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PHILOSOPHY, WISDOM AND HAPPINESS
IN PLATO'S *LYSIS* AND *EUTHYDEMUS*

At the end of *Erastài*, where the initial question of whether or not philosophy is καλόν founders on the dialogue's failure to reach an adequate answer to the question «what is philosophy?»,¹ Socrates as narrator refers to the rival lovers as ὁ σοφός and ὁ ἀμαθής respectively (*Am.* 139a6-7). It is an interesting word choice in relation not only to *Erastài* itself – where the failed search for philosophy presupposes throughout that what they are looking for is a τέχνη or kind of ἐπιστήμη –² but more importantly to the speeches on ἔρωσ in *Symposium*, where Diotima not only initiates Socrates into the mystery of αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν,³ but also famously situates philosophers between the σοφοί and the ἀμαθεῖς (*Smp.* 204a1-b2). Leaving no doubt as to the importance of this way of situating philosophy μεταξύ or *between* wisdom and ignorance, Socrates repeats or anticipates it in *Lysis* (218a2-b3). Since Apollodorus tells us that Socrates left Agathon's house for the Lyceum (*Smp.* 223d10), and since Socrates himself tells us that he was on the way to the Lyceum in *Lysis* (203a1), «repeats» seems like the preferable word choice to me, especially since Socrates can now boast of his knowledge of ἐρωτικά (*Ly.* 204b5-c2). But for the present there is no need to get sidetracked by the difference between Order of Composition – an interpretive paradigm that locates *Symposium* well after *Lysis* – and Reading Order. Instead, let's push forward to *Euthydemus*, which actually takes place in

¹ More accurately, «what then is it? (τί οὖν ἔστιν;)» i.e., τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν (*Am.* 133c1-3, and 132c2; but see φιλοσοφία at *Am.* 132c10). The initial question is posed at *Am.* 133b5.

² See *ivi*, 138c9 for the most striking use of τέχνη, and for ἐπιστημή, see 137d10.

³ Beginning at *Smp.* 209e5-210a4; see especially 211e1-3. Cf. *Hp. Ma.* 286d8-e1; it is noteworthy that, while Socrates claims at *Am.* 133b7-c3 that we cannot know whether philosophy is καλόν without knowing what philosophy is, it is at least equally that we cannot determine this without knowing τί ἔστι τὸ καλόν (*Hp. Ma.* 286d1-2).

the Lyceum, at least insofar as Socrates tells Crito what happened there yesterday (*Euthd.* 271a1).

It is true that all three dialogues are linked by an erotic subtext, but for the present it is sufficient not only that Ctesippus and the Lyceum appear in two of them but that the first trick question Euthydemus puts to Cleinias involves the wise and the ignorant, οἱ σοφοί ἢ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς (*Euthd.* 275d3-4).

I will offer three suggestions about the significance of situating philosophy between wisdom and ignorance. The first of these is specific to *Lysis*, another is specific to *Euthydemus*, and a third – which will be second in order of presentation – implicates both dialogues. The *Lysis*' specific point concerns the identity of the famously mysterious πρῶτον φίλον (first mentioned at *Ly.* 219d1). Although many have attempted to identify it, all have regarded it as the exclusively passive object of love as opposed to something actively loving;⁴ as a result, these attempts have failed to establish what might be called «the unity of the *Lysis*,» and more specifically the connection between the enigmatic «first friend» at the end of the dialogue and its opening discussion of friendship, where Plato draws the reader's attention forcibly and repeatedly to the fact that what's φίλον can be both actively «loving» and passively «dear» [Levin 1986; Robinson 1986; Mackenzie 1988, 26-27]. Although we all know that Plato and Socrates are philosophers and that philosophy is «the love of wisdom», the possibility that the πρῶτον φίλον must be at once an object of love *and* something actively loving has been overlooked. Plato has illuminated philosophy in *Lysis* not only by situating it between wisdom and ignorance but by the preliminary paradoxes involving the two meanings of φίλον. As the love of wisdom, the φιλο- in φιλοσοφία is necessarily active, and although it might be difficult to persuade non-philosophers that philosophy is also a fitting object of any person's love, it should not be so difficult to persuade its devotees.⁵

