ERÔS AND EDUCATION: SOCRATIC SEDUCTION IN THREE PLATONIC DIALOGUES.

Hege Dypedokk Johnsen
Erôs and Education

*Socratic Seduction in Three Platonic Dialogues*

Hege Dypedokk Johnsen
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This glossary is an overview of the Ancient Greek terms that occur most frequently in the text. It should be taken as a rough guide only, as a more detailed discussion and clarification of the terms is given in the main text. Unless otherwise noted, I follow the translations in Cooper’s edition (1997), and the Ancient Greek texts of Burnet’s *Platonis Opera* (1900–1907). Untransliterated Greek terms are inserted in the body text and in quotes in either quotation marks or brackets. Otherwise, the Greek is transliterated. Due to their frequent use, I will write the terms listed in this glossary without italics throughout the dissertation. Other transliterated Greek terms will be italicized; as will terms in Latin, and other non-English terms. When quoting scholars of Ancient Greek philosophy, however, I preserve their use of spelling, italics, and punctuation.

<table>
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<td>manliness, courage</td>
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<td>aporia, ἀπορία</td>
<td>impasse, puzzlement</td>
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<td>erastēs, ἐραστής</td>
<td>the active lover, traditionally older male citizen</td>
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<td>erōmenos, ἐρώμενος</td>
<td>the passive beloved, traditionally younger male</td>
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<tr>
<td>erōs, ἔρως</td>
<td>name of the Greek god of love, intense passionate desire</td>
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<tr>
<td>eudaimonia, εὐδαιμονία</td>
<td>flourishing happiness, “living well”</td>
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<tr>
<td>paiderastia, παιδεραστία</td>
<td>“love of boys”, the erotic educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>philia, φιλία</td>
<td>friendship, loving, liking</td>
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<td>sōphrosunē, σωφροσύνη</td>
<td>sound-mindedness, self-control, moderation</td>
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<tr>
<td>thumos, θυμός</td>
<td>the spirited part of the soul</td>
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Abbreviations

List of abbreviations used in citing the titles of Platonic dialogues:

<table>
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Chapter 0. Introduction

0.1. Topic and aim

What is philosophy and what is a philosopher? Working on Plato, it is intriguing to reflect upon how these questions were supposedly addressed in the Platonic dialogue with the telling title of the *Philosopher*. This dialogue, however, is missing – in fact, we do not know for certain whether it was ever written. Perhaps Plato intentionally withheld it, leaving it up to his readers to figure out answers to these questions for themselves?¹ The present study approaches these opening questions by examining how Plato’s Socrates introduces three youths to philosophy. In Socrates’ encounters with the young interlocutors Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, one aspect stands out as particularly peculiar: The erotic aspect. I aim to show why this aspect ought to be taken seriously, and how it may provide telling information regarding Plato’s view of what philosophy is, and what characterizes a philosopher.

The main purpose of my study is to investigate the erotic aspects of the relevant encounters, and to bring out the role that erôs plays in the way Socrates proceeds in his discussions with the three youths. How does Socrates pique their interest? How does he try to persuade them to passionately pursue knowledge? Briefly put, the central results of my inquiry are these: First, erôs plays a crucial role in the processes of self-cultivation, learning, and the practice of philosophy. Secondly, Socrates’ educational methods take part in his self-proclaimed expertise on erôs. Thirdly, the eponymous youths of the examined dialogues, to wit, Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades, are all subjected to what I shall call Socrates’ erotic educational methods. These results are untangled, explored and argued for throughout the dissertation. In this way, the chapters are thematically linked, even

¹ This is the main argument in Gill’s (2012) comprehensive study on the *Philosopher*, in which she also argues that the *Philosopher* is the fourth and final member in a tetralogy; the *Philosopher, Theaetetus, Sophist*, and *Statesman*. For a discussion of how “[t]he Sophist and the Statesman repeatedly herald a final dialogue” (Gill 2012, 203), see esp. Ch. 7 in Gill’s book. The *Philosopher* ought not to be confused with the dialogue On Philosophy mentioned by Aristotle (cf. EE 1217b15–25), as the latter refers to one of Aristotle’s own dialogues (cf. e.g. Chroust (1965, 351)).
though Chapters 2, 3 and 4 each revolve around a single Socratic encounter. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, I return to the results listed above and analyze them in greater detail.

Chapter 1 is devoted to providing an introductory account of the nature of erôs in Plato, and of Socrates’ erotic expertise. My account of the nature of erôs, however, which has a strong focus on the practice of erôs, will emerge gradually throughout the study. Nonetheless, the following few preliminary remarks should be noted immediately: “Erôs” is both the name of the Greek god of love (Erôs), and a term (erôs), which may be translated as “intense, passionate desire”. Socrates calls his erotic expertise “τὴν ἐρωτικὴν μοι τέχνην” (Phdr. 257a7–8), and his erotic art “τὰ ἐρωτικά” (Symp. 198d1–2). Henceforth, I will refer to Socrates’ erotic expertise and erotic art interchangeably. These alternative labels (and others, such as “erotic skill”, “maieutic expertise”, “art of love”) are to be found in the secondary literature on erôs. One may further note that to use the derived adjective “erotic” in this way – e.g. to call Socrates’ expertise “erotic”, without thereby necessarily implying the sexual connotations that the term has in English – is not in any way controversial in the secondary literature on Socrates’ erotic expertise. I refer to Socrates’ educational methods as “erotic”, because I take Socrates’ educational methods to be part and parcel of his expertise on erôs. When I speak of Socrates’ “methods”, I refer to Socrates’ ways of persuading the three youths; i.e. his practices and procedures – his modi operandi, if you will. These methods unfold in what may be referred to as “Socratic seduction”. The term “seduction” is derived from the Latin seducere, which serves the notion of Socratic seduction well: The Latin term means “to direct”, or “to lead away”, or, alternatively, “to lure off the straight path”. Finally, when referring to Socrates, I refer to Plato’s dramatical character Socrates, unless otherwise noted.

My interest in the nature of erôs is due to an overarching curiosity about our desires and passions, both for abstract objects, such as for example wisdom, and for concrete objects, including persons. Through analyzing Socrates’ erotic educational methods, I also hope to shed light on how Plato relates love of wisdom to interpersonal love. As we shall see, Plato’s dialogues acquaint us with the characters’ experiences and psychological make-up, their dilemmas and the (love-) dramas that unfold between them, which more often than not are intimately connected to the philosophical issues discussed in the dialogues. As a reader, one may find oneself (as I do)
Introduction

relating to and identifying with many of these dramas and dilemmas. This recognition provides Plato’s philosophical works – written about 2400 years ago – with more than a breath of actuality.

As Plato’s texts have been thoroughly discussed in Europe and abroad for over two millenia, the secondary literature on Plato’s texts is vast, reflecting virtually all aspects of Plato’s large body of work. As Plato’s texts have been thoroughly discussed in Europe and abroad for over two millenia, the secondary literature on Plato’s texts is vast, reflecting virtually all aspects of Plato’s large body of work. Let me therefore briefly situate my study: Amongst other studies written specifically on the nature of erôs in Plato, my study differs from those focusing nearly exclusively on the explicit arguments made concerning erôs. In this respect, my approach has more similarities with those scholars who take what is often referred to as the “literary aspects” as integral to the philosophical content. Further, unlike many (if not to say most) studies of the nature of erôs in Plato, I will not focus solely on the most famous Platonic dialogues in which the nature of erôs emerges, such as the Symposium and the Phaedrus. I will, however, use these two dialogues – and others when needed – as touchstones. This is especially true for Chapter 1, where I provide a first, general account of erôs and of Socrates’ erotic expertise. In the subsequent chapters, I argue that this expertise is put into practice and demonstrated in the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I. Focusing primarily on the character Socrates and his erotic expertise, my study is thematically close to Elizabeth S. Belfiore’s comprehensive study from 2012, titled Socrates’ Daimonic Art: Love for Wisdom in Four Platonic Dialogues. Particularly influential on my work is Jill Gordon (esp. 2012). She convincingly shows the fruitfulness of attending to dramatic, mythical, and metaphorical content in understanding erôs, and also how erôs permeates the entire Platonic philosophy. It may be noted, however, that even though both have written on the Alcibiades I, and Belfiore also on the Lysis, neither of them offers a study including all three dialogues I am assessing here.

My topic invites investigations on a number of major philosophical topics; more than I can possibly address in this dissertation. One of the things I will not be able to offer is a comprehensive, systematic analysis of the tripartition of the soul, and how erôs fits (or fails to fit) with this.

5 Plato’s texts are gathered in Cooper’s edited volume, where they number approximately 2000 pages.
6 Gregory Vlastos must be regarded as trendsetting among scholars with this approach to Plato’s texts. For a brief overview of Socrates’ explicit doctrine of love, see e.g. Rudenbusch (2006).
7 I discuss what this approach to Plato’s texts entails more precisely in section 0.3.2.
8 For recent works focusing on erôs in these dialogues, see e.g. Cobb (1993), Gould (1963), Lamascus (2016), Levy (1979), Nichols (2010), Nicholson (1999), Sheffield (2006).
9 The tripartition of the soul is most systematically accounted for in the Republic. In the account there outlined, erôs is not described as one of the parts. The parts of the soul are in this account identified as “reason” (to logistikon), “spirit” (thumos), and appetite (epithumia). Erôs may, however, be said to be functioning within the parts of the soul, directing these toward objects that the parts correspond to, i.e. objects that can satisfy the parts’ respective
Another issue that I will not address – at least not at any great length – concerns the so-called charge of egoism. This charge has been directed towards eudaimonic philosophy in general, but also specifically towards Plato’s philosophy. Because of the strong focus on the agent’s achievement of eudaimonia (a complex term that is usually translated as “happiness”, “flourishing”, and “well-being”) one might suspect that all of the eudaimonic theories give rise to an essentially egoistic ethics, where concern for others only has an instrumental value to the agent’s own happiness. This suspicion seems particularly pressing regarding love and interpersonal relationships, urging questions such as: “Is the eudaimonic lover essentially egoistical?”, and “Does he love his beloved only as a means and per accidens, i.e. only insofar as the beloved is in some way advantageous and beneficial to the lover himself?”

The charge of egoism against Plato has been most forcefully put forward by Gregory Vlastos. Vlastos concludes that, on Plato’s account, “the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love” (Vlastos 1973, 31). What the Platonic lover really loves, Vlastos argues, is the Idea(s). This critique struck a nerve among scholars working on Plato, and a great number of them have discussed how Plato may be affected by and defended from it. An opinion on this criticism is therefore often called for. In this regard, my reader should note that although I take Vlastos to have had a major impact on the subject of the individual as an object of love in Plato, this dissertation will not...

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10 Here, and throughout the thesis, I use the supposedly “unmarked” male pronouns when speaking of Plato’s views (and other Greek thinkers’), including when I exemplify (at least typically). When writing about Plato, whose characters are (almost) exclusively male, I find this to be the least confusing choice.

11 Vlastos (1973, 9) argues that:

“The egoistic perspective of “love” so conceived becomes unmistakable when Socrates, generalizing, argues that “if one were in want of nothing, one would feel no affection,…and he who felt no affection would not love.” The lover Socrates has in view seems positively incapable of loving others for their own sake, else why must he feel no affection for anyone whose good-producing qualities he did not happen to need?”

12 I use “Form” and “Idea” interchangeably.

provide a thorough account of his criticism.14 I will, however, touch upon it briefly in Chapter 2, section 2.6.

What I aim to provide is a close reading and careful analysis of (i) the unfolding of erôs in the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I, (ii) how Socrates in these dialogues puts his expertise on erôs into practice, and (iii) how Socrates’ erotic educational methods are related to his practice of philosophy. A close reading and careful analysis of these three points are crucial in order to understand the rich philosophical content of the dialogues here assessed, and for understanding how this is conveyed to the interlocutors – and also to us readers. I aim to show how this, in turn, may ultimately provide telling information about how Plato perceived not only the philosopher Socrates, but also the philosopher in general, and the practice of philosophy itself.

My overarching thesis is that Socrates has educational methods that participate in his expertise on erôs. In addition, I argue that Socrates uses two kinds of psychological techniques, which I call shaming and charming, while practicing his erotic expertise through his educational methods. I argue that these methods and techniques are systematically put to use in the three encounters I assess. However, as we shall see, they are specifically adapted in light of the personality of each interlocutor. Although the erotic aspects in the three encounters have generic components, each encounter thus depicts and underscores philosophy as an interpersonal, erotic activity.

In the subsequent sections of this introductory chapter, I seek to further clarify my topic, aim, and method. The structure is as follows: In section 0.2., I comment on my selection of Platonic dialogues. Thereafter, in section 0.3., I offer some reflections on the methodology I have adopted. Finally, I offer an outline of the dissertation in section 0.4.

0.2. The selection of dialogues

The decision to study the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I was based on their many common features. They are all typically reckoned (i) as Socratic dialogues revolving around a single “what is it” question; (ii) as among Plato’s so-called “early dialogues”; and (iii) as playfully, yet straightforwardly, written; i.e. as light-spirited, less complex, and easier to read and comprehend than the so-called “middle and late dialogues”. Not

14 Others may find it strange that I do not discuss another contribution of Vlastos’; namely the article titled “The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All” (1994). On this point, I will only say that I wish to focus specifically on the erotic aspects of Socrates’ educational methods, which are rather neglected in the model Vlastos offers. One may also note that Vlastos’ model of elenchus has been thoroughly criticized; cf. e.g. Benson (2002); Brickhouse and Smith (2002); Tarrant (2002).
providing a clear-cut answer to the “what is it” question, however, they all seem to (iv) end in perplexity, or impasse (aporia). Moreover, (v) none of the dialogues are considered to be among Plato’s so-called “canonical dialogues”.¹⁵ Furthermore, (vi) the eponymous interlocutors of the three dialogues share common features, as they are all described as remarkably good-looking youths from noble families. Lysis is the youngest (around twelve or thirteen), Charmides is approximately seventeen years old, and Alcibiades – even though it is said that he has lost his youthful bloom (Alc.I. 131c11–12; e11–12) – is estimated to be no more than eighteen.¹⁶ Another similarity is that (vii) the conversation in each dialogue arises in response to a telltale characteristic of the eponymous youth.¹⁷ The dialogues are also (viii) typically considered to belong to Plato’s so-called “erotic dialogues”, which in addition to the Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I, include the Symposium, the Phaedrus, and to some extent the Republic. (I write so-called here, because I find the characterization “Plato’s erotic dialogues” to be somewhat misleading, as erôs is a concept of major philosophical importance in many of Plato’s other dialogues as well.) It is also (ix) generally agreed that the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I are only secondarily about erôs.

The Lysis is generally taken to be about philia. Philia is usually translated with friendship, and this dialogue is therefore sometimes referred to as “Plato’s dialogue on friendship”.¹⁸ The Charmides is typically viewed as a dialogue primarily about the virtue sôphrosunê. This term is often translated as “temperance”, “moderation”, or “sound-mindedness”, and one who possesses this virtue, i.e. one who is sôphrôn, is typically described as someone who is in control of his desires. I will mostly use “moderation” when translating sôphrosunê. The main topic of the Alcibiades I, finally, is often taken to be “self-knowledge”, as the dialogue in several ways deals with the Delphic maxim “Know Thyself” (cf. e.g. Alc.I. 124a7–b3). My analysis seeks primarily to reveal the important role erôs plays in the dialogues. This is not to say that I take these dialogues to be only about erôs, and not at all about what they are generally taken to be concerned with. On my reading, the dialogues are all thematically rich, and the role erôs plays in them should be interpreted as integral to the dialogues’ other major topics.

Regarding the grouping of Platonic dialogues, it has been claimed that:

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¹⁵ This expression is used by e.g. Smith (2004, 104; 106) in his paper on the authenticity of the Alcibiades I. Among the dialogues that Smith seems to take as “canonical” are Euthyphro, Apology, Republic, Hippias Minor, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno, Symposium, and Phaedrus.

¹⁶ Twenty years old at most, cf. Nails (2002). Regarding Plato’s persons and their history, Nails’ study is immensely helpful.

¹⁷ As emphasized by Friedländer (1965). Friedländer’s second volume contains essays on all three dialogues, and I draw on his analysis of the dialogues and information regarding their reception from antiquity up to modern times.

¹⁸ Cf., e.g. Bolotin (1979). I provide a more detailed account of this term in Ch. 2, section 2.2.
Introduction

If one accepts (as I do) the grouping of the Platonic dialogues according to their intrinsic content as early, middle and late, then one of the hallmarks of Platonic political philosophy is the transition from the early protreptic dialogues, which are mainly based on the Socratic elenchus of the short question and answer, to the middle dialogues, in which there is a sudden flowering not only of more rounded human portraits but of Socrates’ interest in the passions of the soul, especially eros and thumos (…) Whereas the early dialogues show Socrates attempting in the main to convince his interlocutors strictly according to reasonable argument, in the middle period, Socrates is shown as being aware that the intellect must also be reached through the passions and emotions (Newell 2013, 35).

Against the view here outlined by Newell, I hope to show that the human portraits of the Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I are not simply less “rounded”, but rather portraits of young human minds, less fixed and more adaptable to Socratic seduction. They do indeed lack the depth of for example Parmenides’ mind. This, however, should be seen as only natural, taking their age into account. Furthermore, I hope to show that Plato, through how he has Socrates approach these youths in the relevant dialogues, appears as significantly aware that their young minds are persuaded not just by reasonable arguments, but just as much (if not to say more) by appealing precisely to their passions. Whereas Plato in the (presumably) later dialogues to a great extent shows Socrates discussing how the intellect is reached through the passions, he rather shows Socrates demonstrating this point in the Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I.¹⁹

There are other dialogues in Plato’s corpus which could have fitted into my investigation. Especially worth mentioning are the Euthydemus and the Meno, in which Socrates also discusses with rather young interlocutors, and in which education and learning are central topics. Another dialogue in which Socrates talks to a rather young man is the Phaedrus. Unlike the Meno and the Euthydemus, this dialogue is traditionally reckoned as among the (so-called) erotic dialogues. I also considered devoting a chapter to the Theaetetus, in which Socrates also speaks with a young man (Theaetetus). This dialogue is significantly erotically charged, even though it is not traditionally reckoned among Plato’s erotic dialogues. The Parmenides was yet another candidate. In this dialogue, Socrates is the young person, and the older philosopher-educator is Parmenides.²⁰ These dialogues, the Phaedrus, the Theaetetus, and the Parmenides, are all reckoned among Plato’s nobler accomplishments, and they have all been studied quite extensively. The

¹⁹ I will not discuss the grouping of dialogues into “early, middle and late” in this study; for this classification, see e.g. Brandwood (1990). Works focusing specifically on how to read so-called “early dialogues” include e.g. Teloh (1986) and Wolfsdorf (2004).

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Gill (2012, 1, n. 3). Wyller (1972) argues that the Parmenides is the previously mentioned dialogue referred to as The Philosopher, a view that is criticized by Panagiotou (1973). Other studies of the Parmenides include e.g. Miller (1991), Meinwald (1991).
erotic aspects in the two latter dialogues, however, can hardly be said to have
erceived a proper amount of scholarly attention. Though neither of the
dialogues just mentioned have been singled out for closer study in this
dissertation, I will in particular use the Symposium and the Theaetetus as
touchstones when I elaborate on Socrates’ erotic expertise in the next
chapter.

Summing up, one of the main reasons why I have chosen to investigate
the Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I, is their many common features.
Moreover, the erotic aspects of these dialogues have not been as thoroughly
studied as for example the erotic content of the Symposium and the Phaedrus
(which are both considered Platonic masterpieces). By studying the erotic
aspects in the Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I, and Socrates’ erotic
educational methods in these dialogues, I hope to contribute to a better
overall understanding of the practice of erôs in Plato. Furthermore, my study
suggests a shift in focus concerning these three dialogues compared to most
current scholarship: These three dialogues should be read as complex
dialogues, offering us important information concerning how Plato, and
Plato’s Socrates, regard the role of erôs with respect to learning, self-
cultivation, and the very practice of philosophy.

0.3. Reflections on method

0.3.1. A comparative study

I study the Lysis, the Charmides, and the Alcibiades I separately, in the sense
that each dialogue is given its own chapter. As mentioned earlier, however, I
will also use other dialogues as touchstones while studying these three
dialogues. In particular, I will investigate how the accounts provided in the
Symposium and the Theaetetus of the nature of erôs and Socrates’ erotic
expertise (which I outline in Chapter 1), fit the accounts of how erôs is
practiced in these three dialogues. This is not to subordinate the dialogues I
study to these two far more famous dialogues of Plato. Rather, it is because
applying other dialogues as touchstones in this way is most helpful while
identifying and revealing the specific erotic content in the Lysis, Charmides,
and Alcibiades I.

My study may thus, at least to some extent, be characterized as
comparative. I will, however, focus more on the dialogues’ similarities and
affinities than on their differences. My study will furthermore focus on
specific parts of the dialogues, in particular those depicting Socrates’
encounters with the youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, and how

21 One notable exception here is Gordon (2010) and (2012, 125–145).
Socrates uses his erotic educational methods. I have chosen this method, although I know full well that comparative studies of two or more Platonic dialogues have received methodological criticism.\textsuperscript{22} The fact that the context in which a given topic is discussed is different in every dialogue may explain the hesitation among some scholars to compare Platonic dialogues. It is therefore necessary to explain the benefits of comparing Plato’s dialogues beyond merely stating the fact (which indeed is a fact) that although my method is not uncontroversial, it is nonetheless quite common for scholars working on Plato to compare his dialogues.

The differences between each dialogue make it problematic to argue that Plato’s views are entirely consistent across them. Regarding erôs as well, it has been argued that “Plato does not have a comprehensive theory of love” (Ferrari 1993, 248). On this point, Gordon notes that:

Plato does not, to my mind, have an overarching theory or doctrine of eros that is consistent across dialogues or that emerges in any single dialogue. I would say the same, in fact, of all philosophical concepts that are given importance in Plato’s corpus. (Gordon 2012, 3)

I have no wish to argue for the claim that Plato’s views on erôs are entirely consistent across the dialogues. However (as Gordon also emphasizes), this is not to say that there is no consistency across the dialogues at all. I will emphasize the consistency I find. My method may thus be called heuristic, in the sense that I look for similar patterns and consistencies in how Socrates’ erotic art is described and demonstrated in and across Plato’s dialogues.

The subject of erôs and education in Plato is rich and complex; I will not be able to cover this subject in its entirety in this dissertation. Still, I hope that my study will contribute to my reader’s (as well as to my own) overall understanding of the subject. In order to guide my reader (and myself) towards a (more) comprehensive understanding of Socrates’ erotic art and of the nature and practice of erôs in Plato, however, I believe that it is helpful – and perhaps even necessary – to identify and investigate the consistencies to be found on the subject; not only within dialogues, but across dialogues as well.

Some scholars distinguish between what they call “earlier and newer traditions of Plato scholarship”.\textsuperscript{23} On this distinction, studies belonging to

\textsuperscript{22} E.g. by McCabe, who makes the following remark in the preface (no page number listed) to Penner and Rowe’s Lysis (2005): “It is tempting to read them piecemeal – by analyzing the arguments, by espousing or rejecting the theories or by praising Plato’s literary expertise. It is equally tempting to search for Platonic views across dialogues, selecting passages from throughout the Platonic corpus. But Plato offers us the dialogues to read whole and one by one”.

\textsuperscript{23} The distinction, in which the former is described as more focused on “broader investigations” and the latter on “technical details”, is highlighted by e.g. Rider (2013, 263).
the earlier tradition are said to typically investigate a broader sweep of Plato’s thoughts, and to avoid getting caught up in the details, whereas studies belonging to the newer tradition rather offer piecemeal readings on a single issue, and are more fixated on the technical details. My study has similarities to the earlier tradition, in the sense that I compare different dialogues, seeking to form a coherent understanding of Socrates’ methods and Plato’s philosophy. However, in at least three ways, my study also resembles studies belonging to the newer tradition of Plato scholarship: (i) I emphasize the details on one subject in particular (erôs); and (ii) offer an individual chapter on each of the three dialogues I assess, and in this way, I treat them separately; and (iii) I focus merely on certain passages in the dialogues. As this last point reveals, none of the chapters offer complete commentaries on any single dialogue.

0.3.2. Plato’s dramatic dialogues

My topic requires an investigation that pays attention to the dialogues’ dramatic form, including their contexts and literary devices. In short, I study the dramatic structures and literary devices under the hypothesis that they are not merely external “garnish” added by Plato for the readers’ amusement, but rather important and integral to the philosophical content. On my reading, the philosophical content of the dialogues cannot be neatly distinguished from their dramatic form, as the philosophical content is to be found in the form of the dialogues. This means that the Socratic argumentation cannot be intelligibly understood apart from its dramatic context (and vice versa).24

The way in which Plato offers his reflections—whether on erôs, courage, (self-) knowledge, or something else—differs from how many philosophers argue for their views. Whereas many philosophers seek to present their arguments as “to-the-point” and unambiguously as possible, Plato instead presents persons, or more precisely, characters, who present arguments. That is to say, Plato does not write in propra persona. His

See also Rist (2012, esp. pp. 9–10), whom Rider reviews. I would say that Rider, who in recent years has written several papers on Plato’s so-called “early dialogues”, and whose work tends to intersect with my own, belongs to the newer tradition, whereas Rist (as he himself claims) belongs to the earlier. I take this distinction not to signify a difference between so-called (strictly) “analytic” versus (more) “literary” studies of Plato, but rather as concerned with the focus of attention.

24 Among the philosophers emphasizing the importance of the “literary” in Plato’s dialogues, arguing that this is inseparable from the “philosophical”, is Gadamer. Gadamer argues that interpreters of Plato should pay attention to more than what is explicitly stated, and to look especially for what is merely hinted at. Cf. esp. Gadamer (1980, 140; 71). Philosophers who in recent years have stressed this point include Gonzalez (esp. 1995a, Ch. 1), Kahn (1996), Krentz (1983). These points also fit a statement in the sixth letter, where the author (whether it is Plato or someone else) writes that playfulness is the sister of solemnity (Let.VI. 323d).
philosophical texts are dramatic dialogues, in which we readers get to know a range of characters advocating various arguments, or merely stating their viewpoints. As readers, we are also typically made aware of the characters’ interests, professions, social status, age, dreams and desires – in light of which we may understand their arguments and viewpoints.

The characters are both fictional and non-fictional; Plato did not distinguish biography from fiction. Whereas some of the characters are historical figures, such as Socrates, to whom we find references in several works of various writers contemporary with Plato, we have very little information about others. The dialogues also have different dramatic dates; Plato indicates the dramatic time in which a dialogue is set through references to e.g. “happenings” (such as wars and festivals) and descriptions of the historical characters. One may bear in mind that while literature, history, and philosophy are today often viewed as independent disciplines and hence studied separately, Plato does not operate with the contemporary understanding of these fields. This is reflected in the Greek term ἱστορία, from which the term “history” originates, which means “knowledge acquired by investigation”. It is a so-called “umbrella term”, that relates not just to past events, but also to the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events.25

As a result of Plato’s way of writing philosophical texts, his own views are not easily detected. This is true not only for Plato’s views on the nature and practice of erôs, but also for any other of his philosophical concepts, doctrines, or theories. Moreover, given the polyphony26 in Plato’s dialogues, there may be a difference between Plato’s views on erôs, and the various views on erôs presented by his characters (including Socrates). There may also be a difference between Plato’s dramatic character Socrates’ views on erôs, and the historical Socrates’ views.27 (Indeed, this uncertainty applies to every historical character in Plato’s works.) Furthermore, characters of Plato may change their views; not only within a dialogue, but also across dialogues. The views on erôs held by the young Alcibiades in the Alcibiades I, for example, might differ from those expressed by the significantly older Alcibiades in the Symposium.

Although the question “who speaks for Plato?” is undeniably of scholarly interest, it is – as e.g. Nails (2000) argues in her essay “Mouthpiece

26 This is originally a musical term, but when used in literature it signifies a feature of narrative encompassing a range of voices and viewpoints. It has become a standard expression for describing Plato’s works. Bakhtin was the first to use “polyphony” as a literary concept (e.g. when he described Dostoevsky’s prose).
27 This potential difference, or gap, may or may not be intended by Plato. For further reading on this issue, see e.g. Vlastos (1991) and Brickhouse and Smith (1994).
Erôs and Education

Schmouthpiece” – not in itself a philosophical question. Nevertheless, it is worthy of scholarly attention, as the interpretation of Plato’s philosophy is affected by the answer. Aristotle, who was a student at Plato’s academy for many years, often refers to Plato’s views as those argued for by the leading speaker. Typically, this is Socrates. Are we accordingly to view Socrates as Plato’s mouthpiece? Not necessarily. I believe Plato intentionally leaves it up to the reader to assess the meaning and relevance behind the statements made in his dialogues, and to determine the characters’ credibility and degree of conviction. As a philosopher, Plato offers us discussions of generic philosophical questions – not clear-cut arguments about them. Even though Plato typically presents Socrates as the leading speaker, Plato occasionally ascribes this role to one of Socrates’ interlocutors. And although we have reasons to assume that Plato was not sympathetic towards the views of for example Thrasymachus and Callicles, he certainly must have found them interesting enough to be worth exploring.

Ostenfield (2000) has asked and argued – and even titled his essay: “Who speaks for Plato? Everyone!” I am inclined to go one step further down this road and answer “everything!” My point here is not that we do not need to distinguish between what is positively and negatively weighted in the dialogues. It seems evident that we ought do so. It seems equally evident, however, that scholars working on Plato’s dialogues are not always in agreement regarding what, exactly, should be weighted positively or negatively. As Bondell (2002, 5) remarks: “What matters, and how it matters, are always questions of interpretation”. My point here is simply that, on my account, not only the characters’ statements convey Plato’s philosophy, but also the setting Plato places them in while they speak, as well as their behavior during the discussions, are philosophically significant. And although Socrates is often depicted by Plato as having what are presented as the preferable virtues and views, we should not unthinkingly interpret what Plato has him say and do as fully overlapping with Plato’s own preferences and convictions. In fact, even if we did, we would have problems detecting Plato’s views, as Socrates contradicts himself both across and within dialogues.

In Chapters 2–4, each of which is based on one particular dialogue, I will include some remarks about the dialogues’ respective reception histories. I will pay specific attention to the prologues of these dialogues. I will also identify what I call the voiced plot: This is the explicitly expressed plan, or

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28 Published in Press (2000). In the introduction to this essay-collection, Press (editor) provides an account of both ancient and recent views on the “mouthpiece principle” in Plato.
29 For a collection and discussion of passages where Aristotle states this, see Cherniss (1944).
30 Diogenes Laertius (D. L. 3.52.) was, like Aristotle, under the impression that we can detect Plato’s views from the leading speaker, and adds the Athenian stranger, the Eleatic Stranger and Timaeus to the list of these. (There might be good reasons for adding Parmenides to this list as well.)
rather scheme, that moves the drama forward. In the *Lysis* and the *Charmides*, the voiced plots are secretly made, i.e. only vocalized among some of the characters and to us readers – Lysis and Charmides are themselves unaware of the plan Socrates and the other characters have devised. I aim to show how erôs is central in the setting and drama in the three dialogues I assess, which all depict educational encounters between Socrates and young boys. As we shall see, erôs is not merely, perhaps not even primarily, discussed in argumentative form in these dialogues, it is rather something experienced and practiced by the characters in the dialogues. In understanding these experiences and this practice of erôs, a whole range of factors other than the strict arguments provided are relevant. Plato’s characters not only present arguments, they also present their perspectives through analogies, myths, metaphors, jokes, poems, stories, etc. I do not perceive these as just a metaphor, just a joke, etc. Rather, I argue that they are playing a crucial role in conveying the philosophical content, and I will attend to these when they appear in the passages I study.

As we shall see, their interpretation in turn requires historical and cultural awareness. In particular, Plato uses myths to explain various phenomena. Originally, muthos referred to a story commonly perceived as true, and as unveiling the origin (archê) of a phenomenon. The memorable in Archaic Greece relied on such myths, transmitted orally through poetry. Plato frequently applies and alludes to these traditional myths. However, instead of keeping strictly to these, Plato also supplied them by inventing myths of his own. “Myth is about a ‘beyond’ which must be located in a distant past or a space which is different from one in which the narrator and his public reside”, Brisson (1998, 7) explains. By analyzing the myths, then, we may grasp reflections that are not spelled out in an argument.

At its core, this section has focused on how we should interpret Plato. As we have seen, and will continue to see throughout the dissertation, Plato’s dialogues are immensely rich in voices, viewpoints, metaphors, analogies, myths, poetic references, etc. To sum up, I believe that in order to recognize and understand how the nature and practice of erôs unfold in Plato – as well as to understand what is at stake in each of the three dialogues – a philosophical inquiry that attends to the dramatic structures and literary devices is required. I will therefore pay attention to what Socrates and the other characters say; not only to their arguments, but also to the myths and metaphors stated, as well as to how the characters behave, and to the context and circumstances in which they are situated while the drama unfolds, in order to understand what it is that Plato wants to elicit through having his characters say and do this or that in various settings.

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31 Cf. e.g. the introduction in Brisson (1998). One should note that Plato’s use of myths is a much discussed topic. Brisson’s study *Plato the Myth Maker* is an important contribution to this debate.
0.4. Outline of the dissertation

In Chapter 1, “Erôs and Socrates’ Erotic Expertise”, I will present an introductory account of the nature and practice of erôs. In the same chapter I will also provide an account of Socrates’ erotic expertise, which on the account I suggest includes his erotic educational methods and the psychological techniques of shaming and charming.

Chapters 2–4 each revolve around a single dialogue and Socratic encounter. I will focus on Socrates’ erotic expertise, which I argue is demonstrated in each of the three dialogues I assess in these chapters. In Chapter 2, “Erôs and the Need for Knowledge”, I emphasize how the Lysis is particularly concerned with erôs and the need for knowledge. In this chapter I aim to show how Socrates seeks to instill erôs for knowledge in the boy Lysis. In Chapter 3, “Undressing Charmides”, I argue that the Charmides, through Socrates’ and Charmides’ behavior and demeanor, demonstrates how certain character traits of a person are important in the practice of philosophy. In Chapter 4, “Shaming and Seduction”, I highlight how Socrates applies shaming and charming as techniques while persuading the young Alcibiades to educate himself. I further argue that the Alcibiades I demonstrates how lovers are essential in the process of educating and examining oneself.

In Chapter 5, I first provide a summary of the previous chapters, reminding my reader of the main issues and arguments. Thereafter, I turn to a few questions raised in the course of my readings. Finally, I summarize the central results of my study.
1.1. Origin and translations

In Plato, we find several myths about Erôs, the Greek god of love. A myth that stands out as indicative concerning the nature of erôs is the myth of origin told by Diotima, in Socrates’ speech in the Symposium. We are there told that Erôs’ mother Penia, whose name means something akin to “lack”, tricked his father Poros, whose name indicates that he was someone who found his way to “the resources”, into having a child with her (Symp. 203b1–d8). This parentage accounts for Erôs’ intermediate nature, and his intermediacy between “poverty” and “plenty” plays out in several different domains: Erôs is described as a go-between and mediator, and as being between the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, wisdom and stupidity, mortality and immortality, and even being and non-being (Symp. 202a1 ff.).

Being neither human or god, Erôs is referred to as a daimôn, a “half-god”, and a daimonion, meaning literally “a divine little something”. When referring specifically to the god by name, I use an initial capital. When referring to the concept, however, I use the initial capital only if it begins a sentence. Though I make this distinction between the god Erôs and the concept “erôs”, one should always bear in mind the intimate connection between the two.

Erôs is a special kind of intense, passionate desire. Even so, the term “erôs” is not as often translated with “intense, passionate desire”, as it is translated with the shorter, wide-ranging term “love”.

There are some problems with this latter translation, however. These problems are especially pressing if one agrees with Gordon’s statement that “eros is not an emotion,”

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32 From Symp. 202a1 ff. Concerning the intermediacy of erôs, see e.g. Scott and Welton (2008).
33 The word daimonion is in Socrates’ speech used as a synonym for daimôn. Translations of the term daimonion include “divine sign” (see e.g. Tht. 151a4 in Cooper (1997)). An article that provides a study of the term daimonion and its usage is Droge (2007).
34 The term love is a cognate of the Sanskrit lubh. This is a fascinating term, from which a number of related concepts are derived, both nouns and verbs, including the English terms “dear”, “to desire”, “to go astray”, “to allure”, “to be longing”, etc. Cf. Lanman (1884, 234). We shall see that the term “erôs” and its cognates, in effect, when used by Plato, seems closer in its conceptual content and grammar to lubh, than to the term love.
but love is, or at least is commonly taken to be by most English speakers” (Gordon 2012, 6). Let me make a few remarks to this statement, and to whether or not erôs may be said to be an emotion: First, it is not obvious that love is an emotion, and not e.g. a mental state, and/or attitude, or some kind of practical or personal commitment between persons. Nor is it obviously true that most English speakers take love to be an emotion. I will, however, refrain from attempting to provide an answer to what “love” is; and rather focus on the nature of erôs emerging in Plato.\footnote{What is clear, however, is that erôs is not essentially a moral emotion, or phenomenon, as has been argued in the contemporary debate on love, e.g. by Velleman (1999). Another central voice in this debate is Frankfurt (esp. 2004). Frankfurt, too, emphasizes the moral aspect of love, particularly through emphasizing “caring” and “valuing”; of which he defines “love” a variant, cf. Frankfurt (2004, esp., 11; 21; 38). Indeed, the modern debate alludes to ancient and early modern philosophy, and the distinction between erôs and philia (and also agape) is frequently used. The language in this debate, however, is often distinctively Kantian in flavor – not only in Velleman (1999), but also in Frankfurt (2004), who we may also say revisits the main question in ancient philosophy, namely: How should we live? (See esp. Frankfurt (2004, 42)). An interesting study worth mentioning in this context is also Jollimore (2011), who focuses especially on romantic love, and who argues against Velleman and (especially) Frankfurt, on many issues, even though he too regards love as, essentially, “a moral phenomenon” (Jollimore 2011, 4). One should note immediately, however, that even though the contemporary debate on love is fascinating and helpful when studying the phenomenon love as a philosophical subject, I nonetheless predominantly use studies by scholars of ancient philosophy.}

Of greater relevance here is that it is not obvious that erôs is not an emotion. For one thing, if one accepts the understanding of erôs as passionate desire, but rejects the description of erôs as an emotion, one would need to argue that passionate desire is not an emotion. Even if one argued this convincingly, however, it would not be sufficient in establishing that erôs is not considered an emotion in Plato. There are some indications in Plato suggesting that erôs is an emotion: In the \textit{Philebus} (47e1–2), Socrates lists erôs in the same category with several (other) emotions (\textit{pathē}); “wrath, fear, longing, lamentations, love [ἔρως], jealousy, malice, and other things like that”. I do not, however, take this quote from the \textit{Philebus} as sufficient textual evidence for proving that erôs is an emotion according to Plato, or that it was regarded as an emotion in the ancient world more generally. Given that Erôs is also a daimôn, it seems evident that erôs is at any rate not exclusively an emotion. Still, it is far from clear that it is not an emotion at all: It is inevitably the case that when a person has erôs towards an object, there is an emotional tone to it: It feels a certain way, and intensely and passionately so.\footnote{One may here note that that in comparison to Platonic erôs, Homeric erôs is significantly less passionate, including for example desires to eat (e.g., \textit{Iliad}, 1. 469). Cf. Befiore (2012, 8–13), with ref. to Ludwig (2002).} Erôs, then, even though there may be disagreement as to whether or not it is an emotion, or whether or not it is possible to argue (as I
am inclined to do) that erôs is partly an emotion, essentially relates to human emotions.

In this section, I have commented on Erôs’ genesis as outlined in the Symposium, and discussed translations of the term “erôs”. I have not listed all the arguments for, or against, using the common translation “love”, but my reader should note that I take “intense, passionate desire” to be the best translation of erôs. Still, the term “love” and cognates of this term will occur in this study. In most cases, however, I will use the Ancient Greek term. When expressing that a person has erôs towards an object, I will alternatively write that the person “erotically desires” the object.37

1.2. A force directed towards objects

In the present section, I will analyze five overarching points concerning erôs qua force (dunamis) directed towards objects.38 Throughout the dissertation, I will take these points to be applicable across dialogues.

(i) Erôs is a motivational force, i.e. a force motivating us to act, with the intention of obtaining the objects we erotically desire. This point identifies erôs as an intentional and motivational force. Erôs motivates us to act with the intention of obtaining the objects we erotically desire. For the kind of passionate desire that erôs generates is directed towards intentional objects. One way Socrates describes this feature of erôs is by pointing to the parallel in the grammar of “erôs” and of “father” – by definition, a father is the father of some child.39 Similarly, erôs is of “some thing”, in the sense that it is directed towards “some thing”. In other words, erôs has to have a correlate object. I will henceforth refer to such objects as “erotic objects” and “objects of erôs” interchangeably.

(ii) The erotic objects are frequently characterized as instantiating the quality beauty. Erôs is said to aim at beauty (to kalon), or at beautiful things.40 Accordingly, the erotic objects are characterized as instantiating the

37 Erôs has several derived verbs. The verb ἔραν is closely connected to ἔρασθαι, which is an a-thematic verb of the same root. There are some differences in usage; whereas ἔρασθαι is used in all tempora by the poets, the prose writers typically use forms of the thematic α-contract verb ἔραν in present and imperfect tense. Prose writers also use forms of ἔρασθαι in e.g. aorist, such as ἔρασθην “fell in love”.

38 The term dunamis, meaning force or power, is associated with Erôs for example in Symp. 188d3–7. One may, alternatively, say that Erôs has (echein) a divine power, or more generally speak of the “force(s) of Erôs”. In accordance with the just mentioned relation between the half-god and the concept, however, it seems equally correct to speak of “erôs qua force”, as it seems to speak of the “forces (or powers) of Erôs”.


40 Cf. e.g. Symp. 201a; 203d; 210a–212b.
quality of beauty. This point, then, relates erôs to the specific evaluative term kalon. One should bear in mind here that even though the term kalon is usually translated with “beauty”, it is wide-ranging, covering also the fine, noble, admirable, and honorable. A shared feature of the objects considered kalon, is that they are perceived as attractive and alluring; they are inviting, so to speak. \(^{41}\)

(iii) An object of erôs is an object that the erotic subject lacks and needs (i.e. is endees of), and an object that belongs to the erotic subject (i.e. is phusei okeion to it). This point expresses two necessary, but not (I take it) sufficient conditions of an erotic object. What I call the “erotic subject” here (and henceforth) signifies the person who erotically desires an object. Erôs is said to desire the very things that he lacks (Symp. 202d1–3). \(^{42}\) Accordingly, that which erotically desires, desires what it is lacking:

what desires, desires whatever it’s lacking \(\text{[ἐνδεές]}\) (...) what is lacking, in that case, is friend of whatever it’s lacking (...) And what becomes lacking is whatever has something taken from it (...) it is what belongs to us (τοῦ οἰκείου), then, that’s actually \(\text{[τυγχάνει οὖσα]}\) the object of passion \(\text{[ἔρως]}\) (Lys. 221d6–221e4). \(^{43}\)

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\(^{41}\) In Plato’s dialogue the Cratylus, Socrates and Hermogenes are led to investigate the etymology of \(\text{τὸ καλὸν}\) (Crtl. 416b). It is here suggested that the term kalon is etymologically connected to the verb καλάω, meaning to call (forth), or invite. For a study of this, see Chrétien (2004, Ch. 1). That “what is kalon is attractive”, may further be interpreted as a precursor – if not to say the first expression of – the idea of the magnetism of the good and genuinely beautiful. The Phaedrus may in particular be said to deal with this idea. A recent study that discusses the magnetism of the good and its history is Tenenbaum (2007), who moreover defends the accurateness of this idea (or claim), which was resumed in medieval philosophy. A more detailed discussion of the nature of to kalon is to be found in Plato’s Hippias Major. For a study of Plato and the question of beauty, see e.g. Hyland (2008). Hyland (2008) analyzes Plato’s concept of beauty as it emerges in the Hippias Major, Symposium, Phaedrus, and the Second and Seventh Letters.

\(^{42}\) The Greek reads thus: \(\text{ἀλλὰ μὴν Ἔρωτα ἔνδειαν τῶν ἄγαθῶν καὶ καλῶν ἐπιθυμιάν οὐτῶν τούτων ὑποκείμενον ἐστιν} (\text{Symp. 202d1–3}). For this point, see also e.g. Symp. 200a5; 200b9.

\(^{43}\) Here following the translation offered by Penner and Rowe (2005, 349). I discuss this passage further in Ch. 2. It should here be noted, however, that the continuation of Lys. 221e4 reads (still following Penner and Rowe) “the object of passion and friendship [philia] and desire [epithumia], as it appears”. Epithumia (ἐπιθυμία), here translated with desire, is associated with erôs in several passages in the Lysis (e.g. at 211d7–8, 211b7–8 and 221e7–222a7). It is usually described as having to do with human appetites for bodily wellbeing. As noted in the Introduction, I will not offer a thorough analysis of the tripartition of the soul; still, I wish to remind my reader that epithumia is described as one of the three parts (cf. Introduction, section 0.1., p. 15, n. 9). Philia is often translated with friendship, though we shall see, in Ch. 2, section 2.2., that this is a problematic translation. I take it that although the erotic objects and the objects of philia and epithumia are said to have the characteristics noted in the quote above (Lys. 221d6–221e4) in common, these characteristics should be read as only necessary, and not sufficient, for the objects of respectively erôs, epithumia and philia.
This passage reveals significant information regarding erôs and its objects: First, the erotic object is here characterized as an object which “what desires” (i.e. Erôs or an erotic subject), somehow lacks, in the sense of being endees of it. That of which one is endees, i.e. that which one lacks, and is in need of, is not simply that which one does not (yet) have, nor that which one merely wants. It is rather, as Kosman argues, “that which one lacks, or wants in the sense of needing, missing and requiring for the fulfillment and completion of some nature” (Kosman 1976, 59). In this way, “erôs forces us to confront our lack and need” (Hunter 2004, 17). Secondly, Socrates here says that even though we are separated from these objects that “belong to us”, we desire them, and this desire is connected to the fact that we are separated and endees of them. They “belong to us”, in the sense that they are oikeion (οἰκεῖον) to us. I interpret what is oikeion to us as not necessarily being what we possess, but what is “our own”.44 It is also specified that what is phusei oikeion to us appears to be something we must love (at Lys. 222a5).

I take this to mean “what belongs to us by nature”. I believe that there is a wider notion of “nature” (φύσις) that is intended here by Plato; i.e. that phusei in this context does not refer to “nature” in the mere physical, biological sense of the term, but rather to its wider, metaphysical notion.45

(iv) Erôs may be directed towards abstract objects. It is important to note that for Plato, knowledge, wisdom and the Forms are all possible (and proper) objects of erôs. There is even a specific argument in the Symposium where Socrates underscores how wisdom may be an object of erôs, summarized here by Sheffield:

…if something is perceived to be beautiful, then Eros desires it; wisdom is perceived to be beautiful; therefore Eros desires wisdom. Further, wisdom [σοφία] is desired because it is one of the most beautiful things [τῶν καλλίστων] (204b2–3). So, Eros is concerned with the beautiful; the more

After all, there are for example objects that would be proper objects of philia, but perverse objects of erôs (such as one’s mother).

44 Oikeion may be translated “feel close”. It is worth noticing, however, that translators offer various translations of this term, which is particularly central in the Lysis. The term is related to the term oikia, meaning house/household. Annas (1993, 262) renders the verb oikeioo as familiarize, arguing that this term has both a personal and a social aspect. Others translate oikeiotes with intimacy (e.g. Nussbaum (2007)). Bolotin uses the translation “akin”, yet remarks that “the alternative rendering ‘one’s own’ should also be kept in mind” (Bolotin 1979, 56, n. 28). See also Gonzalez (2000), who argues that Socrates in the Lysis replaces the traditional notions of what is oikeion to us with a philosophical kinship grounded in wisdom.

45 On this point, I follow e.g. Kosman (1976). Kosman reads this as in harmony with Aristophanes’ statement, that: “now ‘Love’ [erôs] is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete” (Symp. 192e10). (I will not provide an account of Aristophanes’ speech in this dissertation, however: for this, see e.g. Hooper (2013), and the influential papers by Dover (1966) and Saxenhouse (1984).) I return to Kosman’s reading of the Lysis in Ch. 2, section 2.6., p. 77.
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beautiful an object the more Eros desires that object; wisdom is one of the most beautiful objects; therefore Eros is most especially a lover of wisdom.46

According to Sheffield, Socrates seems to think that it follows from the fact that erôs is that part of desire specifically related to beauty, and that wisdom is amongst the most beautiful things, that philosophy is an important activity of erôs.

Another non-human (though not necessarily abstract) object of erôs that we hear of in Plato is “wealth” (ἔρως πλούτου) (Laws, 831c4, 870a2–6). We also find reference to “erotic lovers of ruling” (ἐρασταὶ τοῦ ἄρχειν) (Rep. 521b4). And in the Alcibiades I, we shall see that Alcibiades, according to Socrates, erotically desires (ἐρᾶν) fame (τὸ ὄνομα συμφιλικόν γενέσθαι τοῦ) more than anything else (Alc.1. 124b3–6).

(v) The erotic objects of an erotic subject (A) reveal character traits of (A). To avoid misunderstandings: Erôs is neither a virtue nor a character trait. What this point suggests is that erôs reveals character traits in the sense that what a person erotically desires reveals character trait(s) of that person. When it comes to character traits, these are linked to the virtues in the sense that if you possess a virtue, e.g. sôphrosunê (moderation), then this is manifested in the corresponding character trait of being sôphrôn (moderate). Erôs not being a virtue, it is less obvious how, exactly, it relates to character traits. What is obvious, however, is that in Plato persons are described as having erôs directed towards different objects (e.g. honor, money, wisdom.) I believe this reveals character: If a person is a lover of honor, then this is a character trait of that person. Likewise, if you are a lover of money, then this is a character trait you have. Qua money-lover, you will moreover be reasonably associated with other character traits that tend to accompany the money-lover, character traits such as being materialistic, greedy, etc. This is the sense in which I take erôs to reveal character traits. That is to say, in itself, erôs is not a character trait – but to have erôs for honor, i.e. to be an “honor-lover”, is a character trait. In Chapter 3, I argue that the Charmides (too) underscores how to erotically desire knowledge, i.e. to be a “lover of knowledge”, is a character trait that is crucial in order to practice philosophy well. As explained above, this does not imply that I consider erôs to be a virtue, or erôs to be a character trait, per se; what I suggest is that the object(s) a person erotically desire reveals character traits of that person.

