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## The akin vs. the good in Plato's *Lysis*

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**Abstract:** The two most compelling accounts of the friend in Plato's *Lysis* are that the neither good nor bad is friend of the good and that the akin is friend of the akin. In this paper I challenge a common interpretation that these accounts are the same, similar to, or compatible with one another. I argue instead that the two accounts are incompatible because they rely on opposing assumptions about the nature of desire and its relationship to need and about friendship and its orientation towards what benefits the one who loves. Although

I do not offer a comprehensive interpretation of the dialogue, I argue that, given his main assumptions about the friendship, desire, and philosophy in the *Lysis*, Socrates could only endorse first of these accounts, that the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good, if indeed endorses any of them.

**Keywords:** Plato, *Lysis*, friendship, friend, good, akin, desire, need, philosophy.

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The *Lysis* contains Plato's most sustained treatment of friendship. In it, Socrates and his interlocutors raise and reject several possible accounts of what the friend is. Because each proposed account seems to be refuted and because Socrates claims, by the end, not to have discovered what the friend is, interpreting the dialogue has proved difficult and controversial. A comprehensive interpretation of the *Lysis* would minimally involve understanding each of the proposed accounts, their relationship to one another, the merits of the purported refutations of them, and how these discussions relate to the drama that Socrates narrates. In this paper I aim to advance our understanding of only some of these issues. First, I offer a novel interpretation of the meaning of and the relationship between the two most important and plausible accounts of friendship in the *Lysis*: that the neither good nor bad is friend of the good and that the akin is friend of the akin (*to oikeion*). Some commentators have argued that, despite their apparent differences, the two accounts say nearly the same thing,<sup>1</sup> while others have argued that they identify separate but compatible accounts of friendship.<sup>2</sup> In contrast,

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, 1980; Gonzalez, 1995 and 2003; Reshotko, 1997; Penner and Rowe, 2005; Wolfsdorf, 2007, and Rudebusch, 2009, for instance, all argue that the akin is the same as the good and that the idea that the akin is friend of the akin is an improved version of the idea that the neither bad nor good is friend of the good.

<sup>2</sup> Pangle, 2006, 306 and 314-15 and Bolotin, 1979, 188-189 argue that love for the akin and love for the good are separate yet complimentary motives to friendship. Versenyi, 1975, 186 argues that all the accounts of friendship found in the *Lysis*, when considered in a certain light, are compatible with the rest.

I argue that the two accounts are both different and incompatible because they rely on opposing assumptions about the nature of desire and friendship. Second, I argue that only the proposal that the neither good nor bad is friend of the good is consistent with Socrates' main assumptions about desire and friendship and with his understanding and practice of philosophy in the *Lysis*.<sup>3</sup> I seek to advance our understanding of the dialogue by revealing which of the views of friendship found in it Socrates could endorse, while staying true to his other commitments, and which ones he could not.

## 1. The two main accounts

At 216d, after having refuted the views that like is friend to like, that good is friend to good, and that unlike is friend to unlike, Socrates argues that “the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good” (216d3-4).<sup>4</sup> He supposes that there are three classes (*gene*), the bad, the good, and the neither good nor bad (hereafter, “the intermediate”) and so that the members of friendship (*philia*) must be drawn from these three classes. From here he discovers the friend, understood first as the subject of love and next as the object of love, by process of elimination. Since, according to the conclusions of the earlier arguments, both the bad and the good are incapable of love, neither one can be the friend as the subject of love (214b-d and 215a-b). So, only the intermediate “is left” (*leipetai*) to be the friend, in this sense of the term (216e1-2).<sup>5</sup> As to the object of love, Socrates reasons that the intermediate is not friend to the bad because “nothing is friend to the bad” (216e4), that is, nothing loves the bad. Nor is the

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<sup>3</sup> As I hope will become clear, I agree with Gadamer, 1980, 3 who suggests that an important goal of Plato's dialogues is to show the harmony between Socrates' speeches and his deeds and so to exhibit that the philosophy is a distinctive way of living. Though in this paper I focus on one element of this harmony, the speeches, I emphasize a connection between these speeches and Socrates' practice of philosophy in the dialogue below.

<sup>4</sup> References to the *Lysis* advert to the text of Burnet, 1903. Translations are my own.

intermediate friend to one like itself because, as they concluded earlier, “like is not friend to like” (216e5; compare 215e-216c). So, assuming friendship exists, he concludes, the intermediate “alone is friend to the good alone” (216e9-217a2).

Next Socrates turns to a consideration of why the intermediate is friend of the good. Observing that only sick people are friends to doctors (217a4-6), he explains that the body, which “insofar as it is a body” (*kata soma*) is neither good nor bad (217b1-2), is a friend of the medical art, which is beneficial and good (219a3), because of illness, which is bad (217e4-5). The body, he says, is “compelled to love [*philein*] and be fond of the medical art because of illness” (217b3-4). The intermediate becomes a friend to the good “because of the presence of the bad” (*dia kakou parousian*: 217b5-6): the presence of sickness causes both the body to have friendship for the medical art (217b1-4) and the sick person to have friendship for the doctor (217a5-7). Though the intermediate body is to some degree sick, and so in that sense bad, Socrates emphasizes that the body is a friend to the medical art only so long as it remains intermediate (217b6-c2). For, if the body becomes fully bad through the presence of illness, it will be deprived of its love and desire for the good (compare 217e8-9). One kind of badness, then, must be responsible for producing the desire and love for the good, and another kind for removing it.

This distinction between different ways that the bad can be present requires further illumination. Socrates indicates that one thing can be present to another in one of two ways. X can be present to Y in such a way that X and Y differ in kind, or X can be present to Y in such a way that X and Y are the same in kind. For instance, whiteness can be present to one’s hair in either of these ways. One can paint one’s hair white with lead paint. In this case whiteness is present: one’s hair “appears” (*phainoint’*) white because its surface is covered with paint –without it thereby “being” (*eien*) white (217d3-6). Or one’s hair can become white through old age. In this case whiteness is present to one’s hair in such a way that it not only appears but also is white (217d6-e1). When badness is present to the

body or soul like white paint is present to one's hair, this presence of badness, according to Socrates, "makes it love and desire the good"; but when badness is present like the whiteness of old age, it "deprives [the body or soul] of the desire and, at the same time, of the love for the good" (217e7-10).<sup>6</sup>

Socrates now uses this distinction to explain the intermediate nature of the philosophers. He suggests that those who are wise do not love wisdom because they are *already* wise and that those who are so ignorant as to be bad don't love wisdom because the bad cannot be friends of the good (218a2-6). "Indeed, those remain who have this bad thing, ignorance, but who are not yet made by it ignorant and incapable of learning, still thinking [*hegoumenoi*] they don't know [*eidennai*] what they don't know" (218a6-b1). By process of elimination Socrates has shown that only the intermediate love wisdom. He speaks as though there are only three types of people: the wise (those who are fully and completely wise, having no need of wisdom and so being incapable of loving it), the ignorant (those who are so ignorant as not to desire or love wisdom), and the neither wise nor ignorant (those who are, to some degree, ignorant but not so ignorant as to be unaware of their need for wisdom). It is by eliminating the first two options –signaled by his phrase, "those remain" (*leipontai*: 218a6; compare 216e1-2) –that he discovers philosophers alone are intermediate between being ignorant and so bad and wise and so good. A certain presence of ignorance (which is bad) causes the philosopher (who is intermediate) to desire and love wisdom (which is good). Socrates concludes: "relative to the soul or to the body and in every way, [the intermediate] is a friend of the good because of the presence of the bad" (218b9-c2). He has not been

