfactory. It would seem, then, appropriate for us to reconsider his methods of approaching the dialogue. Perhaps an approach which considers the dialogue as a whole and appreciates the dramatic content will yield an outcome more satisfactory.

Several scholars have approached the *Lysis* in this way.³⁹ For Hans-Georg Gadamer the key to understanding the *Lysis* is the harmony of *logos* and *ergon* which is discussed in the *Laches*. There we hear Laches express the disappointment one experiences when someone's actions do not correspond to his words:

For when I hear a man discoursing of virtue, or of any sort of wisdom, who is a true man and worthy of his theme, I am delighted beyond measure, and I compare the man and his words, and note the harmony and correspondence of them....But a man whose actions do not agree with his words is an annoyance to me...(188de)⁴⁰

A few lines later Socrates reminds Laches of this harmony between words and deeds. But, the problem here is not a lack of the deeds, but of the words. Socrates states,

...you and I, Laches, are not attuned to the Dorian mode, which is a harmony of word and deeds, for our deeds are not in accordance with our words. Anyone would say that we had courage who saw us in action, but not, I imagine, he who

39. For example, R. G. Hoerber, A. Tessitore, C. Tindale, and H. Gadamer.

40. *Laches*, trans., B. Jowett.

heard us talking about courage just now (193e).⁴¹

Gadamer argues that Lysis and Menexenus are young boys who could only have a very limited, childish sense of friendship. The setting of the dialogue is the wrestling-school; a place where boys compete with one another, each trying to outdo the other. We get a very similar feeling for the friendship between Lysis and Menexenus. Striking up a conversation with the two boys, Socrates asks them which of the two is the older. Menexenus replies, "It is a point in dispute between us" (207c). Menexenus goes on to say that they are also at variance in regards to which one of them is most noble and most handsome. But, Socrates says, he's sure they don't argue over who's the wealthier of the two, since friends have everything in common.⁴² Just as Socrates asks which of them is more just and more wise, Menexenus is called away. The friendship of Lysis and Menexenus is a typical boyhood friendship, one based on good-natured competitiveness and naive boasting. Gadamer says Socrates starts to lead the discussion toward that which real friendship is based on, justice and wisdom, but Menexenus is called away. It is probably safe to assume the boys would not have had much to say about those topics; they are too young to know of such complexities.

Likewise, they are too young to know about real friendship, because they are too young to have experienced it. They have not yet had the time to experience the commitment and loyalty that is involved in real friendships. Gadamer points out that Aristotle explicitly states that those who study ethics must be of a certain age. Aristotle also says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b25, that "...people cannot know each other until they have eaten the specified <measure of> salt together." Friendship requires that

41. *Ibid.*, 193e.

42. Here, it should be noted, at the beginning of the dialogue a notion is introduced which appears again at the end of the dialogue. That is, the idea that friends have things in common, they are akin.

each person know the other, and that requires time. Lysis and Menexenus have not had the time to eat much salt together so they do not really know each other, nor are they mature enough to understand real friendship. It is not surprising, then, says Gadamer, that a discussion of friendship with young boys would end in *aporia*. The harmony between *logos* and *ergon* requires that one have the *ergon* in order to give the *logos* for it, and, likewise, one must be able to give the *logos* if one has the *ergon*. Lysis and Menexenus have only a very simple, childish friendship and hence, will not be able to give the *logos* for friendship. That Plato intends the reader to see this is apparent, Gadamer argues, at the end of the dialogue where Socrates states he would like to find some older people with whom he could continue the topic. The dialogue ends in *aporia* because the boys, out of ignorance, give the wrong answers to Socrates' questions. The reader is not to take their answers at face value, but should recognize that they have given the wrong answers. Socrates hints at this when he states at the end of the dialogue that they should go back over what has already been said. Clearly, he is trying to get the boys to think again about their answers.

The dramatic content of the beginning and end of the dialogue is also important in that it offers us some sense of what Plato takes friendship to be. Just as we must keep in mind the occasion for the servant boy's reading of Socrates' conversation between Theaetetus and Theodorus in understanding the *Theaetetus*, so too must we keep in mind the occasion of Socrates' discussion with Lysis and Menexenus. Socrates agrees to go into the wrestling school in order that he may show Hippothales the way in which one should treat one's beloved. That this is the purpose of Socrates' conversation with Lysis is clear when Socrates says, upon bringing Lysis to Socratic ignorance, "...for it came into my mind to say: This is the way, Hippothales, in which you should talk to your favorite, humbling him and reducing him instead of puffing him up and spoiling him" (210e). At the beginning of the conversation Lysis was quite confident that he knew his parents loved him very much.

But it becomes apparent that Lysis can not give any *logos* for this love. Hence, Lysis realizes that he does not know what it means to love someone. Socrates has brought Lysis to a point in which he is ready to learn. The proper way in which one should treat one's beloved, then, is to help him learn.

Socrates' last words of the dialogue are revealing. He says,

Today, Lysis and Menexenus, we have made ourselves ridiculous--I, an old man, as well as you. For these others will go away and tell how we believe we are friends of one another--for I count myself in with you--but what a "friend" is, we have not yet succeeded in discovering (223b).

At the beginning of the dialogue Socrates did not know either of the boys other than, perhaps, as acquaintances. Socrates did not know who Hippothales was referring to when he spoke of Lysis, until Hippothales told him Lysis' patronymic. But at the end of the dialogue Socrates says he counts himself as their friend. What has happened, in the course of just this conversation to make Socrates their friend? He has acted with them in the same way as he acted when he was demonstrating to Hippothales the proper way to treat one's beloved. He has led them to realize that they do not know what they thought they knew. Although they may not have discovered what a "friend" is, they are now in a better position to do so. Before their conversation with Socrates, they took it for granted they were friends. They had not thought much about what it means to be a friend and what true friendship really is. Undoubtedly, Lysis and Menexenus both went away thinking about friendship in a much more serious manner. Socrates has helped them to learn, in that he has made them aware of their own ignorance. These last words of Socrates are also reminiscent of Socrates' words to Laches. The person who is courageous but cannot say what courage is lacks the Doric mode of harmony between deeds and words. The person who is a friend, but cannot say what a friend is lacks the Doric harmony as well.

Socrates has shown, rather than tell, the boys what friendship is. Christopher Tindale

argues that Plato does this “because one cannot capture in a definition this living reality.”⁴³ Tindale refers to the *Seventh Letter*, saying, “No serious man will write about serious realities for the general public. Unless a man has an affinity for what he’s seeking he won’t see it anyway.”⁴⁴ The boys, in their youthful innocence, see themselves as friends but have not yet had the time or experience that is required to develop lasting, steadfast friendships. Had Socrates tried to tell them what a friend is, his efforts would have been in vain.

The dramatic function of the dialogue can also be seen as describing different types of friendship.⁴⁵ First, we see the friendship that involves erotic love with Hippothales. We hear from Ctessipus how Hippothales lavishly praises Lysis, but his praises are nothing about Lysis in particular. Hippothales simply reiterates what the whole city already knows and says about Lysis—that his family is a noble, wealthy family, with good horses and victories at Delphi. Socrates reprimands Hippothales, telling him that these praises are merely praises of himself. We see a different kind of friendship between Lysis and Menexenus. Their friendship is different from Hippothales’ erotic love. Although their friendship may not be a thoughtful and earnest friendship, it represents the kind of friendships that are typical in childhood. Such friendships are innocent and fun-loving. Often competitive, these kinds of friendships are filled with game playing. Another kind of love is introduced as soon as Socrates begins his conversation with Lysis, the love between parents and children. Finally, looking at the dialogue as a whole, we see that Socrates’ relationship represents another kind of friendship, philosophic friendship.

43. Tindale, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Some scholars who have maintained this are R. G. Hoerber, A. Tessitore, C. Tindale, and P. Friedlander.

Socrates and the boys have become friends through their common quest for knowledge.

Since Socrates' demonstration for Hippothales' sake was a demonstration in philosophic friendship, and since Socrates becomes a friend of the young boys through a common quest for knowledge, we must assume that Plato thinks this kind of friendship to be the best. What, then, it means to be a friend must have something to do with helping your beloved to learn. This is quite a different kind of interpretation from what Adams found in the dialogue. In fact, this interpretation seems to be an exactly opposite approach to friendship conceived according to Adams' instrumentalist approach. Socrates' concern was to benefit Lysis and Menexenus, rather than himself. If this is true, then Adams' interpretation is clearly false. So it seems there is a basic difference of opinion how best to go about reading a Platonic dialogue. Richard McKim maintains that a proper reading of a Platonic dialogue includes both the dramatic content and an analytic interpretation of the arguments in the dialogue.⁴⁶ The one, he says, should serve as a check on the other. This seems to be the most reasonable approach. After all, Plato considered philosophical discussion to be one of the most important aspects of life. It is quite unlikely that Plato included the philosophical arguments as merely filler for the dramatic content. We must then, take up with the general arguments of the *Lysis*. If, in doing so, we find a congruency with the dramatic element of the dialogue we will be more assured that our interpretation is the right one.

2.5 The Arguments in the *Lysis*

It has been said that the instrumentalist thesis is the rock on which the whole discussion in the *Lysis* founders.⁴⁷ Every suggestion put forth is quickly rejected on the grounds of

46. Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, p. 35.

47. L. Stefanini, *Platone* (Padua, 1949), I, as quoted by Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

utility. The like cannot be friend to like since their needs are the same and therefore they will not be useful to one another. Opposites cannot be friends because their needs are complementary and therefore they are not useful to one another. The good cannot be friends on the grounds that they are self-sufficient and therefore not useful to one another. The neither-good-nor-bad can be said to love the good, but that good must also be a friend, so ultimately what we are loving is some one *proton philon*. But that first friend cannot be loved for the sake of an evil, so it must be desire that causes us to love. This desire must be a desire of what is one's own. If friends are akin, then they are alike, and we already rejected this possibility on the grounds of utility. Clearly, the "utility" thesis is the culprit in the dialogue's aporetic ending. What does Plato intend that we make of this? Perhaps it would be helpful to go back to Socrates' first conversation with Lysis, where the "usefulness" thesis was initially introduced as a requirement for loving someone.

At 207e Socrates suggests to Lysis that since his parents love him very much they must want him to be happy. And since they want him to be happy, they must allow him to do whatever he wants. Lysis, of course, says they do not allow him to do whatever he wants. Lysis goes on to say that his parents grant him freedom only insofar as he benefits them. The more he benefits them the more things in which they will grant him freedom. The more freedom they give him the happier he will be, and, correspondingly, the more they will love him.

Catherine Ludlum points out that the important premise in this argument is a very unplatonic concept. Namely, that complete and total freedom is a necessary condition for happiness.⁴⁸ Lysis, in responding to Socrates, has said that freedom is required for any person to be happy; "no man is happy if he is enslaved and restricted from doing everything he desires"(207e). As evidence that this is not something Plato would

48. Ludlum, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

seriously maintain Ludlum draws our attention to some important passages. First, she points out that in *Republic VIII* the democracy is far from the perfect state. In fact, it is freedom that destroys it. Consider the passage at 562b:

And isn't democracy's insatiable desire for what it defines as the good also what destroys it?

What do you think it defines as the good?

Freedom: Surely you'd hear a democratic city say that this is the finest thing it has...

Socrates goes on to describe just how freedom destroys the democratic city. Valuing freedom more than anything else, the individuals in the democratic state eventually refuse to obey laws. Every person becomes the equal of every other person and all social structures begin to break down. Teachers begin to fear their students, fathers fear their sons, the young imitate the adults, and the old act like children for fear they will be thought of as authoritarian. Eventually, the individual becomes so sensitive to restraints that he cannot even put any upon *himself*. The democratic constitution breaks down as anarchy begins to take over, which in turn gives way, finally to the tyrannical constitution.

