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Chapter 14.

“The Elenchos in the *Charmides*, 162-175”

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The *Charmides* has not received much scholarly attention, as Platonic dialogues go,¹ and most discussions of the dialogue focus their attention on the latter half in which Socrates cross-examines Critias about *sophrosyne*.² This is probably due to the fact that two especially

¹ I know of only three books in English on the *Charmides*. T. G. Tuckey, *Plato's Charmides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951) is historically contextualized, philosophically rigorous, but pays insufficient attention to dramatic structures. Van der Ben, *The Charmides of Plato: Problems and Interpretations* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1985) is a close study of several important and controversial passages rather than an overall interpretation. Drew Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Charmides* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) is a Heideggerian “reading” of the dialogue, rather than an attempt to see the dialogue in its own historical and philosophical context. W. Thomas Schmid, *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), is a detailed and sensitive interpretation marred by commitment to Platonic chronology and developmentalism and by the attempt to find a “Socratic” view. One reason for the relative lack of attention may have been the way the dialogue violates modern preconceptions about Platonic dialogues, mixing together, as it does, “early” and “late” characteristics. Crombie found it impossible to understand what the point might have been. For monographs in German, see n. 2.

² This orientation goes back at least to the nineteenth century; see C. Schirlitz, “Der Begriff des Wissens vom Wissen in Platons *Charmides* und seine Bedeutung für das Ergebnis des Dialoges,” *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik* 155 (1897), 451-76, 513-37. It characterizes the work of Tuckey, whose monograph is about three quarters concerned with knowledge of knowledge. For more recent examples, see Christopher Bruell, “Socratic Politics and Self-Knowledge: An Interpretation of Plato's *Charmides*,” *Interpretation* 6 (1977), 141-203; M. Dyson, “Some Problems Concerning Knowledge in Plato's *Charmides*,” *Phronesis* 19 (1974), 102-11; G. Fabris Pianon, “La techne introvabile. Una rilettura del *Carmide*,” *Discorsi* 5 (1985) 7-27; H. Herter, “Selbsterkenntnis der *Sophrosyne* zu Platons *Charmides*,” *Festschrift für Karl Vretska*. Heidelberg, 1970. 74-88; Michael Thomas Liske, “Absolute Selbstreflexion oder wertkritisches Wissen. Thesen zu Platons *Charmides*,” *Th & Ph* 63 (1988) 161-181; Ekkehard Martens, *Das selbstbezügliche Wissen in Platons Charmides* (Munich: Hanser, 1973); Richard McKim, “Socratic self-knowledge and knowledge of knowledge in Plato's *Charmides*,” *TAPA* 115 (1985) 59-77; T. F. Morris, “Knowledge of Knowledge and of Lack of Knowledge in the *Charmides*,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 21 (1989) 49-61. Although the *Charmides* has been considered Plato's dialogue about *sophrosyne* at least since it was given the subtitle *Peri sophrosynes* in antiquity, *sophrosyne* figures also in *Protagoras* (332b-333b), *Gorgias* (esp. 491d-508c), *Phaedo* (68ce, 82c), *Symposium* (188a,

interesting formulations are discussed in this section: (1) that *sophrosyne* is self-knowledge and (2) that it is knowledge of knowledge or science of science.

This *elenchos*, however, has several substantial problems, which may explain why the scholarly discussion has produced so little agreement. First, the extreme abstraction of the crucial section (167b ff.) seems inconsistent with the “early” characteristics of the dialogue.³ Second, it is striking that a number of ideas that are typically “Socratic” on the basis of other dialogues are here put into the mouth of Critias; and then puzzling that Socrates apparently rejects them.⁴ Third, there are disagreements about what exactly the subject is at various points,⁵ and some interpreters argue that there is a fallacious shift of subject from ‘knowledge of oneself’ to ‘knowledge of itself’ (166e), though even here there is disagreement about whether to attribute this Critias, Socrates, or Plato.⁶ Finally, there is the usual question that arises in the so-called aporetic dialogues of whether there is a doctrine of *sophrosyne* (Socrates’ or Plato’s) to be found here, as opposed to the apparently unacceptable alternative that Plato is a skeptic or the propounder of only an *unwritten* doctrine.⁷

209ab), and *Republic* (esp. 430c-442d), *Phaedrus* (esp. 247b-250d), *Timaeus* (273c, 277c, 279bc), *Sophist* (228a-230d), *Politicus* (30da-309e), and *Philebus* (12d, 19c).