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<sup>6</sup> Annas, 1979, 535 understandably calls the distinction Socrates makes here "extremely obscure." In fact, there are at least two distinctions at work: one between being and seeming and another between the relevant quantities that issue in a difference in quality. When hair is painted white, it is said merely to appear white because it is white only on the surface but not underneath. When hair is white from old age, it is said to be white because its surface and subsurface are the same color. Perhaps there is also a tacit appeal to the natural versus the artificial origins of the color.

explicit about what it means for one to have intermediate soul. When explaining the sick persons' love for the doctor, Socrates emphasized that it was the presence of sickness in a body that was neither good nor bad which caused its love for the medical art (217b1-4), which the doctor possesses. The philosopher appears to be his example of someone who is intermediate in soul: a philosopher's love for wisdom is caused by the presence of ignorance in the part of him that's capable of opining or knowing.

On this view, which I will refer to as "the Intermediate thesis," what is neither good nor bad is a friend to the good. Socrates' provides two examples of intermediate persons who are friends as the subject of friendly love: the sick person and the philosopher. The sick person loves the doctor presumably because the doctor possesses the relevant knowledge to heal their sick body. Philosophers love wisdom presumably because it is relevant sort knowledge that would cure their souls of ignorance. So, on the Intermediate thesis, at least one member of the friendship must not be good, in the sense of being fully wise or fully healthy, and yet also must not be bad, in the sense of being fully ignorant of fully ill. Rather one friend, the subject of friendly love, must be –as Socrates puts it later –"in between" (*metaxy*: 220d6). The other friend, the object of the friendly love, must be good in some way, and the examples suggest that what is good in this context are forms of knowledge that could cure the body or mind.

An "absurd suspicion" comes to Socrates that his recent conclusion is mistaken (218c6). Socrates first argues that the good to which the intermediate is friend cannot be a good that is loved for the sake of some other good. For example, although we might describe a person as loving money, in truth, Socrates reckons, they love what money can provide them (220a1-5). The true object of the intermediate's friendly love is a good that is not loved for the sake of some other thing: "the friend is not a friend of a friend for the sake of a friend, but the good is a friend" (220b3-c1). With this implication in hand, Socrates raises doubts about the Intermediate Thesis using roughly the following argument: (1) If the intermediate is friend of

the good, then it is a friend “on account of the bad” (*dia to kakon*: 219b1 and 220b8) of a good that is not loved for the sake of some other thing. (2) But the intermediate is not friend of the good in this way: Instead, he argues that since the intermediate loves the good on account of the bad, such that the good is “like a medicine for the bad” (220d3), the intermediate somehow loves the good for the sake of the bad or perhaps of removing the bad. So, he concludes the good “is a friend for the sake of an enemy” (220e2-5).<sup>7</sup> (3) Nor is the intermediate a friend of anything, the good included, because of the presence of the bad: Instead, he argues that one becomes the friend of something merely because of desire, for some desires would continue to exist even if the bad perished (221b5-6). So, he concludes, “desire is the cause (*aition*) of friendship” (221d3). Because the intermediate is neither a friend of the good that is not loved for the sake of another, nor is it a friend of anything because of the bad, the tacit conclusion of this reasoning is that (4) it is not the case that the intermediate is a friend to the good.<sup>8</sup> Below I will focus on Socrates’ support for premise 3 since it in particular paves the way for the idea that the akin friend is of the akin (*to oikeion*).

Socrates argues that friendship is caused not by the presence of the bad but instead by desire. He begins by claiming that he “knows” (*ismen*) that desires are sometimes beneficial, sometimes harmful, and sometimes neither beneficial nor harmful (221a5-b3). He then asks what would happen if the bad were “removed” (*apollyetai*) and so touched no soul or body (221b3), as he had done in an earlier

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<sup>7</sup> Socrates here appears to run over his own distinction between being a friend “on account of something” (*dia ti*) versus being a friend for the sake of something” (*tinis heneka*).

<sup>8</sup> Wolfsdorf, 2007, 243; Rudebusch, 2009; Penner and Rowe, 2005, and others would disagree with my characterization of this argument, in particular my version of premise 1. On their view only the qualification that the intermediate is friend of the good because of the bad is refuted, while the idea that the intermediate is a friend of the good is left standing. However, in the text at 221d2-5 Socrates speaks as though the entire Intermediate thesis, and specifically the notion that the intermediate is the friend, has been refuted. It is then replaced by the Akin thesis, as I explain in section 2 below.

argument (220c3). In answer, he suggests, “there will be neither-good-nor-bad desires even if the bad is destroyed” (221b5-6).<sup>9</sup> By “neither good nor bad desires” I presume Socrates refers to neither harmful nor beneficial desires, which he has just mentioned a few lines above. This alternative formulation, by including the phrase, “nor bad,” helps him make clear why these desires would continue to exist even if the bad were destroyed. Since neither-harmful-nor-beneficial desires persist under this condition, he concludes that friendships would, too (221b5-c1).<sup>10</sup> Because friendship persists even when the bad goes away, he concludes, the presence of the bad cannot be its cause (221c2-3). Instead, he claims, “desire is the cause [*aitia*] of friendship” and so that we are friend to “what we desire whenever we desire it” (221d3-4).

Now, it seems, we can discover what we are friends of by finding the object of desire. Socrates reckons we desire and are friends of whatever we are in need (*endeēs*) of, we need whatever “has been taken” (*aphairetai*) from us, and what has been taken from us is what was once ours, *to oikeion*, a thing that belongs or is akin to us (221d6-e3). The idea of the akin comes about, ultimately, as the answer to the question of what we desire. This suggests that fundamentally we are friends of what we desire. And since, in this line of reasoning,

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<sup>9</sup> Socrates refrains from saying whether good desires or bad desires will be destroyed along with the bad. One might reasonably conclude from what he says that at least harmful desires would disappear. The point of the thought-experiment seems to be that some type(s), but not all types, of desires would disappear, and harmful desires are the best candidates for disappearing with the bad because of the intimate relationship between what is bad and what is harmful. But it is unclear whether Socrates thinks that beneficial desires would remain or perish under this same condition. Annas, 1979, 538 suggests that beneficial desires would also perish since, she assumes, the good must perish with the bad. A further reason to think beneficial desires would perish is that earlier in the discussion the desire for the good was thought to be caused by the presence of the bad.

<sup>10</sup> Socrates reaches this conclusion as follows. Without warning he reintroduces erotic love (*eros*) into the discussion and assumes that if the bad were removed then *eros* would nevertheless continue to exist. He seems to think that if X desires and erotically loves Y then X must be a friend to Y (compare 212b7-c1). For an interesting account of why Socrates discusses *eros* and *philia* together here, see Gonzalez, 2003.

what we desire turns out to be akin, we are friends of the akin. Socrates –with hedging language –guardedly concludes: “Erotic love [*eros*], desire [*epithymia*] and friendship [*philia*], it seems, are for the akin [*tou oikeiou*], as it appears” (221e3-4). Here, the akin appears to be the object of desire and so also the object of friendly love.