Everything that was said about the state applies to the individual soul as well. Socrates goes on, in Book IX, to look at the tyrannical man. He says that while the tyrant appears to have complete freedom, he, in fact, is the most enslaved and wretched person. His soul is "full of disorder and regret" since it is ruled by its worst part, and always lives in fear. Recall that in Book IV Socrates describes the soul as having three parts: the rational part, the appetitive part, and the spirited part. The city, too, has the corresponding three parts, the rulers, the guardians, and the artisans and farmers. The rational part of the soul in the just person rules the other parts, and likewise, the ruling class rules the other two classes in the just city. Plato intends that the just man is the happy man; what makes a man just is that each part of his soul does its own job. That is, the rational part rules the other parts. Plato does not intend the happy man to be the man who has total freedom.

It is quite unlikely that Plato would maintain that freedom is the ticket to the greatest happiness. Lysis failed to see that sometimes being restrained in what one wants to do is the best thing. Socrates tries to hint to Lysis that he made a mistake. In the section from 209a-210b Socrates asks Lysis why his parents restrict him in some things. Lysis answers because of his age. Socrates points out that there are some things in which they do not restrict him-- the things in which he has knowledge. So, it must not be his age, but his lack of knowledge that causes them to place restrictions on Lysis. Rather than seeing that his parents' restrictions are for *his own* good-- that lack of knowledge may cause harm-- Lysis is led to the idea that their restrictions are for their *own sake*, and complementarily, they give him freedom (and love him) in order that they, themselves, may benefit from doing so.

Why would Socrates deliberately lead Lysis in the wrong direction? We must remember Socrates' purpose in talking to Lysis. His purpose is to show Hippothales the right way to approach one's beloved. Socrates wants to humble Lysis in order that he may gain self-knowledge. It is quite likely that Plato intends his reader to realize that this is the purpose of the discussion with Lysis, and that "usefulness" is not to be taken as the cause of one person loving another. If that is the case, it would make sense of Plato's exploitation, here, of parental love. Of all the kinds of love we experience, parental love is the most unselfish, unegotistical kind of love. Plato deliberately chooses parental love to use as an example in order that we may catch the absurdity that parents love their children only insofar as they are useful.

But, Plato goes on to assert the usefulness thesis again, and it is not until the medicine analogy, as Vlastos points out, that we get a theory of egoism. D. B. Robinson suggests a way in which this section of the dialogue may be understood. He spends a great deal of time discussing the technicalities involved with the meanings of "φιλεῖν", "φίλος" and

“φιλία.” The important outcome of his lexicographical investigation of these words is that the adjective, “φίλος” has three senses. It can take the form of a passive participle, “φιλούμενος,” meaning “dear,” or, if referring to an activity it can have the sense of “fond of” doing some particular activity. It can have an active sense, in which the emphasis is on the active side of friendship, the act of befriending, or loving. Or, the adjective can have the common meaning we translate as “friend.” As Robinson points out, “this is a logically symmetrical term separate from both active and passive.”⁴⁹ “Φιλία,” the noun, comes from “φίλος” and not from the verb “φιλεῖν.” It is used to refer to mutually reciprocated friendly feelings.

At 212a-213d Socrates takes Menexenus through a maze of the different uses of these words. He asks, “when one person loves another, which of the two becomes friend of the other--the loving of the loved, or the loved of the loving?” There has been much debate over the significance of this section of the dialogue. Some maintain it is merely a logical puzzle posed for the eristic Menexenus, aiming to bring him to ignorance.⁵⁰ Other scholars have argued Plato is intending that we see the necessity of reciprocity in friendship. Robinson rejects this interpretation, pointing out that Socrates finds Menexenus’ suggestion that both persons are friends when one person loves because there are objects we love that do not love us back. A third possibility is discussed by Robinson, although he ultimately rejects it. Robinson suggests Plato may have intended that the reader see the different senses in which “φίλος” may be used and to realize that there are

49. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

50. For example see Julia Annas, “Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,” *Mind*, Vol. 86, 1977.

two separate phenomena to be examined. There is the sense of “φίλος” in which a symmetrical relation is implied--if X is a friend to Y, (if X loves Y) then Y necessarily loves X, and is a friend to X. Then there is also the sense of “φίλος” in which a symmetrical relational is not implied at all. Rather, what is implied is that some **object** is valued, or cherished, and hence, is an object of pursuit. Distinguishing these two senses is crucial, Robinson maintains, if we are to find some “unity of aim throughout the dialogue.”

In the first part of the dialogue Socrates uses “φίλος” in the sense of mutual friendship. He asks “what is a friend?”, and searches for the answer by asking what kinds of people become friends. Is it that persons who are like each other are drawn to each other and become friends? Here Socrates is talking about both persons in a relationship having reciprocal feelings for one another. But once Socrates suggests it is the neither-good-nor-bad that love the good, the sense of “φίλος” changes. We are no longer discussing a reciprocal relationship. Socrates uses the example of the sick man loving medicine. Clearly, we cannot have a friendship with medicine, since medicine cannot reciprocate our love. Robinson points out that Socrates has switched, here, from a search for *what is friend*, to a search for *what is the object of pursuit*.⁵¹

Robinson argues that Plato did not clearly recognize the difference between these senses. That the notion of “pursuit” is relevant to the notion of friendship is recognized by Aristotle, but not by Plato, according to Robinson. Robinson quotes Aristotle,

...just as in the case of inanimate objects we can like a thing for each of these qualities, so we can like a man for each of these qualities...⁵²

When searching for the reason one becomes a friend of some other, Aristotle sees an

51. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

52. *Eudemian Ethics*, 1236a10-12

investigation of what it is in objects that we value, as helpful. He maintains that we are drawn to love others because of certain qualities they possess, just as we are drawn to objects because of certain qualities. However, Aristotle saw that looking at the objects of pursuit in order to learn about friendship, can only go so far. He realizes that loving persons is much different from loving objects. One simple factor is that friendship requires that the love be mutual, which, of course, is not possible with objects.

Perhaps Plato, like Aristotle, thought it important to understand what it is that causes each particular friend, in a friendship, to love the other. And an investigation of what the general object of pursuit is would shed some light on what causes someone to love someone else. That would explain Plato's shift in investigation from "what is a friend," to "what is the object of pursuit." However, Robinson argues Plato does not consciously recognize this, since he has not made mutual reciprocity a requirement. Robinson takes Socrates' suggestion that the neither-bad-nor-good person loves the good to be Plato's conception of friendship. And this relationship, he maintains, is not a reciprocal relationship. The good person is loved by the intermediate person, and there is no requirement that the good person reciprocate that love. In fact, Robinson argues, the good person will not love at all since he is self-sufficient.

Robinson concludes that Plato thought that friends were "φίλοι" in exactly the same sense that objects can be "φίλοι."⁵³ That Plato was fully conscious of these different senses of *philos* and that the discussion with Menexenus at 212b-213b is intended to tip off the reader to these different senses is highly unlikely, according to Robinson; Plato could not have expected his readers to follow this line of thought, and surely he did not expect his readers to discover from the *Lysis* the Aristotelian account of friendship.

Here we see the importance of the questions "Why did Plato write dialogues?" and

53. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

“How should we read a Platonic dialogue?” To recall the *Seventh Letter* (341c-343a) Plato says that there are some things one cannot put into words. He also denies having ever told anyone anything about the fundamental truths. Plato wrote dialogues in order to may capture a living conversation, dialectic in action. He aimed to create a living conversation so that his reader might engage in the conversation himself. It is not, then, implausible to think that Plato intended his readers to work with the dialogues in such a rigorous way that one would come to some conclusions similar to those of Aristotle.

Plato does, in fact, have in mind a notion of friendship similar to Aristotle’s. With the suggestion that *philos* is one’s own (*oikeion*), Plato switches from the use of *philos* in a passive sense (the sense in which only objects are loved) back to the sense of *philos* in which he began the discussion, that is, the sense in which mutual reciprocity is implied. The indication of this is that the examples Socrates gives have switched from objects (such as medicine) and abstract qualities (such as health and the good) back to persons. Yet, Robinson maintains that Plato was not conscious of this switch and is still not seeing reciprocity as a requirement for friendship, since “belonging” is an asymmetrical relationship. My possessions belong to me, but I do not think of myself as belonging to my possessions.

Paul Genest, however, points out that Plato did think of *oikeion* as implying a reciprocal relationship.⁵⁴ Socrates says to the boys, “Then if you two are friends to each other, by some natural bond you belong to **one another**” (221e). He also points out that the previous suggestion, that the intermediate loves the good because of some evil, is rejected because “it fails to capture what Plato recognizes as a crucial feature of *philia*: that in it one does seek the good of the friend for the friend’s own sake.”⁵⁵ The previous

54. Paul Genest, *Socratic Eros and Philia*, 1993, Diss: The John Hopkins University, p. 171.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

suggestion implies that the neither-bad-nor-good loves the good as a means to an end. The *philos* is merely a cure for some evil. But Socrates **rejects** this account of friendship in two ways.

First, he says that the only true friend is the one who we value for his own sake. Following up on the example they had already been using, Socrates says that medicine is loved for the sake of health, and that health must be loved for the sake of some good, and if this is not to go on *ad infinitum*, there must be some one thing at which all our love is directed. Vlastos takes this to mean that the only thing we truly love is the Good. Adams takes it to mean that we only love our own happiness. Robinson does not want to read into this passage any theory of the Forms, but says the *proton philon* must be something like the quality of goodness. What they all seem to miss is that Socrates offers another example in which a father loves his son for his own sake. If the father thought his son, who had drunk some hemlock, could be saved by wine, the father would value the wine, and, in fact, the vessel that carried the wine. But he would only value the wine and the vessel as a means to saving his true love, his son. The final end, and thing loved for its own sake, here, is the son. Socrates does not go on, as he did earlier with Lysis, to say that the son is only valued by the father as a means to some further benefit. Rather, he says the father values his son more highly than anything else. If Plato's intention here were to show that individuals themselves could not be loved for their own sake Plato would have had to show that the father only loved his son for some instrumental reason. Plato is requiring a friend be valued for his own sake. If a friend is not valued for his own sake, then he is merely a phantom, not a true friend. Socrates' next example is the love of gold. People value gold, but only for its instrumental value. Plato seems to be making a distinction between the kind of love we can have for material objects, and the kind of love we can have for people. If this is right, then Plato is making the same distinction that Aristotle later makes; that is, that friends are *philoï* in a different sense from the way objects are

philoï.

Second, Socrates rejects the suggestion that we love because of some evil on the grounds that if all evil were abolished, we would still desire friends. It cannot be the case that we love others only as a means (or a cure) because we would still love others even if there were no evil in the world. In other words, if there were no possibilities for a person to serve as a means for us, that is, if we had no disease that needed a cure, for example, then we would not have any friends at all, if friends were merely loved instrumentally. But Socrates thinks that we would love others despite not needing a cure. He thinks that we would love others for *their own sake*. Genest points out that the notion that *philoï* are *oikeioi* is offered as a solution to the earlier suggestion that the intermediate is loved because of some evil. Desiring what is one's own, and loving one's *oikeios*, is loving that person for his own sake. Socrates discards the disease/cure theory of friendship because it only allows us to love others as a means. He offers, then, a theory in which we can love others for their own sake, not as a means. Adams, then, is wrong that Plato sees friends as merely instrumental to some end.

However, the thesis that one loves out of some deficiency is not abandoned with the suggestion that the cause of love is a desire for one's own. Julia Annas argues that Plato turns from an egoistic love to an altruistic love.⁵⁶ But, as Genest correctly points out, the "loving one's own" thesis cannot truly be said to be altruistic.⁵⁷ One loves that to which one is akin because of a desire of what one lacks. One is still loving because of some deficiency. The deficiency is no longer considered an evil, which needs to be cured. Rather, the deficiency is a lack which needs to be fulfilled. There is still some benefit. But, unlike the previous account in which the friend is dispensable (I no longer need him

56. Annas, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

57. Genest, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

once I am cured), the friend is not dispensable. Genest says this account “emphasizes self-completion through community with others whom one finds congenial.”⁵⁸ My desire for what is *oikeion* is fulfilled by association with friends to whom I am akin. The fulfillment of this desire *is* the association; if the association ever dissolves, I will be deficient once again. Adams seems to have missed this entirely. Here we see that friends are not valued instrumentally at all, given Adams’ conditions for what it means for something to be instrumental. The state of Y (the fulfillment of my desire) cannot occur without X (my association with my friend). Furthermore, the state of affairs in which my desire is fulfilled is not just as valuable as the state of affairs in which I am not able to associate with my friend. My friend is part of me in the sense that we are akin. There is something that draws me to him, something that makes my friendship with him a completion of my self.⁵⁹ My beloved is never dispensable.