³ E.g., the long, detailed dramatic opening (153a-159a), which amounts to approximately one quarter of the entire dialogue, and which Schmid (1) correctly describes as “one of the most richly textured and fascinating among all the prologues to Plato’s works;” Socrates’ playful *elenchos* with Charmides (159b-162b), and the aporetic conclusion (175a-176a).

⁴ Especially *ta hautou prattein* (161b ff.), but also self-knowledge (*gignoskein heauton*, 164d ff.), and the deep interest in *episteme* that is evinced from that point to the end of the dialogue. Noted by Tuckey (30). Kahn (“Plato’s *Charmides* and the Proleptic Reading of Socratic Dialogues,” *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988), 541-9) attempts to resolve the apparent doctrinal contradictions by arguing that the dialogue has an anticipatory (“proleptic”) function, “to prepare the reader for the reception and understanding of later doctrines” (541). But the argument depends on a chronology that cannot be sustained. See Thesleff 1982 for the chronology and Thesleff, *Studies in Plato’s Two-Level Model* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1999) for a sustained critique of Kahn.

⁵ Cf., Robert R Wellman, “The Question Posed at *Charmides* 165a-165c,” *Phronesis* 9 (1964), 107-13.

⁶ Tuckey considered this “the central problem of interpretation” (33).

⁷ In “Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues,” *Classical Quarterly* 47 (1997), 423-37, J. Angelo Corlett argues that interpreters such as Kraut, Irwin, Annas, and Frede err by taking it as self-evident that the dialogues are meant to communicate Plato’s own theories, doctrines, or beliefs. George Rudebusch, “Plato’s Aporetic Style,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1989), 539-47, on the other hand, argues that the aporetic structure serves to produce in the reader an understanding of Socrates’ philosophical opinions as expressed in the dialogues.

There is a more general interpretive problem of which our passage is an example – and it is a microcosm of the larger confrontation between doctrine-oriented interpreters who ignore the dialogues’ dramatic characteristics and those who take the dialogues’ dramatic form seriously and are less interested in isolating Platonic or Socratic doctrines: what *kind* of reasons ought one to give or look for to explain the various turns or steps in the *elenchoi*? One strategy is to give no explanation. From this point of view, Charmides first offers shame (or modesty, *haidos*) and then quietness (*hesychia*); they are simply different answers and neither survives Socrates’ examination. But here, as in many Platonic dialogues, there are connections to be found if one just scratches the surface of the various answers. For one thing, as any of Plato’s original audience would have recognized, ‘shame’ and ‘quietness’ are traditional meanings of *sophrosyne* that we find in earlier poets and playwrights;⁸ for another these answers seem to relate to the character who offers them in ways that are philosophically interesting – modesty and quietness are appropriate forms of *sophrosyne* for a stripling (*meirakion*), which is what Charmides is. This implies that there *is* some reason for the various answers given, but raises the question: what sort of reasons should one seek?

It is helpful to distinguish between what might be called external and internal reasons. By internal reasons I mean that each successive speech (hence each proposed answer) would be explicable by the interaction of the characters conversing within the dialogue itself. It should be noted that this is a criterion that would be applicable to all drama and would contribute, in many cases, to distinguish between better and worse drama. By external reasons, I mean that the successive answers are taken to represent ideas imposed on the characters – just inserted into the dialogue – by Plato for his own reasons. On this view the characters’ speeches do not derive in any significant way from them as characters, but from Plato, for whom they are then merely mouthpieces of various sorts.⁹ The problem with this approach, of course, is that, lacking any

⁸ E.g., Hom *Il* 4.402, 21.468-9, *Od* 4.158.

⁹ See G. A. Press, ed., *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) for arguments in theory and history and interpretations of dialogues on the view that

evidence *other* than that of the dialogues themselves, it is difficult to justify the claim that Plato had this or that reason for putting a particular speech into the mouth of a particular character without either invoking a set of interpretive assumptions that will themselves need proof or else begging the question.¹⁰

If these alternatives – internal only or external only - seem too extreme, one could look for a combination of internal and external reasons. This approach produces alternative lines of interpretation. One possibility is that the internal and external reasons in some way coincide; i.e., the characters' reasons and Plato's reasons are the same. Another is that they differ or even conflict; i.e., the character means one thing but Plato means for the audience to see something else.¹¹ A third is that they are co-ordinated in some way; e.g., inner-outer, higher-lower, foreground-background.