Socrates extends the argument to show that the akin is also the subject of friendly love. He does so by arguing that since Lysis and Menexenus are friends they must love one another (221e5-6).<sup>11</sup> And since they love one another, each must be akin to the other. So, the one who loves is akin to the one who is loved, and vice versa.

On this account, which I will refer to as “the Akin thesis,” two people are friends if they are akin to one another. Initially this thesis appears to be an improvement over two accounts of the friend which were considered and rejected earlier in the dialogue, that like is friend to like and that unlike is friend to unlike. (I will discuss them in part 4 of this paper.) The word “akin” (*oikeion*) comes from the word for “house” (*oikos*), so to describe two or more things as akin suggests that they are related as members of the same household or family. In an earlier discussion Socrates uses the term “kin” (*oikeioi*) in reference to Lysis’ parents and probably to his other relatives (210c2 and d1-d4). Members of a household are neither fully alike nor fully unlike. Insofar as they live under one roof, accept the same set of rules, and share ancestry or values, they are alike. They also differ in countless ways, not least in that they occupy different places or different times, have different roles in the household economy, and have diverse ambitions and preferences.

We can expect that the kinship of friends similarly allows for elements of likeness and unlikeness. While assuming friends are akin, Socrates suggests that since Lysis and Menexenus are friends they must also be akin to one another in some way (221e5-6). Earlier in the dialogue we discover that the two boys are similar in age and

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<sup>11</sup> For an alternative account of this argument, see Rudebusch, 2004. He argues that reciprocity is built into the nature of kinship, so it doesn’t need to be derived from the example of Lysis and Menexenus’ friendship.

nobility of birth, but they still find grounds for dispute (207b9-c9). For all their likeness they differ in their character: Lysis loves to listen (206c10) while Menexenus loves to debate (211b8). As friends they are both competitors and allies (consider 212c2 and 222a4-b1). By hinting at elements of likeness and unlikeness, kinship seems to offer a more nuanced and so a more plausible account of the grounds of friendship than either one could do on its own. Also, by evoking a natural connection (consider *physei pei oikeioi*: 221e6) like the one that exists between family members, kinship suggests a connection between friends that is somehow grounded in the world order. In keeping with this possibility, *oikeion* can also mean “proper to” a thing.

Yet it is still hard to say exactly what it means to be “akin” in this discussion. Some help might be found in Socrates’ equation of the akin with the object of desire (221d3-e4). If two persons desire one another then both are friends. What accounts for each one desiring the other is left unexplained aside from the pregnant suggestion that we lack, and so desire, “whatever was taken from us” (*aphairetai*: 221e2-3).<sup>12</sup> The akin is thus like us insofar as it once belonged to us and yet unlike us by now being separate. If the akin is the friend, then friendship involves retrieving what belongs to us, making us the whole we once were, and in that sense making us more complete.

This thesis about friendship is reminiscent of Aristophanes’ account of erotic love in the *Symposium*.<sup>13</sup> For Aristophanes, erotic love aims at wholeness, at retrieving a lost part of ourselves. In fact, Socrates, in the voice of Diotima, interprets the comic poet’s view as *eros* for the “akin” (*oikeion*: *Sym.* 205e6).<sup>14</sup> What could count as a

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<sup>12</sup> For an exploration of what this might mean, see Geier, 2002, 125-132.

<sup>13</sup> Others have observed this connection between the texts, too. See for instance Nichols, 2006, 7; Price, 1986, 12-13; and Versenyi, 1975, 188. The comparison is suggested by the fact that Socrates offers the akin as the object not only of *philia* but also of *eros* at *Ly.* 221e4.

<sup>14</sup> References to the *Symposium* advert to the text of Burnet 1903. Translations are my own.

missing part of oneself in another remains a mystery.<sup>15</sup> But even if there were someone who could make us whole and we knew who it was, it is still unclear whether wholeness is beneficial. Socrates indirectly criticizes Aristophanes on these very grounds. He says, “My account says that *eros* is neither of the half nor of the whole, unless, I suppose...it happens to be the good, since human beings are willing to cut off both their own feet and hands, if their own things [*ta heauton*] seem to be bad” (*Sym.* 205e1-5). His point here is that wholeness can differ from the good. When it does, wholeness cannot be the object of erotic love, provided it seeks what is good. Similarly, I propose, kinship will fail to be adequate grounds for friendship in the *Lysis* –even if to possess the akin makes us more complete –so long as the akin differs from the good and so long as what we are friend of is necessarily beneficial. Later in this essay I argue that for Socrates we cannot be friend of the akin for these very reasons.

## 2. The relation between the two accounts

A straightforward reading of the text suggests that Socrates presents the Akin thesis as an alternative to the Intermediate thesis. He treats the discovery that the friend is what we desire (a claim on which the Akin thesis rests) as a rejection of the whole previous line of thought in which the Intermediate thesis played the central role. He says:

So it was agreed by us that the friend loves something and [does so] on account of something, and we thought *at that time (tote ge)* that it was on account of the bad that the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good? – True. –But *now (nyn de ge)* it seems, there appears to be some other cause of loving and being loved. –So it seems. –So in truth, as we said just now, desire is the cause of friendship, and what desires is a friend to this: what it desires, whenever it desires it; and what we

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<sup>15</sup> Price, 1986, 12-13 suggests that identifying object of love with the *oikeion* offers no explanatory advantages, while Geier, 2002, 125-132 suggests the opposite: the mysteriousness of the *oikeion*, or the fact that it is unknown, is essential to explaining how it can be the proper object of love, or “beloved.”

said was a friend earlier is some nonsense, just like a long poem. (221c5-d6)

Here Socrates claims not merely to have changed his view about the cause of friendship, from its being caused by the presence of the bad to its being caused by desire; he claims also to have abandoned the previous account of what the friend is, according to which the intermediate is friend of the good. “*What we said was a friend earlier*” he says, “is some nonsense.”

Nevertheless, some commentators interpret the Akin thesis as a restatement, explanation, or an improved version of the Intermediate thesis.<sup>16</sup> Socrates might seem to invite such an interpretation, for when considering possible meanings of the akin he asks: “Or shall we posit that the good is akin [*oikeion*] to all and the bad is alien [*allogtrion*]?” (222c4-5). And in an earlier discussion with Lysis, he says, “if you become wise, my boy, all will be your friends and kin [*oikeioi*], for you will be useful and good; but if not, no one will be your friend...[or] kin” (210d3-4). In both cases there is a suggestion that the good is akin to everyone. If it were the case that nothing else was akin but the good, then the Intermediate and the Akin theses would posit the same thing as the object of friendly love. But I think Socrates cannot accept this view of the relation between the akin and the good for two main reasons. First, as I will argue below, according to the account of the akin offered in the *Lysis* we can be akin to something that is not in fact good, so it is only in some cases that the

