

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

SOCRATES' LESSON TO HIPPOTHALES IN PLATO'S *LYSIS*

Plato's *Lysis* usually draws interest for the range and variety of its accounts of friends and friendship—and for the arsenal of objections with which Socrates demolishes these accounts. The *Lysis* ends without clearly stated answers to its questions about friends and friendship. Accordingly, one easily wonders about what account of friends and friendship, if any, the *Lysis* ultimately accepts.¹

In this note, however, I explore the *Lysis* from a different perspective. I attempt neither to determine the dialogue's considered account of the nature of *philia*, nor to settle whether it ultimately contains one. Instead, I examine, and evaluate, Socrates' lesson in the dialogue's opening about how to converse with a prospective beloved—that is, one with whom one wishes to forge a close, erotically tinged *philia*-relationship. For in this section of the *Lysis*, Socrates criticizes the love-besotted Hippothales' way of speaking to, and about, Hippothales' yearned-for *Lysis*. Socrates subsequently proceeds to demonstrate (ἐπιδείξει) how Hippothales *should* converse with *Lysis* (206c5–6). The *Lysis*' prologue, then, explicitly foregrounds questions about how one ought to converse with the object of one's affections. But how should we assess Socrates' criticisms of, and demonstration to, Hippothales? Are they defensible by Socrates' own standards, as well as independent criteria?

Given usual approaches to the *Lysis*, such questions perhaps seem unusual.² Yet such questions about the *Lysis* are salient for at least two reasons. A first reason: Plato portrays Socrates throughout the corpus as a master seducer.³ At *Symposium* 177d7–e1, Socrates explicitly claims knowledge of nothing other than erotics. In the *Lysis*, Socrates alternately alludes to and assumes such knowledge (204b8–c2, 206a1–3), and he offers Hippothales what amounts to a tutorial. Examining Socrates' lesson to Hippothales, then, provides a way of understanding, and assessing, Socrates' expertise in this domain. A second reason: through the drama of the *Lysis*, Plato shows how philosophical questions emerge naturally within the context of ordinary life—including our everyday concerns about love.⁴ As the *Lysis* reveals, we can converse with a prospective beloved virtuously or viciously, with potentially serious ethical ramifications for both the suitor and the suited. Our speech in such contexts reveals our character, reinforces our dispositions, and affects the lives of others. How we converse with the objects of our affection, then, matters. From this standpoint, how to converse with a prospective beloved proves a fitting topic for philosophy.

1. For a useful overview of recent discussions, see Obdrzalek 2013.

2. Nightingale (1993, 114–16), however, offers astute, but brief, remarks on Plato's worries about Hippothales' erotic encomia in the *Lysis*.

3. Obdrzalek 2013, 210. On Socrates as seducer in the *Lysis*, see esp. Scott 2000, chap. 2; Gonzalez 2003, 25; and Rider 2013.

4. Trivigno 2011.

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Socrates' lesson thus deserves consideration for its challenges to one popular way of so conversing and for the approach that Socrates' demonstration introduces as an alternative.⁵

Socrates offers practical demonstrations of how to converse with a prospective beloved in other works. Yet I focus Socrates' portrayal in the *Lysis* for three reasons. (1) Plato scholarship has devoted comparatively little attention to the *Lysis* and its opening exchanges. (2) Socrates' criticisms of Hippothales, and Socrates' "demonstration" of how to converse with a beloved, are explicit, focused, and provocative. (3) Socrates' lessons in the *Lysis* generate interesting puzzles of their own.

In what follows, then, I pursue two main tasks. In parts 1–2, I articulate and assess Socrates' criticisms of Hippothales. In parts 3–5, I identify, examine, and respond to puzzles to which Socrates' demonstration to Hippothales gives rise.

1. SOCRAATES' CRITICISM OF HIPPOTHALES

To set the stage, I first consider the dramatic context in which questions about conversing with a prospective beloved emerge within, and come to occupy the foreground, of the *Lysis*. Along the way, I spell out Socrates' objections to one popular style of such conversation.

As the *Lysis* begins, Hippothales invites Socrates into the palaestra at the Lyceum to join him and his friends for conversation in the presence of the good-looking boys there (203b–204a). When Hippothales blushes at Socrates' question about who the best-looking boy in the palaestra is (204b), Socrates claims a "god-given ability to tell pretty quickly when someone is in love, and with whom he's in love" (204b–c). Socrates senses that Hippothales *is* in love and "pretty far gone" (πόρρω ἤδη) at that (204b7). Hippothales, in response, blushes still more (204c3).

Hippothales' friend Ctesippus reveals the identity of Hippothales' yearned-for beloved: Lysis (204c). Moreover, Ctesippus calls attention to Hippothales' way of speaking to, and about, Lysis. According to Ctesippus, Hippothales, whether drunk or sober, spends all his time speaking about Lysis (204c–d). Ctesippus complains that Hippothales "drowns" his friends with poems and prose about the boy (204d4–5). "Worst of all," says Ctesippus, "he actually sings odes to his beloved in a weird voice, which we have to put up with listening to" (204d5–7). On these grounds, Ctesippus calls Hippothales "ridiculous" (καταγέλαστα, 205b7, 205c2).

Ctesippus, then, plays an important dramatic role in setting up the philosophical discussion to follow. He suggests that Hippothales' way of going about conversing with Lysis is woefully inadequate. And his remarks certainly make the *Lysis*' audience happy not

5. Likewise, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates criticizes Lysias' written speech, which aims to seduce a boy into granting sexual favors to a non-lover (230e6–234c5). Socrates describes this speech, like the similar speech that Socrates subsequently improvises (237b9–238c4, 238d8–241d1), as "shameless" (ἀναιδέος, 243c1). Such speech displays a debased, anti-erotic eroticism that reduces both *logos* and the seduced to instrumental means for attaining sheer sexual gratification. (On these points, see Griswold 1986, 47–48, 69 and Ferrari 1987, 91.) Such speech also deceives: the non-lover claims not to be motivated by *erōs*, when nothing else could explain the seducer's seducing. (See, e.g., Griswold 1986, 48–49 and Belfiore 2012, 215.) Such speech, Socrates contends, betrays the perspective of those "totally ignorant of love among the freeborn" (οὐδένα ἐλεύθερον ἐρωτα ἐωρακότων, 243c8).