In short, philosophy is both a proper object of our love *and* actively loving, and for this Janus-like mediation the early discussion of what

⁴ And not altogether without reason: it is introduced at *Ly.* 219d1-2 as «that on account of which all the other things we call [φίλα understood] are φίλα». Except where otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

⁵ For philosophy as τὸ οἰκεῖον (*Ly.* 221e3-6), consider *homo sapiens*.

is φίλον has prepared us. Moreover, by situating the μεταξύ-based account of philosophy between the lesson in “the taming of equivocation” centered on φίλον at the beginning of dialogue, and the mystery of the πρώτον φίλον at its end, Plato has provided us with the λύσις of his *Lysis* [cf. Glidden 1980, 282]: φιλοσοφία is the πρώτον φίλον because it alone is both «dear» and «loving», i.e., φίλον in both senses of that equivocal word. Moreover, the hypothesis that philosophy is the πρώτον φίλον makes good sense of the opening trick question posed by Euthydemus at the beginning of *Euthydemus*. Anyone who has learned from either Diotima in *Symposium* or Socrates in *Lysis* that φιλοσοφία is μεταξύ will know that it is neither the wise *nor* the ignorant who learn, but rather those who are situated *between* σοφία and ἀμαθία, and who thus are neither wise nor ignorant. Nobody who has discovered philosophy as the πρώτον φίλον is going to fall for that one; indeed no philosopher who has assimilated what Socrates has just told us that philosophy is in *Lysis* – and in that number, we clearly should not include Cleinias – *should* fall for it: it is the philosophers alone who learn, and that is as good a reason as any to recognize philosophy as no less «dear» than it is «loving», for where would any of us be without the capacity to learn?

But even if we pass unscathed as philosophers through the Scylla of wisdom and the Charybdis of ignorance between which the hapless Cleinias founders – for the wise already know and the ignorant don’t learn (*Euthd.* 275c3-6) – a more difficult test awaits us, this one administered by Socrates himself. It occurs in Socrates’ famous First Protreptic to philosophy and virtue in *Euthydemus* (cf. 278d2-3 and 283a4), where he identifies σοφία as the only good and ἀμαθία as the only bad (*Euthd.* 281e3-5). My claim is that these dual identifications conceal φιλοσοφία for the third time in a row: first when Plato concealed it as the mysterious πρώτον φίλον in *Lysis*, then when he made it conspicuous by its absence at the start of *Euthydemus*, and most controversially in the First Protreptic, where an ignorance-free notion of philosophy, in tandem with «the Eudaemonist Axiom» [Vlastos 1991, 203], has made it possible to configure the πρώτον φίλον in *Lysis* as εὐδαιμονία [Price 1997, 8], or more subtly as the knowledge that maximizes or is in any case inseparable from it [Penner & Rowe 2006]. In fact, «has made it possible» isn’t sufficiently strong, for it is no accident that Terry Penner

and Christopher Rowe must repeatedly invoke the First Protreptic in *Euthydemus* in order to explain the *πρῶτον φίλον* in *Lysis* as they do [Penner & Rowe 2006, 15, note 6; 71; 91; 150, note 36, and especially 264-269]. Although Diotima anticipates it in *Symposium* (205a2-8), «the Eudaemonist Axiom» is most clearly stated in the First Protreptic,⁶ and the worrisome facts that εὖ πράττειν is just as equivocal in *Euthydemus* as φίλον is in *Lysis* and that the word “virtue” never actually appears in Socrates’ protreptic to philosophy and virtue [Hawtrey 1981, 89], are quickly forgotten thanks to the testimony of Aristotle, who told us that Socrates regarded virtue as ἐπιστήμη – or, to speak more precisely, that he thought all the ἀρεταί were ἐπιστήμαι – and, moreover, that Socrates was wrong to have done so.⁷