46 Sheffield (2012) (review, no page number listed). One may note that Sheffield here refers to the daimôn Erôs, but bear in mind the intimate connection between the daimôn Erôs and the concept of erôs.
1.3. Noble and shameful aspects of erôs

In the following chapters, I will focus on how Socrates puts his erotic educational methods into practice. In this way, I will focus on how erôs is ascribed a positive role in education in Plato, as important in the noble pursuit for wisdom. It should be noted, however, that erôs is also characterized in negative terms. In this section, I comment on how there are both noble and shameful aspects of erôs. I will also use this opportunity to provide an introductory account of the erotic-educational system in classical Athens, the paiderastia, which Socrates’ erotic educational methods need to be viewed in light of.47

Plato offers several discussions of the paiderastia and pederastic relations, and the paiderastia is the essential backdrop of many dialogues. This holds especially for the so-called erotic dialogues, but also for dialogues that are not typically viewed as erotic.48 The paiderastia was an accepted and respectable institution in the higher social circles of classical Athens. In the pederastic relations, the older lover, i.e. the erastês, offered his guidance – educational, social, political, etc. – in return for pleasure given by (or perhaps rather taken from) the teenage boy, i.e. the erômenos. In the pederastic relationships, the erastês was characterized as the active part. The erômenos, on the other hand, was expected to be passive and reluctant, yet not totally resistant, especially not if the erastês was a respectable man.49 The passivity of the erômenos is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by Plato in the Phaedrus, in a metaphor depicting the erastês as a sculptor and the erômenos as the statue – as if the boy were simply passive material (Phdr. 252d–235b). It is also stated in Plato that the erômenos ought not be motivated by pleasure; instead, the erômenos ought to accept an erastês for the sake of virtue (Symp. 184b6–c3):

Our customs, then, provide for only one honorable way of taking a man as a lover. In addition to recognizing that the lover’s total and willing subjugation to his beloved’s wishes is neither servile nor reprehensible, we allow that there is one – and only one – further reason for willingly subjecting oneself to

47 On the details and role of the paiderastia, see Halperin (1986), Dover (1978), and Laqueur (1990). The term paiderastia (παιδεράστια) combines the term παῖς (gen. παιδός), meaning boy, slave, son, boy child, and the term ἐραστής (erastês), meaning lover. The term παῖς is also the basis for the derivative noun παιδεύσις, meaning pedagogy, educating, learning. I usually use the terms erastês and erômenos, but one should note that there are several terms in Plato denoting these concepts. The erastês is for instance also referred to as erôn, and the erômenos as e.g. paidika.

48 E.g. the Parmenides and the Theaetetus (see esp. Parm. 127b–128a; Tht. 143e–144a.) Even the Gorgias opens with a scene of seduction.

49 One way of thinking about how the young boys should conduct themselves, then, is through Victorian ideas of what was suitable sexual etiquette for women. Cf., e.g. Schmid (1998, 7).
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another which is equally above reproach: that is subjection for the sake of virtue.

This is said by Pausanias, the erastês of Agathon, in what must be regarded as a self-serving speech upon the nature of erôs.\(^5\)\(^0\) Even though it is here stated that the erômenos and future citizen in this way could honorably take on an erastês, the hierarchy between the erastês and erômenos in the paiderastia in Plato should not be underestimated; the erastês is explicitly said to be more “divine” than his boy (Symp. 180b3).\(^5\)\(^1\)

Roughly stated, we find in the Symposium a distinction between “good erôs” motivated by virtue and “bad erôs” motivated by pleasure. In his speech (Symp. 180c–185c), Pausanias notes that there are two different kinds of erôs: The noble and honorable Uranian, in which the erastês’ object of erôs is the erômenos’ soul, which the erastês aims at instilling knowledge and virtue in; and the dishonorable, shameful Pandemotic, in which the aim is bodily sexual pleasure, primarily for the erastês.\(^5\)\(^2\) Whether it is Uranian or Pandemotic is said to depend upon which “Aphrodite” is Erôs’ partner (beginning at Symp. 180c5): Concerning Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation, whom Erôs is said to be inseparable from, there is said to be not a single goddess, but in effect two.\(^5\)\(^3\) One may note that Urania is an epithet of Aphrodite, signifying heavenly (from Uranus, the god of heaven), which distinguishes her from her earthly aspect, Aphrodite Pandemos, meaning “Aphrodite for all the people”.

One could think that this distinction – and other descriptions of erôs suggesting one mental and one physical aspect of erôs – permits us to operate with two different kinds of erôs, i.e., to specify whenever one refers

\(^{50}\) Cf. Plugh (1996, 43), who argues that Pausanias’ speech is made “in a transparently self-serving spirit”. Grube (1958, 98), however, argues that “Pausanias prepares the way for Socrates”.

\(^{51}\) I here want to remind my reader of the difficulty of determining “who speaks for Plato” (cf. Introduction, section 0.3.2.), and not too readily ascribe the view presented by Pausanias to Plato: It is unclear to what extent (if any) the statements reflect Plato’s own view – yet it might have been a (convenient) common belief amongst the older citizens, i.e. the erastai. (The citizens of Athens were all free, adult men, amounted to approximately ten percent of the population of Athens). Moreover, even though the passive role of the erômenos is both depicted and discussed in Plato, we should remember that it by no means is invented by Plato. We find representations in the art from this period of boys looking away during intercourse, whereas the erastês faces his erômenos in delight. As underscored by e.g. Green (1998, 139), decorum (which sets down appropriate social behavior and propriety) was indeed a major factor in all public art; studying homoerotic representations in public art from this period is therefore one way to better understand the normative roles within the paiderastia.

\(^{52}\) The Greek term here used is “τὸ αἰσχρόν”. Though dishonorable is an accurate translation, a more literal translation would perhaps be “shame-causing”.

\(^{53}\) Erôs is here referred to as her partner (Symp. 180d1–3); elsewhere in Plato, however, Erôs is referred to as her son (Phdr. 242d9). Interestingly, it is Phaedrus who in both passages agrees to these two different claims about Erôs’ relation to Aphrodite.
to “heavenly, intellectual erôs” or “earthly, physical erôs”.54 One might even argue that for the sake of clarity, this practice should be mandatory. I believe that the distinction and similar distinctions may be appropriately applied in certain circumstances.55 Even so, imposing the distinction on the Platonic corpus generally is misleading. For one thing, Plato rarely specifies the kind of erôs that is dealt with in terms of the distinction above. The kind of erôs in play is rather detected by paying attention to the context, not by any sort of label. Moreover, even when the context is taken into account, it is not always clear what “kind” of erôs it is.

My main problem with this distinction, however, is that I do not regard Plato, or Plato’s Socrates, as having a completely de-sexualized concept of erôs, which such a distinction may lead someone to believe. There is simply not, in my opinion, sufficient textual evidence for ascribing to Plato (and certainly not to Plato’s Socrates) a de-sexualized concept of erôs. Even though the English term “erotic” (originating from erôs) has sexual connotations that are not necessarily implied when Plato uses the term ἔρως or its cognates, we should not presume that the sexual connotations are always excluded. Furthermore, even though the distinction may be understood as expressing on the one hand a mental and on the other hand a physical state of love, that need not entail that sexual intercourse was unacceptable in the so-called “Uranian relationships”. In addition, the distinction between “heavenly” and “earthly” love is made by Pausanias—not in Socrates’ speech (which includes Diotima’s description), where there seems to be more than two distinct aspects of erôs.

There are other passages in the Symposium, though, in which we find a similar distinction. For example the division between the “lower and higher mysteries” of erotic practice (cf. Symp. 208c1–209e4; 210a1–212a7). This is a simplified description, however, as there is much “in between” the “lower” (i.e. physical), and the “higher” (i.e. psychic, or intellectual) mysteries, so to speak. When Socrates speaks of erôs, he seems rather to describe levels of erôs than different kinds of erôs. On my understanding, Socrates operates with a normative and hierarchical account of erôs; a scale, if you will. When speaking of erôs, however, he does not always make clear which level of the scale he is operating on. Moreover, the distinction between noble and shameful aspects of erôs is not identical to the psychic-bodily one. To conclude this discussion; I will in the following refrain from using labels like “physical erôs” and “intellectual erôs” in referring to erôs.

As we have seen, in the Symposium, Erôs is by Socrates/Diotima said to be per se neither good nor bad, beautiful or ugly, wise or stupid, noble or

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54 As, among others, Belfiore (2012, 2–3) does, using the distinction “ordinary, sexual erôs” and “Socratic erôs”.

55 E.g. when Nussbaum (2007, 190) distinguishes between Alcibiades’ account of “personal erôs” and Socrates’ account of “transcendental erôs”.
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vulgar, but always “in-between”. So too when a person erotically desires (eran) an object; this does not necessarily feel pleasant (or unpleasant), or bring about good (or bad) consequences. Eros may potentially benefit you, i.e. make you more virtuous and wise; yet eros may also make you embrace a pleasure-seeking role. This is underscored in the Phaedrus (at 251d7–252a7):

From the outlandish mix of these two feelings – pain and joy – comes anguish and helpless raving: in its madness the lover’s soul cannot sleep at night or stay put by day; it rushes, yearning, wherever it expects to see the person who has that beauty. When he does see him, it opens the sluice-gates of desire and sets free the parts that were blocked up before. And now that the pain and the goading have stopped, it can catch its breath and once more suck in, for a moment, this sweetest of all pleasures. This it is not at all willing to give up, and no one is more important to it than the beautiful boy. It forgets mother and brothers and friends entirely and doesn’t care at all if it loses wealth through neglect. As for proper and decorous behavior, in which it used to take pride, the soul despises the whole business. Why, it is even willing to sleep like a slave, anywhere, as near to the object of its longing as it is allowed to get!

As described here, eros may even make you go mad. Eros may also manifest itself as a disease, causing fever, warmth and sweat, rendering you weak and slavish, as if you were pierced and bitten by a snake. On the negative characteristics of eros in Plato, Belfiore (2012, 2) remarks that eros is said to be among the affections that impede phronesis (wisdom) and philosophy (Phae. 64c4–68c3). Moreover, it is said to be something that the just person must conquer (Tim. 42a6–b2). Furthermore, Socrates agrees with those who characterize Eros as a tyrant (Rep. 9.573a4–575a7). The Athenian stranger, too, associates eros with madness and hubris, and calls it a sickness that needs restraint (Laws. 6.782d10–783b1).

How then, Belfiore asks, can eros be essential to Socrates’ philosophical activities, as Socrates claims (cf. e.g. Phdr. 257a3–b6)? (And, I would like to add, as Socrates repeatedly demonstrates.) I seek to answer this question by providing an account of Socrates’ erotic art and showing how this relates to his educational methods, which we later in the thesis shall see Socrates using while introducing the youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades to philosophy.

56 Example from Symposium, see 217e–218a.
57 See also Ludwig (2007), who focuses on how eros is treated as both unruly and bad in the Republic, but who further argues that the coercive parts on eros in the Republic are not in harmony with other parts of the Republic itself.
1.4. Erotic reproduction

In this section, we shall see how both the Symposium and the Theaetetus connect metaphors, myths and analogies concerned with erotic arrangements and erotic reproduction to the acquisition of knowledge. I will begin with Socrates’ speech in the Symposium, then turn to the erotically charged metaphors in the Theaetetus.

As noted already, Socrates’ speech in the Symposium includes Diotima’s descriptions of erôs. That is to say, in his speech Socrates divides himself up, so to speak, into two different characters: On the one hand, he appears as the lacking and youthful Socrates; on the other hand, he speaks for the wise priestess Diotima, whom Socrates tells us that he once visited when young. We are told that Diotima questions the young Socrates, and then laughs at his answers (Sym. 202b10). According to Socrates, she even uses his own arguments against him (Sym. 201e2–7). At one point, when Socrates (once again) admits that he does not know the answer to her question, she blurts out: “How do you think you’ll ever master the art of love, if you don’t know that?” (Sym. 207c2–4). Socrates humbly answers (Sym. 207c5–7):

But that’s why I came to you, Diotima, as I just said. I knew I needed a teacher [γνοὺς ὅτι διδασκάλων δέοµαι]. So tell me what causes this [passionate desire], and everything else that belongs to the art of love [τὰ ἐρωτικά].

Socrates says that he went to Diotima, then, because he came to realize that he was in need of a teacher. According to Socrates, Diotima assured him that she would instruct him (using the term διδάσκειν, Sym. 204d2), and Socrates explicitly and repeatedly tells us that it was Diotima who taught him the art of erôs (ἐμὲ τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ἐδίδαξεν, Sym. 201d1; ἐδίδασκέ με, Sym. 207a5).59

We are then told that conception, pregnancy and birth belong to the art of erôs. According to Socrates, Diotima taught him about getting pregnant (κυεῖν), bearing a child (γέννησις), and bringing it forth (τίκτειν), the birth pangs (ὠδῖνες), and finally about nourishing the young (τροφή).60 In the discussion between Socrates and Diotima, erôs is said to be “wanting to possess the good forever” (Sym. 206a11–12), and the way lovers pursue this is by “giving birth in beauty (τόκος ἐν καλῷ), whether in body or in

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58 My emphasis.
59 That, however, is not to say that Socrates did not have his erotic art shaped by others as well; such as for example the erotic poets he alludes to. (In the Appendix, I briefly comment on three of these poets.)
60 These terms are frequently used from Sym. 206c1 to 212a5. For a complete list of frequencies, see Halperin (1990, 262, nn. 15–20).
When Diotima rhetorically asks herself why reproduction, she answers: “Because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. (...) Love must desire immortality” (Symp. 206e7–207a4). But what kinds of “erotic offspring” does the erotic reproduction result in? Hobbs (2000, 251) offers a summary:

..she [Diotima] argues that humans can and do pursue three different kinds of substitute “immortality” (...) these are [i] biological offspring, [ii] fame for noble deeds, and [iii] the creation of artistic, legislative, educative and philosophical works.  

In short; Diotima states that Erôs aims at immortality, and immortality is only possible through reproduction (Symp. 207d1–5), i.e. through the creation of erotic offspring. On this account, reproduction is the characteristic function (i.e. the ergon) of erôs.

At the end of Socrates’ speech, we learn that the third group ((iii) above) ought to be further divided: The poets, craftsmen, and lawmakers beget mere images of true virtue, whereas only philosophers, by contrast, beget in true virtue. This is because the begetting in true virtue is grounded in a philosophical understanding of the nature of Beauty itself. Now how may philosophers come to an understanding of the nature of Beauty itself? The process towards understanding this is explained through a metaphor often referred to as The Ladder of Love. Henceforth, however, I will refer to it as “the erotic ladder”, as in these passages (Symp. 210a5–211d1), the terms translated “love” and “lover” are all cognates of erôs. This is one of the most famous metaphors connecting erôs to the acquisition of knowledge in Plato’s corpus. The metaphor pictures a process where the erôs between an erastês and an erômenos might arouse them to look up from the particularities, such as a particular beautiful body, and towards the most beautiful things, such as wisdom, and ultimately the Form of Beauty itself. Beginning from beauties, Diotima says, one must for the sake of the highest beauty be ever climbing ahead, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful (kalon) bodies “as on the rungs of a ladder” (ὥσπερ ἐπαναβασµοῖς χρώµενον, Symp. 211c3). The steps are (beginning at Symp. 210a): (1) erôs of a particular beautiful body, (first step, the most basic form of sensory erôs); (2) erôs of all beautiful bodies; (3) erôs of the beauty of people’s particular souls; (4) erôs of the beauty of customs (i.e. laws and institutions); (5) erôs of the beauty of learning beautiful things; (6) erôs of Beauty itself (final step). The

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61 Hobbs (2000, 251) argues that these three pursuits may be seen in relation to the tripartition of the soul outlined in the Republic, as the three of them seem to correspond to the pursuits of appetites, thumos, and reason. For the difference between the erotic, psychic offspring of the philosopher and the non-philosopher, see Sheffield (2001).

62 Cf. e.g. Foley (2010).
understanding of Beauty itself, then, is achieved only by those who complete the ascent to the Form of Beauty (cf. Sheffield 2001, 4).

Diotima is described as “a woman who was wise (σοφή) about many things” (Symp. 201d2–3). Now, why would Plato use a woman as instructor in the art of erôs? Did Diotima’s gender give some sort of authority to the special theory of erotic reproduction outlined in the Symposium? All of Plato’s different characters are male, except Diotima. (Women like Aspasia, Sappho, and also Socrates’ wife Xantippe, are referred to only in passing.) That is, if we accept Diotima as a character on her own: We ought to remember here that Diotima is not a guest invited to the drinking party, i.e. she is not actually present at the symposium, but is brought into the discussion by Socrates telling his comrades about his encounter with her. For all we (and the other symposiasts) know, Socrates (the dramatic character) “invented” her on the spot.

Metaphors connecting philosophy and the acquisition of knowledge to erôs, erotic arrangements and erotic reproduction, however, can be found not only in the Symposium. I will now turn to the Theaetetus, which we shall see is rich in this regard as well. In this dialogue, Socrates famously describes himself as a midwife (Tht. 149a1, ff.). The term translated into midwife is ἡ μάαι. He states that he practices the same art as as his mother, the midwife

63 As suggested by Halperin (1990). See also Engelen (2001), who revisits the main question asked by Halperin (1990), namely: “Why is Diotima a woman?”
64 We cannot know for certain whether the historical Socrates ever actually met a woman called Diotima. Among the minority of scholars who argue that the mysterious Diotima is a historical character (on a par with the rest of the characters in the Symposium), and furthermore that it is quite plausible that Diotima and Socrates had an actual encounter, are Kranz (1926a and 1926b) and Wider (1986). (Kranz is primarily concerned with Hölderlin’s reading of the Symposium.)
65 It should be noted that Sedley (2004, 30, n. 52, following Burnyeat 1977b, 7–9), against e.g. Sheffield (2001), has argued that the Theaetetus “is not designed to recall the Symposium.” The rationale Sedley offers is that there is a passage in the Symposium that may be interpreted as suggesting that everyone is pregnant, whereas only some are in the Theaetetus, and even fewer with authentic offsprings. (The passage in the Symposium that Sedley here has in mind reads: “ἔστι γὰρ τοῦτο τόκος ἐν καλῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχήν” at 206b7–8, and the continuation at Symp. 206c1–3 is: “κυοῦσιν γὰρ (…) πάντες ἄνδροι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχήν.”) Even though there is a difference on this point, I do not find it to be a sufficient reason for not investigating the remarkably strong affinities between the two accounts on the art of erôs provided in the Symposium and the Theaetetus. I therefore follow Sheffield (2001) instead on this point, and connect the midwife-metaphor in the Theaetetus with (using Sheffield’s words) “psychic pregnancy” as described in the Symposium. (One may further note that according to Sheffield (2001), the notion of psychic pregnancy plays a similar, significant role in the Meno and the Phaedo as an assumption about the mind.)
66 Socrates’ metaphorical descriptions of himself as a midwife are well known to readers of Plato, and his midwifery skills have been thoroughly studied by several philosophers, including Burnyeat (1977a), Scott (2000), Sedley (2004). (I refer both to Gary Allan Scott and
Phaenarete (Φαιναρέτη), whose name literally means “she who brings virtue into light”. According to Socrates, his art is like the regular midwives’ in most respects, the difference being only that he watches over the labor of men’s souls, not women’s bodies (Thet. 150b6–8). Socrates releases his interlocutors’ “brainchildren” (Thet. 157c7–d5):

So I [Socrates] chant incantations over you (…) till I succeed in assisting you to bring your own belief forth into the light. When it has been born, I shall consider whether it is fertile or a wind-egg (Thet. 157d2–5).

More precisely, Socrates engages his interlocutor in a philosophical discussion using a dialectical technique in which he does not give information directly, but instead questions his interlocutor. Through answering the questions, with help from the midwife Socrates, the interlocutor’s thoughts are brought forth and into the light. In other words, they are articulated. Thereafter, Socrates tests and considers whether these thoughts are fertile or merely “wind-eggs”, i.e. whether, or to what extent, they are sound and defensible. According to Socrates, midwives also have the power to bring on the pains, and to relieve them, if they think they should, by using drugs and singing charms – they are even able to bring on the birth, and to cause miscarriages (Thet. 149a8–9).

In the Theaetetus, Socrates moreover argues that midwives are also “the cleverest of matchmakers” (Thet. 149d5–10). The reason why midwives are the cleverest of matchmakers, Socrates argues, is that conception and birth belong to the same art: Just like there is “no harvesting without proper sowing” (Thet. 149e2–4), there are no brainchildren, or other kinds of erotic offspring, without proper matchmaking. The description of matchmaking and midwifery as two aspects of the same art in the Theaetetus is consistent with the statement in the Symposium saying that procreation and birth belong to the same art. In the Symposium, this art is more precisely defined as the art of erôs, τὰ ἐρωτικά (Symp. 177d8; 198d1).

In comparison with Socrates’ claim that he is a midwife, his claim that midwives are the cleverest of matchmakers has been neglected. It does, however, contain information of philosophical significance. The term translated here as “matchmaker” is ἡ προµνήστρια (Thet. 149d6), and it means “one who solicits or woos for another”. The term and its cognates are used by Plato in the Theaetetus multiple times (e.g. at 149d6, 150a1, 150a5, 151b3). The term ἡ προµνήστρια is rooted in the Greek verb µνάσθαι, meaning “to be mindful”, and the noun ἡ µνήστις, meaning “recollection”.

Dominic Scott, who both published in 2000. Since I only refer to Dominic Scott once, I include only his initials when citing his work.)

67 Cf. Gordon (2012, 137). Unlike Gordon, I here use the infinitive form of the verb (as elsewhere). When recollection is discussed in Plato, e.g. in the Meno and the Phaedo, the term is usually supplied with the prefix ana (anamnēsis). One may also note that in Homer’s
In other words, there is a link both in terms of content and etymology between Socrates’ skills in midwifery and matchmaking, which Socrates insists ought to be seen as two aspects of the same art, and the doctrine of recollection.

Since Socrates describes himself as a midwife and matchmaker, and since the latter is connected to the doctrine of recollection, it is hard not to notice that Socrates later in the *Theaetetus* (at 197e2–3) seemingly denies the main premise in the doctrine of recollection: That all learning is recollection of innate knowledge of the Forms, which our souls gazed at in their pre-existential state.\(^6\) Socrates here compares our cognitive apparatus to an aviary, and argues that our aviaries “far from being stocked with all species of knowledge-birds, are in fact empty in infancy” (Sedley 2004, 29). The postulated link between midwifery, matchmaking and the theory of recollection, however, need not thereby be superficial or illusory. Sedley solves this problem by distinguishing between two levels of discourse:

On the dramatic level, the speaker, Socrates, is innocent of any heavy-duty metaphysical or epistemological theory. Although acutely aware of his divine mission (which he believes his midwife role to embody), he is still struggling to make sense of the concept of knowledge at the simplest level. (…) [He] has no theory that all learning is recollection, let alone recollection of transcendent Forms. But it seems to me equally clear that, from a Platonic perspective, we are meant to recognize that this primitive Socrates is practicing a method by which he extracts, from the interlocutor’s inner resources, beliefs which are already present there, if only in embryo, and some which when tested turn out to be true (Sedley 2004, 29–30).

On Sedley’s account, there is thus one dramatic level of discourse between the *characters*, which includes the way Socrates presents himself to the other characters; and then another level, on which there is a discourse between *Plato and his readers*. Henceforth, I will call the latter the “meta-level”. On the meta-level, the readers are – using Sedley’s words – “meant to” recognize Plato’s perspective. It is the dramatic character Socrates, that – again, in Sedley’s words – practices the “primitive” method of extracting his interlocutors’ thoughts and ideas.

First; I agree with Sedley that Plato’s dramatic dialogues operate on two levels of discourse. I would, however, refrain from using Sedley’s characterization of the Socrates who uses this method as the “primitive” Socrates. Although the dramatic Socrates in the *Theaetetus* seems to deny the

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\(^6\) We are told about this journey in the *Phaedrus*, at 246a–254e. For a short discussion of the main premise of Socrates’ theory of recollection, see the *Phaedo*, at 72e–78b. The discussion in the *Phaedo* seems to allude to the *Meno*, in which Socrates’ theory of recollection is discussed at length.

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main premise of the recollection theory, we should take Socrates’ descriptions of his methods seriously. In my opinion, to characterize them as “primitive” risks defeating this purpose. Furthermore, I believe that the methods Plato has Socrates applying when he describes how Socrates engages in philosophical discussions with his interlocutors reveal significant information regarding how Plato perceived philosophy, and the very practice of it. That is to say, I take it as not only possible, but preferable, to recognize both levels of discourse in Plato, and, at the same time, to recognize that the dramatic level also provides us readers with what Sedley above calls “Plato’s perspective”.

As Sedley points out in the quote above, on the dramatic level, Socrates is “innocent of any heavy-duty metaphysical or epistemological theory”. Most people – if they know anything about Socrates at all – know that the dramatic character Socrates claims to be ignorant, in accordance with what is often called the Socratic Paradox: “I know one thing: That I know nothing.” Consistently, in the Theaetetus, Socrates claims that he himself is “barren”, and that the god has “forbidden him to procreate” (Tht. 150c8). In this respect, he is similar to regular midwives, who are not pregnant, nor able to carry children (Tht. 149b5–7). The unwedded goddess Artemis assigns midwifery only to those women who are barren because of their age (cf. Tht. 149b9–13).

If Socrates had known, he would not love wisdom – since, as he states in the Lysis – those “who are already wise no longer love wisdom [φιλοσοφεῖν], whether they are gods or men” (Lys. 218a2–5). This, in turn, is consistent with the notion that one loves that which one is endees of, that which one lacks, and wants in the sense that one is in need of it. The erotic subject who has knowledge as his erotic object, then, seeks out knowledge that he does not yet have.

1.5. Socrates’ erôtikê technê

There is only one subject that Socrates does not deny having expertise in: the art of erôs. This is asserted in several dialogues, including the Lysis and the Charmides. Although this may at first seem like an oddity, or even a

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69 Socrates deals with this phrase primarily in the Apology (21d) and in the Meno (81d).
70 This point is also stated in the Symposium, 204a1–c8, and it is consistent with Socrates’ declaration in the Meno, that he “would gladly search” for what he does not know (Meno, 84b10–11).
71 As emphasized earlier (section 1.2., pp. 30–31).
72 See e.g. Lys. 204b5–c2 (indirectly at 204c2 and 206a1); Charm. 155d4–c2; Symp. 177d7–8, 198d1, 212b5–6; Thea. 128b1–4; Phdr. 257a6–9; and in Xenophon’s Memorabilia, 2.6.28. See e.g. Kahn (1996, esp. Ch. 1) for a study of erôs and philosophy in the Sokratikoi logoi.
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paradox, it actually makes perfect sense: This is the only way Socrates may be said to be a true philosopher on his own terms, since on his account, a true philosopher is not someone who believes he is wise, but someone who is aware of what he does not know, and yet understands the way to achieve wisdom, and passionately pursues knowledge and wisdom. The erotic love and search for wisdom is an ongoing process that can never, for the true philosopher, be completed. Recalling Diotima, it goes on “forever” – to employ a cliché, it’s a never-ending love story. In this section, I seek to further clarify what kind of expertise this is, and how it is practiced by Socrates.

Socrates claims to have erotic expertise, which he refers to as both ta erôtika (Symp. 198d1–2) and erôtikê technê (Phdr. 257a7–8). But what kind of art, or technê, is this? On Belfiore’s account (2012, 13), Socrates’ use of the phrase “erôtikê technê” distinguishes his art from both (i) the true technê of rhetorikê technê, which Socrates says is to the soul what the technê of medicine is to the body; and (ii) atechnos diatribê, meaning a “practice without art”, which aims at pleasure, rather than the good. According to Belfiore, this second kind is practiced by experts in seduction, in order to gain physical pleasure. Socrates’ erôtikê technê, then, Belfiore concludes, is not craft-knowledge, like the first, nor a practice without art, like the second. So what kind of technê is it? It is “erotic” and based on experience:

Socrates’ erotic art, then, is not craft-knowledge, but instead “erotic”, or “daimonic” in that it, like its possessor, the daimôn Erôs in the Symposium, is always in a state between wisdom and ignorance (...) [Socrates] has the kind of art that allows him to be a marvelously skilled hunter for wisdom (...) Like the daimones of the Cratylus, he [Socrates] is daêmon, skilled or experienced (Belfiore 2012, 17–18).

Belfiore’s statement needs to be further explicated. First, that Socrates is daêmon (δαήμων) literally means that he is deinos (δεινός). This term may

Kahn (1996, 290) also emphasizes the consistency regarding how erôs is described in the Lysis and in the Symposium, e.g. that the two thoughts expressed in Lys. 221d6–221e4, i.e. (i) that desire implies lack, and (ii) that what one lacks is to oikeion (cf. section 1.2, p. 30-31), are also central in Diotima’s description of erôs in the Symposium. 73 Belfiore (2012, 13) here discusses Socrates’ use of the term technê in the Phaedrus, and while establishing the distinction above, she refers to Phdr. 257a3–b6; 260e2–6; 261a7. Another scholar who has discussed Socrates’ seductions in relation to the rhetorikê technê is Rider (2011b), who remarks that Socrates’ way of seducing Lysis fits well with how a skilled rhetorician should proceed, according to Socrates’ account of this in the Phaedrus (cf. Rider 2011b, 43, n. 10; with to Phdr. 271d–e). See also Scott and Welton (2008); according to Belfiore (2012, 7, n. 15), a difference between the account of Socrates’ erotic art presented by Scott and Welton (2008, see esp. p. 190) and the one she suggests, is that “they identify Socrates’ erotic art with the ‘true art’ of rhetoric”. For Socrates’ account of “true” versus “false” arts of rhetoric, see (also) the Gorgias, esp. 464b–465b.

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be translated “experienced”, which I take is the meaning of the term that Belfiore wishes to emphasize. It may also, however, be translated as “clever”, or “knowing”. The primary meaning, however, of the term δεινός is in fact “terrible” (related to the verb δείδειν, “to fear”). The meaning of this term, then, must (like most terms) be interpreted based on the context in which it occurs. When Socrates claims to be “δεινὸς τὰ ἐρωτικά” (Symp. 198d1–2), it does not mean that he is terrible when it comes to ta erôtika, but rather that he is terribly, or marvellously, skilled in ta erôtika. It is noteworthy that Socrates also uses a cognate to δεινός when claiming the midwives “the cleverest of matchmakers [προμηχανεῖ] εἰς δεινόταται” (Tht. 149d5–10). The term daêmôn here used by Belfiore also alludes to the term “daimôn” (δαίμων), which Socrates uses when referring to Erôs. It is also worth noticing that Belfiore describes Socrates as a “hunter”. This is far from accidental. In the Symposium (at 203d4–6), Erôs is described as a skilled hunter and plotter. As we go on, we shall see that this is a metaphor for Erôs (and also of the erotic subject) that Plato repeatedly has Socrates expressing.

The “hunter”-metaphor puts emphasis on a certain aspect of erôs, which, on my account, cannot be overrated: erôs involves striving. Likewise, Socrates’ erôtike technê is – unlike most, if not to say all, other technai – “a technê of loving and striving, rather than a technê of mastering” (Gonzalez 2011, 104). According to Gonzalez (cf. 2011, 106), this technê is presumably the same as that which Socrates in the Phaedrus (at 276e–6) calls dialektikê technê, a skill that is specific for philosophers; a skill of impregnating a soul with logoi that can defend and reproduce themselves (Phdr. 276e6–277a1). The erôtike technê, then, is on this view a technê of striving, more precisely striving for impregnation and reproduction.

In the next section I give an overview of how this process is carried out; i.e. of the methods that I argue Socrates uses in this process. We shall see that Socrates first tries to make his interlocutor understand his need of

74 Thus “dinosaur”, for example, from deinos (here “terrible”) and sauros (“lizard”).

75 The passage in the Cratylus that Belfiore (2012, 17–18) refers to is the one in which Plato has Socrates speculating on the possibility of an etymological link between these two terms (parentheses and italics in translation):

[B]ecause daemons are wise and knowing (daêmones), I think, that Hesiod says they are named ‘daemons’ (‘daimones’). In our older Attic dialect, we actually find the word ‘daêmones’; So, Hesiod and many other poets speak well when they say that when a good man dies, he has a great destiny and a great honor and becomes a ‘daemon’, which is a name given to him because it occurs with wisdom. (Crt. 398b5–c1)

76 Cf. e.g. Lys. 206a1–7 and 218c5–6; Phdr. 241c6–d1; Prt. 309a1–2. The Greek term here is ὅψηρπαρ, and this term is used quite frequently by Plato; the references I here provide represent a selection only.
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knowledge, and then tries to instill and direct the interlocutors’ erôs towards knowledge. These are the methods, I will argue, that Socrates makes use of in the process of impregnating souls.

1.6. Socrates’ erotic educational methods

In the previous sections I emphasized how the acquisition of knowledge is connected to erôs and erotic reproduction in at least five different ways:

(i) Knowledge and wisdom are described as erotic objects.
(ii) According to the metaphor of the erotic ladder, the erotic lovers, on the erastês’ lead, ascend from erôs directed towards beautiful particulars towards erôs for the Form of Beauty itself.
(iii) Thoughts and ideas are described as erotic offspring, i.e., as “brainchildren”.
(iv) Socrates claimed to be a midwife, releasing his interlocutor’s thoughts and ideas.
(v) Socrates claimed that midwives are also the cleverest of matchmakers.

In the following, I will explicate further how (i)–(v) above are related to Socrates’ erotic expertise. I argue that the erotic educational methods are included as participating in Socrates’ erotic expertise, and used by Socrates when he demonstrates his erotic expertise. On my account, the erotic educational methods practiced by Socrates manifest the expertise on erôs he claims to possess. I believe that the methods Socrates uses may be described in the following way:

A. Matchmaking: Socrates tries to arrange the erotic matches he believes will produce the best erotic offspring, i.e. the best thoughts and ideas; and
B. Midwifery: Socrates tries to release his interlocutor’s thoughts and ideas – the offspring his interlocutor is carrying.

Even though I here describe these as two methods, we ought to remember that they are part of one single expertise, the erôtike technê, or alternatively phrased, of one specific art, ta erôtika. I argue (A) that Socrates first seeks, through his matchmaking, to instill and (re-)direct his interlocutor’s erôs. In the following chapters, I will show how Socrates directs Lysis’, Charmides’

77 On this point, I agree with Belfiore (2012, 71): “Socrates’ use of his erotic art to help others recognize their own lack of wisdom also produces affection in his interlocutor”.

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and Alcibiades’ erôs first towards himself, and tries to establish a match between himself and his interlocutor. One should note that the matchmaking I argue Socrates conducts does not correspond perfectly to our everyday notion and common usage of the English term “matchmaker”: One way in which it differs is that we tend to use this term to characterize a third party, namely the person who seeks to match two other persons; whereas I (in part) focus on how Socrates acts as a matchmaker on his own behalf, so to speak, as he tries to match another person with himself.  

Through this personal matchmaking Socrates also aims at turning his interlocutor’s erôs towards knowledge, knowledge that the two lovers will pursue. On this account, knowledge is the lovers’ common erotic object. The thoughts and ideas that are brought forth may be understood as “erotic offspring”. In bringing this outcome forth, Socrates uses (B) the method of midwifery. Recalling Socrates’ parallel between matchmaking/midwifery and sowing/harvesting, we may say that sowing corresponds to matchmaking/impregnating, and harvesting to midwifery/birth.  

In other words, I argue that Socrates aims at arousing an erotic affection in his interlocutor first for himself (establishing a match between himself and the interlocutor), and also, through this matchmaking, an affection in his interlocutor for knowledge. In this way, Socrates seeks to make not only himself, but also knowledge, the interlocutor’s object of erôs. There is thus a sense in which the persons are matched with knowledge: When knowledge is a person’s erotic object, we may talk of an erotic relation between that person and knowledge. As Gordon (2012, 137) remarks:

Socratically speaking, the matchmaker can also call a different object to mind of a young man, namely, the forms, encouraging his desire for them.

One might think it confusing to describe Socrates as a matchmaker who seeks to establish erotic arrangements between persons and knowledge (or as Gordon writes, “the forms”), as this could be interpreted as if “once one is matched with knowledge, there is no reason to continue the search for knowledge, because then one will have it already”. In other words, when

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78 That I will focus on instances in which I argue that Socrates tries to establish a match between himself and a youth, however, does not mean that I take erotic matches between Socrates and another person to be the only type of interpersonal matchmaking that Socrates took an interest in.

79 There is also a sowing metaphor in the Phaedrus, at 276e5–277a4:

The dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge – discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character of others. Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders man who has it as happy as any human can be.
describing Socrates as a matchmaker in this sense, it may sound as if by
matching a person with knowledge, that person comes to have knowledge;
thus he does not have to passionately search for it (anymore). This would
indeed be an unfortunate interpretation on my view.

This possible unfortunate interpretation, however, only arises if one has a
mistaken understanding of matchmaking – even in the ordinary sense. To
understand matchmaking as a matter of “once you have been matched with
someone, then you have a partner and hence do not need to do anything
further”, is, in my opinion, indeed a mistaken understanding of interpersonal,
regular matchmaking. If a matchmaker has matched me with someone, I
would most certainly be correct in assuming that I would still need to do the
work of erotically pursuing that someone. Moreover, I would have to take
the risk that the relation might not work out. In fact, one of the very reasons
why it may not work out is precisely that I may lose interest, and thus fail to
passionately desire the other.

Likewise, on my view, the erotic relation between a person and
knowledge consists in, and is dependent on, the person having erôs for
knowledge. And the person’s erôs for knowledge only arises if that person
realizes that he needs knowledge. This insight (which may be characterized
as a negative insight) generates an intense passionate desire to actively
search for the knowledge one realizes that one is in lack of. In this sort of
erotic relation to an abstract, rather than concrete, erotic object, the person
who is matched still has to “keep on” passionately desiring that
something/someone, in order to maintain the relation.

When Socrates says that midwives are the cleverest of matchmakers, and
furthermore, that “reliable matchmaking is a matter for no one but the true
midwife” (Tht. 150a5–6), he states that the regular midwives through their
skill in matchmaking bring together men and women (Tht. 150a1). This
passage does not explicitly speak of arrangements bringing men together
with men (with the potential benefit of being brought closer to knowledge).
Focusing on the erotic relation between persons and knowledge, we need to
ask: What is the textual evidence supporting the claim that Socrates is a
matchmaker in the sense that he arranges erotic relations between persons
and knowledge? It has already been established that we may call the relation
between a person and knowledge an erotic relation. Still, what is the textual
evidence for claiming that Socrates is a matchmaker who arranges relations
of this sort? There is direct textual evidence in Plato that Socrates claims to
be arranging matches that bring male persons together, with the aim of
(indirectly) begetting intellectual offspring: “I [Socrates] undertake the
business of matchmaking; and I think I am good enough – God willing – at
guessing with whom they might profitably keep company” (Tht. 151b2–5).

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What does “might profitably” entail? On my reading, Socrates here claims to have expertise regarding which matches (might) produce the best offspring.

There are also at least three additional reasons for thinking that Socrates is properly characterized as a matchmaker, and in a wider sense than indicated in the quote above. To begin with (i), most Plato scholars would agree that Socrates indeed tries to direct some of his interlocutors’ erôs towards knowledge, and one may simply say that “matchmaking” is the Platonic term best suited to capturing this Socratic practice of directing erôs. Secondly (ii) (and in support of (i)), we should recall the fact that Plato persistently and across dialogues connects knowledge to erotic seduction and reproduction. The content and practice of actual pregnancy and midwifery is to a great extent transmitted to an analogous sphere of epistemic pregnancy and midwifery. It is therefore reasonable to assume that what is said about matchmaking – which midwives are said to be the cleverest practitioners of – is also transferable to the epistemic sphere. There is robust textual evidence suggesting that Socrates considers himself a midwife: Socrates says very explicitly that his art is like the regular midwives’ in most respects, the difference being only that he watches over the labor of men’s souls, not women’s bodies (Th. 150b6–8). Why, then, presume that he is not a matchmaker, a capacity he explicitly ascribes to midwives? Thirdly (iii), the “role of midwife in ancient Greece did not, so far as medical texts of the period indicate, include matchmaking” (Gordon, 2012, 131). This makes Socrates’ statement even more peculiar. Why claim to be a midwife, and then ascribe a capacity to midwives that, as far as we know, regular midwives did not have, if he did not want to draw attention to himself as having this capacity? On this point, I follow King (1998, 177; cf. Gordon 2012, 131), who suggests that since Theatetus claims that he is not aware that midwives are also matchmakers, one may assume that Socrates here invents material that serves his own purpose of presenting himself as a midwife (and matchmaker) of the soul.

I will go on to explicate in more detail how the matchmaking aspect of Socrates’ erotic expertise is put into practice in the chapters to come. In all our three cases – the three individual encounters that Socrates has with Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades respectively – I argue that Socrates practices his erotic educational methods, midwifery and matchmaking. Socrates uses these methods in the process of trying to turn these youngsters into philosophers; i.e. into lovers of wisdom. I take it as highly plausible that Plato had a specific temporal order in mind here; one which is in accordance with the erotic ladder. By ascending the ladder through erotic practices, such as erotically loving a beautiful body, a person may come to have wisdom as his erotic object. After recognizing the beauty of wisdom and having wisdom as one’s erotic object, one may begin to philei wisdom (sophia). By

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81 Cf. section 1.4.
definition, the person is then a philosopher (philosophos). That is to say that one first needs an erotic desire to know before one starts to philēi wisdom. As Gordon puts it: “Eros is the engine of what we call philosophy” (Gordon 2012, 6). I take this to imply that one needs the “engine” erōs provides as a starter for the activity it is to do philosophy, yet also in order to keep on going, i.e. to continue the search for wisdom and proceed in philosophizing.

Now, what (if anything) does this tell us about philosophy, and the very practice of it? First, it tells us that philosophy is an erotic activity. This activity is both interpersonal, and at the same time, it is individual. It is individual in the sense that the individual person must have erōs towards knowledge in order to actively pursue it. Moreover, it suggests that philosophy, as activity, is related to two kinds of erotic relations: An erotic relation between persons, and also an erotic relation between an individual person and knowledge. It also reminds us of the fact that philosophy is a philia-relation, as well as an erotic relation. For it surely does not seem to be the case that once one begins to love wisdom (to philēi sophia), one’s erōs for knowledge vanishes, or somehow becomes redundant. Socrates still has a strong erōs for knowledge even though he is a philosopher, a “friend of wisdom”. On my account, erōs and philia are not mutually exclusive, nor completely overlapping (I elaborate on this point below, in section 2.2). One can note, in this regard, that Plato also refers to “lovers of wisdom” as erastai – the plural of “erastês”, which is a derived cognate of erōs – of phronēsis, i.e. “wisdom” (cf. Phae. 66c2–3).

I take the purposed relation between midwifery and matchmaking to be complementary (like the relation between sowing and harvesting). An actual midwife’s predominant assignment and function (ergon) is to help pregnant women give birth to living and healthy children. In order for a woman to conceive, however, a partner is needed. A matchmaker is said to be deinos (“experienced”, “clever”, “skilled”) in finding partners who together will produce sound offspring. In the analogous epistemic sphere, there is a question of eliciting sound erotic offspring too; thoughts and ideas (particularly concerning how life should be lived). In this epistemic sphere, as well, both conception and birth are needed: Thoughts and ideas must first be conceived, they must “come to mind”. How does this come about, in the epistemic sphere? My best suggestion is that thoughts and ideas are conceived through philosophical intercourse; i.e. philosophical dialogue. For

82 In addition to Gordon (e.g. 2012) and Belfiore (2012), this may be read as in agreement with e.g. Sheffield (2001), who argues that philosophy is an important activity of erōs (cf. section 1.2., p. 32), and Scott and Welton (2008), who describe Socratic philosophy as “an art of love” (Scott and Welton 2008, 136) and who argue at length that “philosophy is fundamentally erotic” (Scott and Welton 2008, 3).

83 Though I here connect the terms “knowledge” and “wisdom” to two different contexts, my reader should note that I do not thereby wish to distinguish sharply between these terms (that is not the point I wish to make here).
this to take place, however, desire must be awakened and a proper match must be attained. After having conceived a thought, the thought may (eventually) be brought forth, i.e. articulated. The soundness of the thought may then be examined. The philosopher’s assignment and function, on this account, is to help in the processes of mental conception and birth. In this way, we may say that philosophy combines the two methods of midwifery and matchmaking, and that Socrates thus – when practicing his erotic educational methods midwifery and matchmaking – embodies philosophy.

In this section, I have discussed what it is that Socrates claims to be good (or experienced) at, when describing himself as a midwife and matchmaker, and what this midwife-matchmaking amounts to. In Chapters 2–4, we shall see in more detail how Socrates applies these erotic educational methods of midwifery and matchmaking when introducing young interlocutors to philosophy.

1.7. Charming and shaming

In the following chapters, I will emphasize how Socrates, in carrying out his erotic educational methods, uses both charming and shaming as psychological techniques while seducing the interlocutors. Based on the information he has at hand, which is partly based on reputations and whispers, Socrates starts charming his interlocutors. We will see that to some extent, this charming consists of praising the boy and his ancestors; but not exclusively, nor even primarily. In fact, we shall see that to try to seduce a boy by means of flattery at one point is said to be something that the skilled lover refrains from doing. \(^84\)

So how does Socrates seduce boys and young men? When Socrates presents himself as a lover, he is careful to make himself and what he has to offer interesting to the youths by appealing to their interests and needs. In each of the dialogues, the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I, Socrates begins the conversation with the eponymous interlocutor by showing an interest in his dreams, characteristics, virtues, and vices, as well as his general background. Thereafter, Socrates applies his erotic expertise, which may potentially bring his interlocutor to seek wisdom: After having made himself relevant to the boy (or young man), Socrates attempts to throw the boy into aporia. By throwing his interlocutor into a state of aporia, i.e. of confusion and uncertainty, Socrates tries to make his interlocutor realize that he is in

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\(^84\) I elaborate on this point in Ch. 2, section 2.3.
need of knowledge; since it is a precondition that one must lack (and therefore be in need of) wisdom in order to love wisdom.85

In his attempts to throw these youths into aporia, Socrates uses shaming as a technique. In this way, the technique of shaming is in fact undertaken simultaneously as the charming. Both charming and shaming, then, are used in Socrates’ seductions.86 By trying to provoke, through humbling – and at times even ridiculing – his interlocutor, Socrates tries to induce shame in his interlocutor, i.e. make him feel ashamed. The appropriateness of referring to this technique as “shaming” is reflected in the term elenchus, which is often used in referring to Socrates’ manner of questioning of his interlocutors. While this term is often translated as “examine” and “refute”, it also (and originally) means to “put to shame”.87

Now, what motivates Socrates to use this technique? The final goal of using this technique, I take it, is to motivate the interlocutor: If not knowing what you thought you knew, and perhaps have also claimed to know, is sufficiently shameful, this might motivate you to seek knowledge. I also agree with Gordon, who writes that: “Shame can be an effective propaedeutic insofar as it serves to draw an interlocutor’s attention toward his own ignorance and his lack of awareness of that ignorance” (Gordon 2003, 24). Plato thus seems to ascribe a positive role to shame, as morally and epistemologically edifying.

Even though shame is often understood as an essentially social emotion, shame (as opposed to guilt) has a distinctive link to the self. This point is also stressed in contemporary philosophical studies on shame.88 Deonna et al. (2012, 83) remark that this is reflected in the grammar: I am ashamed of myself because of p. Even though one can leave out the “of myself”-clause, it is nonetheless always correct to use it, they argue.89 Does this suggest a

85 The term aporia, is combined by a (negation, “without”) and poros (“passage”, “way”). As mentioned, Poros was also the name of Erôs father. For the etymological connection between aporia, poros, and erôs, see Kofman (1988).
86 I discuss this in greater detail in Ch. 4, esp. section 4.4.
87 Cf. e.g. Furley (1973). See also Lesher (1984), who provides an analysis of the meaning of the expression poludêris elenchus in Parmenides’ poem, fr. 7. Lesher argues that the notion of philosophical elenchus, which Socrates’ way of educating later became associated with, originates from Parmenides; “the philosophical elenchus must be counted one of Parmenides’ more influential ideas” (Lesher 1984, 30). A clear example of elenchein meaning “to shame” or “to blame” is for example to be found in Gorgias’ Encomium of Helen (paragraph 2). My thanks are due to Lars Leeten for pointing this out to me.
88 Cf., e.g. Deonna et al. (2012, see esp. 73–4; 82–3). One may note that Deonna et al. (2012, Ch. 1), characterize the understanding of shame as an essentially social emotion as a dogma. For a discussion of shame felt on the behalf of others, see Deonna (2012, 112–114).
89 In comparison, one would never say that one is “guilty of oneself”. I think that Deonna et al. here refers to specifically expressing shame one has for one’s self. Needless to say, one may of course feel shame for others too, e.g. for one’s partner, father, sister, etc. This kind of shame, however, also seems to be somehow connected to oneself. So too with shame felt on
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dereper bond between the self and shame? At any rate, such a bond seems present in Plato, where shame is evidently connected to (a lack of) self-knowledge. As we shall see, Alcibiades is put to shame because he cannot explain himself (and not because he does not know all different kinds of things about the Spartans). It is his lack of self-knowledge that, eventually, makes him ashamed. In this way, by putting interlocutors such as Alcibiades to shame, Socrates encourages them to improve their self-knowledge. It is important to note here that the sense of shame that for example Alcibiades demonstrates is not at all a sign of bad character. On the contrary; as we shall see, Charmides fails to demonstrate such a sense of shame, and in the end, this makes him appear as someone lacking in self-knowledge, as well as in sôphrosunê.

1.8. The multiple roles of the lover-educator

In the process of turning Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades towards philosophy, we shall see that Socrates himself, in different ways and with various degrees of explicitness, takes on the role of being a seductive lover. In all of these encounters, Socrates reveals himself to be a better lover than “the others”: In the Lysis better than Hippothales, and in the Charmides and Alcibiades I better than an unidentified group of infatuated lovers. It may also be argued that Socrates comes across as a better guide for these boys.90

There are several reasons why good interpersonal matchmaking matters within Plato’s philosophical framework: With a good erotic partner, one can get proper erotic guidance, which is needed in order to cultivate one’s erôs, and thereby cultivate oneself. Good erotic guidance, then, when properly observed, is a way to achieve self-knowledge, since the lovers can reflect themselves in one another.91 In Chapter 4, we shall see how Plato conveys the idea of self-knowledge as requiring reflection by another soul; not just by any soul, but more specifically the soul of a genuine lover.

Self-knowledge, in turn, is necessary for sôphrosunê.92 In particular, we shall see that sôphrosunê plays an important role in Chapters 3 and 4. Let me therefore take this opportunity to introduce it here: The term “sôphrosunê”

other’s behalf, even if they are strangers; one feels shame because one identifies with them, one puts oneself in their shoes.

90 In Lysis’ case better than his parents, in Charmides’ case better than Critias, and in Alcibiades’ case better than Pericles. In Ch. 5, section 5.2., I shall return to the question of whether, or to what extent, Socrates in the end might be said to have helped these youths.

