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Humbling as Upbringing: The Ethical Dimension of the Elenchus in the *Lysis*

FRANÇOIS RENAUD

Two of the most debated problems in Platonic scholarship of the last fifteen years or so have certainly been the Socratic elenchus and the dramatic form. These two problems have been discussed in relative isolation from one another, however. Most studies of the elenchus have focused mostly on its logical dimension, while those on the dialogue form have often ignored the question of the elenchus. A rapprochement between the so-called analytic and dramatic (or literary) approaches to Plato, especially on the question of the elenchus, appears now possible and desirable. This paper attempts to show some aspects of the ethical dimension of the elenchus in the *Lysis*, as embodied in the drama as well as in the argument. A few preliminary remarks about the dialogue form are in order.[1]

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1. For various accounts and interpretations of the dramatic, or literary, approach to Plato, see these useful collections: Charles L Griswold, ed., *Platonic Readings, Platonic Writings*

The philosophical content of Plato's dialogues cannot be reduced to the explicit argument. The dialogues do not simply present arguments concerning philosophical problems, but human beings discussing those problems. The dialogues are characterized by concreteness: each dialogue takes place at a particular place and at a particular time, and its treatment of the subject matter is inseparable from the capacities and motivations of the characters. To that extent, the drama and the argument are interdependent.[2] Their relationship roughly corresponds to Plato's own distinction between argument (*logos*) and action, or deed (*ergon*).[3] The interplay between drama and argument, action and speech, is present in the Platonic dialogues in varying degrees; it is particularly striking in the "Socratic dialogues." In the *Laches,* for instance, Socrates discusses courage with the generals Laches and Nicias; in the *Euthyphro,* piety with the self-professed pious character by the same name. In the *Lysis,* Plato depicts friends or would-be friends discussing the nature of friendship (*philia*).[4] The connection between argument and action, between what one says and what one does or is, already suggests the Socratic notion that knowledge is inseparable from self-knowledge. The characters of a dialogue behave as well as argue, their speech being in a sense a part of their behavior. One may refer here to Aristotle's well-known remark, in the *Poetics,* that the Socratic conversations (*logoi sokratikoi*) are a literary genre belonging to the mimetic art, which presents an action (*praxis*) governed by two causes, namely character (*ethe*) and thought (*dianoia*) (*Poet.* 1449b38).

(New York: Routledge, 1988); James Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith, eds., *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues* (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* suppl. vol., 1992); Gerald A. Press, ed., *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993); Francisco J. Gonzalez, ed., *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995); I. Cossutta and Michel Narcy, eds., *La forme dialogue chez Platon: Évolution et réceptions* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2001). For a synthetic account of the Gadamerian, open-ended version of this approach and its larger German context, see François Renaud, *Die Resokratisierung Platons: Die platonische Hermeneutik Hans-Georg Gadamers,* International Plato Studies, vol. 10 (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1999).

2. Cf. Terence H. Irwin, "Art and Philosophy in Plato's Dialogues," review of *The Art of Plato,* by R. B. Rutherford, *Phronesis* 49 (1996): 349–50.

3. For example, *La.* 187e6–188a2. This distinction is widespread in Greek literature; it is common to historiography and tragedy as well as to classical rhetoric (e.g., Herodotus VI, 38; Thucydides I, 128, 3; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 336; Sophocles, *Electra* 59–60; *Oedipus Rex* 517, 864–65).

4. Cf. Robert G. Hoerber, "Character Portrayal in Plato's *Lysis,*" *Classical Journal* 41 (1945–46): 271–73; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "*Logos* and *Ergon* in Plato's *Lysis,*" in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato,* trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 6.

Aristotle's opinion is later confirmed by Diogenes Laertius, who refers to it explicitly.[5]

Plato's choice of the dialogue form does not necessarily entail, however, a completely open-ended philosophy, nor does it rule out didactic functions. This paper tries to show, within its modest parameters, that there are positive views in the *Lysis,* corroborated in part by other dialogues, namely, the humbling and pedagogical functions of the elenchus as an integral part of the conduct of philosophy. The difficult task of retrieving Plato's views from the dialogue may perhaps be compared to the task of extracting Hume's own position on religion from his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.*[6] Two obvious and important differences, however, should be stressed: there is no additional treatise on the same topic available in Plato's oeuvre as in Hume's (with the possible, partial exception of the *Seventh Letter*), and many of Plato's dialogues surpass Hume's in literary or dramatic complexity. The degree of significance to be attributed to the dramatic elements may vary from case to case. The interpretative task consists in establishing the interdependence, whenever possible and relevant, between the dramatic elements and the explicit arguments. In addition to the logical question whether an argument is valid, there is the other, dramatic or interpretative one: why is an argument advanced by this particular character and in these circumstances?[7] One must ask, in other words, to what dramatic purpose something is said.[8]