Plato does seem to have understood that people are *philoï* in a different way than objects are said to be *philoï*. Plato rejects the theory that the intermediate loves the good because of some evil on the grounds that it does not allow us to love people any differently than the way we can love objects, or activities. It does not allow us to love people for their own sakes. Furthermore, Socrates’ solution to the problem is a theory of friendship in which love is mutually reciprocated. Plato thinks of friendship as necessarily involving reciprocal love. The discussion with Menexenus at 212b-213d shows the different senses of *philos*: that which is a friend, and that which is an object of pursuit. But it also shows the necessity of mutually reciprocated love. Genest rightly interprets this passage as an attempt to show the absurdity of non-reciprocal friendships by suggesting that one will be a friend

58. *Ibid*, p. 178

59. This line of Plato’s thought will be discussed in the next chapter when the *Symposium* is discussed.

to one's enemy and an enemy to one's friend.⁶⁰ Robinson has sold Plato short by refusing to read the *Lysis* as a precursor, in most every way, to Aristotle's theory of friendship.

60. Genest, *op. cit.*, p. 169. Genest makes an interesting point here. He argues that the *Lysis* is a criticism of the traditional Athenian practice of pederasty. This passage, in particular, criticizes the common expectation that the beloved is not to reciprocate the eros of the pederast.

Chapter 3

Scholars who see the *Lysis* to offer an instrumental account of friendship have not given the dialogue a fair interpretation. Plato did not see friendships as merely useful relationships that one forms in order to benefit oneself. The correct interpretation of the *Lysis* shows that Plato does, in fact, recognize that an essential element of any kind of real friendship is a reciprocal concern for the well being of the other, for his own sake. This account of friendship is consistent with the other Platonic dialogues, several of which expand and elaborate the notions discussed in the *Lysis*.

3.1 The Apology

In order to appreciate fully Socrates' defense in the *Apology* one must understand the traditional practices of political *philia* in ancient Greece. Typically, citizens formed groups, or factions, which were alliances with particular households. The people within one's faction were considered one's *philo*. The purpose of such relations was to help secure one's property and to help defend one's property and one's reputation from enemies. With the vicissitudes of war and the state's lack of basic protections the Athenians did not look to the state to secure one's freedom or one's property but to one's *philo*. Consequently, one's loyalty was first to one's *philo* and then to the state. *Philo* supported each other's measures in the Assembly and business endeavors, as well as aiding in defenses against lawsuits or attacks in the Assembly.⁶¹

Mutual benefit was the essence of political *philia*. One had an obligation to support one's *philo* whenever the occasion arose and one could expect to receive the same support in return. Political *philia* is an instance of pure instrumentalism; one seeks to benefit one's *philos* only in order that one may in turn receive benefits. Benefitting one's *philos* for his

61. Genest, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

own sake was not typically a characteristic of political *philia*. K. J. Dover argues that even apparent acts of generosity were really just an attempt to benefit oneself.⁶² He offers a quote from the comic dramatist Menander which suggests this:

For that reason, father, I think that as long as you have possession of money, you should use it generously yourself and come to the help of everyone else, and make as many people as possible secure through your agency. For that is something that lives on for ever; if at any time you meet with misfortune, that same help will come back to you from them. (*Dyskolos* 805-12)

The generous act is not an altruistic act, performed merely for the sake of the other. Such acts of generosity are thought of as a sort of insurance policy; the receiver of the generous act becomes obligated to his benefactor by accepting his generosity. The generous act ties the two persons together in a relationship of political *philia* and assures each person that he has someone to defend himself or his property should the occasion ever arise.

Having political *philoï* implied having enemies. Whoever was not part of one's political faction was considered to be one's *ekhthros*, one's enemy. Dover points out that the Athenians took enmity much more for granted than we do.⁶³ He states, "A long-standing feud, year after year of provocation and retaliation, is a conspicuous phenomenon of the upper-class society..."⁶⁴ The common expectation that one has enemies is expressed in *Republic* I where Polemarchus agrees with Socrates that justice is "benefitting one's friends and harming one's enemies" (335e). Perhaps the competitiveness of Athenian society contributed to such tendencies. Genest says Athenians struggled to outdo one another, both in the political sphere and in rivalries between households.⁶⁵ Being part

62. K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle*, (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1974), p. 277.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

65. Genest, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

of a faction, and consequently *philos* to someone, meant that one was *echthros* to someone else. I might not have anything against you, but if you are the enemy of one of my *philoï*, then by obligation you become my enemy. My loyalty to my *philos* may require that I take revenge on you in some way; hence, I become your enemy and also the enemy of everyone in your household.

These traditional practices of political *philia* shed light on part of Socrates' speech in the *Apology*.⁶⁶ At 36a Socrates states,

Now, it seems if only thirty votes had been cast the other way, I should have been acquitted. And so, I think, so far as Meletus is concerned, I have even now been acquitted, and not merely acquitted, but anyone can see that, if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, he would have been fined a thousand drachmas for not receiving a fifth part of the votes.⁶⁷

Socrates was convicted by a very small margin of the votes. This, to him, means he was not convicted of the charges against him because of the weight of the evidence, but because the jury included too many of his accuser's *philoï*. The person officially prosecuting Socrates is Meletus. He is, however, only the person recruited to bring the charges against Socrates. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates says he does not even know Meletus (2b). Socrates' real accusers are Anytus and Lycon. Undoubtedly, both of these accusers had connections of political *philia* with some members of the jury. If some of the jury were not the accusers' *philoï* the votes of the jury would not have added up to a conviction. Had it not been for the support and the loyalties of their political *philioï* Anytus and Lycon would not have won the case against Socrates. Hence, Socrates' conviction was a result of his accusers' connections of political *philia*.

Just a few lines later, at 36b Socrates explicitly blames these traditional practices of political *philia* for his conviction:

66. I am indebted, here, to Paul Genest's dissertation.

67. *Apology*, trans. H. N. Fowler. All citations of the *Apology* will be from this translation unless otherwise noted.

And what do I deserve to suffer or to pay, because in my life I did not keep quiet, but neglecting what most men care for--money-making and property, and military offices and plots and parties that come up in the state...

The Greek word Fowler translates as “plots” is συνωμοσίαι, which are political unions or clubs; the word translated as “parties” is στάσεις, which are factions. As discussed earlier, one belonged to a particular faction and a particular political club on the basis of one’s connections of political *philia*. Socrates did not bother with such strategic alliances. He avoided seeking out one particular faction to which he could pledge his loyalty. Socrates asks what he deserves to suffer for not participating in the traditional practices of political *philia* for that is the cause of his conviction.

Instead of belonging to one particular faction, receiving and giving benefits to just a select group of people, Socrates says his aim was to benefit each and every citizen. At 36c he says,

...and devoted myself to conferring upon each citizen individually what I regard as the greatest benefit...For I tried to persuade each of you to care for himself and his own perfection in goodness and wisdom rather than for any of his belongings, and for the state itself rather than for its interests...

Socrates’ concern was to benefit everyone. This could be said to be his own version of political *philia*. Socrates’ political *philia* differs from the traditional practices in several ways. First, Socratic civic *philia* aims to benefit others; the ultimate purpose is not to benefit oneself. Socrates says again and again in his defense that his aim is only to inspire whomever he meets to care about his own virtue. At 29d Socrates says,

For I go about doing nothing else than urging you, young and old, not to care for your persons or your property more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much...

Socrates’ aim in the *Lysis* is consistent with his aim here. He seeks to benefit the citizens he associates with by educating them and, in doing so, turning them away from a lifelong

pursuit of material possessions and power toward a lifelong pursuit of wisdom and virtue. Whereas the traditional practices of political *philia* arise out of a desire to benefit oneself, Socratic political *philia* arises out of a desire to benefit others. To be sure, Socrates thought one would benefit from such a revision of the traditional practices. However, the benefits would not necessarily be the kinds of benefits one seeks within the traditional practices. The benefit to each person will be that the state itself benefits.

Socrates' version of political *philia* also differs from the traditional practices in that all citizens are *philoī*, rather than just the citizens within a particular faction. At 29d Socrates says

...I shall never give up philosophy or stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to **any one of you whom I may meet...** (my emphasis).

And the passage at 36c, quoted in full above,

For I tried to persuade **each** of you to care for himself... (my emphasis)

Socrates sought to benefit as many people as he could. While he may not have had the chance to associate individually with every citizen, he considered each citizen to be his *philos*. This is significant because it makes an important component of the traditional practice of *philia* impossible. If every citizen is considered *philos*, one could not have enemies as a consequence of alliances. This drastically changes the traditional practices of *philia*, which existed largely because of the existence of enemies and which cyclically created enemies. If Socrates' version of political *philia* became the common practice in Athenian society, political *philia* would no longer be characterized by having enemies. The kind of political *philia* that Socrates aims to cultivate, the kind of political *philia* that develops out of a concern for all citizens and that lacks enemies is seen in the ideal city of the *Republic*.

3.2 The Republic

Like the *Lysis*, the *Republic* has been interpreted by some to insist that people should be, and in fact are, loved only insofar as they are useful. For example, recall Gregory Vlastos' *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato*. Vlastos argues that his interpretation of the *Lysis* "fits perfectly" with the *Republic*.⁶⁸ Referring to the ideal city he says,

The institutions we find here appear designed from start to finish to make it possible for people to have each others' affection if, and only if, each "does his own" ...This principle, upheld in the name of δικαιοσύνη, dovetails into a conception of φιλία according to which one is loved so far, and only so far, as he produces good.⁶⁹

As with the *Lysis*, Vlastos' interpretation is not right. It is not surprising that he should come up with the same interpretation of the *Republic* as he did the *Lysis* since he simply imports his interpretation of the *Lysis* into it. He starts his critique of the *Republic* by pointing out that the ideal city is held together by bonds of fraternal love. Socrates describes the citizens of the ideal city as brothers.⁷⁰ Beginning the Allegory of the Metals at 415a he says, "All of you in the city are brothers." Socrates' aim in telling the citizens that they are all brothers originating from the same mother is to engender in the citizens a feeling of *philia* for one another. Socratic political *philia* is the fundamental basis of the ideal city; it is what holds the city together. There are no enemies in the ideal city; each citizen thinks of the other citizens as his *philoï*, in at least the broad political sense. But there is even a closer bond of *philia* between the citizens in the guardian class. At 463b-d

68. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

70. "if anyone attacks the land in which they live, they must plan on its behalf and defend it as their mother and nurse and think of the other citizens as their earthborn brothers," *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing: 1992). All citations of the *Republic* will be from this translation unless otherwise specified.

Socrates describes the guardians as thinking of themselves as kinsmen to one another. They will see each other as their brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. And they will treat each other as such, for “it would be absurd if they only mouthed kinship names without doing the things that go along with them” (463de). Since they are akin to one another they will have all things in common; “Friends possess everything in common,” even wives and children (424a). No individual guardian shall possess any property or material possessions. What property and possessions are necessary will be shared by the entire class (416d-417). Socrates says such restrictions are necessary for the citizens of the guardian class to do their job well (417ab, 421c).