91 This point is made in the Alcibiades I, 132d–133d. I discuss this analogy in Ch. 4, section 4.4., pp. 145–146.

92 “Because sophrosune entails self-knowledge, everyone who lacks self-knowledge necessarily lacks sophrosune” (Scott 2000, 95).
Erôs and Socrates’ Erotic Expertise

(σωφροσύνη) has proven notoriously difficult for translators, but it is typically translated with “sound-mindedness”, “moderation”, or “temperance”. It is also identified with self-control; when Callicles asks Socrates to explain the concept of ruling oneself, Socrates replies that it is to be sôphrôn (σοφρονα ὄντα) and master of oneself and one’s pleasures and appetites (Grg. 491d10–e1). We shall moreover see that in the Alcibiades I, self-knowledge is repeatedly said to be sôphrosunê.93 Both self-control and self-knowledge seem to be sound interpretations of sôphrosunê. Annas (1985, 120) argues that the Socratic view is that sôphrosunê is essentially self-knowledge, while self-control, a phenomenon of behavior, is a manifestation of sôphrosunê, but not what sôphrosunê essentially is.94

On my reading, Socrates’ view is that sôphrosunê is pivotal for well-functioning and happiness (eudaimonia), providing those possessing it with self-knowledge crucial in order to live lives free from error (Chrm. 171d1–172a5). Sôphrosunê is thus important for understanding what kind of values are worth pursuing, and what kind of “good things” (e.g. virtues, individual persons, wisdom, etc.) may lead one towards a good life. Summing up, then; the good erotic partner, the genuine lover, will function as a guide who cultivates the beloved’s erôs, directing it towards “good things” worthy to pursue. In this way, genuine lovers function as guides to the good and happy (eudaimon) life, as an individual with a well-guided soul would be more likely to achieve eudaimonia. When these aspects are taken into account, it becomes clear that matchmaking matters within Plato’s framework, and it makes perfect sense that Socrates should (also) be an excellent matchmaker, i.e. one who arranges productive erotic relations.

As one may deduce from the previous sections: On my account, Socrates takes on a range of roles in the relevant encounters; besides being a philosopher, he acts, among other things, as an erotic expert, midwife, matchmaker, “shame-inducer”, lover, seducer, and guide. In addition, we shall in the following sections see that Socrates is also referred to (by himself or others) as a friend, a friendless person, and a stalker. On the account I am suggesting, then, Socrates’ roles as a midwife and a matchmaker are complemented by several other roles. His function is not at all limited to midwifery and matchmaking alone. As Socrates undertakes several roles at the same time, these ought not to be perceived as mutually

93 Alc. I. 131b, repeated at 133c–134a. I return to this in Ch. 4, section 4.4, p. 147–148.
94 That sôphrosunê is self-knowledge is also stated in the Alcibiades I (at 131b, repeated at 133c). Annas (1985, 120) further remarks that we also find this identification in the dialogue Lovers (also referred to as Rival Lovers), at 138a. In her study of sôphrosunê, North (1966) argues that there is a progression in Plato; from sôphrosunê as self-knowledge to sôphrosunê as self-control, of which she characterizes the former as Socratic and the latter as Platonic. On this point I agree with Annas’ (1985, 119, n. 28) comment: Plato did not have to choose one, and then change his mind in favor of the other. In her study, however, it seems to me that Annas takes self-knowledge to be what sôphrosunê truly is.
exclusive (even though some roles at times appear more prominent than others).

Now, one may wonder: To what extent, if any, does Socrates act as a teacher? According to Socrates, he has “never been anyone’s teacher (διδάσκαλος)” (Ap. 33a5). The term didaskalos as used here is in need of some clarification: What Socrates denies is ever having been a master or instructor, or ever having received money for teaching. Socrates has no didaskaleion, i.e. no school. He says that he only tries “to persuade” (πείθειν) others (Symp. 212b2–3). It is worth noticing that the term for persuasion used here is connected to Peitho, the goddess of spirit (daimona) and charming speech, who personifies persuasion and seduction. That the educational methods used by Socrates are erotic does not mean that he teaches (in the sense of διδάσκειν) on erôs, however. In the three dialogues I assess in Chapters 2–4, Socrates does not offer any of the youths a long speech about the nature of erôs for them to rehearse. Instead, Socrates educates through erôs: In approaching the young men and trying to educate them and turn them towards philosophy, Socrates embodies erôs, and takes on the role of a searching, seductive lover.

One may further wonder; did Socrates himself, when young, ever take on an erastês? Who guided and taught Socrates? It has been claimed that although Socrates in Plato’s “Socratic dialogues” appears open-minded, eager, and willing to learn, he “never seems to learn much of substance, if anything, from his interlocutor about the topic under discussion” (Scott 2000, 27). As exceptions, Scott (2000, 28) argues that only twice in the dialogues is Socrates cross-examined at length (Prt. 338c–339d and Grg. 462a–467c). Moreover, Scott argues, only twice is he depicted as learning something of substance, and both times from a woman: Diotima in the Symposium, and Aspasia whom Socrates refers to in the Menexenus, as the

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97 Unlike in the Symposium, where Socrates offers a speech about erôs. This speech was, according to Plato’s narration, rehearsed and rephrased by one (or more) members in his audience, who later repeated it to someone else. In the Symposium, Plato uses multiple narrative levels.
98 When Aelius Aristides (117–181 C.E.) quotes Aeschines the Socratic, he has Socrates make this point explicitly himself: “Furthermore, even though I knew no piece of learning (mathêma) by which I could benefit a man through teaching [it to] him, I thought that being with him [Alcibiades] I could make him better in virtue of [my] love [for him] (dia to eran)” (Ael. Aristid. Orat. 45, II 23–4d). My thanks are due to Pål Rykkja Gilbert for help in translating this passage. Aristides was a Greek orator and author, described by the famous physician of antiquity Galen as belonging to the “prominent rank of orators”, cf. Behr (1968, 162).
99 Aspasia was, presumably, Pericles’ lifetime companion, mistress, and partner. Ironically, she was not his wife: Shortly before her arrival, Pericles had made a law that forbade Athenian citizens to marry women from abroad (“metic women”). She is said to have been
only two Socrates seems to position himself as a student of. Given the
general absence of female characters in Plato’s works, it is remarkable that
these are both women.\textsuperscript{100} We cannot know for certain why Plato chose two
women to play the roles of mentors for the young Socrates. A consequence
of this remarkable choice, however, is that even though dramatic Socrates in
these two settings is depicted as a student, he nevertheless escapes the role of
an erômenos (at least in the traditional sense of the term).\textsuperscript{101} The absence of a
reference to the \textit{Parmenides} in Scott’s section concerned with Socrates as a
student, however, stands out as most peculiar. Indeed, Socrates seems to be
cross-examined by Parmenides, and he furthermore seems to learn
something of substance in that dialogue. (I will, however, refrain from
arguing \textit{what}, exactly, I think that is, and how this may be understood in
light of Socrates’ claims to ignorance.) Is Socrates thereby depicted as
Parmenides’ erômenos? I am inclined to answer in the negative.\textsuperscript{102} In sum
then, Plato seems to make sure that Socrates, the intellectual hero, escapes
the “tag” erômenos in his dialogues.\textsuperscript{103}

In Chapters 2–4 I will argue that Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades are
subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods. These youths are by Scott
(2000, 5) characterized as:

seemingly teachable youths when Socrates first encounters them. And they
have not yet had to commit themselves to a particular way of life (…) And
last, each are suddenly smitten with Socrates in the course of his initial
conversation with him. In this way, these dialogues show how normally
passive and conceited youths could be transformed into active (and sometimes
aggressive) pursuers of Socrates.

Moreover, they are all good-looking young men of noble birth. That there is
a correspondence between the age of the interlocutors and the extent to
which Socrates makes use of his erotic educational methods is far from
arbitrary. For one thing, young minds are less stable and fixed, and more
adaptable to change, and hence more receptive to Socrates’ erotic
educational methods. Second, due to the custom of the paiderastia, the
young men and boys were regarded as erotic objects to a significantly larger
extent than the older men, who instead were typically regarded as the erotic

well-educated, but is also referred to as a whore (pornê), and a “dog-eyed concubine”. For
more information on Aspasia (and Diotima), see e.g. Ch. 6 in \textit{A History of Women

\textsuperscript{100} Cf. section 1.4., p. 39.


\textsuperscript{102} One reason for this is that in the \textit{Parmenides}, this role seems to be ascribed to Zeno (the
originator of Zeno’s paradoxes), rather than to Socrates. Cf., e.g. \textit{Parm.} 128a4–6.

\textsuperscript{103} Plato never depicts Socrates as the erômenos, not in the traditional sense at least, but
Diogenes Laertius remarks that there were rumors suggesting Socrates was the pre-Socratic
philosopher Archelaus’ pupil and erômenos (D. L. 2.19).
subjects; thus, the boys stand in a more erotically charged position in relation to Socrates than e.g. Crito does. Yet, we shall see that all of our three youths are transformed into pursuers of Socrates.\textsuperscript{104} Through this, they are all in effect challenging the traditional pederastic roles. The most famous instance of this in Plato’s corpus is the relation between Alcibiades and Socrates, which we shall examine more closely in Chapter 4.\textsuperscript{105} According to Alcibiades, however, he is not the only young man who has fallen in love with Socrates. Alcibiades explicitly mentions Charmides (\textit{Symp.} 222b1) amongst others who have, like himself, been seduced by Socrates and ended up loving him. I shall turn to Socrates’ encounter with Charmides in Chapter 3. Before that, however, we shall in the next chapter see how Socrates seduces the young boy Lysis.

\textsuperscript{104} Scott (2000) discusses at length the reversal of pederastic roles in the \textit{Lysis}, \textit{Alcibiades I} and the \textit{Symposium}.

\textsuperscript{105} In Nussbaum’s words, “Alcibiades begins as the beautiful \textit{eromenos} but seems to end as the active \textit{erastes}” (Nussbaum 2007, 188).
Chapter 2. Erôs and the Need for Knowledge

2.1. Introduction

The ancient subtitle of the *Lysis, Peri philias*, is typically translated *On Friendship*, as philia is often translated as “friendship”. Socrates’ main interlocutors in this dialogue are two young boys and close friends, called Lysis and Menexenus. A significant part of the dialogue is concerned with answering these questions that Socrates asks the two:

So tell me: when someone loves [φιλῇ] someone else, which of the two becomes friend [φίλος] of the other, the one who loves [ὁ φιλῶν] or the one who is loved [ὁ φιλούµενος]? Or is there no difference? (Lys. 212a8–212b2)

Intriguing as these questions are, it should be immediately noted that in this chapter, I do not aim at providing a comprehensive answer to them, or a complete account of what is said about friendship in this dialogue, or a definition of philia. Instead, I will call attention to passages concerned with the practice of erôs, and how this practice relates to the boy Lysis’ need for knowledge. We will then see that the background for why they discuss philia, and likewise how they discuss it, and furthermore what Socrates wants to elicit through this discussion, are all erotically charged. I will argue that Lysis is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods; in particular, we shall see how Socrates acts as a matchmaker in this dialogue. I will argue

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106 These boys are generally thought to be the youngest interlocutors in any Platonic dialogue, around twelve or thirteen years old, cf. Nails (2002.)

107 Scholars who argue that the topic of this dialogue amounts to providing a definition of philia, and discuss what this definition might be, include e.g., Justin (2005), Levin (1972), Robinson (1986). Bolotin (1979) takes the main question to be whether friendship is possible. A scholar who argues that the dialogue does not conform to the dialogues of definition is Konstan (1997, 73). This point, however, is most famously argued by Sedley (1989, 107–8), who argues that a definitional question is never actually raised, so it is not a dialogue of definition; the dialogue rather attempts to discover what the relationship is between those who are friends, Sedley suggests. Penner and Rowe (2005, 113, n. 42) reject the significance of the distinction Sedley here makes (and also some of the interpretations Sedley makes that support his thesis), yet remark that they are inclined to doubt the value of the category “dialogues of definition”.
that Socrates attempts to make Lysis realize his need for knowledge, and to instill in him an erotic desire to pursue that knowledge.

Before embarking on the dialogue, I wish to make a few remarks about the dialogue’s reception history. First, it may be noted that the attention it has received has been quite limited in comparison to many other Platonic dialogues. Moreover, the attention the dialogue has received has been focused almost entirely on its (alleged) shortcomings. Roughly, the criticism has centered on the following charges: The dialogue contains poor arguments; it provides an unsatisfying account of what friendship is; Socrates demonstrates here a great lack of moral sensibility. It is not at all controversial to claim that “the general view was, and still remains, that the *Lysis* is not a philosophical success” (Penner and Rowe 2005, xi).

My intention is not to try to save the *Lysis* (or Plato, or Plato’s Socrates) from this criticism. Nor, for the most part, will I engage with or try to rebut these charges on their own terms. However, the reading I propose amounts to a fresh outlook on the dialogue, from a different standpoint than commonly adopted, and therein also suggests a different standard by which to evaluate it: It is not obvious that the “shortcomings” just mentioned are problematic for the purpose of displaying the nature and practice of erôs, and the connections this has to the need for knowledge. In that context, it *may* even turn out, as we shall see, that the “flawed accounts” or the “poor arguments” serve a function in the overall scheme of the dialogue. Such evaluative complexity and potential multiplicity strike me as inherent to Plato’s dialogues.

The parts of the dialogue I shall primarily focus on are these: The prologue, Socrates’ conversation with Lysis, and the last passages of the dialogue. I shall also comment on the arguably most well-known passage of the *Lysis*, i.e. that which concerns the *prôton philon*. The structure is as follows: In 2.2. I comment on the term philia and how it, to some extent,

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108 The most weighty commentaries on the dialogue are provided by Bolotin (1979) and Penner and Rowe (2005).

109 For the record, Penner and Rowe (2005), who offer a detailed analysis of every twist and turn in the dialogue, do not share this view themselves. One who holds this view is Guthrie (1975, 143–4): There “are many opinions about this dialogue, and I must confess to my own, which is simply that it is not a success. Even Plato can nod. (…) The failure is in method and presentation (…) an unappetizing view of friendship”. Another famous critic is Vlastos (1973). Some scholars have even viewed the *Lysis* as such a philosophical fiasco that they have doubted whether Plato really is its true author (e.g. Grote (1888, 184, n. 2), and Tejera (1990)). In this respect, it should be noted that there is nowadays a general agreement that it was written by Plato, cf. Cooper (1997, vi). Scholars have recently shown an increasing interest in this short and (presumably) early dialogue, including Nichols (2006) and (2010), who argues that friendship in the *Lysis* serves as a model of philosophy.
The Lysis

overlaps with erôs. In 2.3., I turn to Lysis’ prologue, arguing that the prologue is highly erotically charged. I then (2.4.) discuss Socrates’ conversation with Lysis. In 2.5., I argue that what Socrates is aiming for in that conversation is to instill in Lysis the erotic desire required in order to pursue knowledge. Thereafter, in 2.6., I turn to the passage concerned with the prôton philon. In 2.7., I comment on the threads Socrates draws together at the end of the dialogue, before I summarize and conclude in the last section (2.8.).

2.2. Philia and erôs

According to Annas (1977, 532), the “Lysis, one of Plato’s early inconclusive dialogues, deals with friendship or philia (the Greek term cannot be equated with ‘friendship’, but there is no other reasonable translation)”. My impression is that the view here expressed is rather uncontroversial. However, the translation of philia with friendship, however, is problematic, perhaps even misleading. Roughly, we may say that interpersonal philia-relations involve feelings of concern and care, and that philia and its cognates are often used when referring to the relation between those who are “close” to one another, or “kin”. There is an ambiguity, though, in the dialogue, often not noted in translations, as the much used cognates philos (φίλος) and philon (φίλον) – typically translated into “friend” and “dear” – do not necessarily refer to persons, but might as well be referring to anything that is loved or valued, including inanimate or abstract entities. As Penner and Rowe write, the Lysis “treats anything loved (i.e. anything that is a proper object of philein) as a ‘friend’ (philon)” (Penner and Rowe 2005, 42, n. 11). In the Lysis, Socrates thus speaks of for example friends of wine (phil-oinoi), friends of gymnastic (phil-gumnastai) and friends of wisdom (phil-o-sophoi) (cf. Lys. 212d5–8). Philia, then, should be taken to include more than friendly relations between persons – which the English term “friendship” typically refers to in everyday language.

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110 Even though philia as such will not serve as the center of attention in this chapter, I believe that a short discussion of how we should understand philia, and how it to some extent overlaps with erôs, will prove helpful.

111 In Plato’s Lysis, one of the Greek terms used for understanding is ἐπίστασθαι, which is the verb from which the noun ἐπιστήμη is derived. In the following, I highlight which terms for knowledge, understanding, wisdom, learning and mind Plato uses in the quotes I offer.

112 As argued by Wolfsdorf (2008, 59).

113 Still, as noted by Belfiore (2012, 74, n. 18): “In the Lysis, however, philos is never used to refer exclusively to ‘kin’, although kin may be included among those who are called philoi (e.g. 210d1–4)”.

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A philia-relation can thus be *asymmetrical*, as one may have philia-feelings for objects that cannot return the friendly feeling, and not only in that the person who is the object of that friendly feeling does not reciprocate. Indeed, on Socrates’ account, philosophy itself seems to be an example of a non-reciprocal philia-relation, as true philosophers love wisdom (see e.g. *Lys.* 212d7–8), without any talk or demand of wisdom loving them back. Clearly, if we widen our understanding of what a mutual reciprocal relation consists in, we may say that *sophia* loves the *philos of sophia* back; through providing the *philos* with wisdom that will prevent him from error, and hence be a “friend” who helps him to live well – on the assumption that error would make his life worse. This is, however, not the way in which we usually think of reciprocal love. Socrates’ view on philia, as expressed in the *Lysis*, then, does not seem to be restricted to the notion of friendship as a relation involving reciprocal friendly love between persons.¹¹⁴ Even though it is true that there is talk of love of abstract objects in the *Lysis*, and that the terms *philos* and *philon* do not necessarily refer to persons, much of the discussion in the dialogue is in fact concerned with interpersonal philia-relations; but not all of the interpersonal relationships discussed correspond to the everyday notion of friendship. For instance, we shall see that one of the larger discussions is concerned explicitly with parental love, as family members also have philia-relation.

It may therefore be useful to distinguish between what we may call a “narrow” and a “broad” reading of philia. On a narrow reading, philia is understood merely as interpersonal friendship between equals.¹¹⁵ On a broader reading, philia and its cognates *philos* and *philon* are understood more generally as describing a certain relation between an object and a subject who is “philei-ing” the object. At any rate, however, one would be correct in saying that the terms *philos* and philia in the *Lysis* describe some sort of relation: It is a relation between the object that is loved, valued, liked...

¹¹⁴ Jennings (2011) notes how Aristotle, Cicero, and Kant all build reciprocal love into their definitions of friendship, while Socrates treats the terms *philos* and philia as univocal across their many usages (cf. e.g. *Lys.* 212d). In doing so, Jennings writes, “[Socrates] rejects Aristotle’s assumption that friendship (philia) cannot be felt for inanimate objects such as a bottle of wine” (Jennings 2011, 14, with ref. to *NE* 1152b27–30). See also Wolfsdorf (2008, 60): “Readers have consistently approached the text with presumptions about the nature of friendship, as this reciprocal, often exclusively human psychological, and particularly emotional relationship is commonly experienced and conceived”. Penner and Rowe underscore this as well: “The interest in the *Lysis* is only in the one-way relation given by ‘x loves (philein) y’, not in the two-way relation given by ‘x and y love (philein) each other’” (Penner and Rowe 2005, 235). This, of course, is not the same as saying that Socrates thought that there was no difference between the philia-feelings directed toward a person and those directed toward wine.

¹¹⁵ Those who have argued that the *Lysis* is about philia in a narrow sense of friendship include von Arnim (1914, 40), Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1920, 68), Hoerber (1959), Lualdi (1974, 59), Hyland (1968, 36); cf. Gonzalez (1995b, 69, n. 4).
or desired by a subject, and the subject who has these motivational attitudes towards the object; the subject who, so to speak, is “philei-ing” the object. On this point, philia and erôs are alike, as an erotic relation can also be described, in a general manner, as a relation between an object that is loved, valued, liked or desired by a subject and this subject – though then more passionately so.\footnote{Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.1. and 1.2.}

Certainly, in the \textit{Lysis}, various relations are both explicitly discussed and also depicted. Not all of these relations are philia-relations, however. In this chapter, I shall provide a reading focusing on how the dialogue is particularly concerned with \textit{erotic relations}. We shall see that in the \textit{Lysis}, various erotic relations are both explicitly discussed and depicted. Above all, I shall attend to a \textit{specific kind} of erotic relation: The emerging erotic relation between knowledge and the boy Lysis, which will arise if Lysis’ erôs is turned towards knowledge.

Indeed, the concepts philia and erôs are complex and overlapping, and the cognates alone do not necessarily determine what kind of love or relation is being discussed.\footnote{In addition, the cognates of philia are many: Vlastos (1973, 4) remarks that there are twenty-two columns under the “umbrella of philia” alone in the Liddell Scott Jones dictionary of Ancient Greek. (Henceforth referred to as \textit{LSJ}).} Distinguishing between them is therefore a challenging task. The distinction between erôs and philia is also blurred throughout the \textit{Lysis}.\footnote{According to Penner and Rowe, philia and erôs “are used almost, if not quite, interchangeably in the \textit{Lysis}” (Penner and Rowe 2005, 249). See also Penner and Rowe ((2005) Ch. 5, esp. n. 30, 16, and 44). For a discussion of erôs and philia in the \textit{Lysis}, see also Kahn (1996, Ch. 9).} For one thing, cognates of philia are in some passages characterized quite similarly to how erôs is described elsewhere in Plato’s corpus: \textit{Philon} is for example said to be “neither bad nor good” (cf. Lys. 216c1–2), which is similar to how erôs is characterized by Diotima in the \textit{Symposium}.\footnote{Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.1., p. 27. For comparisons of these two dialogues, see e.g. Price (1989) and Penner and Rowe (2005, 300–307).} Another passage (Lys. 221d6–221e5) highlights the shared conditions for objects of philia and erôs, respectively, as the objects of erôs and philia here are characterized as sharing two necessary conditions; (i) the subject must be \textit{endees} of the object, and (ii) the object must be \textit{oikeion} to the subject.\footnote{Rudenbusch (2004) deals specifically with this passage.} In the following, I will note when the cognates of erôs and philia are used interchangeably (which they are at e.g. Lys. 206c3–5; 204c2; 205b7), when referring to the relationships between the interlocutors.

The distinction between philia and erôs is also blurred through Socrates’ many roles in the dialogue; as a friend, a seducer, a philosopher, a role-model – and also as a midwife and matchmaker (or so I argue). Moreover, in this dialogue, Socrates claims to be a friendless person (cf. Lys. 212a4–6),
yet he also says that he is erotically disposed to possessing friends (cf. Lys. 211e1–3). One may say that this contributes even further to the difficulty of defining what a philos is, as Socrates through these roles covers a wide range of what it may mean mixing up the categories.121 It also, in my opinion, reveals the dialogue as concerned with more than what philia and its cognates amount to, and certainly about more than philia understood in the narrow sense.

In this section, I have offered a brief clarification of philia and discussed how it to some extent overlaps with erôs. We have also seen examples of how these two concepts are verbally and conceptually blurred in the *Lysis*. In sum, this points to the difficulties of separating philia and erôs sharply. Nevertheless, I regard them as not completely overlapping. Even though an erotic skill may also be skill in philein,122 erôs is itself a rich concept, and in comparison to philia, arguably also a concept of greater philosophical importance for Plato. If philia is understood in the broad sense, then it is possible that erôs can be subordinated to philia – in a similar way that the concept “gold” is subordinated to the concept “metal”.123 However, substantial further argumentation would have to be provided in order to prove such subordination accurate; argumentation I will not provide here. In any case, however, even if such subordination is accurate, erôs in itself is a rich concept on its own. (After all, so much of what is most important to know about gold is what is specific to gold, rather than what it has in common with other metals.) Even though I recognize the close relation between philia and erôs, and the difficulties in separating them, we shall see that it is worthwhile to study how erôs, specifically, emerges in the *Lysis* as a major theme.124

121 For how Socrates mixes up the categories philia and erôs in the *Lysis*, see e.g. Jennings (2011, esp. pp. 38–39).
123 Like Penner and Rowe (2005, vii) suggest when placing it under “the umbrella of philia” (cf. next footnote). Others, e.g. Vlastos (1973), ascribe to Plato a unitary theory of love. Even though Vlastos (1973, 4) too, as mentioned, recognizes philia as an “umbrella term”, he regards erôs and philia as different species: he does not place erôs under the “umbrella of philia”. I here refer back to the distinction between “broad” and “narrow” readings of philia (cf. this section, p. 60).
124 One may note that some scholars have argued that the dialogue’s primary topic is in fact erôs, and not philia. According to Bolotin, the first dispute on the relationship between erôs and philia in the *Lysis* was between Pohlenz (1913, 1916, 1917 and 1921) and von Arnim (1914 and 1916) (Bolotin 1979, 201–25). The minority of scholars who claim that the *Lysis* is primarily about erôs, and only secondarily about philia, include Kuiper (1909, 102), Pohlenz (esp. 1913 and 1916, 229), Friedländer (1965, 102,) Haden (1983), Bolotin (1979), cf. Gonzalez (1995b, 69, n. 4). A survey of this issue is also given by Levin (1972, 240–2). There are also intermediate positions in this regard, held by e.g. Belfiore (2012, 73): “Even though the philos is the explicit topic of the *Lysis*, this dialogue is equally concerned with erôs”. Penner and Rowe seem to hold that it is primarily about philia, and remark that they are “surprised” at finding a theory not just about friendship, “but about love, including and
In this section, I emphasize the erotic content present in the prologue. It is widely agreed among scholars that the beginning of the Lysis has at least some erotic content. However, I do not think that the full extent of this erotic content has been appreciated. In this section I point out how (i) the location, (ii) the time, and (iii) the voiced plot of the dialogue are all charged with erotic content and connotations.

In the beginning of the Lysis we are told that Socrates is walking by a wrestling-school (παλαίστρα, Lys. 204a2). Due to the connection between sports, athletic heroes, manliness, male beauty, nudity, and erōs – which was well rooted in classical Athens – the dialogue’s location, the wrestling-school, is itself erotically charged. Moreover, the time at which the Lysis is set to take place is during the festival of Hermaia. Hermaia was the festival of Hermēs, the Greek god of transitions and boundaries. He is typically described as a trickster and thief – no lock or barricade could keep him out, not even those between the worlds of the mortal and the divine. Like Plato’s Erōs, Hermēs moves freely between these worlds. Festivals in general – and especially the Hermaia, which was a festival primarily for youths – served as an excellent occasion for Athenian boys and men to mingle, and hence for lovers to meet potential boyfriends. That the boys and men were mingling is also confirmed in the Lysis (Lys. 206d2). According to Socrates, the boys look especially good on the particular day the dialogue takes place, as they are all dressed up for the festival’s ritual and sacrifice (cf. Lys. 206e).

In the prologue, we learn that the young man Hippothales is infatuated with the younger boy Lysis. The actual age difference between them is unknown, but that Hippothales is older than Lysis is made clear in the text.

especially the ‘romantic sort’, and desire, under the umbrella of philia” (Penner and Rowe 2005, xii).

125 I thus disagree with Annas (1977, 532), who only attends to what she refers to as the “serious discussion” in the Lysis, beginning after the prologue. For the record, Annas is far from alone in disregarding the prologue of the Lysis. Objecting to this neglect, both Gonzalez (2003) and Trivigno (2011, see esp. p. 82) argue in their respective articles on Lysis’ prologue for its philosophical importance and function.

126 See e.g. Scanlon (2002, 206).

127 Another similarity is that erōs and Hermes are both depicted with wings, Hermes with winged sandals, winged cap, and a winged herald’s staff (kêrykeion) to keep the messages he brings across the worlds. Where Hermes has his herald’s staff, Erōs has his arrows. Like Erōs often is paired with Aphrodite (cf. Ch. 1, section 1.3., p. 34), Hermes is paired with Hestia, the virgin goddess of the hearth, home and family. Vernant (2006) devotes an entire chapter (Ch. VI) to an analysis of this couple.

128 Cf., e.g. Scanlon (2002, 91).

129 Cf., e.g. Scott (2000, 52). Both are called “young men” (neaniskoi; Hippothales at 203a5, Lysis at 205b9), but only Lysis is called “boy” (cf. Lys. 204e6). This indicates that Hippothales is a bit older than Lysis, for Hippothales at any rate is no “boy”, cf. Penner and
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In the *Lysis*, the older lover is referred to as the erastês or erôn, while the younger boy is referred to as the beloved, the erômenos or paidika, meaning “favorite.” One should note, in this regard, that a person may be referred to as an erastês or an erômenos even though the erômenos has not shown any sign of interest for the erastês (not yet, the erastês may emphasize). As we shall see, Lysis is from the very beginning referred to as Hippothales’ erômenos, even though Hippothales has not succeeded in seducing him.

During Socrates’ talk with Hippothales, the linguistic connections between erôtan (“to ask”) and erôs are emphasized (*Lys.* 204b5–c1). Socrates states that he can see that Hippothales is not only in love (έρας), but that he is pretty far gone too (πόρρω ἦδη εἰ πορευόμενος τοῦ ἐρωτος) (*Lys.* 204b5–8). Because, as Socrates says, revealing his possession of a capacity crucial for matchmakers: “I may not be much good at anything else, but I have this god-given ability to tell pretty quickly when someone is in love and who he’s in love with (ἐρῶντα καὶ ἐρώενον)” (*Lys.* 204b9–204c3). At this Hippothales blushes. His friend Ctesippus takes over, informing us that Hippothales drives everyone around him crazy “from all the ‘Lysis’ he’s poured into our ears” (*Lys.* 204c7–d1). Ctesippus further tells us that Hippothales praises Lysis with “poems and prose pieces” and “actually sings odes to his beloved (παιδικά) in a weird voice” (*Lys.* 204d4–7).

Socrates then wants Hippothales to perform these songs for him – “so that I [Socrates] can see if you know what a lover (ἐραστήν) ought to say about his boyfriend (παιδικῶν) to his face, or to others” (*Lys.* 205a1–2). Hippothales (naturally) gets embarrassed and hesitates, and asks Socrates to ask Ctesippus instead, since Ctesippus “must have total recall of it all” (*Lys.* 205b5). Ctesippus continues to complain about how Hippothales flatters Lysis’ own excellences, as well as his ancestors’, their wealth and victories (c.f. *Lys.* 205b6–d4). It’s “pretty ridiculous”, Ctesippus says, “here he is, completely fixated on this boy and totally unable to say anything more original to him than any child could say” (*Lys.* 205b7–c1). When Socrates hears this, he tells Hippothales that he indeed “deserves to be ridiculed” (*Lys.* 205d5–6), and adds the following rationale:

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Rowe (2005, 6, n. 10). Because of the difference in age, not only between these two but also between Socrates (presumably around 60 years old) and the boys, as well as among the young men and boys at the festival, it has been suggested that one of the main topics of the *Lysis* is “inequality in experience and knowledge and its relation to friendship and love” (Gonzalez 1995b, 72).


131 For a remarkably playful passage containing linguistic connections between erôtan (“to ask”) and erôs (and also the Greek term for “hero” (ἥρως), see *Crat.* 398d1–e1. These connections are noted by several scholars, including Belfiore (2012, 16), Gordon (2012, 59–61), and Reeve (2006, xix–xx).

132 The term idion here translated “original” may also be translated as “private” or “intimate”.
The Lysis

the skilled lover [τὰ ἐρωτικά…σοφός] doesn’t praise his beloved [ἐρώμενον] until he has him (…) these good-looking boys, if anyone praises them, get swelled heads and start to think they’re really somebody (Lys. 206a4–206a5).

In short, we may say that Socrates advises Hippothales to stop praising Lysis, because the “more swell-headed they get, the harder they are to catch” (Lys. 206a5). And a good hunter – in this case, a skilled lover – does not make his game harder to catch.

When Hippothales hears this, he seems to agree that his approach so far has not been very wise. He realizes that he lacks knowledge and experience regarding how a man should conduct himself in front of a potential boyfriend. Hippothales admits that he is in need of guidance on this matter. And so he turns to Socrates: “What different advice can you give me about what one should say or do so his prospective boyfriend will like him [τί πράττων προσφιλῆς παιδικοῖς γένοιτο]?” (Lys. 206c3–5).

Socrates replies that: “if you’re willing to have him talk with me, I might be able to give you a demonstration of how to carry on a discussion with him instead of talking and singing the way your friends here say you’ve been doing” (Lys. 206c5–8). Socrates thus takes on the task of demonstrating for Hippothales how to talk to a young and beautiful boy. This is the voiced plot: Socrates is going to demonstrate for Hippothales how he should talk to his beloved.

However, as we shall see, Socrates will not merely provide Hippothales with hints as to how Hippothales should go about seducing Lysis. Rather, the demonstration will involve Socrates attempting to seduce Lysis himself. In short, Socrates will not (as one might expect at this point in the dialogue) act as a matchmaker on Hippothales’ behalf, i.e. try to match Hippothales with Lysis. Instead, Socrates will act as a matchmaker on his own behalf, trying to match Lysis with himself – through which he will also seek to match Lysis with knowledge, by instilling in Lysis an erotic desire for knowledge.

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133 The Greek term translated “swell-headed” by Lombardo is µεγαλαυχία (from µεγάλαυχος). This term may also be translated as vainglorious (cf., e.g. LSJ). In the context the term here is used in, however, I think the more modern term cocky could be a suitable translation, as it grasps both the boasting arrogance and the erotic connotations. The term is also used by Aristotle in his erotic dialogue On Drunkenness (Peri Methês), at 128. I comment briefly on Aristotle’s erotic dialogues in section 2.8., p. 85, n. 176.

134 This is an example of Socrates, right from the start, using cognates of philia and erôs seemingly interchangeably: The first term here, prophilês, is a cognate of philia, often translated as “beloved”. Earlier on, however, Socrates has indirectly referred to Lysis as the erômenon (Lys. 204c2), and Ctesippus refers to Hippothales as the lover, the erastês (Lys. 205b7) – these are cognates of erôs.

135 Gonzalez remarks that he is puzzled by how this discussion (from 204b5 to 206d1) is often skipped by interpreters, while “other scholars simply give it no prominence” (Gonzalez 1995b, 73, n. 12).
As previously mentioned, the prologue is generally taken to have some erotic content. For instance, any reader of the dialogue can easily detect that Hippothales has erotic feelings for the younger boy Lysis, and any reader of the original Greek text will see that it features several cognates to erōs. What I have argued here, however, is that the prologue is erotic far beyond Hippothales’ infatuation: The location, the time and the voiced plot are all erotically charged. In the following, I assume that the erotic content of the prologue is not present merely as external “garnish”, but as part of a careful Platonic stage-setting that serves as a valuable guideline, pedagogically giving us a hint at what we should be looking for.

2.4. Seducing Lysis (207d5–211b5)

Socrates is going to demonstrate for Hippothales how to seduce Lysis. And if we take Socrates’ already outspoken advice to Hippothales into account, we may suspect that Socrates’ attempt to seduce Lysis will not involve praising in terms of compliments or performances of love-songs. What, then, will Socrates’ approach be?

Socrates immediately locates Lysis when he enters the wrestling-school with Ctesippus and the others (Lys. 206). Lysis is shy, but eventually he comes over together with Menexenus, his close comrade (hetairos) (Lys. 206d4). They take their seat next to Socrates and the others, and Socrates starts a conversation with Menexenus (Lys. 207b8). The conversation is soon interrupted, however, since Menexenus has to leave (temporarily, as “he still had some part to play in the ceremony” (Lys. 207d2–3)). Socrates now turns to Lysis instead, which of course was his aim all along.

What follows next is that Socrates asks Lysis whether he believes that his parents love (philei) him and would like him to be as happy as possible (Lys. 207d5–7). “Naturally”, Lysis answers. Socrates then asks Lysis whether his parents let him do whatever he desires.136 In this way, Socrates seems to take what he believes are Lysis’ own assumptions on happiness and love as a starting point, namely, that loving people is letting them do whatever they want, and happiness is a matter of doing what one wants. (There are good reasons to presume that Socrates himself believes these assumptions to be

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136 The Greek verbs here used are cognates of epithumia, and also of βούλεσθαι, usually translated to wish. They are used interchangeably, and both terms may also be translated as to want. (Aristotle, however, and to some extent also Plato, tend to identify the first verb and its cognates with irrational desiring and the latter with rational wishing, cf. Penner and Rowe (2005, 19).)
false. When Lysis then answers no; there are so many things they will not let him do, Socrates acts astonished:

Good gracious! (…) You must have committed some kind of terrible offense against your father and mother (…) why in the world do they so strangely prevent you from being happy and doing what you like? (Lys. 208c2–5)

In Socrates’ words, Lysis’ parents thus prevent Lysis from being happy and from doing what he likes, which, according to the conceptions of happiness and love previously assumed by Socrates, leads to the conclusion that they do not love their son. Socrates’ argument here may be stated in the following way: (Premise 1) Loving people is letting them do whatever they want; (Premise 2) Lysis’ parents do not let Lysis do whatever he wants; (Conclusion) Lysis’ parents do not love Lysis.

Responding to Socrates’ question regarding why they do not let him do whatever makes him happy, Lysis answers that presumably they prevent him from doing things he does not “understand ἐπίσταμαι” (Lys. 209c2). “Aha!” Socrates says, and goes on to argue that in those areas where we have knowledge, all kinds of people will trust us, but in areas where we do not possess knowledge, no one will trust us to act as we judge best, but “everybody will do their best to stop us, not only strangers, but also our mother and father and anyone else even more intimate” (Lys. 210b7–c3).

Socrates then adds (1) that Lysis’ parents only let Lysis do what he wants when he has the right knowledge; and (2) that they only love him when he has that knowledge, because only then can he be useful:

So it turns out that your father does not love you, nor does anyone love φιλεῖ anyone else, so far as that person is useless ἄχρηστος. (…) But if you become wise, my boy, then everybody will be your friend φίλοι, everybody will feel close οἰκεῖοι to you (…) If you don’t become wise, though, nobody will be your friend, not even your father or mother or your close relatives (Lys. 210c7–d3).

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137 Rider (2011b, 47) notes that Socrates here offers “a false view about happiness, one that is closely related to views Plato has Socrates explicitly reject in other dialogues, such as the Gorgias, Euthydemus, and Protagoras, among others”. I agree with Rider (2011b, 58) when he remarks that: “In order to construct an argument Lysis will find convincing, therefore, Socrates uses the boy’s own (admittedly un-Socratic) assumptions”. For this point, see also Price (1989, 3, n. 3), and Scott (2000, 66–9).

138 As Penner and Rowe notes: “it would ultimately be hard to swallow any theory that started by disallowing parental love” (Penner and Rowe 2005, 33, n. 53). In particular, Vlastos (1973) seems to have had problems swallowing this.
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Lysis can only be loved insofar as he is useful, and he can only be useful if he has knowledge. Now the question therefore becomes whether Lysis has knowledge. With Lysis’ young age taken into account, I think it may be implied that Lysis, at this point anyhow, is not very wise, which, given what Socrates says, would mean that Lysis is not really loved by anyone. But Socrates is not satisfied with merely implying this. He is not finished with Lysis just yet (Lys. 210d5–8):

Socrates: Now, tell me, Lysis, is it possible to be high-minded [μεγαλόφρων] in areas where one hasn’t yet had one’s mind trained?
Lysis: How could anyone? (…)
Socrates: And if you need a teacher, your mind is not yet trained.
Lysis: True.
Socrates: Then you’re not high-minded either, since you don’t have a mind [ἀφρων] of your own.
Lysis: You’ve got me there, Socrates!

Summing up, in his short conversation with Lysis Socrates has concluded – with “help” from no one but Lysis himself – that Lysis is neither loved by his parents, nor by anyone else, and that he does not have a mind of his own. Even though the boy does not appear to be crushed, this treatment may seem brutal – even for Socrates – and perhaps even more so if Lysis’ young age is taken into account. We therefore need to ask ourselves why Socrates treats Lysis this way. What on earth does he want to achieve by going on like this?

2.5. The longer route

In this section, I will argue that Socrates’ treatment of Lysis is part of a greater plan; to instill in Lysis a desire for knowledge, and to arrange erotic relations for him that may help in the processes of acquiring that knowledge. Although Socrates started his conversation with Lysis with a discussion of parental love, which may be categorized as philia-love, we should not forget the voiced plot: How does the discussion about parental love connect to the

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139 It is worth mentioning that this is a central passage in the mentioned debate regarding whether the account of love offered in the Lysis is egoistic or not.
140 I would like to add that at this point, we have reason to believe that this is false, given that Hippothales has just demonstrated that he is in love with Lysis, unless Hippothales’ love ought to be regarded as not really love. (One may certainly question the accurateness of the statement in any case, but I will refrain from entering into a detailed discussion of this here.)
141 Italics in translation.
142 I return to this issue in Ch. 5, section 5.2.
aim of demonstrating for Hippothales how he should talk to his erômenos? As noted in the previous section, in his conversation with Lysis, Socrates argues that Lysis is not useful, because he lacks knowledge, and furthermore that because of this he is also unloved. Why would Socrates say these things to Lysis?143 My view is that he does so because he seeks to humble Lysis and make him ashamed, which is the exact opposite of praising Lysis, and hence the opposite of what Hippothales has so far been doing. Socrates also confirms this – after Socrates has said to Lysis that he is not high-minded, having a mind of his own, and Lysis has had to agree with this, Socrates addresses us readers:

Hearing his last answer, I glanced at Hippothales and almost made the mistake of saying: “This is how you should talk with your boyfriends [παιδικοῖς], Hippothales, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them as you do.” But when I saw how anxious and upset he was over what we were saying, I remembered how he had positioned himself so as to escape Lysis’ notice, so I bit my tongue. (Lys. 210e1–211a1)

Disguised as a conversation about parental love, Socrates has acted in accordance with his aim of showing Hippothales another way of talking to a beloved than to charm the beloved by flattering him. Socrates has humbled Lysis, and hence done exactly what he had planned all along: Instead of praising the potential boyfriends, Socrates says that one should humble them – and since he was going to show Hippothales how to talk to potential boyfriends, that is exactly what Socrates did. But why would he want to humble Lysis this way? One reason has been noted already – wounded game is easier to catch for the hunter. One may also see the humbling as connected to Socrates’ critique of the encomiastic genre in general.144 But naturally, Socrates could have humbled Lysis in other ways. He could have made a rude remark about his physical appearance or his shyness or something else. Why argue that Lysis does not have knowledge in particular? By doing this, Socrates achieves at least two things: He make Lysis realize (i) that he is not wise, not epistemically self-sufficient, but in need of knowledge; and (ii) that what he lacks, namely knowledge, is something that

143 Critics such as Vlastos seem to hold the view that the reason is that Plato’s theory of love is essentially egoistic – one only loves another because of some benefit, and just because of that benefit, that the egoistic perspective is “unmistakable” (Vlastos 1973, 8). (As will be made clear in the following, this is not the reason on my account.)

144 “Encomia” refers to speeches or pieces of writing that praise something or someone highly. Nightingale argues that Plato in the Lysis “sets up encomiast rhetoric as a foil for Socrates’ dialectical method; philosophical discourse is both defined and legitimated by way of its opposition to eulogy”, and that Plato by this “reminds us to meditate not only on what Socrates says but how he says it and what sort of effect it produces on the young” (Nightingale 1993, 112; 116).
he should seek to attain through erotic relations. These relations include both philosophy itself and (given the erotic-educational system) pederastic relations.145

If Socrates had humbled Lysis by making rude comments about for instance his shyness or his looks, it would perhaps not be clear what to do about it. How does one overcome shyness or ugliness? (Should these things even be regarded as worth changing?) When it comes to a lack of knowledge, however, it seems evident that there is a solution in the air, so to speak, namely pursuing wisdom through the help of an erotic partner. This may perhaps be seen as additional advice to Hippothales: That not only should he humble his beloved, but if he in addition humbles him by showing his lack of knowledge, he will create a situation where he could present himself (in the role of the lover) as part of the solution.

One may question to what extent it is necessary, however, to make Lysis realize his lack of knowledge. After all, there are no indications that Lysis believes himself to be very wise, only Socrates’ worry that too much praise (which we know Lysis has received) makes beautiful boys arrogant. Yet, although Lysis (presumably) did not think himself very wise before his encounter with Socrates, he might not before this encounter have had (sufficient) motivation for pursuing knowledge, either. During their encounter, however, it seems clear that a robust motivational cause for pursuing knowledge is brought to Lysis’ attention.

One may further wonder: If Socrates wanted to make Lysis realize that he is in need of knowledge, why did he not simply tell Lysis, straightforwardly, that he should seek knowledge? Why would Socrates take this longer route? One answer to this question is that then he would not have showed Hippothales how to talk with an erômenos. But I believe there is another answer to this question as well, and that has to do with Socrates’ role as matchmaker: Socrates wants (i) Lysis to realize on his own that he needs knowledge, and (ii) to arrange erotic relations for Lysis that will help Lysis in acquiring knowledge. To clarify the second point: I argue that Socrates will seek to match himself with Lysis in order to function as his erotic guide towards knowledge, and to try to instill in Lysis an erotic desire to pursue that knowledge. And a precondition for erotically desiring knowledge is that one realizes that one is in need (endees) of it (cf. e.g. Lys 221d6–221e4).146 Thus, this aporia plays a crucial role: It should therefore not be taken as a sign of some kind of failure or ineffective procedure, but rather as a pedagogical tool intentionally used by Socrates in his encounter with Lysis.

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145 As he is approximately twelve years old, I believe chances are good that Lysis is aware of the practice of the paiderastia (and also of the expectations of him in this regard), even though he himself, at this point, seems rather unfamiliar with the practice itself, beyond Hippothales’ advances.

As Belfiore notes (with reference to Slings): “[A]poria is a necessary and sufficient condition for ‘attempting to search and learn’ ([Meno] 84c4–5); in other words, one who is ‘thrown into aporia’ will automatically ‘feel a desire to know’ (cf. [Meno] 84c5–6)” (Belfiore 2012, 69).147 This view befits the notion of the philosopher conveyed in Plato, as one who does not already know, but rather as one who has a passionate desire to know. This notion of the philosopher is expressed explicitly in the Lysis: Philosophers, or those who philosophize, are characterized as people who desire (epithumein) wisdom (Lys. 217e7–9), not as those who already think they are wise (cf. Lys. 218a2–b3).

When seeking to turn Lysis into a lover of wisdom, Socrates first initiates a conversation with Lysis about “things” that Lysis has reasons to care about (such as being loved, his parents, his freedom and autonomy, his happiness). Socrates thus introduces interesting problems and philosophical questions worthy of Lysis’ attention. And, according to Socrates, Lysis give their discussion his “complete attention” (Lys. 211a7–8). Furthermore, shortly after the conversation between Socrates and Lysis ended, Socrates lets us readers know that he became “pleased by Lysis’ love of wisdom (philosophia)” (Lys. 213d7), which Socrates had awakened through erotic practices. And it must have been obvious to the others that the two of them were caught up with each other during their talk—they are interrupted by Ctesippus, asking: “Is this a private party between you two, or do we get a share of the conversation?” (Lys. 211c10–11). Their conversation is also (by Socrates) referred to as “our little tête-à-tête” (Lys. 211c10), an expression indicating a certain level of intimacy.

As mentioned earlier, the ancient subtitle of the Lysis is Peri philias, often translated into On Friendship. Less known, perhaps, is that the title “Lysis” (Λύσις) is a Greek term meaning a releasing, as in a releasing of chains. Other translations may be loosening, or in some cases resolving. It is a component in the term “analysis”, which originates from the Greek term ἀνάλυσις, where “ana” means “up/throughout”. Plato’s choices of proper names tend to be most apt, although to which extent we should emphasize this is a moot point. However, in light of this meaning of the title, the time at which the dialogue is set to take place, namely during the festival in honor of the god of boundaries and transitions, seems to take on further meaning. It has also been suggested that the choice of title may be related to Lysis

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147 Cf. Slings (1999, 141–2). In contrast to Mackenzie (1988, 20; 23), who argues that aporia is both a necessary and sufficient condition for desiring to learn, Belfiore (2012, 70) argues that it is only necessary, but not sufficient: In addition to reaching an aporetic state, one needs to feel shame, she argues, with reference to Alcibiades I. I commented on shame and its role in learning also in Ch. 1, section 1.7., pp. 51–52. This is a central topic in my thesis and one that I also discuss in the following chapters.
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growing up, and becoming free from his parents chains. It may also be related to familiar, friendly, and loving bonding in general, and the problems associated with these bonds (e.g. how tight should I hold the reins?). As mentioned, Socrates argues that Lysis “did not have a mind of his own”. With Lysis’ young age taken into account, he is hardly his own person; he must submit to those he belongs to, i.e. to his parents, teachers, and attendants.

That the title may be related to Lysis breaking free from his parents’ chains does not conflict with the view I am inclined to support, namely that the main title “Lysis” may indicate that the boy Lysis needs to acquire knowledge. As we have seen, the reason why – on Lysis’ own account – his mother and father hold him in chains is precisely because they don’t allow him to do things he does not understand, things he does not (yet) have knowledge about. Furthermore, we may say that Lysis needs to “free his mind”, in order to gain his independence, and especially in order to become a lover of wisdom. (One might note that Plato elsewhere describes the soul/mind (ψυχή) as winged (ὑπόπτερος), i.e. as free from earthly boundaries and chains.) This entails being freed from the idea that he is self-sufficient. On this point, I agree with Bolotin (1979, 84). For, as noted, according to Socrates, the self-sufficient person will because of his self-sufficiency not be in need of anything, and hence not cherish anything – and therefore not love anything either (Lys. 215a7–b1).

How can Lysis achieve knowledge? What is the first step towards knowledge for a young boy like Lysis? A precondition, as argued, is that Lysis first would have to realize that he is not epistemically self-sufficient, because only then can he start to love wisdom. Seen in this context, one may take Socrates’ arguments with the conclusion that Lysis does “not even have a mind of his own” to be an attempt to make Lysis realize his insufficiency.

148 Suggested by Bolotin (1979, 66). See also Thaning (2012) for an analysis of Lysis’ name and its implications for how we should read the dialogue. At Lys. 209c–d, Socrates also uses the term horos: “Horos in Greek, means boundary, or definition, and specifically refers to the boundary stone separating one piece of property from another” (Nichols 2006, 10).

149 The same may be said about Menexenus, cf. Gonzalez (1995b, 71). Gonzalez further underscores this point, by highlighting that (1) Lysis is known by his patronymic (Lys. 204e7), (2) Menexenus has to leave because he is commanded to come by his teacher (Lys. 207d), and (3) they cannot finish their discussion because they are taken away by their attendants (Lys. 223a).

150 In the Phaedrus, Socrates says that the soul (divine or human), is “like the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer” (Phdr. 246a6–7). One of the horses is black, and is generally conceived as representing erôs (and the sexual appetite, madness and lack of self-control associated with erôs). The erastês, too, is also often described as winged, in the same way that erôs is often portrayed with wings, and called pterôs, meaning “the winged one” (cf., e.g. Phr. 252b7–9). For an analysis of the erotic aspect of the charioteer-myth in the Phaedrus, see Belfiore (2006). The connection between erôs and horses is not limited to the myth in the Phaedrus, however; I return to this shortly.
And the way towards knowledge, I have argued, goes through erotic relations, of which philosophy itself is one. Summing up, I have in the previous sections of this chapter argued that: (i) Socrates uses undesirable (presumably even false) conceptions of happiness and love (established on the basis of what Socrates presumes are Lysis’ own assumptions), in seeking to humble Lysis by making him believe that he is unloved. I have also argued that (ii) this is done as a part of a greater process which has a greater cause; namely to (first) seduce Lysis, and (secondly) make Lysis realize his need of knowledge, and (thirdly) instill in him an erotic desire to pursue that knowledge. (And, we may add, to show Hippothales how he should talk to his erômenos.)

