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"Cutting Them Down to Size": Humbling and Protreptic in Plato's Lysis

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Abstract: This article examines the role that humbling plays in Socratic practice. Specifically, we consider how Socrates humbles

his interlocutors in order to turn them towards the pursuit of philosophical friendship. We argue against a standard interpretation of humbling in the *Lysis*, which holds that Socrates humbles Lysis by exposing his own ignorance to him at 210d. Instead, we argue that the humbling occurs not when Lysis is (allegedly) made aware of his own ignorance, but at 222d near the end of the dialogue, when Lysis is made to think that he is not as good a friend as he thought he was. On this reading, Socrates humbles Lysis not by exposing to him his ignorance about theoretical matters but by suggesting to him that he may be not the sort of person he thought he was.

Keywords: Humbling, Protreptic, Elenchus, Method, Socrates.

Introduction

Plato's *Lysis* depicts a conversation about friendship that takes place between Socrates and two young boys–the titular Lysis and his best friend, Menexenus. In the narrative episode which occurs before the start of the conversation, Socrates speaks with Hippothales, a would-be *erastes* of Lysis, about how to court and win over young boys. Socrates and Hippothales embody different approaches to courtship, approaches which are differentiated by their aims and the means employed in pursuit of those aims. Hippothales's aim is traditional, given the nature of the pederastic relationship: he desires to subjugate Lysis to his sexual desires. And the means he employs are traditional as well (though perhaps, given the mocking abuse Hippothales suffers at the hands of Ctessipus, not customarily employed in pederastic courtship): he seeks to win over Lysis by writing and singing encomia that praise Lysis's family wealth and lineage. Socrates disagrees with this approach, both with respect to its aims and the means employed. For Socrates thinks, though he does not say this explicitly in the *Lysis*, that the proper aim of true courtship is not to subordinate a boy to one's sexual whims but to draw him into philosophical friendship. And Socrates thinks this

should be done, not by praising the boy, which will only make him "full of ambition and conceit" (*phronematos empimplantai kai megalauchias*, 206a), but "by cutting [him] down to size and putting [him] in his place" (210e)–that is to say, by humbling him.[1] But when Hippothales asks Socrates how he should pursue his beloved, Socrates refrains from telling him this directly. Instead, he offers to display to Hippothales *in propria persona* how one should go about humbling a beloved. The resulting conversation, then, is a performative demonstration of Socrates' approach to courtship.

This paper is about Socrates' demonstration. The question it takes up is what exactly Socrates' demonstration shows us about Socratic practice, that is, the distinctive manner in which Socrates engages his interlocutors in conversation and turns them towards the pursuit of virtue.[2] More specifically, the question that interests us concerns the role that humbling plays in this process. There is a standard reading of the role that humbling plays in the *Lysis*.[3] On this view, Socrates humbles Lysis by getting him to admit his ignorance right off the bat, after only a few pages of dialogue and before the

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[1] We use the translation of Stanley Lombardo throughout, though with occasional changes.

[2] Assuming–as we do–that the Lysis exhibits Socrates' 'distinctive' work. Notably, Vlastos (1994, p. 1, 30-31) thinks Socratic elenchus does not appear in the Lysis. We disagree, not so much because we think we can find the elenchus, as Vlastos construes it, in the dialogue (though on this see Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 77, n. 25), but because we think Socratic practice is best conceived along lines other, and broader, than Vlastos's.

[3] See, e.g., Versenyi, 1975; Penner and Rowe, 2005; Tessitore, 1990; Reeve, 2006, 2016; Rider, 2011. Though it is standard to take the humbling to occur at an early point in the dialogue, specifically 210d, there is some disagreement over how exactly Lysis's alleged humbling contributes to Socrates' protreptic. The strong view, exemplified by Reeve, is that the humbling is what starts Lysis on the road to philosophy. A weaker view, exemplified by Tessitore and Versenyi, has it that Socrates's aim at this point of the discussion is to humble Lysis in order to make him "aware of his ignorance" and so set him "on the difficult path which leads to wisdom" (1975, p. 119), but without committing to whether Socrates' alleged humbling is successful in this regard. Another view, exemplified by Gonzalez, has it that the humbling itself does not contribute to Socrates' protreptic at all, and that Socrates does not begin to awaken a love of wisdom in Lysis until the dialectical portion of the discussion which starts at 212b.

discussion of friendship begins. And, on the standard view, it is by exposing Lysis's ignorance to him at this point in the dialogue that Socrates is able to set him on the road to philosophy.[4] We think, however, that this view has serious problems, and we propose an alternative reading of the role of humbling in the *Lysis* and the means by which Socrates is able to turn his interlocutors towards philosophical friendship.

1.