In this paper, I use Alexander Nehamas' and Paul Woodruff's translation of the *Phaedrus*, and Stanley Lombardo's translation of the *Lysis*, both in Reeve 2006.

to be Hippothales. Yet Ctesippus' response to Hippothales also invites the *Lysis*' audience to ponder *why* Hippothales' speaking goes wrong. Notice that Ctesippus raises his criticisms of Hippothales immediately after Hippothales blushes in response to (a) Socrates' question about who the most attractive boy in the palaestra is (204b5) and (b) Socrates' remark about his ability to recognize a lover and a beloved (204c3). True, Hippothales' response may well show a certain natural bashfulness.⁶ But in the dramatic context, I suggest, Hippothales' blushing, like other instances of blushing in Plato, results from his recognizing something worrisome about himself.⁷ More specifically, Hippothales' blushing reveals his nagging, but suppressed, sense that there is something potentially shameful or indefensible about his way of conversing with Lysis. Through his blushing, Hippothales shows himself to recognize, at some level, that his speaking invites challenge of the sort that Ctesippus explicitly raises, and has no doubt raised before—a challenge that, Hippothales suspects, his own speaking might not be able to withstand. So, when Socrates announces that he can recognize a lover and a beloved, Hippothales blushes because he worries that Socrates will reveal Lysis as his beloved, and that such revelation will naturally encourage Ctesippus to rehearse his criticisms—as indeed Ctesippus does.

Ctesippus describes Hippothales as unhealthily obsessed with Lysis, yet “unable to say anything more original [ἴδιον] to him than any child could say” (205b8–c1). Hippothales can only serve up the sorts of things about Lysis that the whole city says, namely, items of praise about Lysis' relatives and ancestors, and their great fortunes and honors (205c). According to Ctesippus, Hippothales even identifies Zeus as one of Lysis' ancestors (205c–d). On these grounds, Socrates agrees that Lysis *is* ridiculous (205d). And so, Socrates questions Hippothales: “Do you really compose and sing your own victory ode [ἐγκώμιον] before you've won?” (205d5–6). This question paves the way for Socrates' main criticisms of Hippothales' way of speaking.

Here is Socrates' first criticism. If Ctesippus' complaints about Hippothales are true, Socrates tells Hippothales, “You are really what these songs are all about” (205e1). On the one hand, if Hippothales' speech succeeds in attracting Lysis, then Hippothales' speech will effectively eulogize Hippothales himself. It will celebrate Hippothales for having seduced a boy with all the desirable qualities that Hippothales' encomia attribute to Lysis (205e). On the other hand, if, having praised Lysis, Hippothales fails to attract the boy, then Hippothales promises to look like a fool. For in this case, someone with such admirable qualities will have rejected Hippothales. Socrates' first criticism, then, is that Hippothales' way of speaking with his prospective beloved is either (a) objectionably self-glorifying or (b) recklessly foolish.

Socrates subsequently offers a second criticism: Hippothales' style of conversing with his prospective beloved is self-defeating. Hippothales' praise of Lysis, Socrates holds, is apt to fill the boy with arrogance (φρονήματος ἐμπίπλανται καὶ μεγαλαυχίας, 206a4), which threatens to make Lysis hard to win. According to Socrates, Hippothales' way of conversing with Lysis attempts, counterproductively, “to drive things wild” (ἐξαγριαίνειν, 206b2). A hunter who scares away his prey is, as Hippothales admits, a pretty poor hunter (205a). Likewise, Hippothales ensures his own defeat and invites deserved ridicule by praising Lysis (205e–206a).

6. Hoerber 1946, 272.

7. Cf., e.g., *Prt.* 312a, where Hippocrates blushes when Socrates compels Hippocrates to recognize that he would become a sophist by going to Protagoras. On blushing in Plato, see Gooch 1988 (who describes Hippothales' blushes as “the blushes of someone whose secret is found out” [p. 26]).

In Plato's historical context, many aspiring lovers apparently did converse with their prospective beloveds in Hippothales' fashion. Andrea Wilson Nightingale attests to an entire genre of such erotic eulogy—*paidika*—typified by the Demosthenean *Erôtikos*.⁸ Kenneth J. Dover, meanwhile, speculates that Hippothales' poems to Lysis were akin to poems attributed to Theognis and poems in the *Garland* of Meleagros.⁹ Moreover, at least some self-styled erotic authorities recommended that lovers praise their beloveds. According to fragments from a sex manual attributed to Philaenis of Samos—a fourth-century BCE courtesan—one should woo with flattery, for instance, by comparing one's beloved to a divinity.¹⁰ So, in questioning Hippothales' flattering style of conversing with Lysis (*qua* flattering), Socrates' two criticisms indirectly question both existing practice and purported expert prescription. These criticisms also form part of Plato's more general challenge to Greek pederasty in its conventional, nonphilosophical forms, other parts of which we see in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.¹¹ In the opening to the *Lysis*, Plato especially highlights the worrisomeness of the conventional pederast's manner of initiating a relationship. Besides its threatened ineffectiveness at actually attracting a prospective beloved, this figure's flattering style has deleterious effects on both the lover (insofar as it implicates the lover in self-glorification) and the prospective beloved (insofar as it somehow drives the beloved wild).

2. EVALUATING SOCRATES' CRITICISMS OF HIPPOTHALES

How fair, however, is Socrates' first criticism—namely, that Hippothales' way of speaking to, and about, Lysis is either objectionably self-glorifying or recklessly foolish? Hippothales, as portrayed in the *Lysis*, is an imperfect and somewhat silly character. Socrates, moreover, calls attention to his worrisome ways of interacting with young Lysis. Yet—as an objector might argue—perhaps Hippothales deserves some sympathy. As Eugene Garver observes, “Ctesippus' mockery points to a poignant truth. Frequently, the deeper and more powerful our feelings, the less able we are to express them, the less well does discourse capture the emotions we experience. The more powerful the emotion, the more generic, banal, and clichéd my expression.”¹² Even if Hippothales' “ridiculous” speech elicits laughter, perhaps Socrates should give Hippothales a break.