That Lysis needs knowledge, and that this relates to the practice of erôs, is conveyed in myriad ways. As horses symbolize masculine sexual energy in Ancient Greek literature, it might be worth noting the many references to horses in the *Lysis.* Socrates offers several examples concerning horses in his conversation with Lysis on parental love. We there learn that Lysis is not allowed to hold the horses’ reins/charms, or (even) drive the mule-team (*Lys.* 208a1–b5). His parents won’t allow it, due to his lack of knowledge on this point (they hold *him* in chains). I am inclined to regard Socrates’ examples as indicating that Lysis cannot handle masculine erotic energies. In order to become a man, Lysis needs to start climbing up the erotic ladder – i.e. engage with someone who can teach him about “horses” – and from these erotic experiences transcend towards knowledge.

Against the reading I suggest, it may be objected that it presupposes a questioning of Socrates’ explicit statements and arguments in the dialogue. After all, I argue that he is not upfront with what I take to be his true aims, but rather takes what he suspects are Lysis’ beliefs about happiness and love and from there provides arguments resulting in what must be seen as rather unfortunate conclusions for Lysis himself. One may thus ask: “What counts in favor of such a skeptical attitude towards what Socrates actually says?” I have argued that a skeptical attitude towards Socrates’ statements to Lysis – and above all the conclusions he suggests – seems not only permissible, but most reasonable, once his erotic educational methods are taken into account. What I suggest is that Socrates not being upfront with Lysis supports the greater cause that Lysis himself needs seek knowledge (item (ii) above).

In the appendix, I will comment further on the connection between erôs and horses that Plato plays on in several dialogues. The most famous myth in Plato that conveys this connection, however, is the just noted charioteer-myth in the *Phaedrus.* It may also be noted that Ctesippus’ name has connotations to horses, meaning “possessing horses”.

On this point, one may bear in mind that the idea that deception may be permissible is well-rooted in Plato’ dialogues. In the *Republic* (at 414b–c1), Socrates famously introduces “the Noble Lie” (γενναῖον ψεῦδος), arguing that certain lies are acceptable – *noble* even – as means of persuasion, when they are put forward for a greater cause. On this passage, Petterson...
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short: Plato is known for his careful staging – why should we think any differently of the Lysis? I believe Plato wants us to call Socrates’ ignorance, acts, arguments, and conclusions in this dialogue into question, and look beyond that which is explicitly stated.154

2.6. The mysterious próton philon (219c5–d2)

In this chapter I focus primarily on Socrates’ encounter with the boy Lysis, arguing that Lysis is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods. The conversation Socrates has with Menexenus (which Lysis is listening in on), however, has bearings on the subject of erôs and the need for knowledge as well. I find the passage concerned with a discussion of the próton philon particularly interesting in this regard. This discussion is embedded in the discussion on philia, which, in turn, is embedded in the greater story or scheme in the dialogue, which I seek to reveal in this chapter. In what follows, I shall comment on this passage from the heart of the dialogue, and show how it has bearings on the subject of erôs and the need for knowledge, before I proceed to the dialogues’ final passages.

(2013, 85–6) remarks that “some basic type of trick or scheme (µηχανή) is also necessary, we read, when it comes to the education of the citizens of the Kallipolis.” It may also be helpful here to distinguish between the two levels of discourse in Plato, i.e. the dramatic level and the meta-level (cf. Ch. 1, section 1.4., p. 41). On the dramatic level, there are occasionally (like in the Lysis) hidden motives and schemes amongst the characters. On the meta-level, we need to ask what it is that Plato wants to communicate to his readers. On this level, I think it plausible that Plato occasionally wants us to see some of the character’s (including Socrates’) statements as not conveying what that character truly believes.154 From my point of view, much speaks in favor of taking the oddities concerning the Lysis listed by Planeaux (2001) as parts of a very careful Platonic staging. Planeaux questions Socrates and his narration in the Lysis, and argues that Socrates (this is a reconstructed and shortened summary): (i) claims that he intended to go directly from the Academy to the Lyceum, yet the route Socrates describes is a longer, indirect route; (ii) claims that he is unaware of the newly built wrestling-school, even though it is situated near by the Lyceum, one of Socrates’ usual haunts; (iii) claims that he is unaware of the fact that the sophist Mikkos spends time at the school talking to the young and promising men, even though Socrates clearly knows Mikkos (Lys. 204a5); (iv) claims that he does not know the young and beautiful boy Lysis, even though Socrates (a) spends a lot of time talking to the young boys who belong to the upper class, and (b) recognizes Lysis immediately among the other young boys in the crowd (cf. Planeaux 2001, 64.) Are all these oddities merely coincidences? If one accepts the claim that Plato is making Socrates ignorant on purpose, one may ask: What would Plato gain by having Socrates approach in this way, and why would Plato have Socrates refrain from simply stating his views, and even lie? Socrates’ claim to ignorance, undeniably, is not unique for this dialogue. As previously noted, we find similar claims to ignorance in several dialogues. (One who questions Planeaux’s list of oddities is Hetherington (2009).)
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The passage concerning the prôton philon seizes on a topic that was first touched upon in Socrates’ conversation with Lysis: the relationship between love and utility. In their discussion, Lysis was told that he could only be loved insofar as he was useful. In Socrates’ conversation with Menexenus, in which the passage concerned with the prôton philon occurs, Socrates returns to this topic, asking whether or not we love something because of, or for the sake of, something else. This topic is brought up immediately after Socrates has announced that the search and seduction were over, declaring to us readers how “I [Socrates] had the satisfied feeling of a successful hunter and was basking in it” (Lys. 218c4–5). We should notice that Socrates here uses the “hunter”, a well-known metaphor for the erastês. By saying that he feels like a satisfied hunter, Socrates might here be sending a double message when communicating that the he has “won his game over”. For one thing, it may imply that he feels that he has accomplished the seduction of Lysis (and maybe also Menexenus). Secondly, it may imply that the search for answers to the questions they have discussed is over: Socrates also explicitly states that they now, absolutely and completely (pantos mallon), have found out what a friend is and is not (cf. Lys. 218b6–8).

Socrates then starts to worry – what if what they have just agreed on is not true after all? “Whoever is a friend, is he a friend to someone, or not?” (Lys. 218d6–7), Socrates now asks. They agree that he indeed is, and that he is so “for the sake of something and on account of something” (Lys. 218d8–9). It is shortly thereafter said that “So the friend is friend of its friend for the sake of a friend, on account of its enemy” (Lys. 219b2–4)155. For example, we love medicine for the sake of our health, on account of disease. Continuing this line of thought, we may say that we love money for what it enables us to buy, and that we love what we buy for the sake of something else. And so Socrates asks (Lys. 219c5–d2):

Aren’t we going to have to give up going on like this? Don’t we have to arrive at some first principle which no longer brings us back to another friend, something that goes back to the first friend (πρῶτον φίλον), something for the sake of which we say that all the rest are friends too?

To this they agree; there must be such a first principle, such a first object of love, for the sake of which we say that we love all other things. And this “first friend” has to be what we really and ultimately love. But what is it, this mysterious prôton philon, what is it that can be a proper object of desire, not desired for any further end? May a person, such as Lysis, be an object of this kind? May he be ascribed the status of being a “first friend”?

155 Penner and Rowe’s (2005, 124) translation of these lines reads: “So then it’s for the sake of the friend that the friend is friend, because of the inimical.”
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The Lysis does not provide a detailed, explicit account of what the próton philon essentially is. Vlastos, who has put forward an influential reading of the próton philon, writes that in this dialogue, “all Socrates is prepared to say is that it is ‘the good’” (Vlastos 1973, 10). In order to find a more detailed answer to what the proton philon is, Vlastos turns to the Republic, more precisely the latter part of Book V, where we are introduced to the theory of the Ideas: “In the Republic we could have inferred that now the proton philon is the Idea.” (Vlastos 1973, 20). For Vlastos, this supports his conclusion that what the Platonic lover really loves is the Idea.

To turn to other dialogues when trying to explain phenomena or to solve problems within a dialogue is not uncontroversial. However, like Vlastos, I sometimes find it both permissible and helpful. Unlike Vlastos, however, I do not think that it is the Republic that provides us with the most promising answer to what the mysterious próton philon is. If we were to turn to other dialogues while searching for an answer to this question, I believe we may find a more promising answer in the Symposium and in the Euthydemus. In the Symposium, it is said that there is no reason to ask further about what the point of wanting happiness is (Symp. 205a2–3). That happiness is what we all want, in the end, and want for its own sake, is also stated in the Euthydemus (at 278e, 280b and 282a.) Irwin (1977, 263) remarks that Socrates seems to assume that it is some kind of “psychological fact” that everyone pursues happiness (I concur – however imprecise our notion of happiness may be). We do not, then, strive for happiness because of something that would follow from it. On the contrary, happiness is our final end. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the próton philon, love’s first principle, yet also love’s telos (the end, purpose and goal of it), indeed is happiness, in terms of eudaimonia.

If only eudaimonia, and not a person (e.g. Lysis) can be accorded the status of próton philon, to what extent, then (if any), should this worry us? If eudaimonic happiness is the próton philon – as I here argue – then this may seem egoistic. One might think the platonic lover only capable of genuinely loving his (or her) own happiness. However, before concluding that the platonic lover is egoistic in his pursuit for happiness, we first need further knowledge regarding what “eudaimonic happiness” entails. This is a difficult question (I have no wish to conceal that fact by suggesting otherwise). Even though I cannot provide the treatment this major philosophical question

156 As mentioned in the Introduction, section 0.3.1., p. 21.

157 As Aristotle puts it (NE 1095a15–30): “As far as the name goes, we may almost say that the great majority of mankind are agreed about this; for both the multitude and persons of refinement speak of it as Happiness, and conceive ‘the good life’ or ‘doing well’ to be the same thing as ‘being happy.’ But what constitutes happiness is a matter of dispute.”
deserves, I will in the following offer some remarks. My impression is that to Plato, as well as the other Greek thinkers promoting eudaimonic theories, eudaimonic happiness has objective implications, i.e. it is not limited to subjective, mental states. Exaggerated for rhetorical purposes, it does not mean having a ball. Rather, it is related to – even gained through – two intimately connected components in particular, to wit, knowledge and virtue. Let us also not neglect the strong energy and divine connotations of the term eudaimonia: It evokes and points to the term daimôn, and moreover expresses that this daimôn is truly excellent, as the supplied eu carries this adverbial value.

When striving for happiness, in terms of eudaimonia, I take it that one is not striving for maximizing one’s own pleasure. Rather, one is striving for making a good life for oneself. Now, one may argue that this striving (at least for most people) includes the goal of creating a good life for those we love. One may even argue that “loving someone” essentially involves “to strive for their happiness”. That does not necessarily have to mean that one is only striving for the happiness of one’s loved ones, and not at all for one’s own happiness. (These are, after all, not mutually exclusive, but rather intimately connected.) Striving to make a good life for oneself, then, may in this way be said to include striving for the happiness of loved ones as well as for one’s own.

On Kosman’s reading of the Lysis and the Symposium, what we love for its own sake and what we long for is the fulfillment of our own nature. We love that which belongs to us by nature, in other words, that which is phusei oikeion for us. To this view, I just want to add what I have emphasized in

158 For an anthology that deals specifically with the complex relation between happiness and character, see Snow and Trivigno (eds.) (2014), esp. Part II and IV. See also Annas (1993) and Rabbås (et al.) (2015), esp. the Introduction (written by Svavarsson).

159 Nor does the German term Glücksaligkeit seem to be a proper translation (or understanding) of eudaimonic happiness (which Kant seems to presume, cf. (1900, Ak 5:111). For a recent published study of the relation between happiness (in terms of Glücksaligkeit) and duty in Kant, see Kristensen (2016); see also Brännmark (2002).

160 Plato uses to eu in e.g. the Timaeus (68e) as designating “the divine”.

161 Cf. Kosman (1976, 60; 61):

Erotic love is thus for Plato self-love, for it is finally our true self which is at once native to us and lacked by us. “Self-love” does not here mean love for love, like understanding for understanding in the Charmides, but one’s love of one’s self. Nor does it mean selfish love […] It means at the human level that erotic self-striving which characterizes all being: the desire of each thing to become what it is. […] To recognize my erotic striving as fundamentally directed toward my true being is to recognize, with Aristophanes [Smp. 193d], Eros as that “great god who leads us εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον… εἰς τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, who restores us to our native selves, to our true and original nature.

162 I first commented on the expression phusei oikeion in Ch. 1, section 1.2.
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this section; that the fulfillment of our own nature will ultimately bring us happiness in terms of eudaimonia. To sum up, then, the prôton philon, love’s first principle, yet also love’s telos (the end, purpose and goal of it), ultimately seems to be one’s happiness in terms of eudaimonia (which includes the happiness of those whom one loves), for this may be something that one lacks, but that nevertheless belongs to one by nature. Eudaimonia is our final end, and also the final end of love. The connection between happiness and love, then, can thus not be overrated on the account I am suggesting – not on Plato’s account of love, nor, I would add, in human life overall.

On Vlastos’ (1973) account, it is highly problematic that the individual cannot be ascribed the status of the prôton philon. One may thus say that even though I agree with Vlastos that no individual person can be accorded the status of prôton philon on Plato’s account, I do not share Vlastos’ view that this is provocative. Instead, I concur with Plato; no single individual person should be that which one’s happiness in life depends on. Recall that whereas Vlastos argues that the Platonic lover only loves the Idea, I argue that what he ultimately loves is eudaimonia. In my opinion, we ought to be careful and not too readily map problems considering the distinction between Ideas and particulars onto another distinction; that between instrumental and final goods. Vlastos (1973) does this in arguing that particulars, which in his perspective include individual persons, only function as steps towards the ends represented by the Ideas, and that a beloved individual person in this process of climbing up the erotic ladder is bypassed, that the lover fails to love his beloved qua the unique individual the beloved is. But what does it mean to love an Idea? In my view, to love the Idea of Beauty is to love the realization of beauty in one’s soul and others’, and to reproduce (this) in Beauty. That the Platonic lover really loves the Idea does thus not contradict with the Platonic lover loving another individual person.

Price (1997, 254–5) summarizes what the lover loves quite efficiently:

The lover loves beautiful things to have for himself; to love beautiful things is to love good things, and to have good things is to be happy; hence the lover desires to be happy ([Symp.] 204d5–e7). (…) What I love may be altogether a function of the sort of life I wish to lead and the sort of man I wish to be (…) It might be that, while all love and desire is for things that one lacks ([Symp.] 2009a9, c2–9), only all love is ultimately for happiness (…) we must take the background assumption to be Socratic: happiness is the ultimate goal of all desire (…) Erotic desire has then to be accommodated as a special mode of desiring that which all desire desires; its definition is a theorem derived from a Socratic axiom.

Ideas, virtues, or loveable individual persons; the Platonic lover loves these “things”, insofar as these ultimately contribute to happiness, in terms of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia thus stands out as the most promising answer to the
The question of what the prôton philon amounts to. In short, I think that the Platonic lover loves the Forms, the virtues, individual persons, and wisdom—all “good things” contributing to eudaimonia—because eudaimonia is the prôton philon.

That eudaimonic happiness is the prôton philon may be connected to Socrates’ erotic expertise and skills in interpersonal matchmaking in the following way: A good erotic lover should provide his beloved with proper guidance and cultivation. And good erotic guidance, when properly observed, is a good way to achieve knowledge, including self-knowledge. And this is pivotal in the process of understanding what kinds of “things” one should find worth pursuing; i.e., what kinds of “things” may lead one towards an eudaimon life. In this way, the person with a good erotic partner would be more likely to actually live a life in eudaimonia.

2.7. Erôs in the end (222a5–223b8)

Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates sums up and tells Lysis and Menexenus that: “What belongs to us by nature [φύσει οἰκεῖον] has shown itself to us as something we must love (…) the genuine and not the pretended lover [ἐραστῇ] must be befriended [φιλεῖσθαι] by his boy [τῶν παιδικῶν]” (Lys. 222a5–7). Due to the Greek terms for lover and beloved that are used here, which indicate an older lover and a young boy, it is obvious that Socrates is not talking about friendships between equals, like the one between Lysis and Menexenus. We are told that Lysis and Menexenus, who are still very young, and presumably without an erastês as they are not yet “enrolled” in the erotic-educational system, just manage a nod of assent to this concluding comment offered by Socrates (Lys. 222b1). The slightly older Hippothales, by contrast, is thrilled by it. Hippothales, who has been a bystander to the conversation since they went inside the wrestling-school, is thus brought back to our attention; when he heard these words, he “beamed every color in the rainbow in his delight (ἡδονή)” (Lys. 222b1–2). Alternatively, one could translate this passage more literally: “Hippothales’ skin broke up and sent forth all sorts of colors, as a result of his pleasure” (Lys. 222b1–2). But why did Hippothales get so excited by this comment? It has been suggested that the reason is that he thinks that he is the lover of whom Socrates speaks, and that he therefore believes Lysis should reciprocate his love. If this is the case, then this remark must seem like the conversation’s conclusion for Hippothales.

163 This point will be elaborated on in the following chapters as well, in particular in Ch. 4.
164 My translation.
However, looking closely at Socrates’ statement, it is the genuine lover who must be befriended by his boy. Does Hippothales qualify as a “genuine lover”? Hippothales is clearly up for the role as Lysis’ erastês, but is he suitable? Socrates showed Hippothales how to talk to a potential boyfriend, and has thus done what he promised to do in the beginning of the dialogue. However, Socrates only promised to give Hippothales a demonstration – not to actually match him up with Lysis. Socrates correctly bites his tongue so as not to embarrass Hippothales unnecessarily in front of Lysis (Lys. 211a1). Yet, Socrates does not speak highly of Hippothales in front of Lysis. We have no knowledge as to whether Hippothales and Lysis established a pederastic relationship or not later on, but nothing in the dialogue indicates that Lysis thinks any higher of Hippothales at the end than he did in the beginning.

One may note, in this respect, that Socrates praises Hippothales’ choice of Lysis as the object for his love explicitly: “Well, congratulations, Hippothales, on finding someone so spirited and noble to love!” (Lys. 204e9–10). Lysis is by Socrates described as “not only beautiful, but a well-bred young gentleman” (Lys. 207a2–3). Socrates is furthermore pleased by Lysis’ philosophical interest (Lys. 213d7), and Lysis is from early on called a lover of learning (Lys. 206c10). Socrates even calls Lysis “his favorite” (paidika, Lys. 205e2). Hippothales’ choice of the boy is the only thing Socrates praises Hippothales for. Socrates does not express approval of Hippothales, on the contrary, we receive the impression that Hippothales is immature, inexperienced, and ignorant. Yet, the only one who seems to believe that he has been granted an answer, and is not left in a state of aporia after the discussion between Socrates and the boys is over, is the one who probably understood the least. This could have been seen as a paradox, if it were not for the fact that it fits perfectly with Socrates’ descriptions of himself, and of the true philosopher in general: As the one who loves and seeks wisdom, and not as the one who believes he already has it.

Hippothales is not interested in philosophy or any discussion about love. All Hippothales cares about, at least according to Socrates, is his own love

166 Lysis is described as a bright and pretty boy from a distinguished family. That Lysis is from a noble family is also indicated in 204e2–3, 207c7, 208c and 209a1–2. The term gennaion (used in 207c7 and 209a1–2) is often translated as “noble”, and can also mean “from a distinguished family”, cf. Bolotin (1979, 54, n. 14). Lysis is also described as a remarkably beautiful boy with a garland on his head (cf. Lys. 207a2–3) – probably still dressed up since the boys had just finished a sacrifice and ritual in relation to the Hermaia (Lys. 206e3–5).

167 Like philos, the term paidika may refer to abstract objects: “philosophy is Socrates παιδικά (paidika) at Gorgias 482a and wisdom is the philosophers’ παιδικά at Republic 485c” (Gonzalez 1995b, 84–5, n. 32).
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for Lysis. This is also pointed out by Gonzalez, who writes that “education plays no role in Hippothales’ love” (Gonzalez 1995b, 72); by Wolfsdorf, who characterizes Hippothales as philhédônos (a lover of pleasure), as opposed to philosophos (a lover of sophia) (Wolfsdorf 2008, 30); and by Penner and Rowe, who write that: “if we stay at the level of Hippothales, we shall, of course, miss virtually everything worth anything” (Penner and Rowe 2005, 63). Hippothales seems to be standing on the first step of the erotic ladder, but he is so taken by his love of Lysis’ beauty that he misses out on the rest. He seems – at this point anyhow – incapable of climbing up the ladder. Maybe it is because sensory love is all Hippothales has to offer Lysis, that Socrates does not throw bouquets at him in front of Lysis? In any case, Socrates seems more interested in matching Lysis with knowledge than in matching him with Hippothales. Lysis is in need of a suitable erastês, but Hippothales seems unsuitable for the job. After all, Hippothales is only slightly older – how experienced and wise could he be?

But if Hippothales is not the older lover that Lysis needs, then whom might Socrates be speaking of? When Socrates speaks of the “genuine” lover, whom the “boy” must be “befriended” with, he is referring to himself.169 There are significant implications in the Lysis that Lysis is in need of a suitable erastês, someone who can teach him, and that it is Socrates (if any) who in this dialogue is portrayed as most suitable. Not only does Socrates, as noted in the previous section, describe himself as a “satisfied hunter” (Lys. 218c4–5), i.e. as an erastês who has managed to seduce “his game”. Socrates has also perfectly demonstrated genuine love, as it has been characterized by himself. Socrates has benefitted Lysis by educating him, and he has proven himself capable of offering Lysis proper guidance and cultivation, as a proper lover should. And good erotic guidance, when properly observed, is a good way to achieve self-knowledge.170 Due to Lysis’ own interest and activity in this learning process, we may say that the guidance has been properly observed, and that Lysis has good prospects of

168 As Socrates points out, Hippothales sings love-songs for his own sake – for if Hippothales succeeds in winning a person that is as loveable as he is said to be in the songs, then the songs will be like a tribute to the “master” who has managed to win the heart of such a noble person (Lys. 205d5). When Socrates states this, he calls Hippothales “ridiculous” (καταγέλαστος).

169 On this point, I agree with e.g. Gonzalez (1995b, 85) and Penner and Rowe (2005, 170).

170 Perhaps even the best way, since, according to Socrates, it is easier to see oneself in the reflections of the eyes of a lover (Alc. 1 132d–133d). The acquisition of self-knowledge is necessary for sôphrosûne, and a healthy mind is crucial to understanding what kinds of values are worth pursuing, and what kinds of “good things” may lead one towards a good life (cf. Ch. 1, section 1.8., p. 53). In this way, as just stated, the person with a good erotic partner, and therefore, if everything goes well, eventually a well-guided soul, would be more likely to achieve eudaimonia, which is the prôton philon. Presumably, this is one reason why Socrates shows a presistent interest in proper interpersonal matchmaking (cf. the Phaedrus, Lysis, etc). However, there is a big if in if everything goes well: There is no guarantee that it will. I return to this point in Ch. 5.
increasing his self-knowledge through spending time with Socrates. It seems that whereas Hippothales wants to instill in Lysis an erotic desire of the more sexual kind, the desire Socrates, at least seemingly, is aiming to instill in Lysis’ soul is an erotic desire for wisdom; using his erotic educational methods to turn Lysis into a philosopher. After this concluding comment (and others not addressed here, see esp. Lys. 221d6–221e4), Socrates suddenly takes it all back:

If neither the loved [φιλούμενον], nor the loving [φιλοῦντες], nor the like nor the unlike, nor the good nor the belonging [οἰκεῖοι], nor all the rest that we have tried in turn—they are so many that I, for one, fail to remember any more—well, if none of these is a friend [φίλον], I am at a loss for anything further to say (Lys. 222e3–7).

Socrates, then, concludes that they have not reached a definition. The conversation, in this respect, ends in aporia. Indeed, when saying that he is at a loss for anything further to say, Socrates himself expresses that he is in a state of aporia. However, according to Socrates, he says this since he “had a mind to get something going with one of the older men” present (Lys. 223a1–2). But just then, “like some kind of divine intermediaries [δαίμονες]” (Lys. 223a2), the boys’ guardians (paidagôgoi) show up. The guardians call them, and say that it is getting late and that it is time to go home. At first Socrates and the others try to drive them off, but the guardians (slaves) keep on calling in their “foreign accents [ὑποβαρβαρίζοντες]” (Lys. 223b1), or perhaps more literally translated, in their “barbaric Greek”. Moreover, we are told that the guardians had been drinking too much at the Hermaia and that they therefore might be difficult to handle, so that Socrates and the others have to capitulate. Bolotin (1979, 65) remarks that, arguably, this “brawl between Socrates’ circle and two somewhat drunken slaves is – with the possible exception of the end of the Phaedo (Phae. 188a12) – the most violent scene in Plato’s dialogues.” That the guardians show up at the end of the dialogue, and in an aggressive manner break up the party and bring Lysis home, functions as a strong reminder for Lysis (and us readers) that the boy Lysis is kept in chains, and that he needs knowledge to break free. Just as the boys are taken home by force, Socrates calls after them that:

Now we’ve done it, Lysis and Menexenus – made fools of ourselves, I, an old man, and you as well. These people will go away saying that we are friends [φίλοι] of one another – for I count myself in with you—but what a friend [φίλος] is we have not yet been able to find out (Lys. 223b4–5).

These are the last words Socrates manages to tell Lysis and the others: That in the eyes of others as well as in Socrates’, they are friends, even though they did not succeed in finding a satisfying definition of “friend”. But what kind of friend? As we have seen, Socrates has during his conversations with
The boys undertaken multiple “friendly” roles. I believe, however, that we should bear in mind, that, as “Socrates puts it, lovers love boys – the way wolves love lambs” (Nussbaum 2007, 209; cf. Phdr. 241d). It would therefore be wise for the seducer to disguise himself as a “lamb” (i.e. a friend) not to “scare off his game”; as Socrates argued in the beginning of the dialogue. 171

2.8. Concluding comments

In this chapter, I hope to have revealed how the Lysis is extensively concerned with eros and the need for knowledge, and how Lysis is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods. I have argued that the background for why they discuss philia, and likewise how they discuss it, and furthermore what Socrates wants to elicit through the discussion, are all erotically charged. We have seen that the dialogue’s erotic content is to be found in the context and drama of the dialogue, i.e. in the drama between the characters, the location, the time it is set in, the voiced plot, and indeed in Socrates’ ways to bring about his agenda; which on the reading I suggest is to make Lysis realize his need of knowledge, and to instill in him an erotic desire to pursue knowledge. The discussion of philia is embedded in this greater story, which above all concerns the boy Lysis’ need for knowledge, and how this knowledge to a significant extent is gained through erotic relations and practices.

These practices include philosophy, which itself is an erotic practice. The knowledge Lysis is in need of, however, can also be achieved through a suitable erastês. Ideally, the practice of philosophy and the interpersonal erotic relation are co-occurring, as the proper erastês is one who is able to educate his erômenos; not simply by lecturing him, but by philosophizing with him. Socrates recognizes what Lysis loves and cares about, and uses these motivations (such as e.g. Lysis’ relationship with his parents) to direct Lysis towards the erotic activity of philosophy. In the process of directing Lysis towards philosophy, Socrates also uses his erotic educational methods, which include both (i) midwifery, as Socrates releases Lysis’ thoughts through asking Lysis questions (instead of simply directly telling the boy the “truth”); and (ii) matchmaking, as Socrates seeks to arrange erotic relations for Lysis, relations that may help him in the processes of acquiring

171 This idea is also pointed out in the Phaedrus (e.g. at 237b), where Socrates hints that one does not really know that Lysias, the self-claimed “non-lover”, actually is who he claims to be (i.e. a non-lover), and not a mad lover in disguise.
knowledge. In particular, I have in this chapter emphasized how Socrates in this dialogue functions as a matchmaker.\footnote{Adams (1992, 4) has argued that: “Socrates is the main source of initiative in the progress of the dialogue. Most of the dialogue is, therefore, not maieutic.” However, this fails to recognize that matchmaking is a part of Socrates’ erotic/maieutic expertise.}

The extent to which I have focused on what the dialogue has to offer on friendship is indisputably limited. That being said, I take the relationships between Lysis and Menexenus, and between Hippothales and Cesippus, to correspond fairly well with our modern notion of friendship. Lysis and Menexenus go to school together and are close companions. Hippothales and Cesippus seem to be close friends as well – close enough, at least, to drink together and discuss pretty boys and potential boyfriends. Regarding my selection of passages to focus on in the \textit{Lysis}, however, I am happy to admit that I have predominantly focused on the passages that demonstrate the dialogue’s deep concern for erôs and the need for knowledge.\footnote{Once Socrates has stated that Lysis does not have a mind of his own, and Lysis has had to grant Socrates this (\textit{Lys.} 210d5–8), Menexenus returns, and then: “Lysis turned to me [Socrates] with a good deal of boyish friendliness and, unnoticed by Menexenus, whispered in my ear: ‘Socrates, tell Menexenus what you’ve been saying to me’ (…) so you can teach him a lesson!’ (\textit{Lys.} 211a4–5). We also learn that Lysis and Menexenus argue about who is the oldest, noblest, wealthiest, etc., and that Socrates was just about to ask them who is more wise when Menexenus had to leave. The terms Socrates uses when asking whether they quarrel about these things are \textit{ἀµφισβητεῖν} and \textit{ἐρίζειν}. According to Rider (2011b, 44) both of these terms suggest “arguing or disputing just for the sake of it, without regard for the truth”. Rider seems more correct regarding \textit{ἐρίζειν} than \textit{ἀµφισβητεῖν}, however, as \textit{ἀµφισβητεῖν} is a more neutral term for disagreement, and frequently used about the two parties in a trial, where it would be odd to say that they quarrel “just for the sake of it”. Lysis and Menexenus do not seem too upset about the quarrel, however, but merely laugh when Socrates asks them about which of them is the more beautiful (at 207c). It has also been suggested, by Tindale (1984, 105), that the competitive nature of their friendship, together with the location, the wrestling-school, indicate that the dialogue’s theme is \textit{competition} in relation to friendship. For an analysis of Lysis and Menexenus as friends, see e.g. Nichols (2006, 13–17).}

I have focused on (i) the dialogue’s prologue, (ii) Socrates’ conversation with Lysis, (iii) the passage concerned with the \textit{prôton philon}, and (iv) the final passages of the dialogue. The reason for assessing the prologue is that I take it, as argued, to be carefully staged, giving us a hint as to what we

\footnote{For example, I have not attended to what may seem like a trivial discussion about friendship, wrapped up in what may be seen (at least by modern readers) as superficial sayings, like “God always draws the like unto the like” (\textit{Lys.} 214a5; \textit{Od.} xvii.218), which in turn is refuted by another saying that similarity is the ground of enmity: “Potter is angry with potter, poet with poet, and beggar with beggar” (\textit{Lys.} 215c7–d1; \textit{WD}. 25–6). Socrates also states “the good alone is friend to the good alone, while the bad never enters into true friendship [φιλίαν]” (\textit{Lys.} 214d3–7). These sayings may be said to represent three theses: (1) Like is attracted to like; (2) opposites attract; and (3) only the good are friends. Indeed, as Belfiore writes, a “number of possible answers are proposed, to all of which objections are raised” (Belfiore 2012, 68). I have not discussed all the various answers and objections offered to Socrates’ question; for this, see Penner and Rowe (2005). A study that deals specifically with the varieties of philia in the \textit{Lysis} is Jenks (2005).}
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should look for in the rest of the dialogue. And the prologue, as shown, is more erotically charged than it looks like at first glance. The reason I have paid attention to Socrates’ conversation with Lysis was to show how this conversation carries out the plan outlined in the prologue, i.e. that Socrates is going to demonstrate how a lover should behave. Further, I take Lysis to be the main subject of Socrates’ erotic educational methods in this dialogue. (Instead of for example taking Lysis’ friend Menexenus to be the main subject, even though Menexenus – on Lysis’ request, but nonetheless – actually converses more with Socrates than Lysis does.) In my discussion of the prôton philon, I suggested that this is eudaimonia: I here argued that the connection between eudaimonia and love cannot be overstated, and suggested that lovers, through providing erotic guidance, may be valuable in the search for eudaimonia. 175 Finally, I discussed the final passages of the Lysis because I wanted to highlight how Hippothales’ presence and wishes in both the dialogue’s opening and at its end create an erotically charged framework for the dialogue, and show how these final passages also underscore how Lysis is held in “chains” that he needs knowledge to free himself from.

“[T]here is little attempt to organize the various dilemmas and suggestions with a view to any solution, or rendering coherent what emerges from the discussion” Annas (1977, 551) remarks. We must turn to Aristotle, she says, for a systematizing of “the points that the Lysis throws up in aporetic fashion” (Annas 1977, 551). 176 Indeed, the Lysis is typically viewed as an aporetic dialogue, i.e. as a dialogue ending without a solution. 177 On

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175 I will elaborate on this point in Ch. 4.
176 The fact that the discussion in the Lysis, however, provided the material for Aristotle’s distinction between three kinds of philia seems indisputable. Be that as it may, I have no wish to underestimate the richness of the account of philia offered by Aristotle: About one-fifth of the Nicomachean Ethics concerns philia, and a similarly large part of the Eudemian Ethics. When comparing the Lysis with Aristotelian texts, however, we ought to remember that the Lysis is not a traditional treatise (nor is it a text based on a collection of lecture-notes, as Aristotle’s works typically are). As such, one could argue that the Lysis rather should be compared with Aristotle’s dialogues, especially the erotic dialogues titled the Eroticus and the Symposium, the latter sometimes just referred to as his book On Drunkenness (Peri Methês). Unfortunately, very little of these have survived. The fragments mostly appear in Athenaeus of Neuctratis. For a list of Aristotle’s lost works, and comments to these, see Georgoulis (2000, 70–98). Thanks to Panagiotis Pavlos for pointing out references to Aristotle’s erotic dialogues in Georgoulis’ study (which is written in Greek but referred to in the bibliography in Latin letters). For translated fragments, see Ross (1952). For a discussion of Aristotle’s Eroticus (not to be confused with Plutarch’s dialogue by the same name), see Friedländer (1945). For Aristotle on erotic love more generally, see Price (1989), pp. 236–251. Price (1989, 236) also refers to a “Thesis on Love, 4 books” (with ref. to D. L. 5.22–7), remarking that this work sounds more like a workshop product (than a dialogue).
177 However, scholars disagree on whether the aporia is genuine or not. Belfiore (2012, 63, n. 3) remarks that “most scholars claim that Socrates or Plato actually endorses a particular view about issues that are represented in the dialogue as leading to aporia”. In this note, Belfiore
my view too, the *Lysis* does seem to end in aporia and confusion, at least in the sense that it fails to provide a definition or final account of friendship. However, if one reads the dialogue focusing on erôs and the need for knowledge, there is still a sense in which the *Lysis* ends in aporia, but aporia of another kind: Not aporia in the sense that “friend” is not defined, but aporia on the dramatic level, in the sense that the boy Lysis is thrown into aporia, into a wavering state of mind that is necessary for awaking in him a desire to pursue knowledge.

When reading this dialogue (and especially when critically examining the level of argumentation in it), we must not forget that Socrates in the *Lysis* is talking to very young boys, not to old men, nor to an undifferentiated group of people (as in the *Apology*). Naturally, this affects Socrates’ level of argumentation. Moreover, Socrates is discussing with the young boys; he does not lecture them. This may be frustrating; “why would Plato handicap the discussion by making the philosopher talk to such young characters?” (Scott 2000, 53). Because, as Scott answers his own (obviously rhetorical) question, “Lysis’ age is essential to the result”: the *Lysis* offers a “dramatic enactment of a successful Socratic lesson” (Scott 2000, 53). But what, exactly, is the lesson? I have argued that the lesson Socrates elicits is that Lysis is not self-sufficient, but in need of knowledge and of a lover who can help him obtain that knowledge. This Platonic dialogue, then, is one in which we see how the practice of erôs is intimately connected to the practice of philosophy.

I have presented a reading that, despite its clear textual basis, may strike some as controversial: I am claiming that Socrates is not upfront with his true aim, and that he intentionally seeks to put the young boy Lysis to shame by humbling him. The reading I am suggesting thus connects to a larger question, as interpreting Plato and searching for his true intentions and views becomes (even) more challenging if we cannot trust all of Socrates’ explicit arguments and conclusions. If we cannot find Plato’s view in Socrates’ arguments and the conclusions he suggests, where, then, should we look for it? Since Plato wrote narrative dialogues, a reasonable answer to this question is that we have to take the dramatic devices into account, in addition to the arguments offered, to get a fuller picture of what Plato wishes to convey.

Why Plato has chosen this longer route for us, why he did not simply present his own accounts, arguments and views, or had Socrates present them in a more straightforward manner, has, I believe, to do with his view of what true philosophers should do: Not learn or teach what is right or good by

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178 Bolotin suggests that it is perhaps easier for Socrates to discuss friendship with these two young boys than with one of his closer companions (Bolotin 1979, 67).
The Lysis

being told or telling what is right and good, but instead by engaging actively with others in finding this out. Accordingly, rather than explicitly and directly argue that Lysis is in need of knowledge and erotic relations that could help him in the search for knowledge, Socrates demonstrates that this is so.
3.1. Introduction

The *Charmides* opens on a deadly serious note. It depicts the beginning of one of the darkest chapters in Athenian history, the Peloponnesian war, in which Socrates and the other citizens were put to the test. It soon shifts into a lighter tune, however, as Socrates changes the topic of discussion into one he takes an immense interest in: Young men and the education of their souls. Hearing the others praise the teenager Charmides for his good looks and sôphrosunê, Socrates sets out to examine the state of Charmides’ soul. 179 Is he really as sôphrôn as the others claim?

The question of what the wide-ranging concept sôphrosunê amounts to constitutes the core of the discussion between the main characters in the dialogue; Socrates, Charmides and Critias. My primary interest in this chapter is not, however, to examine the various definitions explicitly put forward, or to propose an alternative answer. Instead, I will argue that the dialogue portrays certain character traits as pivotal in order to properly engage in philosophical discussions, i.e. to practice philosophy well.

The virtue(s) or vice(s) of a person are manifested in that person’s character traits. 180 A much discussed question – not only in philosophy, but also in other disciplines, as well as in popular culture – is whether a person can change. To what extent (if any) is it possible to look at “the man in the mirror” and decide to change one’s ways, one’s (moral) character? The subject of whether or not virtue can be taught is much discussed in Plato, as well as in the secondary literature on Plato, where commentators differ in opinion. Indeed, one may ask what (if anything) could be done with the (negative) insight that one finds oneself “in need of virtue”. Is one “doomed”, so to speak, if one for example realizes that one is in need of moderation (sôphrosunê), because one will then never obtain it? In Plato, the ability to act virtuously, for example courageously (*andreios*181), seems to be

179 For short clarification of the term sôphrosunê, see Ch. 1, section 1.8., pp. 52–53.
180 Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.2., p. 32.
181 This is the adjective form of the term “andreia” (ἀνδρεία), which in turn is derived from anêr, meaning “man”. Literal translations of andreia are “manliness” and “manhood”. The
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determined – at least to a significant extent. It seems that according to Plato, humans have what we may call “congenital conditions” in this regard, i.e. we are born with certain dispositions which make us more or less prone to act courageously. Yet, there also seems to be strong textual evidence suggesting that this ability may be learned through proper education.\footnote{Cf. e.g. \textit{Rep}. 410b–412a. We do not necessarily need to favor one of these two views, however, as they may be viewed as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive (cf. e.g. Carelli (2015)).}

The question of whether or not virtue can be taught is complex. Even though I will briefly revisit this question, my aim for this chapter is not to contribute to the rich secondary literature on this subject. In this chapter, I shall make the claim that \textit{character traits can be encouraged}. I aim to show that Socrates encourages Charmides to be courageous and moderate.\footnote{It should be noted here that the first may be said to be included in the second, i.e. that if you are moderate (\textit{sôphrôn}), you are also courageous. Indeed, the grouping of virtues in Plato is notoriously difficult – in accordance with the principle of the unity of the virtue, which Socrates argues in favor of in the \textit{Protagoras}, there is also a sense in which whoever has one virtue has them all (cf. Vlastos 1972). This principle of unity is a well-known Platonic principle (although I have the impression that it is not a typical subject of discussion amongst scholars today). Even though I recognize this principle, I still think it permissible to treat courage and moderation as separate here, for the sake of clarity. It should also be noted that one way to begin the investigation is by distinguishing what may be called “ideal virtue” from so-called “natural virtue”: Whereas ideal virtue involves wisdom, natural virtue merely involves the \textit{disposition} for virtue, and requires only limited knowledge. That is to say, the cognitive dimension required for natural virtue is limited to that of \textit{reasoning}, needed in order to reach the (negative) insight that one is in \textit{need} of knowledge and virtue. This distinction may be used in clarifying my aim; I do not wish to suggest that one needs to have “ideal virtue(s)” in order to engage in philosophy, but rather put emphasis on how certain character traits are encouraged by Socrates, as they stand out as particularly important for practicing philosophy well.} I will also show how Socrates encourages Charmides to pursue knowledge. Moreover, I will argue that to erotically desire knowledge (i.e. to be a lover of knowledge) is a character trait.\footnote{As underscored in Ch. 1, section 1.2., p. 32, this does not imply that I consider erôs to be a virtue, or erôs to be a character trait \textit{per se}.} My overarching thesis is that to erotically desire knowledge, as well as to be moderate and courageous, are all character traits that this dialogue demonstrates as crucial in order to practice philosophy well.

I argue that Socrates encourages these character traits because he wants to initiate Charmides into philosophy and philosophical practice, and these character traits are of major importance for practicing philosophy properly. However, I will conclude that, ultimately, Charmides does not change as a result of Socrates’ encouragement, but instead fails to participate
satisfactorily (i.e. courageously, moderately, and passionately) in their philosophical discussion.

In addition, I aim to show how Socrates’ discussion with Charmides, and the setting in which this is carried out, are erotically charged. Against the view that Socrates in the Charmides involves erôs only as sexual desire, I will argue that Charmides is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods. Socrates tries to bring Charmides’ beliefs into the light. He examines them, and when not satisfied, he tries to throw Charmides into an aporetic state. In this process, and in the process of encouraging the character traits needed for practicing philosophy well, Socrates makes use of certain psychological techniques. In particular, we shall see that Socrates attempts to put Charmides to shame: The feeling of shame that tends to accompany the aporetic state is intended to motivate Charmides to seek knowledge – knowledge that Socrates encourages Charmides to erotically pursue.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: First (3.2.), I discuss the dialogue’s prologue and background-history. Thereafter (3.3.), I turn to Socrates’ examination of Charmides’ soul. I here comment on Charmides’ definitions, before I discuss how the connections between sôphrosunê, andreia, and erôs are related to the dialogue’s depiction of the practice of philosophy. Finally (3.4.), I pull some threads together, sum up, and offer some concluding remarks. In short, my conclusion is two-fold: First, the Charmides demonstrates, through Socrates’ and Charmides’ behavior and demeanor in the prologue (153a–157c), and in Socrates’ conversation with Charmides (157c–162b), that certain character traits are important in the practice of philosophy. Secondly, Charmides fails to demonstrate the crucial character traits that are encouraged by Socrates for practicing philosophy well.

3.2. Prologue and background-history

As is often the case with the prologues in Plato’s dialogues, the prologue in the Charmides tends to be neglected in the secondary literature. Presumably, the reason for this is that in comparison to the rest of the dialogue, the prologue is not rich in philosophical arguments. Still, the prologue is worthy of attention: Not only does it create a vignette for understanding the importance of the main virtue scrutinized – sôphrosunê –

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185 Such a view is held by e.g. e.g. Rist (2012, 70), who remarks that Socrates in the Charmides “limits eros to sexual desire”. For a detailed account of Socrates’ erotic educational methods, see Ch. 1., section 1.6.

186 As Schmid (1998, 2) observes: “Many scholars, including Tuckey, Taylor, Guthrie, and even Friedländer, devote relatively brief or no attention to the prologue”. 
but it also efficiently and pedagogically introduces the other main themes in the dialogue, including courage and erôs. In the following, I aim to show how the prologue reveals the virtues and interests of the characters involved. I will first provide a short account of the dialogue’s background-history and setting (section 3.2.1.), before turning to three telling metaphors in the prologue that are central in detecting how Plato portrays Socrates (section 3.2.2.).

3.2.1. Background-history and setting

Sôphrosunê was the Athenian aristocrat’s virtue par excellence. Socrates’ main interlocutors, Charmides and Critias, are both aristocrats and members of a distinguished Athenian family (the same, in fact, as Plato belonged to). Despite Charmides’ young age (approximately seventeen) we are told that he is considered sôphrôn (Chrm. 157d6). However, we may suspect that neither Charmides nor Critias, albeit aristocrats, were chosen as Socrates’ interlocutors because they were perfect examples of persons having sôphrosunê: According to Xenophon (Mem. 1.2.24–26), Critias behaved well as long as he sought Socrates’ company, but while in exile, he lost his self-control.

Some time after his return to Athens, Critias became the leader of the Thirty Tyrants: a group of rich, upper-class men, appointed by the Spartan King to establish a new constitution after the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), as Athens was defeated in the war and its democracy abolished. Charmides, too, became part of this group. According to Xenophon, Socrates supposedly once commented on Critias’ lack of self-control, after having failed to convince Critias not to stalk a boy called Euthydemus: “Critias seems to have the feelings of a pig: he can no more keep away from Euthydemus than pigs can help rubbing themselves against stones” (Mem. 1.2.30; cited from Nails 2002, 110). According to Nails (2002, 110) this is said to have started a conflict between Critias and Socrates – a conflict that was never healed – and once Critias was empowered, he was central in drafting a law that could be interpreted as a sort of revenge: The law that forbade Socrates to teach the art of words (ἡ λόγων τέχνη), and in practice prevented Socrates from talking to anyone under thirty.

We should reflect on the significance of these historical facts while reading the Charmides. When Plato wrote this dialogue, his contemporary

187 Cf. e.g. Cooper (1997, 639).
188 Charmides was Plato’s uncle on his mother’s side and Critias the first cousin of Plato’s mother (cf. Nails (2002)). One may also note that there are several characters named Critias in Plato’s corpus, and that this one is the same Critias as the one appearing in the Protagoras. According to Nails’ numeration, this is Critias IV. On Charmides’ and Critias’ ages, I follow Nails (2002, 91; 109).
189 For a discussion of this, see Nails (2002, 119).
readers had knowledge of Socrates’ trial and execution, in which a central charge against him was that he was corrupting the young. Well-informed readers today are also aware of this. Furthermore, his readers were (and are) familiar with Charmides and Critias, their violent methods and spectacular lack of moderation, as well as with Charmides’ erotic attractiveness, which served him well in attaining political power. We also know about the controversy regarding Socrates’ affiliation with the Thirty Tyrants. Socrates criticized the Thirty Tyrants as the situation in Athens worsened. Even so, the Athenians held that he had demonstrated sympathy towards them by staying while they ruled, instead of leaving in protest of their government (like many other prominent citizens did).

The Charmides opens with Socrates’ return from the battlefield. Eager to resume his wonted life he goes to his old haunt, the wrestling-school of Taureas. At the wrestling-school, Socrates meets his friend Chaerephon, who asks: “How did you come off in the battle?” (Chrm. 153b4). This question may also, however, be interpreted as: “How (on earth!) did you survive the battle?” In this way, the question can be interpreted as asked out of both relief and curiosity: For even though Chaerephon is said to be Socrates’ close friend, he might still have been curious regarding how, exactly, his friend Socrates whom at this point was in his forties (according to dramatic timeline), managed to survive.

Taking Callicles’ accusation into account (that Socrates is able neither to defend himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers), one might even suspect that Socrates had fled the scene. The

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190 It has even been suggested that Socrates was killed because of his link to Critias. Wilson refers to the comments by Aeschines the orator as important evidence suggesting that near-contemporaries thought his role as teacher to Critias was the sole reason he was executed. Cf. Wilson (2007, 83). (I comment further on this subject in the Ch. 5, section 5.2., p. 159, n. 315.)

191 Xenophon too pictures Charmides as remarkably beautiful, and writes about his erotic attractiveness and how it served him well in the aristocratic circles, cf. e.g. Tuozzo (2011, 88). Notably, Charmides is also one of the characters in Xenophon’s Socratic dialogue titled The Symposium, in which major themes are eros, wisdom, virtue, beauty, and laughter.

192 In the very beginning of the dialogue, Socrates says that he has just returned with the army from the fierce battle at Potidaea, between Athens and Sparta. It has been argued that this information provides the dialogue with a quite precise fictive date, the year 432 B.C. One may note that while this is the traditional view, Planeaux (1999, 75) has argued that the battle referred to in the Charmides is the Battle of Spartolus in 429 B.C.

193 This is the same wrestling-school that serves as the location in the Lysis. The Lysis, Charmides and the Theaetetus are all located in a wrestling-school (palaistra), and the Euthydemaus in a gymnasion. The palaistra and gymnasion both may be said to have the same gymnasium atmosphere, providing the setting of the dialogues located in either of them with connotations of nudity, competition, and courage. According to Tuozzo (2011, 103), the palaistra and gymnasion “were in some sense the athletic analogue to the symposium, and as in the symposium, the pedagogic aspects of these institutions had pederastic overtones”.

194 In the Gorgias at 486a–b.
Athenian general Alcibiades, however, once held that Socrates fought with exemplary courage in this battle, saving his (i.e. Alcibiades’) life (cf. *Symp.* 220d–e). To this, in turn, it might be objected that Alcibiades, being Socrates’ admirer, is not an objective source. However, Alcibiades’ report may be correct, as Socrates also receives what seems to be genuine praise for his military valor in the *Laches* (at 181a–b), here from the general Laches, who tells us that if everyone had fought like Socrates, they would not have been defeated.

We cannot know for certain how well Socrates fought (even though it may be argued that the statements of the general Laches seem more trustworthy than those of Callicles). If we give Socrates the benefit of the doubt and assume that Socrates did fight well, however, then one may say that Chaerephon’s question created an opportunity for bragging. But Socrates does not answer by explaining how courageously he fought. He does not share the others’ enthusiasm in talking about the battle at all, even though he answers their questions (cf. *Chrm.* 153c9–d2). This might be read as one of the first indications that Socrates is moderate, *sôphrôn*, and one of the first connections so far made between moderation and courage.