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance Gadamer, 1980, 20; Gonzalez, 1995, 82-93 and 2003, 31; Rudebusch, 2009, 113; Wolfsdorf, 2007, 250; Penner and Rowe, 2005, 154-156; Reshotko, 1997, 12; and. By contrast, Nichols, 2004, 8 and Versenyi, 1975, 196 argue that the Akin and the Intermediate provide two different accounts of the nature of the good. They assume (for it is not asserted in the text) that on the former account desire-satisfaction is the good. My point differs from theirs as well. It is closer to one made by Annas, 1979, 538, who also argues that the akin cannot be the good. But her argument, in contrast to mine, depends on the assumption that if the bad is removed, then the good must go with it. I don’t think the text is clear on whether the good would be destroyed. Even if it was present, I argue that a neither beneficial nor harmful desire cannot have the good as its object or else it would be a beneficial desire. The important point is that because the akin is whatever we desire, it can be but need not necessarily be good.

akin and the good overlap. Second, earlier arguments in the dialogue imply that it is not the case that the good is akin to all. For if the good was akin to all then it would be akin also to the good and to the bad. And if it was akin to them then they would be its friends, assuming that each was a friend to its kin. But Socrates has argued earlier that neither one can be friend to the good: the good cannot be friend of the good (215a-b), nor can the bad be friend of the good or of anyone else (214b-d). Provided he still accepts these arguments, the good is not akin to all.<sup>17</sup>

I contend that the two accounts are incompatible because they depend on opposing assumptions about the nature of desire and its relation to friendship. The Intermediate thesis assumes that we do not desire everything we need, and that friendship occurs only when we desire what is in fact good for us. But the Akin thesis assumes that we do desire everything we need, and that friendship occurs whenever we desire something, regardless of whether it is good for us. The two accounts nevertheless have some common traits, which I will discuss before explaining their opposition.

On both accounts, friendship is sufficient for desire. Socrates argues for this point explicitly while developing the Akin thesis. A key point in that discussion is that desire is the cause of friendship. Clearly, then, desire is sufficient for friendship. But on this thesis, friendship is also sufficient for desire, since an effect is sufficient for its cause, provided it has only one, as Socrates appears to assume. So, friendship and desire imply one another on the Akin thesis. The case is slightly harder to make out for the Intermediate thesis. When discussing it Socrates says that one kind of presence of the bad makes the body or the soul desire and love the good, while another kind deprives it of this desire and love. Friendship for the good is present when desire is present, and when desire is absent so is friendship. For these reasons it looks like friendship implies desire on both the Akin and Intermediate theses.

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<sup>17</sup> Below I address an alternative reading according to which there is no one who is bad.

Also, on both accounts desire can be beneficial or non-beneficial. Again, this is more explicit in the discussion of the akin than in the discussion of the intermediate. In the former, Socrates takes as his starting point that there are different sorts of desires: some are beneficial, others harmful, and yet others neither beneficial nor harmful (221a6-7). In the discussion of the intermediate, he speaks explicitly only of desire for the good, such as the desire for wisdom, health, or medicine. But desire for what is in fact good and a beneficial desire must be the same thing, since what makes a desire beneficial, at least on broadly eudaemonist grounds, can only be that its object really is good, at least for the one who desires it. Throughout the *Lysis* Socrates endorses one's interest in one's own advantage: he uses one's real advantage as a measure for the rightful allotment of personal freedom and property (210b-c) and for the possibility of loving others (210c5-d4, 215a1-2 and 222b9-c1). I presume that beneficial desire is desire for an object that is, in fact, good for the agent; that harmful desire is desire for an object that is, in fact, bad for the agent; and that neither beneficial nor harmful desire is desire for an object that is, in fact, neither good nor bad for the agent.<sup>18</sup> So in the discussion of the intermediate Socrates acknowledges the existence of beneficial desire by acknowledging desire for what is in fact good for the agent, like health and wisdom.

But does the Intermediate thesis assume the existence of non-beneficial desires? Socrates' characterization of bad persons while discussing it suggests that it does. There he characterizes the bad as being ignorant in a way that makes them stupid and incapable of learning and implies that they think they know what they do not know (218a4-b1). And in an earlier discussion Socrates characterizes them as doing injustice to whomever they get close to (214b9-c2; compare *Ap.* 25d-e). Quite the cocktail of bad traits! I suggest that it is because bad persons think that they know that certain things are good, which

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<sup>18</sup> This presumption is strengthened by Socrates' substitution of "neither bad nor good desires" for "neither beneficial nor harmful desires" at 221b2-6. For alternative accounts of this taxonomy of desires, see for instance Wolfsdorf, 2007, 243 and Penner and Rowe, 2005, 137-138.

in fact are not so, that they unwittingly desire and pursue things that are in fact bad. For instance, they do injustice to others and thereby prevent themselves from having the benefit of friends. Bad people are bad, I suppose, in large part because they pursue what is bad for themselves and others. I further suppose that one's pursuits must be caused, at least indirectly, by his or her desires. Since, according to Socrates in this discussion, the bad do not desire the good, and since –as I suppose –they pursue something, and pursuit implies desire, it follows that they must desire things that turn out to be bad. Although they are incapable of friendship, bad persons nevertheless have harmful desires. Thus, in developing the Intermediate thesis, Socrates implicitly acknowledges the existence of non-beneficial desires.

Despite these similarities, the two accounts disagree fundamentally on the nature of desire. During the development of the Akin thesis, Socrates assumes that if X needs Y, then X desires Y. He says, “the thing that desires, desires this: whatever it needs” (*hou an endees ei*: 221d7-e1).<sup>19</sup> Need is sufficient for desire. This is one of the basic claims Socrates uses to generate the Akin thesis, and for this reason I presume that the Akin thesis rests on it. He does not assume that we desire what is akin but rather that we desire what we lack or need, whatever that turns out to be. Only because of accepting two separate claims, that one needs “whatever one has been deprived of” (*hou an ti aphairtai*) and that what one is deprived of is akin (221e1-4), does he infer that one desires the akin. On this picture, need unfailingly determines desire, perhaps because the akin, by once being part of ourselves, is somehow like us and so easier to identify than the good.

By contrast, the Intermediate thesis holds that need is not sufficient for desire: if X needs Y, then X may or may not desire Y, depending on whether other conditions are in place. To illuminate this feature of desire was the whole point of the discussion of the

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<sup>19</sup> “*Endees*” could be translated as “in need of” or “in lack of” but not as “deprived of.” Socrates infers that what we need is what we are deprived of, as I indicate. To translate *endees* as “deprived of” would erase the evidence of this inference.

different types of presence of the bad. We learned there that illness can be present in two different ways and so that there are two different ways for the body to need or lack health. In one, the body desires and is a friend to the medical art; in the other, it is deprived of that desire and friendship. So, the mere fact that we need health is not enough to make us desire the medical art. Regarding the soul, both bad persons and philosophers are ignorant, and so both need wisdom, but only philosophers desire and love it. Need for wisdom is not enough on its own to produce desire for wisdom; one must also have recognition of ignorance. The Intermediate thesis assumes there is difficulty in discovering that we need and what we need. Accordingly need for a good, whether in body or soul, does not ensure desire for it. On the Akin thesis, then, need is sufficient for desire, but on the Intermediate thesis it is not.

