
Pro Rege

Volume 32 | Number 4

Article 1

June 2004

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Recommended Citation

Reppmann, Aron (2004) "Truth of Love and the Love of Truth: A Christian Plato-Scholar Stops to Look at What He's Doing, and Why," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 32: No. 4, 1 - 8.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol32/iss4/1

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The Truth of Love and the Love of Truth: A Christian Plato-Scholar Stops to Look at What He's Doing, and Why



by Aron Reppmann

Plato is unusual among the writers normally recognized as major contributors to the western philosophical tradition. What's so unusual about him is that he never tells us what he thinks; or at least he doesn't tell us in the direct, propositional way we tend to associate with thinkers who want to be sure that they get their point across. Plato wrote a loosely connected set of dramas, which we traditionally call "dialogues," although they frequently involve multiple characters and include elements that are not strictly covered by the term "dialogue," such as considerable amounts of dramatic action. Plato never

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appears as a speaking character in these dramas, and, unlike some philosophers who also wrote dialogues, he left us no companion text in which he says, speaking for himself, what the fictional texts are attempting to portray. Plato does not *say* anything, in the conventional sense, but he *shows* many things in indirect, suggestive, and exploratory ways. Interpreting Plato requires discerning the coherence among various elements that might seem, at first glance, to be unrelated: for example, between one topic that is discussed and another; or between what the characters in a particular dialogue *say* and what they *do* or *enact*; or between what is said and done in *one* of the dialogues and what is said and done in *another* dialogue that shares some of the same themes, concerns, or characters but portrays them in a different light.

My current project is to explore a web of such interconnected elements regarding two kinds of interpersonal relationship or attachment as they are discussed and depicted in three of Plato's dialogues in which they play a central role. Those dialogues are entitled *Lysis*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*, and the two kinds of interpersonal relationship or attachment I'm talking about are *erōs* and *philia*. *Erōs* is often translated as "love" or "passionate desire"; in everyday use, it means just what we mean when we talk about "eroticism." *Philia*, on the other hand, is often translated as "friendship" or "friendly feeling." Now, if it sounds as though I'm being especially careful to qualify these translations (with phrases like "is often translated as"), you're already beginning to perceive what my work on Plato is about. For Plato's contemporaries, just as for our own, there

were assumed to be clear differences, boundaries of separation, between *erōs* and *philia*; to put the matter roughly, we could say that we would expect *erōs* and *philia* to be distinct “topics.” However, my project is to demonstrate that in the three dialogues of Plato in which *erōs* or *philia* constitutes the major focal point of the discussion, matters seem to be deliberately more complicated: in both the concepts discussed and the action depicted, the possible relationships between *erōs* and *philia* are constantly explored in ways that seem to make the meanings of both continually shift in relation to one another. To complicate matters even further, Plato’s depiction of the dynamics of *erōs* and *philia* seems to have an effect much larger and more profound than we might expect. Although the discussions and enactments of *erōs* and *philia* in these dialogues certainly have something to do with the ethics of interpersonal relations, there is also a lot of exploration about the deeper significance of these forms of devotion or attachment. We often think of ethics as a “secondary” subdiscipline of philosophy: on that conventional model, it is the “primary” considerations of metaphysics or ontology, the grand, abstract theories of the structure of everything, that lay the groundwork, and what’s left for ethics is just practical application of metaphysical principles. Plato’s representation of the dynamics of *erōs* and *philia*, I’m happy to say, turns that conventional model upside down. At key points in these dialogues, Plato seems to be experimenting, at once seriously and playfully, with the possibility that, if people could just understand what *erōs* and *philia* are really about—their ultimate significance—and would conduct themselves in ways that are attuned to that ultimate significance, they would achieve the highest and most comprehensive understanding possible for humans, *and* they would lead the most fully achieved life possible for humans. To put it another way, getting rightly oriented with regard to one’s understanding and practice of *erōs* and *philia* is portrayed as philosophy itself, not “philosophy” as the peculiar academic discipline that we are familiar with, but “philosophy” as *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, an all-encompassing and harmonious way of life.