These are *logical* possibilities, but in the nature of the case I don't think that they are *real* possibilities. Since the dialogues themselves are alone what we are given by Plato and since they are self-evidently dramas, whatever else they may be, we must begin by looking for what I have been calling internal reasons and only retreat to the quest for external reasons if the internal reasons do not produce an adequate explanation of what goes on. In fact, careful attention to the internal reasons for a sequence of proposed answers may provide evidence to resolve some of the doubts and disagreements among the scholars, as I think it does in the present case. I propose that the solution to the problems that interpreters have had about Socrates' *elenchos* of Critias are to be explained not by Plato's criticism of Socrates, nor by the demands of a Socratic or Platonic

neither Socrates nor any other individual character ought to be taken as directly expressing Plato's own views and arguments.

¹⁰ See Nails, "Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece," pp. 15 – 26 and Press, "The Logic of Attributing Characters Views to Plato," pp. 27 – 38, in Press, ed. 2000.

¹¹ This is a position taken by some Straussians and some followers of the Tübingen approach.

doctrine of *sophrosyne* being propounded; but rather by Critias' character, his education by Socrates, and his politics.¹²

Critias is a character about whom we know a great deal. Historically, he was a sophist, a poet, and a politician.¹³ He was also Plato's relative, as was Charmides.¹⁴ In the dialogue, he is richly and continuously characterized. We find clear evidence in the dialogue of his elitist aristocratic attitudes,¹⁵ intellectual and moral traits, and, ultimately, his violently reactionary politics. Note the following: he brags about Charmides as philosopher and poet (154e), dreams up a lie to tell Charmides about Socrates' skill at medicine (155b), and then brags more about Charmides' moral qualities even though he doesn't actually remember what they were talking about (157a). Then again he makes vague, sweeping generalizations about how perfect Charmides is; but is himself shown to be more interested in physical than spiritual beauty. He lies about the origin of 'doing ones own as an account of *sophrosyne* (161c). He is 'agitated' and 'eager to impress' (*agonion kai philotimos*) the assembly but 'angry at' Charmides for failing to explain what 'doing ones own' means (162c-d). His high opinion of

¹² On the importance of character in Plato's dialogues, see Lucinda Coventry, "The Role of the Interlocutor in Plato's Dialogues: Theory and Practice," pp. 174-96 in Pelling, ed., *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Mary Whitlock Blundell, "Character and Meaning in Plato's *Hippias Minor*," pp. 131-72 in Klagge and Smith, eds. *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues* (OSAP Suppl. Vol. 1992); Eugenio Benitez, "Characterization and Interpretation: The Importance of Drama in Plato's *Sophist*," *Literature and Aesthetics* (1996), 27-39. On its importance in the *Charmides*, see Schmid 10-14.

¹³ As a politician, nicknamed "The Tyrant," he was involved with Alcibiades and went to Thessaly after his fall, was accused in the mutilation of herms, but released on the evidence of Andocides, had a controversial role in The Four Hundred, was a violently aristocratic opponent of Democracy), leader of the extreme wing of the Thirty Tyrants (Kagan, *Fall of the Athenian Empire* 152), implicated in the liquidation of Theramenes in The Thirty's reign of terror, and died in street fighting in 403. (cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.2, 2, 9, *Hell.* 2.3, 2.4.19; Andoc. 1.47; Lys. 12). Whatever else he was, he was not temperate, and this background also gives the dialogue a political flavor from the very beginning. As a poet, he wrote political elegies (his *Political Constitutions* was apparently partly elegiac) and tragedies (*Tennes*, *Rhadamanthy*, *Pirithous*, *Sisyphus*). Some of his work was compared or confused with that of Euripides. Fragments of his work can be found in Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 770-75. He may also be considered a Sophist or a Presocratic. Fragments of his *Definitions* (*Aphorisoï*) and *Conversations* (*Homiliai*) are collected in Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* 88, though Kerferd (*Sophistic Movement* 53) has doubts about his being considered a sophist.

¹⁴ A second cousin on his mother's side, he seems to have been the dominant male figure in the family during Plato's youth, after his father died. See J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 322-35.