No full-scale interpretation of the First Protreptic in Plato’s fallacy-rife *Euthydemus* will be undertaken here, and I will therefore not play Iolaus to Georgia Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi’s Hercules [Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014]. I will, however, invoke Rosamond Kent Sprague, the ninety-seven year-old fairy godmother of all of us who believe that Plato can and does use deceptive and misleading arguments deliberately [Sprague 1962, xi]. Naturally Sprague trained her fire on the brothers in *Plato’s Use of Fallacy*; although she touched on Socrates’ use of it in *Protagoras* [Sprague 1962, 27-28, note 15], she had the prudent good sense not to find it the First Protreptic. But despite its importance to systematizing «the philosophy of Socrates» [Irwin 1995, 52], *Euthydemus* – thanks to its rampant eristic and fallacy-rife humor – is a mighty questionable place to look for it and indeed for Plato’s serious doctrines. Gregory Vlastos wisely sidestepped the quicksand, and regarded *Euthydemus* as «transitional» as opposed to genuinely Socratic [Vlastos 1994, 29-33]. But as the scholar who coined the phrase «the Eudaemonist Axiom» he too can scarcely do without it. But «Plato’s Use of Fallacy» appears at the start of the First Protreptic, when Socrates intones the truth that all men desire to εὖ πράττειν. Apparently a claim about our desire «to fare well» it is what allows us «to do things

⁶ In fact, it only appears to be stated there; it first occurs in an unequivocal form at *Euthd.* 280b6.

⁷ On Aristotle, *EE* 1216b2-9 (especially ἐπιστήμας γὰρ ὅτι εἶναι πάσας τὰς ἀρετάς), *MM* 1182a15-26 (especially ἀδύνατον), and *EN* 1145b23-27, see Vlastos 1991, 95-97.

well» – to play the flute, for example (*Euthd.* 279e1-2) – that justifies the ignorance-annihilating claim that σοφία is the only good.

In unmasking the First Protreptic as deliberately deceptive, Socrates' outrageous claims about εὐτυχία constitute something like low-hanging fruit, and those claims have generated debate [Russell 2005, 41-43; Rider 2012; Jones 2013]. I prefer to focus on a part of Socrates' speech that its defenders rarely mention:⁸

“And when a man thinks that this [*sc.* σοφία] is what he ought to receive much rather than money from his father, and from his guardians and friends, especially those who profess to love him [*sc.* οἱ ἐρασταί], whether strangers or citizens, and entreats and beseeches them to impart wisdom,— for this purpose, Cleinias, there is no cause for shame (οὐδὲν αἰσχρόν) or blame in serving or slaving (ὑπηρετεῖν καὶ δουλεύειν) either for a lover (ἐραστής) or for any man, and being willing to perform any honorable services (τὰ καλὰ ὑπηρετήματα) from the desire to become wise.⁹ Or does it not seem to you [*sc.* Cleinias],” I [*sc.* Socrates] said, “to be so (οὕτως)?”. “Very much so (πάνυ μὲν οὖν), you seem to be speaking well to me (εὖ μοι δοκεῖς λέγειν),” was his reply. “If indeed it is the case (εἰ ἔστι γε), dear Cleinias,” said I, “that wisdom is teachable (ἡ σοφία διδακτόν), but does not come into being of itself for mankind. For this remains unexamined by us, and has not yet been agreed upon by you and me”. “But to me, Socrates”, he said, “it seems to be teachable (διδακτόν)”. And I, delighted, said: “How beautifully (καλῶς) you speak, o best of men, and well have you done (εὖ

⁸ But see Penner & Rowe, *Lysis*, 231, note 1: «Turning now to the way the *Lysis* ends, we find at 222a6-7, within a Stephanus page of the end, that what Socrates says is exactly what we find in the *Euthydemus*: that the darling should give in to the genuine and not pretended lover». Note that no such distinction is made in *Euthd.* and it is annulled by Pausanias in *Smp.*

⁹ Cf. Pausanias at *Smp.* 184b6-c3: «For there exists for us a law, that just as in the case of lovers there was neither flattery or anything reproachable in being willing to serve as a slave (δουλεύειν) in any kind of slavery (δουλεία) to the boy (τὰ παιδικά), so also indeed there is left but one only voluntary slavery (δουλεία) that is irreproachable [‘for the boy’ understood but suppressed], and that is the one [‘slavery’ once again understood and suppressed] concerning virtue (ἡ ἀρετή)».