That Socrates here might be said to be depicted as *sôphrôn* becomes particularly evident if we interpret it in the context of *hubris*, which is used by Plato as an opposite term to *sôphrosunê* (cf. e.g. *Phdr.* 237e–238a.). The term *hubris* was specifically used in describing serious assaults on the honour of the victim, which were likely to cause shame, for the pleasure of the abuser. The shame, however, reflected back on the abuser; to be hubristic signified that one craved a perverse sense of honor. The actions were often violent, and the pleasure of the abuser typically sexual in nature. (The

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195 This is the same Alcibiades as in the *Alcibiades I*, which I discuss in Ch. 4.
196 As they were, by the Boeotians, in 424 B.C.
197 When they discuss the war, it is worth noticing that the term used to describe it, *ischuros*, meaning “fierce”, or “intense”, later in the dialogue is used as the opposite for the one used for moderation, *hêsuchos*, “calm”. Cf. e.g. Schmid (1998, 3).
198 *Hubris* (*ὕβρις*) was also held to be an offense against the gods, and said to be the cardinal sin against Apollo (cf. *Rider (2011a, 399)*. Worth mentioning in this regard is that in the *Apology*, Socrates claims to be a disciple of Apollo (*Ap.* 20e8), and he here also states that his main objective in life is to disabuse his fellow citizens of their *hubris* (*Ap.* 23b).
199 The connection between sexual desire and *hubris* are particularly strong in Plato (in comparison to other Greek writers from the same period), according to Fisher (1992). Fisher (1992, Ch. 12) shows how this connection plays out in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, yet also in the *Laws*, where sexual assaults are called *hubris*; it is said that rape against free women (apparently not against female slaves) or boys may be (as in Athens at the time) punished by the “one who has been treated with *hubris*” or his/her relatives (*Laws* 874c; cf. Fisher (1992, 482)). For further reading on erôs, hubris and the thumoeidetic, see esp. Ludwig (2002), Ch. 4, pp. 170–212, who remarks that: “Rape was an important subcategory of hubris because force or otherwise undesirable intercourse was one means of shaming the victim (…) Hubris as rape created shame on the part of the victim and a perverse sense of honor or ‘raising above’ on the part of the perpetrator” (Ludwig 2002, 171). The prime example in ancient
strong sexual connotation of *hubris* is one that is rather absent in our modern use of the term.) By not sharing the others’ “war-fever” and not taking pleasure in explaining how he harmed his enemies, but instead calmly and reluctanty answering their many questions, Socrates may here be said to demonstrate the opposite of *hubris*; i.e. *sôphrosunê*. We shall see that the opposition between *hubris* and *sôphrosunê*, in the prologue merely hinted at, becomes explicit at the end of the dialogue.

### 3.2.2. Erôs and domination

The prologue is rich in metaphors, analogies and images worthy of our attention. I will now assess three of these, referring to them as “metaphors”. These metaphors may all be read as providing hints to the dialogues’ core themes. Among these core themes, I argue, are erôs and domination.

After the others have “had enough of these things”, Socrates soon enough introduces the theme of erôs and philosophy, asking whether anyone has become distinguished in beauty or wisdom, or both, while he was away (*Chrm.* 153d2–5). Upon hearing Socrates’ question, Critias glances towards the door, replying that Socrates will soon be able to make up his own mind, because the laughing men just arriving are the lovers (*ἐρασταί*) of the one thought to be the handsomest (*κάλλιστος*) young man of the day – so the young man himself, Charmides, cannot be far away (*Chrm.* 154a3–7).

When Charmides enters the room, Socrates addresses us readers:

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200 Literature of *hubris* is perhaps Achilles (in the *Iliad*), who kills his beloved’s killer Hector, then slits his heels and passes a girdle through them, before he fastens the girdle to his chariot and drags Hector’s dead body around. Achilles continues to mistreat Hector’s body for the next twelve days. Another example of *hubris* is that of Achilles’ son Phyrrus (also known as Neoptolemus), whose violent actions included rape. For a discussion of the treatment of Achilles in the *Republic*, see Hobbs (2000, Ch. 7).

201 My reader should note that I here use “metaphor” in the loose sense of the term.

202 While Charmides is described as particularly beautiful, Critias’ father bears the interesting name “handsome-ugly” (*Κάλλαισχρος*), and Critias is referred to as precisely the “son of Kallaischos” a few times. (On this Friedländer (1965, 2:67) remarks: “Perhaps this is merely play with words. Perhaps it is more.”)
You mustn’t judge by me, my friend. I’m a broken yardstick as far as handsome people are concerned (ατεχνῶς γὰρ λευκὴ στάθμη εἰμὶ πρὸς τοὺς καλούς), because practically everyone at that age strikes me as beautiful. But even so, at the moment Charmides came in he seemed to me to be amazing in stature and appearance, and everyone there looked to me to be in love (ἔρων) with him, they were so astonished and confused by his entrance, and many other lovers (ἔρασται) followed in his train (Chrm. 154b8–c5).

The metaphor (M1) translated “broken yardstick” (λευκὴ στάθμη) seems odd. What does it mean, and what does Socrates want to convey by using it? The term στάθμη refers to some kind of measuring tape (or line), used by for example by carpenters in order to draw a straight line. The term translated with “broken” here means white, or bright (λευκή). Now, why is this translated with “broken”, when it is rather describing the color of the measuring tape? The reason must be that these measuring tapes were usually red, not white or bright. The expression may be a shorter variant of a saying that is to be found in Sophocles (λευκῷ λίθῳ λευκὴ στάθμη) meaning “a white measuring tape on a white stone”. Needless to say, a white measuring tape on a white stone would be hard to see. Undoubtedly, it seems better to use for example a red measuring line on a white stone: To use a white measuring tape on a white stone could be a token of the carpenter’s lack of professionalism. Does Socrates here inform us that he finds practically all young men handsome, and therefore is like a “broken yardstick” concerning these, i.e. incapable of measuring them? What, exactly, is it that he finds it hard to measure – who is more physically attractive?

We may here also bear in mind that it was common to exercise nude (or close to it) in the wrestling-schools.
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Socrates observes that everyone seems to be in love with Charmides, as opposed to – as one could expect according to the pederastic system – only the older men. As Socrates remarks (Chrm. 154c5–7):

[That] men of my age should have been affected this way was natural enough, but I noticed that even small boys fixed their eyes upon him (…) like he was a glorious statue.

Chaerophon then lets Socrates know that “if he were willing to strip (…) you would hardly notice his face, his body is so perfect (πάγκαλος)” (Chrm. 154d4–5). Upon this, Socrates tells the men that they are describing a man without an equal. That is, at least if Charmides should happen to have one “small thing” in addition, namely a well-formed soul; “why don’t we undress this part of him and have a look at it before we inspect his body?” (Chrm. 154e5–6), Socrates suggests. This is the voiced plot; to undress Charmides’ soul, i.e. to investigate the soundness of it. They will put Charmides to test, and measure and evaluate his soul and what it possesses.

They decide to lure Charmides over to their table, planning to catch his interest by pretending that Socrates has a remedy for the headaches Charmides (apparently) has complained about lately (Chrm. 155b3–6). According to Socrates, Charmides’ arrival at their table causes laughter – everyone starts to push each other to make room for the beauty next to themselves – the man sitting on the one end gives up, and the man sitting on the other end is toppled off sideways. Finally, Charmides sits down between Socrates and Critias. Socrates now gets intimate with us readers once again (M2):

And then, my friend, I really was in difficulties, and although I had thought it would be perfectly easy to talk to him [Charmides], I found my previous brash confidence [θρασύτης, “over-boldness”] quite gone. And when Critias said that I was the person who knew the remedy and he [Charmides] turned his full gaze upon me in a manner beyond description (…) my noble friend, I saw inside his cloak [εἴδον τε τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱµατίου] and caught on fire [ἐφλεγόµην] and was quite beside myself. (Chrm. 155c5–d4)

Socrates’ reaction here stands out in Plato’s corpus. Yes, Socrates is depicted as an erotic figure in several Platonic dialogues (and also in works by other writers from the same period, e.g. Aristophanes’ Clouds and Xenophon’s Symposium). But there is no other passage in which Socrates states his attraction towards a youth at greater length and depth. Some scholars have even suggested that the expression “caught on fire” (ἐφλεγόµην) implies an erection. 206

Socrates nonetheless manages to keep his cool while carrying on the conversation with Charmides; in light of their conversation, Socrates’ description of his reaction when meeting Charmides seems a major overstatement (perhaps even false). At the very least, even if Socrates did experience an intense erotic fever upon seeing Charmides, he was still able to concentrate on examining the boy’s soul. If the latter is the case, then this reveals Socrates as able – even in this challenging situation – to stay calm and in control of his desires. Socrates’ éros for finding out what sôphrosunê amounts to and whether Charmides’ soul possesses it seems stronger than his erotic attraction to Charmides’ appearance.

By making us attentive to his struggle in this way, we are given a demonstration of Socrates’ own sôphrosunê. Alternatively, if we think he is bluffing, we see how Plato’s Socrates tries to display himself as possessing it through managing his desires.207 Adding to his earlier display of sôphrosunê through being neither war-feverish nor hubristic, our attention is here directed towards Socrates’ erotic fever, and control thereof. We here glimpse Socrates’ (whether genuine or pretended) moderation. And this (erotic) moderation is very much in character: He usually appears as (erotically) sober regarding physical beauty. What is of importance is not merely his chastity or abstinence, however, but his ability to stay calm and in control of his desires.

After telling us that he lost his self-control and confidence for a moment, Socrates says that no one was as wise regarding the art of éros as the erotic poet Cydias (σοφώτατον εἶναι τὸν Κυδίαν τὰ ἐρωτικά), who advised someone on the subject of beautiful boys: “The fawn should beware lest, while taking a look at the lion, he should provide part of the lion’s dinner” (Chrm. 155d4–e1).208 It has been claimed that Socrates – who elsewhere claims to be an authority and expert on éros209, and in the Apology denies that poets are wise (sophoi) – here “falls back on poetic wisdom like any stereotypic lover” (Schmid 1998, 88). Instead of dismissing this reference to Cydias as irrelevant, however, we should ask ourselves the following question: What did Plato hope to elicit by having Socrates refer to this piece of poetry?

207 On this point, we should be aware that Plato has Socrates saying this to us, i.e. the readers; Socrates does not say this directly to Charmides or the other men present. Socrates sometimes offers a “noble lie” to his interlocutors, a “lie” that we readers are supposed to call; but this is not one of these cases, as Socrates here addresses us, the readers. Unless one argues that Plato offers “noble lies” to his readers, as well; for in order to argue that Socrates is dishonest when telling us how he felt (that he “caught on fire”), one needs to argue that Plato here tries to deceive his readers, through having Socrates providing the readers with deceptive information.

208 For more information on Cydias, see Appendix.

209 Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.5.
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At first glance, this metaphor (M3), or rather analogy, may be read as standing in contrast to Socrates’ erotically charged hunting-analogies elsewhere (see e.g. Lys. 206a1–7; Phdr. 241c6–d1; Prt. 309a1–2). I nevertheless think it should be interpreted in light of these. In these hunting-analogies, Socrates describes how the erastês should behave in a way that does not “scare off his game”, thus depicting the older lover as the hunter. But here, Socrates, who according to the norms should be the erastês, apparently considers himself to be the fawn; the hunted animal that needs to take precautions not to be snapped up, and the youth Charmides – befittingly, for the future murderous tyrant – as the lion, the dangerous and potentially deadly animal.

However, as previously mentioned, Socrates argues in the Lysis that one way for a lover to scare off his game (i.e. one’s beloved) is to praise the beloved, as this may result in the beloved becoming arrogant, and hence flee (looking for a better game himself, i.e. a better lover). This may have happened to Charmides, who apparently receives lovers’ praise on a daily basis, having a group of lovers following him and people pushing one another just to sit close to him: Being the lion, he dominates his fawning lovers. One should also keep in mind that “lion” is used as a symbol for thumos (Rep. 588d), and in Homer, it is the “favorite epithet of the proudly egoistic and volatile warrior” (Hobbs 2000, 25). In sum, then, I do not think that Socrates here accidently falls back on poetry like any stereotypic lover, but rather that Plato, by his choice of having Socrates allude to this poetic saying, here hints at Charmides’ dangerous mix of erotic attractiveness and thumetic nature. I am also sympathetic to the reading of Socrates’ appeal to Cydias as a way for Socrates to calm himself down, so that he may continue his pre-voiced, philosophical quest, which is to undress Charmides’ soul. In this way, one may say that Socrates here makes “therapeutic use of poetry” (Schultz 2013, 59), that he uses poetry to uphold his philosophical practice.

The topic of domination, with its erotic and political connotations, is thus introduced. And throughout the dialogue, Socrates continues to give Charmides (and us readers) the impression that he is “the fawn”, i.e., the one who is being dominated, and the one who has to take precautions. For instance, when Charmides says that he wants to write down the charm that goes with the remedy, Socrates asks him: “With my permission? [ἐάν µε πείθῃς] (…) or without it?” (Chrm. 156a3).210 The impression given is that Charmides is in charge – that he will have his way, either way (see also Chrm. 176c). Yet, what better way to outsmart a person than to make him believe he is more in charge than he actually is? Socrates’ hints could be seen as intentional, i.e., as deliberately leading Charmides to believe that he

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210 One may here note that Socrates uses the term pethein, when asking Charmides if he intends to “persuade” him first (i.e. persuade him to let Charmides write down the charm), or force the charm out of him.
Erôs and Education

is in charge. Of course, this does not necessarily entail that Socrates has it all under control (the game Socrates played with Charmides and other noble youths was indeed a risky one, and, as we know, in the end fatal\textsuperscript{211}), but leading Charmides on may still be a smart move on Socrates’ account, as it gives him a head start.

However, the motive for reminding us readers of this particular advice from Cydias may be (even) more complex. Taking into consideration that the central factor in determining the roles of erastês/erômenos was in fact not age, but the active/passive distinction, it seems inevitable that the lion is the active hunter, and the fawn the passive object. Although Charmides is in general depicted as the passive object of erotic admiration, having a great number of active, infatuated lovers, Charmides is not necessarily the passive object in relation to Socrates. We have several reasons to believe that instead, Socrates is here the passive object of Charmides’ erôs. For one, this interpretation fits Alcibiades’ claim that Charmides was a lover of Socrates: Alcibiades (whose own challenging of the pederastic norms is well-known) explains that there are several young men besides himself who have fallen in love with Socrates, as a result of Socrates deceiving them into thinking that he, Socrates, is a lover (erastês) of them, while in fact he lures them into becoming lovers of himself\textsuperscript{212}.

In contrast to the erastês who is “caught on fire”, the erômenos was expected to show sôphrosunê in the sense that he should be “cool”, i.e. in control of his desires. Taking this into account, Socrates’ display of erotic sôphrosunê (which I think is genuine) fits his positioning of himself as an erômenos, rather than an erastês, of young boys: Having briefly “caught on fire”, he not only regains control but also pictures himself as the passive object, i.e., “the fawn”. Further confirmation of Alcibiades’ thesis that Socrates merely pretends to be a lover comes at the end of the day, when the dialogue ends. Here Socrates does not seem to be madly in love with Charmides; rather, Charmides threatens Socrates (playfully, but nonetheless) to spend time with him every day, until Socrates is satisfied with the state of his soul (at Chrm. 176c5–d4). That is far from saying that Socrates is an erômenos in all aspects, or not an erastês of other “things”. Rather, in passionately pursuing the investigation of what sôphrosunê is, Socrates is here – as elsewhere – coming across as an erastês of wisdom.

\textsuperscript{211} I discuss the controversy over Socrates’ seductions and how this is connected to his death in Ch. 5, section 5.2.

\textsuperscript{212} \καὶ μὲν τοιὸς οὐκ ἐμὸς μῶνον ταῦτα πεποίηκεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ Χαρμίδην τὸν Γλαύκωνος καὶ Εὐθύδην τὸν Διοκλέους καὶ ἄλλους πάντα πολλοὺς, οὓς οὗτος ἐξαπατῶν ὡς ἐραστῆς παιδικὰ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς καθίσταται ἀντὶ ἐραστοῦ (Sym. 222a8–b4). One may here also remember Charmides’ remark when he is introduced to Socrates, where he shows that he remembers Socrates as well, telling him that “you are no small topic of conversation among us boys” (Chrm. 156a6–8) – this may be read as a verification of Socrates’ popularity among boys.
Sôphrosunê is in the *Laws* defined as a feminine virtue, and as opposed to andreia, which is said to be characteristic of men.\(^\text{213}\) I believe that this gendered aspect of sôphrosunê is transmitted to the Athenian convention of paiderastia: In the relation between the erastês and the erômenos, the feminine and passive role was ascribed to the erômenos. Therefore, it was the erômenos who should express moderation, through protecting his reputation by the double standard of not letting himself be seduced too easily, nor be too reluctant (especially not if the erastês was a respectable man). One may receive the impression that the erômenos was expected to be even more passive than women, at least in intercourse: As Xenophon puts it in his *Symposium* (8.21): “For a youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love’s intoxication.”\(^\text{214}\) As mentioned, sôphrosunê was the Athenian aristocrat’s virtue *par excellence.*\(^\text{215}\) Even so, some scholars have argued in favor of interpreting sôphrosunê as below the rank of a “manly virtue”, being rather “the virtue of old age, of women, and indeed of all who behave in a way appropriate to their station in life” (Tuckey 1951, 6; 9; qu. in Annas 1985, 122). Presumably, this could be understood in relation to the distinction *active/passive*, since whereas sôphrosunê requires “holding back”, *not* acting on emotional impulses, andreia requires “reaching out”, i.e. that one actively engages even takes risks in the striving towards a goal. The ranking of virtues, however, is notoriously problematic, and not just because of the

\(^{213}\) It is the Athenian who defines modesty and moderation (τὸ κοσμικὸν καὶ σῶφρον) as feminine virtues (*Laws* 802e8–11). This passage has also been compared to the passages on women and virtue in the *Meno*, by e.g. Annas (1976, 134, n. 16). The remark in the *Laws*, however, does not quite entail that *no women at all* can possess andreia. For an analysis of the puzzle of women and virtue in the *Laws*, see Blair (2012, Part II, section 7). Aristotle, on the other hand, thinks women can possess andreia, but that their andreia is different from that of men: “The sôphrosunê and andreia of a man and a woman are different. For a man would appear a coward if he only possessed the andreia of a woman, and a woman would appear a gossip if she were only as discreet as a good man” (*Pol.* 1277b20–3; quoted in Hobbs 2000, 71). In the *Republic* (cf. 509a–b), one of the opposite terms of andreia is *malakia*, meaning both “feminine” and “weakly”. For a discussion of this term, see Hobbs (2000, Ch. 1), who also writes that *malakia* is described as the enemy of thumos (Hobbs 2000, 140, n. 8). (Another one is *deilia*, meaning “cowardice” and “timidity”.) Although it may seem so, the distinction between andreia and malakia does not merely represent a distinction between the two sexes. Rather, it is an evaluative distinction. Plato uses this term in the controversial passage on Leontius’ in Book IV of the *Republic*, in which Leontius gives in to his apparently unwanted desire (or urge) to look at the naked corpses he walks by.\(^\text{214}\) An different translation of this passage is to be found in Rist (2012, 67): “the boy does not share the man’s pleasure in intercourse, as a woman does; while himself is cold and sober he sees the other drunk with sexual desire.” Rist (2012, 67) adds (without further argumentation) that Xenophon “here and elsewhere develops his banal portrait of Socrates”.\(^\text{215}\) Cf. section 3.2.1., p. 92. This could, presumably, be understood as related to the description of sôphrosunê as a matter of remaining on one’s post (cf. *Lach.* 190e5–8), mentioned in section 3.3.2., p. 107.
notion of the unity of the virtues. In our context, it should therefore be noted that there is not exclusive evidence in Plato in support of Tuckey’s view, when arguing that sôphrosunê should be ranked as below andreia. In the Laws (631c–d), it is explicitly listed as ranking above andreia (contrary to what one perhaps might expect, as it is defined as a female virtue).

Although Socrates said he was “quite beside himself”, he manned up and managed to start his conversation with Charmides. In this way, Socrates may be said to display andreia in the prologue. (That is, if we read his description of his own reaction as sincere.) And as their conversation begins, Charmides being interested in the remedy that allegedly can cure his headaches, Socrates’ confidence gradually returns. Socrates now starts rendering the words he claims to have learnt from a Thracian doctor (Chrm. 156d4). The role of the doctor may be compared to that of Diotima in the Symposium; Socrates renders Diotima’s words, telling us that she taught him about the art of erôs, about becoming pregnant in body and soul, and about the pain related to giving birth (Symp. 206c1–212a5). Being a woman, and described as a wise one too, one might think that Diotima has some authority on this subject.217 In the Charmides, where the subject is the soundness of the soul, Socrates is telling us that he met a wise doctor, and repeats his words – for the very same reason, to increase the authority of his own words.

Socrates then goes on about a certain leaf, and the charm to go with it that one has to sing, in order to complete the cure against Charmides’ headache, his “heavy head” in the mornings (Chrm. 155b). The headache, however, could be a sign of Charmides not being moderate, after all: Hyland (1981) suggests Charmides could be suffering from hangovers. If so, Socrates would be right both in suspecting that Charmides is not moderate or sound-minded, and in arguing that he needs to cure “the whole” (Chrm. 156e–157a), including Charmides’ soul, in order to rid him of his headaches (cf. McCoy 2005, 137). Seemingly, the kind of doctoring required is one that Socrates knows well: midwifery. However, Socrates must first examine Charmides’ soul, and what it actually is in possession of. What are Charmides headaches caused by; are they hangovers or pangs related to mental pregnancy? Can Socrates, through his midwifery, help him?

216 See section 3.2.2., p. 98, n. 207.
217 Cf. Ch. 1., section 1.4., p. 39.
The Charmides

3.3. Examining Charmides’ soul

Before the examination starts, Critias praises Charmides and reassures Socrates that the young man not only outstrips his contemporaries in beauty, but that he is moderate as well (Chrm. 157d1–4). Charmides is here cast as living up to the expectations of young men’s sexual etiquette; he is clearly considered by others to be moderate in his behavior and demeanor, as an erômenos is supposed to be.\(^{218}\) The talk about the remedy may come across as confusing: It makes sense that Charmides, suffering from headaches in the mornings, is interested in the remedy. But why would he be interested in the charm to go with it, especially if he is already moderate, which is what the charm is said to be “just the thing” for? Socrates explains (Chrm. 158b5–c4) that if moderation (sôphrosunê) is already present in him, then he may have the remedy for the headache straightaway; but if he turns out to lack moderation, then he must be charmed before being given the remedy. And so Socrates asks: Do you agree with your friend, and assert that you already partake sufficiently of moderation, or would you say that you are lacking in it? When asked, Charmides blushes, and, according to Socrates, looks more beautiful than ever. Charmides answers that it is not easy for him either to agree or disagree (Chrm. 158d1 – 5). If he denies that he is moderate, this would not only seem like an odd thing to say about oneself, but he will also make Critias and the many others to whom, by Critias’ account, he appears to be moderate, into liars; but on the other hand, if he agrees, then he would be praising himself, and this might seem distasteful. (We might add that it would presumably be regarded as a sign of him not being moderate.) Charmides’ answer seems reasonable, and he is probably right in his suspicions. However, his answer also reveals that he is very much concerned with what others think of him: He does not want others to perceive him as someone who praises himself, nor to appear distasteful in their eyes.

Socrates says that they ought to investigate this matter together – “you will not be forced to say anything against your will and I, on the other hand, shall not turn to doctoring in any irresponsible way” (Chrm. 158d8–e3). Charmides agrees, and Socrates starts the process of releasing Charmides’ “brainchildren” through his philosophical midwifery. First, Socrates states that if sôphrosunê indeed is present in Charmides, then Charmides must have some kind of opinion (δόξα) about what it is and be able to express this – since he knows how to speak Greek, Socrates adds.\(^{219}\)

\(^{218}\) In contrast, then, to Alcibiades (this will be explained in Ch. 4).

\(^{219}\) It may be noted that scholars differ in opinion regarding the soundness of Socrates’ demand here – which may be read as indicating that “in order to have a virtue, one must be able to express what that virtue amounts to”. For a discussion of this, see e.g. Annas (2011, esp. Ch. 6).
3.3.1. Charmides’ definitions

Charmides’ first definition (D1) is that sôphrosunê is to do things orderly and quietly (cf. Chrm. 159b3). This definition is rejected by Socrates, who asks whether or not sôphrosunê is something admirable (καλὸν). Socrates then offers a few examples of activities—such as reading, playing the cithara, boxing, wrestling, etc.—of which Charmides agree are more admirable when performed quickly and fiercely, than when done slowly and quietly. Socrates then asks; “in all these cases (…) we think that quickness and speed are more admirable than slowness or quietness?” (Chrm. 160b4–5). Charmides consents. They conclude, then, that sôphrosunê therefore cannot be a matter of doing things “quietly and slowly”, or of living a quiet life; as the quick things have turned out to be no less admirable than the quiet ones.

Socrates’ argument, however, would have deserved further examination. For one thing, Socrates contrasts quietness with quickness, and questions whether “slowness or quietness” is admirable in all cases; Charmides’ D1, however, initially spoke of doing things “orderly and quietly.” It is not obvious that Charmides intended to focus on speed, as Socrates does in his counter-examples. But Charmides does not seem committed to his proposed definition, as he shows no interest in questioning Socrates’ rather swift rejection. This is striking, especially given that the activities Socrates uses as examples are activities an aristocratic youth like Charmides should be familiar with.

Furthermore, they should not have concluded that quickness and fierceness are more admirable than slowness and quietness in all of the activities Socrates mentions. Quickness and fierceness do seem more admirable in boxing and wrestling. But think of some of Socrates’ other examples, for example someone playing the cithara or reading (say, a poem out loud) – it seems obvious that speed and fierceness should not be regarded as more admirable than slowness and tenderness. I think Socrates knows this. (Note that this is not the same as saying that I believe Plato would have endorsed D1.) Therefore, I take Socrates’ argument here, with the choice of examples that are all familiar to Charmides, to be a test. Socrates wants to test whether Charmides is sound-minded, and here provides him with an opportunity to show that: Charmides would have shown philosophical sound-mindedness if he had objected to Socrates’ counter-argument, or at least subjected it to further examination.

However, if sôphrosunê amounts to living a quiet life, then it seems that Charmides would, by his own definition, not be sôphrôn. For one thing, assuming that Hyland (1981) is right in his suspicions, Charmides is apparently hung over from being out drinking, and as we all know, drunk people tend to be loud and cause disturbances (this is even noted by
Moreover, Charmides apparently causes fuss and disturbances wherever he goes, due to his good looks: According to McCoy, Charmides enjoys and encourages these reactions, and craves erotic attention by giving Socrates irresistible looks (McCoy 2005, 141–2). But is it not plausible that Socrates, finding Charmides so amazing in stature, confuses a rather normal look with an alluring one? (After all, this is Socrates’ narration.) However, deliberately or not, Charmides’ arrival does cause a disturbance; Charmides’ beauty causes a disturbance, or perhaps more accurately, the other persons’ reactions to his beauty causes a disturbance. McCoy takes this to prove that “Socrates does not believe that Charmides really believes in his initial definition and so can easily dispose of the argument” (McCoy, 2005, 142).

Socrates then encourages Charmides to try again:

[L]ook into yourself with greater concentration, and when you have decided to what effect the presence of temperance has upon you and what sort of thing it must be to have this effect, then put all this together and tell me clearly and bravely (ἀνδρείως), what does it appear to you to be? (Chrm. 160d5–e1).

While trying to release Charmides’ thoughts, Socrates encourages Charmides to be brave, to reconsider his beliefs, and to try to express them once more. But what would it mean to be brave (or “manly”) in this particular context? In answering this, we may see how Socrates encourages young men to be philosophically courageous elsewhere. For example, Socrates tells the young Cratylus: “You must investigate them [the things they have discussed] courageously (ἀνδρείως) and thoroughly and not accept anything easily” (Crtl., 440d3–5). Socrates encourages Theaetetus in a similar manner: “You must have courage [θαρρῶν] and patience; answer like a man [ἀνδρείως] whatever appears to you to be true about the things I ask you” (Tht. 157d3–5). I take Socrates’ encouragement of these young men, that they should be andreioi in the context of philosophical dialogue, to entail that they should express what they believe is true without anxiety concerning how their beliefs are received, and furthermore be patient and not accept Socrates’ rejections too easily.

Socrates now tells us that at this Charmides pauses, and offers a second definition. “[L]ooking into himself very manfully” (πάνυ ἀνδρικῶς) (Chrm. 160e2), he answers that (D2) “temperance [σωφροσύνη] seems to me to make people ashamed and bashful, so I think modesty [ἀιδώς] must be what temperance really is” (Chrm. 160e3–4). In contrast to Schmid, who holds that Charmides is unwilling to examine his own understanding of sôphrosunê, McCoy (2005, 142, n. 12) argues that Charmides at this point genuinely looks into himself trying to come up with a definition. McCoy

220 In the Symposium, Alcibiades is described as being “very drunk and very loud” (σφόδρα µεθύοντος καὶ µέγα βιοῦντος) (Symp. 212d3–4).
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(2005) argues that Charmides makes more progress than he is usually given credit for; I disagree with her claim that the change is dramatic. Even though I agree with McCoy that Charmides here does seem to make some effort (that he, as Socrates says, “looks into himself”), this glimpse of effort does not, on my account, have a significant impact on the overall picture, in which Charmides stands out as rather reluctant to examine himself and his understanding of sôphrosunê.

However, by references to Homer, Socrates refutes this definition as well. Charmides therefore offers a third definition, one he remembers having heard somewhere (D3): “Sôphrosunê is minding one’s own business”.221 At this Socrates replies: “You wretch, you’ve picked this up from Critias or from some other wise man” (Chrm. 161b8–c1). Critias, however, denies being the source. Earlier on, Socrates encouraged Charmides to look inside himself while answering, and so it seems that Charmides to some extent has done that. Now, however, Charmides hides behind the words of a wise man instead, whose words he furthermore does not try to defend. It may seem unfair that Socrates makes use of wise men’s sayings (like that of Homer) while arguing against Charmides, but denies Charmides the right to do the same. We should remember, however, that it is Charmides’ soul that is being examined; it is Charmides who has to express his opinion about what sôphrosunê amounts to.

Socrates continues questioning Charmides concerning what the definition “sôphrosunê is minding one’s own business” means. As it turns out, Charmides is not really sure. Socrates then asks if he perhaps heard it from an idiot: Charmides denies this, but adds that perhaps the source of it was not himself sure of its meaning. Now Critias becomes angry, similarly to a poet at an actor who mishandles his verses. He eventually (Chrm. 162b) takes over for Charmides, trying to defend the thesis that “sôphrosunê is minding one’s own business”, arguing that what this definition amounts to is that sôphrosunê is pretty much a matter of knowing oneself.

In the following, however, I shall not address the discussion between Critias and Socrates (which must be said to be the part of the dialogue which most of the secondary literature is concerned with). Instead, I shall discuss the character traits that the dialogue outlines as needed in order to properly engage in philosophical discussions.

221 ὅτι σωφροσύνη ἂν εἴη τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν (Chrm. 161b6, my emphasis). Annas (1985, 121, with ref to Alc.I. 127a–b) argues that Alcibiades in the Alcibiades I makes a similar suggestion regarding the link between sôphrosunê and “minding one’s own business”. In this article, Annas makes several interesting parallels between the Alcibiades I, Charmides, and the Lovers – the latter of which she makes a remarkable defense of (against the majority of Plato scholars), indirectly arguing for its authenticity.
3.3.2. Philosophy, shame, and courage

McCoy holds that the “Charmides implicitly argues for a kind of philosophical σωφροσύνη as a condition for philosophical inquiry” (McCoy 2005, 136). McCoy does not clarify exactly what she means by “philosophical sôphrosunê”, but she does seem to connect it to being, in her terms, “philosophically open” (McCoy 2005, 136, n. 7). Open to what, we may thus ask. My answer would be that it means to be open to the discussion, and open to participating even though one may answer in the wrong. Moreover, I take it that “philosophical sôphrosunê” simply entails being sophron while participating in the activity of philosophy. I hope to show how the Charmides not only underscores that philosophical sôphrosunê is an important character trait for practicing philosophy well. On the reading I am suggesting, the dialogue in addition reveals philosophical courage and erôs for knowledge as important character traits for practicing philosophy well.

As mentioned, Socrates encourages Charmides to look inside himself, rethink his definitions, and be courageous in seeking the truth (cf. Chrm. 160d5–e1). However, Charmides fails to satisfy these requests. There seem to be (at least) two explanations for this: First, Charmides seems too concerned with what people might think of him; secondly, Charmides seems to be lacking in erôs for knowledge. In the following, I elaborate on these points, showing how the Charmides reveals information regarding required character traits for a philosopher.

To be too concerned with what others might think of one is particularly problematic for philosophers; this is also emphasized in the Parmenides. Here it is the young Socrates who expresses his concern about not being good enough as a philosopher: “I hurry away, afraid that I may fall into a pit of nonsense and come to harm” (Parm. 130d6–8). The young Socrates may here be said to be describing a lack of andreia, especially if we take the first of the definitions of andreia in the Laches into account, where andreia is said to be a matter of remaining at one’s post, defending oneself without fleeing (cf. Lach. 190e5–8). Parmenides reassures Socrates that this will pass, that philosophy has not gripped him yet (as it will), and that Socrates is insecure.

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222 That does not imply that I take it to be one kind of sôphrosunê involved in certain activities, and different kinds of sôphrosunê when it is involved in other activities.

223 After this first definition of andreia is provided in Laches, Socrates says that andreia is a quality that may be expressed, or a virtue that may be exercised, in different circumstances (i.e. not just on the battle-field), and that he therefore seeks a definition that can capture all of these areas of reference (Lach. 191d–e), whereupon andreia is explained as a general strength of character (cf. Lach. 191d–e), and furthermore a certain kind of wisdom, or knowledge, regarding what to fear and when to conquer it (cf. Lach. 194e12–195a1). For a thorough study of Plato’s view on manly courage in the Laches, see Schmid (1992). See also Rademaker (2004), who writes that the procedure of the Laches is comparable to that of the Charmides, as the definitions provided in these dialogues all seem “insufficient in isolation, but are effective in suggesting the range of the concept in combination” (Rademaker 2004, 5).
because he cares too much about what other people think – because he is young (cf. Parm. 130e1–4).

This point, however, is not entirely unambiguous. We may think of the youth’s precaution here as signaling a sense of shame, a sentiment that is elsewhere described as an important ingredient in learning. According to Belfiore (2012), shame is not only important, alongside reaching an aporetic state it constitutes a necessary condition for successful learning.224 The idea is that once you realize that you actually do not know what you thought you knew, and hence are thrown into an aporetic state, you might feel shame for not knowing what you thought you knew. And this shame could play a motivating role in seeking knowledge: Since shame is painful, one would strive to avoid it. These points by Belfiore are helpful in understanding how Charmides demonstrates his lack of these relevant character traits for properly practicing philosophy.

Even though Charmides’ second definition was that sôphrosunê really amounts to having a sense of shame (αἰδώς, a term that may be translated both as modesty and as shame, depending on context), since it makes people ashamed and bashful, he does not demonstrate this kind of sense of shame, or modesty, himself. Unwilling to be ridiculed by answering what he truly believes, he rather appears (too) concerned with avoiding shameful moments. As a result, he never experiences the shame that could potentially have motivated him to seek the truth. This behavior is perhaps more easily understood if contrasted with someone who does display the sense of shame discussed, like the young Hippocrates in the Protagoras. Socrates puts Hippocrates to the test while they are on their way to meet the great Protagoras, and during the test he blushes in shame (cf. Prt. 312a), admits to his ignorance (cf. Prt. 313c), and expresses modesty as opposed to hubris (“I think I know”, cf. Prt. 312c).225 Even though he is most eager to meet Protagoras, he asks philosophical questions and demonstrates patience, and finishes the discussion with Socrates before knocking on Callias’ door. In other words, Hippocrates shows great potential for philosophical intercourse, and Socrates seems most pleased with his behavior.

As mentioned, Charmides also blushes at a point in the dialogue. Is that a token of his modesty? I am inclined to answer in the negative. Before he blushes, Socrates has flattered him for a while (starting at Chrm. 157d9), assuring him that “it is quite right, Charmides, that you should be superior to the rest” (157d9–157e1), and praising his aristocratic lineage (cf. 157e1–

224 Belfiore (2012, 69) refers to both S. R. Slings (1999, 140–1) and Mackenzie (1988), arguing that aporia is a necessary condition for learning. In contrast to these, however, Belfiore (2012, 70) argues that aporia is a necessary condition for learning, but not a sufficient one, as shame too is a necessary condition. Belfiore (2012, 70) argues that for proud people, a sense of shame is a particularly important condition for learning, but for people with less pride, gentle humbling may be sufficient.

225 My emphasis. For this point, see also Gordon (1999, 28).
Seemingly, Charmides’ blushing is not caused by a sense of modesty (which could have been related to an experience of shame caused by being thrown into aporia), but rather by Socrates’ charming him by flattering. It may perhaps be not merely due to flattery; Charmides’ blush might be a sign of his simultaneous pleasure in being praised for moderation, combined with an anxiety that such pleasure might expose a lack of moderation (cf. Benardete 2000, 240).

In section 3.2.1., I argued that the prologue may be read as suggesting that Socrates is both sôphrôn and andreios. Socrates also speaks of his fears in the Charmides, however. When Critias suspiciously questions Socrates’ motives for rejecting all the definitions Charmides offers, Socrates answers that the reason why he refutes and critically analyzes the statements of others, as well as his own, is “the fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not” (Chrm. 166d1). Why Socrates fears this he does not explain. But one could think of this fear as related to the shame that should be felt upon being thrown into aporia. That is to say, since one should feel shame when coming to realize that one does not know something one thought one knew, one should perhaps also fear being in a state that can lead to such shame.226 It seems to me that Socrates’ motivation for passionately and curiously investigating various phenomena (in contrast to prouder persons such as Alcibiades and Charmides, who, presumably, would become motivated by a sense of shame) is the fear of mistakenly thinking he knows what he in fact does not; and, or perhaps rather because of, his strong erôs for the truth.

When Critias takes over, he offers the following clarification of Charmides’ third definition: Sôphrosunê is to know what you know and do not know (Chrm. 167a). On this definition, sôphrosunê seems a virtue which the philosopher par excellence would strive to have, and one which is brought about through both questioning of the soundness of one’s own beliefs and those of others, and being questioned in returned. This questioning praxis, in turn, seems as inevitable for the (genuine) philosophers as it appears essential to philosophical inquiry.

If there is some truth to this definition, then this may be read as another indication of Socrates possessing sôphrosunê, as Socrates is always keen to test others as well as his own beliefs. Notably, Socrates claims that he himself is not concerned with whose thesis he analyzes (Chrm. 161c5–6). When Critias speculates about Socrates’ motives for rejecting Charmides’ definitions, Socrates encourages him to look at their investigation without attention to whose thesis is being refuted, and instead attend to the argument (Chrm. 166c6–e2). What matters is the truth; not whose argument it is that is being rejected. So Socrates explicitly says, though he occasionally applies

226 Unless, of course, one’s positive knowledge really is certain, or, as Socrates says elsewhere, one only knows that one knows nothing.
means such as irony and pseudo-arguments in attempting to bring the truth to light. Charmides, however, not being committed to the task of investigating the soundness of his beliefs, demonstrates a lack of philosophical sóphrosunê.

There is something courageous about making oneself vulnerable to rejection, also in the philosophical sense, as it may be experienced as shameful to have one’s thesis refuted, or to come across as not knowing something you thought you knew, and furthermore to have been giving the impression of knowing it. On his third attempt to define sóphrosunê, Charmides chooses to refer to a wise man, instead of trying to express his own opinion. To refer to a thesis made by someone else, to draw on an authority in this way, would perhaps be acceptable if the person citing the authority is willing to defend the cited thesis. However, Charmides is not committed to doing so. By not relying on his own beliefs anymore he does not make himself vulnerable to rejection – instead he hides behind an authority he does not seem committed to defend. Charmides has thus broken the first rule of Socratic elenchus, that the respondent must say what he really thinks. For this reason, Socrates calls him a wretch (µιαρός), which can also be translated “poor soul”, or “poor devil”. What Socrates wants from his interlocutor (as well from himself), it seems, is courage. Socrates does not want the interlocutors to “flee”, or to be afraid of coming to harm or falling into a pit of nonsense. He wants them to remain on their post, to stay steadfast, to courageously defend the arguments they put forward. Not for the sake of honor, not because it is their arguments that are put to test, but for the sake of a far nobler goal: the search for the truth, and for self-knowledge regarding who they are, what they stand for, and what they should stand for.

That Socrates regards andreia as an important character trait for a genuine philosopher is emphasized in the Theaetetus as well. There, it is the young Theaetetus who demonstrates courage; courage which benefits him philosophically. When Socrates asks Theaetetus questions concerning the nature of knowledge, Theaetetus takes on the task, and eagerly answers as well has he can. In addition to encouraging Charmides to answer

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227 Cf. Seeskin (1987, 1–2). Seeskin (1987, 3) emphasizes: “Elenchus, then, has as much to do with honesty, reasonableness, and courage as it does with logical acumen: the honesty to say what one really thinks, the reasonableness to admit what one does not know, and the courage to continue the investigation”.

228 This is one of the places one could object to Socrates’ behavior in the discussion – though it is unclear to me what mental state Socrates is in while uttering these words. Is he getting really upset and angry with Charmides here? Perhaps. Or perhaps not – one can easily imagine this expression uttered with a pat on the back, or even with laughter in one’s voice.

229 We also know that Theaetetus was courageous in other respects; he is said to have died during military service in 369 B.C. For physical and psychological similarities between Theaetetus and Socrates, see Blondell (2002, 251–314). Now, we may wonder whether
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courageously, Socrates also tells Theaetetus to “act like a man” (Tht. 151c), and furthermore that he “must have courage and patience; answer like a man whatever appears to you to be true about the things I ask you” (Tht. 157d). Even though Theaetetus expresses his fear, Socrates is pleased with his embracing of philosophical challenges. Theaetetus says that: “I can never persuade myself that anything I say will really do” (Tht. 148e). Still, Theaetetus continues, he nevertheless cannot stop worrying about the matter at stake. Socrates then thinks him courageous, and assures him that “those are pains of labor, dear Theaetetus. It is because you are not barren but pregnant” (Tht. 148d).

Like Charmides and Critias, Theodorus in the Theaetetus seems to lack philosophical courage, hesitating to join the discussion. While encouraging Theodorus to join, Socrates uses this vivid analogy:

Now, Theodorus, supposing you went to Sparta and were visiting the wrestling-schools. Would you think it right to sit and watch other men exercising naked – some of them not much to look at – and refuse to strip yourself alongside of them, and take your turn of letting people see what you look like? (Tht. 162b1–c2)

As Gordon (2012) suggests, Socrates is here comparing erotic risks with philosophical, and encouraging a readiness to stand up and fight, not just to be a member of the audience. We need courage in order to have a chance to obtain almost any object that we erotically desire – whether it is knowledge or something else. This courage may be explained as a readiness to stand up and reach for – maybe even fight for – the erotic objects one takes to be worth pursuing. As Gordon (2012, 94) argues, “courage allows us to pursue objects of eros, while eros can also give us courage”.

Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ philosophical courage are of the same kind as their military courage. Both the desire for victory and the desire for wisdom may be described in terms of eros; perhaps may both philosophical courage and military courage thus be labeled erotic courage, defined as “courage that is needed in order to dare to engage in order to win over the erotic object desired.” (I will, however, refrain from committing to such an definition here.) Regarding the relation between Theaetetus and Socrates, Blondell (2002) argues that Socrates in the Theaetetus acts as a symbolic father. Another thesis is explored by Gordon (2012, 125–130), who suggests that there is an erotic relation between the two. Both Blondell and Gordon, however, argue that Socrates is not acting merely as an epistemic midwife in this dialogue.

A similar connection between courage and philosophical questions (as previously mentioned) is made in the Cratylus (440d3–5), Socrates encourages the young Cratylus to investigate the things they have discussed courageously, and not accept anything easily.

Even though Socrates in the Charmides (as well as in the Laches) emphasizes that participation in philosophical conversations is supposed to be voluntary (Chrm. 158e; Lach. 188a–c, 189a), he draws Critias into the discussion in a rather mocking manner.

See also Bonfante (1989, 556) and Scanlon (2002, 26.)
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Charmides’ erôs, we may suspect – given his answers in Socrates’ examination of his soul, as well as the historical information about him – is not directed towards knowledge, but rather towards his renown. Like Alcibiades, he is too thumetic, too concerned with what is honorable and with how people perceive him, to be a devoted lover of wisdom. But even though one may have congenital dispositions for what one erotically pursues (just as one has congenital dispositions regarding thumos), it is possible, on Plato’s account, to cultivate erôs in a manner similar to how thumos may be trained: That is one of the purposes of Socrates’ erotic educational methods, and one of the reasons why he is so interested in the education of young men; so that he can direct their erôs towards the truth, towards wisdom, arousing in them erôs for knowledge.

As touched upon, the Charmides calls to mind the question of whether virtues can be taught. Does one already have to have certain character traits for Socrates’ methods to be successful? (As argued by Hyland (1981, 147).) It might be helpful to consider the term “character” when adressing this question. When opening a chapter titled “Character”, Gordon (1999, 93) remarks that in English, this term can refer to least two things: a persona in a drama or work of literature, or a moral personality.233 Gordon further comments that “this semantic ambiguity (…) is mirrored in the Greek terms with similar meanings in both the moral and dramatic sphere” (Gordon 1999, 93). According to Gordon (1999, 93, n. 1), éthikos (ἠθικός) describes that which pertains to morals, moral character, or ethics, whereas éthos (ἠθος) refers to a dramatic persona, and both terms share roots with nouns and verbs that mean, respectively, a habit or a custom and to be habituated or accustomed (ἔθος, ἐθέσθη). A more accurate description of the relationship between the terms, however, is to say that ἠθικός is a derivative adjective from ἥθος, that ἠθικός signifies that which has to do with ἥθος. It should further be noted that in Plato, ἥθος refers to moral inclination (moral character), or demeanor, i.e. “way of being”, habit and custom. There are no references in LSJ to Plato in which ἥθος is interpreted as dramatic persona.

Even so, I agree with what I take to be Gordon’s main point here, namely, that the relation between moral character and dramatic character is worth examining, and that this relation is of particular interest and relevance

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233 The term persona, which the terms “person” and “personality” are derived from, may also refer to both a social role and a character played by an actor. The term is derived from Latin, where it originally meant mask. (The Latin term, however, may – at least in part – be derived from the Greek prospótron, often translated “person”.) It may be worth noticing, however, that in modern psychology, a distinction is often made between personality (traits) and character (traits). Briefly put, on this distinction, the former is said to be (more) easy to read, having to do with whether a person is funny, optimistic, etc., and the latter as (more) difficult to grasp, including traits like honesty. This distinction was first brought to attention by Allport (1921), and became soon standard practice (cf. Nicholson (1998)). One who uses this distinction while exploring conceptions of self-hood in Ancient Greek literature is Gill (1986).
– in general when interpreting Plato’s texts – but also specifically when addressing the issue of whether or not moral character (virtue) can be taught. There are some indications in Plato, for example in the *Meno*, that it *cannot* be taught. While some have argued that *Meno* does not undergo any character change, others have argued that he is changes dramatically in the course of the dialogue.\footnote{Guthrie (1956, 11) and Klein (1989, 184) argue that he does not change, while Gordon, convincingly to my mind, argues that he does (1999, Ch. 4).} When it comes to the youths that Socrates talks to, however, it is evident that at least some of these characters do undergo change. These changes seem to be provoked by shifts in their epistemic situation, i.e., their characters seem to change as a result of being thrown into aporia. A striking example of this is Alcibiades in the *Alcibiades I*: from being very self-assured, thinking himself self-sufficient, Alcibiades eventually becomes more insecure as he realizes that he is in need of guidance and knowledge.\footnote{As we shall see in Ch. 4.}

We know, however, that in the case of Alcibiades, his character went back to “normal” as soon as Socrates was not around guiding him. Even so – and even though I will not argue at length for my view in whether or not virtue can be taught according to Plato in this chapter – I wish to note that there are in fact good reasons to believe that one, on Plato’s account, actually *can* learn to for example exercise andreia, if receiving proper education. This is not at all incompatible with the claim that some people are more predisposed in this respect than others (as outlined in the *Republic*). Furthermore, I take it that erôs is something that can be cultivated through Socrates’ erotic educational methods; that is not to say that everyone, at any time, is receptive to such training and guiding. As I have suggested in this chapter, I do not, for example, read Charmides as being receptive of Socrates’ methods and encouragement in the *Charmides*.

As this dialogue shows, for practicing philosophy well one must be philosophically moderate, passionate and courageous, and not give up trying to express and defend one’s opinions just because of the difficulties pointed out by an opponent. The practice of philosophy – and indeed a philosophical conversation with Socrates – may potentially be a shameful experience. Such shameful experiences, however, may be productive: they may motivate one to improve one’s knowledge, so that one (hopefully) is not as easily put to shame another time. Charmides not only lacks the preferred character traits, however, he also seems less receptive to developing them than many others might be.

At the end of the dialogue (*Chrm. 176a ff*), Socrates states that sôphrosunê is a great good, and says to Charmides that if he truly has it, then he is blessed. At this Charmides replies that he does not know whether he
has the virtue or not. How could he possibly know, he says, when even they, i.e. Socrates and Critias, do not know? After all, the discussion has ended in aporia. Remember that in Charmides’ eyes, Socrates and his guardian Critias are two wise older men. Is Charmides here displaying sôphrosunê, after all, by being aware that he cannot compete on their level? Is his comment, that he is “willing to be charmed by you [Socrates] every day until you say I have enough” (Chrm. 176b2–4), a modest admission that he is very much in need of knowledge? Apparently, this is how his uncle Critias interprets it: Critias is pleased, and says that if Charmides goes through with this, then it will truly convince him of Charmides’ sôphrosunê. To this Charmides says he will obey his guardian’s instructions.

All this is said without Socrates being asked, not even once, whether he is willing to charm Charmides “every day”. Eventually, Socrates therefore asks them himself; “what are you two plotting? (...) Are you going to use force [βιάσῃ] (...) don’t I get a preliminary hearing?” (Chrm. 176c5–7). Charmides replies: “We shall have to use force (...) so you had better take counsel as to your own procedure”. What use will there be of counsel in this situation, Socrates rhetorically replies to Charmides, as “no man living can oppose you” (Chrm. 176d1–3). “Well then”, Charmides answers; “don’t oppose me” (Chrm. 176d4). Upon which Socrates concludes the dialogue, saying: I shan’t. Clearly, Plato is here foreshadowing Charmides’ and Critias’ willingness to use force. In addition, and more interesting for the purpose of Socrates’ examination, Charmides here also reveals himself as not moderate, after all, but rather hubristic, thinking that he can learn moderation and philosophy by forcing Socrates to teach him.

One gets the feeling that Socrates’ encouragement of philosophically important character traits fails partly because Charmides already, implicitly, has a different model of erôs and virtue in place: Not as mutual admission of vulnerability, insufficiency, and encouragement to develop, but as domination and forced transactions.

3.4. Concluding comments

Plato’s portrait of Critias is less judgmental than others from the same period. Plato’s Critias “does not seem very much like the moral monster that appears in the pages of Xenophon” (Tuozzo 2011, 56). I think the same may be said of Charmides; he is not portraited as a monster by Plato. However, Plato did not portray Charmides as particularly sôphrôn either. While Plato does not depict Charmides as a monster, we (i.e. Plato’s readers) are repeatedly granted glimpses of the teenager Charmides’ thumetic and hubristic nature. This foreshadows the older Charmides, who would go on to
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become a member of the Thirty Tyrants, a membership that would prove fatal.

There is far from enough indication in this dialogue, however, that Charmides is “doomed”, that he is “destined” to become a tyrant. Moreover, Charmides is clearly aware of his social status, and of the others’ expectations of him, and eager to please them. In this respect, he is sôphrôn, at least according to the traditional accounts of sôphrosunê. However, it seems as though too much of this kind of traditional sôphrosunê, according to which it is of central importance to be attentive toward one’s own social status and other’s expectations of oneself, makes one less sôphrôn according to the idea of (ideal) sôphrosunê expressed in the dialogue. As on this latter account, to put too much emphasis on others’ expectations results in a form of cowardice. This, I take it, signifies a lack of andreia on this latter account.