Before discussing the problems with the standard view, it will be helpful to provide an outline of the dialogue as a whole. The *Lysis* begins, as we mentioned, with a narrative episode in which Socrates and Hippothales discuss how to court young men (203a-207b). After Socrates offers to show Hippothales how this should be done, he begins his demonstration at 207c when he initiates conversation with Menexenus and Lysis. The remainder of the dialogue divides into two sections. In the first, which runs from 207d-210e, Socrates engages Lysis in a conversation about filial love, knowledge, and happiness, a conversation which ends with Lysis's explicit admission of ignorance (210d). In the second section, which runs from 210e-222b, Socrates engages the two boys, though primarily Menexenus, in a dialectical discussion about the nature of friendship. The discussion ends without the discovery of a satisfactory account of friendship and a dramatic yet perplexing moment in which Socrates reduces Lysis to silence (222b). For ease of reference, we will call these two

[4] See, e.g., Rider, 2011, p. 58, 61. See, too, Versenyi, 1975, who expresses this idea as follows: "The method [that Socrates employs in his first discussion with Lysis] is a negative, elenctic, maieutic method. Instead of flattering, inflating and spoiling the beloved [Socrates' method] aims at humbling and deflating him by making him aware of his shortcomings. [It is a] method of making the beloved aware of his deficiencies (*endeiai*) and thus turning him into a lover of what he by nature needs (*to physei oikeion*)…" (p. 197). We are actually in agreement with much of what Versenyi says. We disagree, however, with his view that the humbling of Lysis which "turns him into a lover [of philosophy]" occurs at 210d.

sections the "ignorance discussion" and the "friendship discussion" respectively.

Now, on the standard view the humbling of Lysis is taken to occur at the end of the "ignorance discussion."[5] There is seemingly decisive evidence for this view. After all, Socrates himself concludes this portion of the discussion by almost telling Hippothales that, "this is how you should talk with your boyfriends, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them as you do" (210e2-5). This seems to be an apt description of what Socrates has just done to Lysis in the following exchange which marks the conclusion of the ignorance discussion:

> "Now, tell me, Lysis, is it possible to have a high view of oneself (*mega phronein*) in areas where one hasn't yet had one's mind trained?" "How could one?" he said.
>
> "And if you need a teacher, your mind is not yet trained."
>
> "True."
>
> "Then you don't have a high view of yourself (*megalophron*), since your mind is still untrained (*aphron*)."
>
> "My god, Socrates, it doesn't seem so to me!" 210d4-8

Socrates is here, through a clever argument which puns on words that share the *-phron* stem, eliciting Lysis's agreement that he should not have a high view of himself because he is ignorant.[6] That is to

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[5] Again, see, e.g., Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 25, 37, 45; Reeve, 2006, p. 29; Gonzalez, 1995, p. 74; Tessitore, 1990, p. 119; Rider, 2011, p. 58); Lockwood, 2017, p. 236. Lockwood is representative in being direct about this view: "The goal of Socrates' questioning in the opening refutation is to bring Lysis to a recognition of his own ignorance (something accomplished at 210d7-8) ..."

[6] See Rider, 2011, p. 55-57, for a thorough discussion of the merits or rather demerits of this bit of reasoning. Rider is correct to observe that Lysis should not have accepted the conclusion to this argument for the punning on -phron words

say, Lysis should not be proud of his current state because the sort of thing that would justify such self-respect–namely, wisdom–is just what Lysis lacks. On the standard reading, Socrates has at this juncture in the discussion humbled Lysis by making him aware of his ignorance, thereby setting him on the road to philosophy. (Versenyi, 1975, p. 197; Reeve, 2006, p. 295.)

The main problem with the view that Lysis has been humbled at this point in the dialogue is that Lysis does not behave in the moments that follow this exchange as if he has just been humbled. If we take the Alcibiades of the *Symposium* as our paradigm, then what it means to be humbled by Socrates is to feel "that one's life is no better than the most miserable slave's" (215e9), that one's life isn't "worth living" (216a1), that everything one has done thus far is a "waste of time" (216a4)–in a word, it is to feel "shame" (216b2) at one's present condition. Now, all those who are humbled by Socrates need not feel these things to the degree to which Alcibiades feels them, but we would expect them to feel them to some degree, however slight. This is because one of the effects of Socratic examination is a profound recalibration of one's own self-conception: one changes from conceiving of oneself as someone who knows a grand thing, to conceiving of oneself as ignorant and at a loss. Through Socrates' examination, interlocutors "lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves" (*Sph*. 230c1-2). In the *Lysis*, for instance, Socrates tells Hippothales that if anybody praises young boys like Lysis, they "get swelled heads and start to think they're really somebody" (206a). So if Socrates at this juncture is revealing to Lysis that he is not the 'somebody' he thought he was, we could expect Lysis to respond the way most people would, and many in Plato's dialogues do: with embarrassment, or consternation, or self-justification, or anger (cf.

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hides an ambiguity that renders the argument fallacious. However, we disagree with Rider's reason for thinking that the argument is fallacious. In Rider's view, Socrates is intentionally providing bad arguments in order to spur Lysis on to criticize and engage with them, thereby turning him to philosophy (see, especially, p. 60-62). We think, as we argue later in this paper, that Socrates is simply playing around with Lysis at this point of the discussion.

Sph. 230b9), or dejection, or *some* kind of adverse reaction to the pain of refutation.