These accounts also disagree on the relationship between desire and friendship. The Akin thesis assumes that if X desires Y, then X loves Y: “the thing that desires is a friend to what it desires, whenever it desires it” (221d3-4). So, desire is sufficient for friendship. Remember that we reached this conclusion by observing that there are different types of desire, the beneficial, the harmful, and the neither-beneficial-nor-harmful. Friendship, according to the Akin thesis, can depend on non-beneficial desire: on desire for what is not in fact good for the agent. Socrates explicitly acknowledges this by saying that friendships would exist even if there were only neither-good-nor-bad desires (221b5-9). But the Intermediate thesis denies that every type of desire is sufficient for friendship. It holds that if X desires Y, then X may or may not be a friend to Y, depending on whether the desire is beneficial. Though the intermediate might desire different sorts of things at different times, it is “friend to the good alone” (216e7-a2). Since on this account friendship and desire for the good go hand in hand (217e6-9), only beneficial desires can cause friendship; non-beneficial ones cannot. On the Akin thesis, then, friendship can result from a non-beneficial desire, but on the Intermediate thesis it can result only from a beneficial one.

In sum, the Akin thesis assumes that we desire everything we need, and we love everything we desire, while the Intermediate thesis assumes that we do not desire everything we need and we do not love everything we desire. In the former, there is no need for recognition of ignorance or for wisdom to guide our desires to friendship since any desire –whether beneficial or not –will do. But in the latter, it is essential, because only what is in fact good, like wisdom and health, can be the object of love.

Insofar as it does not require that one be friend of what is beneficial, the Akin thesis resembles those accounts considered and rejected earlier in the dialogue, such as like is friend to like and unlike to unlike. These accounts (which I discuss below in part 4) also characterize friendship as grounded in some other relation than goodness and usefulness. And it is on this basis that Socrates refutes them.

### **3. Considering some alternative readings**

Let me now consider some alternative interpretations of the relationship between the Intermediate and the Akin theses.

One might propose that the two theses have the same content in practice. First, one might correctly notice that if the intermediate desires the good then, according to the Akin thesis, it is akin to the good. Second, one might deny that there is in fact anyone who is bad and that there in fact is anyone who is good, at least by Socrates' measure.<sup>20</sup> If only the intermediate exists then it alone can love and desire, and as we have already seen it desires and loves the good. (Penner and Rowe 2005, 158-160; Gonzalez 1995, 82-93; 2003, 31.) Since the akin is what one desires, since purportedly only the intermediate exists, and since it desires the good, one might conclude

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<sup>20</sup> Gonzalez, 2003, 36, for instance, says that the "human condition... is defined as an intermediate state between good and bad." See also Penner and Rowe, 2005, 139 and 174-175.

that the two theses, in practice, say the same thing. (Gonzalez, 1995, 82-93)

This reading relies on the claim that by the standards set in the *Lysis* there are only intermediate people, because there is no one who is bad and no one who is good. But there are those who are good with respect to their body: they aren't sick and so they have no need of a doctor. And there are those who are bad in their body, according to the standards that Socrates articulates: their body is so sick that it can no longer be cured by the medical art. More likely, there is doubt about whether there is anyone who is, by Socrates' account, good or bad *in their soul*. His account of these latter two classes is, no doubt, stringent: those who are bad in soul are those who consider themselves to know what they don't know, while those who are good in soul are wise. Neither the bad persons nor good persons love what is good for soul, namely, wisdom: the latter because already have it and the former because they don't realize they're lacking it. All the same, I think, Socrates must hold that there are at least some people who are bad by these standards and so must hold that not everyone is intermediate in soul. For if everyone were intermediate in soul, as I suspect the objection maintains, then everyone would be a philosopher. This is because Socrates assumes that there are only three classes: the ignorant, the wise, and the philosophers. So, if there is no one bad then there is no one who is fully ignorant, and if there is no one good then there is no one who is fully wise. Only those who are neither fully wise nor fully ignorant would remain, and these are philosophers. And if everyone were a philosopher, then –by Socrates' reckoning, at least –everyone would consider himself not to know what he doesn't know. But not everyone is like this. Many are just the opposite: they think they know what they don't. That is why it can be part of Socrates' project in this dialogue to reveal to Hippothales his ignorance about courting and to Lysis and Menexenus their ignorance about friendship. Each boy thinks he knows more about this matter than he in fact does, and Socrates gently leads them to realize their ignorance (see 210d and 213c9). And whatever one might think of these examples, surely there are other interlocutors that Socrates encounters who think they know

what they don't. In the *Apology*, for instance, he claims that this is generally the case with politicians, poets, and craftsman and suggests that it is true about many others as well (*Ap.* 21c-22d and 23c).<sup>21</sup> So there are some bad people by the measure Socrates offers in the *Lysis*. But the reading we are considering requires that *there are none*. And so not everyone is akin to the good. As long as those exist who lack wisdom yet fail to love it, the Akin and the Intermediate theses have different content in practice.

Alternatively, one might propose that the two theses have the same content in theory, reasoning in the following way: Since the akin is what is desired, and since human beings desire only what they think is good, the akin is necessarily the good. Therefore, the two theses say the same thing, in theory, at least about the object of love.<sup>22</sup>

It is controversial whether Socrates holds that desire (*epithymia*) is only for what one thinks is good.<sup>23</sup> But supposing that he does, that doesn't mean he thinks everything we desire is in fact good. Socrates does after all say that he "knows" (*ismen*) that some desires are harmful (221a6-221b2). Presumably this is because sometimes the object that we thought was good is in fact bad; in such a case, we unwittingly desire what is bad.<sup>24</sup> Our desires do not aim at what is

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<sup>21</sup> References to the *Apology* advert to Cooper, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> For some examples of these sorts of arguments, see Penner and Rowe, 2005, 175; Rudebusch, 2009, 113; and Reshotko, 1997, 12.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, Socrates seems to affirm this at *Men.* 77b6-78b2. Yet at *Rep.* 438a and following Socrates seems to distance himself from this view, when he argues, "thirst itself isn't for much or little, good or bad.... Rather, thirst itself is in its nature only for drink itself" (438e-439a in Cooper, 1997). Hyland, 1968, 39 and 44-45 argues that, for Socrates, *epithymia* (as opposed to *eros*, *philia*, and *boulesthai*) does not exclusively aim at what is good.

<sup>24</sup> This is a complex and controversial issue. As an alternative to my view, Penner and Rowe, 2005, 205-211 would argue that when I pick up the glass of poisoned water, I am not doing what I desired to do. On their view, desire has a real reference that can differ from the one we grab with our hand. So instead of saying that we desire X, mistakenly believing it was Y (my view), they would say we did not desire X in the first place but only Y.

bad, but they can hit an unintended target.<sup>25</sup> For instance, I might desire a certain glass of water on the table, not realizing that it has been contaminated. In another case, I might desire a glass of water that is clean and pure. Each time I would have grabbed the glass that I desired, but on one of those times I would have, in my ignorance of its contents, desired a glass with bad water. So there remains a distinction between desires based on the real goodness or badness of their object, regardless of what we believe about it. This, I suggest, is the distinction we have already seen between beneficial, harmful, and neither beneficial nor harmful desires, a distinction that Socrates treats as an object of knowledge (see *ismen*: 221a6). But the akin is what we desire *even when that desire is non-beneficial or harmful*. So, the akin fails to be good whenever there is a desire that is non-beneficial. The Akin and the Intermediate theses cannot be the same in theory provided there are non-beneficial desires, and Socrates (rightly in my view) treats these types of desires as a fact of life.