5. Diog. Laet. II, 48. The *ad hominem* character of Socratic dialectic implies that the investigations in the dialogue are partly informed by their dramatic context (especially the interlocutors) and that therefore a single dialogue does not necessarily contain everything the author knows at the moment of writing, as Vlastos's hermeneutics assumes. On this question, see Christopher Rowe, "On Reading Plato," *Méthexis* 5 (1992): 66, and the larger studies by Thomas A. Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), and Kahn, *Plato*. A related question is whether each dialogue is to be taken by itself, as a self-contained work, or whether references across the dialogues are possible. It is certainly advisable to concentrate first on each dialogue so as to respect its dramatic specificity. This initial concern should not, however, *a priori* exclude, but on the contrary may enable, justified cross-references. The possibility of cross-references implies, moreover, that Plato's positive views are retrievable from the specific, contingent contexts and formulated in general terms. The lessening intensity of the drama in the late dialogues, for instance, may perhaps be explained not only by a development in Plato's mind but also by the nature of the characters chosen by Plato in these dialogues, such as undialogical personalities (e.g., the Eleatic visitor or Parmenides) or a young and inexperienced pupil not allowing for any resistance to the main speaker's argument.

6. J. Angelo Corlett, "Interpreting Plato's Dialogues," *Classical Quarterly* 47 (1997): 435.

7. Gerald A. Press, "The State of the Question in the Study of Plato," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34 (1996): 515. Cf. Diog. Laert. III, 65: *tinos heneka leleketai.*

8. The hermeneutical approach also raises the important question whether Plato's has spokesmen. On this, see Gerald A. Press, ed., *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

Let us now turn to the question of the elenchus. The Greek term *elenchos* and its cognates originally means "reproach"; then later, also the "examination" or the "test" of opinions and of the persons holding them; later still, "refutation" (or proof).[9] The older meanings of *elenchos* and their connotations (reproach and especially examination) are still present in Plato's dialogues. Since Robinson and more recently Vlastos, the elenchus has been taken to mean specifically the "refutation" (or defense) of an interlocutor's thesis from his or her accepted premises.[10] On the other hand, both scholars also recognize the personal or ethical dimension of the elenchus, primarily seen in the requirement of sincerity: the elenchus must be the refutation of the interlocutor's personal belief and way of life. As Vlastos remarks, what the elenchus "examines is not just propositions but lives."[11] This is why he speaks of the elenchus's "existential dimension."[12] In that sense, Vlastos's definition is an attempt to combine both the broader, more ancient meanings of the Greek term with its purely argumentative, logical one. Indeed, the Socratic elenchus seeks to establish not only the logical but also the moral inconsistency of the interlocutor; it pertains to the whole human being and inquires into the interlocutor's way of living.[13] Yet, while the studies by Vlastos and others have sharply analyzed the logical structure of the elenchus (on propositions and beliefs), they have largely left aside its acknowledged ethical dimension.[14] As a result of this neglect, as Brickhouse and Smith rightly point out, "a number of philosophically interesting uses to which Socratic argumentation may be put are thus neither claimed on its behalf nor

9. See also H. G. Liddell and R. A. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon,* 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), s.v. ἔλεγχος. Cf. Lesher, "Parmenides' Critique of Thinking," 7–9.

10. Robinson, *Earlier,* 2d ed., 49–60; Vlastos, "Socratic Elenchus," 30.

11. For instance, *Cri.* 49c–e; *Prot.* 331c–d. Interestingly, the requirement of sincerity is no longer present in Aristotle's *Topics:* the dialectical exercises do not require from the respondent that the thesis be a personal one. Hence what one may call the "depersonalization" of the elenchus in Aristotle: see Louis-André Dorion, "La 'dépersonnalisation' de la dialectique chez Aristote," *Archives de Philosophie* 60 (1997): 597–613.

12. Vlastos, "Socratic Elenchus," 37.

13. *La.* 187e6–188a; cf. *Rep.* 518c–d, 523b–c, 525c.

14. Cf. an immediate reaction to Vlastos's "Socratic Elenchus" in the very journal in which it originally appeared: Charles H. Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias,*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 76. This view had already been suggested, for instance, by Robinson, *Earlier,* 15. One should add that the object of Socrates' elenchus is not normally his own opinions or premises. While he says (*Ap.* 28e) he examines himself as well as others, rarely does he actually submit to questioning himself. There appear to be only two exceptions where he does question his own premises: *Prot.* 33c–339d and *Grg.* 462a–467c. On this, see Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates,* 14–16. This further emphasizes the *ad hominem* character of the elenchus.

explained."[15] In this paper I hope to show a few of these uses—its humbling, exhorting, and guiding functions—in the first part of the *Lysis*.