¹⁵ On the elitism of the historical Critias and the circle of men out of which The Thirty Tyrants emerged, see Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 62ff.

himself is reiterated at 169c. His difficulty and then failure to ‘hold himself in’ at 162c shows his lack of *sophrosyne*. *Agon* in the passage above suggests sophistic competitiveness and Plato has given his Critias a sophistic character in other respects. For example, he tends to speechify (163c-d, 164d-165b) and he likes to bring in a poet to support his case (163b). On the other hand, Critias is portrayed as dialectically cagey; note the distinction between making and doing at 163a. He makes sound objections to Socrates’ procedure (163a, 165e, 166c), though he is unable to follow up on them. Yet he complains when Socrates refutes him (165e, 166c); he just doesn’t like it. He exhibits an elitist superiority to such persons as cobblers and fishmongers (163b, 173e). And at the end of the dialogue he implies that he would be willing to use force in order to have Socrates teach Charmides (176c-d).

Plato makes his character display repeatedly a kind of intellectual-moral self-confidence (confidence that he knows, self-certainty, belief in his own knowledge) that characterizes other Platonic interlocutors also and that remains unshaken despite its having been shown to be unwarranted.

Plato’s character, Critias, therefore is complex, but strikingly consistent with the historical one. He is not intellectually dense, like a Meno or Euthyphro; he has some dialectical skill and makes sound objections to Socrates’ procedure at several points. But his intellectual style is sophistic; he likes to give speeches, compete for recognition, cite poets, and argue from authority.¹⁶ His moral character is fairly abysmal. He brags, lies, is eager to impress, has a high opinion of his intellectual abilities that we see to be unwarranted; and he is distinctly lacking in *sophrosyne* by many of the definitions put forward in this dialogue.¹⁷ Many of his statements

¹⁶ Regarding Critias’ withdrawing his statements (164d), Friedländer observes that it’s characteristic of the Sophists to withdraw all their previous statements (*Plato: The Dialogues, First Period Tr.* Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), vol. 2, p. 73).

¹⁷ That he lacks *hesychiotes* (calmness, quietness) is shown by the loud, pushy tone of 165d-166c and 176a-d. That he lacks *aidos* (shame, modesty) is shown by his bragging (154e, 157a). His lack of emotional self-control is shown by his outburst at 162c-e and to be contrasted with Socrates’ control of his sexual arousal at 155d-156a. His lack of self-knowledge and knowledge of knowledge is shown both by his inability to give a coherent account of them and by his behavior. E.g., he repeatedly fails to recognize that he doesn’t know (163d-e, 164c-165b, 166b-c, 168c-e).

reveal the aristocratic political bias that is elsewhere attested. A contemporary reader or hearer of the *Charmides* would have seen in Critias the notorious political leader of the Thirty.

How does this help us understand the steps in Socrates' cross-examination of Critias?

There are essentially four stages in the *elenchos* and we will need to look at each one briefly. The questions I suggest we need to keep in mind are: (1) are these all different answers?¹⁸ How do they relate to each other? (2) How do the shifts occur and what do they signify (as distinct from the question, What does each answer signify)? In each case, I will be arguing that what happens is fully explicable on the basis of Socrates' educational endeavor with respect to Critias.¹⁹ What happens is a result of the character of Critias as it is clearly presented in the dialogue, of his political history as it would have been known to Plato's original audience, and of Socrates' attempt to reveal to Critias both his ignorance and his lack of *sophrosyne*.²⁰ The first two steps of the *elenchos* are relatively straightforward. 'Doing ones own thing' is an anti-democratic political slogan, and the very phrase Socrates uses to define justice in *Republic*.²¹ Thus the answer itself might seem to be 'Socratic;' in fact, it may have done so to Critias, who was an associate of Socrates and may have been accustomed to hearing him use the

¹⁸ A tricky interpretive question is whether, when Critias gives a new view, it is to be understood as a completely new view, completely replacing previous views of his, or whether, on the other hand, the new view is to be taken by us (or was taken by him) as an explanation of the previous view. The latter is van der Ben's interpretation (and, in fact, a main general point of his book); the former the view of George Grote, *Plato and the other companions of Sokrates* (London: J. Murray, 1865-1867) v. 2, p. 155, Guthrie v. 4, p. 160, and Tuckey (24f.), who also cites Pohlenz (*Aus Platons Werdezeit*, 49) to the same effect.