We may (at least I do) wonder about whether or not Socrates did as much as he could have in respect to Charmides’ soul. Could he have had a stronger impact on Charmides’ soul, so as to prevent Charmides from becoming a tyrant?236 If there is (as I am inclined to believe) a certain temporal order regarding the conditions of philosophy here discussed, which are based on certain relevant character traits, then it seems that Socrates did everything he could for Charmides: If (i) the sense of shame must come prior to erôs for knowledge and courage to pursue this knowledge, and (ii) Socrates encouraged preferable character traits by trying to throw Charmides into a state of aporia with the shame that tends to company it, but without succeeding in actually doing so, then (iii) Charmides, not being vulnerable to Socrates’ efforts in eliciting the relevant sense of shame, would not be able to erotically pursue knowledge, and, hence, lacking the motivation erôs would have provided, not find in himself the courage to pursue knowledge either.

When attending to how Socrates and Charmides are depicted, particularly regarding what character traits they display, we find that Socrates is depicted as having sôphrosunê through (i) being moderate regarding the limits of his knowledge, expressing how he fears that he might unconsciously think that he knows something he does in fact not know (cf. Chr. 166d1). Socrates is also depicted as (ii) having sôphrosunê through being humble regarding his military valor, and refraining from taking pleasure in explaining how he harmed his enemies – as this would be a token of hubris, which (as mentioned) is the opposite of sôphrosunê. Moreover, Socrates is described as (iii) having sôphrosunê through managing his erotic desires; even though he is discussing with a remarkably beautiful youth, whom he confesses being attracted to, his erôs for the truth is (apparently) stronger. Annas (1985, 134, n. 54) writes that:

236 I return to this issue in Ch. 5, section 5.2.
Erôs and Education

Sôphrosunê as self-control does not explicitly appear, but it does appear implicitly, in the immense dramatic stress laid on Socrates’ self-control, both in battle before the dialogue opens, and, within the dialogue, when [he is] sexually tempted by Charmides’ body.

Even if he is not as tempted as he claims to be, his self-control is still brought to our attention. And self-control, as Annas also argues, is by Plato indicated to be a part of sôphrosunê. Furthermore, Socrates is depicted as courageous, not only qua soldier just returned from the battlefield, but also as philosophically courageous, through seemingly being willing to falsify his own arguments; at the very least, he argues that it is indifferent whose arguments are being refuted. Summing up, Socrates comes across as displaying the character traits that appear to be important for practicing philosophy. Charmides, on the other hand, is (i) not depicted as courageous, being too concerned with what others might think of him, and hiding behind authority when refuted – even though Socrates explicitly encourages Charmides to be courageous (andreious), to look inside himself and rethink his answers. We also find that Charmides is (ii) lacking passion (erôs) for philosophy, and that he is (iii) lacking moderation (sôphrosunê).

In fact, Charmides does not even seem to possess sôphrosunê by his own definitions: He does not do things quietly and slowly (D1). Given the fuss and disturbance that occurs upon Charmides’ arrival at the beginning of the dialogue, we know that his entrance, for example, is not quiet. Furthermore, if Hyland (1981) is right in his suspicions, that the very reason for Charmides’ heavy head in the mornings is that he is hung over, then we may further suspect that Charmides does not do things quietly and slowly in the evenings. Nor does Charmides demonstrate modesty, or a sense of shame (D2). He blushes once, but does so, I argue, due to Socrates’ flattery. Charmides’ third definition (D3) is that sôphrosunê is minding one’s own business; but it turns out that Charmides does not know what this is supposed to mean. However, it becomes clear that this definition is not Charmides’ own, that presumably, as Socrates suspects, it is in fact Critias’ definition. Eventually and reluctantly, Critias takes over for Charmides, arguing that what this definition in effect amounts to is that sôphrosunê is pretty much a matter of knowing oneself. Does Charmides know himself; does his soul possess what we may call self-knowledge? I am inclined to answer in the negative. Not only because self-knowledge and sôphrosunê seem so deeply intertwined, but more precisely because Charmides does not seem to know the limits of his expertise, as he thinks he knows what he actually does not know. Moreover, he seems rather unwilling to examine these limits. In other words, Charmides appears as lacking certain character traits denoted by erôs, sôphrosunê, and andreia, which would have been most helpful in his discussion with Socrates, and which would have improved the discussion philosophically.
The *Charmides*

Though sôphrosunê and andreia are virtues, in many respects social virtues, whereas erôs is more like a force, I hope to have shown that these all denote certain character traits required for practicing philosophy well, and that this is implicitly argued in the dialogue *Charmides*. In consequence, the *Charmides* does not only offer a philosophical discussion concerned with definitions and arguments regarding what sôphrosunê amounts to: It also demonstrates how the participants’ (philosophical) sôphrosunê, andreia and erôs must be upheld in a philosophical discussion where their opinions are challenged. That it is one’s own opinions that are challenged, however, is not of importance.

In the conversation between Socrates and Charmides, however, the latter fails to demonstrate the relevant and preferred conditions for engaging in philosophical discussion. Through Socrates’ examination of Charmides’ soul, Charmides is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods: Socrates tries to encourage him to courageously look inside himself for the truth about the nature of sôphrosunê, and tries to help Charmides bring his reflections to light. But Charmides refuses to wrestle with Socrates, refuses to fight for what he thinks true. Socrates, on the other hand, manages to keep a cool and uphold the conditions during their philosophical discussion, even though he is discussing with a remarkably attractive and hot youth. As a result, Socrates – here as in many other Platonic dialogues – seems to possess and demonstrate the character traits scrutinized.

That Socrates is cast as “the ideal philosopher” by Plato is unsurprising. This fact, however, is not my main point here. What is of interest is what the *Charmides* can teach us about the practice of philosophy. I have argued that what it teaches us is that practicing philosophy is not merely, in fact, about being wise or skilled in logic. What is required, I have argued, are the three character traits that constitute the three conditions required for properly engaging in philosophical discussions: (i) Moderation (sôphrosunê) regarding the limits of one’s knowledge, (ii) passion (erôs) for knowledge, and (iii) courage (andreia) to pursue this knowledge.
Chapter 4. Shame and Seduction

4.1. Introduction

The good-looking Alcibiades is standing on the doorstep of manhood, eager to enter the man’s world of politics. Just as his other lovers are giving him up and backing off, Socrates approaches Alcibiades, claiming to be his first and only true lover. And what is more, Socrates asserts himself as the only one who can guide Alcibiades towards realizing his dream: to become the advisor of the Athenians. In the following, I will give an account of Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ encounter and its erotic dimensions.

My aim is twofold: First, I aim to show how Alcibiades is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods, which I argue include the psychological techniques of shaming and charming in this dialogue. I pay particular attention to the crucial function played by shame in Socrates’ attempt to persuade Alcibiades to educate himself by pursuing self-knowledge, which will further help him in acquiring knowledge of what are called “the most important things”, of which justice is said to be one. Secondly, I aim to show how the dialogue demonstrates and argues for the important function of lovers in the process of educating and examining one’s self.

As we shall see, self-knowledge is a major topic in this dialogue. But what, exactly, is self-knowledge? This is a complex question. Even though I will to some extent address this question, it is one which I do not aim to give a fully adequate answer to. That is to say, my predominant interest here is not to provide a detailed answer to this complex question, but rather to show (i) how Alcibiades is subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods, and (ii) how the dialogue sheds light on the importance of lovers in the process of self-examination. One may thus say that I here wish to focus more on how self-knowledge is gained, than on what self-knowledge essentially is.237

The structure is as follows: First, I comment on the dialogue’s reception in antiquity and modern times (4.1.1.), and on the relationship between

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237 I will argue that knowledge is gained through lovers, rather than through isolated introspection. Clearly, this – the way in which self-knowledge is gained – might have bearings on what self-knowledge is; but to establish the exact implications of this would need substantial further argumentation (which I will not provide here).
Socrates and Alcibiades (4.1.2.). Thereafter, I group the sections based on three quests, or tasks, which Socrates needs to perform in order to convey what he wants to elicit. In section 4.2, I discuss the first quest, which is to pique Alcibiades’ interest, so that Alcibiades will engage in a conversation with him. Section 4.3 concerns Socrates’ second quest, namely, making Alcibiades realize that he is in need of knowledge. Here I show how Socrates attempts to throw Alcibiades into an aporetic state. In section 4.4, I focus on Socrates’ third quest, which is to convince Alcibiades that Socrates is the only lover-educator who can help him in reaching his goals. In this section, I emphasize how the dialogue sheds light on the importance of lovers in the process of self-examination. Finally, I gather the threads and sum up (4.5.).

4.1.1. Reception in antiquity and modern times

It has become customary praxis for scholars writing on the Alcibiades I to comment on the issue of its authenticity. 238 In this section, I will recall the peculiar fate of the reception of this dialogue. My main reason for attending to the literature concerned with the issue of authenticity is that this literature is a great source of inspiration when interpreting the dialogue and investigating the many themes it addresses. That is a general point that I take to apply not only to the Alcibiades I, but to several dialogues of Plato of debated authenticity. 239 It should immediately be noted that my interest in this chapter is not to argue in favor of the authenticity of the Alcibiades I (even though I believe it to be authentic), but rather to point out its erotic features—which it seems to share with dialogues that, by and large, are considered authentic. 240

238 To avoid confusion, we should note that there exists a Second Alcibiades, also called the Lesser (or Minor) Alcibiades. Moreover, the Alcibiades I is also referred to as the First Alcibiades, the Greater (or Major) Alcibiades, and is also occasionally known by its ancient subtitle, On the Nature of Man. Whereas it is now generally agreed that the Second Alcibiades is not written by Plato, there is still debate concerning the authenticity of the Alcibiades I. Cf. e.g. Cooper (1997, v–vi); Denyer (2001).

239 E.g., the Lysis (which I discuss in Ch. 2).

240 This— to point out how the dialogue shares features with other dialogues that in the main are regarded as authentic—could, I suppose, be taken as a way of indirectly arguing for the dialogue’s authenticity. There are some scholars that seem inclined to think that in commenting on the issue of authenticity, one is taking on a burden of proof: That the dialogue (somehow) becomes guilty (in this context, inauthentic) by the very association with spurious dialogues. This leads to an argument suggesting that if one regards the dialogue as authentic, one should refrain from commenting on the issue of authenticity. This argument, however, is not particularly convincing, for rather obvious reasons: if a person found something (or someone) guilty without evidence, but rather based on association with something (or someone) who was guilty, then this person would commit (precisely) the fallacy of guilt by association. On this point, I agree with Annas (1985, 111), who remarks that arguing directly in favor of the authenticity of dialogues such as Alcibiades I would be to: “go along with the common assumption that the balance of proof is against these dialogues, so that the burden of
The Alcibiades I

The reason why the fate of the dialogue’s reception may be called “peculiar” is that the status of the dialogue has changed dramatically throughout history. The Alcibiades I had a proper place among the Platonic dialogues in antiquity. In modern times, however, it has been somewhat neglected. As Belfiore (2012, 31) points out:

This dialogue, unfortunately, has been neglected in modern times, and what attention it has received has tended to focus on issues concerning authenticity, religion and psychology rather than on its erotic aspects. As a result, important and puzzling questions about erôs have not been adequately addressed.

I agree with Belfiore on this point, but I believe that the erotic aspects should not be understood as sharply distinguished from the psychological and religious ones. (One could be led to think that Belfiore believes in this distinction, as she here contrasts the two, though I find it unlikely that this is her intention.) Even so, the dialogue now seems to have regained scholarly attention. There are two scholars that in particular appear to have been crucial in rediscovering the dialogue’s importance: Annas (1985) and Foucault (1988). Annas’ and Foucault’s readings, however, differ in several ways. One difference concerns what they take to be the main theme of the dialogue. Annas argues that self-knowledge is the unifying theme. The Delphic inscription and maxim “Know Thyself” (γνῶθι σαυτόν) is first used at 124a7–b3, and is particularly dealt with in the last part of the dialogue, more precisely in the passages 128–135. Foucault, on the other hand, takes self-care, or “Care for Thyself” (ἐπιµελήσθῃ σαυτοῦ), to be the main theme of the dialogue.

In the dialogue, the principles “Know Thyself” and “Care for Thyself” are combined by Socrates. As we shall see, Socrates argues that in order to care...
for the self, or, alternatively phrased, to “educate” or “cultivate” the self, a person must first seek to find out what the “self itself” is. Socrates, then, seems to regard self-examination as crucial for self-cultivation and further education. This may explain why the dialogue was considered in antiquity to be a natural starting point when starting to read Plato. The dialogue emphasizes preconditions for philosophical inquiry, through establishing “Know Thyself” as a first principle for “Care for Thyself”, which includes education of oneself.

Several classical authors considered the dialogue a natural starting point for reading Plato: Iamblichus held that the dialogue contains all of Plato’s wisdom “like a seed”, and Olympiodorus called it “the entrance gate to works of Plato.” Later, one of the most influential philosophers of the early Italian Renaissance, the self-proclaimed Platonist Marsilio Ficino, wrote these lovely lines about the dialogue: Candidissimus Platonis nostri liber, qui Alcibiades inscribitur, Alcibiade ipso venustior et omni carior auro – suggesting that the Alcibiades I is more charming than even Alcibiades himself, and more precious than gold, a comment which also elegantly refers back to Alcibiades qua money-lover.

The authenticity of the dialogue was not doubted until a posthumously published work by Schleiermacher argued that it was “very insignificant and poor, and that to such a degree, that we cannot ascribe it to Plato” (Schleiermacher 1836, 329). Though one may doubt that Schleiermacher was in a better position to judge the dialogue’s qualities and genuineness than the many commentators on the dialogue before him, his critique nevertheless seems to have put a lasting stain on the dialogue’s reputation.

My interest here is not to examine Schleiermacher’s rejection of the Alcibiades I in detail. I will, however, seek to tackle one of Schleiermacher’s points. We shall see that Schleiermacher (1836) argues that Socrates’ shaming of Alcibiades is un-Platonic, and that he takes Socrates’ shaming as a premise in support of his conclusion that the dialogue was not written by

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244 Cf. Friedländer (1965, 2:231).
245 Cited from Friedländer (1965, 2:231). A possible translation is “our Plato’s most radiant book, to which Alcibiades gives the title, is more charming than Alcibiades himself and more precious than all the gold there is.” (Thanks to Reier Helle for translating this passage for me.) For a thorough study of the dialogue’s ancient reception, see Renaud and Tarrant (2015). Worth mentioning in this context is also Proclus, another famous commentator on the dialogue (for translation and commentary, see e.g. O’Neill (1971)). I will also mention Plutarch, who in the beginning of the second century wrote several biographies of important Greek and Roman statesmen. In his biography of Alcibiades, he used this dialogue as a basis for describing the young Alcibiades. For Plutarch’s Life of Alcibiades, see Verdegem (2010).
246 The same argument – it’s so poor that it cannot be ascribed to Plato! – was later repeated by Grote (1888, 184, n. 2), when he rejected the Lysis as a genuine Platonic dialogue. Grote (1865), however, defended the authenticity of Alcibiades I.
247 It has also been argued (cf. Brandwood (1990)) that even if Schleiermacher had not cast the dialogue as spurious, stylometric tests would have provoked skepticism.
The Alcibiades I

Plato.\(^{248}\) I argue that the shaming of Alcibiades should be regarded as “Platonic” indeed, as it must be interpreted as a technique employed by Socrates.\(^{249}\) On the account I will suggest, shaming is a technique that Socrates regurlarly makes use of, in particular in those dialogues where he also practices his erotic educational methods – with which the Alcibiades I ought to be compared.

4.1.2. The lovers

So intriguing did the Athenians find the love story between Socrates and Alcibiades that writing on it became a genre on its own. Though Plato’s Symposium and the Alcibiades I are the most well-known contributions, several of Socrates’ followers wrote similar dialogues, including Aeschines Socraticus. In his Alcibiades-dialogue, the erotic-educational theme is also scrutinized. Aeschines’ Socrates here claims that:

Furthermore, even though I knew no piece of learning (\textit{mathêma}) by which I could benefit a man through teaching [it to] him, I thought that being with him [Alcibiades] I could make him better in virtue of [my] love [for him] (\textit{dia to eran}).\(^{250}\)

According to Xenophon and Isocrates, however, Alcibiades was no student of Socrates. However, Xenophon adds, Alcibiades wanted, like Critias, to use Socrates to further his own ambitions.\(^{251}\)

Who was Alcibiades? The historical figure Alcibiades (450–404 B.C.) is known to us as a great Athenian politician, orator and general, who acted as both strategic advisor and military commander in the Peloponnesian War. In spite of his beauty, wit, and popularity – or perhaps exactly because of it – he is also known for his ability to acquire powerful enemies, in Athens as well as beyond the city walls. Loved and despised by both Athenians and foreigners, Alcibiades never stood still for long. Instead, he maneuvered himself through and upwards in the higher circles of society, changing his loyalty frequently as he passionately pursued political power. Though Alcibiades in the Alcibiades I has not yet entered politics, we shall see that

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\(^{248}\) Noteworthy, the opposite claim – that the dialogue is “too Platonic” to be Plato’s – has also been argued, e.g. by Heidel (1976, 62). My emphasis.

\(^{249}\) I here follow up on Gordon’s (2003) critique of Schleiermacher, emphasizing one of her sub-conclusions; that it is neither un-Socratic nor un-Platonic that Socrates induces shame in Alcibiades. Unlike Gordon (2003), however, I do not organize my reading of the Alcibiades I around Schleiermacher’s criticism. For Gordon’s view on Socratic shame, see also Gordon (1999, 22–8).

\(^{250}\) Ael. Aristid. \textit{Orat.} 45, II 23–4d. This passage is quoted in Ch. 1, section 1.8., p. 54, n. 98. Other authors of Alcibiades-dialogues from this period include Euclides and Antisthenes.

In the *Alcibiades I*, we witness the first meeting between Socrates and Alcibiades. It is set to take place shortly before they both participate in the battle at Potidaea.  

Alcibiades is in his late teens, and he is said to have lost his youthful bloom. This, however, does not stop Socrates from stating that he is the first and only true lover of Alcibiades. Socrates’ statement is mysterious for at least two reasons: For one, Socrates is elsewhere said to find boyish beauty particularly attractive. Secondly, according to the norms of the paiderastia, when a youth starts to grow a beard and enters manhood, he is no longer to be reckoned as a boy (*pais*) in need of an erastês to educate him and introduce him to the higher circles. This second point is also touched upon in the beginning of *Protagoras*, where an anonymous friend of Socrates asks him (*Prt.* 309a1–b2):

**Friend:** Where have you just come from, Socrates? No, don’t tell me. It’s pretty obvious that you’ve been hunting the ripe and ready Alcibiades. Well, I saw him just the other day and he is certainly still a beautiful man (καλὸς…ἀνήρ) – and just between the two of us, ‘man’ is the proper word, Socrates: his beard is already filling out.

**Socrates:** Well, what of it? I thought you were an admirer of Homer, who says that youth is most charming when the beard is first blooming – which is just the stage Alcibiades is at.

Here, and in what follows, the friend indicates two things: First, that Alcibiades’ beard is already “filling out”, so that he must be reckoned a “man”, though he is “still”, or “nevertheless”, beautiful. Secondly, the psychological portrait of him as a lover of honor is indeed present, and thereby foreshadows his future career.

For example, Socrates states that Alcibiades desires (at 105e5) power to such an extent that he would rather die than fail to obtain more power, and that Alcibiades erotically desires (ἐρᾶν, at 124b5) fame (or renown) more than anything. I will return to this passage below.

According to Friedländer (1965, 2:232), the year for this battle was 432 B.C. It is possibly the same battle as mentioned earlier, which Socrates has just returned from in the *Charmides*, and possibly also the one referred to by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (220d–e). There is some scholarly disagreement on this issue, however, in particular after Planeaux (1999). (As mentioned earlier, cf. Ch. 3, section 3.2.1., p. 93, n. 192.)

20 years old at most, cf. Nails (2002). He is said to have lost his youthful bloom at *Alc.I.* 131c11–12; e11–12.

As previously noted (Ch. 3, section 3.2.2, p. 96), when Socrates admits his attraction to Charmides (*Chrm.* 154b8–c5), he says that “practically everyone at that age [i.e. Charmides’ age, approximately seventeen years old] strikes me as beautiful.” Belfiore (2012, 31, n. 5) remarks that Socrates finds boyish beauty particularly attractive also in the *Lysis* (204b1–2 and c5–10), and in the *Symposium* (211d4–8). So even though Alcibiades is only slightly older than Charmides (three-four years at most), Alcibiades is still described as having lost his youthful bloom. That tells me that these are crucial years, and that there may also (just as today) be individual differences regarding how young teenagers look.

Cf. *Iliad* xxiv.348; *Odyssey* x.279.
anonymous friend clearly assumes that Socrates’ interest in Alcibiades is sexual in nature. Socrates, on the other hand, reassures the anonymous friend that Alcibiades’ beard has just now started to bloom. And furthermore, arguing from (the friend’s) authority, he points out that he has Homer on his side in this matter. Socrates confirms his anonymous friend’s suspicion, though, saying that he of course was just with Alcibiades. Alcibiades is not only spoken of in the Protagoras, however, he is also a speaking character, who supports Socrates in the discussion (Prt. 336b7–d5; 347b1–7). His support, however, is not explained by Alcibiades’ affection for Socrates. In accordance with the thumetic psychological portrait of Alcibiades given elsewhere, it is here said that Alcibiades always likes victory, and that he believes he will end up on the winning side by supporting Socrates.257

Arguably, Alcibiades’ and Socrates’ most famous encounter is in the Symposium, where Alcibiades makes a flamboyant appearance: as a now fully grown man (in his forties) who is utterly drunk, loud and dramatic, extremely jealous and heartbroken. The Greek drinking-party (or symposion, originating from the term συμπίνειν which literally means “to be drinking together’), was important in Hellenic social life. It was a forum where young men were introduced to society, and where they celebrated special occasions. In Plato’s Symposium, the occasion is that the young (neaniskos, 198a2) and beautiful Agathon has won a poetry contest. With a crowd of drunken men and a bunch of flute-girls, Alcibiades crashes Agathon’s party, uninvited, and half-carried (as he is so drunk that he has problems standing on his feet, cf. Symp. 212d5–e3). Presumably, this is quite late and several hours after the other partygoers (the other symposiasts) have made the peculiar agreement not to become drunk that evening but only to drink as much as pleases them (Symp. 176e1), and instead compose a series of encomia of Erôs, i.e. speeches in honor of the god of Love.258 Alcibiades gets permission to join the party, and sits down between Agathon and Socrates. He then starts crying out his dissatisfaction with Socrates sitting next to the beautiful Agathon. Socrates indirectly answers Alcibiades’ accusations by begging Agathon for help (Symp. 213c6–d4):

[PROTECT ME FROM THIS MAN! YOU CAN’T IMAGINE WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE IN LOVE WITH HIM: FROM THE VERY FIRST MOMENT HE REALIZED HOW I FELT FOR HIM, HE HASN’T ALLOWED ME TO SAY TWO WORDS TO ANYBODY ELSE – WHAT AM I SAYING, I CAN’T SO MUCH AS LOOK AT AN ATTRACTIVE MAN BUT HE FLIES INTO A PIT OF JEALOUS RAGE.]

257 Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ ἀεὶ φιλόνικός ἐστι πρὸς ὃ ἄν ὀρμήσῃ , Prt. 336e1, my emphasis. This may seem as a case of “the pot calling the kettle black”, as the remark is made by Critias (the same Critias as in the Charmides), himself portrayed as being rather thumetic.

258 It may be noted here that Socrates also arrived late (with the exception of Alcibiades he came in last), in the midst of dinner (Symp. 175c3–4).

259 As W. R. M. Lamb translates it. The Greek here is: λέγαθον, φάναι, ὦ ἔμι μοι ἑκατομνεῖς ὡς ἐμοὶ ὁ τοῦτον ἔρως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐ φαύλον πράγμα γέγονεν. ἀπ’ ἐκείνου γὰρ τοῦ
Socrates goes on about how the fierceness of Alcibiades’ passion for his lover (φιλεραστία) terrifies him, and how Alcibiades may become violent. Socrates also wonders whether Agathon will defend him if so happens – or perhaps Agathon has the means to make Alcibiades forgive him? The thumetic Alcibiades, however, yells that he will never forgive him: He will revenge himself later, he says – and starts to praise Socrates instead. Alcibiades asks Agathon (who he has just crowned) to give some of the ribbons back to him, and crowns Socrates’ head with them, saying “look at that magnificent head! (...) he has never lost an argument in his life” (Symp. 213e1–6).

Over a few lines (from the beginning of 213c to the middle of 213e), both Alcibiades and Socrates have confirmed their mutual affection for, and frustration with, one another. Alcibiades appoints himself the new symposiarch, the new “party-leader”. He then says that he hopes the others did not believe a word of what Socrates has said in his speech, and tells the others that they do not really know Socrates. In this way, Alcibiades underscores the level of intimacy between himself and Socrates. Alcibiades then goes on to say that he will tell the audience the truth about Socrates: Following Eryximachus’ suggestion (Symp. 214d9–10), Alcibiades will offer an encomium to Socrates, instead of Erôs.

There are several elements in Alcibiades’ speech that may be mapped onto the happenings in the Alcibiades I, and which thus provide a strong affinity between Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium and their encounter in Alcibiades I. As Friedländer (1965, 2:242–243) argues:

To understand fully the speech of Alcibiades in the Symposium, we must look at the Alcibiades as its background and we must be aware constantly, in each dialogue, both of the extraordinary greatness and of the catastrophe of the historical Alcibiades.

Alcibiades’ and Socrates’ encounter in the Alcibiades I is set to take place prior (in dramatic time) to their encounter in the Symposium. Even so, I believe that not only can we profit from looking to the Alcibiades I when interpreting the Symposium (like Friedländer here suggests), but we can also gain a better grip on their encounter in the Alcibiades by looking to the Symposium.

Friedländer further remarks that in the Symposium Alcibiades tells Socrates that: “You always do this to me – all of a sudden you’ll turn up out of nowhere where I least expect you! Well, what do you want now?”, whereas in the Alcibiades I, Alcibiades says: “What do you hope to achieve

χρόνου, ὥς ὦ τοῦτον ἦράσθην, οὐκέτι ἔξεστιν μοι οὔτε προσβλέψαι οὔτε διαλεχθῆναι καλῷ οὐδ᾽ ἐνὶ, ἢ οὔτοις ξηλοτυπῶν με καὶ φθονὸν ἰσαμετὰ ἐργάζεται καὶ λοιδορεῖται τε καὶ τῷ χείρῳ μόνῳ ἀπέχεται.
by bothering me, always making sure you’re there wherever I am?” (Symp. 213b9–c2; Alc.I. 104d1–3). Moreover, in both dialogues, Alcibiades also emphasizes Socrates’ peculiar character, his atopia (ἀτοπία, in Symp. 215a2, 221d2; Alc.I.106a2). According to Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium, Socrates’ character is so peculiar that you would not find anyone else who comes near, either among his contemporaries or those of the past. In the Alcibiades I, Alcibiades states that Socrates seems much more bizarre to him when he talks than when he followed him around in silence. The peculiarity is also a matter of the effect Socrates has on Alcibiades: In the Symposium, the drunken Alcibiades confesses that Socrates is the only man in the world who has made him feel ashamed:

He [Socrates] always traps me, you see, and makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die. Socrates is the man in the world who has made me feel shame – ah, you didn’t think I had it in me, did you? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave into my desire to please the crowd. (…) Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be miserable. I can’t live with him, and I can’t live without him! 

One may note that the Sirens (Σειρῆνες), whom Alcibiades here speaks of are mythical creatures: beautiful singing (or rather chanting) sea nymphs, represented in early Greek art as birds with large women’s heads. The Sirens are often used as a metaphor for deceitful people (“the Siren charm of persuasion”, etc.), as the Sirens were thought to be deceitful and dangerous female creatures that lured men into sailing closer to them, until the ship finally crashed on the treacherous rocks around the island where the Sirens sat. It seems that Alcibiades, through this metaphor, indicates that it is not

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260 Symp. 216a ff. The term here used by Alcibiades, αἰσχύνεσθαι, means feeling “ashamed”, and/or “dishonored”.

261 In Aeschines’ speech Against Ctesiphon (Aeschin. 3. 288; Eng. Trans. by Adams), the main character defends himself from the accusation that he is like the Sirens:

For he likens me in natural endowment to the Sirens, saying that it was not charm that the Sirens brought to those who listened to them, but destruction, and that therefore the Siren-song has no good repute; and that in like manner the smooth flow of my speech and my natural ability have proved the ruin of those who have listened to me. And yet I think no man in the world is justified in making such a statement about me.

This is Aeschines the orator (not to be confused with Aeschines of Sphettus, also called Aeschines Socraticus, who wrote the Alcibiades-dialogue previously referred to). The portrait
pleasure Socrates brings to those who listen to his charming and beautiful words, but rather destruction.262

In the Symposium, Alcibiades also says to Socrates that he is “quite a flute-player”, looking just like a statue of Silenus, the Greek god of Drunkenness, “sitting with his flute in his hands”, and that Socrates also reminds him of the satyr Marsyas.263 To fully understand the gravity of these comparisons and characteristics, however, some further explanation is needed. I believe these characteristics are worthy of our attention – not only in order to understand what Alcibiades communicates in the Symposium, but also, and more importantly for our purpose here, in order to understand how Alcibiades viewed their encounter in the Alcibiades I. The instrument Alcibiades refers to is the aulos (which is not actually a flute, but a reed instrument), held by the ancients to be the instrument that most strongly arouses the emotions. Hence, Alcibiades seems to suggest that Socrates is quite good at arousing others’ emotions. By contrast, in the Alcibiades I (106e), Alcibiades is said to be refusing to play the aulos – perhaps supporting the image of him as one who sends his lovers packing. Furthermore, the effects of alcohol and erôs may be compared; Alcibiades describes erôs as causing fever, warmth and sweat, rendering a person weak and slavish.264 In addition, he makes a remark about Socrates’ bodily appearance when saying he looks just like the statue of Silenus, as the statues of Silenus typically portrays him as fat, bald and snub-nosed. It may be noted on this point that, even though Silenus seems to be portrayed as significantly fatter than Socrates, this seems based in reality – Socrates is said to be “famous for being short and pot-bellied, having a thick nose, a bulging forehead, and protrusive eyes” (Scott 2000, 10).

As to the comparison of Socrates to the satyr Marsyas: The satyrs were said to have the sexual appetite of wild beasts, and are often portrayed with horses’ tails and ears (horses being a common symbol of masculine erôs265), sometimes the traits of goats, and, not least, very large penises (a comic attribute it is quite likely that Socrates was equipped with in the staging of

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262 I return to the effects of Socrates’ seductions in Ch. 5.
263 Alcibiades says that Socrates is like Silenus at 215b and 216d, and Marsyas at 215c–d.
264 See Symp. 217e–218b. I refer to this passage also in Ch. 1, section 1.3, p. 36. One may here also note that Aristotle’s erotic dialogue the Symposium is occasionally referred to as On Drunkenness (Peri Methês), which I briefly comment on in Ch. 2, section 2.3., p. 65, n. 133, and section 2.8, p. 85, n. 176.
265 For this point, see Appendix, pp. 170–172.
Aristophanes’ *The Clouds*). In a myth, Marsyas competed in music with Apollo, but he lost and was skinned alive. According to Alcibiades, however, unlike Marsyas, whose melodies are divine, and who uses his instruments to cast spells on people, Socrates needs nothing but his own words to cast his “spells”.

The theme of shame is to be found in both Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium* and in the *Alcibiades I*. In the *Symposium*, as we have just seen, Alcibiades says that Socrates is the only one who has made him feel shame. In the *Alcibiades I*, we shall see that Alcibiades confesses twice that he is indeed ashamed (*Alc.I.* 109a, 127d). Another shared theme of the two dialogues is (obviously) erôs, and also more specifically charming.

Now, one has to wonder (at least I do): Does Socrates genuinely love Alcibiades? And if so, why? I believe that there are in fact good reasons for us to believe that Socrates genuinely loved Alcibiades, and that at least a part of the explanation for why he did so was that he recognized Alcibiades’ vital erôs, and within this saw great beauty, as well as perhaps a potentiality for even greater beauty, if Alcibiades’ erôs could be directed towards wisdom, which is said to be one of the most beautiful things.

4.2. Quest i: Piquing Alcibiades’ interest

In contrast to the *Symposium* and the *Protagoras*, Socrates meets Alcibiades alone in the *Alcibiades I*. On this point, Socrates’ meeting with the young Alcibiades also differs from those he had with Lysis and Charmides, as these conversations took place in the company of others. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, Lysis and Charmides were both surrounded by infatuated fawning lovers. In the *Alcibiades I*, the other lovers have fled the scene, providing the meeting between Alcibiades and Socrates with a special level of intimacy. The *Alcibiades I* also stands out from dialogues such as the *Lysis* and the *Charmides* by the fact that the location of the encounter is never specified.

The dialogue begins with Socrates telling Alcibiades that he was his first lover (*πρῶτος ἐραστής*). However, according to Socrates, the *daimonion*

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266 For further reading on Alcibiades’ and Socrates’ encounter in the *Symposium*, see e.g. D. Scott (2000).
267 Hanson (2008, 148) remarks that “Alcibiades makes a spectacle of his shame”. I here sympathize with Hanson, who continues: “He [Alcibiades] ought to be ashamed of his shame, he says, but he talks about it with so much enthusiasm that I feel envious.”
268 I discussed how wisdom is said to belong to the most beautiful things in Ch. 1, section 1.2., pp. 31–32.
269 There might be a possible link here, between the *Alcibiades I* and the *Lysis*. Whereas the discussion in the Lysis concerns the *prôton philon*, Socrates here claims to be Alcibiades’ *prôtos erastês*. I will not seek to establish such a link here, however.
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has forbidden him to talk to Alcibiades before now. Alcibiades has had many lovers, or suitors (ἐρασταί), who have now turned their backs on him. Two reasons for this are mentioned: First, as noted earlier, his boyish beauty is fading. Secondly, Alcibiades has been arrogant towards his suitors. This is a fact Socrates claims to know, as he has been silently observing Alcibiades “all this time” (Alc.I. 103b2–4). Socrates then tells Alcibiades that he would like to explain to him why Alcibiades considers himself so superior to his other suitors.

Alcibiades responds that, actually, he has just decided to ask Socrates what he is up to: “What do you hope to achieve by bothering me, always making sure you’re there wherever I am? Yes, I really wonder what you might be up to, and I’d be very glad to find out” (Alc.I. 104d3–5). Though this reply may be said to reveal some curiosity, it first and foremost reveals that he is annoyed. (Which seems perfectly understandable, given that Socrates was stalking him.) When Alcibiades says that he will pay attention to what Socrates has to say for himself, Socrates replies that “it is not easy to play the role of suitor [ἐραστῇ] with a man who doesn’t give in to them; nevertheless, I must summon my courage and say what’s on my mind” (Alc.I. 104e4–6). Socrates states that he thinks constantly of him (Alc.I. 105a1–3), and then (very self-assured, it seems) goes on to give a short psychological account of Alcibiades and his ambition, who (as previously stated) wishes to become the advisor of the Athenians. Socrates furthermore claims to be the only one who can help Alcibiades (Alc.I. 105d2–e5):

It is impossible to put any of these ideas of yours into effect without me – that’s how much influence I think I have over you and your business (…) I hope to have great influence over you by showing you that I’m worth the world to you and that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence you crave, neither your guardian nor your relatives, nor anybody except me.

To this Alcibiades replies that Socrates seems even more bizarre to him now that he is talking than before when he was just following him around silently – though he thinks Socrates was very bizarre to look at then too (Alc.I. 106a2–3). Alcibiades is clearly annoyed, yet puzzled by what Socrates has said, and responds: “supposing I really do have these ambitions, how will you help me achieve them? What makes you indispensable? Have you got

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270 Socrates also states that the daimonion permits or forbids him to engage in certain conversations in the Theaetetus (151a2–5): “Sometimes they come back, wanting my company again, and ready to move heaven and earth to get it. When that happens, in some cases the divine sign (τὸ δαιμονιὸν) that visits me forbids me to associate with them; in others, it permits me, and then they begin again to make progress.” As elsewhere, then, “Socrates claims that his erotic activities are divinely sanctioned” (Belfiore 2012, 36, with reference to Lys. 204b8–c2; Phdr. 257a6–9). In letting them meet now, however, Schleiermacher remarks that the daimonion did neither of them any great service (Schleiermacher 1836, 330).
something to say?” (Alc.I. 106a4–8). Socrates now seems to have managed to pique Alcibiades’ interest, and asks (Alc.I. 106b1–6):

Socrates: Are you asking if I can say some long speech like the ones you’re used to hearing? No, that sort of thing’s not for me. But I do think I’d be able to show you what I said is true, if only you were willing to grant me just one little favor [ὑπηρετῆσαι].

Alcibiades: Well, as long as you mean a favor that’s not hard to grant, I’m willing.271

This is the voiced plot: Socrates is going to prove that he is Alcibiades’ first and only lover, and the only one who can help him to achieve his goals. But how? Through, it turns out, shaming and charming him.

Socrates’ shaming of Alcibiades has received scholarly attention. Among those who have noted Socrates’ approach and rude manner of speaking to Alcibiades is Schleiermacher (1836, 333):

Socrates intrudes in mere caprice (…) only applying, in fact, every point to shame his interlocutor, so that the whole acquires an eristic character, which no other dialogue bears with it in a similar manner.

The term “eristic” originates from Eris, the Greek goddess of chaos, strife, and discord. In Plato, it is typically used when claiming that someone is arguing just for the sake of conflict.272 It is also a type of “question-and-answer”-method commonly thought of as applied and taught by the sophists. Plato distinguishes this eristic method from the dialectical method, and from other more logical methods.273

In his Eristische Dialektik, Schopenhauer (as his title reveals) rejects any substantial differences between the eristic and the dialectical method, arguing that that only logic pursues the truth: Dialectic, eristic, and sophistry all have selfish aims, he holds, only caring for victory, as opposed to caring for the truth itself.274 Schleiermacher follows Schopenhauer’s rejection of eristic dialectic. In the quote above Schleiermacher ascribes this method to Socrates, using “eristic” as a negative characterization of Socrates’ conduct in the Alcibiades. To Schleiermacher, Socrates’ rude treatment of Alcibiades and his eristic methodological procedure – which Socrates elsewhere

271 The term translated “favor” here is the verb for service, hypêretein, and has sexual connotations (cf. Denyer 2001; Belfiore 2012, 37). It also has connotations to military service.
273 Cf. Rep. 454a. The eristic method is also discussed in the Euthydemus. For further reading, see Nehamas (1990), who (with references to in particular Isocrates) emphasizes that in the fourth century B.C., “terms like ‘philosophy’, ‘dialectic’, and ‘sophistry’ do not seem to have had a widely agreed-upon application” (Nehamas 1990, 5).
274 Schopenhauer (1831), published a few years before Schleiermacher’s study.
criticizes – indicates that the dialogue is too un-Platonic to be Plato’s. In the next section (4.3.), I argue against Schleiermacher on this point.

The first task, namely, to catch Alcibiades’ interest and to make him take part in their conversation, may first seem to be completed at 106c, where Alcibiades agrees to answer Socrates’ questions. However, although Socrates has succeeded in gaining Alcibiades’ interest, he shall also have to keep Alcibiades’ interested. My reading here differs from that of Belfiore, who argues, that: “Alcibiades immediately shows that he has a nature suited to the search for wisdom” (Belfiore 2012, 36). Belfiore here refers to Alcibiades’ wonder, and his statement that he would be “glad to learn” why Socrates takes such care of and interest in him, and that Alcibiades’ curiosity is aroused by Socrates’ strangeness (atopia). On my reading, Socrates has to continuously keep Alcibiades interested and willing to learn. Rather than being interested in knowledge per se, Alcibiades seems interested, firstly, in obtaining an explanation for why Socrates is stalking him, and, secondly, in acquiring knowledge that might be advantageous to himself. That is, only insofar as knowledge helps him achieve his true ambition, which is to rule.

That Socrates has to work in order to keep Alcibiades’ interest becomes clear, I think, when Alcibiades at one point tells Socrates to stop pushing him around, and instead to “answer his own questions” (Alc.I. 114d7–e7):

Alcibiades: Stop pushing me around, Socrates!
Socrates: No, in fact I’m going to push you around and persuade you of the opposite of what you’re willing to show me.
Alcibiades: Just try it!
Socrates: Just answer my questions.
Alcibiades: No, you do the talking yourself.
Socrates: What?! Don’t you want to be completely convinced?
Alcibiades: Absolutely, I’m sure.
Socrates: Wouldn’t you be completely convinced if you yourself said, ‘Yes, that’s how it is’?
Alcibiades: Yes, I think so.
Socrates: Then answer my questions.

Smith (2004, 100, n. 12) echoes Schleiermacher on this point: “My argument is that it is too un-Platonic!”. Against Smith, Benitez (2012, 122) argues that, rather than being a “fake”, it belongs to a transitional period in Plato’s career. Predominantly, Smith (2004) argues that the dialogue threatens what he calls a “secure understanding” of central Platonic issues, and that, because of this, the dialogue should be read the work of an imitator. On this point, I sympathize with Annas’ (1985, 115) remark, which Smith neglects (although he frequently cites her paper, which he criticizes): “When a work is not standardly in the canon, we do find when we read it that it may not, initially, sound Platonic because our ideas of what is ‘Platonic’ come from reading the accepted canon. The circularity here is obvious”.

It should be noted that, pace Schleiermacher, the importance of shame has been acknowledged, e.g. by Belfiore (2012, 69), who argues that shame is essential in the process of learning (as commented on in Ch. 3, section 3.3.2, p. 108).
To this Alcibiades agrees. In this way, Socrates convinces Alcibiades to continue their discussion. It is crucial for Socrates to secure Alcibiades’ participation. As he already told Alcibiades; “it’s partly up to you, surely, to keep our conversation going well” (Alc.I. 108c). This is an important issue in Socrates’ erotic educational methods: To make the interlocutor realize that he is in need of knowledge through *demonstration*, instead of simply *telling* him that he needs knowledge.

### 4.3. Quest ii: Provoking aporia

In order to achieve the second task, i.e. to make Alcibiades realize that he is in need of knowledge, Socrates must first make Alcibiades experience aporia. That the experience of aporia is a pain constituting an important motivation for pursuing knowledge is hinted at in 109e, where Socrates says that he believes Alcibiades will investigate justice and injustice if Alcibiades himself realizes that he does not know these things. As it appears, Alcibiades cannot recall a moment in his life when he thought he did not know about these things. Eventually, however, Alcibiades agrees that, from what has been said, it is not likely that he does know about justice and injustice (Alc.I. 112d ff.):

- **Socrates:** (...) how likely is it that you know about justice and injustice?
- **Alcibiades:** From what you say anyway, it’s not very likely.
- **Socrates:** You say that I say these things.
- **Alcibiades:** What? Aren’t you saying that I don’t understand justice and injustice?
- **Socrates:** No, not at all.
- **Alcibiades:** Well, am I?
- **Socrates:** Yes.

We should here note that the knowledge in question is knowledge that implies *virtue*: Justice is a virtue. Already here, then, we find a hint that foreshadows Socrates’ conclusion at the end of the dialogue, where he tells Alcibiades that what he needs is virtue (Alc.I. 135b3–8).

It is also crucial to note that in the quote above, Socrates argues that Alcibiades is the one who says he is lacking this knowledge, since he is the answerer, and Socrates is the questioner. Alcibiades agrees; it is the one who answers who is making a statement, not the questioner. Since he was the one doing the answering in this case, it was actually he himself who said that he does not know about justice and injustice. What Socrates here did, was to use his method of midwifery to help bring this insight (i.e. that Alcibiades
And what was said was that Alcibiades, the handsome son of Clinias, doesn’t understand justice and injustice — though he thinks he does — and that he is about to go to the Assembly to advise the Athenians on what he doesn’t know anything about. Wasn’t that it? (...) I’m not the one who says these things — you are — don’t try to blame me. And furthermore, you’re quite right to say so (...) your scheme, my good fellow, is crazy.

Even though Socrates characterizes Alcibiades’ plan as “crazy”, Alcibiades is not yet convinced, and not yet thrown into an aporetic state. Instead, he becomes even more annoyed. This is when he tells Socrates to stop pushing him around, and do the talking himself. Eventually (Alc.I. 116e), however, Alcibiades admits that he is wavering and not so certain of himself anymore:

Alcibiades: I swear by the gods, Socrates, I have no idea what I mean — I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition! When you ask me questions, first I think one thing, and then I think something else.

Socrates: Are you unaware, my dear fellow, of what this feeling is?

Alcibiades: Completely.

In the quote above, a connection is made between Socrates’ interrogation and his charming, which does not come out clearly in the English translation. Alcibiades says he changes when Socrates is “asking questions”. The term Alcibiades uses is ἐρωτῶντος, which is related to erôtan, meaning “to ask”, and which also plays on the term “erôs”.277 This links Socrates’ questioning to his seduction. The feeling Alcibiades is describing seems new to him, as he is rather used to being on top of things. Socrates then explains the feeling, arguing that it is the feeling of uncertainty and perplexity — aporia. On Socrates’ account, you do not feel this way when you know that you do not know. You do not waver about things you realize that you do not understand. Alcibiades, for example, does not waver about how to prepare a fine meal, as he knows that he does not have the expertise to do so anyway. Nor does one waver about things one knows that one knows — you are not wavering about how many eyes you have, or how many fingers you have. The feeling of aporia occurs when you have just realized that you do not know what you thought you knew, after all. The ignorance of thinking that one knows what one does in fact not know, is according to Socrates the worst kind of ignorance, it is stupidity of the highest degree (Alc.I. 118b4–7):

277 I comment more in detail on the linguistic connections between erôtan (“to ask”) and erôs, which are emphasized in several dialogues, in Ch. 2, section 2.3., p. 64.
The *Alcibiades I*

Good God, Alcibiades, what a sorry state you’re in! I hesitate to call it by its name, but still, since we’re alone, it must be said. You are wedded to stupidity [ἀµαθία γὰρ συνοικεῖς], my good fellow, stupidity of the highest degree – our discussion and your own words convict you of it.

Arguably, this is Socrates’ most offensive remark to Alcibiades. The reason why Alcibiades is “wedded to stupidity of the highest degree”, is presented earlier in the text. Socrates has made Alcibiades agree to the following (shortened) argument – let’s call it the “stupidity argument” – leading up to this conclusion (from 117e1 to 118b7):

1. When people think that they do not know something, they hand it over to (i.e. rely on) someone else.
2. The sort of people who think that they do not know how to do certain things make no mistakes, because they leave those things to other people.
3. The ones who make mistakes are not (a) those who know, and not (b) those who do not know and know that they do not know, but (c) those who do not know but think they know.
4. Those who do not know but think they know (c above) are guilty of the kind of ignorance (ἀγνοιά) that causes “bad things” (τὰ κακά), and this is the most disgraceful (ἐπονείδιστος) sort of stupidity (ἀµαθία).
5. This kind of ignorance is most harmful when it concerns important things.
6. There is nothing more important than what is just, admirable, good, and advantageous.
7. Alcibiades is ignorant about what is just, admirable, good, and advantageous.

*Conclusion:*

8. Alcibiades is ignorant about important things (from 6, 7).

*If we add the following premise:*

9. Alcibiades thinks he knows what is just, admirable, good, and advantageous.

*Conclusion:*

10. Alcibiades makes mistakes (from 3, 7, and 9).

*Conclusion:*

11. Alcibiades is guilty of the most disgraceful and most harmful sort of stupidity (from 4, 5, 8, and 9).

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278 The term “κακόν” (kakon) refers a wider range of “bad” things; wickedness, cowardice, laziness, etc. (The opposite term is kalon, which refers to the beautiful, the good, the noble, etc.)

279 The significance of “makes mistakes” seems to be found in premise four; mistakes cause “bad things”.

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We should note that at this stage in the dialogue, the added premise 9 is in fact false: Alcibiades no longer thinks that he knows what is just, admirable, good, and advantageous. As shown above, Alcibiades has been thrown into an aporetic state. Why, then, does Socrates keep pressing conclusion 11 on him? Perhaps he believes that Alcibiades’ current state is unstable: Unless he commits to a project of self-cultivation, he will soon return to thinking that he knows what he does not know (i.e., the state that makes premise 9 true). Hence, when Socrates asks, “Do you intend to remain in your present condition, or practice some self-cultivation?” (Alc.I. 119a), there is a third, unstated option: returning to his original disgraceful and most harmful kind of ignorance. As we know, Alcibiades says at the end of the dialogue that he will start to cultivate justice in himself immediately. In this dialogue, then, Socrates accomplishes what Gordon describes as philosophical seduction: “Alcibiades has been philosophically seduced; that is, he is willing to make his commitment to Socrates and to the just life. But like all seductions, the morning after is another story” (Gordon 2012, 182). As soon as he is no longer with Socrates, he goes back to his old self and returns to his old ways, as he reported in the Symposium.

To Socrates’ argument, Alcibiades replies that he sees what Socrates means, and agrees (Alc.I. 119b1–3). However, the conclusion Alcibiades first draws from this is not the one Socrates had planned for. Alcibiades says that since the others entered politics as idiots (ἰδιωτικῶς), there is no need for him to go through the trouble of learning – “I’m sure my natural abilities will be far superior to theirs” (Alc.I. 119b7–10). In other words, Alcibiades reasons that it does not seem worth the trouble to cultivate oneself, because all the others are amateurs as well. To this, Socrates replies (Alc.I. 119c2–c5):

Good God, my dear boy, what a thing to say – how unworthy of your good looks and other advantages! (...) I am furious [ἀγανακτῶ] with you and with my infatuation of you [τοῦ ἐμαυτοῦ ἔρωτος]!

Socrates then tries to make Alcibiades realize his need of self-cultivation through appealing to his thumetic nature: “Surely you don’t think that cultivating yourself will do you any harm, do you?” (Alc.I. 120d), before he proceeds with what is often referred to as Socrates’ Royal Speech. He here argues that Alcibiades’ true competitors are the Kings of Persia and Sparta. In this speech, Socrates tells Alcibiades that when it comes to upbringing, wealth, and education, these are superior. So too when it comes to self-
control, decorum, and discipline: Although Alcibiades is typically described as a courageous lover of victory and honor, Socrates tells him that “you’d consider yourself a mere child in all these respects” (*Alc.I.* 122c). The Spartans and Persians are far more courageous (*ἀνδρεία*) and more loving of honor (*φιλοτιμία*) than Alcibiades, Socrates stresses. Even their wives and mothers would think him mad, Socrates argues, if they heard that the one challenging them was hardly twenty years old yet, entirely uneducated, and furthermore, that he told his lover that he was happy and content with the way he was, when the lover encouraged him to study and cultivate himself so that he could fare better when competing with the king. Socrates continues (*Alc.I.* 124a5–b6):

[D]on’t you think it’s disgraceful that even our enemies’ wives have a better appreciation than we do of what it would take to challenge them? No, my excellent friend, trust in me and the Delphic inscription and ‘know thyself’ [*γνῶθι σαυτόν*]. These are the people we must defeat, not the ones you think, and we have no hope of defeating them unless we act with both diligence and skill. If you fall short in these, then you will fall short of achieving fame [*τοῦ ὀνόμαστος γενέσθαι*] in Greece as well as abroad; and that is what I think you’re longing for, more than anyone else ever longed [*ἔραυν*] for anything.