Given his strict definition of the Socratic elenchus as the refutation of a thesis, Vlastos regards the *Lysis* as devoid of any genuine elenchus. To be sure, Socrates' discussions with his very young interlocutors—Hippothales, Lysis, Ctesippus, and Menexenus—is not adversarial in nature, for they involve no contest between opponents.[16] According to Vlastos's interpretation, Plato abandoned the elenchus as the proper philosophical method by the time he wrote the *Lysis*. This conclusion is only possible, however, on the basis of an unduly restrictive definition of the elenchus.[17] A strictly unified conception of the elenchus cannot do justice to the variety of functions of Socratic argumentation, such as humbling, exhortation, and *psychagogia* (or guided instruction).[18] Socrates typically addresses his interlocutors in various ways. To take the example of the *Gorgias,* the main source of Vlastos's conception of the elenchus, Socrates' argumentation and strategy varies depending on who his immediate interlocutor is: the old, decent, but vain Gorgias, the inexperienced and inconsiderate Polus, or the frank but tyrannical Callicles. So it is also in the *Lysis*. Socrates addresses Hippothales, Lysis, and Menexenus each in a manner adapted to age or character. Moreover, Socrates' first conversation with Lysis (207d–210d) includes an argumentative examination (or elenchus) displaying both exhortative and pedagogical functions. There Socrates corrects the boy's mistaken view about freedom and happiness and elicits from him an admission of ignorance while also guiding him on the longer road.[19]

The dramatic elements, primarily the setting and the characters, are aptly

15. Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates,* 13.

16. Vlastos, "Socratic Elenchus," 30–31.

17. Vlastos writes: "Here again there is no elenchus against anybody. [. . .] In the initial encounter with Hippothales what the love-crazed youth gets is not a refutation (he has proposed no thesis) but a dressing down. When the investigation gets under way Socrates proposes all the theses which are discussed and refutes all the theses which are refuted. There is no contest" ("Socratic Elenchus," 31).

18. Cf. *Phdr.* 261a7–8: "Isn't the rhetorical art, taken as a whole [*to holon*], a way of directing the soul by means of speech [*techne psychagogia tis dia logon*], not only in lawcourt, and on other public occasions but also in private [*alla kai en idiois*]" (Nehamas and Woodruff, trans.). Cf. *Phdr.* 271c–e. A very similar definition of rhetoric is given in the *Gorgias,* but without this important addition (*en idiois*): *Grg.* 452e.

19. Charles H. Kahn, "Vlastos' Socrates," *Phronesis* 37 (1992): 250; Henry Teloh, *Socratic Education in Plato's Early Dialogues* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 23; Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 51–80.

selected and integrated in the *Lysis*. The palaestra, or wrestling school, is the natural place to find young boys. The dialectical "wrestling match" or the intellectual undressing ensuing from it corresponds analogically to its concrete setting. Socrates' wrestling match will be adapted to the strength and interests of his young interlocutors.[20] Lysis and Menexenus are only *paides;* they are between twelve and fourteen years old and as such possibly the two youngest interlocutors of Socrates in the Platonic corpus. The stark inequality between Socrates and his very young interlocutors announces the pedagogical dimension of the discussion. In the following I pass over without comment many a dramatic and argumentative aspect of the first section of the dialogue in order to limit myself to only a few of the features of the dialogue that are immediately relevant to my concern here.

The *Lysis* begins with an apparently unphilosophical subject: the contest in the art of speaking to one's beloved (*eromenos,* 205a–211a). Socrates asks Hippothales to show him (*epideixai*) his way of speaking to Lysis, his beloved, so as to see whether Hippothales has knowledge about the matter.[21] Socrates is not curious to hear the verses Hippothales has composed for Lysis. His interest is not aesthetic but ethical and intellectual: he desires to know Hippothales' thoughts (*dianoia*). His thoughts, one may add here, will prove inseparable from his character (*ethe*) and behavior (*ergon*). The display is not necessary, for his friend Ctesippus can give a lively description of Hippothales' oral and written odes to Lysis: they are old-fashioned *encomia,* or eulogies, on the nobility of his family (204d, 205c–d). Hippothales, Ctesippus adds, "is unable to tell him anything personal [*idion*]" (205b).[22] Socrates remarks that these eulogies seem in reality to be composed to celebrate Hippothales' own hoped-for triumph over Lysis. But this triumph is unlikely, adds Socrates, for such praises make the beloved more presumptuous (*megalauchoteroi*) and more difficult to seduce (206a–b). The true art of seduction, he maintains, does not consist in flattering the beloved but on the contrary in humbling him. Already perplexed and curious, Hippothales then asks Socrates for advice (206b). Socrates agrees to show him (*soi epideixai*) "what one ought to say instead of these things [*anti touton*]" (206c).

20. Cf. Gadamer, *"Logos,"* 6.

21. *Lys.* 204e10–205a2: *kai moi epideixai ha kai tois de epideiknumi, hina eido ei epistatai.*

22. The translations from the Greek (for the *Lysis*) are S. Lombardo's, with occasional modifications, as in this case: I translated *idion* as "personal" instead of "original," as Lombardo does. I have also consulted the translations by Lamb, Wright, and Bolotin.

He will himself assume the role of the lover (*erastes*) by showing—not by arguing directly with—Hippothales how to humble and win the favors of his beloved, Lysis. Socrates will repeat the lesson of his humbling method even more explicitly later, after its successful demonstration (210e–211a).[23] In what follows, then, Socrates will instruct Hippothales about the true origin of friendship not only by his words (*logoi*) but also by his deeds (*erga*). This first conversation with Hippothales may not contain any logical, refutative elenchus as such, since it is largely mediated by a third person and since its actual demonstration occurs only later, in deed, through the encounter with Lysis. Nevertheless, this conversation already exhibits Socrates' well-meaning—and partly playful—pedagogy.