¹⁹ On Plato's presentation of Socrates' educational mission in general, see *Apology* and other dialogues. Many recent commentators have emphasized it. See, e.g., Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 195-210, Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3-29, and David O'Connor's chapter on Socrates in the *Columbia History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Richard Robinson's sound comments on the personal character of dialectic (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 15-19) are echoed by many later interpreters who have noted that Socrates refutes not just arguments, but persons. Cf. Kenneth Seeskin, *Dialogue and Dialectic: A Study in Socratic Method* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 1-4

²¹ Cf. Victor Ehrenberg, "Sophrosyne," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 67 (1947), 46-67; North, Helen. *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966; and A. W. H. Adkins, "Polypragmosune and 'Minding Your Own Business,'" *Classical Philology* 71 (1976), 301-28. The phrase also turns up in different ways in the *Gorgias* (526c), *Politicus* (307e), *Timaeus* (72a) *Theaetetus* (184e), and *Alcibiades I* (127b).

phrase. He seems shocked and angry when Socrates attacks the notion as presented first by Charmides. If we are looking for ethical or political doctrines, however, this attack constitutes a problem. If we see Socrates as engaging in his usual educational activity, it is less so because he can be seen to be trying to show Critias that he doesn't really know what *sophrosyne* is. Critias' entry into the conversation displays him as intemperate in several ways and brings politics into play.

Socrates commences a refutation based on the questionable identity of 'doing' and 'making,' but Critias notices the trap and tries to evade it by appealing to Hesiod for the difference between them. The speech reveals a "narrow . . . snobbish . . . typically aristocratic" attitude, Tuckey rightly says.²² His position is that 'making' of the sort that is *sophrosyne* is not that of artisans. It amounts to saying that the sort of work done by those who work for a living excludes them from *sophrosyne* and thus from social or political power. It is sophistic in both its language and its use of poetry as evidence.²³ This step suggests that although he has some dialectical skill (he heads off Socrates' announced refutation), nevertheless he lacks constructive philosophical alternatives and instead utilizes sophistic strategies (poetry interpretation). But when Socrates says, improbably, that he doesn't understand the distinction between doing and making (163e), Critias just abandons 'doing ones own' and accepts Socrates' suggestion that what he really means is 'doing good things.' Note that this is not a reflective move on Critias' part; he is essentially reacting against Socrates' criticism.

Thus he comes to his second answer, 'doing good things,' which, as indicated, reveals his aristocratic class bias against people who 'make' things. The position is that what the many, artisans, for example, make are not the sorts of things that should be called 'good;' only those of persons like himself and members of his class who don't make things in that sense and whose 'own things,' presumably, include poetry-making, speech-making, and governing. And note that,

²² Tuckey, p. 103f. Van der Ben (34-38) analyzes the false reasoning in detail.

²³ On sophistic reasoning, see W. K. C. Guthrie *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) v. 3, pp.41-50 and G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 59-67.

like many another Platonic interlocutor, Critias does not think his first answer has been refuted; only that he needs to explain it more clearly.

Socrates suggests that a temperate man might be ignorant of himself as temperate if *sophrosyne* is understood as simply ‘doing good things’ (164ac). This motivates Critias to back away from ‘doing good things’ and give a long speech about Delphi the point of which is to shift to another idea about *sophrosyne*, that it is self-knowledge (*to gignoskein heauton*, 164d). The transition thus initiated from step two to three is where matters begin to get complicated. The first complication is Critias’ speech itself, which is the subject of radically differing assessments in the literature.²⁴ It is sophistic, mock reasoning, and displays apparent, not real intellectual seriousness. It reveals that he is not ashamed to be caught contradicting himself. He still doesn’t think his answer has been refuted and he is not learning anything.

Observe that the refutation of *sophrosyne* as ‘doing good things’ derives from ignorance, hence the notion of knowledge, which Critias asserts next, is suggested by Socrates, as was ‘doing good things’ before. Thus again Critias’ next proposal is essentially a reaction to Socrates’ criticism rather than an independent, reflective proposal. The actual motivation is something like this: Socrates shows Critias that ‘doing good things’ can be made to seem (the suggested argument is faulty) to conflict with a traditional identification of *sophrosyne* with self-knowledge and Critias is so distressed by this appearance that he leaps into precisely this traditional notion. Critias is trying to make his beliefs square with traditional beliefs. Again, note that Plato makes us see that Critias is distressed by Socrates’ suggestion; but distressed, to be clear, about his public refutation rather than by a recognition of his lack of knowledge.

The idea of self-knowledge, like the idea of doing one’s own, seems like a serious and Socratic notion, but Critias is vague²⁵ and, given how distressed and reactive he is, it seems

²⁴ Although van der Ben, Taylor, Shorey, and Hyland say nothing, Tuckey reads this as Critias struggling to catch “what Socrates is driving at” (24). Guthrie (v. 4, p. 160 and n. 2) considers the reply “frank,” and, disagrees with Friedländer (73), that such a reply “made in these terms is surely a sign of grace.”