But Lysis exhibits none of this. He sees that he has been bested in argument, but there is no evidence that there has been any internal change worked in him through confrontation with the painful recognition that he does not know what he thought he did, or that he is not the sort of 'somebody' he thought he was. What Lysis *does* do is telling. He cozies up to Socrates, whispers playfully in his ear, and begs him to perform the same routine on Menexenus that he has just performed on him. Importantly he wants Socrates to do this, not so that Menexenus may be improved by learning an important lesson, but so that Menexenus may be bested by a more competent debater. Menexenus is depicted in the opening narrative as the more competitive of the two friends, and we learn just a few lines after the exchange under consideration that he is *eristikos* and *deinos* (no doubt, at *dialegesthai*). Lysis, the shy friend who enjoys watching a competition more than participating in one, wants to see his friend, Menexenus, who perhaps frequently bests Lysis when the pair fight with one another about who is more beautiful and who comes from the nobler family, bested by a superior debater. Hence, Lysis evinces not a sense of shame but a competitive spirit when he implores Socrates to put the competitive Menexenus in his place. This tells us a good deal about how Lysis himself understands what has just transpired between him and Socrates; he has been bested in a game–specifically, a bit of verbal word play–and now he wants Socrates to draw his best friend, Menexenus, into the same game so that he too will be bested.[7]

[7] Thus, while Vlastos (1994, 31) seems right to say there "is no contest" in the dialogue in the narrow sense that there is no real contest over a "What is F?" question (Socrates provides and refutes all the theses about friendship that appear), a wider frame reveals several contests: between Lysis and Menexenus (who is richer, better-looking?), between Menexenus and Socrates (Lysis hopes Socrates will beat Menexenus, just as he's been beaten), and between Hippothales and Socrates (who will 'win' Lysis?).

There is another problem with the standard view. Not only does Lysis respond to the refutation in a way that makes little sense if he had been genuinely humbled by Socrates, but there is also little reason to think that Lysis *should* in fact be humbled by Socrates–at least, not at just this point of the discussion and not in just that way. Socrates does not simply humble his interlocutors. Instead, he usually targets the precise respect in which his interlocutor views himself as significant (*mega phronein*) and exposes to the interlocutor that he is not as great as he thought he was in precisely that respect. Now at this point in the discussion, Lysis is being shown that he does not possess the kind of knowledge a mature adult employs when he uses his possessions *well*. If Lysis is being humbled at this point of the discussion, we would expect that prior to this moment Lysis took himself to possess just that knowledge and had a high view of himself when it comes to just that thing. But clearly, he doesn't. Lysis, who has not made any claims about his own wisdom, readily acknowledges his shortcoming here. And so, Lysis doesn't stand in need of a humbling at the hands of Socrates–not at this point in the discussion, and not in that respect.

2.

We take these problems with the standard reading–Lysis' lack of pretense and the absence of any indication he has been humbled–to be decisive. We will assume, then, that, at the portion of the dialogue in question, Lysis has not been humbled in the way he is often thought to have been humbled. What are we, then, to make of this fact? It seems to us that there are two ways to respond. First, we could think that Lysis is not humbled at this point in the discussion because Socrates is not, in fact, trying to humble Lysis *at all* in the conversation enacted in the dialogue. Socrates seeks to puncture the pretensions of his interlocutors only when his interlocutors are, in fact, pretentious and full of themselves. In the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates claims that he waited until Alcibiades was full of ambition to engage him in discussion (i.e. humble him, 105e-106a). Perhaps Lysis, who is probably the youngest interlocutor Socrates engages in any of the

works of Plato, has not yet reached the stage of young adulthood at which one is filled with such vanity and ambition, and so the work of humbling which Socrates attempts to bring off in his interlocutors would have no positive effect on Lysis–as Socrates says in *Alcibiades I*, it would be "pointless" (105e). Or second, we could think that Lysis is not humbled at this point in the discussion, not because Socrates doesn't intend to humble him in the discussion, but because the actual humbling occurs elsewhere–later in the dialogue. In the remainder of this section, we will call the former the "non-humbling reading" of the *Lysis* and the latter the "humbling reading" of the *Lysis*.

We will argue at the end of this section that the "humbling reading" of the work as a whole is correct, but in order to make the points we intend to make there we will need to establish some preliminaries. First, we need to introduce an important distinction. We can distinguish between what occurs in the exchange of words (what is often called "mere speech") and the perlocutionary effect these words have on their recipient. Consider, for instance, the controversial claim that Socrates makes at 210c8, to which Lysis gives his assent, that Lysis' parents do not love him. If this exchange left a mark on Lysis, an effect beyond the mere exchange of words–that is, if Lysis *really* came to think that his parents do not love him–then Lysis would've exhibited this in his behavior, say, by withdrawing from conversation or breaking into tears. But Lysis does nothing of the kind, which suggests that the exchange of words in which it is established that Lysis's parents do not love him does not reach out beyond mere speech and effect a change in the boy's soul. In the same way, when Socrates turns the screw regarding Lysis's *mega phronein*, Lysis is in good spirits: "You've got me there, Socrates!" he says and attempts to get Socrates to perform the same routine on Menexenus.[8]

Now, the disagreement between the humbling and non-humbling readings of the *Lysis* as a whole is ultimately a disagreement over

[8] Lombardo's translation in Cooper, 2007; the Greek is Μὰ Δία, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὔ μοι δοκεῖ (210d7-8).

how we understand the perlocutionary effect that Socrates intends to have on Lysis's soul in the discussion enacted in the *Lysis*. On the non-humbling reading, Socrates' conversational intentions are not actually to humble Lysis in fact, but to accomplish something else– perhaps to gain Lysis's affections or perhaps to show Hippothales something about how Socrates' conversational toolkit may be deployed, or both. On the humbling reading, Socrates' intention in conducting the conversation with Lysis *is* to humble him in fact (not merely in speech), it is just that he accomplishes this aim elsewhere than the ignorance discussion. Hence, in order to decide between these two readings of the dialogue as a whole, we need to decide what we take Socrates' conversational aims to be in the dialogue as a whole.