Lysis then joins the conversation. They all move to the palaestra. The examination of Lysis is also adapted to his character, interest, and level of understanding. The initial dialogue between Socrates and Lysis deals with Lysis's parents' love for him and their desire to see him happy. Now, since your parents love you and wish you to be happy, Socrates remarks, they must therefore (*ara*) let you do, and never prevent you from doing, anything you desire to do (*epithumes,* 207e). Not at all, Lysis answers: they don't let me do many things. Socrates shows surprise (*pos legeis*) and asks why this should be so. Socrates' first questions intend to lead his young interlocutor on to the problematic of education and knowledge, but indirectly, for he does not tell him in advance what his point is. To this end, Socrates' initial

23. It is important to bear in mind that *philia* in the *Lysis* is not restricted to our notion of friendship: *philia* here includes *eros*. If the main discussion on *philia* did not include the passionate love of Hippothales, "the whole introduction," as G. M. A. Grube rightly observes, would be "singularly irrelevant" (*Plato's Thought* [London: Methuen, 1935], 92). That this is not the case is already indicated by the loose terminology: the verbs *philein, eran, agapan, epithumein* are used almost interchangeably throughout the dialogue. Cf. 215a–d: *agapan, philein,* and *peri pollou poiesthai* are used interchangeably; 216c–e: *epithumein* and *philein;* 220c: *agapan* and *philein;* 221b and 222a: *epithumein, eran,* and *philein.* Cf. Laszlo Versényi, "Plato's *Lysis,*" *Phronesis* 20 (1975): 187. Cf. *Laws* 837a: *eros* as excessive *philon; Symp.* 179c. That which belongs to oneself, that is the good, is the goal of *eros, philia,* and *epithumia* (221e): these are therefore diverse forms of longing with a common goal. On the link in the *Lysis* between *philia* and *eros,* see Hans von Arnim, "Platos *Lysis,*" *Rheinisches Museum* 71 (1916): 365; Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 115; Friedländer, *Plato,* 2:96; Robert G. Hoerber, "Plato's *Lysis,*" *Phronesis* 4 (1959): 19; Donald N. Levin, "Some Observations Concerning Plato's *Lysis,*" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy,* vol. 1, ed. John P. Anton and George L. Kustas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 242. *Philia* is not limited to human relationships, but extends also to animals (cf. Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1155a16) and even to things; for the relationship between *philia* and *eros* in Aristotle, see *Nic. Eth.* 1157a6–16.

question appears implicitly to attribute to Lysis a commonsense view, a view especially to be expected of a person of his age, namely, that happiness is synonymous with freedom, freedom understood as the power to do whatever one desires. The reader may recall that this view is essentially Callicles' position in the *Gorgias:* the tyrant is the most happy because his power allows him to fulfill, unrestrained, all his desires (491e–492e).[24] Socrates argues here *ad hominem* by beginning with a likely prejudice of Lysis's and with the intention of refuting his mistaken (and potentially dangerous) belief.

Socrates then gives a list of things that Lysis is likely to love doing, such as driving his father's chariot, whipping the mules, and playing with his mother's woolworking tools. Asked if he is allowed to do any of these things, Lysis replies in the negative in each case. Socrates expresses amazement ("By Heracles!" 208e). He then goes on to ask why then in the world (*alla' anti tinos*) his parents forbid him to do so many things and treat him more as a slave than a free person. His wealth and noble birth are then of no benefit to him, since he is not his own master. With little hesitation, Lysis gives what seems to him the obvious answer for his lack of freedom: "Well, Socrates, that's because I'm not yet of age" (209a). Socrates finds this answer unsatisfactory and undertakes to show the boy that this cannot be the real reason for his condition. He will let Lysis gradually see for himself the actual cause of his—and any person's—lack of freedom and happiness. Socrates begins by saying: "I suspect this is not the reason [*me ou touto*]."[25] It becomes clear, shortly after, that Lysis's answer is to be rejected. But instead of telling him so immediately, in a long speech, Socrates proceeds through questions and answers in order to bring him to see, little by little, that the indispensable condition for genuine freedom and real adulthood is knowledge, not a number of years. In doing so, Socrates gives a list of activities (reading, writing, and playing the lyre) in which Lysis, as any Greek child of good family, is bound to possess competence. Through his own brief admission for each example, Lysis can see for himself why he is allowed by his parents to do these other things, for which he has specific practical knowledge: "I suppose it's because I understand these things, but not those" (209c). Socrates immediately acknowledges the correctness of Lysis's response: "Very well!, excellent boy [*o ariste*], so your father is not [*ouk ara*] waiting for you to be-

24. Cf. M. Borgt, *Platon, Lysis: Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 134.

25. The use of the *me ou* with the subjunctive conveys here a cautious negation or mere suspicion that something may not be the case.