Yet another alternative reading might propose that the Intermediate and Akin theses, instead, represent two *different types* of friendship.<sup>26</sup> This reading could allow for a ranking of the two accounts in order of importance, with the Intermediate thesis representing the more important, primary type and the Akin, the less important, secondary type. Because it invokes a natural connection between friends that cannot be reduced merely to likeness or unlikeness, and because it thus improves over some accounts of the friend that Socrates refutes, the Akin thesis offers an attractive account of the friend. The alternative interpretation we are

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<sup>25</sup> At *Men.* 77d7-e2 Socrates says of those alleged to desire the bad: “It is clear that these men do not desire bad things, since they are ignorant with regard to them, but [they desire] those things which they thought were good, but these things are bad.” This is my translation, using the text of Burnet 1903.

<sup>26</sup> Here I disagree with Pangle, 2006, 306, 314-15 and Bolotin, 1979, 188-189 who argue that, for Socrates or Plato, love for the akin and love for the good are separate yet compatible motives to friendship. They see Socrates as closer to Aristotle who thinks that there are different types of friendship and who, at *EN* 9.4, argues that in a friendship between good men each takes pleasure in the other whose actions are at once the good and one’s own (*oikeias*: 1170a2).

considering now might seem to have a leg up on the one I'm offering by allowing us to accept both the Akin and Intermediate theses, at once.

According to this interpretation, Socrates would have to accept two different theses about friendship that are, if I'm right, incompatible with one another. They are incompatible because, as I argued in section 2 above, the Akin thesis assumes (1) we desire whatever we need and (2) we are friends to whatever we desire and says (3) what we are friend of can but need not be beneficial, while the Intermediate assumes (~1) we do not desire everything we need, (~2) we are not friends to everything we desire and says (~3) what we are friends of must be beneficial. If we desire everything we need, it cannot also be the case that we do not desire everything we need, at the same time and in the same respect, and similarly with the other two sets of opposing claims. So, one cannot hold both accounts of friendship unless one assumes there can be multiple, incompatible senses of "need," "desire," and "friendship," and so forth.

For the interpretation proposed in the objection to make sense, it would have to be the case that there can be multiple answers to the question: what is the friend? We might want to adopt such a view, and surely there are important thinkers that do. Aristotle, for instance, argues that there are different types (*eide*) of friendship (*EN* 1156a6-8), and in his view one type, that between good men, is significantly more important and representative of friendship than are the others, the friendships of utility and pleasure (*EN* 1157a25-32).<sup>27</sup> Socrates does not anywhere in the *Lysis* suggest that there are different types of friendship.<sup>28</sup> There is, however, a passage where Socrates says that bad men cannot enter into "true friendship" (*alethe philian*) with either themselves or the good (214d6-7). But this passage suggests that there is a difference between apparent and real friendship, not

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<sup>27</sup> As the passage referred to in the second citation shows, Aristotle is not entirely univocal on whether the lesser forms of friendship really are friendships.

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that Aristotle is distancing himself from Plato and Socrates at *EN* 1155b13-15, where he says that because friendships differ in degree does not mean that they do not also differ in type.

one between types. In the *Lysis* there is no indication that, as a matter of procedure, Socrates is looking for anything but one single answer to the questions of who or what a friend is, what it is a friend of, or perhaps of how one becomes one. Even if the *Lysis* is a not pure case of a definitional dialogue,<sup>29</sup> Socrates still seems to take it as a given that there is only one type of friend and only one type of friendship.

I conclude that these two accounts of friendship are incompatible in such a way that one cannot be a restatement or an improved version of the other because they employ opposing assumptions about the nature of desire, of friendship, and their relation to one another. Nor can Socrates hold both at the same time, since if one is right, in his view, the other must be wrong. So, if we wish to show that Socrates endorses one of these views of friendship in the *Lysis*, it must be one or the other, not both. This point is worth making because it advances our understanding of friendship in the *Lysis*, even if it does so only by forcing us to face the correct dilemma. It is controversial because it conflicts with common interpretations that tend to collapse or otherwise obscure this dilemma.

The next question to consider is which of the accounts best harmonizes with Socrates' understanding of desire and friendship in the rest of the dialogue.

#### **4. The best candidate for Socrates' view**

I will argue that the Intermediate thesis alone is the best candidate in the *Lysis* for being Socrates' view of friendship. Part of the evidence for this claim is that Socrates relies on the principal assumptions of the Intermediate thesis in every argument of the dialogue except the one which supports the Akin thesis. By relying on alternative assumptions, the argument for the Akin thesis, I suggest, constitutes an exception to Socrates' ordinary adherence to the assumptions that support the Intermediate thesis. I presume that

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of whether Socrates asks his characteristic "What is it?" question in the *Lysis*, see Sedley, 1989.

if Socrates regularly appeals to a set of assumptions, this constitutes *some* evidence that he accepts them and might also accept the view of friendship that is consistent with them. The remaining evidence comes from the way Socrates understands and practices philosophy in the *Lysis*. The depiction of Socratic philosophy here, I argue, implies the account of desire that underwrites the Intermediate thesis but conflicts with the one that underwrites the Akin thesis. Because Socrates endorses his own view of philosophy, he cannot accept the Akin thesis, but he can accept the Intermediate. In sum: since (1) throughout the whole dialogue except for the development of the Akin thesis Socrates relies on principles that support the Intermediate thesis, since (2) his view of philosophy is consistent with these principles and with this view of friendship, and since (3) no other definition of friendship in the *Lysis* has these merits, I suggest that the Intermediate thesis constitutes the best candidate for being Socrates' view of friendship in the *Lysis*. He either accepts this one or none of them.

One of my conclusions in this part of the paper will be found less controversial than those above, as it conforms more closely to the scholarly norm. Others too have observed that, for Socrates, friendship must be beneficial, that it must have an object that is in fact good for the one who loves.<sup>30</sup> I add that he must also endorse the specific account of desire on which the Intermediate thesis depends and that he cannot accept the Akin thesis. Also, some of my arguments for this view are novel, especially the connection I draw between Socrates' account of philosophy and his account of friendship and desire.

Perhaps the best evidence that the Intermediate thesis fits Socrates' assumptions about friendship is that he uses philosophy as an example of it. In the *Lysis* Socrates describes philosophers –those who are intermediate with respect to their souls –as “still considering

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<sup>30</sup> Most famously, this is the view of Vlastos, 1973, but it is widely held by others, including, Gonzalez, 2003; Penner and Rowe, 2005; Hyland, 1968; Reshotko, 1997; and Wolfsdorf, 2007.

themselves not to know what they don't know" (218a9-b1). By doing so he reminds us of his famous description of the type of wisdom he claims to possess in the *Apology*: "Just as I do not know," he says, "I do not think that I know... in this at least I am wiser" than one who thinks he knows what he doesn't (*Ap.* 21d). As both passages suggest, for Socrates, philosophy essentially involves recognizing one's lack of knowledge. And the passage in the *Lysis* shows that he thinks that the Intermediate thesis makes sense of philosophers' peculiar status between knowledge and ignorance and of their friendship for wisdom. So, this view of friendship is consistent with his view of philosophy.

