

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The *Charmides* is a strangely attractive and unsettling work.¹ Narrated by Socrates to a 'noble friend' whose identity remains undisclosed, it unfolds as both a powerful drama of characters and a complex philosophical argument assessed in vastly different ways by interpreters of the dialogue. According, for instance, to T. Godfrey Tuckey, author of the first analytic monograph on the *Charmides*,

no better introduction to Plato's thought could be devised. The *Charmides* forces the reader to study the historical background of the early dialogues. It shows us Plato's political and educational thought in formation. It helps us to see the origins of those logical and metaphysical theories which Plato later constructed to provide a framework for his ethical doctrine. Above all, it forces us to think hard and analyse meanings with care and precision, compelling clear thought by the form of its argument as well as advocating it by its content.²

Paul Shorey, however, provides a check to such enthusiasm: 'the dialogue involves so much metaphysical subtlety that some critics have pronounced it late, some spurious, and many feel the same distaste for it that they do for the subtlest parts of the *Theaetetus*'.³

Both statements are outdated by over half a century and neither is entirely defensible. But, taken together, they convey an idea of the range of readings that the *Charmides* is susceptible to and also indicate what I take to be a peculiarity of this dialogue: perhaps more than any other Platonic composition, everything about the *Charmides* has been debated, all of it at once: not merely this or that aspect of the drama or the argument, but the nature and purpose of the work taken as a whole. The present monograph

¹ Gould 1955, 36, groups together the *Charmides*, *Hippias Minor*, and the first book of the *Republic* on the grounds that they have at least one thing in common: they may all be called Plato's 'problem plays' in the sense that they have all caused controversy regarding their real significance.

² Tuckey 1951, 105. ³ Shorey 1933, 103.

is no exception. It has the form of a running commentary that closely follows Plato's text and gradually develops a new and integral reading of the dialogue. I hope to be able to defend that reading thoroughly and, as far as possible, convincingly. Nonetheless, I believe that the dialogue is deliberately open-ended and, at times, deliberately ambiguous. Partly for that reason it remains open to diverging approaches and multiple viewpoints. We may gain a preliminary understanding of why or how this happens by surveying the dialogue's salient features: the story, the characters, the subject, the argument, the interplay between the dramatic and the philosophical elements of the dialogue, the intertextual connections that it evokes, and its declared objectives.

1 An Interpretative Summary of the Dialogue

The *Charmides* is a narrated dialogue, artfully crafted and masterfully executed. Drama and philosophical argument are interwoven in a story whose external frame is drawn by Socrates as narrator at the beginning of the dialogue but not at its end. He is represented as relaying to an anonymous friend an encounter that he has had some time in the past with two fellow Athenians, the young Charmides and the guardian and relative of this latter, Critias. Socrates' narrative consists of the particulars of that encounter and exactly coincides with the dialogue's content.

In the unusually long prologue, Socrates relates that, upon his return to Athens from the battle of Potidaea, he went to the palaestra of Taureas where he found many of his acquaintances, including Chaerephon and Critias, son of Callaeschrus. In the ensuing narrative, after giving them news from the camp, he enquires about his own concerns, namely what is the present state of philosophy and whether there are any young men distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both. Critias answers that his cousin and ward, Charmides, is notable for both and, indeed, Charmides' entrance confirms that the young man has a splendid stature and appearance. Socrates proposes to examine whether his soul is just as perfect as his body and Critias volunteers to facilitate the undertaking by summoning Charmides on the pretext that Socrates has a cure for the morning headaches bothering the young man. Charmides' approach causes a stir in the male company and sexual arousal in Socrates who, however, shows himself capable of mastering himself. He answers affirmatively Charmides' question whether he knows the headache's remedy, claims that the remedy consists in a leaf and a charm, and appeals to the authority of Zalmoxis, a divinity of the Getae in Thrace, to convince the youth that the part

cannot be treated independently of the whole and, therefore, Charmides' head and body cannot be cured unless his soul is first treated by means of charms consisting in 'beautiful words'. He stresses the paramount role of *sôphrosynê*, temperance,⁴ as the cause of everything good for a person, and underscores the importance of finding out whether temperance is present in one's soul. For his own part, Charmides agrees to submit his soul to the charm before being given the remedy for the headache and, after a short speech in which Socrates traces Charmides' noble lineage, he agrees to investigate together with Socrates the question of whether or not he possesses *sôphrosynê*, temperance – a cardinal virtue of Greek culture, literally associated with the possession of a sound and healthy mind, widely believed to involve self-control and a sort of self-knowledge, and carrying civic and political connotations as well.⁵

Sôphrosynê, temperance, and the successive attempts to define it turn out to be the main subject of the conversation, first between Socrates and young Charmides, and then between Socrates and the mature and experienced Critias. According to Charmides' first definition, 'temperance is to do everything in an orderly and quiet way'; it is, in other words, a sort of quietness (159b2–5). Working from Charmides' own set of beliefs, Socrates brings counterexamples to show that, in fact, temperance is only contingently related to quietness and occasionally is more closely related to the opposite of quietness. Charmides then proposes a second definition, that temperance is modesty or a sense of shame (160e3–5), which is also refuted. Charmides owns himself convinced by the argument, at which point he proposes a third definition which he says he has heard from someone else, namely that temperance is 'doing one's own' (161b5–6). It becomes clear that the author of the definition is Critias who gets increasingly angry because Charmides accepts the naïve assumption that 'doing one's own' is equivalent to 'making one's own' and hence is unable to defend the definition. So, Critias jumps into the discussion and takes over the argument. On the authority of Hesiod, he draws a distinction between *doing* a thing and *making* something and he modifies accordingly the claim advanced earlier by Charmides: now temperance is defined as the doing

⁴ There is no English word that can fully capture the meaning of σωφροσύνη (translit. *sôphrosynê*) and all its connotations and nuances. Following most translators (e.g. Lamb, Sprague, Jowett), I render 'σωφροσύνη' by 'temperance' and 'σώφρων' by 'the temperate person' or 'the temperate man'. Other translations include 'modesty', which, however, lies closer to the meaning of αἰδώς (a sense of shame), and 'discipline' (Moore and Raymond 2019), which, nonetheless, carries strong behavioural connotations and, moreover, does not adequately capture the epistemic aspects of the Greek notion of σωφροσύνη.

⁵ See, notably, the classic study by North 1966.

of good things or the performance of useful and beneficial actions (cf. 163e1–3). This variant too gets refuted when Socrates points out that, assuming that this definition is true, it would seem to follow that the experts in various fields may be temperate and yet ignorant of their temperance (163e3–164d3).

Rather than accept this implication, Critias appeals to Apollo and the Delphic oracle to propose another, altogether new definition: that temperance is knowing oneself (165b4). It is the *epistêmê* of oneself (165c4–7). The meaning of ‘*epistêmê*’ in this and other Platonic contexts is controversial. Up to a certain point in the dialogue, the interlocutors of the *Charmides* use the term interchangeably with ‘*technê*’⁶ to refer to all sorts of arts and crafts, and also sciences or disciplines. Insofar as each of these latter presupposes the mastery of interrelations and rules within its own domain, the most accurate translation of ‘*epistêmê*’ and ‘*technê*’ is ‘scientific or expert understanding’. As a shorthand, I follow the scholarly convention of rendering ‘*epistêmê*’ by ‘science’ or (expert) ‘knowledge’, and ‘*technê*’ by ‘art’, ‘craft’, or ‘expertise’. But it should be borne in mind that these expressions are intended to entail the ideas of causal explanation and complete understanding.⁷ (This point will become clearer in the later chapters of the book.)

To continue with the summary of the *Charmides*: Critias appears to expect that his definition of temperance in terms of knowing oneself would be acceptable to Socrates (165b3–4). And indeed it evokes in the reader’s mind Socrates’ own quest for self-knowledge in the *Apology*, the terms in which he develops his conception of this latter, the connection that he draws between self-examination and self-knowledge, and his claim that the unexamined life is not worth living (*Ap.* 38a). Nonetheless, Socrates declares that he cannot accept Critias’ definition without submitting it to examination (165b5–c4). On my reading of the text, he thus makes clear that the argument to follow principally regards not his own beliefs about self-knowledge, but Critias’ conception of temperance as self-knowledge, whatever that turns out to be.

To begin this enquiry, Socrates uses analogies from specific sciences or arts (*epistêmai* or *technai*) such as medicine and house-building to press the idea that temperance as an *epistêmê* must have an object distinct from itself, and he asks what that object might be (165c4–166b6). Critias argues that, on the contrary, the *epistêmê* equivalent to temperance differs from all

⁶ I shall say more about this both at the end of the Introduction and in later chapters.

⁷ See the argument by Nehamas 1984, which, nonetheless, focuses on Plato’s later dialogues.

other *epistēmai* or *technai* precisely because it does not have an object distinct from itself (166b7–c3). From this point onwards, the interlocutors favour the use of ‘*epistēmē*’ over that of ‘*technē*’, presumably because they are focusing primarily on the cognitive aspects of the virtue under discussion.⁸ Eventually, with the help of Socrates, Critias articulates his final definition of temperance as follows: temperance is the only *epistēmē* which is of itself and the other *epistēmai* and the privation of *epistēmē*,⁹ but of no other object (166e4–167a8). As Socrates phrases it, temperance is an ‘*epistēmē epistēmēs*’ (usually rendered as ‘knowledge of knowledge’ or ‘science of science’),¹⁰ but not an *epistēmē* of some distinct object or subject-matter (as well).¹¹ As we ourselves might put it, Critias contends that temperance is the only knowledge or science which is both strictly reflexive and higher-order: it governs everything that qualifies as an *epistēmē* just insofar as it is an *epistēmē*¹² in addition to being of itself.

Now Socrates wants to know, first, whether such an *epistēmē* could be conceivable or credible and, second, even assuming that it were possible, whether it would be appropriately beneficial (167a9–b4). The elenchus that follows addresses these two questions in turn. Initially, Socrates develops an analogical argument (I call it the Argument from Relatives: 167c8–169c2) which examines different groups of relatives that Socrates takes to be analogous to *epistēmē*: perceptual relatives such as sight and hearing, other psychological relatives such as desire and belief, quantitative relatives such as half and double or larger and smaller, and, finally, cases such as motion and heat. Critias comes to accept that, in some of these cases, strictly reflexive constructions appear very odd and that, in other cases, such constructions seem entirely incoherent. Hence, he reluctantly accepts the tentative conclusion drawn by Socrates that a strictly reflexive *epistēmē* likewise seems incredible if not altogether impossible.

In the next phase of the elenchus, Socrates proposes that they concede for the sake of the argument the possibility of reflexive knowledge in order to address the issue of benefit: assuming that temperance can be an *epistēmē*

⁸ Compare Plt. 292b: ‘we have said that the kingly art is one of the *epistēmai*, I think’. First, the expertise of the statesman is called a *technē* but then it is called an *epistēmē* to emphasise the cognitive aspects of statesmanship, in particular the capacity to form accurate judgements and issue commands accordingly. On Plato’s use of synecdoche, see Hulme Kozey 2018 and the remarks in Chapter 8, 172 and note 7.

⁹ This exactly corresponds to the text and gets articulated in terms of knowing what one knows and what one does not know (167a5–7).

¹⁰ See notes 5 and 6 in this chapter. ¹¹ This point is controversial and shall be discussed later.

¹² Hence reflexivity is preserved all the way through. On this point, see Chapters 9 and 10, *passim*, and also Chapter 11, 271 and *passim*.

of *epistêmê* itself but of no other object, what good might it bring? On the basis of this assumption, Socrates develops the last, very impressive argument of the *Charmides* (I dub it the Argument from Benefit: 169c3–175a8). On the reading that I shall defend, this is a cumulative argument which advances in successive stages. First, conceding for the sake of the investigation that an ‘*epistêmê epistêmês*’ may be possible, Socrates questions whether it entails knowledge-what as well as knowledge-that: can its possessor tell *what things* one knows or doesn’t know, in addition to being able to judge *that* one person possesses some knowledge but another person doesn’t? As the elenchus suggests, since, according to Critias, temperance is an *epistêmê* of itself but of no distinct object or subject-matter, and assuming (as Socrates does) that the content of an *epistêmê* is determined by its proprietary object, i.e. what the *epistêmê* is of, it seems to follow that temperance cannot be substantive knowledge of content (knowledge-what) but only discriminatory knowledge (knowledge-that). Namely, it is a knowledge that enables the temperate person to distinguish knowers from non-knowers, without being able to tell, however, what these knowers are knowers *of*. Second, Socrates points out, counterfactually, the great benefits that temperance would yield if it were substantive knowledge. Then, he briefly suggests that, since temperance is not in fact substantive knowledge and cannot offer great benefits, perhaps it may offer certain lesser benefits. Both interlocutors, however, dismiss this possibility, for it seems absurd.

Third, to help the argument, Socrates proposes another major concession. Let us assume, he says, that temperance is, in fact, substantive understanding entailing knowledge-what: it is knowledge of *what things* one knows and doesn’t, as well as knowledge *that* one has some knowledge but another person doesn’t. To consider this hypothesis, Socrates proposes a thought-experiment about an imaginary society ruled by temperate rulers endowed with *epistêmê epistêmês*. And although he grants that such a society would function efficiently under the rule of the ‘science of science’, nonetheless he questions that the city would do well and the citizens be happy. Fourth, continuing with the argument, Socrates extracts from Critias the admission that, in truth, happiness is not the proprietary object of temperance or the ‘science of science’, but the proprietary object of another *epistêmê*, namely the *epistêmê* of good and evil. Finally, he completes the elenchus by refuting Critias’ last suggestion, namely that since the ‘science of science’ is supposed to be higher-order on account of its reflexivity and hence govern all the other sciences, it governs the science of good and evil as well and can appropriate the peculiar object of this latter. However, Socrates retorts, since the ‘science of science’ is supposed

to have no object other than *epistêmê* simpliciter, it cannot appropriate the proprietary object of any particular *epistêmê*, including, of course, the science of good and evil. Nor can it appropriate the latter's peculiar function and the benefits it brings. The absurd outcome of the investigation is that temperance as Critias defined it would be completely useless.