come old enough before he trusts you with everything, but for the day when he thinks you know more than he does." Without knowledge, Lysis will never be useful and responsible and therefore will be no better than a slave (*doulos*). What Lysis needs to do is to "become wise" (*sophos gene,* 210d). Such is the moral as well as intellectual lesson imparted to the young boy by Socrates. This lesson is of course no other than the well-known Socratic view that virtue is knowledge, that is, that *sophia,* not wealth or reputation, is the first and most important good to be sought. Socrates has thus shown to him, by two sets of contrary examples, that knowledge, not age, is the condition of friendship, freedom, and happiness. Despite Lysis's ready admissions to the correct answers, Socrates further humbles him, more forcefully this time: "And if you need a teacher, your mind is not yet trained [. . .]. Then you're not high-minded [*megalophron*] either—since you don't have a mind of your own" (210d). Lysis acquiesces readily: "By Zeus, Socrates, I don't think so." (Lombardo's freer but more telling translation: "You've got me there, Socrates!") This remark seems to encapsulate the intention and effect of Socrates' humbling method. Thus, after stimulating Lysis with an initial *aporia,* Socrates has guided him to a resolution, but not without a formal humbling at the end, so as to make the meaning of the "lesson" clear to Hippothales as well as Lysis. Socrates has thus examined and guided both boys, Lysis personally and Hippothales indirectly. Socrates' method may be characterized here as a humbling, although benign, examination accompanied by exhortation and guided instruction (or *psychagogia*).

One usually assumes, and rightly, that the pretense to knowledge and the defense of false beliefs are indispensable conditions for an elenchus-refutation. Lysis does not ostensibly profess purported knowledge. However, the pretense to knowledge need not be declared. This pretense can assume various forms, from the most explicit and arrogant to the most implicit and (apparently) harmless. The well-known passage of the *Sophist* at 230a–e, which constitutes one of the very few explicit definitions of the elenchus in the Platonic corpus, might be helpful here. This description is rightly considered by many scholars as an adequate account of the Socratic elenchus. Vlastos too regards it as "an authentic, if partial, representation of Socrates."[26] Concerning the pretense to knowledge, the passage in the *Sophist* remains quite general: "They cross-examine someone when he thinks he's saying something though he's saying nothing [*an oietai tis ti peri legein legon meden*]"

26. Vlastos, "Socratic Elenchus," 45 n. 50. See also Robinson, *Earlier,* 2d ed., 12–14.

(230b).[27] According to this description, then, the interlocutor's pretense to knowledge need not be professed, but merely implied. And implied it is in any uttered truth-claim, that is, any statement or answer to a Socratic question. Indeed, one might argue that the very willingness to answer a question, as opposed to asking one, is already a form of pretense to knowledge. Inversely, asking a question implies some form of awareness of one's ignorance and a desire to know. Socrates' art of asking questions includes his pedagogical aims: he appears to be at once searching for himself and guiding his interlocutors. As for the second condition for an elenchus-refutation, Lysis did propose a "thesis"; that is, he did express a (false) belief. His spontaneous and telling answer about his age as cause of his condition is shown by Socrates to be inadequate and is replaced, with Lysis's assent, as always, by the correct one. Moreover, with his last, robust remark, already cited, Socrates does "inflict" on Lysis a formal humbling blow, which was already implied in his continued insistence on his lack of freedom and knowledge. Therefore, Socrates' exchange with Lysis does combine a humbling and exhortatory elenchus, coupled with *psychagogia*.

Psychagogia, or the art of guiding souls, appears akin to the art of maieutics, the art of bringing out new insights from within the interlocutor. Interestingly, the *Lysis* was classified in antiquity, as indicated in its subtitle, as "maieutic" (*maieutikos*). According to Vlastos, the elenchus and maieutics are two completely different and even incompatible methods, belonging to two distinct phases of Plato's development. Vlastos accepts the conclusions of Burnyeat in opposing the two methods and confining maieutics almost exclusively to the *Theatetus,* the only dialogue in which the metaphor of maieutics is explicitly described (148d–151d).[28] However, an opposition between the elenchus as purification and maieutics as discovery underestimates the resemblances between the two methods. The elenchus is not purely destructive, as sometimes assumed, since purification constitutes the first step in the right direction toward self-discovery, as Socrates' examination of Lysis shows. Inversely, maieutics includes the refutative function: the greatest (*megiston*) maieutic task, as Burnyeat himself notes, consists in examining (*basanizein,* 150b–c) whether the opinions brought to light prove true or "viable," that is, internally and externally coherent. In other words, some-

27. Translation by N. P. White (in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. J. M. Cooper [Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1997], 251). The other passages quoted in English translation are all taken from this volume, unless indicated otherwise.