Socrates practices this very form of philosophy in the *Lysis*. He conducts most of the discussions with the aim of revealing to his interlocutors –and perhaps also to himself (consider 218c4-9) –that they don't know what they think they know. He also admits that he is not completely wise about friendship, saying that he's so far from having a friend he doesn't even know how one becomes a friend to another (212a4-7). And he concludes the dialogue suggesting that he and the boys still don't know what a friend is (223b5-8). His recognition of ignorance about friendship comes from or even consists in his careful consideration of different ideas about it.

Socratic philosophy also implies the account of desire on which the Intermediate thesis is based. Not everyone is a philosopher by Socrates' description, as I argued above. Since Socrates thinks that there are people who fail to love wisdom due to their stupidity, it follows, as we have seen, that there are people who fail to love a good that they need. And failing to love a good we need implies that we also fail to desire that good, for love is caused by or otherwise implies desire. Hence Socrates' account of philosophy implies that we often fail to desire the good that we need. But when we do desire the wisdom that we lack, that desire issues in "*loving wisdom*" (*philosophhein*: 218b1). Friendship for wisdom is caused by a beneficial desire, a desire for what is in fact good for us.

Having shown that Socrates' view of philosophy shares important assumptions with the Intermediate thesis, I will now focus

on how, in the remaining relevant discussions of the dialogue, he assumes the claims about desire and friendship on which the Intermediate Thesis rests. These claims are that (1) the friend, as the object of love, must be good or beneficial and (2) that we do not always desire the good we need, and so need for a good does not ensure desire for it.

In his first conversation with Lysis, Socrates assumes that we sometimes fail to desire the goods that we need. His stated goal there is to show Hippothales how to speak to the boy with whom he is enamored (206c4-6), while his true goal seems to be to encourage in Lysis a love of wisdom. Socrates achieves the latter by showing him that he is not yet fully loveable because he is not yet wise, for only by becoming wise will Lysis become good and useful to himself and others (210d1-5). As it stands, however, he is not yet good and useful because he still “desires” (*epithymein*)<sup>31</sup> and “wishes” (*boulesthai*)<sup>32</sup> to take charge of matters that he doesn’t understand. This is why his parents sometimes prevent him from doing what he wants. But in the things that he does understand, such as tuning the lyre and writing and reading letters, they let him do as he pleases. Socrates explains:

In those things, in whichever ones we become prudent [*phronomoi*], everyone will entrust their affairs to us...for we will benefit from them; but in those things where we don’t possess mind, no one will entrust us to do what we think good [*dokounta*] with regard to them...for we will gain no advantage from them.  
210a9-c4

Doing whatever you want when you are ignorant confers no benefit to anyone, while doing whatever you want when it comes to those areas where you have knowledge leads to beneficial results for you as well as for others (this is why they entrust their affairs to you).

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance *epithymeseis* at 208a2. Socrates begins the discussion with Lysis by drawing a relation between desire (various conjugations of *epithymein*) and happiness at 207e.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance *bouloio* at 208b3. Socrates appears to use “desire” and “wish” interchangeably in this discussion, as Penner and Rowe, 2005, 19 also observe.

Socrates drives home the point that Lysis still lacks the education he needs to become good and useful, by shifting his language from the inclusive “we,” as in the above passage, to the “you” singular: “So then if *you* become [*genei*] wise... everyone will love *you*, but if *you* don’t... And if *you* need a teacher, *you* don’t yet think prudently” (*phroneis*: 210c6-d9).

By the end of the conversation Socrates has strongly implied that Lysis lacks wisdom. The point of all this is to get him to see that he is not yet wise and, as a result, to desire and want to become wiser. But that means at the beginning of the conversation, at least, Socrates must have thought that, although Lysis lacks the wisdom that he needs, he does not yet adequately desire or love it. And this is true even though Lysis has other, non-beneficial desires and wishes. He wants to drive a chariot and whip mules despite not understanding the how or why of these activities (208a-c). Lysis has desires, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he desires wisdom, the good he needs most of all. Thus, Socrates assumes a picture of desire according to which we don’t always desire the good we need.

In the same conversation Socrates also assumes that love must have as its object what is good and useful to us. He says,

Will we be friends to anyone and will anyone love us in those things in which we are useless? –No, indeed, [Lysis] said. –Now then neither your father loves you, nor does anyone love anyone else, insofar as he is useless? –It doesn’t seem so, he said. –So if you become wise, my boy, all will be your friends and kin [*oikeioi*], for you will be useful and good; but if not, no one will be your friend...[or] kin. 210c5-d4<sup>33</sup>

Here Socrates indicates that being wise is necessary for being loved or lovable and that the wise are good and useful. This implies that love’s object is necessarily what is useful and good, and since

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<sup>33</sup> The Akin thesis at the end of the dialogue indicates that whatever we desire is akin to us, even if that desire is non-beneficial and its object is not good. By contrast, in this passage Socrates suggests that only when something is good, do we love and become akin to it.

love's object is what is good, it can only be caused by a desire for what is good, a beneficial desire.

In the following conversation Socrates raises the question of who becomes a friend when one person loves another (212a8-b2). He and Menexenus consider several different answers to this question, none of which proves satisfactory. The main stumbling block they face concerns how to make sure that their answer rules out the possibility of being a friend to an enemy. Though it is never made explicit just what might be “absurd” (*alogia*: 213b3) about this possibility, a plausible explanation is that one cannot be friend to an enemy because enemies are unlovable and unloving. They are so, presumably because they hate us and wish us harm, or because they are otherwise harmful to us, irrespective of their intentions. So, it is plausible that Socrates assumes in this discussion that enemies cannot be friends precisely because they are harmful, the very opposite of what a friend must be.

Socrates then steers the discussion to the question of what sorts of things are friends. He and the boys consider and reject two accounts held by reputable thinkers of the day: that like is friend to like and oppositely that unlike is friend to unlike. Both accounts he refutes by appealing to the principle that friend, as the object of love, must be beneficial.

The poets and natural philosophers say that “it is necessary for like [*to homoion*] always to be friend to like” (214b3-4). If they meant that *all* likes are friends then they must be wrong, Socrates argues, since bad men are alike yet cannot be friends to one another. The closer they get, the more they become enemies, for they treat each other unjustly (214c1-2; compare *Ap.* 25d). And those who are enemies cannot also be friends. Bad men do injustice and so are harmful to those around them. This fact suggests a plausible explanation of why they cannot be friends: their harmfulness makes them unlovable. This explanation receives further support from Socrates' account of why likes cannot be friends insofar as they are alike. Like cannot be friend to like, he argues, because insofar as they are alike neither one has any “benefit” (*ophilian*) or “assistance”

(*epikourian*) to give the other” (214e5-215a2). And he assumes one cannot love what does not benefit oneself. Here Socrates’ argument depends on the assumption that the object of love must be beneficial to the one who loves. Likeness fails to offer benefit and so cannot be the grounds for friendship.

For similar reasons Socrates argues that the good cannot be friend to the good, not insofar as they are alike but insofar as they are good. In this respect, he assumes, the good are sufficient unto themselves and so have no needs (215a6-7). And if they have no needs, they have no “use” (*chreian*: 215b6) for one another. One good person cannot love another because the latter won’t benefit the former. So even when arguing that the good are not friends, Socrates still relies on the idea that we love only what is beneficial. The good cannot be friends as the subjects of love because no one benefits them.

