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THE ENACTMENT OF MODERATION IN PLATO'S *CHARMIDES*[1]

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Abstract: Plato's dialogues are as much literary dramas as philosophical inquiries. In light of the scope and development of *σωφροσύνη* and the carefully crafted historical resonances of the dialogue's dramatic date and cast of characters, it is argued here that *σωφροσύνη* is a foundational virtue, best understood as moderation, moderating one's behavior, rather than on a par with other virtues. The *Charmides* is non-dogmatic, rather than skeptical or aporetic, and essentially political rather than ethical or epistemological, as often assumed. Rather than asserting any simple, propositional account of moderation, it enacts a complex moral and political view of moderation that unifies many strands of the term's meanings in Greek through the persons and words of its characters and operating as much through the reader's, imagination, and emotions as through reason and purely logical argument.

Keywords: Plato, *Charmides*, Charmides, Critias, moderation, temperance, enactment, literature, drama

Several kinds of problems confront the interpreter of the *Charmides*. Although its central topic is unmistakably *σωφροσύνη*,[2] no consensus exists among interpreters about what Plato's view of it is or even about the proper translation of the Greek into a modern vernacular language. In English, choices have ranged among temperance, self-control, moderation, and sound-mindedness. Looking at the dialogue more broadly, further problems have arisen about the dubiousness of many arguments, the explicit rejection here of precisely the phrase used to define justice in the *Republic*, other puzzling, paradoxical critiques of familiar

[1] The paper is clearer, better argued and written, thanks to very helpful critical comments from different perspectives by Debra Nails, Holger Thesleff, Laurel Berger, and Mateo Duque, for which I am grateful. The errors that remain are, of course, my own.

[2] In what follows I will use the noun *σωφροσύνη* as shorthand for the complex of meanings that center on this noun, the verb *σωφρονεῖν*, and the adjective *σώφρων* for the activity, the quality or characteristic, and the person who possesses it. Throughout I will use Sprague's translation regularly changing 'temperance' to 'moderation' and 'definition' to 'account,' and making other minor alterations. Translations of other dialogues, unless indicated, are my own.

Socratic ideas, the conceptual complexity and richness of the dialogue's treatment of reflexivity in general and knowledge of knowledge in particular, and the penultimate statement that moderation is useless.[3]

These problems exemplify general problems about interpreting Plato's dialogues. Is the *Charmides* Socratic or Platonic, dogmatic, skeptical, or aporetic? Is it early, middle, or late? Is it primarily about the ethical notion of moderation or perhaps about psychology (reflexivity) or epistemology (knowledge of knowledge)? Is Socrates expressing Plato's own views and arguments? These problems arise, it is important to realize, because the dialogues *are* dialogues, *not* the treatises, tractates, commentaries, essays, summations, critiques, and meditations that are the usual text-forms employed by philosophers, in which the author speaks directly to the reader, explicitly communicating the problems under consideration, the conclusions the author has come to, and the arguments for those conclusions. The problems arise, that is, from the attempt to discern Plato's philosophic views from dialogues in which he never speaks directly, no explicit answer is usually given, and his main character seems to assert inconsistent or contradictory things and to make dubious arguments.[4] For these reasons, in the past 30 – 40 years, discussions have increasingly attended to the literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogues along with the logical and argumentative ones.[5] But whereas principles for the analysis and criticism of arguments are clear and widely shared, reasonable[6] and replicable principles justifying interpretations that emphasize literary and dramatic elements lack comparable clarity and consensus. A different kind of text requires different interpretive principles, responsive to the dialogues' literary and dramatic elements as well as those for dealing with their logic and arguments.

The paper begins by summarizing (1) interpretive principles appropriate to the dialogues' unique character, then (2) introduces essential verbal and historical contexts before (3) applying the principles and contexts to the *Charmides*, and finally (4) summarizing the solutions to the dialogue's interpretive problems which this approach indicates.

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[3] Ben 1985, 2 calls it "deliberately perplexing, especially when it comes to the subject of knowledge."

[4] Berger 1987.

[5] For an extended treatment of the secondary literature, see Press 1996 and more recently Press 2015 and 2018.

[6] I.e., for which rational justification can be given, that is plausible and rationally persuasive, even if not demonstrative.

1. Principles

I propose the following principles as starting points for a more focused discussion as both reasonable and replicable, though they cannot be defended here other than by their intrinsic plausibility and actual ability to explain more of what happens in the *Charmides* and to explain it less arbitrarily than is possible on the customary argument-analysis approach.[7] The most general basic principles for interpreting individual dialogues are contextualism, holism, and organicism,[8] which have been increasingly adopted by Plato interpreters. Contextualism means interpreting the text in light of its original language, the beliefs, values, literature, science, philosophy, and political history of its own time. Holism means looking at the dialogues as wholes, rather than piecemeal, as is often done, selecting a section or an argument for close analysis. Organicism means, recognizing that the dialogue as a whole is an organic unity in which parts have specific functions to perform; so, an essential aspect of understanding any bit or part is grasping its role in the philosophic and literary arc of the whole dialogue.

Another general interpretive principle is that the dialogues serve multiple functions besides the usual philosophic function of communicating conclusions and arguments. Primary among these additional functions is the presentation of a new *paideia* or cultural formation which is neither the traditional aristocratic individual guidance nor the 'modern' and less class-restricted instruction on offer by some sophists,[9] but which includes elements of each and transcends their opposition. Like the former, it is a multi-faceted *guiding* rather than a dogmatic propounding, but like the latter, it is highly rationalistic and involves verbal and conceptual dexterity and complexity. Plato's philosophic enterprise is more like the poets' and sophists' (in pursuit of *paideia* and cultural transformation) than like Aristotle's and that of later philosophers. His goal is neither just solving philosophic problems nor analysis of concepts for their own sake, as was philosophy's aim for much of the last century. Although Plato did not write for a reading public,[10] it is reasonable to surmise that he is trying to reform the political and intellectual culture of his fellow citizens and of Athens from the dialogues'

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[7] As premises, I take it, with a good deal of recent Plato scholarship, that there is no determinable compositional order of individual dialogues (Thesleff 1982, Nails 1995: ch. 4-7, Cooper 1997: xii-xviii), no well-grounded division into three "periods" (though a "late group" seems to be supported by the evidence), and therefore no developmental story about Plato's philosophic doctrines can be used to interpret any given dialogue or anything said in a given dialogue.

[8] See Press 1993. Contextualism and holism are well stated by Hazebroucq 1997, 9-15. Organicism can be traced back to *Phdr* 264c and was articulated powerfully by Schleiermacher 1973, 14. On the history of organic unity in literature, see Trivigno 2009.

[9] Marrou 1948.

[10] Thesleff 2002.

repeated criticism of thought-leaders and prevalent ideas of its time and their consistent presentation of a leading character who represents and articulates both criticism and an alternative.[11] In the dialogues, this takes place through criticism of traditional moral ideas, but also through the reinterpretation of traditional stories, and the replacement of traditional cultural heroes such as Achilles and Odysseus with a new hero, The Philosopher.

The Philosopher's project (and, one can imagine, Plato's) is the moral improvement of individuals and the political improvement of the state, in part through reinterpretation and replacement of traditionally valued practices (e.g., poetry, rhetoric, and politics) with a new, agonistically defined practice called *philosophia*.[12] Socrates is not Plato's mouthpiece;[13] he is Plato's vision of The Philosopher and what philosophy is. As a richly drawn dramatic character, he attracts our adherence imaginatively and emotionally as well as through the coherence of his ideas.[14] Observable patterns and structures in his words and deeds in contrast with those of other characters both affect us and enable us to recognize guiding philosophic commitments and orientations. His attractiveness derives from his humility, never-failing politeness and respect, combination of playfulness and humor with constant moral seriousness,[15] and from his irony, iconoclasm, idealism, and provocativeness.[16]

The machinery of improving his interlocutors is the conversational activity of Plato's Socrates. Key words for his practice are discuss (*διαλέγεσθαι*), examine (*ἐξετάζειν*), investigate (*σκοπεῖν*), and cross-examine or refute (*ἐλέγχειν*).[17] As has long been recognized, this involves question and answer conversation, not lecture or uninterrupted exposition, proceeds only with the interlocutor's agreement at each step, is critical rather than pedantically instructive, and individual rather than universal. Less generally acknowledged, the dialogues remain intellectually open,[18] not closed, make use of attitude-fitting, Socratic humility (including recognition of one's ignorance), humor, self-deprecation, and other tac-

[11] Jaeger 1939. Vol 2:84-86.