That’s a quick survey of the area I’m working in, with a good deal left out and much unargued for. In fact, almost none of what I have said so far about Plato is uncontroversial. What I’d like to do is

simply to unfold some of those controversies expressing my work as a scholar. I’ll begin by talking about Christian identity and scholarly practice, and then offer two specific examples of controversies in which my approach as a Christian scholar helps me to contribute to the larger scholarly discussion on Plato.

Christian identity and scholarly practice: who am I in my scholarship, and what difference does it make?

I need to begin this section of my remarks with an important disclaimer: as a Christian scholar, I have worked more in an exploratory way—discovering both the field and myself, including aspects of my identity as a Christian, along the way—than in a programmatic, deductive way. I did not first get my Christian scholarly perspective fully in order, and then apply it as a preformulated pattern for encountering the history of philosophy; rather, as a person with my intellectual habits somewhat formed, but not perfected or finalized, by the traditions and practices of the Christian communities in which I have spent my entire life (including an undergraduate education at Trinity), I set out to discover what attracted me and what made me suspicious, and to find out whether careful research, as well as living with the consequences of the ideas I embraced, would prove my attractions and suspicions to have been trustworthy or not. This experiment with myself is not finished, but our discussion today is a chance for me to stop for a breather along the way and to look back. Please keep in mind, then, that when I reflect on the coherence between my identity as a Christian and my practice as a scholar, you are hearing a report on retrospection, on hindsight. I hope that my hindsight is clear and accurate, but it will also necessarily be reflective and interpretive. I do not offer you *absolute principles* of Christian scholarship with which I consciously began and which I kept firmly in front of me all along; if you can trace your own scholarly path that way, then God has blessed you differently from me. Instead, I offer you some of the patterns I can see now that I look back on the steps I’ve taken, patterns that have more to do with communally formed habits than they do with my own reasoning and choosing. Let me point out two such patterns.

(1) *Awareness of limits and of the necessity of assumptions.* The communities in which I was formed as a Christian, indeed as a person, emphasized and blessed the finitude of human life, its *limits*. It's important that I say that our finite character was not just emphasized but also blessed: I was taught early and in many ways (most of them not focused in intellectual statements) that being a *limited* human creature was not the same thing as being a *sinful, broken human creature*—I was and am both, but my damnable brokenness cries out for healing, whereas my limitation just means that I'm a creature, not the creator. This attitude has a particular intellectual corollary, which is especially prized by the Reformed and Catholic intellectual traditions that have nourished me: I know that I have deep, basic orientations and assumptions on which all of my thinking and living are based but which I cannot fully explain or account for, even to myself. I have always been deeply puzzled when certain social reformers insist that people should “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps”; I always thought that that image was intended precisely as an example of what it was *impossible* for humans to do in any arena, social or intellectual. Only for a god is it possible to fully close the circle for oneself; there is only one God, and I am not that God. This awareness, which as a Trinity student I learned to call “consciousness of presuppositions,” makes me very attentive to the presuppositions of others, too, whether or not they know or acknowledge that they have presuppositions—and *especially* when their assumptions seem to clash with my own. Martin Marty, an eminent church historian, has put the point this way: Christian scholars can be especially good at “smoking out presuppositions” because, as criminals say, “it takes one to know one.”

(2) *A particular spirituality of reading: the role of my Christian formation in my approach to ancient texts.* When I talk about a “spirituality of reading,” I don't mean a special spiritual something tacked on to simple reading; I just mean to point out that a spirit, an attitude, an orientation always characterizes everything we do, including our reading. I was inducted into this *particular* spirituality of reading through churches, homes, and schools in various clans of the Reformed tribe of the Christian people, but I do not claim that all the members of that tribe think and act this way, nor that it is the exclusive

possession of that tribe.