Vlastos says, the guardian “can claim no benefit for himself except insofar as it would enable him to be a better producer.”⁷¹ He implies, then, that one is loved in the *polis* only insofar as one produces some good for the state. This principle, he says, is upheld in the name of justice. At 433a-434a Socrates defines justice as each person doing well that which he is naturally suited for, and not meddling in anyone else’s business. The philosopher- rulers will take turns ruling the city. When they are not serving as ruler they will spend their time contemplating the Forms. The guardians will protect the city, living harmoniously with one another in a communal manner. The artisans and farmers will work at perfecting their crafts and producing the best products they can. Everyone will acknowledge the authority of philosopher -rulers and will allow them to rule.

Vlastos recognizes that *philia* is the element that bonds the city together. But since, as he says, “we are given no formal definition of φιλία and φίλος in the *Republic*” he brings in his instrumentalist interpretation of *philia* from the *Lysis*; people are loved because they are useful.⁷² A person in the ideal city is loved only insofar as he is just; that is, only insofar

71. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

72. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

as he does his own work, and, in doing so, is useful to the city. Vlastos is right that we are given no formal definition of *philia* in the *Republic*. But, his misinterpretation of the *Lysis* does not fit at all within the arguments of the *Republic*. On Vlastos' account, if an action is not in one's self-interest then one would not be happy in performing that act; happiness entails that one's self interests are furthered. Clearly there are cases in which just action appears not to be in one's self-interest. According to Vlastos' account, then, performing those just acts must make us unhappy. However, this cannot make sense of Socrates' claim in Book II that justice always pays.

The guardians and the philosopher rulers of the ideal city seem to be obvious instances of persons performing just acts but being unhappy in doing so. At 419a Adeimantus expresses concern that far from benefitting from such justice, the guardians are actually treated badly and have a worse life in the ideal city. At 519d, when Socrates says the founders of the city must not allow the philosopher-rulers to remain in the light, but instead must compel them to go back down into the cave, Glaucon asks, "Then are we to do them an injustice by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?" Socrates gives them both the same answer. In response to Adeimantus he says,

...it wouldn't be surprising if these people were happiest just as they are, but we aren't aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so, as far as possible"(420b).

His almost identical response to Glaucon's question concerning the philosopher-rulers is:

You are forgetting again that it isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other...(519e).

In designing the ideal city Socrates is attempting to construct a healthy city, one in which each class of citizens is happy; he is not, however, seeking to make one particular group supremely happy. Clearly, though, Socrates thinks each group will be happy. Happiness will spread throughout the city. Why does Socrates think the people in the guardian class will be happy despite all the restrictions on their lives? How is it that justice benefits them,

even though they are deprived of almost every luxury? After experiencing the Forms, seeing the most beautiful and just of all things, how could the philosophers ever be happy to come back to the cave in order serve their term as ruler?

Richard Kraut, in his article “Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato” addresses these questions.⁷³ He focuses on the philosopher’s obligation to rule. At 519cd Socrates remarks that the founders of the city must *require* the philosophers to rule, if not, they will remain in contemplation and not ever serve as rulers. A few lines later Socrates asserts that serving as ruler is an obligation of the philosophers, and one which they will acknowledge. Socrates tells Glaucon what they will tell the philosophers:

And what grows of its own accord and owes no debt for its upbringing has justice on its side when it isn’t keen to pay anyone for that upbringing. But we’ve made you kings in our city and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both for yourselves and for the rest of the city. You’re better and more completely educated than the others and are better able to share in both types of life. Therefore each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of others...520bc.

The philosophers have an obligation to rule the city because the city raised them and gave them an education which allowed them to become philosophers. Therefore, the philosophers must rule as payment for their education. They are indebted to the city, and can only pay the debt by serving as ruler.

However, Glaucon’s question still hangs in the air. Are the philosopher-rulers made to live a worse life than they would if they were allowed to contemplate the Forms continuously? Why does Socrates expect the philosopher-rulers to be happy even during their service of ruling? If all just acts are beneficial to the person who performs them, how does the philosopher-ruler benefit by the just act of repaying the city by serving as ruler? Kraut maintains that “when Plato says that something pays he sometimes means by this not

73. Richard Kraut, “Egoism, Love, and Political Office in Plato,” *Philosophical Review*, 82, 1973.

that it is to one's own advantage but that it is to the advantage of someone else."⁷⁴ Kraut offers some helpful terminology. A person's interests are of two kinds: the person's proper interest, and the person's extended interests. He illustrates this distinction by considering a parent-child relationship. When a parent loves a child he considers anything that benefits the child to benefit himself also. As far as his interests are concerned, he sees the child as an extension of himself. He feels that he himself is harmed whenever the child is harmed, even if he doesn't know about the harm. His own interests consist, in part, of the child's interests, which are his extended interests. His proper interests are those interests which directly affect him. Kraut says, "When deliberating, he takes into account both his proper and his extended interests, gives each consideration its appropriate weight, and then acts in his own interests, all things considered."⁷⁵ A person considers his extended interests and his proper interests and serves whichever of those two he thinks serves his own interests overall. He may decide, in a particular situation, to serve his extended interests, rather than his proper interests. We would typically say that such an act is altruistic, since it does not serve the agent's proper interests but seeks to serve someone else's interests.

When Plato says that justice pays he does not mean that it necessarily benefits one's proper interests. It may benefit someone else's proper interests, and not one's own proper interests at all, while still benefitting one's own interests if the other's interests are part of one's extended interests. That Plato does, in fact, see one's interests to include one's extended interests Kraut says is evident from the following passage:

...can it profit anyone to acquire gold unjustly if, by doing so, he enslaves the best part of himself to the most vicious? If he got the gold by enslaving his son or daughter to savage and evil men, it wouldn't profit him, no matter how much gold he got. (589d)

74. Kraut, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Plato is saying that no amount of money is worth harming one's child. If selling one's child into slavery were, in some way, not harmful to one's child then perhaps one could profit from doing so. For instance, if the slave owners were kindly people who treated their slaves well one might think his child would be better off, or at least not worse off, if he did sell his child. Perhaps the family is struggling to have enough money to eat. One could decide that at least the child would be fed and clothed, and the rest of the family might be a bit better off with one less mouth to feed. Plato specifies that the slave owners are savage and evil men so there is no question that the child will be harmed if he is sold. Even if one never had to see his child or even hear of his child's fate after he went into the hands of the slave holders, despite having gained unlimited amounts of money, Plato thinks one could never profit. Clearly, one's proper interests could be served, for he could become the richest man alive. For Plato, then, the child's welfare is part of the parent's interests. Plato is assuming that a parent has a certain kind of love for his child. He is assuming that the parent considers the child's welfare to be his own, an extension of his own interests. If the child is harmed, the parent is harmed as well.

When Plato says that injustice is never profitable, he means it is never profitable to one's overall interests; that is, injustice is never profitable to one's interests when one's interests consists of both one's proper interests and one's extended interests. Plato takes the citizens of the ideal city to be willing, at least to some extent, to sacrifice their proper interests for their extended interests. He expects the citizens will think of their interests in this way because they think of all the citizens as their *philoī*. The Allegory of the Metals reminds them that they are all born from the same mother, the earth. Just as we saw in the *Apology* that Socrates considers all the citizens of Athens to be his *philoī*, so too do all the citizens of the ideal city think of their fellow citizens as their *philoī*. Each citizen considers the welfare of his fellow citizens. His fellow citizens' welfare is in his own interests,

among his extended interests, because they are all his *philo*. Socrates describes this connection between the citizens as sharing in each other's pleasures and pains. At 462b he says,

And when, as far as possible, all the citizens rejoice and are pained by the same successes and failures, doesn't this sharing of pleasures and pains bind the city together?

And at 462c,

What about the city that is most like a single person? For example, when one of us hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers.

Plato is not saying that this unity is found just among the guardian class. The whole city is bonded together by *philia* which causes each citizen to see all his fellow citizens' welfare as part of his extended interests. As Kraut points out, it is such bonds of *philia* that allows parents to give up their children when their children are born of a different metal (415b, 423cd).⁷⁶ If the citizen did not consider the welfare of his fellow citizens, giving up his child would be contrary to his own interests. Since giving up one's child to the class that suits his nature is a just act and since all just acts are in one's own interests the parent must see the benefit of his fellow citizens and the benefit of his child (for the child benefits by doing the work his nature is suited for, which is necessary if one is to be just) as his own benefit. This would be implausible if the parent saw his fellow citizens and his child as *philo* in the way that Vlastos' understands it. According to Vlastos one feels *philia* for another only insofar as he is directly useful to oneself. Vlastos interprets the *Lysis* to argue that the beloved is loved only because of the benefit the lover himself receives.⁷⁷ One does not love someone because of the benefit he produces for some third person. Vlastos, attributes to Plato a strong egoism, which does not incorporate extended interests into

76. Kraut, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

77. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

one's interests. Plato assumes that the citizens see each other as *philoï* in the sense that each is concerned for the other's interests and is willing to sacrifice one's proper interests for the interests of someone else, to at least some extent. Plato realizes there will be some limitations on the bonds of *philia* within the artisan/farmer class. The people in this class own private property and possessions, which will make the complete unity impossible. He expects there to be unity within the city as a whole, but only so far as possible. At the very least citizens will see each other as *philoï* in Socrates' political sense; that is, they will seek to help their fellow citizens to become the best human beings they can be.

Much more unity amongst the guardian class is possible, since they have everything in common, including wives and children. The philosopher-rulers care for and love the city most of all. Socrates says that "someone loves something most of all when he believes that the same things are advantageous to it as to himself and supposes that if it does well, he'll do well, and if it does badly, then he'll do badly" (412d).⁷⁸ The philosopher-rulers are incapable of distinguishing their private interests from the interests of the city. It is just this kind of altruism that distinguishes the rulers from the guardians. It is one of the requirements for becoming a ruler. This, in part, explains how the just act of serving as ruler is not contrary to the philosopher-ruler's own interests. However, Kraut brings up an interesting question: Why should the philosopher not try to avoid receiving an assignment to rule? There is a *class* of philosophers, which means that there are more philosophers than political offices at any given time. The philosopher could avoid ruling without harming the city since there are other philosophers just as competent who could

78. This passage confirms the claim that Plato recognizes and approves of the fact that people act not only out of self-interest but out of love for others. Seeing another's well being as a part of one's own interests is a kind of altruism. When one wishes the good for another for his own sake, if the wish is granted the well-wisher's interests are served by having his wish fulfilled. The well-wisher feels a sense of benefit since his wish is fulfilled. But it can hardly be said that the well-wisher did not wish the good for the other's sake, just because he benefitted in this way. Vlastos' interpretation of *philia* cannot make sense of this passage.

rule. When Socrates says that the founders must compel the philosopher to rule, does he mean they must make him rule against his will? The philosopher loves the state more than anyone, but he loves the Forms more than he loves the state. Given the choice between contemplating the Forms and ruling the state the philosopher would always choose to contemplate the Forms. He does not see ruling as a fine thing, although he cares for the state as much as he cares for himself, because he can experience the finest and most beautiful things in contemplating the Forms. How, then, is it in the philosopher's interest to rule when he is fully aware that the city will not be harmed if he does not rule? To answer this question, Kraut quite appropriately turns to the *Symposium*. An examination of the *Symposium* will help explain the philosopher's compliance (although still having to be compelled) to rule. It will also confirm the interpretation of the *Lysis* given in the previous chapter and elaborate Plato's theory of love and friendship.

3.3 The Symposium

The *Symposium* is a series of speeches given at a dinner party hosted by the poet Agathon. The festive party is a celebration of Agathon's recent victory at a dramatic festival. After they had finished dinner and were relaxing Eryximachus suggested they each give a speech praising the deity Eros. Vlastos, as well as many other scholars turn from the *Lysis* to the *Symposium* to locate the *proton philon*. As noted earlier there is no clear distinction between φιλεῖν and ἔρῶν. Both words are translated as "love" in English. ἔρῶν is usually more passionate and is more associated with desire, often sexual desire, whereas φιλία is most often associated with affection. But the two terms often overlap; one can refer to one's erotic lover as his *philos*. It is a mistake to think simply of *eros* in

terms of what we would call romantic love and *philia* as friendship. As we will see, much of what was said in the *Lysis* about *philia* will be restated as characteristics of *eros* in the *Symposium*. One cannot fully understand Plato's account of friendship without also understanding his views on *eros*.