ἐποίησας), sparing me from a full study concerning this very thing, whether this wisdom (ἡ σοφία) is teachable or not teachable (διδασκτόν ἢ οὐ διδασκτόν)”¹⁰

The first point I want to make about this passage is that it implicates *Symposium* once again, thereby offering another good reason that we should read *Lysis* and *Euthydemus* with the speeches at Agathon’s in mind. But here, it is not Diotima whom Socrates echoes but the slippery pederast Pausanias [Neumann 1964, 261]. The connection between his speech and this passage in *Euthydemus* was noted long ago [Routh 1784, 324], and the value of that connection has not withered with time. If wisdom is the only good, says Socrates, then a young man would be well advised to regard no form of service, including slavery, as base in its pursuit, and he lays especial emphasis on slavish service to ἐρασταί, and we all know what kind of «service» they have in mind. One should sexually gratify or χαρίζεσθαι an ἐραστής, Pausanias claims, as long as he promises the youngster ἀρετή in return, nor is there any shame in the young man’s doing so even if that promise turns out to be spurious (see *Smp.* 185a5-b1, especially χαρισάμενος and καλή ἢ ἀπάτη).

Cleinias apparently hasn’t heard that speech either, for he promptly agrees that a young man like himself should do as Socrates now recommends. Nor has he heard any Socratic reason why such services could only be decently called καλά if they were asexual (*Xen. Smp.* VIII 19-21), as a proponent of Platonic Love like Xenophon’s Socrates might wish to insist while construing τὰ καλά ὑπηρετήματα. What makes this innocent construction impossible is the silence of *Lysis* in *Lysis*:¹¹ pursued by Hippothales, it is Lysis who already senses that Soc-

¹⁰ *Euthd.* 282a7-c8. The translation of the first sentence (282a7-b6), apart from making «service» plural, is that of Gifford 1905, 26.

¹¹ *Ly.* 221e7-222b2 (translation by W.R.M. Lamb; Socrates is speaking): «And in a case where one person desires another, my boys, or loves him, he would never be desiring or loving or befriending him, unless he somehow belonged to his beloved either in soul, or in some disposition, demeanor or cast of soul. ‘Yes, to be sure’, said Menexenus; but Lysis was silent. Very well, said I: what belongs to us by nature has been shown to be something we needs must befriend. ‘It seems so’, he said. Then the genuine, not the pretended, lover (ἐραστής) must needs be befriended (φιλεῖσθαι) by his favorite (τὰ παιδικά). To this Lysis and Menexenus gave but a faint nod of assent;

rates is about to claim that it is necessary for a genuine lover to be loved in return by his boy (*Ly.* 222a6-7), a culmination that will soon unite Menexenus and Lysis in reluctant assent, while the erotic Hippothales is rendered polychromatic by the pleasure that the prospect of being “gratified” by Lysis brings him. We might well claim that Ctesippus is more admirable than Hippothales, and that it is only sexually gratifying *him* that Cleinias has in mind. But there is a sharp difference of opinion as to the moral worth of Ctesippus, and whether or not he plays Iolaus to Socrates’ Hercules in their battle with the Hydra and the Crab proves to be the interpretive crux of the argument of this dialogue’s action.¹² So even though Ctesippus will eventually join Menexenus in *Phaedo* (59b9), it is easy to see that Cleinias agrees too quickly and unwisely as well.