Socrates seems right in suspecting that Alcibiades erotically desires and longs for fame. These statements therefore hit Alcibiades hard. I presume, however, that they are not as painful as Alcibiades’ discovery that he is not as self-sufficient and superior as he first thought he was. It is of major importance here that, by help of Socrates, it is Alcibiades himself who utters that he does not know about justice and injustice, and that he is guilty of the most disgraceful and most harmful sort of stupidity. (That is, at least if we, like Alcibiades, accept Socrates’ earlier arguments (cf. *Alc.I.* 112d) that he is just the questioner, so that it in effect is Alcibiades who says these things.)

It is thus not, at least not just, Socrates’ explicit statements and the content of these that are here affecting Alcibiades. Moreover, the shame felt by Alcibiades includes not just his realizing that he lacks knowledge about certain important things, but that he is being thrown into an aporetic experience of his own ethical deficiency. This makes Alcibiades less arrogant. Eventually, Alcibiades therefore becomes more humble and willing to follow Socrates’ lead. Alcibiades asks Socrates: “what kind of self-cultivation [*ἐπιμέλειαν*] do I need to learn? Can you show me the way [*ἔχεις ἐξηγήσασθαι*]? What you said really sounded true” (*Alc.I.* 124b7–9). Alcibiades has realized that he is in need of guidance, and asks Socrates to lead him. Moreover, Alcibiades did previously agree that he would be more convinced if he said “yes, that is how it is”, than if he was simply told how it was – now saying that what Socrates has said really sounded true, he seems to have reached this insight.
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Socrates is here making progress in respect to his second quest. In contrast to Schleiermacher (and others) who find the shaming of Alcibiades un-Platonic, I here see a clear resemblance to other Platonic dialogues, especially regarding the erotic educational methods and psychological techniques Socrates is applying. Most striking is the resemblance to the Lysis. For one thing, Socrates makes use of the same psychological techniques in the two dialogues, to wit, shaming and charming. In the Lysis, Socrates explicitly states as advice to Hippothales that the skilled lover does not praise his beloved before he has successfully seduced him, because if these good-looking boys receive praise, then they become arrogant, and hence harder to catch. Socrates says that what one should do is “cutting them down to size and putting them in their place” (cf. Lys. 210e1–211a1). This is also demonstrated by Socrates: While taking on the role as a lover of the boy Lysis, under the pretext that he is going to show Hippothales how he ought to seduce Lysis (whom Hippothales is infatuated with), Socrates does not praise Lysis (like Hippothales so far, and unsuccessfully, has been doing). Instead, Socrates indicates to Lysis e.g. that he is not loved by his parents, nor by anyone else, and that he does not have a mind of his own. Taking into account that Socrates in the Alcibiades I emphasizes how arrogantly (µεγαλόφρων) Alcibiades has acted towards his suitors (Alc.I. 103b4 ff.), I believe that Socrates in the Alcibiades I is acting in accordance with his own advice to Hippothales: Instead of praising Alcibiades, like his other lovers (unsuccessfully) have done, Socrates here tries to win Alcibiades over by “cutting him down to size”. The “shaming-charming” Socrates conducts in the Alcibiades I, as well as in the Lysis, may be understood as a kind of intellectual “negging.” Socrates’ treatment of Alcibiades, then, which involves shaming him, is therefore not “un-Platonic”, but ought rather to be seen as a strategy of seduction that Socrates

283 “[T]he skilled lover [tû ἐρωτικά…σοφός] doesn’t praise his beloved [ἐρώμενον] until he has him (…) these good-looking boys, if anyone praises them, get swelled heads and start to think they’re really somebody” (Lys. 206a1–206a4). And the more swell-headed they get, the harder they are to catch, cf. Lys. 206a5.

284 This term also occurs in the Lysis, at 210d5.

285 Indeed, “negging”, which denotes low-grade insults meant to undermine the self-confidence of a person (usually a woman) so (s)he might be more vulnerable to the seducer’s advances, is applied by some today as a pick-up strategy. This (sexist) technique became more widespread after it was encouraged and explicated by the “pick-up artist” Strauss, in his New York Times bestseller, The Game (2005). The kind of “negging” conducted by Socrates, however, which I perceive as included in his toolkit when practicing his erotic educational methods, differs from the kind of “negging” that one may experience today regarding its ultimate goal: Socrates’ final goal is to install an erotic desire for knowledge in the person he “negs”, whereas the typical goal for seducers that “neg” today is physical pleasure. (One might say that Socrates’ advice to Hippothales – that he should not flatter his beloved, but humble him instead – has been taken to the extreme by the “pick-up artist” and those following his strategies.)
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systematically puts to use. Against Schleiermacher, I side with Friedländer (1965, 2:236), that the Alcibiades I:

shows the pupil’s pride broken (…) he has come to see his own emptiness before the superior strength of his master. Thus, humiliation and submission belong to the inner development of the dialogue, which leads from the strong resistance displayed by Alcibiades at the beginning to his surrender at the end.

On the reading I am suggesting, Socrates’ aim is to make Alcibiades realize that he is not self-sufficient, but rather in need of education. This is brought about through trowing Alcibiades into an aporetic state of mind, which in the case of Alcibiades requires breaking his pride and making him ashamed. After having succeeded in this quest, Socrates can now proceed to convince Alcibiades that by virtue of his guidance, he himself is the only genuine lover-educator available to Alcibiades.

4.4. Quest iii: I’m the one

I read Socrates’ shaming of Alcibiades, at the very same time, as a way of charming Alcibiades. The shaming is Socrates’ way of making himself interesting, and through being brought to shame, Alcibiades becomes aware of his problem, i.e. his shortcomings regarding (self-) knowledge. Socrates can then present himself as a part of the solution; claiming he is the person to help him achieve (self-) knowledge.

Though shame is a painful experience, as Alcibiades himself confirms in the Symposium (as quoted earlier), Plato seems to have Socrates using shame instrumentally, as a technique, for a higher purpose. This higher purpose is erotic-educational. It is crucial that Alcibiades reach aporia, so that he will understand that he needs knowledge. As Belfiore writes, “[t]his is an important stage in acquiring self-knowledge, which, whatever else it may include, must begin with the recognition of one’s own lack of wisdom” (Belfiore 2012, 39). Through making Alcibiades realize his need for knowledge, Socrates is stimulating Alcibiades’ erôs for knowledge. Belfiore (2012, 71) states that Socrates by using his erotic art both helps his interlocutors to recognize their own lack of wisdom, and also produces an affection for wisdom in them – I agree.

I take it that that is precisely what

286 We may, however, naturally question the morality of Socrates’ methods and their related techniques. I return to this issue in Ch. 5, section 5.2.
287 As argued by Lutz (1998, 120–123). According to Gordon (2003, 27): “[O]ne could take Lutz’s view further and characterize more broadly the eros that Socrates elicits as Alcibiades’ desire to improve, to achieve his political goals, and his desire for what he lacks in general”.
288 As also mentioned in Ch. 1, section 1.6., p. 45, n. 77.
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Socrates is up to in the Alcibiades I: To make Alcibiades aware of his lack of wisdom, and to cultivate his erôs – by arousing an erotic affection for wisdom in him, which is needed in order to pursue it. In this very process, the shaming serves as a technique.

But how will Socrates guide Alcibiades towards self-knowledge? Currently, the situation is as follows: Socrates has succeeded in the two first quests, (i) piquing Alcibiades’ interest, so that he will engage in a conversation with him, and (ii) making Alcibiades realize that he is in need of a lover-educator. Socrates can now proceed to his third quest; (iii) convincing Alcibiades that he is that lover-educator who is needed.

Let us put ourselves in Socrates’ shoes for a moment: Imagine that you have just managed to get your beloved to agree to the claim that lovers are vital in the process of knowing, loving, educating, and examining oneself. In short, they are essential in order to “see oneself”. Now, you have to convince your beloved that you are the right lover for him/her, that “you’re the one”, so to speak, who can guide your beloved through the beloved’s self-searching (and life in general). Furthermore, when imagining this, remember that your beloved is extremely arrogant and exceptionally good-looking, and that he/she has already sent a significant amount of infatuated lovers packing. How would you go about it?289 This is the challenging situation Socrates is in – that is, if one (as I do) believes that Socrates genuinely loves Alcibiades (as suggested in section 4.1.). How shall Socrates convince Alcibiades that Alcibiades needs him, that Socrates and no one else can guide him towards the realization of his dreams?

We find a seed, or in more prosaic terms, perhaps, a premise of support, already planted in the Royal Speech (Alc.I. 122b6–8):

Alcibiades, your birth, your upbringing, and your education [παιδείας] – or that of any other Athenian – is of no concern to anybody, to tell the truth – nobody except perhaps some man who may happen to be in love with you [εἰ μὴ εἶ τις ἐραστής σου τυγχάνει ἔων].

Socrates is here saying that no one really cares about Alcibiades’ education, except perhaps a man who may happen to be in love with him. This may be read as suggesting that someone who happens to be in love with Alcibiades will perhaps care for his education; i.e. that someone may (or may not) actually do so. The custom of the paiderastia resounds in this statement, as the proper and genuine erastês would care for his erômenos’ education, and introduce him to the higher circles of the society. If Socrates can prove that

289 One may think that Socrates should consider leaving Alcibiades, and instead search for a less arrogant person to erotically desire. However, this does not seem to be one of Socrates’ alternatives. Not surprisingly; as we all know, this advice is significantly easier to give than to act upon. One may here note we find already in Sappho’s poems descriptions of Erôs as a little beast “impossible to fight off” – I return to this in the Appendix, p. 174.
he is in fact a proper and genuine lover of Alcibiades, then it follows that he cares for Alcibiades’ upbringing and education. In order to exclude other potential proper lovers, however, he would also have to prove that he is the only lover of Alcibiades.

Socrates then says something that surprises Alcibiades: He admits that they are in the same condition, they both need self-cultivation: “we stand in need of self-cultivation. Actually, every human being needs self-cultivation, but especially the two of us” (Alc.I. 124d2–3). Indeed, this is in accordance with Socrates’ usual claims to ignorance.290 There is one respect, though, according to Socrates, in which they differ: Socrates claims that his guardian is “the god”, and that this god is wiser than Pericles, i.e. Alcibiades’ guardian (Alc.I. 124c5–6). As previously stated, even Pericles, who is said to be (or, more accurately, said to perhaps be) one of the few Athenian politicians who is not an idiot, has not managed to educate his own sons (see Alc.I. 118b8–e4). In classical Athenian culture, the guardian was the one who ideally would care for the upbringing and education of a future citizen; one may perhaps say that the erastès joins in on this task when time is due. Socrates here underscores that Pericles, who was presumably regarded as an ideal guardian, would in fact prove inferior to Socrates and his guardian.291

Socrates now repeats that it was the god who prevented him from approaching Alcibiades before this day, and adds “I put my faith in him, and I say that your glory will be entirely my making” (Alc.I. 124c9–10) – the glory that Alcibiades just a moment ago was said to long so desperately for.292

But “what does it mean to cultivate oneself? When does a man do that? Is he cultivating himself when he cultivates what he has?” (Alc.I. 127e9–128a4). They agree that “cultivating oneself” and “cultivating what belongs to you” are different things (Alc.I. 128d8–9). Socrates then states that in order to care for one’s self, one must first know the nature of one’s self, i.e. that for which one cares: “if we know ourselves, then we might be able to know how to cultivate ourselves, but if we don’t know ourselves, we’ll never know how” (Alc.I. 129a). The command Socrates here refers to is Apollo’s

290 See Ch. 1, section 1.4., p. 42.
291 Whom, or what – if anyone/anything – is Socrates here referring to as his “guardian”? There are good reasons to assume that Socrates is here referring to Erôs. First, Socrates claims elsewhere to be devoted to Erôs and to be under Erôs’ patronage, and that Erôs is the best helper. This is stated when Socrates ends his speech in the Symposium, saying that he was persuaded by Diotima, and that he will go on persuading his neighbors, that Erôs is the best helper our human nature can hope to find (Symp. 212b1–5). The Greek here is: ἔφη μὲν Διοτίμα, πέπεισμαι δ’ ἐγώ· πεπεισμένος δὲ πειρόμαι καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους πείθειν ὅτι τοῦτο τοῦ κτήματος τῇ ἀνθρωπείᾳ φύσεις συνεργὴν ἄμεινον Ἐρωτός σῶς ἂν τις τριάδας λόγοι. It may also, however, be argued that it is “the god in Delphi”, i.e. Apollo, whom Socrates calls himself a disciple of. Cf. Ap. 20e8; 23b; see also Ch. 3, section 3.2.1., p. 94, n. 198.
292 Cf. Alc.I. 124b3–6. For quotation, see previous section 4.3, p. 137.
command, the Delphic maxim “Know Thyself”. They must find out what the self is, in itself (auto to auto, Alc.I. 129b). Socrates provides the following argument:

1. Man must be either the soul, the body, the two combined, or nothing at all.
2. Man is what rules the body.
3. The body, being ruled, cannot take part in ruling itself.
4. If something cannot take part in ruling something, it is inconceivable that it should rule that thing in combination with some other thing.

If “impossibility” follows from “inconceivability”:

5. Body and soul together cannot rule the body (from 3 and 4).

**Conclusion:**

6. Either a man is nothing, or else, if a man is anything at all, it must be nothing else than the soul (from 1, 3 and 5).

Since one’s self, Socrates states, must be one’s soul, “the command that we should know ourselves means that we should know our souls” (Alc.I. 130e8–9). What happens next is that Socrates starts combining the discussion of what a man is and this argument with his courtship of Alcibiades (Alc.I. 131c5–12):

Now if there was someone who loved Alcibiades’ body, he wouldn’t be loving Alcibiades, only something that belonged to Alcibiades. (…) someone who loved you would love your soul. (…) Wouldn’t someone who loves your body go off and leave you when your beauty is no longer in full bloom?

“Clearly”, Alcibiades answers. Having agreed that the soul is what a man is, Socrates can now proceed to argue that those who have loved Alcibiades because of his beautiful body have actually only loved something belonging to Alcibiades, and not Alcibiades himself, namely his soul. And since the beauty of Alcibiades’ body is ephemeral, the lovers will leave him as it perishes – or so the argument goes.

This argument makes room for another: That the one who loves Alcibiades’ soul would not leave him although the beauty of his body should

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293 In Hutchinson’s translation of the Alcibiades, in Cooper (1997), auto to auto is translated “itself, in itself”. Notably, there have been many discussions regarding the meaning of auto to auto, and how it should be translated. I translate it as “the self in itself”, however, as I take this to serve the meaning best, if one takes the context into account.

294 Werner (2013, 3) comments that the “logic of these arguments is suspicious—a fact to which Socrates himself calls attention.” As Socrates states; “if we’ve proven it fairly well, although perhaps not rigorously, that will do for us” (Alc.I. 130e8–d1).
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fade, but stay, at least as long as the soul stays loveable through making progress (Alc.I. 131d1–5):

But someone who loves your soul will not leave you, as long as you’re making progress. (…) Well, I’m the one who won’t leave you – I’m the one who will stay with you, now that your body has lost its bloom and everyone else has gone away.

The distinction between the true/genuine lovers and the pretended/false lovers is something Plato deals with in other dialogues as well – most famously in the Phaedrus. In the Alcibiades I, Socrates argues that the genuine lovers love the beloved’s self, his soul, whereas the false lovers do not actually love the beloved qua who/what he is, but qua something that belongs to him, his body. Here, Socrates repeats that he is a true lover of Alcibiades.295

In Alcibiades’ response to this, we see clearly that his dramatic character has changed; from first being utterly annoyed and upset with Socrates, he now says that he is glad Socrates loves him, and that he hopes Socrates will never leave him. Looking at the argument, however, it is not unconditionally true that Socrates will not leave him. The argument may be summarized as follows:

1. If a man is anything, he is his soul.
2. If we add the following premise:
3. A man is something.
4. A man is his soul (from 1 and 2).
5. Anyone who loves Alcibiades’ body only does not love Alcibiades “the man” (from 3).
6. The other lovers loved Alcibiades’ body only.
7. The other lovers of Alcibiades were not lovers of Alcibiades “the man” (from 3, 4 and 5).
8. Anyone who loves your body only will go off and leave you when your body is no longer in full bloom.
9. Alcibiades’ bodily beauty is fading.
10. Alcibiades’ other lovers will leave him (7 and 8).
11. Lovers of Alcibiades’ soul are lovers of Alcibiades “the man” (from 3).
12. Lovers of Alcibiades “the man” will not leave him, not even if his body is no longer in full bloom.

295 In total, this claim is made four times in the dialogue: First (unargued) at 103a, and 104c. Then it is argued for here at 131e, and repeated again at 132a.
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12. Socrates loves Alcibiades’ soul.

Conclusion:

13. Socrates loves Alcibiades “the man”, and will not leave Alcibiades (from 3 and 10, 11, 12).

To this conclusion, Socrates adds two qualifications. First, that he will not leave Alcibiades, if his soul makes progress; as quoted earlier, Socrates, who claims to love Alcibiades soul, also tells Alcibiades that “someone who loves your soul will not leave you, as long as you’re making progress”. Secondly, Socrates adds that he will not leave Alcibiades, as long as the Athenians don’t make him corrupt and ugly (Alc.I. 131e1–132b3):

So this is your situation: you, Alcibiades, son of Clinias, have no lovers and never had any, it seems, except for one only, and he is your darling Socrates, son of Sophroniscus and Phaenarete (…) I was your only lover – the others were only lovers of what you had. While your possessions are passing their prime, you are just beginning to bloom. I shall never forsake you now, never, unless the Athenian people make you corrupt and ugly. And that is my greatest fear, that a love of the common people might corrupt you, for many Athenian gentlemen have suffered that fate already. (…) you need to scrutinize them in their nakedness, so take precaution I urge. (…) Get training first, my dear friend, and learn what you need to know before entering politics. That will give you an antidote against the terrible dangers.⁵²⁶

Alternatively, we may say that insofar as Alcibiades’ soul becomes corrupt and ugly as a consequence of his soul not making progress, then Socrates offers two different descriptions of one and the same qualification, and not, in fact, two different qualifications. In the quote above, Socrates encourages Alcibiades to acquire training and study the Athenians’ weaknesses, in order to escape becoming “corrupt and ugly”. Indeed, this worry foreshadows Alcibiades’ fate. The worry is later repeated (at 135b3–e5), where “Socrates characterizes Alcibiades’ political ambition as a desire for tyranny” (Belfiore 2012, 32), expressing his concern that Alcibiades may be ruined by becoming, as he says, a lover of people.

Alcibiades asks Socrates to explain how, exactly, they should cultivate themselves. They have made one step already, Socrates reassures him: They have agreed to what they are, so that they can now cultivate the right thing, their souls. Cultivating ourselves means cultivating our souls. But how can the soul be educated? How should we fulfill the Delphic inscription “Know

⁵²⁶ One may note that Socrates here refers to his parents by name: His mother Phaenarete, whose name literally means “she who brings virtue into light”, and his father Sophroniscus. The name (Σωφρονίσκος) alludes to σωφροσύνη (σωφροσύνη), and should perhaps be regarded as a diminutive of σώφρων (σώφρων), i.e. that it refers to someone who is σώφρων (like νεανίσκος is a diminutive of νέος).
Thyself’ (Alc.I. 129a)? As a way of illustrating how one may reach self-knowledge, Socrates offers a metaphor (Alc.I. 132c7–133a7):

If the inscription took our eyes to be men and advised them, “See thyself,” how would we understand such advice? Shouldn’t the eye be looking at something in which it could see itself? (…) Then let’s think of something that allows us to see both it and ourselves when we look at it (…) I’m sure you’ve noticed that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We call this the ‘pupil’, for it’s a sort of miniature of the man who’s looking (…) Then an eye will see itself if it observes an eye and looks at the best part of it, the part with which it can see.297

This may seem strange. (For one thing, one must be really, really close and gaze very intensely into another’s eye in order to see oneself. Believe me, I have tried. Presumably, then, one must be really, really “close” in order to see oneself in another’s eye metaphorically as well.) If the soul, Socrates continues, is to know itself, then it must look at a soul, and especially at that part of it which makes it good; the one in which wisdom occurs. This part is said to be the most divine part. One who looked at this part “and grasped everything divine – vision and understanding – would have the best grasp of himself as well” (Alc.I. 133c4–6), Socrates says. Here, telling a person to “know himself”, is compared to telling an eye to “see itself”. And the best way for an eye to see itself is by looking into the most divine part of its lover’s eye: its pupil. Likewise, Socrates suggests, a way for the soul to see itself is to mirror itself in the most divine part of another’s soul; that part in which the virtue of the soul, i.e. the wisdom, occurs. Socrates presents himself as that reflecting soul for Alcibiades; if Alcibiades reflects his soul in Socrates’, he will thereby come to know his self. But how, exactly, may this mirroring be brought about; under what kind of circumstances may it occur? I believe that the most promising answer to this question is that it may occur in a philosophical dialogue, or, alternatively phrased, during philosophical intercourse.

The metaphor is taken by some scholars as the climax of the dialogue.298 If we for a moment imagine this dialogue put before the public, the director would have had to decide how to stage this important and intense scene. How does Alcibiades respond to the metaphor? In what manner is it put forth? Does Socrates gaze into Alcibiades’ eye while telling it? While reading the dialogue, too, one immediately starts imagining the scene (at least, I do). Seemingly, so does Gordon (2003, 13):

297 In Greek, the word for “pupil” also means “doll”.
298 Cf. e.g. Forde (1987, 236); Gordon (2003, 22). Again we see that Platonic dialogues proceed not only through strict argumentation, but also and just as importantly through myths and metaphors (cf. Introduction, section 0.3.2).
Does he meet Socrates’ eyes? In that moment, a spark could be ignited in the young man that fuels his desires even further and inspires him to become this man’s devoted boy. Or is this a moment during which Alcibiades cannot meet Socrates’ eyes, perhaps ashamed of his shortcomings, a moment therefore unlike what he has experienced with any other lover or suitor before?

Or does he briefly meet Socrates’ eyes, but then turn away in shame? However this scene is played out, the image of the self-seeing eye is certainly striking, and highly erotically charged.

One philosopher who adapted the striking image of the self-seeing eye was Aristotle. We find it in the fragments of his erotic dialogue the *Eroticus*, and also in the *Magna Moralia* (1213a20–24). Hutchison (1997, 558) remarks that in the *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle “takes up the striking idea that self-knowledge is best gained through a philosophical friendship, in which we see ourselves, as if in a mirror”. One way to understand the metaphor of the self-seeing eye, then, is the way Aristotle seems to endorse: That self-knowledge is gained through philosophical friendship, in which the friend enables us to see ourselves. It is clear, however, that in the *Alcibiades I*, the relation in which self-knowledge is gained is described as *erotic*. The understanding of the metaphor, that our lovers (or “friends”, as Aristotle writes) enable us to see ourselves, indeed suggests that lovers have an important function in the process of educating and examining one’s self. On Plato’s account, then, we may say that the acquisition of self-knowledge is not so much gained by lonesome, isolated introspection. Rather, we acquire self-knowledge, i.e. we get to know ourselves – and even constitute ourselves – through our lovers. Note that this concerns how self-knowledge is gained, and not what self-knowledge is.

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299 For a discussion of the “self-seeing eye” in the *Eroticus*, see cf. Friedländer (1964, 2:231–232). I briefly discuss the *Eroticus* in Ch. 2, section 2.8., p. 85, n. 176. Schleiermacher is also among those scholars who have argued that the *Magna Moralia* was written by Aristotle. Other scholars in support of the authenticity of *Magna Moralia* include e.g. von Arnim (1924), Dirlmeier (1958), Cooper (1973), Nussbaum (2007, 493). Opponents include e.g. Jäger (1928), Rowe (1975), Rist (1989, 189; 310). In the main, it is nowadays taken to be authentic, though a comprehensive study rejecting the arguments suggesting otherwise has yet to appear, cf. Dudley (2012, 237).

300 Like in the *Alcibiades I*, we also find the close comparison between the status of the sight and that of thought in the *Magna Moralia*, in Ch. 7, at 74.7. Renaud and Tarrant (2015, 95) argue that it is unclear whether Aristotle adapted the image from the *Alcibiades I*, or whether, if the dialogue is not written by Plato, the author of the *Alcibiades I* adapted this image from Aristotle.

301 That the acquisition of self-knowledge has this social dimension is also underscored by Moore (2015), in his recently published book on Socrates and self-knowledge.

302 That knowledge is not gained through isolated introspection but rather through lovers, however, might have bearings on what self-knowledge is. But to establish the exact
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that my predominant interest here is not to provide a detailed answer to the complex question of what, precisely, self-knowledge is, but rather to show that the dialogue demonstrates how lovers have an important function in the acquisition of self-knowledge. How this is demonstrated in the dialogue has now been spelled out.

It should be noted, however, that scholars have disagreed on what kind of self-knowledge is dealt with in the Alcibiades I. This disagreement is worth briefly commenting on. The most intuitive interpretation is that when Socrates encourages Alcibiades to seek self-knowledge, he encourages Alcibiades to seek knowledge about his own particular, personal self. Annas (1985, 133), however, argues against this interpretation, suggesting that the relevant kind of self in this dialogue is impersonal in nature: “One form it does not take is the modern concern with self-knowledge as knowledge of the individual personality (…) in the ancient world the individual personality was not, in this connection, the relevant self to know” (Annas 1985, 121).

Instead, Annas argues that the self-knowledge Socrates here has in mind is objective knowledge of an objective self (Annas 1985, 121; 129). Against Annas, however, I am inclined to agree with Rider (2011a) that there are good reasons to think that the “self” discussed in the Alcibiades I has both personal and impersonal aspects. I take Rider (2011a, 399) to be suggesting that self-knowledge, as it is dealt with in this dialogue, includes these two different (though compatible) dimensions: (A) having personal, subjective knowledge regarding your particular self, including your erotic inclinations; (B) having objective, impersonal knowledge of your place in society, including its associated normative expectations.

It is further worth stressing that in this dialogue, self-knowledge is said to be sôphrosunê (at 131b, repeated at 133c–134a). And if self-knowledge is sôphrosunê, this suggests that it will be intimately related to knowledge of, and deliberation regarding, oneself as an acting individual subject. So if self-knowledge is sôphrosunê (as it is said to be), it is not just (A) personal, subjective knowledge of my personal traits, nor just (B) objective knowledge of my place in society. To conclude, then, I interpret Plato as operating with a broad conception of self-knowledge in the Alcibiades I, in which self-knowledge is essentially sôphrosunê. Relevant on this account of self-knowledge is also a certain knowledge (C) regarding how one, as subject – given one’s knowledge of (A) and (B) – should act. It is important to note that (C), the knowledge regarding how one should act (in a certain situation) does not strictly follow from (A) and (B) alone. One may be (painfully)

implications of this would need substantial further argumentation, which I will not provide here.

304 All of the definitions suggested by Charmides in the Charmides, as well as the manners in which I argued Socrates demonstrated sôphrosunê in that dialogue, describe sôphrosunê as concerning ways of acting. For a more detailed account of sôphrosunê, see Ch. 3.
aware of one’s own urgent needs and desires, as well as of one’s place in society and its associated normative expectations, yet still be uncertain regarding how one should act. Let us say that the subject here is me. I have to make up my mind regarding how to act; I have to decide what to do. In doing so, I am also constructing myself, in the sense that the choices I make, and my thoughts and sentiments regarding these, in turn determine what sort of person I become.

Returning to Alcibiades in particular, we can say that his self-knowledge will involve (A) awareness of his particular erôs for honor, fame, and power; (B) objective knowledge of his place in the society he lives in and its associated normative expectations; and (C) knowing how to conduct himself and control his erôs—which he may learn how to do by directing and cultivating it. And all of these elements, that together constitute the relevant kind of self-knowledge for Alcibiades to have, are in this dialogue stressed by Socrates, who offers Alcibiades an erotic relationship through which the self-knowledge that Alcibiades is in need of may be gained.305

At the end of the dialogue, Socrates concludes that if Alcibiades is to prosper, he needs justice and self-control (δικαιοσύνην καὶ σωφροσύνην, Alc.I. 134c10–11 (my emphasis)). More generally, he needs virtue (Alc.I 135b3–8):

It isn’t supreme power you need to get for yourself or the city, but virtue [ἀρετήν] (…) But before one acquires virtue it’s better to be ruled by somebody superior than to rule; this applies to men as well as boys.

This echoes the “stupidity argument”, in particular its first two premises. Alcibiades has now changed his attitude towards Socrates, confirming that he has been convinced and that he shall follow Socrates’ lead. However, he remarks that (Alc.I. 135d7–10):

we’re probably going to change roles, Socrates. I’ll be playing yours and you’ll be playing mine, from this day forward I will never fail to attend [παιδαγωγήσω] to you, and you will always have me as your attendant.

Alcibiades says that they will change roles, that he shall become the attendant of Socrates. Hooper (2012, 107) argues that Socrates here involves Alcibiades in a “dual-role relationship”, in which both are acting as erastês and erômenos. Socrates responds (Alc.I. 135e1–3):

305 According to Gordon (2003, 28–29), Socrates’ claim that self-knowledge is sôphrosunê highlights and helps to explain the difference between Alcibiades’ and his own erotic outlets, since sôphrosunê is that which controls and directs erôs toward its proper ends.
The Alcibiades I

Then my love [ἐμὸς ἐρως] for you, my excellent friend, will be just like a stork: after hatching winged love [ἔρωτα ὑπόπτερον] in you, it [your ἐρως] will be cared for [nurtured] by it in return.

Here it seems as if Socrates is saying that by, or through, his love for Socrates, Alcibiades will also care for himself. This is what I take Gordon to refer to, when arguing that the dialogue “portrays self care as, paradoxically, putting oneself in the care of another, the proper guardian who loves one’s true self or soul” (Gordon 2003, 22). Alcibiades answers that he shall start cultivating justice in himself immediately. Socrates, however, has some concerns – he says that he would like to believe that Alcibiades will keep on cultivating himself, but that he is afraid. Not, however, because he distrusts Alcibiades’ nature (*phyxis*), which, as we have seen, is deeply thumetic. But rather because “I [Socrates] know how powerful the city is – I’m afraid it might get the better of both me and you” (*Alc.I.* 135e6–8). Socrates thus ends the dialogue by foreshadowing their mutual destiny in Athens.

4.5. Concluding comments

In Plato’s dialogues, we are given the impression that the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates is extremely intense, with mutual fascination and affection, though it is also a source of much head- and heartache. I have here showed how Socrates carries out his three quests in the *Alcibiades I*: (i) piquing Alcibiades’ interest so that he will engage in a conversation with him, (ii) making Alcibiades realize that he is in need of a lover-educator, and (iii) convincing Alcibiades that he is the lover-educator who can help him.

In carrying these quests out, I have argued, Socrates subjects Alcibiades to his erotic educational methods, which in this dialogue are accompanied by the psychological techniques of shaming and charming. Through shaming and charming Alcibiades, Socrates persuades him to educate himself, to seek self-knowledge as well knowledge on the most important things, such as justice. Nevertheless, as we know, Alcibiades would later fail in attending to this.

306 Belfiore (2012, 54) argues that *phyxis* here refers to “a good natural endowment”, and that Alcibiades’ soul (i) is beautiful in nature because it is capable of becoming better and more beautiful, and (ii) that in addition to being beautiful, it has ἐρως for the greatest power. According to her, this results in that “it [Alcibiades’ soul] can, with proper guidance, also lead him to acquire ἐρως for the wisdom that confers this power. That Alcibiades’ *phyxis* is distinct from his desire is clear from the fact that he might lose his desire while still retaining his *phyxis*” (Belfiore 2012, 54; with references to Denyer (2001) and O’Connor (1999, 36–7), and *Alc.I.* 119b5–c5; 135e6–8).
Erôs and Education

We have also seen that, according to Socrates, if the soul is to know itself, then it must reflect itself in another’s soul, and especially in that part of it which makes it good; the divine part in which wisdom occurs. As the genuine lover cares for the education of his beloved, the beloved may reflect his soul in that of his lover. This reflection may occur during philosophical intercourse, i.e. while engaging in a philosophical dialogue; through this, the beloved may achieve self-knowledge. Stressing that Alcibiades is in need of self-knowledge, Socrates here presents himself as the soul Alcibiades should reflect his soul in, so that he – through this reflection, i.e. this erotic relationship – will become aware of his erotic desires and manage to cultivate and direct these. In this way, the dialogue both argues and demonstrates how lovers play an important role in the process of educating and examining one’s self.

However, although genuine lovers that care for the beloved’s soul and the education of it seem to be of major importance for acquiring knowledge (perhaps even necessary), the lovers do not seem to be sufficient in this regard: In order to (continue to) make progress and attain (further) knowledge, the beloved has to engage actively, passionately and persistently in the search for knowledge. As we know, Alcibiades failed in this respect as well. For even though Socrates in this dialogue seems to have successfully seduced Alcibiades, managing to direct Alcibiades’ erôs both towards himself and towards knowledge, Alcibiades’ erôs for honor and fame was in the end stronger than his erôs for knowledge.

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307 Cf. section 4.4., p. 145.
308 I here agree with Gordon (2012, 168), who argues for a stronger claim, that, in the “Alcibiades 1, Socrates argues and implies in myriad ways that the gods are the best leaders of souls, but that true lovers are the best mortal guides.” (My italics.)
Chapter 5. Concluding thoughts

In this concluding chapter, I will first (section 5.1.) offer a brief summary of the previous chapters, reminding my readers of the main issues and arguments in each of these. Thereafter (section 5.2.), I will turn to some issues that come into view as a result of my readings: Is Socrates successful in his erotic education? What does this success (or lack of it) tell us about the practice of philosophy? Thereafter, in the final section of this concluding chapter (section 5.3.), I summarize the central results of my investigation.

5.1. Summary

In the Introduction, I clarified the topic and aim of my dissertation. I there described it as an investigation of the erotic aspects of the encounters Socrates has with the youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades. I stated that my aim would be to bring out the role that erôs plays in the ways Socrates proceeds in his discussions with the three youths. In the Introduction, I also provided a discussion concerning my selection of dialogues, in which I highlighted some of the common features of the three main dialogues I have here assessed. Thereafter, I offered some reflections regarding methodology; I emphasized how Plato wrote dramatic dialogues, which, I argued, ought accordingly to be interpreted as such. I further discussed how that includes looking beyond that which is explicitly stated in the texts, and to take the metaphors, analogies, etc. – as well as the (erotic) dramatic interplay – seriously. I argued that to take these things seriously further entails treating them as integral to and important for understanding the richness of the philosophical content of Plato’s dialogues.

In Chapter 1, I provided an introductory account of the nature and practice of erôs in Plato, and of Socrates’ erotic educational methods. There, I first discussed translations of erôs, and some of the myths of origin to be found in Plato (section 1.1.). Thereafter, I analyzed the manner in which erôs in Plato is described as, and also functions as, a motivational force that is directed towards certain objects (section 1.2.). While clarifying how erôs both have noble and shameful aspects in Plato, and how it is far from always discussed in positive terms, I took the opportunity to account for the paiderastia, i.e.
the erotic educational system in classical Athens (section 1.3.). Thereafter, I provided an overview and discussion of erotic reproduction in Plato (section 1.4.), using (predominantly) the Symposium and the Theaetetus as touchstones. These two dialogues served the same role when I went on to explain Socrates’ erotic expertise and erotic educational methods (section 1.5. and section 1.6.). Next, I introduced the psychological techniques of shaming and charming, which I have argued tend to accompany Socrates’ erotic educational methods (section 1.7.). In the final section of Chapter 1 (section 1.8.), I briefly discussed how Socrates takes on a range of roles in his encounters with his interlocutors (this point was in turn underscored in the chapters that followed).

In Chapters 2–4, I revealed how the nature and practice of erôs is conveyed in three Platonic dialogues. Thus, my account of the nature and practice of erôs in Plato can be said to have emerged gradually throughout this study. In Chapter 2, “Erôs and the Need for Knowledge”, I discussed the Lysis. I here showed how Socrates in this dialogue puts his erotic expertise and erotic educational methods into practice, and argued that the Lysis is particularly concerned with erôs and the need for knowledge. I focused on how Socrates tries to instill an erotic desire to pursue knowledge in the boy Lysis, something which involved Socrates himself taking on the role of seducer. I devoted a relatively large part of that chapter to establishing how the prologue of the Lysis is highly erotically charged. Next, I presented a careful reading of Socrates’ conversation with Lysis. I argued that we should not be too worried about the conclusions Socrates suggests to Lysis (e.g. that Lysis was unloved), but rather understand these in light of the larger story that unfolds in the dialogue. Central in this larger story, I argued, is that Socrates seeks to make Lysis realize that he needs knowledge. I also commented on the passage concerning the prôton philon. I here argued that this passage may be related to the discussion of love and utility, and suggested that we should understand the prôton philon as eudaimonic happiness. Towards the end of the chapter, I commented on how the theme of erôs is present in the ending of the Lysis as well, which, I argued, provides support for my thesis that this dialogue should be read as particularly concerned with the nature of erôs and the need for knowledge.

In Chapter 3, “Undressing Charmides”, I focused on Socrates’ encounter with the teenager Charmides. I first argued that the prologue of the Charmides is rich on metaphors and analogies connecting erôs and domination. Thereafter, we saw how Socrates in his conversation with Charmides undresses him mentally. I argued that Socrates uses his erotic educational methods and psychological techniques to expose Charmides’ soul and what it truly possesses. On my reading, this examination uncovered Charmides’ lack of:
Concluding thoughts

(i) Moderation (sôphrosunê) regarding his limited knowledge,
(ii) Intense, passionate desire (erôs) for knowledge, and
(iii) Courage (andreia) to pursue this knowledge.

I argued that these are character traits that the dialogue demonstrates to be pivotal in the practice of philosophy. On my suggested reading, Socrates tries to encourage these character traits. However, Charmides does not show sufficient improvement. In failing to induce shame in Charmides – which, I argued, might have motivated Charmides to direct his erôs towards knowledge and courageously pursue this knowledge – Socrates did not succeed in seducing Charmides philosophically. I concluded that, due to the lack of the character traits listed above (which remained even though these were encouraged by Socrates), Charmides’ engagement and development in the philosophical conversation Socrates lured him into must be characterized as minor.

In Chapter 4, “Seduction and Shame”, I presented a careful reading of the Alcibiades I. I argued that as a part of trying to seduce the young Alcibiades and persuade him to cultivate himself, Socrates subjects Alcibiades to his erotic educational methods, which in this dialogue include using shaming and charming as psychologic techniques. Through shaming and charming Alcibiades, Socrates persuades him to educate himself, to seek self-knowledge as well as knowledge about the most important things, such as justice. (We know, however, that Alcibiades soon enough returned to his old ways.) I grouped Socrates’ mission in this dialogue into three quests:

(i) How Socrates managed to pique Alcibiades’ interest.
(ii) How Socrates threw Alcibiades into a state of aporia.
(iii) How Socrates managed to convince Alcibiades that he, Socrates, was Alcibiades’ only true lover.

We here saw that, according to Socrates, if the soul is to know itself, then it must reflect itself in another’s soul. As the genuine lover cares for the education of his beloved, the beloved may reflect his soul in that of his lover, and through this achieve self-knowledge. Stressing that Alcibiades is in need of self-knowledge, Socrates here presents himself as the soul Alcibiades should reflect his soul in, so that he – through this reflection – will become aware of his erotic desires and manage to cultivate and direct these. In this way, I argued, the dialogue demonstrates how lovers play an important role in the process of educating and examining one’s self.

Chapters 2–4 presented readings of the erotic-educational aspects of what Socrates is doing (and trying to do) in his encounters with the youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, and how he tries to achieve his aim of turning these youths toward philosophy. In the next section of the present chapter, I will turn to some issues that come into view as a result of my reading, issues
that so far have not received the attention they deserve. We need to ask to what extent (if any) Socrates succeeded in seducing Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades, and moreover, to what extent (if any) we should perceive Socrates’ methods and techniques as morally objectionable, as well as why Socrates proceeds in the manner that he does. What may have been his motivation for doing so? And what about Plato; what might his reasons have been for depicting Socrates in the way he did?

5.2. Rethinking Socrates’ seductions

One criterion for success may be whether Socrates succeeded in directing these youths’ erôs towards himself. On this point, I have argued that all of these youths do seem to become lovers of Socrates. (However, as previously mentioned, Alcibiades stands out in this regard, in intensity as well as in persistence). Another criterion for success, however, may be whether – or to what extent – Socrates succeeds in seducing them philosophically. Does he manage to establish a match between his interlocutors and knowledge? Does he succeed in turning these youths towards philosophy?

As indicated in Chapters 2–4, the question of whether Socrates actually succeeded in turning these youths towards philosophy cannot be answered unconditionally in the positive. Briefly put, I argued that Charmides does not seem to change in any significant way. Alcibiades seemed to change dramatically (but we all know too well that he soon returned to his old ways). As for Lysis, we know that Socrates expressed being pleased with Lysis’ philosophical interest, but we simply do not know whether Lysis continued pursuing knowledge. Thus, there might seem to be at least some reasons for answering the question of whether Socrates succeeded in turning these youths towards the philosophical life in the negative, and none for answering exclusively in the positive. Now, what ought the impact of this to be? Ought we thereby to reject Socrates’ claim that he truly is an expert on the art of erôs? Before doing so, we would first need to ask ourselves why Plato has Socrates acting the way he does, and why he has the youths responding to Socrates in the way they do.

The answer to the question of whether Socrates succeeded (or failed) further seems strongly connected to (some would perhaps say dependent upon) whether these boys, at the end of the day, were helped or hurt by the encounters with him. This question, in turn, invites a discussion of a subject that has not been adequately addressed so far: the morality of Socrates’ seductions. Indeed, concern regarding whether Socrates is “helping or hurting these boys by talking to them in this way” (Rider 2011b, 41) is legitimate. It has also been written of Socrates’ behavior, especially of his behavior in the so-called “early dialogues”, that: “His humor is always at
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someone else’s expense – usually demeaning, often unkind, and occasionally cruel” (Beversluis 2000, 259). And, as just mentioned, the positive long-term effects of Socrates’ seductions are hard to establish: It is therefore far from obvious that Socrates’ erotic educational methods and techniques, involving shaming (some may even say torture) of boys like Charmides, Lysis and Alcibiades, actually helped these youths. It could further be objected that even if it were to be proved that Socrates through these encounters did help them, this would not have any bearings on the question of whether Socrates’ treatment of the youngsters ought to be considered morally permissible.

To concretize: we may ask ourselves about the extent to which it could be regarded as morally acceptable for Socrates to suggest to the twelve-year-old boy Lysis that he is useless and unloved by everyone (including his own parents). One way to go about trying to decide whether Socrates’ treatment of Lysis is permissible might perhaps be to investigate how Lysis himself responds. Does Lysis seem to be hurt? There is no indication of Lysis feeling hurt. That Lysis does not seem to be hurt, however, is not sufficient to establish that Socrates’ treatment of Lysis is morally acceptable. (Indeed, if it was considered sufficient, a lot of sexism would be permissible by this standard.) Perhaps more to the point is the fact that Lysis wants his good friend Menexenus to receive the same treatment. Neither is this, however, sufficient in establishing that he considered the treatment not to be hurtful, or without any hurtful stings. On this point, one could easily argue that, in accordance with the competitive nature of Lysis’ and Menexenus’ friendship, Lysis wanted to see how Menexenus “held up” under the treatment he himself received.

However, if one finds Socrates’ treatment of Lysis, for example, morally unacceptable, one should bear in mind that views regarding permissible elements in upbringing and education of children and teenagers have

309 Once Socrates has stated that Lysis does not have a mind of his own, and Lysis has had to grant Socrates this (Lys. 210d5–8), Menexenus returns – and then: “Lysis turned to me [Socrates] with a good deal of boyish friendliness and, unnoticed by Menexenus, whispered in my ear: ‘Socrates, tell Menexenus what you you’ve been saying to me (…) so you can teach him a lesson!’” (Lys. 211a4–5).

310 We learn that Lysis and Menexenus argue about who is the oldest, noblest, wealthiest, best looking, etc., and that Socrates was just about to ask them who is more wise when Menexenus had to leave. The terms Socrates uses when asking whether they quarrel about these things are ἀφισβητεῖν and ἐρίζειν. According to Rider (2011b, 44) both of these terms suggest “arguing or disputing just for the sake of it, without regard for the truth”. (Rider seems more correct regarding ἐρίζειν than ἀφισβητεῖν, however, as ἀφισβητεῖν is a more neutral term for disagreement, and frequently used about the two parties in a trial, where it would be odd to say that they quarrel “just for the sake of it”). It has also been suggested, by Tindale (1984, 105), that the competitive nature of their friendship – together with the location, the wrestling-school – indicate that the dialogue’s core theme is in fact competition in relation to friendship.
changed tremendously since the classical period. This is not to say that I take Socrates’ conduct towards Lysis to be morally permissible, all things considered. Rather, my point here is that we should be aware of the standards we use while evaluating the morality of Socrates’ treatment of these youngsters, which reflect our situatedness. And although Socrates’ treatment may seem both strange and cruel, and even though we, as readers of the twenty-first century, may not find his ways morally permissible, I believe chances are good that Socrates (and Plato) would hold that such treatment can be justified, on the rationale that it is acceptable because it is for a greater cause, namely making the boy understand that he needs to passionately pursue knowledge. It may further be argued that the (potential) pain caused by Socrates’ erotic educational methods should be understood as essential in the process of epistemic erotic reproduction: The pain may be conceived as resulting from “birth pangs”, in accordance with Socrates’ statement in the Theaetetus (151a5–b1):

There is another point also in which those who associate with me are like women in child-birth. They suffer the pains of labor, and are filled day and night with distress; indeed they suffer far more than women. And this pain my art is able to bring on, and also to allay.

However, if Socrates’ maieutic treatment – including the accompanying pangs he evoked – was “all for nothing”, i.e. if the treatment did not have the predicted, desired outcome, ought the treatment nonetheless to be considered morally permissible?

In the three readings I have offered, I proceeded hermeneutically in the sense that I presumed there were greater reasons justifying Socrates’ statements and behavior, which I tried to detect and reveal. In Chapter 3, I argued that Socrates encouraged Charmides to improve his soul, and tried to throw him into a state of aporia. I concluded, however, that the encouragement failed. In the prologue of this dialogue, Socrates lured Charmides into thinking that he had a cure that could heal his soul, which he had learned from a doctor. With the bamboozlement taken into account, however, we should perhaps not believe that he actually had the means to do so. We may also bear in mind that Socrates elsewhere calls himself a “laughable doctor”, whose treatment not only does not cure the disease, but worsens it (cf. Prt. 340e). We do not know if Socrates actually made Charmides’ soul worse – however, it seems safe to say that he did not heal it.

In the conclusion of Chapter 3, I touched upon the question of whether or not Socrates should – or could – have done more in respect to Charmides. As a reader, I find myself wanting to come to the teenaged Charmides’ rescue.

311 To put this in perspective, one might take a moment to reflect on the dramatic changes the world has witnessed on this point since no longer back than the 1970’s. For a study on children and childhood in classical Athens, see Golden (2015).
Concluding thoughts

Who (if anyone) is to blame for the fact that Charmides later (according to the dramatic timeline) becomes a tyrant? Was Charmides himself solely responsible for turning out as he did? We may all agree that Charmides should have been more open to Socrates’ encouragement and attempts. Still, it is hard to blame a teenager for being afraid of the possibility of being ridiculed while answering Socrates. (Why wrestle if you know you’re going to lose?) Could Socrates have provided him with better guidance? Perhaps Critias, his uncle and guardian, who also became a tyrant, is the one who ought to be blamed for Charmides turning out the way he did. One may also wonder whether Charmides’ fawning lovers ought to be blamed, for getting drunk with desire, and blind to the fact that their praise created an arrogant and dangerous person. (To blame nature itself for creating such a beauty with such a dangerous disposition seems rather unsatisfying.)

Much of what I ask here also applies in the case of Alcibiades. Who is to blame for his tragedies; perhaps Pericles, his powerful guardian? In fact, even though I argued in Chapter 4 that the Alcibiades I reveals how erotic lovers may function as guides, one may seriously wonder how erotic lovers may have an impact on their beloved ones at all: Should not Alcibiades, then, have turned out differently? Could not Socrates have guided him better? One may take Alcibiades, under the guidance of Socrates, to be the prime example in Plato of good erotic guidance not being properly observed: After all, they stayed erotically attached to each other throughout Socrates’ lifetime.

There is indeed a sense in which the dramatic failures in Socrates’ seductions appear as tragi-comical portraits of the paradoxical nature of philosophy; on which the most capable philosopher turns out to be incapable of convincing even youths that look up to him of what is worth pursuing in life. Now, what, if anything, do the “failures” in Socrates’ seductions reveal about how Plato perceived the figure of the philosopher, and the very practice of philosophy? One thing they teach us is that in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates – the one philosopher who figures in almost every Platonic dialogue (the one exception being the Laws), and who furthermore is the most celebrated philosopher in Plato overall – far from always succeeds in his endeavors.

This, however, is certainly not the most important, nor the most interesting, lesson we may deduce. Rather, we should focus on what it teaches us about philosophy and the philosopher more generally. Regarding the very practice of philosophy, we may surmise that it is not, on Plato’s account, a lonely affair (as philosophy is sometimes perceived). Rather, Plato depicts philosophy as an interpersonal practice, where the philosophical outcome is unpredictable and contingent on more than one of the parties – however great one of these may be. (We may recognize this feature as common to other erotic relations and pursuits as well.) Regarding the philosopher, then, and especially regarding what makes someone a
philosopher, we may further infer that in order to become a philosopher, one needs not only an encouraging educator piquing one’s interest in philosophy and guiding one in the practice of it. Roughly stated, this idea of how philosophers philosophize is quite different from that of the (typically old male) philosopher who, detached from other persons and their “trivial” affairs, sits in his chair silently contemplating, occasionally receiving various “insights”.

Plato, moreover, shows us that one needs to engage in the passionate pursuit for knowledge. This is demonstrated in all of the three dialogues I have assessed. Socrates’ practice of his erotic-educational methods, and the psychological techniques that tend to accompany these, do not by any means guarantee that the person subjected to these will start – and/or continue to – pursue the philosophical life. Instead of telling Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades what they need, and with what they should be concerned, Socrates engages them in philosophical dialogues in which they must themselves actively participate in order to make progress. Through his art of midwifery, Socrates guides his young interlocutors and tries to bring forth their beliefs. He cannot go all the way for them. In fact, that would defeat the purpose: if they fail to engage themselves in the philosophical dialogue, then what they are carrying will stay unrevealed. And in order for them to become expectant, they need to engage themselves in erotic relations, which Socrates the matchmaker may help to arrange. On Plato’s account, then, philosophy is similar to love: It is an activity which one has to engage in, in order to learn.

312 That learning is no mechanical matter, in the sense that intercourse with people one thinks wise is not sufficient in itself for becoming wise oneself, is also underscored in the Symposium: “How wonderful it would be, dear Agathon, if the foolish were filled with wisdom simply by touching the wise. If only wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one (Symp. 175d3–7).” I further agree with Strauss (2001, 32–3), when he suggests a conflict between Agathon and Socrates: Socrates says that if wisdom is like water, flowing from a full cup over to an empty one, it would be an honor to sit next to Agathon - but wisdom is not like that. Hence, it is no honor to sit next to him. However, whereas Strauss seems to regard this comment (and other comments exchanged between the two) as offensive and as signalizing a conflict, I am inclined to imagine the comment (even if a bit rude) as put forward in a flirtatious rather than in a sour manner. (Strauss’ On Plato’s Symposium was published posthumously, ed. by Benardete.)