The speeches reflect the different personalities of the guests, each understanding Eros in his own way. It would be interesting and fruitful to take up with each speech, however, the most important speech is that of Socrates. Before Socrates begins his speech he says his speech will differ from the other speeches in that it aims to speak truthfully about Love (198d-199b).⁷⁹ The other guests eulogized Love with whatever words they could, whether or not the description was true. Their aim was to give the most beautiful and noble speech, not the truest account of Love.

Socrates begins by dissipating the belief that Love is beautiful, the central theme of most of the other speeches. He asks Agathon if Love "is a love of something or of nothing?" (199e). Agathon agrees that Love must be a love of something. There must be some object to which love is directed. Love directs itself toward an object in the form of desire. Love desires that object to which its love is directed. When someone desires some object he must not, at the particular time that he desires, be in possession of that object. If he possessed the object of his love, he would no longer have a desire for it since he already possesses it. He possesses it at the present time, whether he desires it or not. When a healthy person says he desires to be healthy, Socrates maintains that what he really means is that he desires to be healthy in the future. He desires to continue being a healthy person. Future health is something that he lacks, at the present time. All desire then must necessarily be desire of something one lacks. Socrates says,

...and in general all who feel desire, feel it for what is not provided or present; for

79. *Symposium*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb. All citations of the *Symposium* will be from this translation unless specified otherwise.

something they have not or are not or lack; and that sort of thing is the object of desire and love (200e).

This is the same account of *philia* that we saw in the *Lysis* at 221d. Socrates says,

...desire is the cause of friendship, and the desiring thing is a friend to that which it desires...and the deficient is a friend to that in which it is deficient...

Love's object, Socrates and Agathon agree, must be beautiful things, since for ugly things there is never any love. Since Love is love of something that one lacks and since Love is always directed toward beautiful things, Love must lack beauty.

At this point Socrates says that he learned these things about Love from a Mantinean priestess named Diotima and that he will recount the things she said to him.⁸⁰ Having agreed to her argument that Love desires beauty but is not itself beautiful Socrates asks her, "Is Love then ugly and bad?" (201e). Of course not, she responds. Just because something is not beautiful does not necessarily mean that it is ugly. There is an in-between state, which is neither beautiful nor ugly. Just, she says, as there is a state between wisdom and ignorance. This too is a notion that we have already heard about in the *Lysis*; after disposing of the poet's ideas that like loves like, and that opposites are drawn to each other, Socrates offers his own suggestion that it is the neither-good-nor-bad which loves the good. Diotima then points out to Socrates that he must not think that Love is a god, for he is always saying that the gods are always beautiful and good. What, then, must Love be if it is not a god? Love, she tells him, is a *daimon*. All *daimones* are posed in between the immortals and the mortals. She proceeds to tell Socrates the genealogy of Love and in doing so explains metaphorically the origin of Love's character. Love's father was Resource and his mother was Poverty. This explains the metaxy that Love is in; on the one hand love is resourceful in achieving what he desires, but at the same time he is poor. She reminds Socrates that those who strive for wisdom are in this same kind of metaxy (203e).

80. It is often argued that the Plato attributes what follows to Diotima as a way of signaling that the account cannot be attributed to the historical Socrates.

Those who are wise already do not seek wisdom, for they already possess it. But those who are ignorant do not seek wisdom either, for they cannot even see that they have a deficiency. The followers of wisdom then are those in between wisdom and ignorance: they are not wise, but they are not ignorant since they are aware of their lack of wisdom.⁸¹ Love is a follower of wisdom: he is wise since his father is Resource, but ignorant since his mother is Poverty.

Having described the nature and origin of Love, Diotima then asks “what will he have who gets beautiful things?” (204e). She rephrases the question for Socrates, substituting “good” for “beautiful.” Now Socrates can see more clearly the answer. He who gets good or beautiful things will be happy. And this is common to all, she tells him. Everyone seeks the good in order to be happy; consequently, everyone is a lover. Socrates finds it a bit strange that everyone is said to be a lover. Clearly, some people seem to be lovers and some do not. Diotima tells him,

But you should not wonder, for we have singled out a certain form of love, and applying thereto the name of the whole, we call it love;...Generically, indeed, it is all that desires of good things and of being happy--Love most mighty and all beguiling. Yet, whereas those who resort to him in various other ways--in money making, an inclination to sports, or philosophy--are not described either as loving or as lovers, all those who pursue him seriously in one of his several forms obtain, as loving and as lovers, the name of the whole. (205e-d)

They have identified a certain form of love, the desire for one’s happiness, but this is just a general formulation of love and there are forms of this that are not given the name “lover.”

All craftsmen are makers of something, but not all makers are called craftsmen.

Generically speaking, she says, everyone is called a lover because everyone desires to be happy and strives for those things that he thinks will bring him happiness.

Alluding to the speech of Aristophanes, Diotima says love could be of our other half only if the other half that we are longing for were good; we would cut off a limb if it were

81. Undoubtedly Socrates is being referred to here.

bad, even though it belongs to us. Here, again, we are reminded of the *Lysis*: “So it is one’s own belongings, it seems, that are the objects of love and friendship and desire (*Lysis* 221e). In the *Symposium* Diotima puts a stipulation on the desire for one’s belongings: “...each person does not cherish his belongings except where a man calls the good his own property...since what men love is simply the good” (205e). The good, or beauty belongs to everyone. It is the good that one lacks, and which one seeks to possess. What Plato intends by the good “belonging” to someone is not explicit. L.A. Kosman offers an account of what it means for one to “seek the good which belongs to him” which is quite helpful. He points out that “good” is an incomplete predicate; “To say of something that it is good must always be relative to some description under which the entity said to be good is specified.”⁸² When we say someone is a good teacher we are assuming the description of a teacher. And if we say that someone is a good musician we are understanding what it means to be a musician. If I say simply “He is good,” without any further description, what is usually meant is that he is a good man. What it means to be a good man is dependent on the essential nature of man. When I predicate “good” or “beautiful” without giving any further qualification then I must mean that thing is “good” at being what it is, that is, in relation to its true nature. It itself is good in respect to what it is. The goodness which I am referring to depends on the essential qualities of the thing. When I say a sunset is beautiful, I have a different set of qualities in mind than those I do when I say a woman is beautiful.

To say something is good or beautiful is always in relation to what the thing in question is, its essential nature. What one seeks when one desires the good is to become a good human being; that is, one strives to become what one truly is. The lover desires to become a good specimen of that which is his proper nature. Self-love, then, is one’s desire to

82. Kosman, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

become one's true self. The lover is a lover in metaxy in the sense that he has not yet achieved his proper nature, but what he is striving for is, by nature, his. His essential nature is part of him, it belongs to him, it is just not yet realized. He is neither-good-nor-bad, as he was described in the *Lysis*, and he is striving to possess the good, striving to become a good human being. But what are we to make of love for others?

The lover desires to possess the good forever (206a). Human beings are, however, mortal and cannot possess the good forever. The behavior of the lover who pursues the good in perpetuity therefor takes the form of "engendering and begetting upon the beautiful" (206e). Diotima explains what she means. "All men are pregnant, Socrates, in both body and in soul: in reaching a certain age our nature yearns to beget." (206e). We yearn to beget because we desire immortality. The desire for immortality is the desire to possess the good forever. We yearn after the good and immortality, then, equally. The desire for immortality and the desire for the good are two different desires joined together into one desire called love. Each desire is fulfilled in a different way. The desire to possess the good is the self striving to become what one truly is, the completion of one's nature. The desire for immortality is the desire to beget in beauty.

One can beget in beauty in different ways. Diotima explains, those who are teeming in body achieve immortality by begetting children. This she treats as a lower, rudimentary kind of begetting. Those who are pregnant in soul give birth to virtue and wisdom. By far the most noble begetting is that of just cities and social institutions. Those who conceive of the soul most truly achieve immortality; for what the soul gives birth to is more lasting than any mortal child one could beget. Consider the key passage at 209b-c:

So when a man's soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget, he too, I imagine, goes about seeking the beautiful object whereon he may do his begetting, since he will never beget upon the ugly. Hence it is the beautiful rather than the ugly bodies that he welcomes in his pregnancy, and if he chances also on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one; and straightway in addressing such a person he is resourceful in discoursing

of virtue and of what should be the good man's character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other's education.

We now begin to get a picture of what love for others looks like. Just as in the *Lysis*, love here takes the form of educating one's beloved. Through dialectic the lover strives to educate his beloved. Socrates' demonstration to Hippothales was just this. Through discourse he educated Lysis by showing him he did not know what he thought he knew. He gave Lysis a boost toward wisdom by making him aware of his own deficiency. Without awareness of one's own deficiency of knowledge one is ignorant and does not strive for knowledge. Diotima here tells us that the lover seeks to educate one's beloved about what should be the good man's character and which are his proper pursuits. Recognizing beauty in the beloved, the endeavor of the lover is to bring forth that beauty. By educating his beloved about what his proper nature is, what the essential nature of man is, he beckons his beloved to it.

Kosman calls this love a recognition of beauty in another. This kind of love demands that the beloved become his true self; that is not to say that the lover demands the beloved to become someone else, but rather, to become his true self. By educating him the lover helps his beloved to understand his true nature and, hence, to understand what it means to be a good man. Knowing his true nature enables him better to fulfill his desire to possess the good. Although all people desire to possess the good, the good which belongs to them, many people do not know what that good is, since they are not aware of their essential nature. Consequently, they spend their lives striving for something they do not know. The lover shows his beloved who he really is, and bids him to strive to become this. In this sense Platonic love is conditional. It requires that one strive to be who he truly is. But it is also in this sense that Platonic love is not merely coincidental to one's existence as a human being, as the Christian *agape* love is. Platonic love, most of all, allows individuals to be loved for their own sakes. What is loved in them is their beauty

and goodness, and it is those parts they feel are their true selves, the parts they would claim as truly their own. Recall Diotima's words at 205e, "...each person does not cherish his belongings except where a man calls the good his own property and the bad another's." When one is loved because of the good in him, he feels it is he, himself, that is being loved.

There is another sense in which it could be said that Platonic love is love of the individual for his own sake. The lover seeks to draw his beloved to himself in order that the lover may possess the good and be happy. He seeks this for the beloved's *own sake*. The lover does not strive to possess his beloved's good, for that is not the good which belongs to him. He strives to possess the good which belongs *to him*, which culminates in his own self completion--becoming a good man. In loving someone he wishes the good for his beloved, for his beloved's own sake, and tries to bring that good about. He wishes his beloved to achieve fulfillment of his proper nature, and he does whatever he can to help him achieve this by educating him about what is his proper nature.

The cause of this wish (love) for someone else is his desire for immortality. Through the dialectic with his beloved the lover is able to give birth to that which was conceived in his soul. We cannot help but think of Socrates' maieutic practices here. Diotima says,

For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception, because in presence or absence he remembers his fair. Equally too with him he shares the nurturing of what is begotten, so that men in this condition enjoy a far fuller community with each other than that which comes with children, and a far surer friendship, since the children of their union are fairer and more deathless. (209cd)

If the lover happens onto a soul that is fair and noble, together they beget the most beautiful offspring. It is through their friendship and their dialectic that they are able to do such a thing. The lover seeks the good, and bids his beloved to do so as well. Together they pursue their proper natures and the fundamental questions of philosophy. Their offspring are virtue and wisdom, and these offspring bind them together in the closest and truest of

friendships. Although the lover's own desire is fulfilled through the association of his beloved, the desire can only be fulfilled if his beloved is loved *for his own sake*. Diotima says that the lover's beauty is beget by association with his beloved, and "because in presence or absence he remembers his fair." In the *Lysis* at 214 a-c Socrates discusses the necessity of friends cherishing one another and says that friends who cherish one another will long for each other when they are apart. Diotima is suggesting it is the very fact that each loves the other for his own sake that allows the association to be one in which virtue and wisdom are beget. Although each friend's desire for immortality is fulfilled by the mutual begetting of virtue and wisdom, it cannot be said that each loves only in order to fulfill this desire. If each person did not wish for and promote the other's good, their association would never beget virtue and wisdom.