[12] Nightingale 1995.

[13] See Nails, Thesleff, Press, Ostenfeld, and Mulhern in Press, ed. 2000.

[14] A coherence that appears over and above (and sometimes despite) the details of actual arguments made.

[15] The combination of play and seriousness is a regular feature of Plato's dialogues, indirectly acknowledged at *Smp* 223d and echoed, surprisingly, by Plotinus, *Enneads* III 8,1, esp. lines 8-12.

[16] On Socratic and Platonic provocation, see Press 2012.

[17] Tarrant 2000 and 2002 show that, contrary to the Vlastosian assumption, *ἔλεγχος* is *not* the ordinary term for Socrates' interactions with his interlocutors.

[18] Nails 1995, 218.

tics to gain, maintain, and re-establish interlocutors' involvement. More controversially, Socrates uses fallacious arguments to guide interlocutors toward greater critical awareness.[19]

The dialogues as texts are *dialogical* both in a general sense, that argument and drama work together,[20] and in the more specific way, following Bakhtin, that Plato's characters express diverse worldviews that are not unified by the author into an overall judgment or interpretation.[21] But what is needed at this point is much greater clarity and specificity about *how* the arguments and drama work together to produce a joint outcome.

Although it is essential, interpreters have difficulty keeping the dialogues' two operational interpretive levels distinct: what Socrates accomplishes with his interlocutors *in* them and what Plato accomplishes with readers *through* that. The dialogues thus communicate with us only indirectly, through the drama and its use of character, action, irony, paradox, and semantic inversion.[22] Overall, Socrates guides his interlocutors *in* them while Plato uses all of that to guide readers. He does not *teach* us in the usual sense of the word[23] or in the way philosophic texts usually do, directly and by assertion.

The dialogues are what I call *non-dogmatic*. They are not dogmatic, since Plato does not make positive assertions in them, and most reach no definite propositional conclusion. Neither are they skeptical, explicitly denying positive assertions; nor are they aporetic in their effect on us; although both explicit denials and explicit assertions of *ἀπορία*[24] are often used tactically. Though Socrates and his interlocutors may explicitly end in doubt about the correct account, readers

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[19] Sprague 1962 shows that Plato knew some fallacious arguments were fallacious. Whether Socrates *in* the dialogues is presented as knowing that they are fallacious is a different and more complicated question. Long before recent discussions, Kierkegaard recognized in Plato the strategy to "deceive people into the truth," which is, in fact, how *all* drama works. Kierkegaard 1962, 7. Cf. Lorentzen 2001, 44.

[20] Schmid 1997, xiii defines it, minimally but vaguely, as "the relation of drama and argument."

[21] Bakhtin 1981. The core notions of heteroglossia and polyphony are summarized by Martin Irvine, *Bakhtin: Main Theories* http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Bakhtin-MainTheory.html.

[22] Significant terms are used by different characters in different senses: demotic (traditional and conventional) as opposed to rational and philosophic. The former is familiar and believed to be true, while the latter is strange and paradoxical, but true, as we are guided to see. Examples include 'philosophy' and 'wisdom,' along with central terms discussed in many dialogues.

[23] Socrates denies being a teacher in the usual sense at *Ap* 33a and denies more specifically the possibility of putting of true knowledge into the student's head at *Meno* 81e-86c and *Sym* 175d.

[24] *Ἀπορία* is often, and reasonably translated, 'doubt,' but in the dialogues it often signifies, more precisely, an awareness of not knowing the correct answer.

are not in doubt about a complex, integrated picture of valued-ordered reality,[25] that I call Plato's *vision*: identifiable general beliefs, values, and orientations, as opposed to propositional doctrines. Among them are the superiority of soul to body, reality to appearance, permanence to change, and knowledge to opinion, but even these must always remain open to further consideration and criticism.[26] As is reasonably inferred from numerous explicit statements and arguments, Plato's aim, differently stated, was personal and social improvement rather than the authoritative articulation or propagation of fixed philosophic doctrines or a doctrinal system.[27]

Given these principles, the dialogues are a unique kind of logico-dramatic text that can be referred to as an *enactment*[28] in two senses: first, a view of a matter under discussion is enacted by Socrates rather than defined or asserted in the dialogue;[29] second this view is brought to consciousness and thus realized *in us* through the fiction reader's suspension of disbelief, the combination of imaginative, emotional, and logical means that Plato's dramas, like all fiction, deploys. The effect of individual arguments depends on character, interaction, affect, and deployment of other literary and dramatic tools as much as on their logic, making them imaginatively and emotionally as well as logically persuasive.[30]

In light of these principles, the *Charmides* is neither dogmatic nor aporetic, but non-dogmatic. Instead of *asserting* anything specific about *σωφροσύνη*, it enacts a view of it.[31] The dialogue is not epistemological, psychological, or ethical in the limited and specific modern sense; it is comprehensively political. The

[25] I follow Thesleff 1999, substituting 'vision' for his 'model.' It is two-level, but a matter of principles and generalities (e.g., soul is more valuable than body, virtue is good) rather than specific propositional truths, doctrines, and system (e.g., the soul has three parts, virtue is knowledge). Some propositions (e.g., virtue is knowledge of good and evil) are expressed so often that it is difficult not suppose that they were Plato's own beliefs. Even so, a belief one holds is not necessarily a doctrine one thinks is beyond question or means to teach authoritatively.

[26] E.g., *Crito* 46b-47a.

[27] For Plato's avoidance of being an authority, one of the functions and outcomes of Platonic anonymity in the dialogue form, see Karamanolis 2006, 6, Sedley 1997, and Stone 2012.

[28] On enactment, see Cook 1971 and Press 1995. The concept has significant other lives in the literatures of corporate management and psychoanalysis.

[29] Although Socrates speaks much more than acts in the dialogues, I am here speaking about the dialogue as an organic whole and about an outcome that Plato achieves with respect to his audience by virtue of all the words and deeds (and, in the case of the *Charmides*, by the narrator's observations and comments) rather than about what Socrates achieves with respect to his interlocutors.

[30] Cotton 2014 shows how the dialogues' educational effect on readers parallels their portrayal of the attempted education of interlocutors and is an experience both cognitive and affective.

[31] The argument presented briefly here will be more fully argued in a forthcoming monograph.

progressive revelation and ultimate refutation of Critias' oligarchic political ideology is its central drama of ideas, not the failed attempt to give an account of *σωφροσύνη* in words. Socrates is not a mouthpiece for Plato's views nor is he the historical Socrates; he is a literary character who serves to *show* us what *σωφροσύνη* is comprehensively and what the philosophical life is in contrast with other characters' beliefs and life practices.

I hope to show in the ensuing pages that *σωφροσύνη*, in the *Charmides* is best translated as 'moderation.' It is to be understood not as one among other moral virtues, as usually assumed, but as the foundation of all other virtues or excellences.[32] It consists in being aware of one's impulses and circumstances and *moderating* one's words and deeds so as to avoid excess, stay within limits set by the innate desire (need) for recognition or respect from others and the inter-subjective requirement of reciprocity.[33] It is essentially political, having to do with how and by whom the city is managed, rather than a matter primarily of individual ethics. Moderation is not a simple idea that could be expressed in the sort of brief account[34] Socrates' interlocutors assume he is seeking. It is, rather, a complex,[35] integrating many of the features found in *σωφροσύνη*'s semantic history and used repeatedly by Plato in the *Charmides*, where they are criticized verbally but not actually refuted or rejected, while being enacted positively by Socrates and negatively by others. To see that they are not totally rejected verbally requires understanding the logic of Socratic argumentation.[36] Governed by an interlocutor's proposed accounts of the dialogue's topic, Socrates' refutations are rough deductive arguments that the interlocutor's account *cannot* be correct – the whole and complete answer – consistent with the interlocutor's other beliefs and agreements, *not* that the idea under discussion is totally false or has nothing to do with

[32] Clear in *Rep* 427e-443e. Cf. North 1966, 151.

[33] Cairns 1993, 2-14 reviews the scholarly literature on these questions and 371-91 argues that Plato sees the foundation of moderation in the feeling called shame (modesty or respect, *αἰδώς*) and the foundation of the latter in the individual's need for recognition or respect, which turns out to be available only on condition of social reciprocity.