However, before considering *that* question, we want first to consider the question of what Socrates's conversational aims are in the ignorance discussion. We saw in the previous section that, although Socrates purports to have "taken the wind out of [Lysis'] sails" and to have "cut [Lysis] down to size", he has not actually succeeded in humbling him. We may say, in light of the distinction introduced above, that Socrates humbles Lysis in word–for he surely trips him up and elicits from him a verbal admission of ignorance– but that he does not humble him in fact. We take this to be a strong reason for thinking that Socrates' conversational intention in the ignorance discussion is not actually to humble Lysis in fact. For the words that Socrates almost utters to Hippothales indicate that he thinks he has succeeded in what he was attempting to do, and if what Socrates has succeeded in doing is verbally (not actually) humbling Lysis, then that must be what he was aiming at. A second reason for thinking this is found just after Lysis's admission of ignorance. Consider the fact that when Lysis whispers to Socrates to perform the same routine on Menexenus, Socrates tells Lysis *to do it himself* (211a). If Socrates had intended to humble Lysis in fact, to expose Lysis's personal failings, he would have targeted in his argument the precise respect in which Lysis held a mistakenly high view of himself. Such a refutation would not be something that could be replicated on any number of boys without variation–as if the boys

themselves who come in for refutation are simply replaceable values of a variable. No, if Socrates were trying to refute *Lysis*–that is, to say something that is *idion* to the *son of Democrates* (the very thing Hippothales is faulted as a lover for not doing)–then he would have provided a refutation which could not be so replicated. The fact that Socrates provides a refutation of Lysis which can be replicated on any number of boys suggests that the point of such a refutation is a merely verbal humbling, not the opening of Lysis's eyes to his own inadequacy.

We take it then that, in the ignorance episode, Socrates neither pulls off a humbling in fact (section I) nor is attempting to do so (section II, above). If that is right, then we may ask what Socrates *is* attempting to do in ignorance discussion. Clearly, he has humbled Lysis in speech, but what is the point of doing that? We think that what Socrates is trying to achieve in the ignorance discussion is exactly what he does achieve–to win the playful affection of Lysis. When shy Lysis cozies up next to Socrates–an old man he has just met–whispers in his ear, and has an intimate tête-à-tête with him, Socrates has achieved with his words exactly what he intended to achieve. But this fact has two significant implications. First, it means that in this part of the discussion Socrates is having a bit of fun.[9] He is discussing friendship, power, knowledge, and happiness–all themes he cares deeply about–but with a full awareness that this discussion will stay at the level of mere speech. Lysis will admit that his parents do not love him, but he will not be affected in his soul so

[9] To be clear, when we claim that Socrates is having fun, we do not mean to deny that he is being serious at the same time. Socrates has an uncanny ability to play around and be deadly serious at the same time, as he is, for instance, when he asks Callicles whether the best cobbler has the biggest and greatest number of shoes (490e). Socrates is clearly playing around, since he does not think that that is what Callicles actually meant. But he is also serious in that he does in fact mean to show Callicles that his understanding of what is best is mistaken. Our point is only that, however seriously Socrates may be about the topics of filial love, power, happiness, Socrates conversational aims are not to transform Lysis through this bit of discussion. The point of the episode is not (contra Penner and Rowe) to help Lysis come to discover deeper philosophical truths nor (contra Reeve) to humble Lysis. Instead, he is simply trying to win Lysis's affections.

as to think (and be tormented by the thought) that his parents do not love him. Likewise, Lysis will admit that he is ignorant, but he will not be tormented in his soul by the recognition of his inadequacy. And second, it means that Socrates achieves, in the ignorance discussion, not what Socrates ultimately wants–which we take to be the wounding of an interlocutor that turns him to virtue–but what Hippothales wants–namely, the attention and affection of the boy, Lysis. Socrates here is standing in for Hippothales, a fact about which we will have more to say in what follows. Not only does he produce words which, like those of Hippothales, have nothing *idion* to say to Lysis, but he is able to pull off, by means of his words, the very thing Hippothales asked Socrates to show him how to do–win over the boy. Socrates here is exhibiting how to catch a beloved, where "catch a beloved" means not what Socrates takes it to mean, but what Hippothales takes it to mean.