But the rashness of Cleinias is tangential to the real point. By having Socrates channel Pausanias, Plato also makes it easy to see that Socrates is continuing a pattern of deliberate deception in the First Protreptic that began with the claim that all human beings strive to εὖ πράττειν, which must be construed as «to do [things] well» or even «to succeed» if the argument’s opening moves are to work. But just in case *you* don’t find it easy to see this – if, for example, you don’t realize that in colloquial English «I’m doing good» doesn’t mean that I’m either a skilled technician or a philanthropist but rather what an Athenian meant when she said εὖ πράττω – Plato promptly makes it easier for all of us. Famously diffident about whether virtue can be taught in *Protagoras* (319a10-b3; cf. 361a6-b3), Socrates praises Cleinias for having no doubts about the teachability of the kind of σοφία that would allow anyone to succeed in anything (*Euthd.* 281b2-4),¹³ for this is what εὖ πράττειν has come

while Hippothales, in his delight, turned all manner of colors». Note that while Lysis is passively «dear» – a φίλοςP for passive – to Hippothales while Hippothales is ἔχθροςP, i.e., passively hated by him, he is ἔχθροςA, or actively hating, the hapless Hippothales who is nevertheless φίλοςA to him. The terminology is from MacKenzie 1988.

¹² It is revealing that both Jackson 1990, and Chance 1992, who affirm the identity of Iolaus and Ctesippus, view the latter as having (dangerously) embraced the brothers’ eristic outlook, while Sprague 1962, and Hawtrey 1981, who reject the identity, see Ctesippus in a far more favorable light.

¹³ After a promising start («εὖ πράττειν is ambiguous» in his article’s abstract), Dimas 2002 attempts to dissolve the ambiguity on 18; cf. 20: «Socrates insists emphati-

to mean thanks to the prior equation of wisdom with εὐτυχία (cf. Xen. *Mem.* III 9, 14-15). Quite apart from whether it can be taught, it is by no means clear that σοφία in this grandiose form actually exists.¹⁴ Socrates' praise for Cleinias is therefore what might be called «ironic», for by affirming that the wisdom even a criminal¹⁵ could love can be taught, the youth has by no means spoken καλῶς or proved his own capacity to εὖ ποιεῖν. But no matter how heavy-handed Socratic irony may be in this case, there is good reason why students of «the Philosophy of Socrates» have generally chosen to overlook it, and it is no accident that the chapter in Terry Irwin's *Plato's Ethics* devoted to *Socrates: from happiness to virtue*, begins with a section called: *The Importance of Euthydemus* [Irwin 1995, §35].

My response is that the First Protrectic in Plato's *Euthydemus* offers markedly equivocal support for making the transition from «faring well» to «doing well», i.e. «from happiness to virtue». Apparently an exhortation to philosophy and virtue, the only possible response to Socrates' failure to so much as mention ἀρετή is that σοφία as εὐτυχία is ἀρετή, for as we all think we know, Socrates regarded virtue as ἐπιστήμη [cf. Brickhouse & Smith 2010, 117 and 220, with Hawtrey 1981, 59]. Whatever were Aristotle's other excellences, they manifestly did not include interpreting Plato's Σωκρατικὸν λόγοι, and the proof is that he regarded Plato's *Laws* as one of them (*Pol.* II 6, 1265a11-13). But since the allegedly Socratic nexus connecting the Socratic Paradox, the

cally that the knowledge of the wise agent brings success in *all* her action».

¹⁴ Note that «knowledge of future goods and bads» (*La.* 199b10-d1) depends on knowledge of the future, i.e., the kind of knowledge we don't have. Cf. *Ly.* 220e6-221a5.