Proper love, then, according to Plato, is the unselfish act of educating and promoting another's good. Platonic love of others is loving others for what they really are, not what they happen to be at the moment. Since the lover loves all instances of goodness and beauty it is the good and beauty in his beloved which initially draws him to his beloved. Vlastos says that the individual is never the object of love in Plato, since what the lover loves is the instantiation of good and beauty in him. But it is not that beauty or good that he seeks to possess, since it is not his own. The Platonic lover is concerned with developing the good in himself. In loving another he seeks to inspire his beloved to recognize and nurture his own beauty. The lover helps his beloved to develop his own good by revealing to his beloved his own ignorance, and then engendering in him a desire for wisdom and a desire to strive to become better.

We can now go back to our question about the philosopher-rulers that we left hanging. The philosopher-ruler also has the desire for immortality. He too, being mortal can only fulfill this desire by begetting the beautiful. He is concerned about the well being of the citizens in the ideal city because he does not distinguish between his private interests and

the interests of the state. But he also has a desire to create beauty. He does this by inspiring his citizens to become virtuous and wise and by helping to create the just city and its just social institutions. As Kraut points out, the philosopher has to be compelled to rule because he is so captivated by the contemplation of the Forms. It is the Forms that he loves and pursues most of all. But he also has the desire for immortality. However, he prefers to contemplate the Forms, since that is the most noble and beautiful activity. Left to himself, he would never choose to rule. The philosopher, therefore, must be compelled to rule. That does not mean that ruling is something he does not want to do or is unhappy doing. He derives happiness from the act of ruling and, in fact, fulfills a desire that would not otherwise be fulfilled. Ruling is simply the less preferred of two desirable activities.

Chapter 4

Chapter 1 brought attention to a dramatic element in the *Theaetetus* which has generally been overlooked by scholars. We saw that Plato juxtaposes Protagoras with Theodorus and exploits their friendship in the first half of the dialogue. Although Protagoras himself does not take part in this discussion, he is an important character in the dialogue. The question Socrates poses to Theaetetus is “What is knowledge?” Protagoras is brought into the discussion because Theaetetus’ answer--knowledge is nothing but perception-- is quite like the answer Protagoras gives in his book *Truth*. Theaetetus is familiar with Protagoras’ theory since he has read it often (152a). They agree, then, to examine Protagoras’ theory to see whether Theaetetus’ answer is worth keeping. However, Socrates wants Theodorus, rather than Theaetetus, to be the one to discuss Protagoras’ theory with him. He repeatedly tries to draw Theodorus into the conversation, but Theodorus resists on the grounds that Protagoras was his friend. Theodorus believes he would be acting unfaithfully to his late friend if he could not defend his friend’s theory against Socrates’ examination. Several times throughout this section of the dialogue Plato presses the fact that Theodorus and Protagoras were friends.

It was argued, in Chapter 1, that the dramatic content of a Platonic dialogue is not superfluous material put into the dialogue merely to entertain the reader. Plato uses dramatic content to bring his dialogues to life and in doing so bids the reader to participate with the dialogue rather than merely study its logical arguments. The juxtaposition of Protagoras with Theodorus is an intentional shift in interlocutors. After all, the search for a definition of knowledge begins in the first place as a way for Socrates to witness the brilliance of Theaetetus. Yet, Plato puts Theaetetus in the background for the examination of Protagoras’ doctrine, even though he has declared himself to be quite familiar with the

theory. Instead Plato has Theodorus square off with the “man is the measure doctrine,” not giving Theaetetus a chance at all to display his abilities. Did Plato forget that Socrates’ original purpose was to acquaint himself with Theaetetus? Once the examination of Protagoras’ doctrine is finished Theaetetus takes over the position of interlocutor for the rest of the dialogue. Plato, then, must have intended that Theodorus play a particular role in the examination of Protagoras’ doctrines.

In order to appreciate fully the dramatic function of this friendship it was necessary to gain understanding of what Plato took friendship to be. Contrary to the interpretation of some scholars, Plato does not take an instrumentalist approach to friendship. Taking as a hypothesis its authenticity, it will be shown that the *Seventh Letter* confirms this non-instrumental interpretation of Plato’s account of friendship. Then, turning back to the *Theaetetus* with this notion of friendship in mind, it becomes obvious that Plato intends to augment his refutation of Protagoras’ theory by means of the friendship between Protagoras and Theodorus.

4.1 Summary of Plato’s account of friendship

Plato took true friendship to be a relationship between two people in which each wishes the good for the other and is loved by the other for his own sake. Plato does not think of friends as merely instruments to serve one’s own interests. In the *Lysis* Plato intends to show that friends must not be *philoï* in the same way that objects are *phila*. In switching from the question “Who is a friend?” to “What is the object of pursuit” Plato is making a distinction, albeit subtly, between loving something insofar as it is useful and loving something for its own sake. He, like Aristotle, saw a connection between the two questions because both things, objects and friends, are said to be *phila*. But, also like Aristotle, he recognizes that people are not, or at least should not, be *philoï* in the same way that objects are *phila*. Within the traditional practices of political *philia* in ancient Athens persons were *philoï* in just the way

that objects are *phila*. One's *philo*i were those people who served one's interests. *Philo*i were dear only insofar as they were useful. In the *Apology* we see Socrates condemning such practices. Socrates does not want to do away with political *philia*, but revise it so that people are not *philo*i in the way that objects are *phila*. The ideal city in the *Republic* shows us in just what way Socrates intends citizens to be *philo*i to one another: citizens are to be *philo*i to one another in that they see the interests of their *philo*i as their own, so far as possible. This differs from the traditional practice in that it is an altruistic kind of love; one will sacrifice one's proper interests (which is what we call "one's interests") for the sake of another's interests.

We also see in the *Lysis* that Plato thought the proper way to treat one's *philos* was to educate him. Socrates demonstrates this to Hippothales through his conversation with Lysis. Furthermore, Socrates' entire conversation with both Lysis and Menexenus is an enactment of friendship because he reveals to them their own deficiency in knowledge. That this is what Plato takes to be the essence of true friendship is confirmed by the *Symposium*. Love for others is the recognition of good in them and the act of helping them to develop that good. The first step in obtaining one's good is recognizing one's deficiencies. The lover helps to bring the good about for his beloved first by turning him to recognize his own deficiencies--the first step of the Socratic method of education. Once the beloved realizes his own deficiency the relationship becomes a mutually reciprocated endeavor to help each other become virtuous and wise. At this point each person in the relationship benefits from the association. However, this kind of mutual benefitting is different from that which characterizes the traditional political *philia*. Each person is loved, in part, for the benefit he provides his beloved. But he is also loved for his own sake. This is not problematic for Plato, for he thinks there are many things that are loved both for their own sake and for the benefits they provide. In the *Republic* at the beginning of Book II Glaucon gives a division of goods into three classes. There are some things that are good only for the benefit they

provide. We would not choose these goods for their own sakes, but only for their benefits. Then there is a class of goods we welcome, not because we desire what comes from them, but because we welcome them for their own sake (357b). The third class of goods are those that we welcome on both counts. These goods we welcome for their own sakes and for the benefits they provide. Socrates says these are the finest goods, and it is in this class of goods that he sees justice. True friendship is also this kind of good. Surely, since Socrates says a good friend is the one thing he has longed for since his childhood, he would put friendship in the class of goods which is the finest.⁸³

We also see in the *Seventh Letter* that Plato considered true friends to be one of the finest goods. He says, at 331e, that if Dionysius were to avoid the plight of his father he must win loyal friends and companions. Without loyal friends, Plato says, he would not have any people whom he could trust to put in charge of the various cities. Darius' success was largely due to the fact that he had loyal friends.

Despite appearances, Plato is not talking about the kinds of traditional bonds of political *philia*. He says, at 332c, that Dionysius was "in want of tried and true friends." Two pages later we are given a description of who is a tried and true friend. Plato describes Dion's friendship with those who were with him when he was murdered, those who, in Plato's mind, were responsible for his murder:

His friendship with them, however, was not based on philosophy but on such social activities as are current among most of those that call themselves friends.

In comparing his own friendship with Dion to these other friendships he says:

His [Plato's] attachment to his friend [Dion] had originated not in any low-bred friendship, but in mutual participation in liberal [education]...(334b).

Tried and true friendship is a relationship of mutual education. It is a relationship that is

83. "There is a certain possession that I have desired from my childhood...for the possession of friends I have quite a passionate longing, and would rather obtain a good friend than the best quail or cock in the world; yes, and rather, I swear, than any horse or dog. I believe, indeed, by the Dog, that rather than all Darius' gold I would choose to again a dear comrade--far sooner I would than Darius himself., *Lysis*, 211e.

founded on mutual commitment to strive for virtue and wisdom. The consequence of such a relationship for Dion was that he came to hold virtue dearer than pleasure or luxury (327b). Referring to Dion, at 327c, Plato says, “he had by the operation of our mutual intercourse arrived at a desire to live the noblest and best life.” Friendship based on philosophy is a relationship of two people working together to lead a virtuous life. These are the kinds of friendships that Plato advises Dionysius to cultivate. He sees it as necessary for Dionysius to have such friendships for two reasons. First, if one’s associates are persons who care about philosophy, they will be trustworthy and loyal because they will care about virtue more than pleasure or luxury. They will care most about truth and justice and will see the interests of their citizens as their own. Second, in order that he be a philosopher-ruler he must have true friends with whom to philosophize, for dialectic is the means by which one attains true knowledge, and the dialectic requires friendship (341cd and 344b). True friendship, then, is one of the finest things one could have, and Plato undoubtedly saw it in same category of goods as justice and wisdom, that is, valued both for its own sake, and for the good it brings.

4.2 Plato’s Refutation of Protagoras’ *homo mensura* doctrine

Since Protagoras is no longer alive and cannot defend his doctrines himself Socrates and Theodorus must surmise what Protagoras himself would say in defense of his theory. In Socrates’ longest “impersonation” of Protagoras, at 166a-168c, he argues that his theory does not make it impossible for one man to be wiser than another. It is quite reasonable to suppose that Protagoras would have argued this, since he himself sought to teach young men to be wise. Speaking for Protagoras, Socrates says at 166e,

By a wise man I mean precisely a man who can change any one of us, when what is bad appears and is to him, and make what is good appear and be to him...It is not that a man makes someone who previously thought what is false think what is true...

A wise man, for Protagoras, is simply a man who can change a person’s bad condition to a better condition. For example a physician can change a sick man into a healthy man. The

Sophist can change a person whose thoughts are unsound to sound; the change is not from false thoughts to true ones, but to *better* thoughts.

Given that Protagoras admits that one person can be wiser than another, that is, that one person knows the “better” condition of a certain state, Protagoras’ appears to be refuting himself. Socrates points out at 170d that no one, not even a Protagorean, would say that there are no people who are ignorant, or that there are no people whose judgments are bad. However, the *homo mensura* doctrine maintains that however something appears to someone is true, for him. Every person’s judgments are true, for him. There is no room for ignorance or bad judgments since every person’s judgments are true for himself. If someone is of the opinion that my judgments are bad judgments, I must acknowledge that his judgment (about my judgments) is true, for him. Protagoras’ theory requires that one admit that whatever is true for an individual is true for that individual. At 171a Socrates says this has an exquisite conclusion: Protagoras (on the basis of his own theory) must acknowledge that his own theory is false. Many people maintain that Protagoras’ theory is false. Since, on Protagorean terms, everyone’s own judgments are true for themselves, then Protagoras has to admit a judgment that his theory is false, is true. Now, since the person who believes Protagoras’ theory to be false does not maintain that everyone’s opinions are true, for him, he does not have to admit the validity of Protagoras’ opinion that man is the measure of all things. Protagoras admits that other’s opinions that his theory is false, are true, but they do not, in turn, admit that Protagoras’ opinion is true. Socrates concludes, “Then, since it is disputed by everyone, the Truth of Protagoras is true to nobody--to himself no more than to anyone else” (171c).