[34] Although often overlooked, Plato's Socrates seeks not definitions of words or terms or even concepts, but accounts of realities. No theory of Forms is articulated in the *Charmides*, but Socrates describes the object of their inquiry as one of the *ὄντα*, real things, at 166d and 175b.

[35] Bourgault 2013 sees that it is complex and essentially political, the complex as consisting in self-control, self-knowledge, harmony between pleasures and acquired judgment, and obedience to rules. Lobo 2006 denies it, partly relying on a developmental theory.

[36] Ben 1985, 2 clarifies the logic of Socrates' critiques by reminding us that the *definiendum* remains stable whereas each account of it proposed is discussed as a logical *definiens* which is only found to be unacceptable as covering all and only cases of the *definiendum*. His analysis of 174bff. (86-91) shows how the *definiens* (knowledge of knowledge, Critias' account), not the *definiendum* (moderation) is what is said to be without benefit.

that topic. By the rules of Socratic dialectic, unrefuted or unrejected propositions remain in effect as premises of discussion.[37]

2. Contexts

Both verbal and political-historic contexts are crucial for understanding the *Charmides*.

a. Verbal Context. *Σωφροσύνη* was one of several virtues or excellences (*ἀρεταί*), parts of the answer to the fundamental practical question, What is the best life for a person? What is it to do or fare well (*εὖ πράττειν*)? What is happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*)?[38] *Σωφροσύνη* had many meanings (polysemy[39]) both historically and in the late fifth century;[40] and Plato employs so many of them in the *Charmides* as to call for comment and explanation.[41]

Originating as Homeric "soundness of mind" and "orderly" behavior, it became a value word in the *Odyssey*, and acquired a wide variety of associations and meanings in later Greek literature. Among prominent synonyms were *αἰδώς* (modesty, shame, humility, respect), *ἐγκράτεια* (self-control), *μετριότης* (measuredness or measure), *κοσμιότης* (orderliness), *ἁγνεία* (chastity), *καθαριότης* (purity), and *εὐνομία* (good order). Among prominent antonyms were: *ἀφροσύνη* (folly, thoughtlessness), *ὕβρις* (overweening pride, violence), *ἀνδρεία* (courage!), *ἀκολασία* (licentiousness), *ἀναισθησία* (insensibility), and *τρυφή* (wantonness) down to the fifth century.[42] A common thread in many of

[37] Evidence of this in the *Charmides* is found in Socrates' references back to previous agreements later, but especially in the final refutation: 'knowledge of knowledge' cannot be moderation because it produces no benefit whereas it was agreed early on (160e) that, whatever moderation is, it must be beneficial even though that agreement was made with Charmides and Socrates is now conversing with Critias.

[38] Adkins 1960 identifies Plato's project as transforming the old, loud, competitive values into quiet, moral values. In Adkins 1972 moderation has become a moral value already in Theognis, Xenophanes, and Solon. Dover 1974 provides a contextual corrective.

[39] Polysemy refers to both that the fact of having many meanings and the literary principle that authors may deliberately make use of them in ways that, strictly logically, would seem equivocating.

[40] The essential sources are North 1966 and Rademaker 2005, emphasizing the diachronic and synchronic respectively. I summarize their findings here, but draw different conclusions from their discussions because I do not share their assumptions that the dialogues exhibit a developmental pattern of Platonic doctrine and that the dialogues seek a single definition of *σωφροσύνη*. As already indicated (n. 29), Socrates does not seek definitions at all.

[41] Rademaker 2005, 3: "The *Charmides* seems to address virtually all traditional ideas concerning *σωφροσύνη* and to show that most of these are problematic."

[42] North 1966, 1-31.

these is the contrast between a 'moderation' or sufficiency on the positive side as opposed to excess on the negative side, e.g., *πλεονεξία*, overreaching, greediness, seeking the larger share, which presupposes that there is a right limit.

Rademaker's review of earlier meanings of *σωφροσύνη* leads him to map the variety of meanings that were available to Plato, distributed both by emphases in the earlier range and demographic groups to which *σωφροσύνη* could be applied with each meaning.[43] Notably 'soundness of mind' had become rare[44] and some meanings were especially associated with girls, women, and boys (sexual chastity, *fidelity*, and decency). Like North, he sees the 'authoritarian'[45] view of *σωφροσύνη* held by fifth-century aristocrats and oligarchs in alignment with both their claimed Dorian historic identity and their present politics, using a group of meanings focused on quietness or the quiet life (*ˈsuc…a,* and not being a busybody, (*ἀπραγμοσύνη*), and obedience. As applied to subordinates, moderation would mean do not resist, obey, don't speak up.

In Hesiod, *σωφροσύνη* correlates with measure and restraint. In Greek tragedy, importantly a development of the democratizing world, where "the individual hero confronts the world order in religion and the *polis*,"[46] the emphasis is on measure in cases of conflict with religious and social limits. *Σωφροσύνη* acquires associations with freedom and justice, avoidance of force and violence (*ὕβρις*), comes to be associated with Apollo, with the Delphic ideals of self-knowledge ("Know thyself," *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*) and "Nothing Too Much" (*μηδὲν ἄγαν*), and with the triumph of reason over humans' passions and drives. North identifies *σωφροσύνη*'s core meaning, therefore, as "the harmonious product of intense passion under perfect control"[47] and in reviewing the history of *σωφροσύνη*'s use down to Plato identifies its initial appearance in Homer and early writers as not overstepping boundaries, measure, self-restraint or self-control.

In the early period, *σωφροσύνη* had acquired an association with the Dorian, aristocratic, and Spartan, but as city-states developed toward greater democracy, especially in the latter half of the 5th century and especially in Athens, it became contested. In an early article,[48] North identified a "period of opposition" to its positive value in the late fifth and early fourth centuries in the political struggles

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[43] Rademaker 2005 describes earlier uses (251-76) with figures (277-87) representing these relationships, to be compared with 354-56 representing Plato's use of the terms.

[44] So its use as a translation of *σωφροσύνη* by the Wests and others is anachronistic.

[45] North 1966, 161; Rademaker 2005, ch. 9.

[46] North 1966, 32.

[47] She goes on to add, "perfect yet precarious control of the most turbulent forces … producing law … form … restraint and proportion in human conduct" (x). A summary from North 1947 is: "the *σώφρων ἀνήρ*, … modest and conscious of his limitations, prudent, sensible, wise, obedient to authority, or free from *ὕβρις*" (2).

[48] North 1947

between the aristocratic oligarchs and democrats that turns out to be very important for the *Charmides* and will be discussed below. The traditional aristocratic idea of moderation as restraint, measure, and respect for class and status distinctions of the individual is opposed by the new way of thinking, Ionian, democratic, assuming equality among citizens, openness of leadership to all classes, and preference for expressiveness.[49] The values of the heroic or high-achieving individual are opposed to the leveling or equalizing values of fitting into the social group or community as a whole under a differently inflected idea of moderation.

Rademaker's thesis is that, whereas Plato exploits *σωφροσύνη*'s polysemy in dialogues such as the *Protagoras, Laches, Gorgias,* and *Politicus* in order to argue for the unity of virtue, he seeks to restrict it to a single preferred "technical definition" in the *Charmides* and *Republic*.[50] Several problems afflict this view. *Plato* remains anonymous; he doesn't actually argue for anything anywhere in any dialogue; and Socrates usually argues *against* others' proposals rather than for his own. No explicit 'technical definition' is, in fact, given in the *Charmides*. The *Republic*'s 'definition' of moderation is actually something of a different *kind* from the concise propositional definition of justice as 'minding one's own business,' something of a higher order and more foundational.

In fact, the treatment of *σωφροσύνη* in several dialogues including the *Republic* conflicts with the idea that a technical definition is given and provides a context for understanding it in the *Charmides*. In the *Republic* 430-40, though introduced as if it were one of the four cardinal virtues, *σωφροσύνη* is explained as an overarching harmony (*symphonia*) of psychic forces, rather than generally like the others in being a virtue but different in some specific way. [51] Similarly, in the *Gorgias* 466-68, 488-508, its function as the force that tames a heroic or forceful individual and makes him a citizen via *rational control of appetites and impulses* is a necessary condition or foundation of virtues such as courage, justice, and piety. In the *Sophist* 230d, a soul cleansed through refutation of the false conceit of knowledge, rid of belief in the individual's own wisdom, is said to be

[49] Wilson 2003, 199n7 concerns the 'ideology of measure' and its great role in *σωφροσύνη*. He argues that 'moderation' was a quietistic credo of old aristocrats, a discourse critical of democracy as a thing of excess, violence, and uncontrollability.