Let me describe the experience of reading that I'm talking about. When I approach an old text that people whom I trust have assured me is important, I tend to do so *both* with eager anticipation that it has “something for me” *and* with a cautious awareness that I will only perceive that “something” well (and not just see reflections of my own face) if I approach that text as *wholistically* as possible, trying to understand its historical context, characterization, narrative voice, dramatic action, rhetorical devices, use of particular words, associations of words, and so on. I'm keenly interested in the *unsaid* dimensions that

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provide the context, the meaning-framework, for what is said. Now, I'm not suggesting that a dialogue of Plato is *equal* to a book of the Bible; there is certainly a difference. Nevertheless, the particular activities and objects through which we are initiated into a practice have a profound effect on our later exercise of that practice; my 18-month-old son is becoming more and more familiar with books, and his mother and I are careful that he has *good* books to look at and that he learns to exercise a kind of delightful respect for them, because these early encounters with books may profoundly shape his attitudes about reading for the rest of his life. Well, my introduction to ancient literature—and indeed, until I was an adult, pretty much the *only* ancient literature I read—was the Bible, and the reverent, wholistic attention to the said and the unsaid dimensions of that literature that I learned early on profoundly shape the way I read Plato.

I've discussed two ways in which my particular identity as a Christian affects my practice as a scholar. Now let me give two examples from my experiences as a scholar among other scholars, experiences that helped me to become more keenly aware of and grateful for those elements of my identity that I've just described. Initially, I'll focus on the first pattern I indicated, the awareness of human limits and the necessity of assumptions; I'll save the second pattern, a particular spirituality of reading, for the final section, in which I show you how I approach a specific dialogue.

First example: contributing to the scholarly discussion through attentiveness to presuppositions

I find that in my scholarly practice, I spend a great deal of time and energy in "smoking out" the (often unexamined) presuppositions of other scholars, and that this work of critique constitutes what I see as one of the best contributions I can make to Plato scholarship. I hope it isn't surprising that the longest chapter of my dissertation (48 pages and destined to grow by a few more) is the one devoted to examining the major trends of interpreting Platonic *erōs* and *philia* among modern scholars; for this paper, I ran a few word searches in this chapter and found out that words like "assume," "assumption," and "presupposition" occur some 96 times. Add to that my introductory chapter, in which I spend some 30 pages laying out and attempting to justify my own assumptions and approaches, and it should be evident that my faith tradition's sensitivity to the importance of human finitude plays a vibrant role in the directions and strategies of my scholarly work.

I don't want simply to rest on numbers of pages and word counts, though; let me give a specific example of this critical awareness at work. English-language scholarship on Platonic *erōs* and *philia* in the last century has been dominated by an approach I call "separatism," since the distinguishing characteristic of this approach is the tendency to *separate* *erōs* from *philia* as fundamentally distinct forms of relating to another person. When these interpreters turn to investigate *erōs* and *philia* in Plato, they treat them from the outset as distinct issues whose connection, if any, must be established after their own individual structures have been clearly delineated. The separatists contend that *philia* represents the

mutual, affirming affection that exists between friends, whereas *erōs* is represented as an overwhelming desire (originating in or analogous to sexual desire) in which one seeks only to grasp something for oneself, not to enter into relationship with another. I don't accept that approach; I don't find that it's very helpful for making good sense of what's going on in Plato's dialogues. Because of my appreciation for the role of presuppositions, though, I don't simply take the separatists to task about the flaws in their particular interpretations of the dialogues. I also explore the ways in which this interpretive separation between *erōs* and *philia* in Plato can be understood as resting on deep assumptions concerning what is *at stake* in *erōs* and *philia*, that is, as answers to such fundamental questions as these: Why do *erōs* and *philia* come up at all as topics of discussion and investigation in the dialogues? What is it that is compelling about *erōs* and *philia*, such that they merit (or even demand) philosophical consideration in Plato's dialogues?