Edward Lee, in his “Hoist with his own Petard” argues that Socrates’ refutation of Protagoras’ theory at 171a-c is flawed.⁸⁴ It does not follow, Lee points out, that since some

84. Edward Lee, “Hoist with his own Petard,” *Exegesis and Argument*, 1973, p. 225-61.

people think his theory is false that he, therefore, must himself admit his theory to be false. For all that follows from this is that he must admit that if someone thinks his theory is false then it is false for that person. In other words, if I were to say to Protagoras that his theory is false, he would simply say, “yes,- it is false *to you*.” He does not have to admit that his own theory is false, because his own judgments are true-for-him. Protagoras does not have to admit the falsehood of his own theory simply because he can assert, to use Lee’s terms, “relativized qualifiers” on his opponents unrelativized vocabulary. In doing so, Protagoras does not acknowledge his opponent’s criticism. Instead he treats the criticism as if it were a statement expressing nothing but his opponent’s feelings. In asserting relativized qualifiers the opponent’s refutation is denied to be a refutation at all. The effect of this is to block the force of the criticism as a criticism.

In making a criticism against Protagoras’ theory by using an unrelativized vocabulary Socrates has begged the question. He argues that Protagoras has to admit the unrelativized truth that his theory is false, because of the relativized truth that his theory is false. But Protagoras’ theory says that there are no unrelativized truths at all. To make a sound and logical refutation of Protagoras’ theory one’s arguments would have to stay within Protagoras’ unrelativized language. To assert any relativized qualifiers in one’s argument would be to beg the question.

As Richard Ketchum points out, highly revisionary theories such as Protagoras’ are hard to refute.⁸⁵ “Revisionary” theories are theories that argue or imply that the majority of our common sense beliefs are false. These theories are difficult to refute because they call into question most of our current beliefs, which makes it hard to find any ground from which to argue. Ketchum says the challenge of refuting Protagoras’ theory is that it has to be done “by

85. Richard Ketchum, “Plato’s ‘Refutation’ of Protagorean Relativism: *Theaetetus* 170-171,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1992), p. 90 ff.

using premisses which do not assume that anything is flatly true or false.”⁸⁶ To say that Protagoras is refuting the *homo mensura* doctrine by the very act of asserting it is to assume that an assertion is either true or false, which is the very thing Protagoras denies. Ketchum says the difficulty of arguing against highly revisionary theories is that it is like arguing with someone who speaks a foreign language. Any kind of real discussion is nearly impossible. Ultimately, Ketchum argues, the best way to deal with highly revisionary theories is to ask what reasons there are for the adoption of a particular theory. If we are to give up all our current beliefs there must be good reasons for doing so. We must ask how the new theory will benefit us, and weigh those benefits against the sacrifices we make in giving up our current beliefs. Ketchum maintains that Plato was aware of the difficulty in arguing against such theories. He speculates that the image of Protagoras popping up out of the ground may suggest that there is more to be said on this account. Ketchum states,

The image suggests that Plato was aware that there may be more to be said. It may even show an awareness on Plato’s part that the only way to discuss relativism is not to try to prove it false or true for one or another person. Rather, the only way to evaluate the theory is by arguing for or against its adoption as one might argue for or against the adoption of a language or technical vocabulary.⁸⁷

It is very likely Plato did, in fact, see the difficulties of refuting Protagoras’ theory merely by means of straightforward philosophical arguments. He does try to argue within Protagoras’ own relativized language. At 171a Socrates states,

If, on the other hand, he [Protagoras] did believe it [the *homo mensura* maxim], but the mass of mankind does not agree with him, then, you see, it is more false than it is true by just so much as the unbelievers outnumber the believers.

Socrates’ argument is that Protagoras’ theory is more false than it is true, since there are more people who maintain that it is false than there are who maintain it is true. However, this conclusion is unsatisfying and it can hardly be said to be a refutation of Protagoras’ theory; all

86. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

87. Ketchum, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

that it proves is that Protagoras is in the minority in his belief that man is the measure of all things. It does not prove that the theory itself is false. That Socrates goes on to argue that Protagoras' doctrine is self-refuting shows that he, himself, was not satisfied with this refutation.

Plato was well aware of the challenges he was up against in trying to refute a theory of relativism. He knew that it would be very difficult to refute Protagoras' theory solely by logically sound arguments. Plato recognized that if he were to refute the theory that knowledge is nothing but perception, it would have to be done, in part, by recognizing the consequences of such a theory. We should not, however, expect Plato to *tell* us those consequences, for he did not think it was possible to *tell* anyone anything about the fundamental truths. Furthermore, if Ketchum is right, that there is no common language in which to express Protagoras' theory and by which one could refute it, then Plato has no choice but to *demonstrate* its contradictory. Alexander Sesonske argues Plato *shows* his readers that which he cannot say.⁸⁸ Intellectual progression is achieved through discussion; it is through dialectic that one realizes his own ignorance. Once a person knows that he does not know he strives to gain knowledge through inquiry (this time knowing that one does not know) by using hypotheses. We pose a hypothesis, and through questioning and answering we are led to either confirm or reject that hypothesis. The written dialogue, however, cannot answer our questions. We cannot have a discussion with the written word in the way that Socrates had discussions with people. How, then, Sesonske asks, are we to move beyond knowing that we do not know? He suggests that the dialogue can lead us to knowing by *showing* us whether our hypotheses are correct ones. He states,

The argument similarly cannot say, if asked what its presuppositions and implications are; can it too somehow *show* them? When Socrates was asked, what is virtue? he replied, I do not know. But if beholding the life of Socrates we ask ourselves what

88. Alexander Sesonske, "Knowing and Saying: The Structure of Plato's Meno," in *Plato's Meno* (Cal., Wadsworth Publishing Company: 1965).

virtue is, we can see that to be virtuous is to be like Socrates.⁸⁹

Plato's dialogues may not be able to tell us, explicitly, what virtue is. But they show us what virtue is: being like Socrates. The *Lysis* does not *tell* us what a friend is, rather it *shows* us. The dialogue exhibits friendship. Socrates cannot say what a friend is, but he is a friend to Lysis, Menexenus and Hippothales. We gain knowledge of what a friend is by directing our attention to what Plato has to show us, and not merely by what he tells us.

By juxtaposing Protagoras with Theodorus, a distinguished mathematician, Plato shows us what the consequences of Protagoras' theory would have on mathematical studies and the sciences in general. The rhetorical structure of the dialogue implores us to validate the life of Theaetetus, who has, as an adult, become much like his mentor, Theodorus. The occasion of the dialogue is Theaetetus' ensuing death and Terpsion's and Eucleides commendation of him. If we see Theaetetus' life as worthwhile we make the same judgment of Theodorus' life and dismiss Protagoras' theory in doing so.

Implications of Protagoras' theory are also shown to us by the exploitation of the friendship between Protagoras and Theodorus. Plato has Socrates insist that Theodorus be the one to take up with Protagoras' doctrines because of the friendship between the two men. Theodorus does not want to involve himself in the discussion of Protagoras' theory on the grounds that he was his friend. He repeatedly displays his loyalty to Protagoras by resisting Socrates' requests that he be the one to defend his friends' doctrine. Having finally taken up the discussion with Socrates, Theodorus' loyalty to his friend is seen again when he says, at 171c, "We are running my old friend too hard, Socrates." Throughout the examination of Theaetetus' answer that knowledge is nothing but perception the notion of friendship is an important sub-theme. Plato exploits the friendship between the two men in order to draw our attention to the implications Protagoras' doctrines would have for friendships in general.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Plato's idea of friendship is, in significant ways, similar to Aristotle's. As previously argued, Vlastos' objection that Plato's account of friendship falls short of Aristotle's because it does not require that persons wish the good for the other for his own sake is wrong. Plato, at least as much as Aristotle, recognized this to be an essential element for true friendship. Platonic friendship is characterized by an effort to make one's beloved aware of his own ignorance and to engender in him a desire to strive for virtue. That, more than anything, would be considered by Plato as wishing, and trying to bring about, the good for one's friend. The very idea of friendship entails that two people each wish the good for one another and attempt to promote it for one another.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle gives these requirements for friendship and includes one more: each friend must be aware of the other's good will. He sees this as a requirement because "many people have good will toward persons they have never seen...but how can they be called friends when they are unaware how they are disposed to one another."⁹⁰ Plato took for granted that this was a part of friendship as well, for dialectic entails that each person is aware of the other's good will. In the *Seventh Letter* Plato describes dialectic as "benevolent disputation...without jealousy" (344 b). The common pursuit of the truth requires that each friend treat the other benevolently and that both persons recognize the other's good intentions. If one person were not aware of the other's good intentions, it is quite likely he would refuse to accept his help and the friendship would be stunted. For example in the *Republic*, Thrasymachus did not recognize Socrates' good intentions. Rather, Thrasymachus interpreted Socrates' intentions to be disingenuous. Consequently, Thrasymachus comes off as a "wild beast" ready to attack Socrates.

One of the implications of these requirements is that there must be some objective good to which both persons in a friendship appeal. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle points out this very

90. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155b34-1156a5, trans. W. D. Ross.

implication: “Those, then, are friends to whom the same things are good and evil.”⁹¹ Plato, too, expects that friends will share the same convictions about what is good and what is evil.

In the *Republic* he says,

And when, **as far as possible**, all the citizens rejoice and are pained by the same successes and failures, doesn't this sharing of pleasures and pains bind the city together?... (462b, my emphasis)

Plato anticipates that the citizens will all rejoice at and be pained by the same things because they are *philoî* with one another. Vlastos criticizes Plato on this point, arguing that this kind of unification of opinion is a constraint on personal freedom at its deepest level--people do not have the freedom to feel what they want to feel.⁹² But, Plato says people will have the same opinions *as far as possible*. He realizes that people will not like and dislike exactly the same things. It would be ridiculous to expect that Plato intends all the citizens to like the same music, the same foods, and the same colors, as Vlastos seems to take him to be saying. Plato's point is that the people will agree on the important things, that is, on the question of who is a good man, and what are his pursuits.

The more subjects on which people will agree the greater the bonds of *philia* will be between them. The citizens in the guardian class will have more of their fundamental ideas in common with one another than the artisan/farmer class, allowing for greater bonds of *philia*. The class of philosopher-rulers will have even more agreement amongst themselves, since they all have experienced the Forms. But all the citizens of the ideal city will agree, at some fundamental level, about the nature of good and evil. Friendship, for Plato, requires that there be some agreement on the fundamental question of the good.

If there were no shared good, it would be difficult for persons to wish good things for one another. The good things one wished for one's friend would be either one's own idea of

91. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1381a8, W. Rhys Roberts.

92. Vlastos, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

the good, or the other's idea of the good, neither of which are actually instances of wishing the good, at least in the sense which characterizes friendship. For example, how would person *J* wish good things for person *K* if the good things for *J* were *x*, and the good things for *K* were *y*. For *J* to wish *K* good things would mean that *J* would wish *x* for *K*. Yet *x* is not the set of good things for *K*. *J*'s wish for *K* is, then, not a wish for good things for *K*, according to *K*; the requirement that one be aware of the other's good will would not be fulfilled. In fact, *K* might see *J*'s wishing and efforts to bring about those wishes as a nuisance or even as a hindrance to achieving his own happiness. Imagine you have a friend, let us call him Ted, who is fervently anti-technology. He believes technology will prevent one from having a good life. Wishing that you have a good life, every time you are with Ted he lectures you about the ill effects technology has for you and society. Everyday your mailbox is full of pamphlets and books which express these views, sent to you from Ted. Far from seeing Ted's actions as benevolent you are beside yourself with frustration and irritation at Ted. Socrates' efforts to benefit his fellow citizens were viewed by some in this way, for example and it cost him his life.