Further—this objector continues—Socrates himself praises Lysis. Socrates congratulates Hippothales on identifying “someone so spirited and noble to love” as Lysis (204e9). Similarly, Socrates recounts Lysis' impressiveness: “He stood out among the boys and older youths, a garland on his head, and deserved to be called not only a beautiful boy but a well-bred young gentleman” (οὐ τὸ καλὸς εἶναι μόνον ἄξιος ἀκοῦσαι, ἀλλ' ὅτι καλὸς τε καὶ γαθός, 206e9–207a3). Perhaps Socrates is somehow ironic here, but that seems unlikely. Socrates finds *something* attractive in Lysis, and he is willing to articulate these features in speech. Even if Socrates does not praise Lysis to his face—this objector concludes—Socrates does not seem to risk undue self-glorification or reckless foolishness

8. Nightingale 1993, 113 n. 4 (citing Gentili).

9. Dover 1989, 57.

10. See the fragments from Philaenis in *POxy.* 2891, included and discussed in Tsantsanoglou 1973. Cf. the advice offered later by Ov. *Ars am.* 2.295–314.

11. Gonzalez (2003, 24) reads Hippothales “as representing the traditional conception of *erôs*,” which Socrates rejects.

12. Garver 2006, 128.

when he praises Lysis to Hippothales, Ctesippus, and the reader, in whose presence Socrates' own demonstration may well fail miserably. So, perhaps the same holds for Hippothales' own speech.

In response to such objections, one can admit that love often reduces lovers to clichés and banalities. Yet Hippothales' praise invites reasonable suspicion. First, on the point about Hippothales' self-glorification: Perhaps—one might think—Hippothales speaks the way he does simply because he has been taught that praising a prospective beloved is the sure way to win him over. And, indeed, Hippothales' speaking makes sense at least partly in these terms: Hippothales does, after all, wish to attract Lysis. But Hippothales' incessant praise for Lysis' incidental features (namely, his belonging to a noble family) elicits reasonable worries about Hippothales' priorities. The best explanation of Hippothales' incessantly praising Lysis for these incidental features, and thereby seeking to win Lysis over, is that Hippothales hopes to glorify himself. Hippothales praises Lysis for his lineage in the hope and expectation that a boy from such a lineage will love him in return. Through receiving the love of such a boy, Hippothales hopes to confirm his own sense of himself as worthy and admirable. Hippothales, moreover, hopes to attain such confirmation not only from Lysis himself, but from others, including his friends, from whom Hippothales expects honor for his having secured so fine a trophy.¹³ If Hippothales did love Lysis for his own sake, Hippothales might say something in praise of Lysis' essential features. But he does not.¹⁴

That Hippothales does not fully recognize these aims reveals a certain self-ignorance on his part. He seems confused about his erotic aims: he believes that his erotic yearnings are for Lysis, but his yearnings are ultimately autoerotic in a suspect sense. Here, the *Lysis*' prologue foreshadows an issue that Socrates discusses later with Menexenus and Lysis (218c–219d). Lysis, by serving as a tool for Hippothales' attaining honor, risks seeming a kind of “phantom” friend whom Hippothales pursues instrumentally for the sake of a “first friend” (πρῶτον φίλον)—in this case, either honor or Hippothales himself.¹⁵ Socrates' reply to Hippothales' protest that he does not seek to honor himself—“You only think you don't” (Ὅκ οἶεi γε, 205d9)—expresses Socrates' reasonable conviction that Hippothales is self-deluded, and hence, in need of self-awareness.¹⁶

Second, on the point about Hippothales' reckless foolishness: Socrates' worry is plausible. Hippothales does put himself at risk for ridicule if Lysis runs off with someone else after Hippothales has just laddled on the flattery. But Socrates' worry runs deeper. The

13. On Hippothales as motivated by honor from others, see Tessitore 1990, 130 n. 7. According to Nightingale (1993, 116), Socrates worries that Hippothales' style of conversing serves as a kind of “currency” to buy sexual favors from Lysis. Belfiore (2012, 100), however, denies that Plato portrays Hippothales as motivated by sexual pleasure. In response, while I agree with Nightingale that sexual pleasure could well be one of Hippothales' aims, Plato nevertheless highlights Hippothales' hope to confirm his own value as Hippothales' key motivation for pursuing Lysis.

14. One, of course, might praise a prospective beloved's essential features for the sake of self-glorification, too. Consider the lover who praises a prospective beloved's virtue with an eye to winning over the latter and thereby attaining a kind of reflected glory. My point here, however, is only that Hippothales' praising Lysis for his lineage shows no obvious concern for Lysis as an end. Instead, it shows concern for capturing Lysis as a means for securing honor.

15. A tantalizing range of plausible options for interpreting the “first friend”—reviewed by Obdrzalek (2013, 219–21)—is available. My point about foreshadowing need not imply my commitment to any particular view about what (or who) the first friend is at 218c–219d.

16. Tessitore (1990, 116) notes Hippothales' self-ignorance. According to Penner and Rowe (2005, 7 n. 16), “Socrates takes people not even to be aware of what their thought is until it has been laid out for them by the process of dialectic.”

young, beautiful, and well-bred Lysis (206e9–207a3) has, at best, the promise of becoming virtuous. But young Lysis can fail to fulfill such promise. If Lysis proves vicious as an adult, then Lysis will show up as unworthy of praise. Since it is unclear whether Lysis will fulfill his ethical promise, Hippothales risks appearing foolish should Lysis turn out badly. For this reason, Socrates believes that one wise in erotic matters is reticent to praise: “he fears how the future may turn out” (δεδιώς τὸ μέλλον ὅπῃ ἀποβήσεται, 206a2–3)—especially when the ethical prospects of a younger beloved are concerned.¹⁷

What, then, about Socrates’ second criticism, that Hippothales’ wooing is *self-defeating*? In the *Lysis*, Hippothales struggles to attract Lysis. The ineffectiveness of Hippothales’ speaking is evident from Hippothales’ hiding from Lysis, “afraid he might annoy him” (δεδιώς μὴ αὐτῷ ἀπεχθάνοιτο, 207b6–7).¹⁸ Further, Hippothales himself accepts Socrates’ self-defeatingness charge, and he actively seeks out Socrates’ guidance (206c). Therefore, it is also easy for *us* to accept Socrates’ charge.

Socrates’ criticism, however, invites further examination. If Hippothales is mistaken about how to converse with Lysis, then his errors are fairly common. The suitor, after all, is attuned and responsive to the beloved’s praiseworthy features if anyone is. Hence, a certain praise could well be attractive in *reassuring* a yearned-for beloved that the beloved really is special to the suitor. In fact, we should question the desire of a suitor who did not speak with (at least some) praise for, and to, a prospective beloved. Hence, one might object, Socrates’ charge is puzzling. Perhaps Hippothales’ praising Lysis is not the principal cause of Hippothales’ failure.