In his brilliant assessment of the argument (175a9–d5), Socrates registers its major flaws and takes responsibility for having conducted the search in the wrong way. The epilogue of the work points back to the themes of the prologue, but also adds a dark shade of its own. Socrates again addresses young Charmides (175d5–176a5). He restates his own belief that temperance is one of the greatest goods for a human being and suggests that the youth must do everything to cultivate it in his soul. He expresses regret for failing to deliver the 'beautiful words' necessary for applying Zalmoxis' remedy. And he urges Charmides to keep examining and re-examining himself (176a1). The youth appears eager to place himself under Socrates' care. Critias instructs him to do so. And both of them together warn Socrates that he must not oppose their plan, for they are prepared to use force to execute it (175a6–d5).

2 The Historical Subtext

This is what Aristotle might call the plot of the play. It is a very Athenian drama. The action takes place in the early days of the Peloponnesian war, in a wrestling-school in Athens overlooked by one of the city's temples. In the opening scene, Plato's marvellous representation of the ambiance in the gymnasium and of Socrates' entrance evokes the idealised description of Athens and the Athenian way of life in the Funeral Oration that, according to Thucydides, was delivered by Pericles in 431 BCE (approximately two years before the dramatic date of the *Charmides*), in honour of the citizens who fell in battle in the first summer of the Peloponnesian war: courage in war and enjoyment in the hours of peace, strength as well as grace, simplicity of manner and the love of beauty, the importance of leisure and the love of philosophy, and a city unafraid of the enemy, whose greatest adornments derive from the virtue of its citizens and whose values are 'a school for all Greece' (Thucydides, *Hist.* II 37.1–41.4).

The opening scene of the *Charmides* seems an emblematic illustration of these attitudes. Socrates has just returned from a destructive battle but shows no fear or sorrow. His concern is beauty and philosophy and the presence of both in the city. He appears eager to contemplate the former and engage in the latter as soon as he is given the opportunity to do so. As

for the other men surrounding the palaestra, their easy manner and pleasantries might make it difficult to believe that they are living in wartime. The same holds for the youths training in the palaestra, for Charmides' admirers, and for Charmides himself. Thus, in these early days of the Great War, Plato depicts Athens full of confidence and hope. The representation has verisimilitude, for Athens could still rely on its army and navy and the fighting spirit of its men. Also, it could still look forward to a new generation of leaders steeped in the values of the city, living the Athenian way of life, and ready to defend Athens and everything it stood for.

Both as narrator and as character, Socrates underscores that prospect.¹³ Notably, the description of Charmides' entrance conveys the impression that the young man is vested with a sort of divinity: superbly handsome, impassive like a god, followed by a train of admirers, astonishing and bewildering to everyone who sees him. If only his physical perfection corresponds to perfection in his soul, there is much that he could achieve. Evidently, the concern about Charmides' *kalokagathia*, excellence of body and soul, is not merely a private matter. For given his social lineage and standing, he is expected to someday play a dominant role in Athenian politics. Within the frame of the dialogue, then, Charmides represents a great hope for Athens. This remark applies to Critias as well. He comes from the same stock as Charmides, is worldly, educated, and formidably intelligent, and, therefore, has the credentials to get involved in high-level politics. The narration stresses that Critias is Charmides' guardian and suggests that he exercises considerable influence on his younger cousin. He appears to serve as a model for Charmides and have authority over the youth's education. From within the framework of the dialogue, then, it might seem that Charmides will turn out right, not least because both he and his guardian acknowledge the value of dialectical discussion and Socrates' pedagogical gifts. One might think that the future is open and hopeful for the two cousins, for Socrates, and for Athens as well.

Plato and his audience, however, have the privilege of hindsight and can tell a different tale: of unfulfilled promise and frustrated hope, of foolishness and loss, of ugliness and violence and destruction. Approximately twenty-five years after the fictional encounter narrated in the *Charmides*, Athens lost the war to the Spartan coalition (404 BCE). The Long Walls

¹³ There is complex irony here. Plato's audiences know that Critias and Charmides do not uphold the democratic values of Athens but are prominent defendants of oligarchy, and eventually will side with Sparta and join the Thirty.

were destroyed, the population was decimated, and the city itself ran the risk of being razed to the ground. The Athenian way of life was lost forever, together with the tolerance and joyful privacy that the Athenians used to enjoy. Democracy was abolished, a military junta commonly called the Thirty and headed by Critias assumed power in Athens, and a similar tyranny was installed in Piraeus under Charmides (404 BCE). Both juntas proceeded to 'purge' the city by summarily executing hundreds of Athenians, and both were overthrown and their leaders killed a few months later (403 BCE). The restored democracy shared only superficial similarities with the polity exalted by Thucydides' Pericles in the Funeral Oration. The confidence, tolerance, and goodwill that the latter attributed to Athenian democracy were replaced by insecurity, intolerance, and the blind determination to eliminate every possible threat to the recently re-established democratic regime. Socrates was perceived as such a threat, and his earlier acquaintance with Critias became one of the liabilities on account of which he was brought to trial and condemned to death (399 BCE).

In outline, these are the historical facts that constitute the background to the *Charmides*. Since Critias and Charmides were Plato's close relatives,¹⁴ their crimes, disgrace, and ignominious death must have affected him deeply, all the more because they also contributed to Socrates' condemnation and execution. Nonetheless, the dramatic date of the dialogue precludes any direct reference by the narrator to those events. It is natural to wonder why Plato chose to set the dialogue so far back in time, and it is also natural to ask why he chose Charmides and Critias as its protagonists. These issues are interrelated and controversial. Also, they bear on another cluster of questions even more difficult to answer; notably, what is the true subject of the dialogue and what is the ultimate purpose for which it was written? An entry point to the discussion of these matters is the dramatic portraits of Socrates' two interlocutors.

3 *The Protagonists of the Charmides*

While the *Charmides* is mostly considered an apologetic work, there is no consensus regarding the nature or the beneficiary of the defence that it is supposed to offer. According to some interpreters, Plato wishes to redress the reputation of his relatives by showing them in a favourable light. On

¹⁴ Plato's family tree is complicated. It seems that Plato was Charmides' first cousin through Pyrilampes, the husband of Plato's mother Perictione, and also Charmides' nephew through Perictione herself. Critias was Plato's cousin once removed.

the contrary, according to others, Plato wants to defend Socrates from the taint of association with the Thirty by showing how he disassociates himself from Charmides and Critias and by contrasting the virtues of Socrates with the obvious flaws of the two cousins. Yet other interpreters maintain that Plato's portrait of Charmides is relatively positive but that of Critias negative, and they draw different inferences from that contrast. There are other interpretations as well, covering a broad range of possibilities. All of them, however, share in common the assumption that the date and protagonists of the *Charmides* are determined by quasi-biographical motives: Plato aims to either contribute to Socrates' hagiography or restore his own family pride or, conceivably, both.

In my view, however, Plato's portraits of Charmides and Critias are far more nuanced than they have been taken to be. They are depicted neither as villains nor as flawless characters, but rather are surrounded by ambiguity throughout the dialogue. Dramatically, the appearance of ambiguity is cultivated by the fact that the dialogue can be read from different perspectives. The reader follows the development of Charmides and Critias within the dialogue, and also can look upon them telescopically, from a vantage point resembling Plato's own. The narrator's frame offers a third viewpoint for the reader's use. In relaying the episode, Socrates steps back from the action and occasionally comments on it.¹⁵ In the following chapters, I shall try to keep alive these different perspectives as I develop my analysis and interpretation of the dialogue. Here, I should like to briefly defend a claim that I hope to substantiate in the main body of this monograph, namely that the portraits of Charmides and Critias are ambiguous: e.g. no clear picture emerges regarding their emotional and ethical texture, their dedication to philosophy, or the extent to which they are really willing to submit to Socrates' scrutiny and conduct a philosophical investigation jointly with him.

Beginning with Charmides, on the one hand, he is depicted as a youth of great beauty and distinguished ancestry, inclined towards poetry, gifted at dialectic, and endowed with a sense of decorum and with commendable natural modesty. His guardian extolls his *sôphrosynê* and, indeed, as we shall see, the exchange between Socrates and Charmides establishes that the latter possesses certain aspects of temperance in an ordinary sense. He shows proper deference to his guardian, addresses Socrates respectfully and

¹⁵ This could raise the issue of Socrates' reliability as a narrator. Even though Socrates gives us no reason to question his sincerity, we may consider the possibility that Socrates has his own interests and motives for presenting the episode in a certain way.

in a measured manner, shows himself willing to submit to the discourses supposed to instil virtue in the soul, and answers Socrates' questions with modesty and decorum. On the other hand, Charmides also indicates a preference for shortcuts and easy answers, e.g. when he borrows someone else's definition of temperance as 'doing one's own' rather than searching for it within himself. He makes sly remarks about the author of that definition, who, as it turns out, is his own guardian, and appears to enjoy the prospect of upsetting Critias. His successive efforts to define *sôphrosynê* reflect traditional ideals and show no trace of originality or any flicker of imagination. Ominously, towards the end of the dialogue, he reiterates his duty to obey Critias and do his bidding.

Similarly, Critias' character is carefully wrapped in ambiguity from the beginning to the end of the narrative. It is simply not the case that Critias is represented as a purely good or a uniformly bad man. Plato's portrait of him is drawn in chiaroscuro and the effect is sensational. Critias emerges as a personage of great complexity, full of light and shadows, endowed with strong intellect and powerful emotions, seeking truth but also vindication and victory, interested in the nature of virtue chiefly in connection to political rule. Neither as narrator nor as character is Socrates in a position to know how Critias will turn out with the passage of time. But Plato takes pains to direct our attention to the aspects of Critias that will eventually dominate his personality, and he guides us to draw connections between the drama of the *Charmides* and historical reality: between the dramatic date of the narrative and the historical date of the regime of the Thirty, between Critias as he appears in the dialogue and Critias the tyrant, between the former's argumentative ability and the latter's political ineptness, between the former's conception of a higher-order 'science of science' entitling only the temperate rulers to govern the state and the ideology of cognitive elitism that the Thirty appealed to in order to justify their deeds.

As I hope to show, Plato regularly highlights the tensions marking Critias' character and pointing to different ways in which his historical counterpart might have developed. On the one hand, for instance, the *Charmides* strongly suggests that Critias is one of the Socratics, i.e. people who regularly associate with Socrates, have respect or affection for him, and are keen on his way of thinking.¹⁶ He is almost the first person to greet Socrates upon his entrance to the gymnasium, and he is the one to answer Socrates' query about the state of philosophy and the promising youths of

¹⁶ On the criteria of who counts as a Socratic, see Tsouna 2015, which contains references to the secondary literature on that subject.

the day. According to Charmides, Critias was frequently in the company of Socrates, when Charmides himself was but a child (156a). The two older men relate to each other with ease, conspire in order to bring young Charmides in the vicinity of Socrates, and Critias repeatedly expresses his confidence in Socrates' pedagogical gifts. Indeed, in the final scene of the dialogue, he says that he will take as proof of Charmides' temperance the youth's willingness to submit himself to Socrates and remain close to him.

From a philosophical point of view, Critias is the only interlocutor in Plato's so-called Socratic dialogues who, jointly with Socrates, channels the course of the argument. He questions certain premises suggested by Socrates. He rejects Socrates' contention that, if temperance is a form of *epistēmē*, it must have an object or domain distinct from itself, just as all other arts and sciences do. He qualifies his 'yes' or 'no' answers when it seems appropriate, uses rhetorical and literary techniques effectively, and reasons with clarity, elegance, and force. Generally, he appears to appreciate the value of *dialegesthai*, dialectical debate,¹⁷ has excellent dialectical training, and, despite occasional lapses, is mostly able to follow Socrates through the twists and turns of a fiendishly complicated argument. However, Critias' dialectical conduct also exhibits elements alien to Socrates' ethos and goals. Plato underscores Critias' aristocratic pride, his violent outburst at Charmides when the youth makes a joke at his expense, his allegation that Socrates is after victory rather than truth, his concern not to lose face but win the debate, and his effort to evade the issue when Socrates casts serious doubt on the conceptual coherence of Critias' final definition of temperance. In addition to these traces of arrogance, ambition, irascibility, and intellectual dishonesty, the Socratic elenchus brings to the surface Critias' obsession with the exercise of power and his concern to determine the sort of knowledge entitling one to become a ruler. Moreover, the last scene of the dialogue exhibits, albeit humorously, Critias' readiness to use force, if Socrates refuses to take Charmides into his care. At this point, the connection between Critias the character and Critias the tyrant becomes too obvious to require further comment.

In sum, both the dramatic date of the *Charmides* and the ambiguous portraits of the two cousins serve an important dramatic purpose. They

¹⁷ In its typical form, training in διαλέγεσθαι involves one-to-one dialectical debate by means of question and answer whose form must be yes or no. The answerer aims to defend a claim *p*, e.g. 'justice is part of virtue', while the questioner sets out to ask successive questions that will elicit from the answerer premises leading to a conclusion inconsistent with the original claim *p*. The students were frequently asked to switch roles, and the same student could be asked to defend first a certain claim *p* and then its contradictory. Critias suggests that his ward has already received some such training, for he says that Charmides is ready to engage in *dialegesthai* (154e6–7).

contribute to embedding the dialectical encounter reported by the narrator in a rich and layered context, which consists of dramatic and philosophical elements as well as historical facts and which offers multiple viewpoints on the dialogue's contents.