We now want to return to the question we postponed earlier in this section–namely, the question of Socrates's conversational aims in the *larger discussion* enacted in the *Lysis*. We prefer the humbling reading of the work as a whole for the following reasons. First, though we do not have the space to argue for this claim, we assume that Socrates' ultimate aim in the dialogue is not to win Lysis's playful affection but to turn Lysis into a philosophical friend–that is, a companion in the shared search for wisdom. But this requires making clear to Lysis the importance of that search, which in turn requires making clear to Lysis the present condition of his ignorance–which is to say, genuinely humbling him. Hence, if our assumption is correct that Socrates is seeking in the *Lysis* to turn Lysis into a philosophical friend, then he must be seeking in the *Lysis* to humble him, which is to say to humble him in fact and not merely in speech. Second, we are dubious of the non-humbling reading because it turns the *whole discussion*, and not just the ignorance episode, into a bit of play–a pantomime or charade in which Socrates knowingly leads the boys along in conversation, not in order to bring about some actual, concrete effect in their souls by which they may be improved, but for the benefit either of Socrates' own self (by gaining the affections of the boy) or of Hippothales (by showing him how *he* may do so). We

take it that this reading strips Socrates of his whole *raison d'être*, the improvement of his interlocutors through conversation, whatever their age. And we take it that a reading of the *Lysis* on which Socrates remains committed to the divine task (*Ap*. 30a) of benefiting those who keep his company by turning them to philosophy is preferable to a reading of the *Lysis* on which he takes a break from that task. In the final two sections of this paper, we will attempt to motivate just such a reading of the *Lysis* as a whole.

3.

We have just suggested that there is a way to read the *Lysis* on which Socrates remains committed to his divine task of helping his interlocutors by turning them to philosophy. We think that the key to this reading is to understand the conclusion of the ignorance discussion, in which Socrates claims to cut Lysis down to size, and the conclusion of the friendship discussion, in which Lysis is reduced to silence, in light of each other. In this section, we intend to show that Plato wrote the *Lysis* in such a way as to invite its readers to draw a comparison between these two conclusions. In the following and final section of this paper, we will show how that mirroring opens up a reading of the dialogue as a whole on which Socrates remains committed to his divine task.

To begin with, it is standardly recognized that the *Lysis* exhibits ring composition.[10] Near the end of the ignorance discussion, Socrates tells Lysis, "if you become wise… everybody will be your friend, everybody will be *oikeioi* to you" (210d). This is significant because the final discussion, the friendship discussion, concludes with an examination of the proposal that friendship exists between those who are *oikeioi* to one another. The presence of this notion at the conclusion of each discussion has been taken by some as a sign that these parts of the dialogue should be read in light of one another.

[10] See, e.g., Gonzalez, 2000, p. 379 (who does not use the language of "ring composition"), and Lockwood, 2017, p. 320, 327 (who does use such language).

It has been argued that what Plato is inviting his readers to do is rethink the meaning of *to oikeion*–either by reinterpreting its first occurrence in light of its second or vice versa.[11] We think though that this view is too narrow. It is not only the presence of the concept of *to oikieon* that establishes a parallelism between these two portions of the dialogue. And so, we think, it is not the notion of *to oikeion* that should be our focus.

But in what other respects do the passages in question mirror one another? In the first place, it should be observed that there are compositional indicators that flag an intentional parallelism between the two passages. Their positioning within the dialogue as whole suggests this. The conclusion of the friendship discussion occurs near the end of the dialogue (222b), while the conclusion of the ignorance discussion occurs nearly at its halfway point (210e). This means the conclusions of the two discussions divide the dialogue as a whole into two roughly equal halves, which suggests, though of course does not demand, that Plato composed these sections with intention. Additionally, the conclusions mirror one another structurally. In each case, Socrates has spent time driving towards what *appear*s to be the conclusion of the ongoing discussion–in the first case, that wisdom will enable happiness, and ignorance deprive one of it; in the second case, that friendship occurs between those who are *oikeioi* to one another–before unexpectedly veering off track and deriving an unexpected (and seemingly unwanted) conclusion–in the first case, that Lysis should not be proud because he is ignorant; in the second case, that Lysis should submit to a genuine *erastes*.

Second, and more clearly, there are dramatic parallels between the two passages. As has been noticed, e.g., by Rudebusch (2004, p. 68), in each case, Socrates (who is narrating the events recorded in

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[11] Gonzalez (1995) seems to suggest (though is not explicit) that we should interpret the latter occurrence in light of the former. Lockwood (2017, p. 321, 328) is explicit in suggesting that we interpret the former occurrence in light of the latter. See, too, Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 165-166). Gonzalez (2000) provides a helpful catalogue of scholars who have noticed the dual use of *to oikeion* at these key points in the discussion.

the *Lysis*) goes out of his way to describe in vivid detail Hippothales' emotional response to what is occurring in the discussion. At the conclusion of the ignorance discussion, Socrates describes Hippothales as "anxious and thrown into confusion" (210e), while at the conclusion of the friendship discussion he is described as "beam[ing] every color of the rainbow with delight" (222b). This stands out as significant, because these are the only two times that Hippothales is even mentioned by Socrates once the discussion with the boys has gotten underway. Similarly, we get vivid indicators of Lysis's emotional state at the conclusion of each discussion. At the end of the first discussion, as we saw, he is friendly and playful, urging Socrates with a hint of competitiveness to refute Menexenus (211a-b). At the end of the second discussion, in contrast, he is reduced to silence and responds to Socrates' questioning with reluctance and pain (*mogis*, 222b). This is made all the more significant by the fact that Lysis has not even been mentioned by Socrates in the dramatic narrative in a full seven Stephanus pages, nearly one third of the entire dialogue. The fact that these are the only two moments in the discussion which are colored in this way by narrative descriptions of the emotional states of these two key characters suggests a deliberate attempt to get the reader to understand these two passages together.