313 One may see this as an expression of the idea of philosophy as a way of life. For further reading on this point, see e.g. Hadot (1995) and Nehamas (1998). Both draw on the ancient tradition while investigating the practice of philosophy from Socrates to Foucault, arguing that philosophy can be an activity, a way of life, and both note the contrast between this conception of philosophy, and the dominant conception of philosophy today; as a body of scholarly doctrine. Nehamas writes in a slightly more “provocative” fashion, challenging the dominant conception by arguing that the construction of character (or “self-fashioning”, as he calls it), is the primary task of philosophical living. For Socrates’ conception of philosophy and the philosophical life, see also e.g. Yonezawa (2004).
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This participation, however, requires courage. The attempt to deliver what one carries is at the very same time a process in which one pursues knowledge, and this process requires courage. It entails daring to expose oneself, making oneself vulnerable to criticism and ridicule, and fighting for what one thinks true. Not because it is oneself who thinks it true, not wanting to lose the argument, but because one aims at the truth and thinks the counter-argument leads the matter at stake astray. This leads us to another crucial lesson: That one must have moderation (sôphrosunê) regarding the limits of one’s knowledge. In this way, certain character traits must be present in order to practice philosophy well.

Another uninvestigated issue in my study so far is the controversy during Socrates’ own lifetime concerning his seductions. How was his way of seducing the young perceived by the other Athenians? The paiderastia, in which citizens provided the future citizens with education, was customary praxis in classical Athens. Even so, we have reason to think that Socrates’ way of seducing these youths was controversial. This may also be relevant to the question of the extent to which Socrates was successful in his seductions. After all, erotic relations (whether philosophical in nature or not) and the offspring of these do not exist in a vacuum, but are always (also) affected by, and vulnerable to, external influences. As we remember from Chapter 4, Socrates told Alcibiades that he would not leave him, as long as the Athenians did not make him corrupt and ugly (Alc.I. 131e1–4). Moreover, Socrates himself was counteracted and eventually sentenced to death: In the Apology, one of the main charges against Socrates – and arguably the most central one in the jury’s mind – was that Socrates was “corrupting the young”. That is to say, Socrates was believed to have a damaging and dangerous impact on the souls of young men. According to Xenophon, some held that Socrates was specifically charged with having a corrupting influence on Critias and Alcibiades: “But, says the accuser, Critias and Alcibiades, after they became Socrates’ associates, caused the greatest harm to the city” (Mem. 1.2.12).315

314 For more details on the paiderastia, see Ch. 1, section 1.3.
315 Cited from Tuozzo (2011, 46). As mentioned earlier (Ch. 3, section 3.2.1., p. 93, n. 190), Wilson (2007, 83) refers to the comments by Aeschines the orator as important evidence suggesting that near-contemporaries thought his role as teacher for Critias was the sole reason he was executed. Brickhouse and Smith (1989, 81, n. 58), however, argue for the possibility that this was simply an invention by Polycrates alone. According to Brickhouse and Smith (1989, 71), Xenophon here refers to Polycrates as the accuser – presumably based on statements in his Accusation of Socrates, which is lost. They therefore conclude that one may “reasonably doubt that Socrates’ associations with Alcibiades and Critias were of specific and profound concern to a significant number of the jurors” (Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 86). Tuozzo agrees that “The accuser” to whom Xenophon here refers is not, as it may seem, one of the actual accusers at Socrates’ trial. It is rather the orator Polycrates” (Tuozzo 2011, 56, n. 11). Even if Brickhouse and Smith and Tuozzo are right, however, that Xenophon refers to Polycrates and his accusations, and wishes to reject these, we may say that Polycrates’
As mentioned, Alcibiades compared Socrates (among other things) to Silenus (Symp. 215a–b). Scott (2000, 73–74) remarks that the point of this comparison is to highlight the propinquity between Socrates’ methods and the brutal offenses for which the satyrs were noted. But, in fact, Socrates’ behavior in carrying out the seduction of boys such as Lysis would have been viewed as even worse than the exploits of the satyrs, for since seduction entails an aspect of complicity, it was viewed as more egregious than rape in classical Athens.

The controversy over Socrates’ form of seduction, and also its peculiar aspect of complicity, were based on (i) his opaque motives, (ii) his way of seducing, which (although containing some of the same elements, like praise of the receiver’s ancestors) differed from that of traditional encomia, and (iii) the outcome of his seduction, which – as far as we know – was not to receive physical pleasure in return for his wise words, but rather to bring forth the beliefs and thoughts of his young interlocutors.

We may here recall another statement in the Symposium, where Socrates says that he himself only tries “to persuade” (πείθειν) others (Symp. 212b2–3). The term πείθειν (peithein) here used is connected to the goddess of seduction, named Peitho.316 There are two typical depictions of Peitho in classical Athenian art: One in which she lifts her hand in persuasion, another one where she flees from the scene of a rape.317 The association between rape and the term “peithein”, then, must have been well known. By his choice of saying, is Plato intentionally having Socrates calling a dubious form of attention to himself? However, even when taking into consideration the factor Scott points to, that Socrates’ seduction would seem worse than the exploits of the satyrs, it is still a bit unclear how Socrates’ seductions could have been viewed as more egregious than rape. Dover (1984, 146) offers some interesting remarks on this point:

[To] seduce a woman of a citizen status was more culpable than to rape her (...) seduction involved the capture of her affection and loyalty; it was the degree of offense against the man to whom she belonged, not her own feelings, which mattered.

accusations were certainly taken seriously by Xenophon (and others), as they were evidently regarded as worthy of attention and rejection. One may note that Polycrates’ Accusation of Socrates is also referred to as Against Socrates, cf. e.g. Tuozzo (2011, 56). For a study of this work, see Chroust (1955).

316 Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.8., p. 54.
317 The scene in Homer’s Iliad where Leucippus’ daughters are raped and Peitho runs away is for example depicted on a vase made ca. 420–400 B.C., titled The Meidias Hydria, which is to be found in the British Museum.
As mentioned earlier, there is an etymological connection between the term Plato uses, which is translated as “matchmaker” (ἡ προμηθήστρια), meaning “one who solicits or woos for another”, and the verb μνᾶσθαι, meaning “to be mindful”. Gordon emphasizes that neither Plato nor Xenophon uses the cruder pornoboskos, meaning “who remonger”, when describing Socrates, and argues that this underscores Socrates’ actions as “those of one who seeks, who brings to mind, who desires, and who ignites desire in others” (Gordon 2012, 38). It seems plausible that when Socrates encouraged young men to be mindful, and to courageously look into themselves as opposed to merely listening to authority figures (i.e. their fathers, guardians, etc.), then these authority figures, whom these young men “belonged to”, may have felt threatened.

As we remember from Chapter 2, Socrates questions Lysis’ loyalty to his parents, and even starts a brawl by trying to talk Lysis’ drunken guardians into making Lysis stay a little longer, when they come to bring him home. Freedom and transition are major issues in the Lysis, and, for Lysis, this is specifically connected to freedom from those he “belongs to”. The topic of self-rule is one of major importance in the Charmides and Alcibiades I as well, as Charmides and Alcibiades are yearning for power and political influence. How may they rule over others, if they are incapable of ruling over themselves? Moreover, as Scott remarks, both Lysis and Alcibiades experience aporia, and they “both pledge, more or less explicitly, to learn what needs to be learned in order to become self-ruling, prudent individuals” (Scott 2000, 7). Whereas these two pledge to Socrates, Charmides, on the other hand, playfully threatens Socrates to do the same. The result is that the “hunter” Socrates has become the hunted. The reversal of erotic roles is – as we have seen – one of the many similarities of these dialogues; Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades all end up as lovers of Socrates.

So what were Socrates’ motives, what did he gain from the discussions with these youths? In this dissertation, I have emphasized how Socrates takes on multiple roles in the Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades I. In particular, I have stressed his erotic roles, arguing that Socrates acts as a midwife, matchmaker, seducer and lover. However, we never read in Plato that Socrates is going all the way with any of these youths (nor with any other). Whereas one may argue that Socrates provided these youths with an opportunity to improve themselves through attempting to turn their erōs towards knowledge, one may certainly wonder how Socrates himself benefitted from these encounters. At any rate, Plato does not depict Socrates as an erastēs who receives pleasure in return for his efforts.

318 Cf. Ch. 1, section 1.4., pp. 40–41.
319 In Alcibiades’ speech in the Symposium (at 217b–219d), Alcibiades expresses his frustration over Socrates on this point.
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Socrates’ encounters with these youths seem even more puzzling when one takes into account his outline of his philosophical mission in the *Apology* (at 23b6–7): “I go around seeking out anyone, stranger or citizen, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise.” How could Socrates think a boy of twelve or thirteen, such as Lysis, is wise? What would be the point of “assisting the god” in showing that someone so young is *not* wise? Neither is Lysis (not in the *Lysis*, at least) among those young men Socrates later speaks of in the *Apology*, who, according to Socrates, follow him around of their own free will, having too much leisure.

Was Socrates really in love with all of these boys? Was that his motivation for trying to seduce them? I have argued that there are good reasons to believe that he genuinely loved Alcibiades. I have also argued that Socrates is sincere when admitting that he is attracted to Charmides. Moreover, he seems genuinely fond of Lysis. I would, however, hesitate to say that he loved, or erotically desired, each of them *in the same way*, or *equally much*. Indeed, the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades is outstanding in its intensity and persistence, revealing the unique nature of their erotic relation. I would not hesitate, however, to say that Socrates seems genuinely concerned with the state and education of the souls of all three youths – as the genuine lover would also be.

In all three dialogues, Socrates takes on the role of being a lover, and the theme of “pretended versus genuine” lovers is addressed in myriad ways. The difference between a genuine and a pretended lover is also discussed in other Platonic dialogues – particularly in the *Phaedrus*, but also in the *Symposium*. I have here argued that Socrates’ main agenda in the examined dialogues was to try to match these youths with knowledge; that Socrates was trying to turn them towards philosophy. In this process, Socrates took on the role of being a lover who could guide them on this path. In the *Alcibiades* I, however, he repeatedly insists that he is a genuine lover of Alcibiades – but is he, really? Did he not foresee that the conditionals he offered of his love, that Alcibiades had to seek knowledge and not be corrupted by the city, were impossible for Alcibiades to comply with? Or was his erôs for Alcibiades so impossible to fight off that even if he did foresee this, the insight was redundant?

Returning to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter: Can Socrates’ seductions, including the techniques he applies, be justified if ascribed to a nobler goal? In short, even though we may find Socrates’ methods difficult to accept from a moral point of view, I believe that on Plato’s account, the goal legitimates Socrates’ methods, his *modi operandi*. And the goal, I have argued, is to turn Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades toward philosophy. However, what good this did to them is, as we have seen, unclear (at best): As far as we know, neither Lysis, Charmides, nor Alcibiades went on to pursue the philosophical life. Plato’s motivational
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reasons, however, for having Socrates’ proceed the way he does, may very well be argued to exceed the impact he depicts Socrates’ seductions as having on his interlocutors. We should be careful not to equate possible (moral) failures of Socrates with failures of Plato. Plato writes for his readers. Accordingly, we, the readers of Plato, must ask ourselves what we gain from reading about Socrates’ seductions.

When investigating Socrates’ seductions and erotic expertise, one certainly becomes even more puzzled by Socrates and his ways. Briefly put, it is difficult to decide what to think of Socrates and his erotic educational methods and techniques: Ought we to view Socrates as a philosophical role model? Or ought we rather to condemn the way of practicing philosophy represented by Socrates? Without further discussion, I will leave these questions for my reader to decide. In any case, it seems safe to say that Socrates – this figure who became no less than the archetype in Western philosophy of the figure of the philosopher – remains mysterious. In classical Athens as well as today, Socrates and his ways are viewed as controversial, admired, ridiculed, respected, disliked, etc. Many aspects of Socrates are mysterious, and the untangling of these seems a life-long project. Nonetheless, I hope that my study on erôs and education in Plato has shed light upon one of the many mysterious aspects of Socrates – the erotic aspect. In the next and final section of this concluding chapter, I will summarize the main results of my dissertation.

5.3. Conclusion

In the Charmides, the Lysis, and the Alcibiades, we first are shown, in a very similar manner, even though with different nuances, the noble birth and the beauty of the young man. The conversation itself begins, in each case, with the partner and his characteristics: the sophrosyne of Charmides, the friendship between Menexenus and Lysis, the plan of Alcibiades to present himself to the people of Athens. And the conclusion in each of the three dialogues points to the newly formed bond that unites master and pupil (Friedländer 1965, 2:239 –240).

The main purpose of my inquiry has been to emphasize the erotic aspect of Socrates’ encounters with the youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, and show the role erôs plays in the way Socrates proceeds in these encounters. In Chapter 1, I (primarily) based the introductory account of the nature erôs, it may be noted here that Socrates also expresses uncertainty (or perhaps rather concerns), regarding himself (Phdr. 229e5–230a6): “I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that (…) Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?”

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and of Socrates’ erotic expertise, on the accounts provided in Plato’s *Symposium* and the *Theaetetus*. Thereafter, in Chapters 2–4, I turned to the *Lysis*, *Charmides* and *Alcibiades I*, investigating how the accounts of the nature of erôs and Socrates’ erotic expertise that I outlined in Chapter 1 fit the the accounts of how erôs is practiced in these three dialogues. Throughout the dissertation, I have emphasized the significant consistency I have found on the subject of erôs and education in Plato across the Platonic dialogues assessed in this dissertation.\(^{321}\) I have defended the overarching thesis that Socrates indeed makes use of erotic educational methods accompanied by a set of psychological techniques, which constitute part of his expertise on erôs, and I have shown how these methods and techniques are systematically put to use in the three encounters. I have also emphasized how these methods and means are specifically adapted to the personality of each interlocutor. In the *Lysis*, *Charmides*, and *Alcibiades I*, Socrates’ expertise on erôs serves educational purposes: Erôs is crucial in forming the bond – using Friedländer’s words (above) – between the master, Socrates, and the “pupils”. I have shown how the bond Friedländer refers to not only serves an essential educational purpose, but moreover is forged in a specifically erotic crucible.

I suspect that some of my readers may object to the selection of passages I have focused on within the *Lysis*, *Charmides* and *Alcibiades I* on the grounds that these are “not the most (philosophically) interesting passages”. That being said, I am not too worried about objections to my not having addressed the (so-called) “most (philosophically) interesting passages”. As noted in the Introduction, the lack of a consensus amongst scholars working on Plato regarding what, exactly, should be weighted positively or negatively, seems obvious; it is always a question of interpretation. Some may further find my selection of passages unfortunate (or perhaps even find themselves disappointed), thinking that “reading a chapter on *Charmides*, I had expected that I would be provided with a (more) solid account of sôphrosunê”. To this, let me first repeat that erôs and education are major philosophical subjects in Plato: It is indeed one that philia, sôphrosunê, and self-knowledge all relate to.\(^{322}\) While I have discussed, and accounted for, all of these topics, none of them has served as the center of attention in any of the readings. This is not because I do not find these topics interesting (I certainly do): It is due to the fact that my primary aim in this investigation has not been to provide a careful, systematic analysis of any of these three concepts.

\(^{321}\) As noted in the Introduction, I have had no intention of arguing for the claim that Plato’s views on erôs are *entirely* consistent across the dialogues, however. (Cf. Introduction, section 0.3.1., p. 21.)

\(^{322}\) These are the topics that are generally viewed as the main topics of the three dialogues that I discussed in Ch. 2–4.
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Instead, I have in this dissertation sought to reveal the important role erôs plays in the dialogues, particularly regarding education. I have emphasized how Socrates seeks to instill erôs for knowledge in Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, and tried to explicate what I take to be a systematic pattern in how the erotic-educational bond between Socrates and these three interlocutors of his is formed. I have investigated Socrates’ erotic educational methods, i.e., his skills in midwifery and matchmaking, and the psychological techniques he applies, which include shaming and charming. I have argued that these should be taken as included in his self-claimed expertise on erôs, and that Socrates puts his expertise on erôs into practice in the dialogues *Lysis*, *Charmides*, and *Alcibiades I*.

In this final section, I wish to further clarify the central results of my dissertation, which reveal this significant consistency in greater detail. First, I want to emphasize that erôs plays a crucial role in the processes of self-cultivation, learning, and the practice of philosophy; secondly, that Socrates’ educational methods take part in his self-claimed expertise on erôs; and thirdly, that the eponymous youths of the examined dialogues – Lysis, Charmides and Alcibiades – are all subjected to what I shall call Socrates’ erotic educational methods. In what follows, I will go through each of these points:

i. **Erôs plays a crucial role in the processes of self-cultivation, learning, and the practice of philosophy.** This point is repeatedly underscored in Plato – within and across the dialogues I have assessed in this dissertation. All of these processes ought to be characterized as involving an active search. In order to carry out these kind of searches, erôs is required. The function erôs here has may be explained in terms of an engine: Erôs is needed both to start these processes (i.e. the searches), yet also to keep them going. In all of these processes, the subject performing these processes needs to have knowledge as its erotic object. We have moreover seen how (genuine) erotic lovers have an important function in these processes: The erotic lovers may not only motivate the beloved to embark on these processes by instilling erôs for knowledge in the soul of their beloved, but also function as guides in carrying them out.

ii. **Socrates’ educational methods are related to his self-claimed expertise on erôs.** In Chapter 1, I emphasized where and why Socrates claims to be an expert on erôs, and I there accounted for his erotic educational methods, which I argued are involved in this expertise. The way in which these methods are related to his expertise is that

323 These results were all briefly listed in the Introduction.
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Socrates demonstrates his erotic expertise through practicing what I have called his “erotic educational methods”. These methods were defined as: (A) *Matchmaking*: Socrates tries to arrange the erotic matches he believes will produce the best erotic offspring, i.e. the best thoughts and ideas; and (B) *midwifery*: Socrates releases his interlocutor’s thoughts and ideas, i.e. the offspring his interlocutor is carrying.

iii. *The youths Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, in the dialogues that carry their names, are all subjected to Socrates’ erotic educational methods.* I have shown how the erotic educational methods – accompanied by the psychological techniques of shaming and charming – are put into practice by Socrates in the dialogues *Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades I*. By showing how, and where, Socrates puts his erotic educational methods and the techniques they involve into practice, it has become more plausible that Socrates, as he claims, is indeed an expert on erôs, and evident that Socrates’ educational methods are, in fact, connected to his expertise on erôs, and furthermore systematically practiced by him.

In sum, I have argued for – and defended – the overarching thesis that Socrates has erotic educational methods, accompanied by psychological techniques, and I have shown how these methods and techniques are systematically put to use in three Socratic encounters. Moreover, I have shown how these methods and techniques are all part of Socrates’ general erotic expertise. Furthermore, I have stressed how these are specifically adapted to the personalities of Lysis, Charmides, and Alcibiades, respectively.

What can we learn from Socrates’ seductions; what can Socrates’ seductions reveal to us readers of Plato on the subject of what philosophy is, and how philosophy is practiced? When looking into how Socrates practices philosophy with his young interlocutors, and how he – through his erotic expertise and methods – inspires his interlocutors to pursue the philosophical life, the nature and practice of erôs stands out as a topic of major importance when forming one’s opinion about what philosophy is. I have emphasized how philosophy in Plato is revealed to be an inter-personal, erotic activity. This activity requires both modesty and courage, and yet – above all else – it requires an intense, passionate desire (erôs) for knowledge.
Appendix: Plato and Erotic Poetry

Let me begin this Appendix on Plato and erotic poetry by offering some introductory remarks on Plato and the poets: One of the most tenacious views on Plato’s opinions regarding poetry and the poets is that Plato criticizes poetry because it is (i) imitation (mimēsis), because (ii) the person who renders the poem (the rhapsode) is ignorant of the things which he imitates, and (iii) because poetry addresses itself to the lower faculties of man, with which he cannot grasp truth. However, while Plato scorns poetry as something we must take precautions against, and not take seriously, as truth cannot be ascribed to it (Rep. 608a6–b2), he also (as we have seen) frequently quotes and echoes poets, and has Socrates and other characters both appeal to them and praise them. Moreover, Plato himself writes as a philosopher poet. He does not write in propria persona, but dramatic dialogues in which we readers become acquainted with the characters’ views, arguments, dreams, and desires; and while portraying these, he does not distinguish biography from fiction. Furthermore, he writes with a proximity to perhaps an ironically appropriated “mythopoetic view on the world” (Kosman 1976, 54). In sum, this appears to be a great paradox; one which a great many scholars have tried to untangle.

However different views scholars have on the topic of Plato and the poets, it is safe to say that “Plato’s own quarrel with the poets is well established, deep-rooted, persistent, recurrent, explicit, and intense” (Most 2011, 2). In the Republic, we find these famous lines: “let’s also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy” (Rep. 607b5–6). Plato’s quarrel with poetry (and also rhetoric, with which poetry is often associated)

324 One may note that the study titled Platon und die Poesie (1864) by J. Reber was highly influential on this subject (cf. e.g. Greene (1918, 1).
325 Cf. Introduction, section 0.3.2., p 23.
326 There is a rather epic discussion concerning Plato and poetry from the beginning of the twentieth century in the journal Mind, in which well-known Platonic scholars like J. A. Stewart, A. E. Taylor and J. Burnet were involved. See esp. Vol. xxxi (1905) and Vol. xxv (1910). Amongst recent works on the topic, see e.g. the anthology Plato and the Poets (2011), or Belfiore (1983).
327 Most (2011) argues that the quarrel must be regarded as Plato’s own, since there is little textual evidence (with the notable exception of Aristophanes’ Clouds) of the poets criticizing philosophy or philosophers.
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is not only evident in the Republic, however, but also in the Gorgias and in the Protagoras, and particularly in the Ion. In that dialogue, Socrates tells the rhapsode Ion that he and his poet (Homer) are empty of intelligence (nous).\(^{328}\) Still, it is worth noticing that the Ion “leaves [it] very obscure where exactly the philosopher stands in the opposition between divinely inspired poet and technical expert” (Gonzalez 2011, 93).\(^{329}\)

Even though Socrates tells Ion that he and his poet Homer are empty of intelligence, Homer is the most frequently quoted poet in Plato. Moreover, Socrates says in the Republic (at 595b) that he has loved Homer since he was a child. It has also been argued that Plato’s Socrates ascribed poetic lines to Homer, lines that seem to be Plato’s own.\(^{330}\) An example of this is said to be these lines in the Phaedrus (252b7–9):

Yes, mortals call him powerful winged ‘Love’
But because of his need to thrust out the wings,
The gods call him ‘Shove’.

Hesiod is also well represented in Plato. Poets are not merely quoted, though, but are also presented in Plato’s gallery of characters. This is most striking in the Symposium, where we are introduced to, among others, the comic playwright Aristophanes (who devoted a large part of his play The Clouds to ridiculing Socrates), and the tragic poet Agathon, who has just won a competition in poetry, and hence is hosting the symposium celebrating his victory.

Unsurprisingly, Erôs was an important theme among ancient poets, just as passionate desire and love are today. Unlike in the Symposium, however, in which they offer encomia to Erôs, the poets rarely praised Erôs and his forces. In Sophocles’ Antigone, Erôs is addressed as “You who harm and make unjust the minds of even just people, you have stirred up this quarrel of kindred men”; and in Euripides’ Hippolytus, he is called “Erôs, the tyrant of men (…) destroying mortals and sending all misfortunes to them when he comes”.\(^{331}\) The two tragedians Sophocles and Euripides, however, are not first and foremost known for their erotic poetry.

\(^{328}\) Cf. Ion 534c9–10. The term “rhapsode” refers to a classical Greek professional performer of epic poetry. Literally, the term means to sew (songs) together. Predominantly, but not exclusively, the rhapsodes performed the epics of Homer.

\(^{329}\) Exactly how the Ion leaves it open, however, I will not go into here. For an investigation of this, see Gonzalez (2011).

\(^{330}\) The translators of this dialogue (in Cooper 1997), Nehamas and Woodruff, here comment to the translation that these lines are probably Plato’s own invention, as the language is not consistently Homeric (cf. Cooper (1997, 529, n. 30)). It could also be translated: “Him indeed mortals name Eros the Flying One (Potenos), but the Immortals call him Feathery (Pteros), because of the wing-growing necessity” (cf. Fisher (1992, 472)).

\(^{331}\) Ant. 791–794; Hipp. 538–542. Cf. Belfiore (2011, 156). The most striking image of erôs presented by Sophocles, however, is to be found in a fragment of a satyr play titled The
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Three poets who all are known particularly for their poems on erôs are Ibycus, Sappho, and Cydias. Among these, Sappho is undoubtedly the most renowned and celebrated. In the following, I first discuss Ibycus, thereafter I turn to Cydias, before ending the Appendix with a few remarks on Sappho. In particular, we shall see how the poetic lines of these poets contain epithets of erôs, epithets that all contribute in revealing its nature. As we shall see, Ibycus, Cydias, and Sappho all use animal imagery in their erotic poetry.

Ibycus

Ibycus of Rhegium lived in the sixth century B.C., at approximately the same time as Sappho. He is referred to by name in the Parmenides. When Socrates and the others in this dialogue beg Parmenides to give a hypothesis and go through a difficult philosophical exercise, so that the others may learn the method, Parmenides sighs and says, and says:

I feel like the horse in Ibycus’ poem. Ibycus compares himself to a horse – a champion but no longer young, on the point of drawing a chariot in a race and trembling at what experience tells him is about to happen – and says that he himself, old man that he is, is being forced against his will to compete in Love’s game (Parm. 136e9–137a4).

We have good reasons to believe that the poem Parmenides refers to is a particular poem written by Ibycus. This poem is not rendered in the dialogue, but its full text is to be found in Proclus’ commentary on the Parmenides.\[332\]

Lovers of Achilles. Sophocles here compares the feeling of erôs with the feeling of holding ice-crystals in one’s hands: A pleasure quite novel at first, but then comes the point at which you cannot put the mass down again, nor keep holding it; a feeling pulling the lover to act and not to act, over and over again. For the fragment, translation, and discussion of this wonderful poem, see Carson (2005, 111–116).

\[332\] Here translated by Bowra (1967, 263; cited from Gordon (2012, 100)).
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Horses symbolized masculine sexual energy in classical Athens.334 Horses were for example used as phallic stand-ins in old comedy.335 Plato here plays on this connection between eros and horses, which is repeatedly emphasized in the Parmenides (Parm. 126c; 136e8–137b1). Drawing on Gordon’s (2012) reading, I believe Parmenides thinks that the discussion they are in is comparable to a love’s game, an erotic exercise. By referring to this poem when Socrates asks him to argue for a hypothesis, Parmenides compares himself to an aged champion horse that is being forced to compete in the race. Moreover, Parmenides compares himself to an old champion horse – a champion but no longer young, on the point of drawing a chariot in a race and trembling at what experience tells him is about to happen – and says that he himself, old man that he is, is being forced against his will to compete in Love’s game (Parm. 136e9–137a4). Parmenides is “being asked to ‘get it up’ again in old age, to get that horse running” (Gordon 2012, 102), suggesting that maybe Parmenides felt the need of some masculine erotic “horsepower” in order to perform the challenging philosophical task.

Notably, this is not the only passage in Plato’s corpus in which Ibycus is mentioned. In the Phaedrus, Socrates quotes Ibycus (at 242c6–d2):

εἰμὶ δὴ ὁνὸς μάντις μὲν, οὐ πάντως δὲ σπουδαῖος, ἀλλὰ ζήσωρ οἱ τὰ γράμματα φαύλοι, δεκτός μὲν ἡματικὸν μόνον ἱκανός σαφῶς οὖν ἢδη μανθάνω τὸ ἀμάρτημα. ὡς δὴ τοι, ὦ ἑταῖρε, μαντικὸν γέ τι καὶ ἡ φυσῆ ἔμε γὰρ ἔδραζε μὲν τι καὶ πάλαι λέγοντα τὸν λόγον, καὶ ποὺ ἔδοσσομύσῃ κατ’ Ἰβυκον, μὴ τι παρὰ θεῶς ἀμβλυακὸν τιμὰν πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀμείψοι· νῦν δὲ ἠδημία τὸ ἀμάρτημα.

333 The “Cyprian’s net” may plausibly be understood as “Aphrodite’s net”, as Aphrodite is also known as the Lady of Cyprus, or only Cyprus. (She is also called Cytherea and the Lady of Cythera.)
334 Cf. Ch. 2, section 2.5., p. 73.
335 Cf. e.g. Gordon (2012, 101; with ref. to Henderson (1991, 126–7)).
In effect, you see, I am a seer [μάντις; diviner, prophet], and though I am not particularly good at it, still – like people who are just barely able to read and write – I am good enough for my own purposes. I recognize my offense [ὑμάρπημα] clearly now. In fact, the soul too, my friend, is itself a sort of seer; that’s why, almost from the beginning of my speech, I was disturbed by a very uneasy feeling, as Ibycus puts it, that “for offending the gods I am honored by men”. But now I understand exactly what my offense has been.

The young man Phaedrus then asks Socrates to tell him about this offense. Socrates, the self-claimed expert on erôs, judges Lysias’ and Phaedrus’ speeches concerning erôs and lovers, as well as his own, answering: “Phaedrus, that speech you carried with you here – it was horrible, as horrible as the speech you made me give” (Phdr. 242d4–5).

In this dialogue, we are offered the already mentioned image of the soul as a winged team, with two horses and a charioteer (Phdr. 245c–254e). Socrates here says that the soul, divine or human, is “like the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer” (Phdr. 246a). One of the horses is black, and is generally conceived as representing erôs (and the sexual appetite, madness and lack of self-control associated with erôs). The erastês, too, is often described as winged, in the same way that erôs is often portrayed and described with wings (cf. e.g. Phdr. 252b).336

The many references to horses in Plato’s dialogues are puzzling, yet more intelligible when the connection between erôs and horses is taken into account. This connection may further explain the many references to horses in the Lysis, e.g., Socrates’ examples concerning horses in the conversation he has with Lysis on parental love.337 We are told that Lysis is not allowed to hold the horses’ reins or (even) drive the mule-team (Lys. 208a1–b5). His parents won’t allow it, due to his lack of knowledge on this point (they hold him in chains). Furthermore, Ctesippus’ name has connotations to horses, meaning “possessing horses”. I take the references to “horses” as indicating

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336 For representations of the soul explicitly as a bird, one can for example turn to art from the Mycenaean period. One may further note that in the Phaedrus, Socrates also refers to Pindar’s First Isthmian 2. (Phdr. 227b6–10). According to Moore (2014, 525): “In this victory ode, Pindar celebrates, uniquely in his extant oeuvre, a charioteer winner who has driven his own team”. Moore (2014) compares Pindar’s ideal charioteer Herodotus to the ideal “charioteer”, the philosophical lover, as depicted by Socrates in the Phaedrus, and identifies similarities in the ideals of their practice:

A chariot-driver wins a race by exercising self-control and thoughtfulness. The risks in poor racing are falling out of one’s lane (Ar. Nub. 25) and consequently crashing (Pythian 5.50). The clever (δεινός) charioteer will, like the palinode’s divine drivers, pull his horses to an outside lane (ἐξω παρασπῆ) to wait out the chaos (S. El. 731–2), and even ‘drive last, holding his horses back, bearing in mind only the finish’ (ἤλαυνε ἔσχατος ὑστέρας ἐκων | πώλους …, τῷ τέλει πίστιν φέρων, 734–5).

337 As commented on in Ch. 2, section 2.5., p. 73.
that Lysis cannot (yet) handle masculine erotic energies. In order to become a man, Lysis needs to start climbing up the erotic ladder, i.e., engage with someone who can teach him about “horses” and from these experiences transcend to knowledge.\footnote{For further reading on how Plato uses horses as symbols of erōs, see Gordon (2012, esp. pp. 58–65; 99–104).}

**Cydias**

In the *Charmides* (at 155d5–e1), Socrates alludes to the erotic and lyric poet Cydias, and calls him the wisest person on the art of erōs. Cydias is a poet of the late fifth century B.C. The biographical information on Cydias is scarce, however. It is possible that he is the same Cydias who is referred to as Cydias of Hermione.\footnote{According to Brill’s New Pauly, Cydias was “obviously popular” in Athens, as he is depicted as a komast on a red-figured dish (Munich 2614) and on a psykter (London, BM E767) from c. 500 BC. Cf. “Cydias.” Brill’s New Pauly, 2015.}

In Burnet’s *Platonis Opera, Vol. 3* (1903), the little epigram is cited in this way *(with the brackets):*

\[
\langle \varepsilon\upsilon\lambda\upsilon\varphi\varepsilon\iota\zeta\alpha\varsigma \eta \kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\nu\nu\nu\nu \lambda\omicron\nu\nu \omicron\varsigma \nu\varsigma \rangle \nu\epsilon\beta\varphi\omicron \nu \varepsilon\lambda\theta\omicron\nu\tau\zeta \nu \langle \mu\omicron\iota\varphi\alpha\nu \alpha\iota\rho\varepsilon\iota\zeta\alpha \varsigma \kappa\rho\iota\omicron\omicron \nu \rangle
\]

In Cooper’s edition, the fragment is translated in this way:

the fawn should beware lest, while taking a look at the lion, he should provide part of the lion’s dinner.

The fragment has also been translated (or rather reinterpreted) in the following way\footnote{In *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* (Washburn et al. (1998, 121)).}:

**BEWARE**

*Beware. There are fawns who, facing the lion die of fright just thinking the lion might be hungry.*

Tuozzo (2011, 108–9) remarks that this is the only source we have of this fragment, and that the text seems to be corrupt. The exact meaning of these lines is therefore hard to establish. With citations from Page (1962, 714), Tuozzo informs us that the νεβρὸν (“fawn”) ἐλθόντα (“coming”) is included.
in the quotation, but changed into the nominative, as Page takes εὐλαβεῖσθαι (“beware”) to be part of the Platonic context.\textsuperscript{341}

When alluding to Cydias in the \textit{Charmides}, Socrates seems to describe himself as “the fawn”, and Charmides as the dangerous “lion”.\textsuperscript{342} As mentioned, it has been claimed that Socrates here “falls back on poetic wisdom like any stereotypic lover” (Schmid 1998, 88). Others read Socrates’ appeal to Cydias as a way for Socrates to “calm himself down”, so that he may continue his philosophical quest - that poetry upholds his practice, and that Socrates in this way makes “therapeutic use of poetry” (Schultz 2013, 59). Tuozzo, however, draws a parallel between the paralyzing effect of erôs alluded in the verse by Cydias, and the philosophical charioteer in the \textit{Phaedrus}, who, after having gazed at the true Form of Beauty, “is reminded of ‘the true nature of Beauty and sees her again standing on a holy pedestal with σωφροσύνη’ (254b5–7) and is thrown backwards in awe” (Tuozzo 2011, 109).

\textbf{Sappho}

“Sappho the Beautiful” (Σαπφὼ ἡ καλή, cf. \textit{Phdr.} 235c), as Socrates calls her, is sometimes referred to as Sappho of Eresos, which is located in the south-west part of the island of Lesbos. An intriguing hypothesis has been suggested by Battistini (1995): That Diotima is a fictional character based on Sappho. Whether it is accurate or not that Diotima is based on Sappho, however, I am inclined to believe that Johnson (2012, 7–26) is onto something when she argues that the influence Sappho had on Socrates is more extensive than scholars usually imagine. Like Socrates, Sappho did not teach in any traditional, direct sense. Sappho, like Socrates, is presented as an erotic educator, as one who combines an erotic dimension with an educational one. “[I]t was how she lived, what she said, how she enacted her own chosen ‘performance’ that enabled the transference of her ideas” (Johnson 2012, 15).\textsuperscript{343} On Sappho’s account, as on Socrates’, erôs is not merely lovely and sweet. Sappho calls erôs a creeping little beast, or creature, that creeps upon her, forcing himself on her, and insists on erôs being in-between.\textsuperscript{344} She also characterizes erôs as being “sweet-bitter” (γλυκύπικρος) – a well-known characteristic of romantic love that Sappho,

\textsuperscript{341} According to Tuozzo, the oldest manuscript by Burnet, however, cites the phrase differently. Tuozzo also refers to Herman (1850) and Bloch (1973, 25, n. 6) as scholars who show how parts of the phrase in the original text must have fallen out.

\textsuperscript{342} Cf. Ch. 3, section 3.2.2., pp. 98–99.

\textsuperscript{343} Johnson (2012) here makes use of Butler’s theory of performativity (see Butler 1993, 95).

\textsuperscript{344} Vlastos refers to Socrates’ \textit{daimonion} as a “that unpredictable little beast” in his review of Brickhouse and Smith’s \textit{Socrates on Trial} (1989). This quote from Vlastos moreover serves as the title of the article on Socrates’ \textit{daimonion} by Droge (2007).
Appendix

to the best of my knowledge, was the first ever to use. Furthermore, whereas Socrates calls Erôs a *sophist*, which is hardly a positive characteristic when coming from his mouth, Sappho calls Erôs a “tale-weaver” (Johnson 2012, 10). Moreover, the connection between erôs and *mania* (madness) which Socrates famously makes in the *Phaedrus* is also to be found in Sappho.\(^\text{345}\)

Echoing Sappho’s description of Erôs as a little beast creeping and forcing himself upon her, Diotima describes Erôs as a skilled hunter and plotter (*Symp. 203d4–6*) – a description we have seen that Socrates also repeatedly uses.\(^\text{346}\)

In her study on Sappho’s influences on Socrates, Johnson (2012) quotes Maximus of Tyre’s *Orations*. There it is said that Sappho – much like Socrates – is presented as an erotic educator, as one who combines an erotic dimension with an educational one:

> What else was the love of the Lesbian woman – if one may compare older things to newer – except Socratic love? For they both seem to me to have practiced love each in their own way, she that of women, he that of men. For they both said that they loved many and were captivated by all things beautiful. What Alcibiades and Charmides and Phaedrus were to him, Gyrinna and Atthis and Anactoria were to the Lesbian. And what the rival craftsmen Prodicus and Gorgias and Thrasymachus and Protagoras were to Socrates, Gorgo and Andromeda were to Sappho.\(^\text{347}\)

Johnson argues that Sappho taught through being a poet-teacher; Socrates through being a philosopher-teacher. One of the poems I have referred to, though not yet cited, is the following:\(^\text{348}\)

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'Ερος δηὔτε μ’ ὁ λοσιμέλης δόνει,
γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον
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Erôs once again limb-loosener whirls me
Sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up

Sappho here describes Erôs as a little beast, or creature, which makes the limbs loose, as if one is trembling. The creature creeps upon one, and is irresistible and impossible to fight off. Socrates too, as we have seen, is impossible to *fight off* – at least according to Alcibiades’ testimony. Socrates himself describes his affection for Alcibiades in turn as equally difficult to

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\(^\text{345}\) Cf. Sappho (fr. 130). It is also in Ibycus (fr. 287c), Anacreon (fr. 413). Cf. Johnson (2012, 19), with ref. to Calame (1999). Nussbaum (2007, Ch. 7) discusses erôs, madness, and reason in the *Phaedrus*.

\(^\text{346}\) Cf. e.g. *Lys. 206a1–7*; 218c5–6; *Phdr. 241c6–d1*; *Prt. 309a1–2*.

\(^\text{347}\) Max. Tyr. 18.9, cited from Johnson (2012, 8).

\(^\text{348}\) Sappho, fr. 130, in Lobel and Page (eds.) *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*. Here translated by Carson (2005, 3). (Johnson (2012, 19) also offers a translation, but I prefer Carson’s).
handle. This is just one of their many similarities: They are barefoot searchers, not simply beautiful or simply ugly, but both at the same time. Although described as wise and beautiful within (by Alcibiades), Socrates’ bodily appearance, as described, represented, and highlighted by Alcibiades, is not so unlike the sculptures of the fat and snub-nosed Silenus (that is, apart from Silenus’ drunkenness). The fact that Socrates usually walks barefoot is confirmed in the beginning of the Symposium. Briefly put, Socrates comes across as the personification of Erôs. This becomes evident when Alcibiades is praising Socrates in exactly the same terms as Socrates used when he praised erôs in his speech. Or is this perhaps one of Socrates’ jokes, using “Diotima’s speech” as a way of describing Erôs as being similar to himself, and getting away with it?

Summary of Appendix

In this Appendix, I first gave a short introduction to the major topic of Plato and the poets. As mentioned, Plato writes that the poets are not to be trusted, that they lack intelligence, and have a dubious relation to the truth. Yet, all of the three erotic poets examined here – Ibycus, Cydias, and Sappho – are mentioned by name in Plato, and these are only a few among the great many poets alluded to. Furthermore, we have seen how Plato himself may be characterized as a philosopher poet. What, exactly, is true or false or oscillating in between is not obvious in his dramatic philosophical dialogues either. This is to his readers’ puzzlement and frustration – yet also to our amusement.

349 Cf. Ch. 4, section 4.1.2., pp. 128–129.


I introduktionen redogör jag till att börja med kortfattat för avhandlingens ämne, mål, och begränsningar. Jag diskuterar där även mitt val av just *Lysis*, *Charmides* och *Alkibiades I* som objekt för min studie av hur Sokrates använder sin erotiksa expertis. Dessa dialoger har flera gemensamma nämnare. De räknas till exempel ofta till gruppen av tidiga, så kallade Sokratiska dialoger av Platon, vilka bland annat utmärks av att de kretsar

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351 Se också *Lysis*, 204b5–e2; *Charmides*, 155d4–e2; *Gästabudet*, 177d7–8, 198d1, 212b5–6; *Theages*, 128b1–4; och *Faidros* 257a6–9. Detta förmedlas även i Sokratiska dialoger skrivna av andra än Platon; för exempel på detta, se Xenophons *Memorabilia*, 2.6.28.
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Kring en viss vad är (ti esti) \( \Phi^2 \)-fråga. En annan gemensam nämnare är att de tre dialogerna alla brukar räknas till Platons så kallade erotiske dialoger (även om erōs inte vanligen anses utgöra huvudämnet i någon av dem). Jag skriver så kallade erotiske dialoger här, därför att jag anser att beteckningen är lite vilseledande. Erōs är ett mycket viktigt begrepp i många fler av Platons dialoger än just de som brukar hänvisas till som erotiske.


De gemensamma nämnarna hos Lysis, Charmides och Alkibiades I är ett av skälen till att jag har valt att studera dem tillsammans. Ett annat skäl är att de erotiska aspekterna i dessa dialoger inte har erhållit samma uppmärksamhet som de erotiska aspekterna i de långt mera kända dialogerna Gästabudet och Faidros. Genom att närmare undersöka de avseenden i vilka Lysis, Charmides och Alkibiades I är erotiskt laddade, och hur Sokrates i dessa dialoger demonstrerar den erotiska expertis han i andra dialoger påstår sig vara i besittning av, hoppas jag kunna bidra till en bättre helhetsbild av erōs betydelse i Platons filosofi.

I introduktionskapitlet diskuteras slutligen också den metod som jag använder mig av i avhandlingen. Jag understryker här det faktum att Platons filosofiska texter är skrivna som dramatiska dialoger, samt förklarar varför mitt avhandlingsämne är sådant att det förutsätter att hänsyn tas inte bara till den filosofiska argumentationen i de tre dialogerna, utan även just till deras dramatiska form.

En följd av Platons sätt att skriva, är att Platons egna åsikter eller uppfattningar kan vara svåra att få fatt på. Detta gäller inte minst för hans uppfattning om erōs, och den roll som erōs spelar för förvärvetandet av kunskap. Platon skriver inte in propria persona; han skriver inte "jag menar (anser, hävdar) X, därför att Y'", utan istället stöter vi som läsare på många olika karaktärer som hyser många olika uppfattningar (på grundval av många olika skäl). Som läsare blir vi vidare ofta underrättade om de inblandade karaktärernas olika intressen, deras yrken, samhällsklass, samt om deras drömmar och målsättningar. Alla dessa saker, tycks det, är avsedda att hjälpa

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oss att bättre förstå deras respektive ståndpunkter. Platons karaktärer framställer sina uppfattningar inte bara genom filosofiska argument, utan även med hjälp av analogier, myter, skämt, dikter, berättelser, och så vidare. Detta gäller inte minst för deras uppfattningar rörande erôs väsen. I stället för att betrakta dessa saker som bara skämt, eller bara metaforer etc., så argumenterar jag för att de måste tas på allvar – att de i själva verket har en viktig funktion vid förmedlandet av Platons reflektioner om erôs väsen.

I kapitel 1 redogörs först kortfattat för erôs som en kraft (dunamis) riktad mot vissa objekt, vilka jag menar att Platon omfattar i flertalet av sina dialoger. Påståendena ifråga är följande: (i) erôs är en kraft som motiverar oss att sträva efter förvärvandet av vissa objekt; (ii) de erotiska objekten utmärks av att de alla är sköna (att de är utrustade med egenskapen skönhet (to kalon)); (iii) ett erotikt objekt är ett objekt som av naturen tillhör det erotiska subjektet – som subjektet av naturen behöver; (iv) erôs kan vara riktat mot abstrakta objekt; (v) de erotiska objekt som ett visst subjekt är utrustat med, avslöjar vissa karaktärsdrag hos subjektet.

I detta kapitel ger jag också en kort översikt över det erotiskt laddade utbildningssystemet i antikens Aten, pederastin, i ljuset av vilket Sokrates erotik-pedagogiska metoder måste förstås. Därefter diskuterar jag hur Platon i framför allt Gästabudet och Faidros jämför erotisk reproduktion med lärande (med förvarandet av kunskap). Denna diskussion kan sammanfattas i fem punkter: (i) kunskap och visdom sägs utgöra exempel på erotiska objekt; (ii) enligt metaforen om den erotiska stegen behöver den som älskar en mer erfaren älskare som kan leda en uppåt på stegen, från erôs (kärlek) till enskilda, sköna objekt, till (på det högsta steget) erôs för det skönas idé; (iii) tankar och idéer beskrivs som exempel på erotisk avkomma ("hjärn-barn"); (iv) Sokrates hävdar att han är ett slags barnmorska; (v) Sokrates hävdar att barnmorskor är de som är mest lämpade eller kunniga i att para samman människor i fruktbara relationer (de är, om man så vill, experter på "matchmaking").

Efter detta knyter jag an dessa punkter till Sokrates erotiska expertis. Jag argumenterar här dels för att Sokrates erotik-pedagogiska metoder manifesterar den expertis på erôs som han menar sig vara i besittning av; dels för att de erotisk-pedagogiska metoderna ingår i Sokrates erotiska expertis; och dels för att dessa metoder används när Sokrates demonstrerar sin erotiska expertis. Dessa erotisk-pedagogiska metoder definierar jag på följande sätt: "Matchmaking": Sokrates försöker skapa eller arrangera erotiska relationer, vilka han tror skulle kunna ge upphov till utmärkt avkomma – med vilket här då avses utmärkta tankar och idéer. Förlossningshjälp: Sokrates försöker förlösa sina samtalspartners tankar och idéer, eller, med andra ord, de hjärn-barn som hans samtalspartners är havande med.
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Vidare diskuteras hur Sokrates, i tillämpandet av sina erotik-pedagogiska metoder, även använder sig av två olika psykologiska tekniker. Dessa tekniker omfattar, på ena sidan, att försöka få den han talar med att uppleva skam, och på andra sidan att försöka förföra eller charmera den andre. Det förra, argumenterar jag, är tänkt som en teknik för att få samtalspartnern att bli uppmärksam på sin egen okunskap; för att provocera fram ett aporetiskt tillstånd, som är nödvändigt för att samtalspartnern skall komma till insikt om att han måste söka kunskap. För att förföra eller charmera sin samtalspartner, tar Sokrates istället på sig rollen av en älskare, som utger sig för att kunna hjälpa den andre i ett gemensamt sökande efter kunskap. Jag argumenterar dock för att ynglingarna i de tre dialoger som jag studerar (och i synnerhet Alkibiades) slutar som beundrare av Sokrates; på detta sätt sätts de traditionella pederastiska rollerna ur spel.

Även om jag i kapitel 1 förser läsaren med en inledande redogörelse för vari erotik väsen består, så är detta något som sedan blir ytterligare exemplifierat, analyserat, och förtydligat genom hela avhandlingen. I var och ett av kapitlen 2, 3 och 4 behandlas ett möte mellan Sokrates och en ung man – eller snarare, i fallet med Lysis, en pojke. Jag försöker tydliggöra de olika erotiska aspekterna i dessa möten, och hur Sokrates använder sig av sin erotiska expertis i dem.


I kapitel 3 diskuteras Charmides. Jag fokuserar där på Sokrates möte med tonåringeren Charmides, om vilken Sokrates tidigare i dialogen har fått höra att han är en osedvanligt vacker och klartänkt (sôphrôn) ung man. I kapitlets inledning visar jag hur prologen till Charmides innehåller ett antal metaforer och analogier som på olika sätt knyter an till två för dialogen centrala teman, erotik och dominans. Därefter går jag vidare till att visa hur Sokrates klär av
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Charmides mentalt: är Charmides verkligen så klartänkt om han påstås vara? Jag argumenterar för att Sokrates använder sig av sina erotik-pedagogiska metoder, liksom av sina två psykologiska tekniker, i sitt försök att blotta bristerna i Charmides själ. I den läsning av dialogen som jag föreslår, så avslöjar Sokrates undersökning att Charmides lider brist på framför allt: (i) måttfullhet (sôphrosunê) rörande vad han vet och inte vet; (ii) begär (erôs) efter kunskap; och (iii) mod (andreia) nog att söka efter den kunskap som han saknar. Jag argumenterar för att det här rör sig om tre olika karaktärsdrag, vilka i dialogen visas vara avgörande för själva utövandet av filosofi. Jag argumenterar också för att Sokrates försöker att ingjuta en strävan hos Charmides efter dessa karaktärsdrag. Emellertid tycks Charmides vara mer upptagen av hur han framstår i andra ögon, än av att sträva efter att utveckla dessa karaktärsdrag.


I synnerhet diskuterar jag emellertid Sokrates påstående att en själ, för att den skall kunna nå insikt om sig själv, måste spegla sig i en annan själ. Eftersom verkliga älskare, enligt Sokrates, sörjer för sina älskades utbildning, kan de älskade därför genom filosofiska samtal spegla sina själar i sina älskares själar, och därigenom nå fram till självinsikt. Genom att presentera sig själv som Alkibiades ende verkliga älskare, så presenterar sig Sokrates också därmed som den vars själ Alkibiades bör spegla sin egen själ i. På detta sätt, argumenterar jag, demonstrerar dialogen hur älskare spelar en central roll i en persons självutveckling.

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I den avslutande sektionen sammanfattar jag de mest centrala resultaten i avhandlingen. Dessa är, föreslår jag, följande:

i. *Erôs* spelar en central roll i såväl lärande som i kultiverandet av ens jag, och inte minst i praktiserandet av filosofi.

ii. Sokrates erotik-pedagogiska metoder ingår i den erotikska expertis som han själv hävdar att han är i besittning av.

iii. Lysis, Charmides och Alkibiades utsätts alla för Sokrates erotik-pedagogiska metoder och psykologiska tekniker.

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