Socrates, however, can again defend his charge against Hippothales. Yes, some praise could, in principle, reassure a beloved. Yet Hippothales goes wrong in two ways. First, what Hippothales praises about Lysis—his familial lineage—is incidental to the boy. Hence, Hippothales’ praise is more likely to elicit Lysis’ suspicion than his reassurance. For strictly speaking, Lysis is not the proper object of Hippothales’ praise. Second, Hippothales praises Lysis with a worrisome single-mindedness. For Hippothales, Lysis possesses a kind of godlike completeness. Lysis, in Hippothales’ view, does seem to be a descendant of Zeus (205d1). And this kind of speaking, Socrates can say, is apt to inflame Lysis’ conceit. Such speaking, then, seems ill-suited for achieving Hippothales’ aim of eliciting Lysis’ desire for Hippothales. Instead, Hippothales’ speaking is such as to convince Lysis that Lysis does not need anyone else, least of all a pining and desperate suitor. Moreover, such speech reassures Lysis that he has no work to do to care for himself. Such speaking only makes it more likely that Lysis will turn out badly.¹⁹ Such an outcome, in turn, threatens only to confirm Hippothales’ foolishness in praising Lysis.²⁰

17. At *Euthyd.* 275a–b, Socrates shows similar fears about young Clinias, the well-born cousin of Alcibiades. Strikingly, a slightly older Ctesippus appears in that dialogue as one of Clinias’ lovers (274b–c). If Ctesippus, whom Socrates describes as a gentleman by nature, shows any shortcomings, it is his tendency toward a youthful hubris (*Euthyd.* 273a). Yet Ctesippus in the *Euthydemus*, unlike Hippothales in the *Lysis*, does not flatter Clinias. For this reason, perhaps, Socrates does not offer to demonstrate to Ctesippus how to converse with Clinias. On Ctesippus, see Nails 2002, 119–20.

18. Cf. Tessitore 1990, 129 n. 5.

19. Cf. Socrates’ worries about the deleterious effects of flattery on those with a philosophical nature: the targets of such flattery, brimming with hubris, end up lacking wisdom (*Resp.* 6.494b–d).

20. If, as I suggest, such flattery was common, should we expect Lysis to take it seriously? And if not, is such flattery really so dangerous? (I thank a referee for a question on this point.)

In response: (1) Young Lysis is, as his conversation with Socrates will reveal, a fairly sheltered youth. Lacking worldliness, Lysis seems particularly susceptible to flattery’s charms. (2) Even if Lysis did grasp that certain speech was flattery, that need not undermine such speech’s deleterious influence on Lysis’ soul. Flattering speech, by its

3. EXAMINING SOCRATES' LESSON, FACING PRELIMINARY WORRIES

On these grounds, then, Socrates can reasonably insist that Hippothales' style of conversing with Lysis invites correction. Agreeing, Hippothales asks Socrates for his insight "about what one should say or do so that his prospective boyfriend will like him" (206c2–3). In response, Socrates offers "to demonstrate how to carry on a conversation with" Lysis (σοι ἐπιδείξει αἱ χρῆ αὐτῷ διαλέγεσθαι, 206c5–6). Socrates' demonstration, as it turns out, consists in his engaging Lysis in a rigorous bout of elenchus.

Socrates begins by eliciting doubts in Lysis about his parents' love for him (207e–208e). Lysis assumes that his parents love him and want him to be as happy as possible. But Lysis admits that one cannot be happy if one is a slave and is prohibited from doing whatever one likes (207e, 208e). Alas, Lysis' parents do not let him do whatever he likes. They prevent him from riding his father's chariots. They leave his education in part to a slave, in part to schoolteachers—both of whom constrain Lysis' behavior. Therefore, Socrates leads Lysis to the conclusion that Lysis' parents "are raising [Lysis] in a perpetual condition of servitude" (208e5–6). Contrary to Lysis' initial assumption, it is *not* clear that his parents love him and want him to be as happy as possible.

Facing Lysis' response that he has not yet come of age (209a), Socrates points out that Lysis' parents let him read and play the lyre, even if he is not an adult. Thus, Lysis' age seems not to be decisive. So, on what underlying grounds do they restrict his freedom? Lysis shifts from age to knowledge: Lysis' parents let him do what he knows (209c). Socrates runs with this point: "[I]n those areas where we're really wiser, everybody—Greeks and barbarians, men and women—will trust us, and there we will act just as we choose, and nobody will want to get in our way" (210b1–4). Accepting that wisdom is a necessary condition for having the freedom that he desires, Lysis concludes that he must pursue wisdom—evidently in a relationship with Socrates. Thus, at the end of his display, Socrates is tempted to tell Hippothales, "This is how you should talk with your boyfriends, Hippothales, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do" (ταπεινοῦντα καὶ συστέλλοντα, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὥσπερ σὺ χαινοῦντα καὶ διαθρύπτοντα, 210e2–5). But Socrates holds back when he senses Hippothales' anguish over Socrates' conversation with Lysis (210e).

Despite having taken an argumentative bruising from Socrates, Lysis himself does not seem upset. On the contrary, he seems affectionately disposed toward Socrates (211a), who seems actually to have demonstrated a promising way of attracting a prospective beloved. Hippothales' pained response (210e5–6), however, invites us to consider the extent to which Socrates' way of conversing with Lysis really improves on Hippothales' own. Socrates rejects Hippothales' approach as (1) either self-glorifying or recklessly foolish and (2) self-defeating. But does Socrates escape these very criticisms?