One example of my critical investigation is in the way I point out the separatists' basically *individualistic* assumptions about human nature and moral categories. One of the most pervasive assumptions in modern life and thought is that of *individualism*. Our conceptions of society and interpersonal relations are atomistically conceived, in that we tend to consider the human individual as the primary reality and most basic unit of analysis; approaching a complex social structure or moral practice, our culture's default approach is to resolve it into ever-simpler units, which we assume will ultimately turn out to be the actions and attitudes of individual human beings. Intersubjective relations are understood as having to overcome a fundamental problem: how can anyone escape the charge that she is basically a selfish egoist, since her world is primarily structured by her own sovereign experience and only secondarily involves contacts with others, who also have their own worlds?

So we have this modern assumption that interpersonal relations consist in successfully building relatively unselfish bridges between basically separate, self-serving individuals. Many of the separatist interpreters of Plato have allowed this assumption to work, unchallenged, in their interpretations of the nature(s) and role(s) of *erōs* and *philia* in Plato's dialogues. According to this line of interpretation,

philia represents the proper expression of a right (nonegoistic) form of relationship to others, whereas *erōs* is irreparably caught up in egoistic striving that uses other people only for one's own selfish purposes. This approach is very clear in a famous and regrettably influential article by Gregory Vlastos, entitled "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato." Vlastos begins his examination of whether the individual can be an object of love for Plato by setting up an idealized conception of *philia* to be used as "a standard against which to measure Plato's concept of love."³ Once this idealized standard of *philia* is set up, *erōs* is defined in opposition to it, so that Plato's dialogues, in which *erōs* undoubtedly plays an important and often highly honored role in the conduct of the philosophical life, turn out, in the estimation of Vlastos, not to "provide for love of whole persons, but only for love of that abstract version of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities."³ There are several problems with Vlastos' approach, but the deepest and most difficult one is that he *begins* by posing questions about *Plato* that are based on an unexamined acceptance of *our* society's individualistic perspective. For Vlastos, love is only morally acceptable—is only, in fact, "real" love—if you love another person's *individual uniqueness* for its own sake rather than appreciating his or her "qualities" that you may "value," since such "valuing" is a sign, for Vlastos, of self-interest.⁴ In Vlastos' judgment, *erōs* is sharply divided from *philia*, and Plato's achievements regarding *erōs* are separated from a morally appropriate understanding of love; but these judgments are made on the basis of standards that do not really apply to Plato since those standards are drawn from a distinctly modern contrast between egoism and altruism.⁵

The other assumption about human nature and moral categories that I trace in the separatist interpreters is what I call "sexualism." Although I will not take the time to lay out the analysis here, I want to mention it, since it provides an example of the way in which my critical scholarly practices, which have been shaped by my faith community, sometimes reflect back on that community in ways that are critical of the community's own unexamined assumptions. What I mean by "sexualism" is the unexamined assumption that the categories of human sexual experience as *we* are accustomed to them are *fixed* categories, reflecting and defining the character of

human sexual experience as such. When *ta erōtika*, "erotic matters," are assumed to be identified with the province of what we are accustomed to call "sexuality," *our* understanding of sexual concerns intrudes on our interpretation of the meaning and significance of *erōs* for Plato (and also of *philia*, when the latter is defined in terms of its difference from *erōs*). When applied to the moral dimension, sexualism results in the assumption that *our* concerns are more or less those of people in all times and places. Therefore, I'm impatient with commentators who assert, as a key to interpreting Plato, that Plato was a "homosexual" or an "invert," or, conversely,

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that he was "anti-homosexual." As long as they assume that these terms mean the same things in talking about *Plato* as they would in talking about someone in our time, they have an unexamined "sexualistic" assumption at work. I make this argument not only in the footnotes of what I write but also when I'm talking with students, Trinity colleagues, trustees of the college, and other interested parties who are puzzled by my fascination with an author who writes a lot about *paidēra*, "pederasty," without clearly and unambiguously condemning what *we* call "pedophilia."