28. Vlastos, "Socratic Elenchus," 32; Myles Burnyeat, "Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 24 (1977): 7–16.

times false fruit must be aborted (150b–c). In that case maieutics includes the negative aspect of the elenchus.[29] In both cases, the aim is to make the interlocutor conscious of the real nature of a belief and to lead either to its acceptance or rejection. In the case of Lysis, his initial answer is apparently not the discovery of an originally unconscious idea or one requiring spiritual labor. In a certain sense the process is the reverse: Socrates' examination of Lysis's initial belief leads to its gradual rejection. The conclusion, however—knowledge makes one free, lovable, and happy—constitutes a discovery, and partly a self-discovery. Thus, the aim and conclusion of this elenchus, here conducted through *psychagogia,* is not as remote from maieutics' procedure as often assumed. Indeed, all three methods are meant to awaken the interlocutor's self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-critical inquiry.[30]

The first part of the *Lysis* is thus marked by a contrast between two contrary models of discourse: Hippothales' opportunist flattery and Socrates' well-meaning humbling.[31] Plato's way of establishing this contrast in the drama draws the reader's attention to the manner and intended effect—as well as to the content—of Socrates' speeches on his young interlocutors. In addition, it gives an important clue about the immediately following exchange with Menexenus about *philia.*[32] Menexenus is ironically presented as an opponent, even as a dangerous eristic (*eristikos*).[33] Socrates playfully presents himself as someone who is about to undergo an examination, and says to Lysis: "But be ready to come to my support, in case Menexenus attempts to refute me" (*elenchein,* 211b). The word *elenchein* assumes here the more technical meaning of "refutation" given to it by the Sophists. In reality, Menexenus will be the "victim" of Socrates. Lysis has by now become a friend and disciple of Socrates, and as a good neophyte he wishes immediately to apply what he has just learned from his teacher. He is of the opinion that his friend Menexenus should benefit from the same special treatment and be in turn humbled. However, apparently incapable of doing so himself,

29. For other considerations on this passage in the *Theaetetus,* see François Renaud, "Maieutik," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik,* vol. 5, ed. G. Ueding (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), cols. 727–33.

30. Cf. Laszlo Versényi, *Socratic Humanism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), 116–23.

31. On the function of humbling in the first part of the *Lysis,* I have found particularly helpful Szlezák, *Platon,* 117–26; Teloh, *Socratic Education,* 69–81; Andrea W. Nightingale, "The Folly of Praise: Plato's Critique of Encomiastic Discourse in the *Lysis* and *Symposium,*" *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 112–30; and Scott, *Plato's Socrates,* 51–80. As for the expression "well-meaning refutation," one thinks of the *Seventh Letter* (344b5): *en eumenesis elenchois.*

32. Szlezák, *Platon,* 119. Cf. Friedländer, *Plato,* 2:95.

33. 211b8: Lysis's remark: *e ouk oistha hoti eristikos estin.*

Lysis has to delegate the task to Socrates: "I want you to have a talk with him [. . .] I want you to trounce [*kolases*] him." While Lysis's remark is largely playful, the verb *kolazein* ("to chastise," "to trounce") depicts well Socrates' humbling method, already applied to Lysis.[34] Socrates will forcefully humble Menexenus in an attempt to purge him of his eristic dispositions. Compared to Socrates' humbling but kind treatment of Lysis, his examination of Menexenus, marked by a series of *aporia,* is rougher.[35] Socrates' method varies in tone and intensity according to the character of his interlocutor.[36]

Humbling, moderate or robust, appears as one of the central functions of the Socratic elenchus.[37] The description in the *Sophist,* partly cited above, brings out very clearly this humbling aim. Here follows a later part of the passage from the *Sophist:* "The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it [*prin an elenchon tis ton elenchomenon eis aischunen katastesas*]" (230c–d; White trans.). According to this description of the elenchus, then, the soul cannot receive any benefit from knowledge if it is not first refuted and humbled, indeed brought to shame. This passage emphasizes the moral obstacles to knowledge and therewith the close link between knowledge and self-knowledge. If philosophy begins in wonder, the elenchus provides the wonder through the *aporia,* the sufficient proof of one's ignorance and of the neces-

34. The figurative expression *kolazein* finds an important parallel in Xenophon's account of this aspect of the Socratic method: "the chastising purpose [*kolasteriou heneka*] of [Socrates'] searching refutation [*elenchen*] of those who thought they knew everything" (*Mem.* I. 4, 1). On this passage, see Louis-André Dorion's analysis, "Xénophon et l'elenchos socratique" (CXVIII–CLXXXIII), in the long and detailed "Introduction générale" (VII–CCLII) of the Budé edition of *Xénophon, Mémorables* (Paris: Collection des universités de France, 2000).

35. From 212a on the discussion about *philia* in the Lysis forms a series of aporetic answers to the somewhat modified question about "the way one becomes a friend to someone": whether the friend is the "lover" (*philos*) or the "loved one" (*philoumenos,* 212a–214a); whether it is an attraction of similars (214a–215c) or of opposites (215c–216b); whether the "true friend" is good, bad, or in-between (*metaxu*), neither wholly good nor bad (216c–217a); whether the "true friend" is an ultimate object of desire (*proton philon,* 218d–221c); finally, whether the cause of friendship is "kinship" (*oikeion,* 221d–222d). Each definition leads to *aporia.*

36. Cf. Teloh, *Socratic Education,* 28.

37. Szlezák, *Platon,* 120. This gives further evidence for some scholars' favorable judgment on the *Lysis* as a prime example of Socratic method; see, for instance, Edith Hamilton: "The *Lysis* has no superior as an illustration of Socrates' method" (preface to the dialogue, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961]).