[50] Rademaker 2005, 323. The view that Plato's aim is to narrow the term to a single approved meaning is shared by North and many other interpreters. Stalley 1983, 55 more accurately refers to "the wider idea of *σωφροσύνη* which embraces, not only self-control, but also order, harmony, moderation, and self-knowledge."

[51] "Moderation spreads through the whole. It makes the weakest, the strongest, and those in between – whether in regard to reason, physical strength, numbers, wealth , or anything else – all sing the same song together" (*Rep* 431e; tr. Grube-Reeve).

"the best and most moderate state of mind (*σωφρονεστάτη ἕξις*)." These passages suggest, what is more openly argued in the *Laws*, that moderation is the foundational excellence; that without which the other virtues are impossible or useless (696b). No matter what the form of government may be, to be good requires wisdom and moderation (712a); and moderation is what holds out against all the various needs and desires, resisting generally the inclination to excess (918d), so that it is the foundation, the *sine qua non* for courage and justice.[52]

Each of these passages shares significant elements with the *Charmides* and collectively they make it plausible that the moderation on offer is something foundational, rather than one among many species of the genus virtue. The shared social and political dimension of these discussions with the *Charmides* is also significant as in Thucydides the political arrangements of Athens and Sparta represent differing conceptions of *σωφροσύνη* and in his comments on the conflicting meanings given to this and other evaluative words.[53]

b. The Political Context. While interpreters usually note that Charmides and Critias were later to be prominent in the post-war 'tyranny',[54] it is less often observed that political indications are found implicitly and explicitly throughout the dialogue. The political history of fifth-century Athens is the on-going opposition between democracy and oligarchy within Athens and between democratic Athens and oligarchic Sparta. Athens' dominant democracy under Pericles' leadership created the empire, expanded citizenship, and enriched the city, but created a mass of impoverished citizens increasingly supported by the state, necessitated the war, and – besides the short-lived oligarchic coup of 411 – was steadily opposed by the old aristocrats whose traditional perquisites the democracy had supplanted. The dialogue's dramatic date is politically charged, at the outset of the Peloponnesian War,[55] when Socrates returns to Athens from the war's first major campaign.

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[52] Stalley 1983, 5: "The aim of the law is virtue. A prerequisite to all virtue is *σωφροσύνη*, self-control, self-discipline, or temperance," that is, what is here called moderation.

[53] Thuc. III 82.2-7. The proper interpretation of this famous passage has been debated. See Wilson 1982, Swain 1993. Plato has Socrates note changes and differences of meaning as well, *Rep* 560d.

[54] On the Tyranny, see Stephans 1939, Krentz 1982, Whitehead 1982-83, Németh 2006, and more briefly, Mitchell 2006.

[55] 429, not 432, as often said. See Nails 2002, 311. Dates and ages that follow also reflect conclusions in Nails 2002 *ad loc*.

Plato's choice of characters set the dialogue on a political stage.[56] Chaerephon (469-403/399), Socrates' first brief interlocutor, is about 37. An age-fellow, long-time friend, member of Socrates' circle and a Socratic imitator,[57] politically he was a democrat, notorious for his strange appearance and *immoderate* behavior, having the nick-name 'madman.'[58] In the *Charmides*, his presence at the outset, a democrat in contrast with the later oligarchs, Critias and Charmides, after whose fall and death he was among those who "returned" to Athens,[59] establishes a political framework that replicates dialogically the democratic-oligarchic opposition that played out historically. Within that, Socrates is thus shown as occupying a middle ground, rather than as having the aristocratic or oligarchic sympathies sometimes attributed to him.

Critias was intellectually diverse; a writer of oratory, poetry, drama, and more theoretical, 'philosophic' prose combining traditional conservatism, political reactionism, and popular sophistry.[60] He had aristocratic and oligarchic orientations but seems not to have become politically active until the last decade of his life.[61] He would be about 31 in 429. Plato has him use the aristocratic label *καλὸς κἀγαθός* to describe Charmides' soul (154e) and exhibit conservative biases in several of his proposed accounts of moderation. A member of the Socratic circle[62] for a period and perhaps still in 429, he was criticized by Socrates for *immoderate* erotic conduct which may explain his later outlawing of teaching "the

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[56] In line with Nails 2016, knowing the facts about the characters Plato chooses to put on the stage is essential for understanding the dialogues in which they appear, as is the cultural and political history in which they were embedded participants. For each of the characters discussed here, see Nails 2002 *ad loc*.

[57] Lampooned in Aristophanes' *Birds* 1280-83.

[58] As at 153b. He makes frequent appearances in comedy for 20 years (see Nails 2002, 86-87).

[59] *Ap* 21a.

[60] The fragments are collected in Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* 88. A "notorious laconophile" (Krentz 1982, 46), recent Critias scholarship clarifies his participation in the intellectual opposition to democracy and connection to ideas specifically discussed in Plato's dialogues. See Centanni 1997, Bultrighini 1999, Iannucci 2003, and Wilson 2003. Wilson 2004 summarizes this Critias renaissance in reviewing Iannucci, Csapo 2004, as well as Németh 2006, who focuses more on his active political career, arguing that it came only late in life and grew out of exactly the sort of frustrated impatience that Plato's Critias exhibits at 162cd. None of this would seem to confirm Tuozzo's 2011, ch. 2 attempt at rehabilitation, nor the more positive views of him in Dušanić 2000 and Danzig 2013. Dillon 2012 finds him a philosopher, but not very talented or well-informed. See my review of Tuozzo in *JHPh* 2012, 133-35.

[61] Németh 2006, 31. In light of this, the *Charmides* can seem, from one perspective, Plato's *ex post facto* explanation of Critias' later career through the views he is presented as holding in the dialogue.

[62] He is so represented in the *Protagoras* as well as in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. He may have thought himself a Socratic, but it has also been suggested that, rather than a true follower of Socrates, he was a hanger-on, exploiting the association for social-political advantage.

art of words" as indirect punishment of Socrates. His non-participation in politics prior to 411 may be an example of the aristocratic/oligarchic version of *ἀπραγμοσύνη*. Plato's Critias is one of Socrates' more resistant interlocutors, though, like many others, he exhibits a conceit of knowledge that is only with difficulty overcome.[63] He is Socrates' central interlocutor; the *Charmides* as a drama is the progressive revelation and refutation of his political ideology.[64]

Charmides' property having been confiscated through involvement in the profanation of the Mysteries in 415,[65] he became impoverished, which may have been a motivation of his political involvements (Xen., *Mem.* IV 31). Chosen by The Thirty to be one of The Ten in the Piraeus, he was part of The Fifty-One.[66] Several tantalizing links between his appearance in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and in Plato's *Charmides* include his shyness and Socrates' urging him to go into politics.[67] He would be about 16 in 429. Plato's Charmides' extraordinary beauty is widely recognized but also shown as the cause of immoderate reactions in others. He appears modest and cautious,[68] but also thoughtlessly imperious, ordering Socrates to dictate a charm for his headache (156a), and willing to use force to get his way (176c).

In light of the likely dramatic date 429, Socrates (460-399) would be 39. From the first words, he is narrating the dialogue to an unnamed 'friend' at an unspecified time and place. He is consistent with the character in other dialogues and the sketch given above is confirmed repeatedly here.

3. The unfolding dramatic argument

To integrate the dialogue's dramatic and argumentative aspects requires minding the rule of fiction, followed by Plato: show, don't tell. Thus apparently rejected logical proposals are dramatically exhibited by Socrates in a kind of logico-dramatic counter-point. This is reinforced by the refutations' leaving their ideas in play logically and by explicit principles and premises. The literary principle of polysemy is also operative.

The heart of Plato's dialogues is always a conversation about ideas, but, as a whole drama, the *Charmides* can be divided into a long prologue relating Socrates' arrival at the palaestra and the preliminaries to his encounter with Charmides,

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[63] In 167b-174d, where he finally experiences *ἀπορία*. See below, pp. 27-28.

[64] Like Hazebroucq 1997, 91-95, and *pace* Tuozzo 2011, 55 and *passim*, Held 2004 sees that this is Plato's *ex post facto* explanation of why Critias went wrong.

[65] See Nails 2002, 17-20 on the profanation for a recent summary.

[66] On the various groups, see Krentz 1982, 55-65.