Second example: contributing to the scholarly discussion through a wholistic spirituality of reading

Plato's dialogue *Lysis* pays a lot of attention to *philia*. Most of the discussions in the dialogue are focused on questions concerning this relationship,⁶ and at the close of the dialogue, Plato underscores the importance of these discussions of *philia* by

having Socrates express frustration and shame to his conversation partners, because although “we suppose we’re one another’s friends,” “what he who is a friend is we have not yet been able to discover” (223b).⁷ The attention paid to *philia* within the dialogue has led many commentators, from ancient scholars down to our own contemporaries, to declare that *philia* is the “topic” of the dialogue.⁸

However, in their concern to understand Plato’s treatment of *philia* in the *Lysis*, most commentators have failed to notice the presence and importance in this dialogue of another form of interpersonal relationship: *erōs*. The dialogue begins with a discussion among Socrates and two young men, Ctesippus and Hippothales, on the question of how one should conduct oneself toward his beloved, the one for whom he has *erōs*. Ctesippus tells Socrates that Hippothales has been annoying all their companions by the ways in which he’s trying to gain the favor of his beloved, who is named Lysis. Socrates agrees that Hippothales has been going about it all wrong, and he agrees to demonstrate for Hippothales how one *should* conduct oneself toward one’s favorite. This promised “demonstration” is the pretext for the entire remainder of the dialogue, in which Socrates engages young Lysis and his friend Menexenus in a series of discussions about *philia*—discussions which are actually about far more than “friendship” narrowly conceived, since Socrates uses an examination of the boys’ assumptions about friendship as a starting-point for uncovering and criticizing their assumptions about what the world is like as a whole and how they should live their lives in it. Besides that, the topic of *erōs* keeps bleeding into the discussion (211e, 212b-c, 221b, e, and following). With all of this in mind, you can imagine the ways in which the dialogue as a whole suffers at the hands of the general scholarly tendency to declare that the *Lysis* is simply about *philia*; for one thing, they have to ignore or explain away the erotic dimensions of the story.^{9,10,11,12} The *Lysis* has often been considered uninteresting, ill-formed, a source of some intriguing puzzles about friendship but not very worthy in its own right—and besides, there are those strange, distracting references to *erōs* that keep intruding into the discussion. One eminent scholar summarized his estimation of this dialogue by writing: “Even Plato can nod.”

My own examination of the dialogue, rather than trying to explain away these seeming anomalies, approaches the dialogue holistically and with a kind of reverent attention. I show that *erōs*, far from being irrelevant or only of peripheral concern, plays a fundamentally important role *throughout* the course of the dialogue, even in those passages that seem to be focused only on *philia*. *Erōs* provides the framework for the dialogue, both dramatically and conceptually: it is because of a particular concern with the proper practice of *erōs* that *philia* comes up in the first place as a topic for discussion, and as the dialogue proceeds, we find that the peculiar kind of eroticism advocated and practiced by Socrates requires a transformation of the conventional ways of understanding and practicing both *erōs* and *philia*. I demonstrate that the dialogue’s discussions about *philia* cannot adequately be understood without a careful examination of the role of *erōs* in bringing about and shaping those discussions: if *erōs* plays a role in the dialogue as a whole, it is necessary for us to understand that role if we are to rightly understand the discussions about *philia* that take place within this erotic context. The result of this approach is a scholarly contribution that makes good sense of passages in the text that others have found perplexing or irrelevant. In that work of interpretation, I have not explicitly brought in “Christian scholarly principles,” but my formation and identity as a Christian have certainly been relevant to my work as a scholar.