sity of learning.[38] This confirms the notion, shown earlier, that the pretension to knowledge is varied in form although ubiquitous in nature: everyone needs to be freed of it, whether they profess it or simply live according to it. In that sense, the first Socratic virtue is modesty, modesty understood as both the knowledge of one's ignorance and the spirit of genuine learning. Hence Socrates' renowned habit of asking, instead of answering, questions.[39] The phenomenon of shame well illustrates the existential dimension of philosophizing.[40] The feeling of shame at the disclosure of one's ignorance is meant as sufficient incentive to rectify one's shameful condition.[41] In other words, the purgative and exhortative functions of the elenchus are inseparable. This in turn confirms the impossibility of a clean separation between the purely logical and the ethical functions of the elenchus.[42]

38. Cf. Michael Erler, *Der Sinn der Aporien in den Dialogen Platons: Übungsstücke zur Anleitung im philosophischen Denken* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987).

39. Cf. Aristotle, *Soph. Elench.* 183b.

40. On shame: *Symp.* 216b; *Phdr.* 243c; *Grg.* 461b, 482d; *Prot.* 248c. Cf. W. Thomas Schmid, "Socrates' Practice of *Elenchus* in the *Charmides*," *Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1980): 141–47; Lesher, "Parmenides' Critique of Thinking," 1–9; Louis-André Dorion, "La subversion de l'*elenchos* juridique dans l'*Apologie de Socrate*," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 87 (1990): 312–17.

41. Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates,* 13. Cf. Gaiser, *Protreptik,* 35–66.

42. It is remarkable, although insufficiently stressed, that the word *elenchos* originally meant shame (as did *aischune, aidos*). Cf. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexikon,* 531. Connotations of this original meaning are still present in Plato. Shame is often portrayed in the dialogues as the natural emotion stemming from the realization of one's ignorance and of the contradictions within oneself (cf. *Soph.* 230b–d). Its most vivid manifestation is blushing (see, e.g., *Lys.* 213d; *Prot.* 312a; *Charm.* 158c.; *Rep.* 350d; *Euthyd.* 275d). The archaic meaning of elenchus is not regarded by Vlastos as an integral component of the elenchus (understood as refutation) in Plato, but only as a possible result of it. For a critique of this view, see Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Platonic Readings, Platonic Writings*. Among important passages in Plato underlying the importance of shame, one must include Alcibiades' confession at the end of the *Symposium* concerning the effect Socrates' words have on him and on many others ("let me tell you, I am not alone"): "Nothing like this ever happened to me: they [the great orators] never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—*my* life—was no better than the most miserable slave's. . . . Socrates is the only man in the world who makes me feel shame [*to aischunesthai*]. [. . .] Yes he makes me feel ashamed [*aischunomai*]" (*Symp.* 216a–b; Nehamas and Woodruff, trans.). See also, in the *Apology,* Socrates' exhortation to the people of Athens: "Are you not ashamed [*ouk aischune*] of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible. While you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?" (*Ap.* 29d–e, trans. Grube). Cf. Kenneth Seeskin, "Socratic Philosophy and the Dialogue Form," *Philosophy and Literature* (1984): 190, and esp. Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato's Dialogue* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 22–28.

One might make a general objection, namely, that philosophy for Plato aims at a liberation from, not a playing with, the emotions, and that our emphasis on psychological or rhetorical elements obscures the fundamentally impersonal character of truth for the Greek philosopher. It is certainly true and important to say that the ultimately decisive element in Socratic dialectic remains the argumentative coherence of the opinion or thesis under discussion. In the dialogues, the *logos* is repeatedly spoken of as a force superior to any personal inclinations or inhibitions: it takes its own course, and we ought to try to follow its traces.[43] As a result, philosophy as presented in the dialogues requires a kind of detachment from the illusions of one's own opinions and from the hindering emotions of the self.[44] On the other hand, however, for Plato philosophy as a human activity aims not only to discover permanent truths but also to convey, especially to the beginner or less advanced, a sense of the importance of these truths. The detachment from selfish, narrow-minded emotions is only possible, inversely, through the attachment to or the striving toward the universal and permanent.[45] The more advanced must therefore help cultivate and maintain, in part through the emotions, a searching, argumentative attitude.[46] As we have seen in the case of Lysis, Socrates' argumentation is emphatically *ad hominem:* Socrates never shared, in reality, Lysis's initial (fallacious) premises or inferences. His goal was to refute Lysis and to guide him in the right direction. Protreptic and *psychagogia* require, among other things, a fair amount of psychological insight and tact, and Socrates proves to possess both.[47]

43. *Prot.* 361a; *La.* 194a; *Men.* 74d; *Phd.* 88d–89c; *Rep.* 365d, 394d, 607b.

44. As Michel Narcy rightly remarks: "le sens du *Lysis,* c'est ce qui s'y passe, l'*ergon,* plus que ce qui s'y dit, le *logos;* mais cet *ergon* n'est pas celui du sentiment; c'est, au contraire, par le découragement du sentiment qu'opère la dialectique, l'œuvre du *logos,* ou le travail de la parole" ("Le socratisme du *Lysis:* I. PHILIA et DIALEGESTHAI," in *Lezioni socratiche,* ed. Gabriele Giannantoni and Michel Narcy (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1997), 218.