[67] Nails 2002, 92.

[68] He blushes at 158c before giving a very careful non-answer to Socrates' question.

followed by two distinct acts in which he converses about moderation first with Charmides, then with Critias. The prologue, one of the longest Plato wrote, could alternatively be considered a distinct act.

a. The prologue (153a-159a) is far too rich in literary and dramatic detail to be treated fully here,[69] but from the first paragraph the dialogue occurs on a political stage at the outset of the war and replicates Athens' internal political conflict over government by the active presence of Chaerephon and Critias. While others including Chaerephon and Critias ask Socrates many questions about the battle, Socrates is only interested in *philosophia* and which young men are notable for wisdom or beauty. While the majority fixate on Charmides' extraordinary beauty, Socrates – who reports in some detail his need to recover from a bout of sexual arousal (155c-d) – is more interested in the condition of Charmides' soul, especially its moderation. A slapstick interlude (155c) illustrating others' excessive responses to Charmides' beauty concludes with Charmides seated between Socrates and Critias. Socrates both introduces *σωφροσύνη* as the topic of conversation and quietly identifies it as 'health of soul' and the source of bodily health (156e-157b). Attributing to "the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis"[70] a holistic and psychosomatic medicine, Socrates says that health and care of soul require conversation (156d-57ba), which leads Critias to assert hyperbolically and a bit vaguely[71] that Charmides 'is thought' to be both a philosopher and poet, "the most moderate of youths now, and second to none in everything else appropriate to his age" (157d). From this Socrates pursues his earlier wish to 'discuss' (*διαλέγεσθαι* 154e) with Charmides by asking whether he has a 'sufficient share' of moderation (158bc). Should we detect a play on words in this suggestion that one could be insufficiently committed to sufficiency rather than to excess? When Charmides blushes and demurs, Socrates proposes to investigate (*σκοπεῖν* 158d, 159a) and premises that if moderation is present (*παρεῖναι*) in him, then it gives a sensation (*αἴσθησις*) of its presence from which he might form an opinion (*δόξα*) "not only that you have it but of what sort it is" (159a).[72] Charmides assents and from this grows the dialogue's central discussion.

[69] On the significance of prologues, Alrivie 1971, Declos 1992, Burnyeat 1997, Gonzalez 2003, and De Sanctis 2016. Especially rich and nuanced is Hazebroucq 1997, 97-150.

[70] On Zalmoxian medicine, see Coolidge 1993, Brisson 2000, Murphy 2000, Held 2004, and McPherran 2004. Most thorough and impressive is Hazebroucq 1997, 108-38.

[71] Critias also fails to understand, significantly in light of later developments, that moderation isn't the same thing as thought or intelligence (*διάνοια* 157cd).

[72] This distinction between knowing that and knowing what will return later as the lynchpin in Socrates' refutation of Critias' ultimate account of moderation as knowledge of knowledge.

The opening scene thus introduces the Platonic values of soul over body, wisdom over physical beauty, and the life of contemplation over that of action. Charmides' beauty is shown by other characters' words and behavior to be extreme and, perhaps for that reason, problematic, for precipitating such behavior. The dramatic arrangement of Charmides between Critias and Socrates (155c) makes the dialogue an educational struggle over Charmides' soul, as the analogous political arrangement of Socrates between Chaerephon and Critias (153c) suggests Socrates' position as connecting with both but identical to neither. The action also exhibits numerous verbal and behavioral immoderations by Chaerephon, Critias, and others, including Critias' exaggerated claims for Charmides as philosopher, poet, and the most moderate, which contrast with Socrates' verbal and behavioral moderation.[73] It introduces philosophy as concerned with care of the soul via Zalmoxian medicine, and, proceeding by dialectical investigation of the interlocutor's opinions about what moderation is, sets moderation as the topic, introduces procedural premises and includes Socrates' own account of *σωφροσύνη* as health of soul (157b).[74] Socrates' premises about moderation as having a 'share of' or being 'present in' one's soul are familiar from other dialogues as are care of the soul and the idea that a person who possesses a virtue should be able to explain it. These regulatory views remain on the table unrefuted: moderation as health of soul and if you are moderate you will have some awareness of it. What is shown but not said is that Socrates *is* moderate in his speech and behavior, unlike other characters.

b. In Act 1 (159a-162b), Charmides offers three accounts of *σωφροσύνη*, the first two of which are his own ideas, traditional and consistent with his character as a young aristocrat: calmness or quietness (*ἡσυχιότης*) and shame or modesty (*αἰδώς*). In response to the first, Socrates obtains Charmides' agreement to the premise that, whatever moderation is, it must be something admirable (noble, morally beautiful, *καλόν*). I will refer to this as the nobility principle. Then he criticizes the proposal through a long, carefully structured, but fallacious argument that equivocates in using *σωφροσύνη* in opposition to quick where Char-

[73] E.g., Chaerephon's running "like the wild man he is" (153b), the crowd "astonished and confused by his entrance" (154c), and Critias' eagerness to invent an unnecessary lie in order to get Charmides to converse with Socrates (155b), unnecessary because Charmides *knows* who Socrates is. As he soon says, "You are no small topic of conversation among us boys" (156a). See Schmid 165-68 for a long list of the moderate and immoderate words and acts of the dialogue's participants. Translations are from Sprague 1992.

[74] Insofar as the dialogue communicates indirectly, this remains its decisive synoptic view of moderation, the opposite of *La folie humaine* in the title of Hazebroucq 1997.

mides had used it in opposition to loud. In response to the second proposal, similarly, Socrates obtains Charmides' assent to the premise that whatever moderation is, it must be good (*ἀγαθόν*) and productive of good.[75] I will refer to this as the goodness principle. He criticizes the proposal through the equally fallacious suggestion that Charmides' proposal would be in conflict with what Telemachus says at *Odyssey* 17.347, "Modesty (*αἰδώς*) is not a good mate for a needy man," as if Homer had asserted "modesty is not always good."

Both proposals are consistent with the semantic history of *σωφροσύνη*, identifying one and then another traditional meaning as *the* meaning. They are the sorts of things a youth would have known about and been taught, meanings particularly associated with youth, as is *Odyssey* 17.347. They initiate a central intellectual movement in the dialogue from outer and behavioral to inner and psychic and from more concrete to more abstract accounts.[76] Although the refutative arguments are logically poor, dramatically they have important benefits. They occasion the introduction of two major premises of the logical argument that are at the same time ideas Plato's Socrates articulates elsewhere, bedrocks of Socrates' arguments and Plato's vision. They do so as assumptions the reader accepts via the fictive suspension of disbelief even though the arguments are *indicated* to attentive readers as dubious.[77] However, even in intention these arguments refute *only* the notions that quietness or modesty is the *complete* account of *σωφροσύνη*, thus leaving both proposals on the table as possible partial accounts along with the ideas that moderation is *καλόν, ἀγαθόν*, and beneficial, productive of good. What is shown but not said is that Socrates is a cagey cross-examiner while Charmides, beautiful as he is, is not very clever, contradicting Critias' claim that he is 'philosophic.'

Charmides' third account is a dramatic shift. "What you say has quite convinced me, Socrates," he said. "But give me your opinion of the following account of moderation: I have just remembered having heard someone say that moderation is minding one's own business" (161b). Socrates calls him 'wretch'[78] for not giving his own idea and says he must have gotten it from Critias, who, falsely, denies it.[79] Rather than a refutative argument, Socrates replies that it's an

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[75] Sprague 1992, n. 31 notes, "It is axiomatic for Plato that the good is productive (and useful)" as at *Meno* 87e: "All good things are useful (or beneficial *ὠφέλιμα*)." Ben 1985, 28 adds *Rep* 367b4, but observes that the idea of benefit was built into the Greek *ἀγαθός*.

[76] These movements are often noted. See, e.g., Schmid 1997, 156-58.

[77] By "as far as this argument is concerned at any rate" (160b) and "if moderation is no more good than bad" (161ab).

[78] While this is a normal idiomatic translation, the term *μιαρός*, also applied to Critias at 174b, literally means polluted and could well allude literally to the blood on their hands in the tyranny of 404/3.