¹⁵ *Euthd.* 280a6-8: «So that wisdom (ἡ σοφία) everywhere causes men to be fortunate (εὐτυχεῖν): since evidently she could never err (ἀμαρτάνειν), but necessarily does correctly and hits the mark (ὀρθῶς πράττειν καὶ τυγχάνειν); otherwise she could be no longer wisdom». It is easy to see that σοφία in this form sells itself to all and sundry: Socrates' protrectic is scarcely necessary. Clearly there is no necessity that ὀρθῶς πράττειν implies doing anything rightly in a moral sense of the term, and if we were assured that the acquisition of σοφία would guarantee that we would never miss our mark (i.e., never ἀμαρτάνειν) and thus that we would always hit our target (τυγχάνειν) *no matter what it was we were doing*, everyone would be a lover of «wisdom» in this sense.

Unity of Virtue, and the knowledge-based transition «from virtue to happiness» – note the reversal on Irwin – has found no greater defender than Terry Penner, it is revealing that he recognized from the start that what Socrates says in the First Protreptic is incompatible with the unity of virtue [Penner 1973, 42-43]. Of course not every reader will wonder whether Socrates is right to suggest that justice without wisdom might really do more harm than injustice guided by σοφία (*Euthd.* 281c6-e1),¹⁶ any more than all of them will reject the identification of wisdom and εὐτυχία, note the absence of the word ἀρετή, or recognize the ongoing equivocation on εὖ πράττειν. But philosophers like us should be able to do all of these things, along with being able to recognize that Socrates is not actually serious about becoming one of the brothers' disciples, that his concluding praise for them is a paradoxical encomium, and that Crito is right to interrupt: Cleinias did not say the things that Socrates has just said that he did.

But Irwin is also right: the First Protreptic *is* of great importance with respect to the Vlastos-inspired search for the philosophy of Socrates. But like εὖ πράττειν in *Euthydemus* and φίλος in *Lysis*, the phrase «the philosophy of Socrates» is equivocal. To use that phrase in a way that the followers of Vlastos do not: the philosophy of Socrates is midway between σοφία and ἀμαθία, and for that reason, φιλοσοφία *as Socrates explains it* is just as absent in the First Protreptic as the word ἀρετή unquestionably is. For understanding «the philosophy of Socrates», and thus for detecting its absence in the First Protreptic, both *Lysis* and the beginning of *Euthydemus* have prepared us, for wisdom is not the only good and ignorance is not the only evil if philosophy, as the πρῶτον φίλον, is the one thing necessary for anyone who strives to live and to die well. Since Socrates demonstrates his courage in *Laches*, his temperance in *Charmides*, his justice in *Gorgias*, and his piety – which must always look more like superstition than wisdom to those who be-think themselves wise – in *Theages*, there must always be a tension between Socratic Ignorance and the Socratic «doctrine» that Virtue is Knowledge [Smith 2018], even though the latter is treated as a mere hypothesis in *Meno* [Robinson 1953]. Philosophy as μεταξύ resolves that

¹⁶ For the need to include justice among the σύμπαντα ἃ τὸ πρῶτον ἔφαμεν ἀγαθὰ εἶναι, see *Euthd.* 279b4-c1.

tension by making both σοφία and ἀμαθία its necessarily co-equal constituents. Purging oneself of ἀμαθία is a greater evil than ἀμαθία itself, and it was Hegel, not Plato's Socrates, who seriously claimed that it was time for philosophy to cease being the love of wisdom. Every Socratic philosopher should be in a position to doubt that σοφία is the only good even before reaching Plato's *Republic*. But just in case we don't, there we will discover that the Idea of the Good, not wisdom or εὐδαιμονία, is the *only* good. For that discovery, Plato has long been preparing us, since without the kind of philosophy that situates itself between σοφία and ἀμαθία, we'll never catch sight of it. After all, as Socrates tries to teach Alcibiades at the start (*Alc.1* 109e7), who would ever bother to search for what they already think they know?

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Abstract

In opposition to a eudaemonist reading of Plato's *Euthydemus* that accepts uncritically Socrates' claim that wisdom is the only good, this article points to the central role of philosophy in *Lysis* – where it is defined as in between wisdom and ignorance – in reaching the true summit of Plato's thought: the Idea of the Good.

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