Socrates too is a complex character. As mentioned, he has a double role, as narrator of the dialogue and as participant in the reported conversation. In his capacity as narrator, he relays his encounter with the two cousins in a manner evoking the narration of the *Republic*: descriptive and dispassionate, elaborate and systematic, focusing on the physical as well as the verbal behaviour of the personages, and suggesting connections between the character of these latter and the beliefs they put forward. Socrates' narration unfolds in an atmosphere of ease and intimacy between him and a 'noble friend', whose identity and reactions remain undisclosed. We are given to understand that he is an adult, familiar with the location and protagonists of the story, and sufficiently close to Socrates to hear from him a confession of a very private nature. As a character of the narrated story, Socrates exhibits features known to us from the *Apology* and other Platonic writings. He is shown returning from the battlefield to his usual habitat, the public space of Athens. He is acquainted with the people in the gymnasium and recognised by them. Chaerephon and Critias appear to know him intimately; Charmides has heard of him and can easily identify him. He seems unmoved by the dangers of the recent battle and averse to telling tales of heroism and slaughter. Although briefly stirred by Charmides' overwhelming beauty, he remains master of himself. Philosophically, his primary concern is what one might expect: he wants to know 'about philosophy, how it is doing at present, and about young men, whether any among them has become distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both'. He is interested in the beauty of Charmides' soul rather than his body, and he stresses the paramount value of the former compared with the latter. His conversation with Charmides has clear pedagogical aims, the topic is recognisably Socratic, and the same holds for the philosophical method applied throughout the dialogue. We shall discuss these features in some detail in subsequent chapters.

On the other hand, there are ways in which the portrait of Socrates in the *Charmides* is peculiar or unique. First of all, this is probably the only dialogue in which Plato represents Socrates as an early and fairly close acquaintance of the tyrants-to-be.¹⁸ Charmides says that he remembers Socrates 'being with Critias' since the time of his own childhood, but leaves

¹⁸ It is controversial whether the character Critias in the *Timaeus* corresponds to the leader of the Thirty or an ancestor of this latter.

unclear the nature of the bond between the two older men. Plato's audience was likely to recall that Critias too had been reputed for his beauty and that Socrates the narrator describes himself as 'a broken yardstick' when it comes to handsome youths: he finds all of them beautiful and is bound to be interested in them.¹⁹ The familiarity between these two characters becomes evident already in the prologue of the dialogue and extends, as it were by proxy, to the relation gradually established between Socrates and Charmides as well. Nonetheless, as just suggested, the narrator does not clarify how deep or steady is the cousins' commitment to Socrates and his values and method. And he is even less revealing about Socrates' attitude towards the two cousins. For instance, in the prologue, Socrates agrees to play the role assigned to him by Critias and pretend to be a doctor that could cure Charmides' headache. But we cannot tell whether he believes that the 'good arguments' prescribed by the doctors of Zalmoxis are likely to work on the youth. Nor can we tell what he really thinks of Critias, even though he preserves a friendly tone towards him and appears mindful of Critias' feelings and pride. Does Plato wish to suggest that, as early as 431 BCE, Socrates had tight connections with the two cousins which, if so, presumably were severed at a later date? Or does Plato intend to show that, despite appearances, Socrates had always kept his distance from Critias and Charmides? Some aspects of the character Socrates seem to point towards the former of these options, while other aspects appear to favour the latter.

More importantly, it is arguable that the philosophical content of the dialogue also contains a certain degree of ambiguity or indeterminacy. Like other so-called Socratic dialogues of Plato, the main part of the *Charmides* consists of several attempts by Socrates' interlocutors to define a virtue, in this case temperance. And similarly to the arguments of other Socratic dialogues, the arguments of the *Charmides* are ostensibly adversative. They purport to examine the consistency or truth of successive definitions of temperance proposed in turn by each of Socrates' interlocutors, but do not directly concern the views of Socrates himself. At the same time, the *Charmides* is not the only dialogue in which the views advanced by Socrates' interlocutors and refuted by the elenchus have an unmistakably Socratic tinge. Something similar occurs also in, for example, the *Laches*, in which the elenchus refutes Nicias' contention that courage is a kind of knowledge, or in the *Euthyphro*, in which the elenchus refutes the view that

¹⁹ Note the parallel with the introduction of the philosopher in comparison with the lovers of sights and sounds in *Rep.* V 474b–476e.

piety is a part of justice. To my mind, however, the *Charmides* stands out in virtue of the fact that it does not challenge just one or two aspects of Socratic philosophy, but rather appears to attack Socratic intellectualism as a whole. As we shall see in more detail later, the central argument of the work appears to challenge, implicitly or explicitly, a set of ideas commonly believed to lie at the heart of the philosophy of Socrates – notably, the ideas that virtue is a sort of expert knowledge, that the endeavour to discover moral truths presupposes a kind of self-knowledge, and that the knowledge equivalent to virtue is able to secure human flourishing. The question arises, then, whether the *Charmides* aims to reject the core of Socrates' philosophy or whether it can be interpreted in some other way, e.g. whether it is intended to suggest that Socratic intellectualism needs to be supported by Platonic epistemology and metaphysics.

Another respect in which the *Charmides* stands out with regard to other dialogues commonly classified in the same group is that it entertains the hypothesis of architectonic knowledge entitling its possessor to rule the state. Again, more will be said later about this subject. For the moment, it is enough to remark that the theme of architectonic knowledge is explored in the so-called middle and late dialogues of Plato, but nowhere else than here in the Socratic dialogues. The only other comparable dialogue in which that theme briefly appears is the *Euthydemus*, whose classification is controversial and its links to the *Republic* under debate. Like the *Charmides*, the *Euthydemus* refutes the idea of a 'kingly art', but the two works achieve that result on different grounds, and also the former goes very much further than the latter. Given that the idea of an architectonic expertise mastered solely by the statesman becomes prominent in Platonic thought, the central argument of the *Charmides* seems especially difficult to interpret, because it seems to cast doubt on the possibility or the benefit of such an expertise. Different interpretative options are possible and each appears to accommodate certain features of the text better than others.

I hope that these examples convey an adequate sense of the sorts of issues at stake in the *Charmides*. Generally speaking, the controversies concerning the nature and status of the philosophical views examined in the *Charmides* often depend on the stance that one takes regarding the dramatic features of the work and, especially, the characters of the protagonists.

When the representation of Charmides or Critias is considered negative, the tendency is to contrast their views about temperance with Socrates' own philosophical beliefs. On the other hand, when the two cousins and in particular Critias are viewed in a positive light, it is frequently suggested that Plato wishes to criticise the philosophy of Socrates and signal a new

departure.²⁰ But in the former case, one wonders where exactly in the *Charmides* Socrates states his own view about temperance²¹ or submits it for examination. Or, in the latter case, one needs to explain why Plato would choose Critias, of all people, as Socrates' own spokesman. Why would he choose this infamous character as a vehicle in order to show that he is now leaving behind the philosophy of Socrates and is ready to move on?

Further complications derive from the structure of the *Charmides*, for it appears to many to be composed, after the prologue (153a–159a), of two quite disconnected parts. As indicated, in the first part (153a–164d or 166e), Socrates engages in a dialectical conversation with Charmides with an evident pedagogical goal in mind: to lead him to express and examine his own beliefs about *sôphrosynê*, temperance, and to find out whether or not that virtue is present in him. After the youth is refuted for the third time, Critias takes his place in the debate and attempts to defend anew the last definition proposed by Charmides, according to which temperance is 'doing one's own'. Critias elaborates this formula into 'the doing or making of good things' (164e), thus introducing value into the argument. The central issue of self-knowledge is raised, precisely, when Socrates points out that, if temperance is what Critias says it is, then the first-order experts may have temperance without knowing that they have it. On most accounts, the second part of the dialogue (164d–176d) begins right here, when Critias retorts that, in his view, it is impossible to be temperate without being aware of that fact. For this assertion leads him to think of the Delphic inscription 'Know Thyself' and advance another definition according to which temperance is 'knowing *oneself*' (164d). Subsequently, with the aid of Socrates' questioning, he articulates the latter formula into 'the only science of both the other sciences and itself' (166c2–3), concedes that it is also 'of the privation or absence of science' (166e7–9),²² and does not object when Socrates refers to it as a 'science of science' (166e7–8) – an accurate and convenient shorthand that I shall borrow as well.

As mentioned, most of the second half of the dialogue is devoted to the development and refutation of Critias' final definition of *sôphrosynê*. But even accepting that the dialogue consists of two fairly distinct parts, how is the first half of the dialogue related to the second? How are the definitions within each part related to each other? How does the prologue bear on the argument in each part or in both? In the end, does the *Charmides* have

²⁰ There are many other interpretative strands as well: see section 4.

²¹ We should also bear in mind the possibility that the target of the elenchus could be some view held by Socrates but not *about temperance*.

²² See note 8 in this chapter.

philosophical unity and what might it consist in? These questions seem especially disconcerting, because Socrates articulates Critias' definition of temperance as self-knowledge in terms strongly evocative of the *Apology*. But there is no consensus whatsoever as to how Critias' notion of self-knowledge is related to Socrates' own. And, therefore, there is no agreement about the target of the central argument or the purpose of the work as a whole.

4 *What Is the Charmides About? Rival Lines of Interpretation*

To provide a scholarly context for my own interpretation, and also to convey a sense of the depth and significance of the philosophical issues at stake, it seems useful to offer a selective and schematic survey of certain prominent lines of interpretation of the *Charmides*.²³ Several of them can be traced back to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship and also occur in more recent publications. While in some cases I sketch a line of interpretation exactly as the author develops it, in other cases, for philosophical or practical reasons, I single out certain aspects of an interpretation but leave out others.

As indicated, one fairly common approach is historical and biographical. Depending on whether its proponents take Plato's representations of Charmides and Critias to be positive or negative, they contend that the ultimate purpose of the dialogue is to defend the two cousins or, alternatively, to dissociate Socrates from them by exposing their villainous traits.²⁴ Certain variants of this approach attempt to map pieces of historical information about Critias and Charmides onto their dialectical behaviour as represented in our dialogue. For instance, it has been suggested that

²³ Tsouna 2017 contains a more extensive presentation and discussion of the material of this section.

²⁴ Most interpreters who endorse the negative portrait of Critias depicted by Xenophon and other ancient authors (e.g. *Mem.* 1.2.12–16, 29–30) extend that view to Charmides as well, and attribute to Plato a strategy comparable to that of Xenophon: in the *Charmides*, he takes care to stress that Socrates and Critias have different values and therefore the former cannot be held responsible for the evil deeds of the latter when he assumed power. See Hyland 1981; Kahn 1996; Lampert 2010; Landy 1998; Levine 1976, 1984; Schmid 1998. On the other hand, Tuozzo 2011, 51–90, challenges that approach. On the grounds of a careful survey of the ancient evidence, he argues that Critias was a philo-Laconian intellectual, conservative and elitist, who believed that the conservative aristocratic values, including, prominently, *sôphrosynê*, are crucial to beneficial conduct but did not think that the many were capable of cultivating such values. Tuozzo also draws a relatively sympathetic portrait of Charmides. Although I find many of Tuozzo's suggestions attractive, I see no evidence in Plato's text bearing out the claim that, for Plato, Critias 'represent[s] a positive strand of Greek political and cultural thought' (57; see also Notomi 2000). Nor do I agree that 'there is no reason to think that [Plato] traces the disastrous outcome [of the political engagements of his cousins] to moral failings in either of them' (89). In fact, I argue, Plato's ambiguous portraits of the two cousins highlight both their potential to do good if they stick to the principles of philosophical education and their proclivity to do evil if they do not.

Charmides' definitions of temperance, first in terms of quiet and decorous behaviour, and then as a proper sense of shame, reflect his automatic endorsement of conservative values. Moreover, it has often been claimed that Charmides exhibits the tendency to follow the opinions of his guardian without thinking critically about them: he borrows from Critias the definition of temperance as 'doing one's own', without really understanding what this formula means. More importantly, biographical or historical approaches attempt to connect Critias' beliefs as they are expressed in the *Charmides* with the cognitive elitism allegedly endorsed by the historical Critias and responsible for the murderous 'purges' that the latter performed as leader of the Thirty. In fact, certain scholars maintain that Critias' impressive performance in the *Charmides* discloses that Plato felt sympathy for his cousin's ideology, though not for his deeds.

According to Noburu Notomi's interpretation of the *Charmides*, on the one hand Plato acknowledges both Critias' good intentions and his ignorance of the nature of political rule and, on the other, Plato also intimates that the Socratic elenchus can undermine belief in the dominant values of society and thus open the way to political absolutism.²⁵ Indeed, as Notomi claims, Plato's political philosophy in the *Republic* lies closer to Critias' conception of political rule as expressed in the *Charmides* than to Socratic philosophy and method: the virtuous few who possess higher-order knowledge ought to be the ones to rule. However, Notomi himself notes that, according to the majority of interpreters, the *Charmides* reveals Plato's revulsion towards the beliefs and values of his cousins. As is often contended, Socrates' well-timed references to a state ruled in accordance with a 'science of science' point unmistakably to the central message of the dialogue: the intellectualist conception under examination should be rejected, not only because it is incoherent, but principally because it encapsulates the epistemic arrogance thanks to which Critias and his associates felt entitled to 'purge' Athens in 404 BCE.²⁶

Some of these ideas also occur in interpretations attempting to integrate the *Charmides* into broader frameworks which are frequently, but not always, of Straussian inspiration. In his book-length study *The Virtue of Philosophy*,²⁷ Drew Hyland rejects various analytic treatments of the dialogue²⁸ for the reason that they fail to take into account its dramatic aspects,²⁹ and he develops an approach that has been characterised as

²⁵ Notomi 2000. ²⁶ Dušanić 2000. ²⁷ Hyland 1981.

²⁸ E.g. Tuckey 1951; Ebert 1974; Witte 1970. See also Hyland 1981, xii n. 1.