Perhaps friendship depends not on likeness but on difference. By way of transition Socrates remembers that he “heard from someone” that likes are not friends but rather enemies of one another, an opinion apparently supported by Hesiod’s claim that “potter is angry with potter” (215c7-d1). Instead, he recalls, “it is most necessary for...the most unlike [*anomoiotata*] to be filled with friendship [*philia*]” for one another (215d1-3). In trying to show the plausibility of this account Socrates appeals to the idea that we are friends to what benefits us. He explains that one unlike, such as the weak or poor, is friend to another, such as the strong or rich, “for the sake of assistance” (*epikourias heneka*: 215d6). And he explains that opposites, such as the hot and the cold and the empty and the full, are friends because each “desires” (*epithymein*) the other since “opposite is nourishment [*trophēn*] to opposite” (215e8-9). Though fuzzy in its details, the basic features of this account of friendship are clear. Opposites are friends because they desire each other, and each desires the other because of the nourishment it provides. Nourishment, I presume, is what is good and needful to someone or something. So again, he assumes, we are friend to what is beneficial.

Socrates goes on to refute this account by arguing that it implies an absurdity. Some opposites cannot be friends presumably because not all opposites are nourishment to one another. The good and bad and the just and the unjust, for instance, are opposites, so by this account they ought to be friends. But since the unjust and the bad are harmful, they can never be part of a friend-pair. Also, Socrates has argued that the good don't have need of others and so presumably cannot be benefited by them. Unlikeness cannot guarantee benefit and so, by itself, cannot be grounds for friendship.

Out of the ashes of the accounts on which friendship depends on likeness or on unlikeness, Socrates raises the Intermediate thesis, which I discussed in detail above. When he purportedly refutes this thesis, he does so by trying to show that under certain conditions the good is *not* beneficial. When the bad is absent, he suggests, "we would have no need of benefit" (*oudemias ophelias deoimetha*) and "the good would be of no use [*chresimon*] to us" (220c6-d1). He likens the good to a drug that cures one of the bad, which itself is like a sickness (220d3). Since we are friends of the good only when the bad is present, Socrates concludes that we are friends of the good "for the sake of an enemy," that is, for the sake of the bad (220e4). But earlier he had tried to show that if we are friends of the good, we are friends of a good that is not for the sake of another good (220a6-220b5). Since it is not the case that we are friends of the good in this way (for he argues that we love it for the sake of the bad or removing the bad), it seems we must conclude that we are not friends of the good at all. Whatever the merits of this refutation, clearly it assumes that we can be friends only of what is beneficial. Socrates employs this assumption to show that under certain conditions the good is not beneficial to us and so that we are not its friend.

After this, Socrates explores the Akin thesis. And when he turns to casting doubt on it, Socrates reminds the boys of the earlier arguments which relied on the idea that the friend must be beneficial. They cannot accept the Akin thesis if it implies that like is friend to like, he says, "for to agree that the friend is something useless [*achreston*] is out of tune" (222b9-c1). Socrates suggests that the

Akin thesis is viable only if it can guarantee that the friend, as the object of love, is beneficial and so succeed where the like is friend to like thesis failed.

This brief review of the remaining arguments of the dialogue shows that, with the notable exception of the development to the Akin thesis, Socrates consistently relies on the assumption that the friend, as the object of love, must be beneficial: he uses it to support some accounts of the friend (such as unlike is friend to unlike and the intermediate is friend of the good) and relies on this assumption in his efforts to refute every account found in the dialogue, including the Akin thesis. His general adherence to this assumption suggests that he favors it. Also, a review of Socrates' account of philosophy and of his discussion with Lysis early in the dialogue shows that he thinks that lack of a good does not always ensure a desire for it, that philosophy involves having a beneficial desire and love for the good, and that not everyone desires and loves wisdom.

Assuming that he is consistent, Socrates can only endorse the view of friendship that is compatible with his views about the nature of desire, friendship, and philosophy. The Intermediate thesis is compatible with Socrates' views on desire, friendship, and philosophy found in the dialogue, but the Akin thesis and the others he considers are not. So, I conclude that he can endorse only the Intermediate thesis. For this reason, it is the most promising view of friendship offered in the *Lysis*.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have focused on the two most compelling accounts of the friend offered in the *Lysis*, which I have termed the Intermediate thesis and the Akin thesis. The former holds that the neither good nor bad is a friend of the good. It assumes that we do not desire everything we need, that only beneficial desires can issue in friendship, and so that the friend must be beneficial. The latter holds that the akin is a friend of the akin. It assumes that we do desire everything we need, that non-beneficial desires can issue in

friendship, and so that the friend need not be beneficial. I have argued that these two theses are incompatible with one another, for they rely on opposing accounts of desire and of the relation between it and friendship and they disagree about whether the friend must be beneficial. This point needs to be made because one cannot understand the dialogue without understanding the meaning and relationship between the views of friendship found in it and because this relationship, as I see it, is often misunderstood.

I have also argued that, of these two accounts of friendship, Socrates can only accept the Intermediate thesis. On the one hand, his understanding philosophy relies on a certain understanding of desire (that we can and frequently do fail to desire the good we need) that is compatible only with the Intermediate thesis. On the other, his assumptions about the nature of the friend (that it must be beneficial) and about friendship (that it depends on a beneficial desire) throughout most of the dialogue are consistent with this thesis but not with the Akin. Since none of the other accounts of the friend offered in the dialogue succeed where the Akin fails (likeness and unlikeness also fail to ensure that the friend is beneficial), I have concluded that the Intermediate thesis best fits what Socrates says about desire, friendship, and philosophy and what Socrates does in the dialogue. This advances our understanding of the dialogue by limiting to one the number of possible accounts of the friend that Socrates could endorse.

But I have not yet shown that Socrates endorses the Intermediate thesis. It could be that he does not endorse any of the views of friendship he considers in the *Lysis*. After all, he attempts to refute every one of them. If his efforts are uniformly successful, then every account of the friend he considers here is a failure. Perhaps this is why he claims not to know what a friend is. Whether Socrates does in fact endorse the Intermediate thesis depends on whether he thinks he really has refuted it—a subject to explore elsewhere. Also, I have not aimed to provide a complete explanation of why Socrates offers the Akin thesis as an alternative; I have tried only to show that it offers a more plausible account of friendship than do some of the

other accounts, and for this reason is worthy of Socrates' consideration.

In closing I would like to underline a possible connection between the Intermediate thesis and Socrates' philosophic activity in the *Lysis*.<sup>34</sup> Philosophy, as he understands it, requires that one consider oneself not to know what one doesn't know. We come to this position through cross-examination, when we discover that we cannot explain or defend our own opinions or those we have adopted from others. In the *Lysis* Socrates considers and argues against several accounts of friendship with Lysis and Menexenus as interlocutors. In the process –assuming all has gone well –the boys have come to recognize their ignorance about friendship (consider 210c8-9 and 213c9) and so have been turned towards the perhaps truer friendship of philosophy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Many other scholars have noticed the connection between philosophic inquiry and friendship that is presented in the dialogue. Versenyi, 1975, p. 198, among others, argues that there is “an internal correspondence” between Socrates' “negative method of education” and his theory of *philia* in the *Lysis*.

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