Suppose that Socrates' elenctic demonstration succeeds in attracting Lysis. Does it thereby promise to be *self-glorifying*? An objector might worry that it does. For Socrates' demonstration displays, and calls attention to, the questioner's linguistic and argumentative dexterity. Yet Socrates can reasonably deny that his conversation with Lysis is

nature, threatens to induce a kind of epistemic akrasia. While flattery's recipient might know, latently, that the flattery is not to be taken seriously, the immediate effects of flattery—the pleasant head-swelling that such speech provides—is apt to override the recipient's exercising such knowledge. Over time, such repeated head-swelling, pleasant as it can be, risks having the results that Socrates predicts.

self-glorifying in any way like Hippothales'. Yes, Socrates shows off his dialectical skills to Hippothales; but Socrates' aim in this performance is primarily educative, not self-eulogizing. Socrates aims, after all, to satisfy Hippothales' wish that he *demonstrate* how to speak to a prospective beloved. Moreover, Socrates' conversational style is fundamentally interrogative and zetetic, not declarative. Socrates does acknowledge Lysis' budding beauty and good upbringing. Yet Socrates, unlike Hippothales, avoids making strong claims about Lysis that could convincingly constitute a victory ode before the fact. So, Socrates does not seek to glorify himself through winning over someone whom he has praised. Similarly, if Socrates' conversation with Lysis fails to attract Lysis, it will avoid highlighting Socrates as *recklessly foolish*. For Socrates avoids making bold claims about Lysis' actual goodness—claims that invite ridicule should Lysis turn his attention to some other lover.

Yet an objector might think that Socrates invites the reckless foolishness charge for other reasons, which unexpectedly mirror Socrates' grounds for criticizing Hippothales. If Lysis turns out badly—if Lysis becomes vicious—then Socrates risks seeming ridiculous or worse. Consider the *Lysis*' dramatic setting: Socrates mixes with very young boys in a wrestling school. In doing so, he invites suspicions that he corrupts the young—suspicions that haunt him later during his trial.²¹ After all, at least some of those whom Socrates attracted through conversation, most notably Alcibiades, *did* turn out badly. But Socrates ultimately avoids this worry as well. For Socrates takes active steps to make Lysis better, namely, by conversing with him philosophically and eliciting a certain self-reflectiveness in him. To be sure, in doing so, Socrates begins to loosen Lysis from his bondage to familial authority.²² Such loosening, in turn, could unintentionally result in Lysis' turning out especially badly (for instance, if Lysis, released from parental rule, were to throw off all behavioral constraints). But Socrates does not, in practice, fully untie Lysis from his family. Socrates stirs a desire in Lysis to question; yet Socrates' initial steps to loosen Lysis' bonds do not flatter Lysis by falsely attributing to him an attained capacity for self-direction. On the contrary, Socrates highlights Lysis' lack of wisdom, the virtue that Socrates identifies as the condition of fitness for freedom (210a–b). While Socrates leads Lysis (at 209c–d) to question his parents' love for him—a love that Lysis would otherwise take for granted—Socrates takes care not to shatter Lysis' connection to his parents. At any rate, Socrates does not prescribe self-indulgence; and given Socrates' other precautions, were Lysis ultimately to turn out badly, Lysis himself would play a blameworthy role, by failing to show proper care for himself.²³

Does Socrates' way of conversing with Lysis, however, promise to be self-defeating? This worry is more pressing, for Socrates' approach initially seems counterintuitive. Socrates considers, but refrains from, telling Hippothales that a suitor should cut down a potential beloved and put him in his place. As Howard J. Curzer writes, "Philosophers love this ungiven advice, perhaps because it validates the way we philosophers often behave. But a moment's unblinkered consideration reveals this to be horrible wooing advice. It is

21. Zuckert 2009, 514–15.

22. On the name Lysis, its sense of "releasing," and its pertinence to the dialogue's dramatic elements, see Bolotin 1979, 66.

23. Given Hippothales' misunderstandings at 222a–b, i.e., at the end of the *Lysis*, Socrates evidently fails to get Hippothales, at least, to think about his relationship with Lysis in a new way. But Hippothales' misunderstandings are comical, and Hippothales seems responsible for his confusion, not Socrates, who has done the best he can. On the need to show care for one's soul, see, e.g., *Alc.* 132b–c; *Ap.* 29e, 30a–b, 31b, 36c; *Resp.* 9.589b; *Phd.* 107c, 118a8.

hard to imagine a less effective, more obnoxious strategy.²⁴ Elenctically refuting a prospective beloved might seem singularly unpromising for sparking a beloved's affections. At best, it might seem to lure only masochists.²⁵ So, is the erotic Socrates really a skilled hunter?²⁶ Or is Socrates' evident success in getting Lysis to approach him in a boyfriend-like and friendly way (παυδικῶς καὶ φιλικῶς, 211a3) merely a Platonic literary trick? Does Socrates succeed in reaching Lysis, in other words, simply because Plato *has written* the *Lysis* that way?

One initial response to this self-defeatingness worry about Socrates' demonstration grants that Socrates' *modus operandi* can alienate. But this response denies that Socrates is, strictly speaking, concerned to show Hippothales how to *attract* a potential beloved. While Socrates offers to show Hippothales how he should converse (χρη̄ αὐτῷ διαλέγεσθαι) with a prospective beloved, Socrates need not share Hippothales' aims.²⁷ Perhaps, then, Socrates thinks that one *should* converse elenctically with a potential beloved simply for such conversation's benefits for the beloved. Cutting down and putting a potential beloved in his place is how one educates him. So, on this reading, Socrates shows Hippothales *how to converse* with a potential beloved just by showing Hippothales *how to educate* a potential beloved, namely, simply by engaging in elenctic questioning with Lysis. But perhaps—claims this response—Socrates aims not to attract Lysis, after all.

In reply, I certainly grant that Socrates seeks to educate Lysis by speaking with him. Further, Socrates, whose motivations differ from Hippothales', need not accept Hippothales' own preconceptions about the character of a desirable *philia*-relationship. Hippothales presumably hopes to initiate a fairly conventional pederastic relationship with Lysis, whereas Socrates hopes to initiate a *philia*-relationship ordered toward the pursuit of wisdom. Yet I see no reason to deny that Socrates intends to meet Hippothales on his own ground.²⁸ The actual results of Socrates' demonstration—Lysis' burgeoning attraction to Socrates—suggest that Socrates *does* intentionally aim to show Hippothales how to attract Lysis.

So, then, is cutting down a potential boyfriend and putting him in his place terrible advice? In response, Socrates' unspoken advice, which encapsulates his approach to conversing with a prospective beloved, does not commit Socrates to being combative, bizarre, and unpleasant. On the contrary, Socrates succeeds in cutting down and putting Lysis in his place gracefully, without destroying him. Consider Lysis' friendly response to having undergone Socrates' demonstration: "You've got me there, Socrates!" (210d7–8). Such a response is playful.²⁹ It shows a boy engaged in, and attracted to, what seems like a bit of flirting—albeit a kind of philosophical flirting with a Socratic edge to it.