²⁹ Hyland 1981, ix and *passim*.

existentialist³⁰ and is accompanied by a hermeneutics aligned with the methods of the Straussian tradition.³¹ On this approach, the *Charmides* points to an alternative path lying in between what he calls ‘the stance of mastery’, which he associates with scientific and technological knowledge, and ‘the stance of submission’, present in phenomenological or existentialist modes of thinking and in social movements professing detachment and an easy submission to the way things stand.³² Thus, according to Hyland, the Platonic Socrates exhibits an attitude most fully represented by the dialogue form itself, i.e. an ‘interrogative’ or aporetic stance identical with Socratic wisdom. The *Charmides*, he thinks, is especially relevant to the understanding of that stance: it illustrates the importance of remaining open and responsive; of adopting an attitude of play; of constantly striving against the tendency to assume the stances of mastery or submission; of being aware of our capacities and possibilities, in particular the potentiality of overcoming human incompleteness through *eros*, love; and of pursuing *sôphrosynê* by redefining the notions of self-knowledge, self-mastery, and self-control. Of course, this is the barest summary of Hyland’s agenda. But assuming that it is roughly accurate, it indicates, I think, that the main subject of the *Charmides* is the advancement of the ‘interrogative stance’ over rival stances and, especially, over the stance of mastery based on technological knowledge.

Although Thomas Schmid’s more recent monograph, *Plato’s Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality*,³³ shows that he is aware of analytic approaches to the dialogue, nonetheless his work too mostly belongs to the same tradition as Hyland’s.³⁴ Schmid frequently interprets the interrelation between drama and argument by reading between the lines of the text and by assuming that the dramatic framework serves to disclose in certain ways the philosophical content of the dialogue.³⁵ His method has far-reaching implications. For instance,

we cannot take the refutation of a definition at its face-value; what may be refuted is only that definition under a certain interpretation, but not under another interpretation, which may be indicated by the drama but not

³⁰ So Schmid 1998, 189 n. 3. ³¹ See Hyland 1981, xii n. 2. ³² Hyland 1981, 1–17.

³³ Schmid 1998.

³⁴ See Schmid’s citation of the traditions and scholars from whom he has benefited most: Schmid 1998, xiii.

³⁵ Analytic approaches too explore ways in which the dramatic framework of the Platonic dialogues serves philosophical purposes, but they do so on different assumptions and in different ways than studies following the methods of, for example, Hyland and Schmid.

addressed in the argument. The effect of this approach is to create two different levels of meaning: there is a surface level of meaning, in which definitions are put forward and refuted; and there is a depth level, at which, through various means but especially through the use of dramatic elements, the same definitions, interpreted differently, may be recovered.

Schmid contends that the contrast between these two levels is essential to the *Charmides* and, in his study of the dialogue, he undertakes to show just how it works.³⁶

In brief, Schmid contends that the central purpose of the *Charmides*, as indicated by the prologue, is to exhibit Socrates' philosophical outlook and to contrast this latter with the moral ideals and social values predominant in fifth-century Athenian culture. In particular, the dialogue aims to show how dialectical engagement on the subject of *sôphrosynê* can serve to redefine the traditional conception of self-knowledge in terms of the Socratic ideal of rationality, i.e. 'as something achieved *in* rational inquiry through a particular kind of self- and other-relation tied to such inquiry'.³⁷ According to Schmid, the exploration of this ideal presupposes the introduction of a framework conceptualising the self, an elaborate psychological theory, the rejection of one epistemic model of self-knowledge in favour of another Socratic one, and, in the end, the adumbration of 'Plato's vision of the life of critical reason and its uneasy relation to political life in the ancient city'.³⁸ Importantly, Schmid's interpretation has a political aspect as well: the *Charmides* is not only Plato's most sustained reflection on the implications of the Socratic knowledge of our own ignorance, but also an attestation that, by rejecting Critias' dysfunctional model of epistemological elitism, Socrates supported democratic relations in the Athenian form of government. While Schmid's book pursues a rich set of topics, for present purposes I wish to stress his suggestion that the dialogue is really about Socratic self-knowledge and aims to advance Socrates' conception of knowing oneself in the context of a metaphysics and psychology of the self.

Laurence Lampert³⁹ develops his interpretation along similar lines but goes further:

The very narration of the *Charmides* serves its unstated theme: Socrates attempts to transmit his philosophy successfully by narrating his failure to transmit it to Critias. Socrates honours his auditor [sc. the unnamed 'noble friend' to whom Socrates recites the conversation with Charmides and his

³⁶ Schmid 1998, ix, endorses the principle expressed by Desjardins 1988 and related to the 'pedimental model' or 'two-level' model of literary composition attributed to Plato by Thesleff 1993.

³⁷ Schmid 1998, x. ³⁸ Schmid 1998, x. ³⁹ Lampert 2010, 147–240.

guardian] by presuming that he may be equal to the challenge of piecing together his philosophy from phrases he once transmitted to Critias but that Critias misinterpreted.⁴⁰

And also: '*Charmides* is about the returned Socrates' discovery of the fate of his philosophy in his absence; *Charmides* is about Socrates' philosophy and its transmission to young associates . . . It is a dialogue in which (Socrates) leaves the essential matters to the inferences of his auditor'.⁴¹ So, Lampert explicitly states a contention that I believe to be present also in the approaches of Hyland, Schmid, and others, namely that the real objective of the dialogue lies below the surface, waiting to be teased out by those in the know. Furthermore, Lampert assumes that Critias' intellectualist view about *sôphrosynê* merely amounts to a misunderstanding of the philosophy of Socrates; it cannot have, as it were, a life of its own. As for Socrates' 'noble friend', the unidentified listener of Socrates' narration of the dialogue, he is expected to 'decipher' Socrates' genuine reflections and guide us to reconstruct the Socratic conception of virtue and self-knowledge by drawing the relevant inferences from his cross-examination of Critias. In sum, the *Charmides* is all about Socrates. It is not about Charmides' or Critias' beliefs concerning the virtue under discussion.

Concerning approaches of clear analytic orientation, in addition to Tuckey's earlier monograph according to which the second half of the dialogue is about knowing that one knows,⁴² I should mention, first, Charles Kahn's proleptic interpretation of the dialogue.⁴³ He proposes that the *Charmides* be read alongside the *Laches*, the *Lysis*, and the *Euthydemus* and, on these grounds, he argues that the refutation of the definition of temperance as 'knowledge of knowledge' or 'science of science' relies on the principle that there is a one-to-one mapping between every specific *technê* and its specific subject-matter (cf. *Charm.* 170a–171a). If so, the refutation of Critias' definition of temperance as *epistêmê* of itself and every other *epistêmê* constitutes, in effect, a serious critique of Socratic self-knowledge or Socratic ignorance. For the elenchus points out that to be able to cross-examine other people about value successfully, as Socrates in the *Apology* claims to have done, one must possess the relevant sort of knowledge; hence, one cannot be ignorant about 'the most important things' or disclaim having understanding of these latter in the way in which Socrates did disclaim it.⁴⁴ Hence, according to Charles Kahn, the main purpose of the *Charmides* is to suggest that the successful application

⁴⁰ Lampert 2010, 157. ⁴¹ Lampert 2010, 156. ⁴² Tuckey 1951.

⁴³ Kahn 1988 and 1996, ch. 7. ⁴⁴ See also McKim 1985, cited by Kahn 1988, 549.

of the Socratic method would require Platonic metaphysics and epistemology. On this view, the dialogue offers a positive definition of *sôphrosynê* in terms of knowledge of the good, implicitly relates that conception of the virtue to the practice of dialectic and the acquisition of the 'royal art', and points to the theory of Forms and the Form of the Good.⁴⁵

On the contrary, Harold Tarrant,⁴⁶ for example, believes that Socrates' own possession of *sôphrosynê* is no bar to his own lack of knowledge about it. Unlike Vlastos⁴⁷ and others, who take Socratic interrogation to apply principally to the beliefs and lives of Socrates' interlocutors, Tarrant maintains that Socrates conducts the main argument of the *Charmides* for the purpose of self-examination, while the conversation between Socrates and Critias points to various Socratic *parakousmata*, mistaken or imperfect ways of understanding major aspects of Socratic ethics. Richard Stalley⁴⁸ takes issue with another widespread assumption: that the intellectualist thesis dominating the second half of the *Charmides* has little or no connection with the interlocutors' earlier efforts of determining *sôphrosynê*;⁴⁹ these latter encapsulate the notion of self-restraint and suggest that the virtue should be defined in terms of order and harmony in the soul. If I understand Richard Stalley correctly, he suggests that, in fact, the main purpose of the dialogue is to show the inadequacy of the conception of self-knowledge espoused by *both* Socrates and Critias and to point to ways in which self-knowledge or *sôphrosynê* may be related to the only truly valuable knowledge; that is, knowledge of the good.⁵⁰ On this approach, then, the notion of 'knowledge of knowledge' or 'science of science' is taken to be a legitimate development of Socratic self-knowledge, and the refutation of the former is considered *ipso facto* a telling criticism against the latter as well.

Finally, towards the opposite end of the spectrum, Gabriela Roxana Carone⁵¹ denies that the elenchus actually refutes the notion of 'knowledge of knowledge', and contends that the latter is closely related to Socratic self-knowledge in the *Apology* and constitutes a perfectly good candidate for determining *sôphrosynê* as a core element of human wisdom. One common point between her approach and that of Tuckey⁵² (in a monograph written over half a century before Carone's article) is that both believe that the *Charmides* problematises the notion of self-awareness: what an extraordinary thing it is to be aware that we know,⁵³ or, what is the faculty or activity by virtue of which we apprehend an act of knowledge.⁵⁴ In sum, with the main

⁴⁵ See Kahn's defence of these claims in Kahn 1988 and 1996, ch. 7. ⁴⁶ Tarrant 2000.

⁴⁷ Vlastos 1983, 25–58, revised by Vlastos 1994, 1–37 (both cited by Tarrant 2000, 251 n. 2).

⁴⁸ Stalley 2000. ⁴⁹ See, for instance, Irwin 1995, 37 ff. ⁵⁰ See, especially, Stalley 2000, 274.

⁵¹ Carone 1998. ⁵² Tuckey 1951. ⁵³ So Carone 1998. ⁵⁴ So Tuckey 1951, *passim*.

exception of Thomas Tuozzo,⁵⁵ analytic authors tend to relate in different ways self-knowledge in the sense that Socrates uses it in the *Apology*, i.e. knowledge of what one knows and does not know about oneself and others, to self-knowledge in the sense in which Critias develops it in the *Charmides*, i.e. *epistêmê* of itself and everything else qualifying as an *epistêmê*. And although the authors belonging to the analytic tradition both differ methodologically from non-analytic interpreters and focus on different aspects of the dialogue than these latter, nonetheless most representatives of both groups believe that the *Charmides* is mainly devoted to a sustained critique of Socrates' own conception of *sôphrosynê* or self-knowledge, not an alternative conception advanced by Critias.

Before I continue, I wish to register a reaction that I have had to the accounts just mentioned and several others besides: I have felt disconcerted by the fact that, as it seemed to me, most of these accounts could reasonably claim to find support in certain elements of Plato's text, though not in others. I have come to believe that this is probably true of my own interpretation of the *Charmides* as well. Even though I am committed to it and shall try to defend it as convincingly as I can, I do not propose it with the intention of eliminating every other candidate from the map. On the contrary, I believe that the dialectical strategy of the *Charmides* crucially consists in cultivating alternative viewpoints and in inviting the reader to consider competing interpretative options. I should state from the start that my reading of the dialogue is inscribed in the analytic tradition and my discussion focuses chiefly on the argument. At the same time, I assume that literary form and philosophical content are inseparable in the *Charmides* as in all other dialogues of Plato, and that the dramatic elements of the *Charmides* have philosophical significance. As indicated, commentators account for these latter in vastly different ways and, in the present study, I shall try to defend my own view of how the dramatic and philosophical features of the dialogue merge into a conceptually coherent whole.

5 Two Competing Conceptions of Self-Knowledge

At the core of my interpretation lies the contention that two different conceptions of *sôphrosynê* or self-knowledge are present in the dialogue,

⁵⁵ In the following chapters, I engage with many aspects of Tuozzo's interpretation. To my knowledge, Tuozzo 2011 is the only analytic author who argues in a sustained manner for a distinction between self-knowledge as conceived by Socrates and self-knowledge as conceived by Critias. My debts to Tuozzo are many and, for the benefit of the readers, I shall frequently compare or contrast my approach with his.

one belonging to Critias, the other associated with Plato's Socrates. The former is the direct and primary target of the adversative argument against Critias developed in the second half of the dialogue, while the latter is regularly and importantly evoked for purposes of comparison and contrast and may be indirectly affected by the elenchus as well. The juxtaposition of these two conceptions throughout the dialogue and their interplay with regard to each other are, in my view, the scarlet thread connecting the different phases of the encounter represented in the *Charmides* and cementing the philosophical unity of the work. Also, they bear on the dramatic unity of the dialogue, insofar as each of these two conceptions of *sôphrosynê* as self-knowledge is related to a corresponding character and is variously illustrated by reference to that character. Socrates is represented as exhibiting self-knowledge in a recognisably Socratic sense, whereas what we know of Charmides and Critias enables us to explore possible connections between their views about *sôphrosynê* in the dialogue and the deeds of their historical counterparts.