²⁵ “This is pretty much what I say temperance is” (tr. Sprague). *Schedon . . . ti egoge auto touto phemi einai sophrosyne, to gignoskein heauton*. Note the *schedon . . . ti*.

much more like an attempt to escape criticism by a pretence of piety that is reminiscent of a modern politician “wrapping himself in the flag.” It does relate to a traditional association of *sophrosyne*, but the traditional meaning, recognize your limits as human, is not what Critias takes the meaning to be.²⁶ His view is actually non-traditional and consistent with the sophistic orientation toward expert-knowledge. Once again Critias wants to give a speech and appeals to authority, this time of the god at Delphi. Socrates’ attempt to find out the peculiar subject of this knowledge leads Critias to his final attempt at a definition.

There are several further complications at this point. One is the assumption – to which Critias here seems peculiarly committed – that a *sophron* must know he is *sophron*. Although it was laid down as a basic premise of the entire conversation about *sophrosyne* (159a), Socrates himself illustrates that it’s a false assumption,²⁷ or at least not true in any simple sense. Thus Critias’ commitment to it is peculiar. Since he is demonstrably *not sophron*,²⁸ what he *really* seems to believe is that it’s the opinion or reputation (*doxa*) for *sophrosyne* that matters.

Another complication for many interpreters is what exactly the topic of the dialogue is from here on. It is easy to think that self-knowledge and knowledge of knowledge are each a new and independent proposal. The dramatic context, however, shows that Critias is continuing to refine the account of *sophrosyne* as self-knowledge, which, in turn, he considered to be a clarification of ‘doing ones own’.²⁹ Thus the “clarifications” Critias is driven to make actually serve to reveal the ideas that lay behind his spoken words.

²⁶ As it turns out later. ‘Knowledge of knowledge’ is not a *new* account, but an explanation of ‘self-knowledge;’ so Critias is interpreting ‘Know Thyself’ as meaning ‘Know what *episteme* you have.’ And if, as I think, he still holds to ‘doing ones own’ with it’s class implications, then he is taking the Delphic inscription to address only *kaloi kagathoi* like himself.

²⁷ As in many dialogues, Plato presents Socrates as possessing the quality under discussion at the same time that he makes Socrates deny knowing what that quality is. To take just one example of this from the *Charmides*, Socrates’ description of his sexual arousal, loss and then recovery of self-control at the sight of Charmides (155d-156a) exhibit him to us as possessing *sophrosyne* in one of its traditional meanings, as has often been noted.

²⁸ The evidence for his lack of moderation is collected in n.18 *supra*.

²⁹ Unlike Charmides, Critias never admits he has been refuted and attempts a new account. Instead, he takes himself to be only clarifying his account in the shift from ‘doing ones own’ to ‘doing good things’ (164b-c) and refining his account in the shift from ‘doing good things’ to self-knowledge (164c-165c) and

Next, although Socrates begins the *elenchos* here by securing Critias' assent to the statement that this self-knowledge is a kind of *episteme*, we ought to wonder, Is (or in what sense is) *gignoskein* a species of the genus *episteme*? That Critias agrees shows us that he is not careful about ideas and that, again sophistically, he wants to reduce the kind of religious-moral recognition of *Gnothi sauton* to a technical expertise.³⁰

In the ensuing discussion (165c-e) Critias makes several objections to Socrates' procedures, but as before in each case he gives in quickly and revises or clarifies his position, now to 'knowledge of itself and other knowledges' or briefly 'knowledge of knowledge' (166c). Does this, as some interpreters believe, involve a fallacy? No; for Socrates' returns to 'self-knowledge' (167a, 170a) indicate that he still considers self-knowledge the operative account. Moreover, Critias' view makes sense – to a Critias. Self-knowledge is knowing that one has *episteme*. It's an amoral, aristocratic, intellectualistic notion; and it is *this* that Socrates now refutes.

Like self-knowledge, 'knowledge of knowledge' superficially seems a serious and Socratic kind of idea, with its emphasis on *episteme*. But in light of Critias' evident distress at Socrates' questions and the way he again just gives in to Socrates' objections without trying to counter them, it looks more like a philosophic makeshift that, however, *does* appeal to him. The position would be that a *sophron* is a person who, having some *episteme*, has *episteme* of that fact.