24. Curzer 2014, 355.

25. One might think that it would be sensible for anyone to be attracted by the prospect of greater understanding and knowledge. Hence, one might find Lysis' attraction to Socrates fairly unmythical. (I thank a referee for this thought.)

I concur that those goods would be desirable, and that the prospect of attaining them could spark some of Lysis' attraction to Socrates. Yet if Lysis can attain these goods only at the cost of personal humiliation (which is what being cut down and put in one's place might seem to entail), it is less clear that these goods suffice to explain Lysis' attraction. Hence, the text does raise a real puzzle about Lysis' motivation.

26. Cf. Socrates' criticism of Hippothales at *Lysis* 206a with Socrates' distinctly Socratic portrait of *erōs* as a hunter at *Symp.* 203d.

27. See Bolotin 1979, 84, contrasting *Lysis* 206c5–6 and 205a1–2 with 206a2–3. See also Nichols 2006, 4.

28. According to Gonzalez (2003, 25), Socrates' "conversation with the beautiful Lysis explicitly assumes the form of a seduction, intended to instruct Hippothales on the rules of the art."

29. I agree with Rider (2013, 61) that this response "fits a boy who has been beaten in an enjoyable game, not one who has been told off or humiliated by an elder." For this reason, I also deny any suggestion that Socrates is

Thus, when Socrates holds back from explicitly advising Hippothales to cut down and put his prospective beloved in his place, Socrates need not think that such advice would actually be bad. Instead, Socrates holds back for two other reasons. First, as Socrates suggests, he shows concern not to rub salt in Hippothales' wounds, given Hippothales' apparent distress (210e). Second, such advice—when explicitly stated—is apt to be misunderstood, especially by someone like Hippothales, who, at this point, shows little sign that he could follow this advice in just the sense Socrates intends it.

4. UNDERSTANDING SOCRATES' LESSON, ADDRESSING FURTHER WORRIES

Socrates, then, can defend his demonstration of how to converse with a prospective beloved against obvious worries. Yet Socrates' demonstration generates other questions. Why, exactly, should Socrates' cutting Lysis down to size and putting him in his place elicit Lysis' attraction to Socrates? Does Plato suggest any deeper explanation for why Socrates' lesson should succeed? In this section, I argue, Lysis' attraction to Socrates is both comprehensible and psychologically realistic.

First, Socrates' demonstration shows skill in revealing incompleteness in, and to, Lysis. Socrates implicitly assumes a certain view about how desire emerges. This is the view that X 's desire for some object Y depends on X 's (awareness of X 's) lack and need (for Y). Socrates articulates this view of desire and its conditions more fully in the *Symposium*, in which Socrates explains to Agathon that *erôs* is always a love of something lacked, but needed (200a–e). But this view about desire's conditions pervades the *Lysis*. (1) In conversation with Socrates, Lysis agrees that whoever is self-sufficient, *qua* self-sufficient, is in need of nothing (215a). (2) While conversing with Lysis and Menexenus, Socrates suggests that desire arises on the condition that one stands in between perfect goodness and perfect badness, and that a certain badness (or deficiency) is present that sparks one to desire the good (217a–218c). (3) Finally, Menexenus later agrees with Socrates that one desires that in which one is deficient (*ἐνδεεῖς*, 221d–222a).³⁰

For his part, Lysis begins the dialogue as demure and passive, as an object of Hippothales' desire, not as a needy desirer. Lysis initially shows up, then, as relatively complete and self-contained. True, Lysis shows glimmers of incompleteness at the palaestra: Socrates reports that Lysis turns frequently to consider what Socrates, Ctesippus, and Hippothales are discussing, which shows an incipient curiosity—a desire to know—on Lysis' part. Yet Lysis lacks at least sufficient yearning to initiate conversation with the group (207a–b).³¹ Through questioning Lysis, however, Socrates brings to light Lysis' incompleteness. Through his exchange with Socrates, and in the ways I outlined in the previous section, Lysis grasps something of his subordination within the household under his parents' authority (207e–209a). His parents' restrictions may well be reasonable; but they are so only for someone who has not yet attained a certain wisdom and who thereby

objectionably manipulating Lysis. Their interaction occurs at the level of flirtation, not psychological abuse. Obdrzalek (2013, 212) raises, but does not endorse, this worry.

30. On incompleteness as a condition of desire in the *Lysis*, see Versenyi 1975, 188–89 and Belfiore 2012, 105. Bolotin (1979, 83–84, 102–3) attributes Lysis' sense of completeness to his parents' providing for many of his needs. Thus, in his conversation with Lysis, Socrates must awaken Lysis to the needs that his parents do not fulfill. Accordingly, Socrates raises doubts about the extent to which Lysis' parents love him.

31. As Bolotin (1979, 79) notes. Cf. Nussbaum 1986, 188 on depictions of the ideal *erômenos* as complete and self-sufficient.

remains incomplete. Further, Lysis accepts the thought that gaining wisdom promises to free him from this subordination (209b–210b). Finally, Lysis comes to accept that his being lovable depends on his gaining a wisdom that he lacks (210d). By revealing Lysis' incompleteness, Socrates elicits desire in Lysis, at least for wisdom. Hippothales' style of conversing with Lysis, by contrast, proves ineffective. Instead, by convincing Lysis of his completeness—by swelling Lysis' head—it precludes Lysis from experiencing any sense of lack, and so, any desire, at all.³²

Socrates' demonstration to Hippothales in the *Lysis* invites useful comparison with Socrates' encounter with Alcibiades in the dialogue of the same name, where Socrates elicits attraction in a similar way. In that dialogue's opening line, Socrates explicitly identifies himself as a lover of Alcibiades (103a). For his part, Alcibiades seems fully confident in his abilities and appears altogether complete. Gradually, however, Socrates brings to light Alcibiades' ignorance and undermines his complacent understanding of himself as ready to enter politics. Through elenctic conversation, Socrates brings to light Alcibiades' need for wisdom and self-knowledge. In so doing, he sparks desire for wisdom in Alcibiades. Thus, at the end of the conversation (135d–e), Socrates and Alcibiades reverse their respective positions as lover and beloved. Alcibiades also speaks to this reversal (*Symp.* 222b).³³

To generate desire, revealing incompleteness is essential. But to generate desire in another for participating in an erotically tinged *philia*-relationship with oneself—to attract someone—Socrates suggests, one must demonstrate at least a kind of completeness in turn. That is, one must show oneself capable of helping the beloved to overcome and satisfy the incompleteness that one initially reveals. A second key aspect of Socrates' demonstration, then, is its capacity to display resourcefulness. Socrates explicitly articulates such a view about the causes of attraction in his initial conversation with Lysis: no one will “love us as a friend in those areas in which we are good for nothing” (210c5–6). To be useful, and thus capable of fulfilling the needs of others, requires wisdom. Hence, to be lovable, Socrates suggests, requires that one possess wisdom (210c–d). Socrates directs this point as much at young Lysis as at Socrates' student, Hippothales.