The mirroring between these two moments in the dialogue, however, is more complex than we have represented thus far. It is not simply that the two passages include similar ingredients–e.g., a mention of *to oikeion*, parallel structural composition, corresponding dramatic elements. They also, more interestingly, exhibit a certain inverse relationship to one another. This can be seen most clearly in the dramatic elements, though, we hope to show, it exists at another, deeper level as well. Consider the descriptions of Hippothales and Lysis discussed in the previous paragraph. Hippothales is first described as anxious and confused–in a state of pained bewilderment at the apparent belittling of his beloved that is unfolding before him. In contrast, at the conclusion of the dialogue, Hippothales is described in terms that are exactly the opposite; he is filled with pleasure and delight. Likewise, Lysis is first described as playful

(*paidikōs*) and affectionate (*philikōs*), and his behavior towards Socrates evinces an intimacy and comfort with the older man. But at the conclusion of the dialogue, he is described in just the opposite way; he is filled no longer with boyish charm and friendliness, but a mysterious silence and a grimace.

To us, this evidence signals that Plato intended his readers to think about these two passages in light of each other. The question that remains to be settled is what insight Plato intends his readers to have into the dialogue as a whole by setting up this mirroring. As we have mentioned, previous commentators have taken the mirroring to signal that the content of what Socrates is saying in each passage should be reinterpreted in light of what he says in the other passage–particularly his remarks about the notion of *to oikeion*. Although this may be part of what is going on, we do not think it is all, nor the most significant thing. We think, instead, that Plato stresses the narrative developments that are occurring at these two points in the dialogue to encourage his readers to think about not only the content of what is being said but also, and just as importantly, the dramatic action that is unfolding. In the final section of this paper, we hope to show that what Plato wants his readers to see is that at the conclusion of each discussion Lysis is humbled by Socrates, the first time in word but not in deed, the second time vice versa.

4.

To see this, let's consider the conclusion of the friendship discussion in more depth. In the lead-up, Socrates and the two boys, at Socrates' prompting, have considered and rejected various views of friendship. Socrates then proposes what turns out to be the final view of friendship they consider together–namely, that those who are friends with each other are friends because they are *oikeioi* to one another. This is a view that the two boys receive with enthusiasm. Lysis, who has been silent for the latter half of the friendship discussion, reenters the conversation to give his wholehearted assent to the view. Socrates then derives two consequences from this view,

the first a welcome one, the second an unwelcome one. First, Socrates shows that since Lysis and Menexenus are friends, they must belong to each other (221e). The boys agree enthusiastically. Second, Socrates shows, with a seemingly sophistical argument, that the two boys must submit to a genuine *erastes*. Lysis, who has rejected the advances of Hippothales, anticipates this conclusion before it is drawn and awaits it in silence, before finally assenting to it with difficulty. What we hope to show is that the humbling of Lysis occurs at this point of the discussion, during the dramatic silence.[12]

Before advancing our own reading of Lysis's silence, we want to make two preliminary points. First, we think that the precise respect in which Lysis is being humbled has to do with his view of himself as a friend. There are two indicators of this fact. First, the dialectical conversation which precedes Lysis's silence is about the nature of friendship, and Socrates tends to puncture his interlocutors' pretensions to be a certain sort of person by engaging them in conversation about the very thing that a person of that sort would know (e.g., Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles about rhetoric). And second, Socrates initiates the conversation about friendship by ironically setting up the two young boys as if they possessed the thing they thought they did. This parallels Socrates' strategy in other

[12] For other attempts to make sense of Lysis's silence, see Lualdi, 1974, p. 123); Tindale, 1984, p. 106. We are unconvinced by these readings of the passage. For instance, Tindale suggests that Lysis is silent because, having grasped that the argument (to be considered below) which requires him to submit to Hippothales is fallacious, he refrains from saying anything in order to allow Menexenus to "discover for himself" (p. 106) that it is fallacious. But we doubt this. For one it is hard to understand why Lysis would assent to the argument with difficulty (*mogis*, 222b2) if he understood that the argument is fallacious. The fact that the conclusion has to be forced out of him suggests quite strongly that he sees that conclusion, which is something unwanted, as actually following from the previous claims about friendship, which he gleefully accepted. Another reason we are doubtful is that this reading completely misses the deliberate mirroring between the conclusion of the ignorance discussion and the conclusion of the friendship discussion which we flagged in the previous section. As we will argue, we think this mirroring is intended to invite readers to see Lysis's silence at the end of the friendship discussion as a sign of genuine humbling in contrast to his glee at the end of the ignorance discussion which was spurred by a mere verbal humbling.

dialogues (e.g., *Euthyphro*, *Laches*) in which Socrates acts at the start of the conversation as if his interlocutor has the very expertise Socrates intends to show he lacks.

The second point we want to make is that, if Lysis is humbled at this point in the discussion, Socrates does not achieve this in his usual way. Standardly, an interlocutor is humbled by being refuted–that is, by having his various attempts to define the thing he claims to know successively demolished by Socrates under dialectical scrutiny. Though there is a discussion in which various attempts to define a thing–namely, friendship–are successively demolished, it is important to notice that this is not what brings about Lysis's silence and, if our suggestion is correct, his humbling. The point in the discussion at which Lysis is silent, and at which we think he is humbled, occurs not after but before the final view of friendship has been destroyed. For the final view of friendship is still a viable option at 222b when Lysis is reduced to silence and is not rejected as inadequate until 222d.