[79] Falsely because, as he admits indirectly at 162d, "the man himself" refers to himself.

enigma since to write or read another person's name, to heal or make craft products for another person, would then falsely be considered immoderate. Charmides also agrees with him that a city would not be well and moderately governed if the law commanded everyone to make and care for his own cloak, shoes, and other personal implements; this is the first in a series of explicit references to moderation in government that runs to the end of the dialogue. Although these proposals might look merely like more deliberate equivocation on Socrates' part, "it can't be minding things of this sort and in this fashion" (162a) signals his awareness that the argument is weak, but dramatically provokes Critias to take over and to clarify what exactly he meant by the phrase: *what* sort of things are "one's own" and by doing *what* is one minding them?

Charmides has abandoned his agreement – and moderation – by failing to give another account of his own, by asking Socrates to give his own opinion, and provocatively maneuvering his elder, Critias, into the interlocutor role. His proposal changes the scope of the discussion from the personal and moral to the political realm and changes the topic to what is actually (though unbeknownst to most later readers) an oligarchic slogan, minding one's own business or doing one's own things.[80]

Unrefuted, 'doing one's own things' remains a possibility and from this point on the dialogue operates predominantly in the political rather than the more narrowly ethical or moral domain. The transition from Charmides to Critias (162cd) also serves to characterize Critias further as dishonest, impatient, disrespectful of others, and (like many Socratic interlocutors) suffering from the mistaken conception that he knows and can explain moderation. By the agreed procedural premises, this implies – what we dramatically *see* – that he *is* not moderate.

c. Act 2 (162c-175b), Socrates' conversation with Critias, falls into distinct scenes. (1) From 162e – 167a, Socrates elicits and criticizes a series of proposals

[80] Noted by North 1947, Classen 1959, 99-101, and Guthrie 1975, 167. More fully explained by Graham and Forsythe 1984 and supported by Wilson 2004, 199. Schmid 1997, 4-5 and Tuozzo 2011, 94-5 recognize the political dimension of the term but do not see it as decisive. That this phrase is also at the heart of the *Republic* suggests something more complicated and unusual about that dialogue – that it is a longer and more elaborate presentation of the point made later in the *Charmides*, that the socio-political community that would follow from (a) Glaucon's aristocratic requirement that a city have luxury and wealth and the shared conception in both dialogues (b) that its core principle is precisely the aristocratic-oligarchic, anti-democratic slogan in process of being refuted here. In other words, like the *Charmides*, the *Republic* is, from one perspective, actually an elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* of that political ideology which, from another perspective, is being used to articulate some paradoxical Platonic ideas. It is not Plato's political doctrine, as Bourgault 2013 sees.

about what moderation is and then (2) from 167b -174d he refutes the final proposal, that it consists in knowledge of knowledge.

Prefatory agreements are essential to the logic of what follows. He has explicitly agreed to 'take over'[81] meaning not only the defense of 'doing one's own things,' but also the premises previously accepted. Critias is a more mature, skilled, confrontational interlocutor who objects to Socrates' lines of argument, but is not intelligent or careful enough to sustain his objections. Instead, unlike Charmides, he responds to Socrates' objections in each successive case by shifting to an account focused on precisely the point Socrates' objection raised. Plato thus shows us Socrates implicitly guiding Critias' thinking while the incomplete refutations are left as implicitly acknowledged because of Critias' shifts.

Socrates' announced criticism of doing one's *own* things via the dubious equation of doing and making leads Critias to propose – a presupposition for any virtue, one would think – that moderation is "doing *good* things" (163e) in an extended, confusing reply that invokes Hesiod and disparages ordinary work.[82] Socrates' criticism of this proposal in light of the potential for the agent to lack knowledge (*γιγνώσκειν*)[83] that he is doing something good leads him to propose "self-knowledge" (*γιγνώσκειν ἑαυτόν* 164d, 165b), a traditional association of *σωφροσύνη*. In reply to Critias' inquiry whether Socrates would agree that *σωφροσύνη* is self-knowledge, Socrates' suggestion that *γιγνώσκειν* must be some kind of *ἐπιστήμη* (165c) leads Critias to propose "knowledge of other sciences and of itself" (166c),[84] 'knowledge of knowledge' for short. Socrates doesn't criticize this proposal immediately, but Critias agrees to his clarification that it will "also be a knowledge of the absence of knowledge" (166e) and that the *σώφρων* will be uniquely[85] the person who can examine both self and others, to determine whether they know what they think they know or not. In short, "moderation and being moderate and knowing (*γιγνώσκειν*) oneself amount to … knowing (*τὸ εἰδέναι*) what one does and does not know" (167a).

Self-knowledge is discussed at the mid-point of the dialogue, which pedimental structure indicates is most important to Plato,[86] but not necessarily that it

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[81] Both Sprague and West & West translate *παραδέχομαι* thus.

[82] Ben 1985, 53 describes it as "a brilliant piece of false reasoning."

[83] *Γιγνώσκειν* implies moral recognition knowledge as distinct from the technical scientific knowledge that *ἐπιστήμη* implies. The terms are used more consistently thus in the *Charmides* than in some other dialogues. Cp. Morris 1989.

[84] The shift from knowledge of oneself to knowledge of itself, unremarked in the dialogue, has generated much scholarly debate. For summaries and citations, see, Adamietz 1969 and Bloch 1973. Ben 1985, 45-50 argues at length that no fallacy is committed.

[85] "[O]nly the *σώφρων*" (167a1) and "no one else" (167a5) are significant reminders that Socrates takes Critias' proposal as a *definiens* of the *definiendum*, moderation.

[86] Schmid 1997, 53.

is Plato's doctrine about the nature of moderation. Knowledge of knowledge, the most abstract of Critias' accounts, is proposed shortly after. This very abstraction, however, signals the problem: Critias' complicated idea, while appearing to escape Socrates' criticisms ultimately reveals Critias' idea as disconnected from the moral realm. At the dramatic level, these shifting accounts exhibit Critias' character as impatient with Socrates' criticisms (163bc, 164, 165e), given to speechifying (163b, 164d), having an aristocratic disdain for ordinary kinds of work and implicit class differentiation (163b-c), a conviction that he knows what moderation is despite Socrates' challenges (162d, 163e, 164cd, 165b), a willingness to counter-attack (163a, 164c), and greater concern for his reputation and being thought right than for the truth (162d, 166e).

Critias' changing accounts are not new and different from each other, but attempts to *clarify* his original 'doing one's own things.'[87] Unlike Charmides, he does not in this section, admit either that his previous account was wrong or that he doesn't know. Under Socrates' logically dubious criticisms, his shifts culminate in 'knowledge of knowledge.' The shift from 'of oneself' to 'of itself' may be logically fallacious, but dramatically the fact that Critias accepts it shows us at least a lack of intellectual skill, but more likely that the unnoticed shift actually fits with his way of thinking. More important, the (also unnoticed) shift from *γνῶσις* to *ἐπιστήμη* shows the attentive reader that Critias' true view of moderation isn't about moral recognition knowledge. By 'self-knowledge' he does not mean the kind of self-awareness that underpins moral conduct. It is a technical, not a moral account,[88] as becomes clear in the final refutation. It is gradually revealed in Act 2 that the *kind* of thing Critias has in mind when he talks about moderation is not same *kind* of thing Socrates has in mind; it's not actually a *moral* excellence.[89]

Above all, though, the role of 'doing one's own things' in the ideological controversies of the fifth century, suggests that his view essentially amounts to identifying the moral virtue of *σωφροσύνη* with the political program of the anti-

[87] At 167a and 169d, Critias agrees that self-knowledge is (still) his view, even though the immediate proposal is knowledge of knowledge. At 172d, Socrates indicates that the view they are discussing is knowledge of knowledge *and* doing one's own things.

[88] That it is technical and not moral is supported by Schmid 1997, 53-61.

[89] Similarly, in the discussion of virtue in the *Meno*, it only slowly becomes clear that what Meno understood virtue to mean was the acquisition of wealth and power whereas what Socrates meant was moral goodness. These are examples of Plato's deployment of what I call double meanings and semantic inversion since, by the end, the interlocutor's *way* of thinking about the subject (virtue, moderation) has been shown to lead to impossible consequences, precisely as in the *Charmides*.

democratic oligarchs.[90] Aristocrats should rule; others should obey; each would thus 'do their own things.' The aristocratic opposition to the dominant democracy included a distinctly intellectual aspect, in which 'doing one's own' was an oligarchic euphemism for reactionary, anti-democratic thought and action.[91] These ideas, only suggested here, become explicit in the utopian visions later.[92]

At this section's end, Critias' proposals all remain logical possibilities: 'doing one's own things,' doing good things, self-knowledge, and knowledge of knowledge. It has struck interpreters that these apparently rejected answers nevertheless resemble what Socrates himself actually pursues and practices both here and in other dialogues. He's the one who truly has self-knowledge and knows better than anyone else both that and what he knows and does not know. It could also be said that he is the one who truly does what is his own. The explanation, hinted at by 'truly,' is that each of Critias' proposed accounts can be understood in very different ways. Socrates critiques Critias' uses, while Plato shows us in the character of Socrates that each account is a correct way to think about moderation if understood in another way. Socrates minds what is truly his own business by caring for his soul and those of others, recognizes himself in naming and overcoming his sexual arousal; recognizes what he does and does not know. This *semantic inversion*, a not uncommon Socratic/Platonic strategy, simultaneously facilitates refutation within the dialogue and indirect communication with readers, enactment in their minds.