By showing resourcefulness—a kind of qualified wisdom in questioning and at bringing incompleteness to light—Socrates reveals what Diotima identifies as the philosopher's paternal lineage, one manifest in such traits as hunting skill and the capacity to weave snares (*Symp.* 203d).³⁴ Yes, Socrates denies that he fully possesses the wisdom for which Socrates ignites a desire in Lysis. The *Lysis*' search for an account of “the friend” ends in *aporia*. Still, Socrates' skillful elenctic discussion with Lysis shows that Socrates possesses a certain wherewithal for attaining such wisdom, and for helping Lysis to attain the freedom Lysis desires. Thus, Socrates' generating attraction in Lysis is no

32. Contrary to one potential worry, revealing incompleteness in a beloved need not be an exercise in exploitation. On the contrary, it can be a way of showing care for one's prospective beloved. When done in a kind way, such challenge can show the beloved that the lover takes the beloved seriously, that the lover really does care for the beloved, and that the lover is concerned enough about the beloved's well-being to question the beloved's self-limiting beliefs.

33. On the similarity between Socrates' approaches to Lysis and Alcibiades, cf. Gordon 2012, 154 n. 11 and Belfiore 2012, 105. For further discussion of Socrates' approach to Lysis (and the ways in which Socrates brings Lysis' incompleteness to light), see Scott 2000, chap. 2 and Belfiore 2012, 86.

34. In displaying such traits, the Socrates of the *Symposium* becomes attractive in his own right. Consider Socrates' beautified appearance at *Symp.* 174a, as well as the desire that Apollodorus, Aristodemus, Agathon, and Alcibiades have for him. I examine Apollodorus' attraction to Socrates in Walker 2016.

mere accident. On the contrary, Socrates' resourcefulness stands to be, in part, a proper cause of such affection.

Nevertheless, a new worry arises: If Socrates' subsequent conversation with Lysis and Menexenus ultimately fails to answer the question of what a friend is, does Socrates possess *reliable* resources to steer Lysis toward wisdom? In the dialogue's conclusion, Socrates counts himself, along with his interlocutors, as ridiculous (*καταγέλαστοι*, 223b4–5), the same charge that he initially raises against Hippothales. Moreover, the lines of reasoning that lead to paradoxes in Socrates' initial exchanges with Lysis rely on dubious premises. It seems questionable, for instance, that one's happiness consists in one's satisfying whatever occurrent desires one has (208e4–5).

In response, however, Socrates need only show a certain relative resourcefulness to attract Lysis. He need not be a fully complete and wise god. Socrates shows that he knows what kind of questions to ask if he and Lysis are to make any progress toward wisdom. Although the chain of reasoning by which Socrates leads Lysis to the conclusion that he lacks wisdom might—in the abstract—seem dubious, Socrates does not trick Lysis. Socrates works within his interlocutor's perspective; and Socrates surely leads his interlocutors. Yet it is up to the interlocutor to assent or refuse assent to Socrates' propositions.³⁵ So, although the conversation between Socrates and Lysis takes some questionable turns, it does so only because Lysis answers in certain ways rather than others. Socrates leaves it to his interlocutors to think through the dead ends of their dialectical exchanges and discern the truth on their own. Such a method—leading his interlocutors to worrisome conclusions and letting his interlocutors reflect on how they got there—promises to be more effective in developing capacities for independent, self-directed thinking in his conversation partners than simply spoon-feeding them the right answers.

In addition to revealing incompleteness in Lysis and to displaying Socrates' resourcefulness in addressing it, Socrates' demonstration shows *the importance of attending to particular people*, and of staying attuned to their characters. Socrates shows this tendency, again, in his special ability to identify lovers and beloveds (204b–c). Socrates also indicates this importance, in part, simply by offering to demonstrate to Hippothales how to speak with Lysis. By admitting that it is “not easy to say” (*οὐ ῥάδιον . . . εἰπεῖν*) how Hippothales should best go about endearing Lysis to him (206c4), Socrates indicates the limitations of articulable general *logoi*. Recall that Ctesippus complains that Hippothales was “unable to say anything more original” to Lysis “than any child could say” (*ἴδιον μὲν μηδὲν ἔχειν λέγειν ὃ οὐχὶ κἂν πᾶς εἴποι*, 205b8–c1). Hippothales speaks in general, impersonal terms when careful attention and attunement to Lysis' character are called for. Socrates' demonstration, by contrast, attends to Lysis in his particularity. First, Socrates is attuned to Lysis' love of eristics (suggested at 207b–c), an attunement that informs how Socrates approaches Lysis.³⁶ Second, Socrates discerns Lysis' sheltered existence within his household, as Socrates' line of questioning reveals. He knows just which questions to ask to stir discomfort, and to generate desire for freedom, in Lysis.³⁷ If Hippothales is ever to attract a prospective beloved, he should follow suit. The speaker—in

35. See Penner and Rowe 2005, 31–32; Rider 2013, 58; and Socrates' exchange with Alcibiades at *Alc.* 112d–113b.

36. As Rider (2013, 44, 61) emphasizes.

37. Cf. Scott 2000, 63–69. As Blank (1993, 436) observes, “The capacity of Socrates to perceive and heal his companions' wounded spirits, as well as his ability to size up and take advantage of their emotions and weaknesses is an essential characteristic of Socratic dialectic.”

conversing with both a prospective beloved and with others—should know the souls of those whom he intends to persuade (*Phdr.* 271c–d).