Let's now take a closer look at the key passage. Socrates speaks first, saying:

> "If one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend unless he somehow belonged to his beloved either in his soul or in some characteristic habit or aspect of his soul."
>
> "Certainly," said Menexenus, but Lysis was silent.
>
> "All right", [Socrates] said, "what belongs to us by nature has shown itself to us as something we must love."
>
> "It looks like it," he said.
>
> "Then the genuine and not the pretended lover must be befriended by his boy."
>
> Lysis and Menexenus just managed a nod of assent, but Hippothales beamed every color in the rainbow in his delight. (221e7-222b2)

The interpretation of this passage is controversial because it is unclear how Lysis understands the conclusion of the argument. Clearly, Hippothales thinks that Socrates has gotten Lysis to admit that he must submit to *him*–that is, to *Hippothales*. Some have argued that Lysis understands the conclusion of the argument in the same way,[13] while others (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 85; Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 169-170) have argued that Lysis understands the conclusion to be that he must submit to a philosophical *erastes*–i.e. Socrates. We opt for the former view for the following reasons. First, the opening narrative emphasizes that Hippothales's advances are a nuisance to Lysis, to such an extent, in fact, that Hippothales must hide from Lysis so as not to upset him. Clearly, then, when Lysis thinks of an *erastes*, the first person who would come to mind is Hippothales. Second, Lysis assents with difficulty (*mogis*), which suggests that he understands the conclusion to mean, not that he must submit to Socrates, whom he likes, but to Hippothales, whom he dislikes. Finally, we reject the two standard reasons for doubting this reading–first, that the *oikeion* account of friendship under consideration presupposes what came before the *oikeion* account and that what came before rules out Hippothales as being genuinely *oikeion* to Lysis, and second that Lysis picks up on the distinction between the genuine and pretended lover and understands the former to mean the philosophical lover.[14] First, we think that when Socrates claims at 221d that "what we were saying earlier about being a friend was all just empty chatter, like a poem that trails on too long," he is rejecting everything that came before, including any view of friendship that may rule the possibility that Hippothales is *oikeion* to Lysis. And second, though Socrates may understand the contrast between genuine and pretended in philosophical terms, we think that the

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[13] Gonzalez, 2003, p. 27; Danzig, 2010, p. 211-213; Lockwood, 2017, p. 324; Wolfsdorf, 2007, p. 247, though he acknowledges the possibility that Lysis recognizes that the distinction which Socrates makes between the genuine and pretended lover allows Lysis not to submit to Hippothales, who is not a genuine lover and so not someone to whom he must submit.

[14] The second reason is briefly alluded to by Wolfsdorf in his (2007, 247). Both are discussed, e.g., in Penner and Rowe, 2005, p. 169.

natural way for Lysis to understand this contrast, given the immediate context, is between one who actually loves–that is, actually feels passion for–the beloved versus one who merely feigns such passion.[15]

On our reading, then, Lysis understands the conclusion of the argument to be that he must submit to Hippothales. The question to be asked is why Socrates has gotten Lysis to think this. On one reading, Socrates gets Lysis to think that he should submit to Hippothales because Socrates is trying to capture the boy *for Hippothales*; Socrates is playing the pimp, he is acting as a *mastropos* for Hippothales (Gonzalez, 2003, p. 37; Danzig, 2010, p. 211-213, 235). We reject this reading for the simple reason that immediately after Socrates has secured Lysis's submission, he destroys the very view of friendship which requires that submission, thereby setting the boy free again–not the sort of thing Socrates would do if he were trying to hand Lysis over to Hippothales. But the surprising about-face that Socrates pulls when he captures and then immediately releases Lysis is a problem for any reading that holds that Socrates is trying to get Lysis to take a lover. Consider the view that Socrates is trying to get Lysis to submit to himself by getting him to think that he should take a philosophical lover. On this reading, the about-face makes even less sense, since Socrates would be destroying at 222d the very means he employed to get Lysis to submit to philosophical friendship at 222a-b.

Clearly then no reading of the relevant passage is satisfactory which holds that Socrates gets Lysis to accept that he must submit to a lover because Socrates is trying, through that very argument, to get Lysis actually to take a lover, whether himself or Hippothales. Why then would Socrates want Lysis to think, even if just for a few moments, that he should submit to Hippothales? In answering this question, we think it is important to consider why, given the

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[15] See Belfiore (2012, p. 95-96) for a helpful survey of how scholars have interpreted Socrates' use of the distinction between the genuine and pretended lover.

preceding, Lysis would be silent at this moment in the argument. We know that Lysis is annoyed by and rebuffs the advances of Hippothales. It is reasonable, then, to think that Lysis feels and firmly believes that he is under no obligation to submit to the older man. If this is right, then Lysis would find it difficult to admit that he is under such an obligation, especially when it is friendship itself that seems to require of him that he submit to Hippothales. Lysis is silent it seems because he has been brought to feel friction between what he feels and believes to be true–that he should not submit to Hippothales–and what he thinks he must admit to be true under force of argument–that he should submit to Hippothales.[16]