Dramatically it has been shown but not said that, while Socrates continues to *be* moderate, Critias is immoderate in several ways, lacking in self-awareness, and uncritically attached to a view of *σωφροσύνη* that is aristocratic, an oligarchic social and political ideology. He also has no doubt about his own understanding of moderation and is oppositional rather than collaborative with Socrates. Plato's Socrates will now show logically that his cannot be the correct account of *σωφροσύνη* – no more than it could be the correct account of justice in the *Republic* – because it fails to satisfy the goodness principle; in other words, is without moral benefit.

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[90] Schmid 1997, 61 sees Critias' view of *σωφροσύνη* as "*a science of rule,* possessed by superior men, issuing not in physical products but in actions of commands to subordinate artists, aimed at the benefit of the ruler-knowers."

[91] Like 'pro-life' in U.S. political debates about abortion. Besides North 1947 and Wilson 2003, this is supported by Rademaker 2005, 216-18 who correctly sees the ideological content of *τοῖς σώφροσι* at Thuc., IV 28.5; cp. 8.53.3 where, Rademaker comments, "*σωφρονέστερον πολιτεύειν* openly refers to 'founding an oligarchy'" (217).

[92] At 172d, Socrates says, "we carelessly agreed that it would be a great good for men if each of us should perform the things he knows and should hand over what he does not know to others who do." To which Critias replies, "You certainly say some strange things (*ἄτοπα*), Socrates," suggesting both that he agrees with the idea being rejected and is surprised that Socrates does not.

Act 2, Scene 2 (167b-175a) is Socrates' two-part refutation of Critias' final account of *σωφροσύνη* as "knowledge of knowledge." It deploys complex philosophic ideas and distinctions and has attracted a lot of scholarly attention.[93] In outline the argument is this:

1. Is knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) of knowledge possible? Doubtful. (167b8-169d2)

2. If knowledge of knowledge were possible, would it be beneficial? (169d3-175b4)

a. knowing (*ἐπιστήμη*) *that* you know and don't know does not benefit (169d3-172c3)

b. knowing *what* you know and do not know does not benefit (172c-175b4)

Socrates is now overtly directive, specifying at the outset the two questions to be pursued. The logic should be clear. If knowledge of knowledge is not possible, then it doesn't exist, and something that doesn't exist cannot be what *σωφροσύνη*, one of the 'existing things',[94] *is*. If it is not beneficial, then by the principle of goodness, again, it could not be what *σωφροσύνη* is.

Logically, 167b-169c argues that reflexivity in sense activities, thought activities, and passions is a 'strange' idea (*ἄτοπον* 167c, 168a), but not necessarily impossible; reflexive 'powers' (*δυνάμεις*) such as greater and double, magnitude and number, appear to be impossible. It seems odd logically that Socrates spends so much time and energy on an inconclusive argument, but dramatically something important happens here. After treating various examples, Plato has Socrates declare that he is unable to settle the question of possibility and shifts responsibility to Critias, asking him "to clear up this point that [knowledge of knowledge] is possible" (169bc). Socrates then humorously reports that "as happens with people who start yawning when they see others doing it, Critias seemed to be … seized by doubt" but "felt ashamed"[95] and wouldn't say anything.

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[93] Often hijacking consideration of the dialogue as a whole. E.g., Herter 1970, Martens 1973, Chen 1978, McKim 1985, Gloy 1986, and Garcia 2003. Indicative is the *Hauptteils* in the title of Adamietz 1969.

[94] *Ὄντα* at 166d and 175b is a term often used in Plato's dialogues for eternal – true – realities.

[95] 'Doubt' translates *ἀπορία*. 'Felt ashamed' translates *ᾐσχύνετο*; it is the emotional foundation of *σωφροσύνη*. Cairns 1993, 5-14.

Abstractly, no doubt reflexivity interested Plato apart from this dialogue: and this passage may reflect his attempt to understand how Socrates could be said to 'know' what he says he 'doesn't know.' But dramatically this passage shows us two important experiences being generated in Critias that he had not previously had, of *doubt* and of *shame*. From the Socratic perspective, these are moral improvements and make him dialectically collaborative enough for Socrates to deploy the final, fatal demonstration that knowledge of knowledge cannot be what *σωφροσύνη* is. Plato thus shows us Socrates guiding Critias both to a better way of thinking about *σωφροσύνη* and to a better moral state: the experience of *ἀπορία* and a more humble, modest, moderate sense of his own abilities. Logically, the problem is not reflexivity in general, but the *kind* of reflexivity Critias wants – a reflexivity that strips *σωφροσύνη* of moral significance – as is about to be revealed in two utopian visions. The passage illustrates Plato's artfulness in getting his readers to consider a difficult, general idea without himself taking a position and while achieving a quite particular and meaningful dialogical result. Critias has finally given up – through having the experiences of *ἀπορία* and shame generated in him – his persistent, proud conviction that he knows what *σωφροσύνη* is.

Despite the difficulties pointed out, then, the reflexive activity indicated by knowledge of knowledge remains in play along with quietness, shame or modesty, minding one's own business, and self-knowledge.

Socrates' final two-part argument is, briefly, this: even if we assumed that knowledge of knowledge were possible, it would not meet the goodness principle, since there is no benefit to knowing (in Critias' sense, *ἐπιστήμη*) *that* you know or *what* you know.

In the first argument part, Socrates begins by indicating the problem in several ways. Even if knowledge of knowledge is possible, how is it possible (more precisely) to know what (i.e., the very thing) one does not know? Wouldn't that be a contradiction? And how can recognition of oneself as knowing (*γιγνώσκων γίγνώσεται,* 169e) be knowing what one knows (*εἰδέναι ἅ τε οἶδεν*, 169e9)? I.e., how is knowing what one knows the same thing as knowledge of self (169d-170a)? Critias' crucial, near explicit equation of *γνῶσις* with (*ἐπιστήμη* occurs here. Socrates asks how self *γιγνώσκειν* is necessarily *εἰδέναι* of what one knows and does not know, and Critias replies that they are "the same thing." The construction makes it clear that *εἰδέναι* refers back to Critias' (*ἐπιστήμη* at 169e1 and that, he asserts, is the same thing as self-knowledge, *τὸ γιγνώσκειν ἑαυτόν.*

Now Socrates elicits Critias' agreement that 'knowledge of knowledge' amounts to the ability to distinguish knowledge from its absence *in general*, which means that whoever has such knowledge "only knows *that*" a particular

case is or is not a case of knowledge (170a-d); but this kind of knowledge is useless because the person who has it will be unable, for example, to distinguish between true and false physicians or other skilled persons (170d-171c). But, if it's useless, then, by the goodness principle, it can't be moderation.

Then (171d-172) Socrates contrasts having only knowledge *that* one knows with knowledge of *what* one knows in an extended utopian[96] vision of enormous moral and political benefits, summed up as "men so circumstanced will fare admirably and well in all their doings and, faring well (*εὖ πράττειν*), they would be happy" (*εὐδαίμονας*, 172a). 'Happy' and 'faring well' explicitly restore the moral dimension to a conversation from which it has been absent perhaps since the discussion of 'doing good things'. After Critias agrees, "This is certainly what we mean," Socrates observes, "But no knowledge of this sort has put in an appearance" (172a), although he adds that mere knowledge *that* one has knowledge might have the humbler and more modest benefit of making its possessor – like Socrates, as we have been shown – a better 'examiner.' So, knowledge of knowledge construed as knowledge *that* lacks moral and political benefit and therefore cannot be what *σωφροσύνη* is.