Perhaps, then, one might say, *J* should wish *y* for *K*. After all, being able to take the circumstances, needs and desires of one's friend into account is a necessary component of formulating a wish for that friend. A wish for good things for a friend must be a wish for the *other's sake*. Which is to say that the good things that are wished must really be good for the person they are wished for. Thus, if *K* says that good things are *y* for him then perhaps *J* should just wish him *y*. *J*'s wishing *y* for *K*, however, would mean that *J* had still not wished good things for *K*, since good things for *J* are *x*, not *y*. If *J* argued that his wish for *K* was not a wish for 'the good things for him' but a wish for 'the good things for *K*', and should still be considered a wish for good things one would have to question the sincerity of *J*'s wish. If, for him, good things actually are *x*, then a wish for a different set of good things altogether would seem to be characterized by indifference, which could hardly be said to be a

mark of friendship. If, for example, Ted did not try to help me break my technology habit, and instead he gave me what I had wished for my birthday-- a faster modem and a cellular phone-- all the while believing that technology would be my demise, Ted would not be wishing the good for me at all.

Although it is important for one to consider what one's friend thinks are good things for himself, this cannot be the only basis on which he formulates his wish. Without some objective good, even in the most abstract form, wishing the good for another is not possible. This is the problem that arises for Protagoreans. On Protagoras' account, the way in which a given thing appears to a person is true for that person. Protagoras did not intend that his *homo mensura* maxim apply only to those things experienced by our sense faculties. He also thought his maxim to include ideas. Richard Ketchum points this out,

...Plato himself was aware of the fact that the theory he refutes at 170-1 is not a theory that assumes or pretends that all properties (other than, perhaps, truth) are perceptual properties. After arguing against Protagorean relativism in all of its generality, Socrates points out that it may none the less be true that "many things--hot, dry, sweet, and everything of that sort--are for each person as they seem to him (171e).⁹³

If Protagoras meant by his maxim that a person's sense perceptions are true for him then his maxim would be quite trivial and Socrates would not be at such pains to refute it. Protagoras' theory, however, is far from trivial; he is arguing that *all* things, not just sense perceptions, *are* however they appear to any individual. Justice, virtue, goodness and evil are however they appear to an individual. There is some confusion about what kind of world Protagoras' theory implies. Ketchum points out that Socrates interprets Protagoras' theory as a theory of relativism and as a theory of solipsism. It is a theory of relativism in the sense that nothing is unqualifiedly anything at all. Everything that is, is in relation to some person.

At 166c he attributes to Protagoras a theory of solipsism:

No, he will say, show a more generous spirit by attacking what I actually say, and prove, if you can, that we have not, each one of us, his peculiar perceptions, or that,

93. Ketchum, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

by granting them to be peculiar, it would not follow that what appears to each becomes --or is, if we may use the word 'is'--for him alone to whom it appears.

In this passage Socrates is referring to the particular objects experienced by sense perceptions. He explained the difficulty of using the word 'is' or any such expression that brings things to a standstill by appealing to Heraclitus' doctrine of the flux (157a). Since every object is in a constant state of becoming, no thing can be said to 'be' at all. Furthermore, there are no objects until there is a friction between two kinds of motion. The friction creates two offspring: the perception and the thing perceived. Hence, everything that is perceived will be entirely dependent upon the person who perceives it. For this reason then, we each live in our own independent world. But Protagoras does not see this solipsism applying only to sense perceptions, but to abstract entities as well. In his argument that one man can be wiser than another he says,

It is not that a man makes someone who previously thought what is false think what is true, for it is not possible either to think the thing that is not or to think anything but what one experiences, and all experiences are true (167a).

Here we see that ideas are also veridical, just as sensations are. That he is talking about ideas, or opinions, is clear, since that is what the wise man is concerned with when he tries to manipulate the unwise man. The distinction between relativism and solipsism, according to Ketchum, is that relativism asserts that everything that *is* is in relation to someone. Relativism, in itself, does not deny there are public objects. Since all objects exist only in relation to someone there will be no grounds for agreements or disagreements between any two people. Solipsism, on the other hand, denies there are any objects common to anyone and anyone else. On this account, disagreements are inevitable because there are no common objects (whether material or abstract entities) by which to resolve them.

It is unlikely that Protagoras intends a full-fledged theory of solipsism because he seems to think that other people do exist as something more than a figment of one's imagination. He argues as much when he argues that the wise man does, in fact, exist. Although there are

differences between a solipsistic theory and a relativistic theory of the world, their implications are much the same. On either account, a given thing can be totally different for two different people--not just appear differently, but actually be a different thing for each person. Hence, the good will be something different for each person. Given the Protagorean context, there is no objective good, and therefore wishing the good for another, with the genuineness we associate with friendship in the true sense is unlikely.

Ultimately, any kind of relations with one another and the community in general would be sacrificed within the context of Protagoras' doctrines. James Haden makes this point: "What emerges [from Protagoras's doctrine] is a view of human relations as solely matters of push and pull, with an in-built tendency toward solipsism."⁹⁴ On Protagoras's account we have "no incentive to recognize anyone else as an entity in his own right,...[our own] feelings come first; his do not."⁹⁵ If another's beliefs do not correspond with one's own they are simply dismissed. If the actions or attitudes of others are a threat to me I can simply regard them as insignificant and ignore them. As Lee points out, Protagoras can block any criticism by asserting relativized qualifiers on his opponents statement, thereby refusing to see it as a denial at all. In a Protagorean world any person could refuse to see another person's statements as meaning anything. Any kind of statement one may make, a denial, an assertion, or a criticism could be seen by a Protagorean as meaning nothing more than a statement of one's beliefs. The Protagorean would not recognize others as saying anything real. At the end of all our statements we would have to add "for me," or "for you." As Haden points out, language within a Protagorean context inherently cuts us off from others and forces us to see others as simply as a means to our own happiness.

Friendship for Plato and Aristotle (and most of us) would be impossible within a

94. James Haden, "Did Plato Refute Protagoras?," *History of Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 1, No. 3, July 1984, p. 236.

95. *Ibid.*

Protagorean context. A Protagorean, entrenched in his own relativized vocabulary, is unable to wish the good for anyone else because each person defines the good for himself. On this account, there is no common good. However one person might define the good may be quite different from how another person defines the good. A Protagorean would also be unable to wish the good for someone because he fails to see the other person as an end in himself. He does not acknowledge the statements other people make as *saying* anything nor does he acknowledge the feelings of other people in such a way as to treat them as real. A Protagorean could insert his relativized quantifiers into any statement one may make. Any kind of significant communication between two people would be hindered by the “for you” at the end of every statement. If a Protagorean did not like a statement you made he could simply insert his “for you” at the end of your statement and thereby render it meaningless. He can choose not to recognize your statements as *saying* anything real. In doing so he would not be treating you as an end in yourself. Therefore, a Protagorean would not be able to wish the good for another, for *his own sake*. For a Protagorean, others are merely instruments to be used to achieve his own happiness. On Protagoras’ account, the only kind of friendship, if any at all, that would be possible would be a very crude utility-based friendship, which would dissolve as soon as the utility ceased. Not only would Protagoras and Theodorus not have a true friendship, but there would not be true friendship between any persons.

Would Protagoras find this outcome acceptable? Although we do not get a first-hand picture of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* we see him portrayed as a friend to Theodorus. It is clear that Theodorus saw their friendship to be a close, abiding one. This friendship was clearly not a crude utility-friendship, at least in Theodorus’ mind; Theodorus is so loyal to Protagoras that he is willing to jeopardize his life’s work for him. Theodorus’ motive for such loyalty could surely not be utility based since Protagoras is no longer alive. If Protagoras and Theodorus did have a true friendship, then Protagoras must not have lived in a Protagorean world; he could not have had a true friendship with Theodorus if he consistently

asserted relativized qualifiers on all of Theodorus' statements. Theodorus clearly does not believe that man is the measure of all things. Since Theodorus was a mathematician we can be quite sure he did not assert his statements in relativized terms. If Protagoras were consistently a Protagorean he would assert relativized qualifiers on all of Theodorus' assertions, and refuse to see them as having the meaning Theodorus believes they have. For example, Protagoras would say, " $a^2+b^2=c^2$, for you, Theodorus," thereby refusing to acknowledge that Theodorus has successfully asserted that $a^2+b^2=c^2$ is a universal truth. Protagoras would destroy the point of Theodorus' statement. Would Theodorus consider this kind of treatment an act of friendship? Certainly not. If Protagoras and Theodorus really had a true friendship, then Protagoras must *not* have consistently maintained that man is the measure of all things. If, in fact, Theodorus and Protagoras had a true friendship, Plato must, in exploiting their friendship, be making an *ad hominem* argument against Protagoras.⁹⁶ Protagoras' own actions repudiate his theory.

But, it is most likely that Protagoras and Theodorus did not have a true friendship at all, according to Plato. A true friendship requires that the well-wishing for the other's sake be mutually reciprocated. Furthermore, for the highest kind of friendship each partner must seek to educate and help promote the good of the other. We can only guess how Theodorus and Protagoras associated with one another. Given that the essential doctrines to which each subscribed were fundamentally opposed to one another their relationship must have been one of either indifference or constant attempts by each to try to educate the other, to no avail. But, if Theodorus' relationship with Protagoras were characterized by Theodorus' attempts to reveal to Protagoras his own ignorance, we would not expect to see him in the *Theaetetus* so concerned that he be loyal to Protagoras' doctrines. We would expect, rather, that Theodorus, of all people, would be adept at arguing against Protagoras' theory and that he

96. This is analogous to a problem Cicero raises about Epicureanism on the ground that its theory makes friendship impossible. See Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum*, Book II, xxiv-xxvi.

would know just what Protagoras' responses would be to the criticisms Socrates makes. This is not how Theodorus is portrayed in the *Theaetetus*. It seems, then, that Theodorus had not tried to educate Protagoras, nor did Protagoras educate Theodorus. Hence, their relationship must have been one characterized by indifference. Furthermore, if Protagoras' actions were in harmony with his words, he would not see Theodorus as anything but a means to his own happiness. Consequently, their friendship would have been nothing more than a crude utility or pleasure-based friendship. If this were the case, Socrates must have hoped that Theodorus would recognize that his loyalties were misplaced.

We will never know for sure what kind of friendship Theodorus and Protagoras had. Either they had the kind of friendship Theodorus seems to think they had, in which case Protagoras did not live in a Protagorean world, or they were not friends at all, for true friendship is impossible for a Protagorean. Plato juxtaposes these two men in part because they supposedly were friends. In doing so Plato draws our attention to the concept of friendship in general, and we are led to see that Protagoras' theory diminishes friendships to nothing more than instrumental relationships. Plato uses the theme of friendship to repudiate further Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine because he realizes that, ultimately, the acceptance or rejection of such a theory will come down to showing us the consequences of the theory should it be adopted. One of the implications of Protagoreanism would be that any kind of real friendship, or love between people would not exist. This is no minor implication, for Plato.

Friendship, as we have seen, is for Plato one of the finest things. It is in the same category of goods as justice and virtue. It is *philia* which holds together the ideal city. Without *philia* no just city could exist, and rulers, like Dionysius, would not be able to rule justly. Friendship is an essential part of dialectic, the means by which philosophical knowledge is obtained. Without *philia* one's quest for knowledge of the fundamental things would be significantly inhibited, if not thwarted altogether. Virtue, too, is something that one

develops, in part, through friendship. Men pregnant in soul seek to create virtue in others, but without *philia* such endeavors could never be successful. Furthermore, friendship is welcomed for its own sake. True friendship is something that one welcomes because one receives enjoyment and happiness from the relationship itself. Friendship, then, plays a significant role in one's endeavor to achieve justice, virtue, wisdom, and happiness. Adoption of Protagoras' theory would put all these things in serious jeopardy, a risk not many of us would be prepared to take.

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