It will simplify matters if I outline from the start what I take to be the two different conceptions of self-knowledge at play. As many have noted to different effects, the text of the *Charmides* appears calculated to regularly remind us of the *Apology* and, in particular, Socrates' description of the verdict of the Delphic oracle that no man is wiser than he is (21a) and of the philosophical mission that Socrates pursued from that point onwards as a service to the god. For instance, at a pivotal point of the *Charmides* where the definition of temperance as self-knowledge is first introduced, Critias refers to the Delphic inscription 'Know Thyself' and contrasts the traditional interpretation of the inscription (which could bear on the Socratic concept of becoming aware of one's human limitations) with his own interpretation of the dictum (154d3–165b4). As Plato's readers will recall, in the *Apology*, Socrates explains to the jury how he acquired an enhanced sort of self-knowledge⁵⁶ by trying to understand the meaning of Apollo's verdict, i.e. that no man was wiser than Socrates (*Ap.* 21a). Namely, after he had cross-examined several people who had a reputation for wisdom, he realised that they thought they knew worthwhile things when they did not, whereas he himself did not believe that he knew when he didn't (21d). Although Socrates avoids identifying the worthwhile things in a straightforward manner, nonetheless he makes clear that they differ from the benefits of first-order *technai* (22d–e), and he strongly suggests

⁵⁶ Socrates does not explicitly say that he acquired self-knowledge, but this is clearly implied by the context.

that they have to do with truth, virtue, and the health of the soul (30a–31c). Socrates' wisdom consists, precisely, in that he does not believe himself to be wise in these 'most important matters', whereas other people lay a groundless claim to such wisdom or expertise. Socrates ventures to call his own sort of wisdom 'human wisdom' (20d–e), but speculates on the basis of his investigations that expertise in 'the most important matters' is 'divine wisdom' possessed, perhaps, only by the gods (20e).

In brief, Socrates' speech in the *Apology* has both a normative and a paraenetic purpose. For Socrates highlights the asymmetry between divine and human wisdom, indicates that the latter consists in self-knowledge of a certain kind, and suggests that we ought to seek the latter in order to correctly assess the limits of human wisdom vis-à-vis the perfect moral wisdom of the gods (23d–e). Socrates is presented as the paradigm of the way of life by which that goal might be achieved: only a philosopher who devotes himself to the dialectical scrutiny of his own beliefs as well as those of others can hope to reach self-knowledge in the sense designated above (28e). It is significant that Socrates describes his search in terms of a divine mission and of labours that he undertook in order to serve the god. For, on a straightforward reading of the text, this suggests that he believes in the existence of divinity, assumes that the gods are far superior to men in moral wisdom (29a), and claims to know that it is necessary for the happiness of humans that they obey the gods' commands. And although Socrates' divinities are probably not identical with those of the city,⁵⁷ he is represented as neither an atheist nor an agnostic, but rather as a profoundly religious man.

Critias' conception of self-knowledge, I contend, is of a very different kind. In the first place, it seems to have little to do with one's awareness of the limitations of human wisdom. Instead, Critias' speech about the meaning of the Delphic inscription 'Know Thyself' (164d–165b) intimates that intelligent people, such as the dedicator of the inscription and Critias himself, can understand the true meaning of the inscription and transcend ordinary human limitations in that regard; they alone have access to the mind of the god, while common people do not. In the second place, regardless of how one interprets Critias' definition of temperance, first as knowing oneself, and then, equivalently, as '*epistêmê* (science) of every other *epistêmê* and of itself', it is clear that Critias' model of such an *epistêmê*

⁵⁷ See, notably, Burnyeat 1997. However, Socrates' appeal to Apollo is, at least rhetorically, an admission that he respects traditional religion. This is an important feature of Socrates' self-representation in the *Apology*.

is both abstract and directive and does not pertain in any evident manner to morality and the care of one's soul. We shall return to this topic later but, for the moment, I wish to stress the following: the text strongly suggests that, according to Critias, temperance or 'the science of science' would be greatly beneficial *precisely because* it is only of itself and of science or every science insofar as it is a *science*. To put it differently, Critias appears to assume that temperance, as he defines it, is enormously profitable just because of its peculiar nature: it is strictly reflexive and, by virtue of its reflexivity, it is higher-order as well.⁵⁸ Evidently, these features do not occur in Socrates' conception of self-knowledge in the *Apology* or anywhere else. The difference between the Socratic and the Critianic⁵⁹ models of temperance as self-knowledge are marked at the level of language as well. For instance, when Socrates elaborates Critias' definition of temperance as 'science of science' (167a), he employs a cognitive vocabulary strongly reminiscent of the *Apology* and, in particular, favours the use of 'gignôskein', 'eidenai', and their cognates ('to know') vis-à-vis 'epistasthai' and its cognates. Critias and Socrates regularly use these latter to refer to expert knowledge in the arts, and Critias reserves 'epistasthai', 'to know expertly or scientifically', and 'epistêmê', science or expertise, for the formulation and defence of the 'science of science' that he takes to be equivalent to temperance. On the other hand, Socrates generally avoids referring to his own 'human wisdom' or the understanding of his own cognitive limitations, as a form of *epistasthai*, let alone an *epistêmê* of some specific kind.⁶⁰

The central argument of the *Charmides* highlights another assumption of Critias' conception of self-knowledge as well: it is supposed to be especially relevant to politics, since one's possession of the 'science of

⁵⁸ Why does Critias think that? As we shall see, he argues that, unlike all the other sciences or arts, temperance is a science that does not have a specific object distinct from itself, but is only of science (i.e. itself and every other science as well as the privation of science). It is precisely on account of that fact that, according to Critias, the 'science of science' can discern experts from non-experts in every science, correctly delegate tasks, and oversee their successful execution.

⁵⁹ I borrow the term from TUOZZO 2011.

⁶⁰ Compare the remarks by Burnyeat 1970, 106, on the use of cognitive terms in *Tht.* 201d, which, I believe, point in the same direction as my own remarks here. Burnyeat suggests that, in contexts referring generally to different forms of expertise, ἐπιστήμη is interchangeable with τέχνη and the same holds for their respective cognates. In contexts focusing on the cognitive aspects of expertise, including the discussion of Critias' conception of temperance as ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης, ἐπίστασθαι and its cognates are preferred over alternatives. In contexts marking out, specifically, Socratic self-knowledge, γινώσκω, εἶδέναι, and related terms are preferred over ἐπίστασθαι. According to Burnyeat, this latter term indicates, generally, various areas or branches of expert knowledge, whereas the former terms are often intended to mark out a particular kind of knowledge, namely Socratic knowledge of what oneself and others know or do not know.

science' entitles one to govern the state. Socrates brings to the fore this aspect of Critianic temperance or self-knowledge by means of a thought-experiment specifically construed for that purpose: an imaginary society governed by temperate rulers who, in virtue of possessing 'science of science', can distinguish true experts from mere charlatans and correctly delegate and supervise the execution of the corresponding tasks. There will be much to say about this thought-experiment, but the point to retain at present is that, unlike Socratic self-knowledge, Critianic self-knowledge as 'science of science' is intended to apply, first and foremost, to the public sphere and points to a technocratic ideal⁶¹ of political governance.⁶² Whether or not this model is defensible remains to be seen.

Something should be added about Charmides' attempts to define temperance, even though they do not play as central a role in the argument as the two rival conceptions of self-knowledge just sketched out. Following what Socrates describes as 'the best method' of investigation, the youth 'looks into himself' in order to discern whether he has *sôphrosynê* and, accordingly, form a belief about 'what temperance is or what kind of thing it is'. The first two definitions that he comes up with reflect corresponding features of his character: first, acting in a quiet and decorous manner and, then, acting with modesty or a sense of shame. Indeed, in the prologue and his conversation with Socrates, the young man conducts himself with ease and dignity, expresses himself decorously and well, and appears mindful of what Socrates and others may think of him. His third and last effort to define temperance is based not on introspection but the authority of 'some wise man', who turns out to be Critias himself. Not surprisingly, Charmides does not succeed in defending a definition whose meaning he does not really understand, namely that temperance is 'doing one's own'. But that definition is not without merit, and its strengths and weaknesses become apparent when Critias replaces his ward in the conversation and defends it afresh.

One of the objectives of this study is to explore the dramatic and conceptual interconnections between these definitions, and also show how the conversation moves on to the central topic of self-knowledge and the refutation of 'the science of science' in the second half of the

⁶¹ See Levine 1976 and 1984.

⁶² Even assuming that Critias develops self-knowledge in terms of strictly reflexive knowledge in order to express a particular conception of value (so Tuozzo 2011, 198–200), few would disagree that his primary endeavour is not the Socratic endeavour to care for one's soul, but rather the concern to determine a higher-order cognitive power authorising the temperate rulers to govern the state in an effective and unchallengeable manner.

dialogue. Even though I take the argument to be adversative in both the exchange between Socrates and Charmides, whose primary aim is pedagogical, and the debate between Socrates and Critias, whose aim is to test the contentions advanced by Critias, nonetheless I consider how earlier stages of the argument may bear on later ones and earlier definitions may remain alive after they have been refuted. For instance, I suggest that every conception of temperance debated or alluded to in the dialogue can be traced back to the prologue, including the two competing conceptions of self-knowledge that my interpretation attributes respectively to Critias and Socrates, but also the ordinary conception of *sôphrosynê* as self-control, which plays no role in the argument but is present in the dialogue's drama. Moreover, like other scholars, I maintain that Charmides' views about temperance are illustrated by the youth's behaviour in the opening scene but probably undermined by his conduct in the final scene of the narration. Furthermore, I try to show how the view initially defended by Critias, i.e. that temperance is 'doing one's own', serves as a bridge to the second half of the dialogue, and also constitutes the principle according to which the imaginary society of Socrates' 'dream' is supposed to function. And so on.

In sum, I aim to discuss each phase of the dialogue both in connection to other phases and in its own right. I chose for this monograph the form of a running commentary, because it suited me best in order to pursue several different and often complementary tasks: provide a new and detailed analysis of the arguments, discuss the dramatic details of the narration, highlight dramatic and conceptual links lending unity to the work, and gradually develop an overall reading of the *Charmides* which inevitably has common points with other interpretations but also, I hope, a distinctive character of its own.

6 What Is Unique about the *Charmides*? Issues of Philosophy and Method

Perhaps I have said enough to indicate that, although the *Charmides* has dramatic resemblances to other Socratic dialogues of Plato, it also has dramatic elements that set our dialogue apart from others. These include the dialogue's frame, the elaborate and somewhat exotic prologue, and, most importantly, Plato's peculiar choice of protagonists. Now I wish to comment further on certain philosophical features on account of which the *Charmides* stands out with regard to other dialogues classified as 'Socratic', 'early', or 'transitional'. Some of these features are very controversial, while

others have received little or no notice in the secondary literature. I shall not engage in any depth with rival interpretations, but only identify methodological and systematic aspects of the *Charmides* which are especially striking or atypical or unique.

At the outset, it should be stressed that several elements of the *Charmides* are typical of the so-called early or transitional or pre-middle⁶³ dialogues (whether these terms indicate Plato's chronological development or the sequence in which his dialogues are intended to be read). Like other works belonging to these categories, the *Charmides* is a dialogue of definition: Socrates asks the 'what is X?' question, where X stands for the virtue of *sôphrosynê*, and the interlocutors jointly try to answer that question by advancing and examining in turn different definitions purporting to capture 'what *sôphrosynê* is and what kind of thing it is'. The *Euthyphro*, the *Laches*, and the *Meno*, for instance, address the 'what is X?' question in a similar manner with regard to piety, courage, and virtue, respectively. Likewise, the 'what is X?' question motivates the enquiry about the nature of justice in the opening book of the *Republic*, is posed with regard to friendship in the *Lysis*, and is also asked in the *Gorgias* concerning the nature of rhetoric.⁶⁴ Moreover, arguably unlike Euthyphro, Laches, and Meno, but like Nicias as well as Gorgias and Thrasymachus, Socrates' interlocutors in the *Charmides* immediately understand what Socrates is looking for when he asks 'what is X?', in this case 'what is temperance?': he is looking for a general formula that can capture the nature of temperance or account for all and only the instances of that virtue. Despite his youth, Charmides is sufficiently familiar with *dialegethai*, dialectical debate, to offer in turn three answers of the right sort. The same holds, of course, for Critias, who is represented as an exceptionally experienced debater. Furthermore, Charmides' three attempts to answer the 'what is X?' question have intuitive plausibility, just as the definitions of courage advanced by Laches do. This is also true of Critias' claims that temperance is 'doing

⁶³ Kahn 1988 classifies the *Charmides* as a 'pre-middle' dialogue, together with the *Laches*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Lysis*, the *Protagoras*, the *Euthydemus*, and the *Meno*. In his view, these dialogues should be read proleptically, looking forward and not backward for their meaning. They should be read in order to find out not what Socrates said long ago, but how Plato will pursue his paths of enquiry from one dialogue to the next and onto the doctrines of the middle dialogues. According to my reading, however, the intertextuality of the *Charmides* is not exhausted by looking forward to other dialogues of the above group and to the works of Plato's so-called middle period, but also by looking backward, notably to the *Apology*, as well as beyond the *Republic* to the *Theaetetus* and the *Statesman*. On this point see below, section 7.

⁶⁴ The *Theaetetus* too addresses the 'what is X?' question: what is *epistêmê*, scientific understanding or, as a shorthand, knowledge?

one's own' in the sense of 'doing good deeds', and then that temperance is knowing oneself. Many Athenians with oligarchic tendencies would find plausible the idea that the distinctive mark of *sôphrosynê* is to avoid being a busybody and instead concentrate on one's own business. And many would assume that *sôphrosynê* entails self-knowledge of some sort.