Next Socrates unexpectedly and provocatively suggests that maybe they've been "demanding something useless" (172c) – meaning in their attempt to justify knowledge of knowledge as the account of *σωφροσύνη* – because, as he goes on to argue, there is also no benefit of knowing *what* you know and do not know (172c-175b4). Whereas the previous argument ended with a utopian vision of knowing what one knows, this one is introduced by a second utopian vision with contrary implications: Socrates' *epistemic* 'dream' of a world in which "everything would be done according to *ἐπιστήμη*" (173b1), "the human race would act and live in a scientific way" (*ἐπιστημόνως*, 173c), and no ignorance (*ἀνεπιστημοσύνην*, 173d) would creep in. Socrates wonders, however, whether this would make us 'happy'? Critias' reply, "But … you will not readily gain the prize of faring well by any other means if you eliminate acting scientifically (*ἀπιστημόνως*)," shows that he is committed to seeing *σωφροσύνη* as a kind of technical knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) in which some can be superior to others and should, therefore, 'rule' while the others obey. The emphatic repetition of *ἐπιστήμη*-related words contrasts with the absence of moral knowledge words such as *γνῶσις* and *γιγνώσκειν*.

This second utopian vision dramatically renders Critias' view finally explicit, pulled out from behind the series of euphemisms and defensive reconstructions of his original view, the oligarchic slogan, 'minding one's own business. *Σωφροσύνη*, as he sees it, is found where 'experts' – those with special

[96] It is tempting to say hyperbolic, ironic, and sardonic.

knowledge or skill – make the decisions. As a political program, this might bring to mind twentieth-century fascist ideologies substituting technical or scientific solutions to moral and political problems, eliminating popular participation in the service of having the trains run on time.[97]

As Critias agrees, however, the knowledge that uniquely makes one morally happy (*εὐδαίμων*) is the knowledge of good and bad, not living scientifically; because without *this*, other types of knowledge still produce their specific benefits, but not happiness (173d-174c). So, knowing only *that* you know doesn't produce the benefit of happiness because it lacks specific content; and even knowing *what* you know doesn't produce happiness because happiness depends on knowing good and bad rather than knowing the subject of any other kind of knowledge or all of them as a group. We can gloss this by saying, if you don't recognize the difference between good and bad, if you can't recognize good things as good and bad things as bad, then you can't be happy. As 'recognize' indicates the difference between *γιγνώσκειν* and *ἐπιστήμη*, the introduction and repetition of 'happy' also brings with it the framework of the moral domain. Critias' notion of *σωφροσύνη* as knowledge of knowledge has turned out to be, in other words, non-moral.

At the beginning of this section, Socrates voluntarily assumed knowledge of knowledge to be possible (169cd; repeated at 172c). Logically, then, this is a hypothetical argument; but it is puzzling when he later calls this assumption 'careless' (172d) and then, after concluding that knowledge of knowledge can't be *σωφροσύνη*, criticizes Critias and himself savagely for having made these assumptions "in the most prodigal manner" (175bc). In between, Socrates directs a complex inquiry that is difficult to follow logically, but dramatically makes sense as guiding to a new recognition someone who, up to this point, thought he already knew what *σωφροσύνη* is. The arguments to absence of benefits via the utopian visions serve to reveal to us, even if not to Critias, what Critias really thinks is admirable and advantageous about *σωφροσύνη* on his view of it as *ἐπιστήμη* knowledge of knowledge and – still operative – as 'minding your own business.' Only now does Critias recognize that his idea cannot be correct; and we realize that ultimately what is wrong with his idea is that it lacks moral substance.

[97] Bourgault 2013, 138, also citing *Rep, Lg, Grg,* and *Phdo,* observes that Plato sees "close connections between wealth, imperialism, decadence, and bloodshed."

4. Conclusions

The logical outcome of the dialogue is negative, but a good deal remains logically available, nevertheless. Along with its traditional links to shame or modesty, quietness, and self-knowledge, turning on *γιγνώσκειν-γνῶσις* as moral recognition knowledge, it has now become clear that there is moral benefit to knowing both that you know and what you know in the Socratic sense, as *recognizing* what you know and don't know and that you know the former and not the latter. We are shown, here and elsewhere, that Socrates possesses this kind of moral recognition knowledge and exhibits in this conversation the benefits of his possessing it, his abilities to recognize and master his own sexual arousal and to examine others.

In the final pages (175a-176d), the dialogue returns from the heights of logical abstraction to the existential present, as Plato's dialogues often do. From the procedural premises about being able to explain the virtue one has it follows that neither Charmides nor Critias is *σώφρων*, as readers have also been shown in several ways and as they were historically. Socrates concludes only that we don't yet know what *σωφροσύνη* is and gently guides Charmides to a humbler and more modest sense of himself. More ominously, however, in the final moments, Charmides and Critias agree to force Socrates if necessary to converse daily with Charmides, a paradoxical way to cure him of his insufficient *σωφροσύνη*, that is, to make him moderate.

Σωφροσύνη in the *Charmides* is defined in propositional form neither directly nor indirectly. Logically, all the proposed accounts fail as complete accounts of it; but dramatically a vision of its true nature is shown to readers, positively through the character of Socrates and negatively through that of others, and through the unrefuted views left open in the reader's mind and imagination. *Σωφροσύνη* is not reducible to, but still involves in words and deeds quiet non-self-assertion, measure and respect for limits, modesty, respect for others, self-control, self-awareness, and even, as indicated above, knowledge of knowledge by a particular interpretation of the phrase, not Critias'.

While these semantically diverse meanings are left in play logically, they are resolved and integrated dramatically, in their being facets of the Socrates whose words and deeds we observe. The vision of *σωφροσύνη* shown to us is something complex, foundational, and of ultimately political significance. The complexity lies in its integration of the many otherwise diverse meanings of *σωφροσύνη*. It is foundational because its core elements – recognition of one's impulses, the limits of one's knowledge and of human behavior, and actively controlling oneself to modesty, avoidance of excess, violence, and self-assertion – are the necessary condition of all other virtues or moral excellences. All of which is why

the best English translation of *σωφροσύνη* is moderating or moderation. The many apparently different meanings that *σωφροσύνη* had in different times and contexts are united in Socrates, The Philosopher.

That *σωφροσύνη* is foundational follows from Socrates' initial and never questioned or criticized statement that it is the health of the soul; linked as it is with his account of Zalmoxian holistic medicine, this makes *σωφροσύνη* the foundation of both physical and psychic well-being. Add to that the self-awareness and self-control Socrates demonstrates, it is, as in the *Republic* and *Laws*, that without which the other virtues are impossible or useless.

The political significance of moderation in the *Charmides* follows from the political cast of characters, the dramatic date, and the recurrent idea that good government is *σώφρων*, whatever *σωφροσύνη* turns out to be. But it follows especially from the fact that Critias' core idea about *σωφροσύνη* – doing one's own things – was an aristocratic-oligarchic slogan in an on-going political struggle in which Chaerephon, Charmides, and Critias were actors on different sides and of which, ultimately, Socrates was a victim. The dialogue, with its ultimate refutation of that idea, suggests that *σωφροσύνη* should not be used as political cover for an oligarchy of technical expertise and, more importantly, enacts a non-authoritarian commitment to principles and individual humility about one's own knowledge, importance, and reputation.[98]

The dialogue sums up, integrates, and transforms *σωφροσύνη*'s semantic scope and seeming diversity – psychic health, quietness, modesty, self-knowledge, and self-control, along with doing one's own things and knowledge of knowledge in particular, Socratic senses – by being simultaneously both a structure of arguments and a drama. The dialogue both shows and is philosophy – serious intellectual provocation, critical reasoning, and non-authoritarian moral guidance, but also playfulness, humor, irony, and the pleasures of good writing and good drama. It accomplishes these many ends by deliberate exploitation of polysemy to guide interlocutors and readers to see that conventional or ideological meanings are less simple, consistent, and coherent than their complex, paradoxical, and philosophic ones. In all of these respects, the *Charmides* is exemplary of Plato's philosophic art.[99]

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[98] Bourgault 2013, 3 well says: "Plato belongs neither to the left nor to the right . . . one of the insights that we ought to gather from Plato's reflections on moderation is that state intervention without moral reform (and vice-versa) is insufficient, if not pointless."

[99] Recent attempts to identify Plato's philosophic art include Boys-Stones 2013, Rowe 2007, and Rutherford 1995. See my reviews of Rowe in *CR* 2009, 54-56 and Boys-Stones in *BMCRev* 2016.5.28.

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