ENDNOTES

1. This assumed moral individualism is at the root of the currently popular description of a mutually beneficial agreement as constituting a “win/win situation”: it is presupposed that there are two “sides” involved, and that only by dint of such an agreement is conflict (in which by necessity one wins and the other loses) averted.
2. *Platonic Studies* (Princeton University Press, 1973), 3-6 (here 6). Vlastos sets up his standard with reference to Aristotle, not Plato. It should be noted that Vlastos recognizes that even Aristotle’s own accounts do not completely “live up” to the idealized standard of *philia* for which Vlastos appeals to Aristotle in the first place: “That Aristotle’s notion of ‘perfect’ love should be so limited is disappointing. But this does not spoil it for my purposes in this essay. All I need here

is to find a standard against which to measure Plato's concept of love. . . . This standard Aristotle does supply. That to love a person we must wish for that person's good for the person's sake, not for ours—so much Aristotle understands. Does Plato?" (6). (For warnings about the inappropriateness of making Aristotle's accounts of *philia* into a standard of "Greek friendship" against which to judge Plato, see David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* [Cambridge University Press, 1997], 67-68, and Diskin Clay, "Platonic Studies and the Study of Plato," *Arion* 2 [1975]: 116-132 [here 120-21]).

3. *Platonic Studies* 31.

4. *Platonic Studies* 30-34. David Konstan, in differentiating the dynamics of classical friendship from those of modern friendship, argues that this standard of love as devotion to the other's uniqueness rather than to his or her admirable qualities is of one piece with modern, individualistic assumptions: "Modern discussions often suppose that the basis of attraction between friends lies in their individual or personal qualities. . . . In a world in which a subject conceives of itself as different in essence from other humans, a monad constituted by unique attributes, intimacy has a special significance. Only by a mysterious contact across the boundaries of self can one escape existential loneliness. . . . Communication with other beings is presumed to be a difficult matter. Hence the need for relationships--a term often employed in place of friendship in modern discussions" (*Friendship in the Classical World* 15, 17).

5. Although I have focused my remarks in this section on Vlastos' individualistic assumptions and their consequences for his interpretation of the relationship between *erōs* and *philia* and of Plato's treatment of "love" in general, similar assumptions and consequences can also be discerned in other separatist interpreters. See Gerasimos Santas (see note 9), 39, 51, 57, 62-63; and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 166-67, 181-84.

6. These quotations include: what it is about a person that makes him or her *philos* ("friend" or "dear") to another, how one becomes a *philos* of another, who is the *philos*, what sort of people can be *philoī* to one another, the purpose for which one is *philos* to another, and the character of the *prōton philon* ("primary dear thing" or "first friend"). David Konstan has urged

against addressing the topic of the *Lysis* as *philia*, pointing out precisely this *variety* of questions: they do not simply take the form "What is *philia*?" but rather are focused on "the reasons why (*dia ti, heneka tou*) a person likes someone or something" (*Friendship in the Classical World* 73). In addition, Konstan argues that, in the classical Greek literature generally, the term *philos* is restricted to a particular sort of friendship (9). While duly noting Konstan's warning to pay careful attention to Plato's exact form of expression (advice that is especially important if one is, as Konstan, engaging in a *survey* project that *compares* the varying uses of certain terms by *different* authors writing at *different* times and places), I will nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion (which focuses entirely on a *single* work by a *single* author), gather the matter of these various particular questions by the general term *philia*. This term is warranted by the text of the *Lysis* itself: at several points, Socrates uses the term *philia* to describe the subject of their discussions, that of which they are seeking to discover the cause (207c11, 214d7, 215d4, 216b5, 217e9, 219a4, 220b3, 221d3, 221e4, 222d2).

7. Unless otherwise indicated, translation of passages from the *Lysis* are those of David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship: An Interpretation of the Lysis, with a New Translation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979). For references to the Greek text I use John Burnet's edition in volume III of the Oxford Classical Text (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903). The reader is reminded that within this discussion, references to "Socrates" or "Socratic" principles refer only to that Socrates who is a character in (and sometimes, as in the *Lysis*, also the narrator of) Plato's dialogues. Thus when I speak, for example, of a "*particularly* Socratic eroticism," I mean the particular understanding and expression of *erōs* advocated and practiced by Plato's Socrates in distinction from his interlocutors' assumptions about *erōs*.