We want to propose that Socrates leads Lysis to accept this conclusion for this very reason–that is, in order to induce in Lysis a feeling of cognitive dissonance. But why would Socrates want to induce such confusion in Lysis? Socrates often induces *aporia* in his interlocutors by leading them around to a view of things which is contrary to that which they previously accepted. Laches, e.g., thinks that firmness of resolve with or without skill is what courage is. Socrates is able to turn his view of things upside down so that that very thing now looks to him like foolish knavery. What Socrates is doing in these cases is making the views of his interlocutors' wander (*planein*, see, e.g., *Alc. 1* 117a ff., *Hp. Mi.* 376c, *Prt.* 356d, *Hp. Ma.* 304c) so that things appear one way at one point, another way at

[16] One reviewer of this paper has suggested a "deflationary" reading of Lysis's silence. The suggestion is that Lysis is silent, not because, as we will argue, he is experiencing an aporia, but simply because he does not want to affirm the conclusion of the argument that he should submit to Hippothales and thereby embolden Hippothales in his advances. We are doubtful of this suggestion for a number of reasons. First, it is not clear that Lysis has been made aware of Hippothales's presence. Second, we think that the fact that Lysis eventually admits the conclusion with difficulty (*mogis*, 222b2) is a sign that he begrudgingly accepts it, albeit temporarily. Hence, any interpretation of his silence must, we think, take into account the fact that Lysis thinks at that moment in the discussion that he should submit to Hippothales.

another.[17] In doing this, Socrates is not trying to persuade his interlocutors to accept this new, different view of things. He is instead trying to loosen the grip of certainty with which they hold their views. Or put another way, the point of leading an interlocutor around to a view of things from which things appear upside down is not to inform the interlocutor which is the correct view, but to show him that, in his current state,[18] *any* view of things he lights on will fall short of *his own* deep (and for now inarticulable) sense of how things actually are. Lysis founders not by failing Socrates' standards, but by in some sense failing his own.[19] We think that this is the perlocutionary effect Socrates is trying to induce in Lysis when he produces a contradiction between what Lysis feels and firmly believes and what he thinks he must accept under the power of argument. Lysis is confused, albeit briefly, because he doesn't know what it is he ought to think–or more accurately, he doesn't know what it is he ought to *do*. For before this moment, Lysis felt he was acting appropriately in rebuffing the advances of Hippothales, but now Socrates has turned this view upside down and made him admit under the power of argument that in refusing to submit to Hippothales he is failing to act like a true friend. Lysis is in a state of *aporia* not because he doesn't know the *ti esti* of friendship (though he doesn't know that either) but because he does not know what it is a friend *does*. This is the moment, then, at which Socrates reduces Lysis's confidence in himself and chips away at the very thing in which he has a high view of himself. This is the moment, in other words, when Socrates takes the wind out of his sails and cuts him down to size.

If our reading is correct, then we can see another level of inverse mirroring between the two passages under consideration. At the

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[17] We find the clearest expression of this idea at *Alc*. 1, 116e, where Alcibiades says, "One thing seems true to me at one point, another at another, when you are questioning me."

[18] Cf. *Alc*. 1 118a-b, particularly b4. See Ahbel-Rappe, 2018, chap. 5 on how Socrates attempts to remedy Alcibiades' "sorry state," and by extension, presumably, that of his other interlocutors.

[19] On Socratic method as eliciting a person's recognition that they fall short of their own aspirations, see Lear, 2009.

conclusion of the first discussion, Lysis admits his ignorance, but the perlocutionary effect this refutation produces is not a genuine humbling but affection for Socrates. Lysis was refuted in word, but not in deed. This is in contrast to the conclusion of the second discussion, where we actually find Lysis in a state of dissonance and confusion which we have called *aporia*. But Socrates induced this *aporia*, not via refutation (that is, by establishing a negative conclusion) but by deriving a positive conclusion, one which conflicts with Lysis's firmly held view of things. Here Lysis is refuted, not in word, but in deed. It is at the second conclusion, then, that Socrates remains Socrates. For if he is playing around in the first discussion in order to win Lysis's affection, it is in the second discussion that Socrates seeks to wound Lysis and thereby turn him towards philosophy. And this is another respect in which the passages inversely mirror one another. At the end of the first discussion, Socrates gets what *Hippothales* wants–namely, affection from the boy Lysis. But it is at the end of the second discussion where Socrates gets what *Socrates* wants–a cutting down to size which turns Lysis, at least part of the way, towards philosophical friendship.

5.

We have argued for a particular way of understanding the role that humbling plays in Socratic practice that may strike some as unorthodox. On our reading of the *Lysis*, Socrates humbles Lysis not by refuting him but by drawing an unwelcome conclusion–namely, that Lysis should submit to the advances of Hippothales. If we are right about this, then the humbling of Lysis is significant when it comes to our understanding of Socratic practice. For, on our reading, Lysis is not humbled by being made aware of his ignorance about a theoretical matter (*ti esti* friendship, or perhaps more accurately, *ti esti aition* of friendship?). Instead, he is humbled by being made to think that he is ignorant about practical matters–specifically, how a true friend would respond to the advances of a man like Hippothales. We do not, of course, deny that Socrates does sometimes humble (or at least attempt to humble) his interlocutor by exposing ignorance

about theoretical matters. But if our reading is correct, then Socrates' toolkit for humbling is more varied than is often thought. For it would follow that Socrates need not resort to (what are often thought of as) the standard elenctic means to take the wind out of the sails of his interlocutors.[20]

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