Regarding the formal features of the debate, the *Charmides* partly consists of a series of refutations that, in the round between Socrates and Charmides, have a clear pedagogical goal (compare, for example, the *Lysis* and the *Euthydemus*), while in the round between Socrates and Critias the dialectical arguments aim to examine the consistency of the substantive view defended by Critias and to discover the truth of the matter. In this respect, the debate between Socrates and Critias is comparable to, for example, the elenchus of Nicias' definition of courage in the *Laches*, the debate between Socrates and Protagoras concerning the unity of the virtues in the *Protagoras*, and the refutation of Callicles' hedonism in the *Gorgias*. In general, according to my reading of the dialogue, while the arguments composing the main body of the *Charmides* may differ in their aim, all of them are adversative in their form. Namely, the successive definitions proposed for investigation represent the views of Socrates' interlocutors, not Socrates himself.⁶⁵ Each definition is examined only on the basis of premises that the defender of the definition concedes and endorses. And each gets refuted because it is shown that the defender's belief set is inconsistent or entails absurdities or both. Thus, the *Charmides* raises the same question that typical Socratic dialogues such as the *Euthyphro* and the *Laches*, dialogues like the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, and, in some ways, the *Meno* and the *Euthydemus* also raise: whose arguments are the arguments conducted in each of these dialogues?⁶⁶ Do they belong to Socrates or his interlocutors or both, and in what way?

As with the aforementioned dialogues, so the *Charmides* prompts us to wonder just how the investigation taking place constitutes a truly joint enterprise. For although Socrates says that the search is jointly conducted between him and his interlocutor, nonetheless the form of the arguments does not commit Socrates himself to either their premises or their conclusion. Nor, of course, does Socrates need to be committed to any of the definitions proposed by his interlocutors. For even when these latter can plausibly be assumed to lie close to his own heart, as is the case with the

⁶⁵ Socrates does himself suggest the definition of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and the view that piety is part of justice in the *Euthyphro*. But these definitions become subjects of cross-examination only after they are endorsed, respectively, by Gorgias and Euthyphro.

⁶⁶ See Frede 1992.

definition of courage as a sort of knowledge in the *Laches* (194d) and the definition of temperance as self-knowledge in the *Charmides* (165b), this does not appear to prevent Socrates from aiming to refute them and succeeding in so doing. I shall argue that, nonetheless, the *Charmides* does mark a new departure with regard to the other dialogues mentioned earlier. For the moment, we should accept that, formally speaking, the *Charmides* resembles other dialogues standardly classified in the same groups in the following ways: the definitions proposed belong in an obvious way to the interlocutors, not to Socrates; and they are refuted as defended by the interlocutors, not by Socrates himself. It is worth noting that the *Charmides* as well as the *Laches* is named after the first and, from the point of view of dialectical maturity, weaker participant.⁶⁷ But in both dialogues it is the second participant that carries the greater weight of the conversation, defends a view commonly attributed also to Socrates, and eventually gets refuted.

So much for method and form. In terms of substance too, the *Charmides* exhibits features typical of other dialogues belonging to broadly the same group. For instance, comparably to the *Crito* as well as the *Gorgias*, the prologue of the *Charmides* suggests a conception of virtue, in this case *sôphrosynê*, according to which the latter is a state of health and the source of everything good for a human being. As in the *Laches*, so in the *Charmides* the initial phase of the conversation consists in examining definitions that have been taken to downplay the dispositional aspects of virtue in favour of its behavioural manifestations. Laches defines courage, first, as remaining in one's post and not running away in retreat (190e) and, then, as a sort of psychic endurance (192b–c). In comparable manner, Charmides defines temperance, initially, in terms of conducting oneself quietly and decorously (159b) and, then, in terms of the inclination to act modestly and with a sense of shame (160e). Arguably, in neither case is behaviour severed from one's disposition, but in both dialogues the former is nonetheless more emphasised than the latter.⁶⁸

Importantly, the *Charmides* as well as, for example, the *Laches*, the *Euthyphro*, and the *Meno* entertain the view that virtue is a kind of expert knowledge and consider implications of that view. More generally, these and other dialogues of Plato explore aspects of the stance frequently

⁶⁷ Arguably this is true of the *Gorgias* as well. For although Gorgias is by far the more venerable speaker, he is also the first and, it seems, the least dialectically strong participant.

⁶⁸ Compare a mainstream view according to which, in both the *Laches* and the *Charmides*, the first definition is merely behavioural, whereas the second constitutes an improvement in that it points to a disposition rather than mere behaviour.

labelled ‘Socratic intellectualism’. Nicias, the second interlocutor of Socrates in the *Laches*, proposes that courage is a sort of expert knowledge or understanding and expects Socrates to assent to that claim (194d). Euthyphro develops the idea that piety is the part of justice having to do with service to the gods by suggesting that the latter amounts to expert knowledge of proper religious ritual. In the *Meno*, the teachability of virtue appears to depend on whether virtue is knowledge as opposed to mere belief.⁶⁹ Likewise, in the *Charmides*, Critias investigates the idea that temperance is a sort of *epistêmê*, science, namely an *epistêmê* of oneself, and he examines jointly with Socrates how the latter might bear on happiness. Finally, like other ‘early’ or ‘transitional’ dialogues, the *Charmides* is partly motivated by an *aporia*, a two-horned puzzle motivating the investigation, and also ends in *aporia*, i.e. perplexity.⁷⁰ The *Laches* yields no final answer to the question ‘what is courage?’, nor does the *Euthyphro* settle the question ‘what is piety?’, nor does the *Meno* tell us, in the end, what virtue really is or whether it is teachable. Similarly, for all its subtlety and sophistication, the *Charmides* does not definitively answer the query whether its young protagonist has *sôphrosynê* or the general question of what *sôphrosynê* is or what kind of thing it is. The central argument shows only that temperance is probably not the sort of *epistêmê* envisaged by Critias and jointly considered by both interlocutors. For the rest, we remain perplexed about the nature of temperance, even though our study of the dialogue can substantially improve our understanding of that virtue and of the important issues at stake.

In many ways, however, the *Charmides* is atypical of the dialogues commonly believed to precede the *Republic*. Formally as well as substantially, it exhibits elements that are not encountered in these latter but occur uniquely in the *Charmides* or point towards dialogues traditionally taken to belong to the middle and later periods of Plato’s production.

From the point of view of structure, while the prologue of the *Charmides* is comparable to that of the *Laches* in terms of length, the former far exceeds the latter in thematic complexity and philosophical significance. For instance, Critias’ ruse to assign to Socrates the role of doctor, Socrates’ acquiescence in that plan, the effects of Charmides’ spectacular entrance to the gymnasium, the atmosphere of stifling sexuality surrounding the youth, the overwhelming influence of his beauty on everyone present including Socrates, and the latter’s encomium of Charmides’ ancestry

⁶⁹ Interpreters disagree about this point, but here I shall not enter the controversy.

⁷⁰ On the different senses of *aporia*, see Politis 2006, 2008; Wolfsdorf 2004.

and lineage (which is also Critias' lineage as well as Plato's) are elements unique to our dialogue. The same holds for Socrates' evocation of the divinity of Zalmoxis, the radical holism attributed to the Zalmoxian doctors, the drugs and charms allegedly used by them, and Socrates' apparent readiness to apply their techniques in order to treat the young man. Furthermore, no other Platonic dialogue is comparable to the *Charmides* regarding either the choice of characters or the ambiguity of their portraits. And also, with the possible exception of the *Phaedrus*, no other Platonic dialogue has raised so much controversy regarding its thematic unity. The selective survey of rival interpretations offered earlier indicates the range of different hypotheses as to how the parts of the *Charmides* fit together or how they contribute, jointly or severally, to the main subject and purpose of the work.

From the point of view of methodology, the *Charmides* stands alone because it contains clarifications but also explicit criticisms of the Socratic way of conducting an investigation. For example: when Socrates tries to encourage Charmides to answer the question of whether he has temperance or is temperate, he outlines 'the best method of enquiry' (158e). He suggests that Charmides should look into himself to discern whether he has temperance: if the virtue is present in him, he is bound to have a sense (*aisthêsis*) of it and to be able to form a belief (*doxa*) about its nature; and since he speaks Greek, he should be in a position to express that belief and submit it to examination. To my knowledge, this is the only passage in the Socratic dialogues of Plato which refers to these psychological assumptions of the Socratic method in a protreptic and pedagogical context.

More importantly, the *Charmides* contains the only sustained challenge to Socrates' use of the so-called *technê* analogy, whose core consists in the assumptions that virtue resembles the first-order *technai*, namely expertise in particular fields, and that virtuous people relevantly resemble experts in such first-order fields. According to a fairly traditional scenario, in Plato's Socratic dialogues, Socrates relies on the *technê* model to explore the idea that virtue is a sort of expert understanding and consider its implications. And he operates with a rationalistic conception of *technê* intended to match his rationalistic conception of virtue. Notably, he suggests that, like every genuine expertise, virtue should be supposed to consist in the expert mastery of a body of knowledge that uses a particular set of methods and tools, has a distinctive function or does a distinctive work (*ergon*), and pursues its own proprietary goal in a systematic manner. Importantly, like every other *technê*, virtue is just the sort of knowledge susceptible to giving a certain kind of *logos*, i.e. a causal explanation of its own practices. And

because of the latter feature, one may expect that virtue, like every other *technê*, should be transmissible from one person to another and can be taught.

In addition, Plato's Socrates intimates that, as every first-order *technê* is set over a distinct domain and governs what falls within that domain, so virtue too must be set over a distinct (if greatly extended) sphere and govern everything belonging to that sphere. Socrates repeatedly underscores the prudentially beneficial character of the *technai* and the difference that they make to the preservation and comfort of human life. Likewise but infinitely more so, he suggests, virtue is supremely beneficial in relation to its own function and goal; in fact, its work (*ergon*) is to achieve and maintain happiness. These and other related ideas are repeatedly encountered in Plato's Socratic dialogues and, arguably, indicate that Socrates views virtue as a form of expertise, which constitutes the crowning achievement of human rationality and the essential component of the good life.⁷¹

The *Charmides*, however, contains a rare instance of explicit criticism directed at a particular aspect of the analogy between the virtue of *sôphrosynê* and the first-order *technai*. To be brief, when Socrates presses Critias to clarify his definition of temperance as a science of oneself (*epistêmê heautou*) by drawing attention to the logical and semantic behaviour of 'technê' or 'epistêmê'⁷² and by pointing out that every art or science must be *of something*, i.e. it must have an object or subject-matter distinct from itself, Critias responds that, in fact, the 'science of science' equivalent to temperance differs from all the other sciences in this: it alone is of itself and the other sciences,⁷³ but has no object or domain distinct from itself (165c–d, 166a–b). Thus Critias attacks the *technê* analogy at its core. For he both raises the methodological worry that Socrates' use of the *technê* analogy is at odds with the problem under discussion (165e) and rejects a central aspect of that analogy. What is more, Socrates eventually concedes the contention that temperance alone is a 'science of science' but of nothing else, and accepts to examine together with Critias whether this could be accepted as the definition of temperance. According to dominant interpretations, generally, of Socratic philosophy or, specifically, of the *Charmides*, Socrates rejects here the *technê* model of virtue and never uses it again. This issue is absolutely crucial both for the interpretation of the

⁷¹ The nature and scope of the *technê* model are under debate. See Chapter 8, 172 and note 5.

⁷² In this context, Socrates uses these terms interchangeably: see note 8 in this chapter and Chapter 8, note 2.

⁷³ This amounts to the claim that temperance alone is a 'science of science' simpliciter: see Chapter 9, 188 and note 1.

argument in the second half of the *Charmides* and in its own right. An important task of the present monograph will be to explore the implications of Critias' stance vis-à-vis Socrates in respect of the *technê* analogy, and revisit the issue of whether the argument in the *Charmides* could be intended to show that the *technê* model is flawed and should be abandoned altogether.

In general, so far as methodology is concerned, Socrates as a character appears more self-conscious in the *Charmides* than in any other Socratic dialogue of Plato. On the one hand, he defends the impartial nature and truth-seeking goal of Socratic investigation against an opponent who accuses him of aiming at victory rather than truth (166c–d), and he highlights the therapeutic and pedagogic power of philosophical discourses to engender virtue in one's soul (157a–b). On the other hand, he regularly draws attention to the dialectical character of crucial premises, casts doubt on the legitimacy of certain moves, and assesses critically the *status questionis* at pivotal turns of the argument in ways that find no close parallel in other so-called early or transitional dialogues. The fact that he steps back from and criticises his own method is especially evident towards the end of the *Charmides*, in his final summary of the argument occupying the second half of the dialogue (175a–176a). To account for the failure of the search, he points to the arbitrary character of the pivotal concessions that he and Critias made (175b), the irrationality of an assumption that both of them took for granted (175c), and the blatant absurdity of the conclusion of the elenchus (175a–b). As he suggests, their failure to determine the nature of temperance is due not only to the sloppy manner in which he and Critias conducted the investigation (175a–b, e), but also to the method of investigation itself (175c–d). Also unique to the *Charmides* is the fact that Socrates blames himself more than Critias for the disappointing outcome of the enquiry (175a). This is the only instance in Plato's Socratic dialogues in which Socrates underscores the responsibility of the questioner as much as of the answerer regarding the quality of a dialectical search.

We should pause to ask where these methodological criticisms leave Plato, and where they leave us. There is no doubt, I think, that the *Charmides* points to some serious limitations and shortcomings of the Socratic method. Pedagogically, we suspect that Charmides learned little from the conversation and we know that, despite his eagerness to place himself under Socrates' care and submit to the charm of Socratic discourses, finally he did not resist the snares of power in real life. It is tempting to entertain a similar thought with regard to Critias, who, as mentioned early in the dialogue (156a), befriended Socrates at a time when

Charmides was a mere child. In this case too, we may surmise, the Socratic method of doing philosophy did not prevent Critias from becoming a lover of power and eventually a tyrant. It is hard to tell what lesson we are to draw, but perhaps it is something like the following: the scrutiny of one's beliefs by means of Socratic *logoi* is an important step in the right direction, but more is needed in order to perfect a young person's character and secure happiness for the individual, let alone the state. In addition to the ethical and pedagogical shortcomings of the Socratic method, the *Charmides* highlights also its logical and epistemological weaknesses and directs us to consider other methods of enquiry. For example, at the close of the Argument from Relatives, Socrates says that he himself is unable to settle the question of whether there can be relatives exclusively orientated towards themselves or whether the *epistêmê* equivalent to temperance is among them; rather, some 'great man' is needed to draw the necessary divisions (*diairêsetai*: 169a) and thus solve the issue under debate in a decisive and satisfactory manner (169a–b). Socrates, then, appears to realise that his own method cannot deal with such substantive issues in a satisfactory manner. And he indicates how to move forward.