8. Thus, for instance, Diogenes Lertius, listing Plato's dialogues according to Thrasyllus' classification, refers to this dialogue by the double title *Lysis* and *periphilias* (III.59). In our own time, David Bolotin has given his translation of and commentary on the *Lysis* the title *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (see note 7 above).

9. For the assertion that the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, and not the *Lysis*, are focused on *erōs*, see, for example, G.R.F. Ferrari, "Platonic Love," in *The Cambridge*

Companion to Plato (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248-276; for the assumption that Plato distinguishes between *erōs* and *philia* on the same lines as were conventional in his society, see, for example, Gerasimos Santas, "Plato on Love, Beauty and the Good" in *The Greeks and the Good Life*, ed. David J. Depew (Fullerton and Indianapolis: California State University, Fullerton and Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 33-68, and Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 258.

10. A number of scholars have explicitly stated that the opening encounter is to be excluded from serious consideration of the dialogue's concern with *philia*. Thus Hans von Arnim, for example, asserts that the erotically focused "introduction" of the dialogue is "merely dramatic setting," so that erotic concerns have nothing to do with the "inquiry proper" of the dialogue (quoted in Paul Friedländer, *Plato: The Dialogues, First Period* [New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964], 314-15).
11. According to von Arnim, the reference to *erōs* at 222a-b is "the only place in the *Lysis* where (apart from the introduction, which is merely dramatic setting) reference is made to the love of boys. It is outside the inquiry proper and is merely a casual jest" (quoted in Paul Friedländer, *op. cit.*, 314). In the estimation of Charles Kahn, on the other hand, Socrates in the course of the discussion actually abandons *philia* for a focus on *erōs*, even if he continues to use the language of *philia*, so that the later references to *erōs* simply reveal what is really at stake in the discussion (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* 259, 261, 265).
12. There are some interpreters who have called attention to the operation of *erōs* in the dialogue, but the force of their explanations has largely been blunted by

their tendency to blur the distinctions between *erōs* and *philia*, at least in Plato's use of these terms. For these scholars, *erōs* becomes basically indistinguishable from (or even identified with) *philia* in Plato's writings. Thus Paul Friedländer, while taking Hans von Arnim to task for relegating *erōs* to a mere frame of the dialogue, himself diminishes the significance of *erōs* for the dialogue's treatment of *philia* by failing to consider *erōs* and *philia* as distinct but related experiences (*Plato: An Introduction* [New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1958], 32-58). Charles Kahn, on the other hand, begins with a clearly stated distinction (in fact a division) between *erōs* and *philia*, appealing to the general cultural presuppositions evident in the Athenian literature of Plato's day. Having made this sharp distinction, however, Kahn also proceeds to elide it through the way in which he approaches Plato's text: in his estimation, those parts of the discussion that attribute to *philia* characteristics that Kahn thinks are specifically erotic are proclaimed to be "really" about *erōs*, even if they are expressed in the language of *philia* (see previous note). Thus these authors, too, even while they discuss the role of *erōs* in the *Lysis*, fail to consider the *intertwining* (neither absolute separation nor simple identification) of *erōs* and *philia* within the words and actions of the dialogue. Therefore the statement of Francisco J. Gonzalez ("Plato's *Lysis*: An Enactment of Philosophical Kinship," *Ancient Philosophy* 15 [1995]: 69-90) that "some [scholars] see *philia*, and others *erōs*, as the dialogue's subject matter" (69) is somewhat misleading; it is more accurate to say that some scholars consider the *Lysis* to be about *philia* to the exclusion of *erōs*, whereas others insist that, for Plato, *philia* is inseparable from *erōs* or even identified with it.