45. As the *Lysis* makes clear and the *Republic* further emphasizes, the relationship between a philosopher and that philosopher's object of learning is erotic (*philos, eros, epithumia;* cf. *Rep.* 485a–487c; 475b). Indeed, the Good ultimately is not distinguishable from the human good (*Lys.* 217a–220a).

46. See David Blank, "Plato and the Arousal of Emotions," *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993), 428–39. As Wolfgang Wieland writes: "Affekte können Bereiche eröffnen und erfahrbar machen, die ihm [Socrates' interlocutor] sonst verschlossen blieben" (introduction ["Einführung"] to *Platons Dialoge: "Nomoi" und "Symposion,"* ed. Georg Picht (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), XIX.

47. The *ad hominem* character of the Socratic elenchus also implies the possibility that some fallacies or week arguments are conscious and deliberate and not real confusions on Socrates' part. (See on this point Michel Narcy, "Le Socrate du *Lysis* est-il un sophiste?" in *Plato, Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides: Proceedings of the Symposium Platonicum,* ed. Thomas M. Robin-

The conception of the elenchus as pedagogical humbling in the Lysis corresponds to the notion of the consciousness of one's deficiencies (*endeia*) discussed later in the dialogue.[48] The person who has become conscious of his or her shortcomings, moral and intellectual, feels a painful lack, a lack that in turn creates a desire for its satisfaction. Socratic pedagogy is erotic pedagogy: it seeks to make the beloved into a lover. This is precisely what happens with Lysis: the beautiful beloved (of Hippothales) becomes himself a lover. To that extent, Socrates' pedagogy here proves successful.[49] In the *Lysis,* the elenchus appears primarily as a pedagogical tool, implying the asymmetrical relationship between teacher and student.[50] Socrates, as a teacher, displays a double personality: he is at once searching with his interlocutor while initially holding back knowledge, if only the knowledge of his own ignorance.

This conclusion, with its emphasis on pedagogy and *psychagogia,* should not be seen as incompatible with the dialectical openness and modesty also characteristic of Socrates in many of Plato's dialogues.[51] Socrates' way of addressing his interlocutors varies, as we have seen, in the *Lysis,* a dialogue in which the extreme inequality between Socrates and his main interlocutors highlights the pedagogical functions of Socrates' argumentation. When Socrates says to Lysis, "And if you need a teacher, your mind is not yet trained" (210d), he is referring to the remote, not the proximate, goal of dialectic. Most characters in the dialogues believe they do not need a guide, but only because, ironically, they fail to realize their ignorance and thus their (initial) need for one. To bring this lesson home to those in need of and receptive to it already constitutes a pedagogical achievement. In other words, Socrates'

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son and Luc Brisson [Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2000], 180–93). However, the decisive difference between dialectic and eristic lies in the intent, that is, in the dialectician's ultimate concern for truth and the Sophist's indifference to it. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates,* 16 n. 30; David Hitchcock, "The Origin of Professional Eristic," in *Proceedings of the Symposium Platonicum,* ed. Robinson and Brisson, 59–67.

48. Cf. Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Plato's *Lysis:* An Enactment of Philosophical Kinship," *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995): 69–90.

49. Versényi, "Plato's *Lysis,*" 197. The last, suggestive line of the dialogue may be understood as a further indication of this success: there Socrates claims to have become a friend to his young interlocutors (223b).

50. Cf. Thomas A. Szlezák, "Gespräch unter Ungleichen: Zur Struktur und Zielsetzung der platonischen Dialoge," in *Literarische Formen der Philosophie,* ed. G. Gabriel and C. Schildknecht (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1990), 40–61.

51. See the potential objection of Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates,* 4; cf. Nicholas D. Smith, review of *Socratic Education in Plato's Early Dialogues,* by Henry Teloh, *Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1990): 108–10.

knowledge of his ignorance includes the awareness of the role and importance of knowledge in human life. On the other hand, the prominent position occupied by *psychagogia* (as opposed to mere *aporia*) in the *Lysis* is also due in part to the young boy's unusually favorable disposition as a learner. Indeed, Lysis receives Socrates' elenchus and instruction graciously. His receptivity and willingness to learn make him a promising pupil, and even one of the very few of Socrates' interlocutors who are genuinely thankful for the humbling lesson. In this he is again reminiscent of the ideal respondent portrayed in the *Sophist* (230b–d).

Although the elenchus and *psychagogia* can occur separately, they are combined in the *Lysis*.[52] Thus Socrates' elenchus in this dialogue not only fulfills the functions of refutation and exhortation but also guides and indeed transforms[53] the young Lysis, as is shown both in the argument and the drama.

52. Teloh, *Socratic Education,* 22.

53. On the notion of the formation and transformation of the individual as the goal of philosophy, in Plato and other ancient thinkers, see the far-ranging study by Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* ed. A. I. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).