The refutation of this, Critias' final account, has two different phases. In the first, Socrates forces Critias to experience *aporia*. The *aporia* is about whether such a thing as (i.e., the category, kind, genus) *episteme epistemes* – which is exactly what Critias' correct account is

in the shift from self-knowledge to knowledge of knowledge (166b-e). Socrates' comments, too, assume that the previous accounts remain operative; e.g., at 170a, where he equates knowledge of knowledge with self-knowledge.

³⁰ The ultimate result in the present case is that what is refuted is not *the* idea that *sophrosyne* is self-knowledge, but *Critias'* way of understanding that idea. As here, so often, one must interpret *through* the superficial, apparent generalization and then *through* the real *ad hominem* level of the argument, to the deeper kind of generalization that Plato is after, which is moral *and* political *and* philosophic.

– is possible; and thus Critias is brought for the first time in this dialogue to doubt himself, his knowledge, though he doesn't admit it.³¹ Thereafter, as in many other dialogues, Socrates takes over and becomes much more overtly directive. In this second phase, Socrates proceeds hypothetically to argue that even if there *were* such a thing as *sophrosyne* by Critias' account of it, it wouldn't be beneficial, and given the earlier premise about benefit, it follows that it wouldn't be *sophrosyne*.

But what is most interesting is the detailed hypothesis – to which Critias gives enthusiastic assent – of what can be called a utopia of expertise or technical utopia. It is presented in two passages close to each other near the end of the dialogue.

1. *Charmides* 171d-172a (Tr. Sprague)

“ . . . if, as we assumed in the beginning, the temperate man knew what he knew and what he did not know (and that he knows the former but not the latter) and were able to investigate another man who was in the same situation, then it would be of the greatest benefit to us to be temperate. Because those of us who had temperance would live lives free from error and so would all those who were under our rule. Neither would we ourselves be attempting to do things we did not understand – rather we would find those who did understand and turn the matter over to them – nor would we trust those over whom we ruled to do anything except what they would do correctly, and this would be that of which they possessed the science. And thus, by means of temperance, every household would be well run and every city well governed, and so in every case where temperance reigned. And with error rooted out and rightness in control, men so circumstanced would necessarily fare admirably and well (*kalos kai eu prattein*) in all their doings and, faring well, they would be happy (*eudaimonas*). Isn't this what we mean about temperance,

³¹ Plato underscores this fact for us at 169c-d. Critias is said to have 'caught' *aporia* the way one catches yawning. Note that it seems an odd argument on Socrates' part, but it is explicable in terms of Socrates' educational mission with respect to Critias.

Critias,” I said, “when we say what a good thing it would be to know what one knows and what one does not know?”

“This is certainly what we mean,” he said.

“But now you see,” I replied, “that no science of this sort has put in an appearance.”

2. *Charmides* 173a-d (Tr. Sprague)

“Listen then,” I said, “to my dream, to see whether it comes through horn or through ivory. If temperance really ruled over us and were as we now define it, surely everything would be done according to science: neither would anyone who says he is a pilot (but is not) deceive us, nor would any doctor or general or anyone else pretending to know what he does not know escape our notice. This being the situation, wouldn’t we have greater bodily health than we do now, and safety when we are in danger at sea or in battle, and wouldn’t we have dishes and all our clothes and shoes and things skillfully made for us, and many other things as well, because we would be employing true craftsmen? And, if you will, let us even agree that the mantic art is knowledge of what is to be and that temperance, directing her, keeps away deceivers and sets up true seers as prophets of the future. I grant that the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way – because temperance, watching over it, would not allow the absence of science to creep in and become our accomplice. But whether acting scientifically would make us fare well and be happy (*an prattontes eu an prattoimen kai eudaimoimen*), this we have yet to learn, my dear Critias.”

“But on the other hand,” he said, “you will not readily gain the prize of faring well by any other means if you eliminate scientific action.”

Critias’ idea of what *sophrosyne* leads to by his definitions is a society in which citizens would do all and only what they knew, including governing. This is consistent with Critias’

aristocratic bias, for he imagines that he and his class are those who know how to govern.³² It is this vision of things that Socrates at the end of the *Charmides* shows would not be beneficial even if it were possible. The refutation of Critias' final definition is a rejection neither of *sophrosyne* nor of *episteme*, but of Critias and the kind of aristocratic-epistemic elitism in which he believes in the dialogue as he seems to have done in reality.