5. A FINAL WORRY ABOUT SOCRATES' LESSON

Socrates' criticisms of Hippothales, I have argued, are well founded. Socrates' own aims in conversing with Lysis, again, need not be identical to Hippothales': the sort of *philia*-relationship that Socrates aims to establish with Lysis differs in kind from the sort Hippothales desires. Nevertheless, given plausible psychological assumptions, Socrates' approach to conversing with Lysis promises to be effective at attracting Lysis. Further, I have shown, Socrates can respond to the main worries that his demonstration invites. In closing, however, I consider whether Socrates' way of conversing with Lysis is prone to self-defeat in a different way.

Perhaps the skillful Socratic suitor elicits awareness of incompleteness in others. Perhaps he is resourceful in eliciting some kind of attraction in a prospective beloved. And perhaps he does so with careful attunement to the prospective beloved's particular character and circumstances. Yet if the beloved comes to desire the suitor for the sake of the latter's instrumental benefits—for the suitor's resourcefulness in fulfilling particular needs in the beloved that the suitor has brought to the beloved's awareness—it is unclear that the beloved can ever be stably attracted *to the suitor* in the emergent relationship. The yearned-for beloved perhaps can come reciprocally to love the suitor, but perhaps only for the sake of the benefits that such resourcefulness makes possible, namely, the beloved's own greater wisdom and happiness. Hence, the prospective beloved would ultimately seem to love *those benefits*, not the suitor. Socrates' demonstration to Hippothales, it might seem, cannot reliably teach Hippothales how to secure what Hippothales desires at 206c: Lysis' reciprocated affection *for Hippothales*. Again, a Socratic suitor need not share Hippothales' aims of possessing a beloved for the sake of confirming his self-worth. Yet Socrates, by all appearances, does aim to elicit Lysis' desire for a philosophical friendship with Socrates himself (even if such friendship be nonexclusive). So, it would be peculiar if Socrates' approach fails to elicit any desire in Lysis for Socrates.

This worry again touches on the problem of our friendship with the "first friend" whom, or which, Socrates suggests that those who are neither bad nor good ultimately love unqualifiedly for its own sake. As discussed, our love for the first friend threatens to reveal our other friendships as (merely instrumental) "phantom" friendships (218d–220d). The *Lysis*' discussion of the first friend raise difficult issues that I cannot explore here—among them, exactly who or what Socrates thinks the first friend *is*. Yet one can articulate a response to this final worry.

The philosophical relationship into which Socrates aims to attract Lysis pursues ends distinct from Socrates himself—namely, Lysis' own wisdom and happiness. To that extent, Socrates *qua* suitor is not the unqualifiedly final object of Lysis' desire. On the one hand, this is a healthy and good-making feature of Socrates' approach: Socrates, unlike Hippothales, seeks to promote Lysis' ethical development, rather than simply to satisfy his own desires for recognition. On the other hand, this feature of Socrates' approach need not render it self-effacing. For a beloved wooed into such a relationship need not focus exclusively on the relationship's exterior, ultimate end. Hence, the suitor need not be thoroughly sidelined as an object of desire for his or her own sake. On the contrary, an

end can be loved both for its own sake and for the sake of other ends. And this point presumably holds for suitors *qua* ends as well. So, should Socrates succeed in attracting Lysis into a close relationship for the sake of wisdom, Socrates would stand subordinate to wisdom as an end. But Socrates, for all that, can still be an end of desire lovable for his own sake. He need not be merely instrumentally desirable for wisdom.

How so? First, Socrates' resourcefulness stands to benefit Lysis reliably. Socrates does not provide Lysis with conditional benefits (such as money, social connections, or other external goods), which are apt to harm Lysis when misused. Instead, Socrates aims at helping Lysis to attain wisdom, which holds reasonable claim to be an unconditional good (*Euthyd.* 280a–281c; *Meno* 87e–89a). Second, the resourceful lover is in a position, over time, to be reciprocally loved for his own sake *in recognition of* those very personal characteristics—those virtues—that enable him to benefit others. So, even if the beloved begins to reciprocate the suitor's love on an instrumental basis—that is, for the sake of the wisdom that the suitor can assist the suited to attain—the basis of the beloved's reciprocated love need not remain instrumental.³⁸

To understand how a prospective beloved's initially instrumental attraction to the Socratic suitor is apt to transform into intrinsic concern, consider precisely how Socrates reveals incompleteness, displays resourcefulness, and attends to the particularities of his interlocutors. In his exchange with Lysis, Socrates displays wit, care, concern, intelligence, a spirit of courageous nonconformity, and a willingness to think for oneself. Such features of Socrates enable him to teach his interlocutors, and thus conduce to his interlocutors' attaining some measure of wisdom and happiness. Yet these features of Socrates are not merely instrumentally valuable, wisdom- and happiness-conducive qualities. Instead, they are choiceworthy for themselves, and are such as to stir attention to Socrates for his own sake, as an end of desire. They exemplify a certain virtue, or beauty, of Socrates' soul—a beauty that both reveals Socrates *qua* Socrates (that is, Socrates in his relative completeness) and elicits desire for Socrates as such. Such features make Socrates more attractive, for his own sake, than complacent, dull, pining types like Hippothales. In his questioning, then, Socrates reveals yet another way that Hippothales can elicit attraction in a prospective beloved: by cultivating some of the virtues—some of the beauty of soul—that Socrates displays in his demonstration. Being attractive in this fashion is perhaps easier to show than to describe.³⁹

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38. For a suggestion to this effect, see Kosman 1976, 63–64.

39. An early version of this paper was presented at the International Plato Society Regional Conference on "Plato and Rhetoric" at Keio University. My thanks to my audiences on that occasion, and to Noburu Notomi, Yuji Kurihara, Yahei Kanayama, and Suzanne Obdrzalek. I also acknowledge the helpful comments of anonymous referees, as well as the Yale-NUS College Small Research Grant (IG15-SR102, funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education Tier 1 Academic Research Fund) that supported my work.

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Abstract

In the opening of Plato's *Lysis*, Socrates criticizes the love-besotted Hippothales' way of speaking to, and about, Hippothales' yearned-for Lysis. Socrates subsequently proceeds to demonstrate (*ἐπιδειξάτω*) how Hippothales should converse with Lysis (206c5–6). But how should we assess Socrates' criticisms of, and demonstration to, Hippothales? Are they defensible by Socrates' own standards, as well as independent criteria? In this note, I first articulate and assess Socrates' criticisms of Hippothales. Second, I identify, examine, and respond to puzzles to which Socrates' demonstration to Hippothales gives rise.