From the philosophical point of view, the *Charmides* is atypical or unique in many ways. In addition to the fact that it provides materials in order to entertain side-by-side competing conceptions of intellectualism, the dialogue is an exciting exploration of different facets of *sôphrosynê* that are rarely (if ever) considered together in a single philosophical enquiry. We acquire new and valuable insights into behavioural, dispositional, affective, cognitive, logical, semantic, and political aspects of the virtue – some of them closely attached to the conceptual and cultural context of the *Charmides*, many others of direct philosophical concern to ourselves as well. On balance, as I hope to show, the ideas entertained in the dialogue are worthy of serious consideration, and the arguments of the first part deserve more credit than they have been given. As for the two-pronged refutation of Critias' definition of temperance as a unique, strictly reflexive science, I claim that it is a highly original and successful dialectical argument that involves, among other things, seminal work on relatives, logical and semantic problems bearing on reflexivity, sustained criticism of the ideal of technocratic governance, and the eminently sound suggestion that, insofar as the latter involves no conception of the moral good, it cannot by itself secure the happiness of individuals and the well-being of the society in which they live. I should like to say something more about some of these claims.

Starting with the opening scene of the *Charmides*, even though the idea of virtue as a kind of psychic health occurs in several Platonic works, the prologue of our dialogue makes the further move of combining that idea with psycho-physical holism. According to the view that Socrates attributes to the doctors of Zalmoxis, *sôphrosynê* is the source of health for the whole person conceived as a psycho-physical unity. This sort of holism⁷⁴ prompts questions concerning the relations between the soul and the body as well as between the self and the body, and also raises questions concerning the dependence or independence of physical disease with regard to one's psychic condition. Even though these issues are not pursued in the *Charmides*, Socrates takes care to make us aware of them and repeatedly gives us the opportunity to consider them both in the context of the dialogue and in their own right.

The conversation between Socrates and Charmides has its own philosophical virtues as well. Despite the youth's inexperience in dialectic, his definitions of temperance are not implausible and the arguments by which they get refuted are not nearly as weak as they are frequently taken to be. For example, the elenchus of Charmides' first definition of temperance as a form of 'quietness' does not suffer, I suggest, from vicious ambiguities concerning the notion of *hêsychiôtês*, but exploits ingeniously the semantic nuances of that concept to defend a plausible conclusion. Or, the brief elenchus of the definition of temperance as *aidôs* (modesty or a sense of shame) is not affected by a paralogism, nor does it rely on appealing to authority. In fact, I maintain, there is no fallacy here, and the single counterexample adduced by Socrates constitutes adequate grounds for the refutation. The attempt by Charmides and then by Critias to define temperance in terms of 'doing one's own' raises interesting queries as well. As is well known, this formula is used to define justice in the *Republic*, but what meaning may it have in the present context? What could be the systematic relations between virtue and a kind of *praxis*, having temperance and doing the sorts of things that properly belong to oneself? Or, to put it differently, how does the latter kind of *praxis* qualify as *virtuous* or, specifically, *temperate*? Again, such questions serve as entry points to the interpretation of the relevant passage in the *Charmides*, but also have philosophical interest in their own right.

As mentioned earlier, the elenctic refutation of the latter definition brings to the fore an important and, to my mind, defensible assumption: virtue cannot be merely a matter of performing good actions; the virtuous

⁷⁴ Compare *Rep.* 403d.

agents must also *know* somehow the value of their actions, i.e. they must know them to be *good*. In other words, according to the interlocutors of the *Charmides*, one's possession of temperance must crucially involve a sort of self-knowledge. This assumption is both pivotal for the development of the argument in the *Charmides* and central to contemporary discussions in moral philosophy. To be sure, Critias acknowledges its legitimacy and, therefore, advances the view that, in truth, temperance is equivalent to 'knowing oneself'. On my reading, the chief and ostensible aim of the second half of the *Charmides* is to articulate and examine that view as Critias understands it: temperance as a 'science of itself and the other sciences' or, for the sake of brevity, a 'science of science' simpliciter.⁷⁵

This is not Socrates' view. Nor, I believe, is it tenable. Against interpretations that find attractive the hypothesis of a 'science of science' both strictly reflexive and higher-order and, consequently, disvalue the two-pronged elenchus⁷⁶ by which it is refuted, I contend that the arguments constituting this latter are philosophically valuable and dialectically successful. In brief, they are not intended to attack every sort of reflexive knowledge, but only the strict reflexivity involved in Critias' conception of a 'science of science' – incidentally, this is the first and only time that the property of strict reflexivity is discussed in the Platonic corpus. There are several reasons that can explain Plato's interest in that property. As many have suggested, reflexive expressions such as 'science of science' occurred in logical puzzles and were probably used for sophistical or eristic purposes. Plato's interest may have been triggered by such uses, but also, far more importantly, by his own endeavours to understand relatives and relations, his work on self-predication, and his ideas concerning the reflexive character of rationality, human or divine.⁷⁷

Be that as it may, in the *Charmides*, the Argument from Relatives (167c8–169c2) rightly suggests that the conception of strict reflexivity is deeply problematic. As mentioned, Socrates and Critias entertain several different groups of relatives that Socrates takes to be analogous to *epistêmê*, and they conclude that, in some of these cases, strict reflexivity appears strange, while, in other cases, it seems impossible. As for the Argument from Benefit (169d2–175a8), it plausibly suggests that, even conceding that

⁷⁵ Although the expression 'science of science' (*epistêmê epistêmês*: 166e) is introduced by Socrates and not Critias, this is not something to puzzle over: see Chapter 9, 188 and note 1, and compare Tuozzo 2011, 203–4.

⁷⁶ As indicated, this consists of two interrelated arguments that I call, respectively, the Argument from Relatives and the Argument from Benefit.

⁷⁷ Consider, for instance, *Alc.* I 132c–133c.

there is such a thing as a strictly reflexive science, it wouldn't bring any real benefit because it could have no substantive content and no function of its own. According to my interpretation of these arguments, the upshot is not, as many have feared, that if we take them seriously, we must conclude that Socrates or Plato reject the possibility of self-knowledge, or of reflective understanding, or of an architectonic science aiming at the good governance of the state. In fact, the second part of the *Charmides* does not attack these ideas in any general way. Socrates questions just one sort of reflexivity, what I call strict reflexivity, and he brings into the open a cluster of logical, semantic, and philosophical problems related to that phenomenon. I shall aim to show that the Argument from Relatives and the Argument from Benefit, severally as well as jointly, support the conclusion that strict reflexivity appears to be an odd or incoherent notion. If this is right, these two arguments provide grounds for rejecting Critias' claim that temperance is a strictly reflexive *epistêmê* orientated towards *epistêmê* alone but nothing else.

In ending this section, I wish to stress again that the two arguments that establish (albeit tentatively) the aforementioned conclusion are of major philosophical importance and have no close parallel anywhere in Plato. Clearly, the Argument from Relatives is for Plato a new and major departure⁷⁸ comparable, for example, to the theory of causation dominating the *Phaedo*. It contains seminal work on relatives and relations and points forward to puzzles concerning self-predication and, generally, Plato's theory of Forms. Also unique, and terribly important, is the Argument from Benefit, because it appears to challenge two views lying at the heart of Socratic philosophy, namely that virtue is a sort of *epistêmê*⁷⁹ and that virtue as a higher-order *epistêmê* is sufficient for happiness. In addition to its singular target, the Argument from Benefit is remarkable also on account of its structural complexity and several interim inferences and claims. These include the contention that, because of strict reflexivity, the 'science of science' could have no substantive content; that even if it did have substantive content, it is still dubious that it could bring any real benefit to the individual or the state; and that happiness could never be the object of such a science, first of all for formal reasons having to do with the view of relatives and relations at play. In sum, there is much at stake,

⁷⁸ The Argument from Relatives can be compared to the discussion of likes and unlikes in the *Lysis*, but the former passage goes so much further than the latter that no substantial parallel can be drawn between the two works.

⁷⁹ This idea is challenged also in the *Euthydemus*, but the *Charmides* is the only dialogue that deploys a systematic argument to that effect.

philosophically, in these arguments, and they deserve to be revisited with an open mind.

7 Intertextuality

The *Charmides* is by no means the only dialogue by Plato which directs its readers to reach beyond its own frame to other works of the corpus. In fact, most Platonic dialogues lend themselves to such intertextual associations and can simultaneously address different audiences.⁸⁰ However, I think that the *Charmides* stands out in this regard as well, for the intertextual connections it prompts us to seek appear to constitute an integral part of Plato's dialectical strategy in this dialogue, and can enrich substantially our understanding of both the drama and the argument. Also, regardless of whether the dialogue is viewed from a developmentalist or a unitarian perspective, the intertextual associations it evokes point not only forward to the *Republic* and other 'middle' dialogues, but in other directions as well, i.e. Platonic dialogues traditionally classified as 'early', 'transitional', or 'late': the *Apology* and the *Crito*; the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro*; the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Meno*; the *Lysis* and the *Euthydemus*; the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* as well as the *Republic*; beyond them, importantly, the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*; also, occasionally, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

I shall refer to these dialogues fairly frequently in order to illustrate, elaborate, corroborate, or question features of the *Charmides*: dramatic elements too, but mainly ideas and claims that remain undeveloped or require further support. However, it is important to clarify at the outset what I intend to be the status and function of such intertextual connections in my analysis. First, these latter are bound to have a strong subjective element, since they reflect associations that have occurred to me and serve the interests of my own interpretation. I hope that they may prove interesting and stimulating, but they are not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive. Second, while the intertextuality built into the *Charmides* can substantially contribute to its dramatic attractiveness and dialectical success, nonetheless, in my view, the dialogue is philosophically self-standing and its arguments should be assessed primarily in their own right. Third, I should like to make plain that I find no indication whatsoever that the *Charmides* has some hidden meaning accessible only to the privileged few. The text is there for all to read, and the fact that it bears on many other

⁸⁰ See Rowe 2007.

Platonic texts and invites many different readings has nothing to do with some secret agenda on Plato's part. Fourth, while the focus of the present study will remain fixed on the *Charmides*, the readers will be given opportunities to revisit traditional views and acquire new perspectives on other dialogues as well. Immediately below, I give examples of the ways in which the *Charmides* may be pointing to other works by Plato, and I try to convey a sense of the unusual complexity of such connections and their vast scope.

The *Apology* constitutes the main point of reference for the conception of Socratic self-knowledge alluded to in the prologue of the *Charmides* and implicitly contrasted with Critias' conception of self-knowledge in the central argument of the dialogue. For instance, if we read the *Apology* together with the *Charmides*, we are likely to achieve a better understanding of Socrates' claim in the prologue of the *Charmides*, i.e. that, according to the doctors of Zalmoxis, virtue and in particular temperance is the source of every good for a human being and can be acquired by means of *logoi kaloi*, fine words or arguments (157a) – a charm that Socrates is able to administer. Or, the *Apology* lends perspective on Socrates' articulation of Critias' notion of *sôphrosynê* as 'science of science' in terms of the temperate person's ability to judge what they and others know or do not know and thus distinguish between experts and charlatans. The fact that Socrates elaborates Critias' definition of *sôphrosynê* as reflexive science in terms strikingly similar to his own description of Socratic self-knowledge in the *Apology* should give us pause. We should entertain the possibility that the elenchus ostensibly directed against Critias' 'science of science' may point to problems in Socratic philosophy and method as well. The *Crito* and the *Gorgias* provide other points of comparison and a broader context for several features of the *Charmides*: Socrates' interest in Charmides' soul rather than his body, the claim that virtue is the source of every good, the contrast between Socratic *dialogesthai* and Critias' rhetorical speech about the meaning of the Delphic inscription 'Know Thyself', the fact that the nightmarish society of the 'dream' is governed solely by the 'science of science' but not by law, and so on.

As indicated, the *Charmides* has evident commonalities with dialogues such as the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro*, which also belong to the group of Plato's 'Socratic' dialogues and are commonly supposed to have been written during the same period as the *Charmides* or, alternatively, to be so crafted as to be read in close sequel to the latter. In addition to the fact that a comparative examination of the treatment of the 'what is X?' question in these works is likely to enhance our understanding of the

Socratic method and its applications, the first two definitions of *sôphrosynê* in the *Charmides* are structured in ways pointing to their counterparts in the *Laches* and the same holds for their development and refutation. Socrates' description of the 'best method' in the former work can be fruitfully compared to Nicias' account of the Socratic method and its effects on people's lives in the latter (*Lach.* 187e–188c). Certain dialectical initiatives that Socrates takes in the *Charmides* are comparable to the initiative that he takes in the *Euthyphro* to propose to his interlocutor for consideration the view that piety is part of justice (11e–12d). Considered together, these initiatives lead to a better appreciation of the questioner's role in the elenchus and prepare us for Socrates' self-critical comments on method towards the end of the *Charmides*.