Interestingly, though, Socrates has gradually brought to light – possibly for Critias but certainly for us – Critias' notion of civic happiness that has been masquerading as (or mistaken for) a notion of *sophrosyne*. Thus the late *elenchos* of the *Charmides* illustrates the Socratic maieutics of the *Theaetetus* and the Socratic *paideia* of the *Apology*.

The problems that interpreters have had about Socrates' *elenchos* of Critias can, therefore, be explained through the character of Critias as it is clearly presented in the dialogue, his political history as it would have been known to Plato's original audience, and Socrates' attempt to reveal to Critias both his ignorance and his lack of *sophrosyne*. The abstraction in the discussion of 'knowledge of knowledge' that is sometimes taken to be a "late" characteristic, actually reflects the carefully drawn character of an intellectual, but sophistic Critias who has a penchant for fancy talk and an inability to admit his ignorance. The puzzling occurrence of otherwise "Socratic" ideas in Critias' mouth and their rejection by Socrates is less puzzling in light Critias' oligarchic politics and his habit of adopting each critical concept that Socrates uses rather than rethink his beliefs or think critically about Socrates' refutations. It is worth considering, too, that one function of the dialogue may be Plato's attempt to reveal to *us* the problems with the sort of epistemic utopia that is dreamt of by Critias and envisaged in the *Republic*.

Similarly, the subject account of *sophrosyne* at each point is less problematic if one keeps in mind who Critias is and how each account is consistent both with his character and with his previous answers. For him, *sophrosyne* characterizes only the actions of aristocrats, who 'do

³² "Charmides and Critias were extreme oligarchs, and evidently wished to confine political activity to their own, very small group of aristocratic Athenians." Adkins, "Polypragmosune," 325

their own' by governing *inter alia*, who alone fit the Delphic maxim because they alone *have* the kind of expert knowledge Critias cares about, and, moreover, whose *sophrosyne* consists in their knowing that they have such knowledge.

Finally, although many interesting ideas come up in the refutation, the dialogue ends aporetically; no Socratic or Platonic doctrine of *sophrosyne* is directly propounded, though it is suggested that the kind of knowledge that *would* satisfy the beneficiality criterion is knowledge of good and evil. That does not mean that we learn nothing about *sophrosyne*, however. Critias both in his ideas and in his character instantiates lack of *sophrosyne* just as Socrates in both ways instantiates *sophrosyne*. Charmides can be located somewhere in between; but we know how he turned out and we are invited to infer from this dialogue the reason why. Thus there is what I call an enactment of *sophrosyne*,³³ which gains our adherence as much by extra-logical means as by its arguments.³⁴ Rather than a propositional definition of *sophrosyne*, we come to a clearer vision of what it is and what it is not to be *sophron*. And rather than acquiring a definition by means of a purely logical proof that might obtain our rational assent, we acquire a vision by means of arguments complemented by the imaginative and emotional attractiveness of Socrates' and repulsiveness of Charmides' and Critias' characters and comportment.

Attention to character also suggests an explanation for what looks to some interpreters like a Socratic or Platonic doctrine. To be believable, to be true in the sense that good stories are true, characters must have beliefs, attitudes, and practices only some of which appear directly in words or actions; the words and actions of a "true" character, in this sense, come from within.

³³ My conception of the dialogues as enactments is developed in "Plato's Dialogues as Enactments," pp. 133-52 in Francisco J. Gonzalez, ed., *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995). A similar notion is developed in Eugenio Benitez and Livia Guimares, "Philosophy as Performed in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1993), 297-328 and in Victorino Tejera's conception of the dialogues as philosophy in the "exhibitive mode;" see *Plato's Dialogues One by One: A Structural Interpretation* (New York: Irvington, 1984). See also Benitez' "Argument, Rhetoric, and Philosophic Method: Plato's *Protagoras*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25 (1992), 222-52.

³⁴ David Blank ["The Arousal of Emotion in Plato's Dialogues," *CQ* 43 (1993), 428-39] argues that there is no conflict between the dialectical, protreptic Socrates of history and the philosophical arguer of Plato's dialogues, because "The intended effect of Plato's arguments is essentially, though be no means exclusively, emotional; his logic affects us while it teaches" (428).

Socrates is the most fully developed of Plato's characters and in some ways the dialogues are monuments and memorabilia of him. What readers take for Socratic or Platonic doctrines may just be the beliefs and attitudes that serve to define one of the most well formed characters in the history of Western literature.