Similar remarks apply to intertextual comparisons that can be drawn between the *Charmides* and dialogues commonly believed to be more advanced than the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro* either in respect of their relative chronology or in respect of their intended order of study. Such dialogues include the *Meno* and the *Protagoras*. For example, it is worth entertaining the idea suggested by some scholars that Socrates' 'best method' in the *Charmides* looks forward to the theory of recollection in the *Meno* or can be fruitfully considered from the vantage point of the latter dialogue. In both these works there is talk about a belief extracted from within us and expressible in language, and in both it is suggested that the belief could turn into knowledge through repeated and systematic questioning. Or, we may want to compare versions of intellectualism as they are developed, respectively, in the *Charmides* and the *Protagoras* and explore the implications of such a reading for either or both works. The *Charmides* and the *Protagoras* can also be read in parallel with regard to the role of expert knowledge in ruling. On the one hand, the conversation between Socrates and Protagoras raises the worry that democracy may be unable to accommodate and benefit from true political expertise. On the other, the debate between Socrates and Critias represents a failed attempt to defend a certain conception of a higher-order expertise, i.e. a 'science of science' that, according to Critias, would enable its possessor to govern the state well. As we shall see, the relevant argument in the *Charmides* is far more thorough and promising than the corresponding argument in the *Euthydemus*, and it points forward to two different elaborations of its main theme, one undertaken in the *Republic*, the other in the *Statesman*. I shall briefly comment on each of these dialogues in turn.

At the dramatic level, the intertextual affinities between the *Charmides* and the *Republic* are underscored by the fact that both dialogues have

Socrates as narrator and both have Plato's relatives as protagonists. At the philosophical level, the *Charmides* can be considered in certain ways a mirror image of the *Republic*. For the former dialogue focuses on a form of intellectualist elitism that can easily be associated with the elitist ideology of the Thirty, while the latter elaborates and defends an elitist conception of political governance centred on the supreme value of philosophical education. But the theme of a higher-level *epistêmê* is central to both dialogues, as is the idea that such an *epistêmê* empowers its possessor to rule. How exactly the two works may be related, however, is not a clear-cut matter. On one approach, there is continuity between Critias' hypothesis of a strictly reflexive *epistêmê* enabling the temperate person to govern well and the theoretical understanding that the Philosopher-King brings to bear on the affairs of the state. In both cases, the ruler's knowledge ranges over the first-order arts and sciences, determines their application and use, delegates tasks to the relevant experts, and, generally, supervises and orchestrates from above all activities in the state. In sum, according to this interpretation, the same line of thought stretches through the *Charmides* and the *Republic* as well as the *Euthydemus* and the *Statesman*.⁸¹

On a different approach, however,⁸² the 'science of science' in the *Charmides* does not preannounce the ideal of the Philosopher-King, but points in an altogether different direction. While the interlocutors of the *Charmides* articulate the 'science of science' as an architectonic sort of expertise whose application by the ruler is direct and empirical, the *epistêmê* of the Philosopher-King consists in the theoretical understanding deriving from the contemplation of perennial realities, the Forms. Critias' temperate rulers would govern by virtue of their capacity to distinguish science from non-science and experts from non-experts, and to delegate and supervise tasks accordingly. The Philosopher-King is on the contrary supposed to govern by somehow bringing to bear on empirical affairs a kind of knowledge that transcends these latter and includes, all importantly, the contemplation of the Form of the Good. On this latter approach, the abstract, unspecified nature of the 'science of science' defended in the *Charmides* must not mislead us: it has little to do with the philosophical knowledge achieved by the Philosopher-King. Rather, as we shall see shortly, it lies closer to the 'kingly art' of the *Euthydemus* and points towards the *epistêmê* of statesmanship in the *Statesman*.

⁸¹ See Kahn 1988 and 1996, ch. 7: 183–209.

⁸² See Schofield 2006. As Schofield 2006, 145, remarks, the fundamental task of philosophy and the aim of Socratic enquiry is to find out the nature of the good and determine what knowledge of the good would consist in. But neither the *Charmides* nor the *Euthydemus* undertakes this task.

Yet, there are many other respects in which the *Charmides* appears to gesture towards the *Republic* as well as beyond it. For instance, the third definition of temperance as ‘doing one’s own’ overlaps with the definition of justice in *Republic* IV, even though the formula does not mean the same thing in the two works.⁸³ Besides, it occurs as a virtual quotation in the *Timaeus* (72a–b), where ‘doing one’s own’ is not treated as a view of *sôphrosynê* that has been rejected. Also, the *Charmides* suggests a distinction between makers and users, which turns out to be crucial for the argument in the *Republic* and, specifically, for the contention that only users have real knowledge, whereas makers have true belief and imitators have neither. Moreover, towards the end of the *Charmides*, Socrates extracts from Critias the admission that the only *epistêmê* pertaining to individual and civic happiness is the *epistêmê* of good and evil – an idea that Socrates elaborates in the *Republic* in connection with the ideal of the Philosopher-King. And furthermore, importantly, the *Charmides* is sprinkled with terms and phrases used also in the *Republic* in connection with the metaphysics and epistemology of Forms. Notable examples occur in the Argument from Relatives and will be discussed in due course. Again, my proposal is not that we fill the Argument from Relatives or any other argument of the *Charmides* with premises drawn from other Platonic works. I only suggest that intertextual parallels can provide a broader context for certain seemingly arbitrary elements of the *Charmides* and thus help us assess such elements in a fuller and more favourable light. It is up to the reader to decide whether or not they will want to take such suggestions into account.

Whatever stance one takes regarding the relation between temperance as ‘science of science’ in the *Charmides* and the *epistêmê* of the Philosopher-King in the *Republic*, it is clear, I think, that the *Charmides* explores an ideal that also surfaces in the *Euthydemus* and is fully developed in the *Statesman*: an architectonic *epistêmê* that extends over every specialised art or science, delegates and oversees the activities of the first-order experts, and secures the good governance and well-being of the state.⁸⁴ Even though there are marked differences between Critias’ ‘science of science’ and the ‘kingly art’

⁸³ In the *Republic* IV, justice is not identified with ‘doing one’s own’. It is the condition of a soul or a city when its three constitutive parts are each doing their own.

⁸⁴ Schofield 2006, 136–93, explains how Plato’s ideal of architectonic knowledge inspired John Stuart Mill’s technocratic model of government. He compares and contrasts this latter with Jowett’s favourite model, which was inspired by Plato’s answer in the *Republic* as to who is fit to rule: the true statesman is not the technocrat but the philosopher, who rules successfully and well by harmonising practice and contemplation.

(*basilikê technê*) entertained in the *Euthydemus*, nonetheless, in these two cases, the argument is motivated in similar ways and the conclusions are interestingly comparable. On the one hand, the *Charmides* investigates what *sôphrosynê* is and eventually raises the question of whether a reflexive *epistêmê* supposedly equivalent to temperance suffices to ensure happiness in the state. On the other hand, the *Euthydemus* supposes that a certain *epistêmê* is needed for happiness and undertakes to specify what *epistêmê* this is. In response, both dialogues entertain the idea of an architectonic form of *epistêmê* that might be able to achieve the desired result. And both eventually refute the possibility of an architectonic sort of *epistêmê*, while the *Charmides* offers a fuller and more substantial argument to that effect. Moreover, a main reason why the hypothesis of an architectonic science fails in the *Euthydemus* is that it involves a certain kind of reflexivity probably leading to regress (cf. 291b–292e). Another, related reason for that failure is that no connection is secured between the architectonic science supposedly leading to happiness and the good, and both these elements are prominent, as indicated, in the *Charmides* as well. In sum, I believe that we gain a fuller philosophical perspective of certain key ideas of these two works if, in addition to studying each of them independently, we also consider them in parallel to each other and, moreover, read either of them or both in connection with the *Republic*. For example: jointly the aforementioned passage of the *Euthydemus* and the critique of reflexive knowledge in the *Charmides* can be read as showing Socrates' own admission that, in equating the good with knowledge or wisdom, he has initiated a potentially vicious regress (cf. *Rep.* VI 505b) which the *Republic* will block by introducing Plato's Form of the Good. Such a reading can be used to support the idea that, in the *Charmides*, Plato is making moves to distance himself philosophically from Socrates as represented in the so-called early dialogues.⁸⁵ I now wish to pursue a little further the theme of architectonic science that, in my view,⁸⁶ runs through the *Charmides* and the *Statesman*.

The leading question of these two dialogues differs, since the former asks the Socratic question what is *sôphrosynê*, whereas the latter is driven by a concern dominating Plato's substantive philosophy, namely the nature of true political expertise and the entitlement to rule deriving from it. Nonetheless, both the drama and the argument of the *Charmides* prompt reflection on central issues addressed in detail by the *Statesman* and, in a different way, by the *Republic* as well: who ought to govern the ship of

⁸⁵ I thank David Sedley for his comments on this point.

⁸⁶ See also the reference to Schofield 2006 in note 84.

state? What sort of expertise should qualify them for that task? How is it to be applied in practice? How does the ruler's expertise bring about the unity and good governance of the state as well as the happiness of its citizens? The *Charmides* does not systematically discuss these matters, nor does it propose a coherent view of the proper qualifications for statesmanship. However, it is clear that Critias has a deep concern for this latter issue, and many of Socrates' interventions seem calculated to highlight that fact. I suggest that Plato chooses Critias as a principal interlocutor partly because he wishes to signal the unsuitability of the 'science of science' as a political ideal: in all probability, the temperate ruler as Critias conceives of him would be entirely inappropriate to steer the ship of state. The central argument of the dialogue offers grounds that can support that suggestion. Not only is Critias' view of the ruler's *epistêmê* conceptually problematic, but also the latter probably couldn't have any substantive content or any substantive connection to the good. Socrates' thought-experiments, especially the 'dream', illustrate that point and, moreover, bring to the fore the putative ruler's inability to create and preserve a sense of community and cohesion. Thus, the *Charmides* shows among other things the need to redefine the sort of architectonic *epistêmê* pertaining to the ruler, propose a better model of successful political governance, and determine anew the cognitive and moral desiderata for such a model.

The *Statesman* pursues these and other related issues, and one of its most important contributions is that it proposes a fully worked-out conception of an architectonic science of political governance and of the statesman in possession of the latter.⁸⁷ Crucially, this conception comprises the idea that ruling involves a certain kind of theoretical understanding enabling the statesman to direct activities in the state; the metaphor of the ruler as a weaver; the distinction between weaving and contributory activities; and the description of the ruler in terms of the 'supreme orchestrator' of everything that takes place in the state.⁸⁸ Assuming that the statesman is able to properly exercise his art, the results that he achieves for individual citizens and for society as a whole comprise elements conspicuously absent from the imaginary society of Socrates' 'dream' in the *Charmides*. For, unlike the temperate rulers of this latter, the statesman

⁸⁷ On the political argument of the *Statesman* and the methodological approach Plato follows in that dialogue, see notably Lane 1998.

⁸⁸ See Schofield 2006, 168.

brings their life [sc. the life of the citizens] together in agreement and friendship and makes it common between them, thus completing the most magnificent and best of all fabrics and covering with it all the other inhabitants of cities, slaves as well as free people; and it holds them together with this twining and rules and directs and, so far as it belongs to a city to be happy, it does not fall short of that in any respect. (*Plt.* 311b–c)

Arguably, the *Charmides* fulfils a double function in respect of the ideal advanced in the *Statesman*. On the one hand, the former dialogue sets up the agenda pursued in the latter but, on the other, Plato's choice of protagonists in the *Charmides* serves to alert us to the dangers lurking in the ruler's absolute power. Consider, for instance, an idea prominent in the *Statesman*: that the expertise of the wise overrides every other normative element, including the laws of the state. According to the Eleatic stranger, the art of kingship entitles the wise and just ruler occasionally to act against both law and custom, forcing the citizens to do what is best (296b–c) and even using purges when they are needed. The *Charmides*, however, provides a useful reminder of what can happen when absolute rulers merely believe themselves to be wise and just, and on the basis of that mistaken belief undertake to 'purify' the state.

Turning away from the *epistêmê* of ruling to *epistêmê* simpliciter, we may consider reading the *Charmides* in relation to the *Theaetetus*. In some ways, the latter is sharply different from the former. For, unlike the *Charmides*, the *Theaetetus* is generally believed to be a later work of Plato, is widely acknowledged to have philosophical pertinence and value, and constitutes an outstanding example of a cooperative dialectical enquiry between Socrates and interlocutors of similar ilk. In other ways, however, the two dialogues appear to be crafted so as to point to each other. Methodologically, both of them conduct their respective investigations by means of the Socratic method and lead to an aporetic result. But also, each of these dialogues arguably indicates a distance between Socrates as character and Plato as author, albeit in a different manner and to different effect.⁸⁹ Philosophically, the study of reciprocal connections between the two dialogues may enrich our understanding of either or both. Not only are their respective subjects closely related, so that the investigation of the

⁸⁹ In the *Charmides*, Socrates points to some serious limitations and shortcomings of his own method of investigation: see above, 35–6. It seems plausible to infer that the character Socrates voices Plato's criticisms of his mentor's method and his readiness to move on. Regarding the *Theaetetus*, see, notably, the interpretation defended by Sedley 2004.

nature of *epistêmê* in the *Theaetetus* provides a broader epistemological context for our understanding of a specific kind of *epistêmê*, i.e. the ‘science of science’, in the *Charmides*. Also, the *Theaetetus* speaks to Socrates’ worry in the *Charmides* concerning the conceptual coherence of the hypothesis that there can be a science orientated solely towards itself.

Towards the end of his criticism of the aviary, Socrates considers and discards various hypotheses in turn (*Tht.* 200b). The last of them raises the possibility that there might be a second-order set of *epistêmai* of first-order *epistêmai* and the lack thereof, which might exist in some other aviary. As the interlocutors intimate, this hypothesis involves a sort of reflexivity, and it is dismissed because it leads to regress. Even though the *Charmides* examines reflexivity from a different perspective and questions it on different grounds, it is important that both dialogues construe their hypotheses of reflexive *epistêmê* by attributing to the latter a higher-order function, both problematise reflexivity in connection to that function, and both eventually reject the hypotheses under consideration. The *Theaetetus*, then, corroborates the intuition motivating the Argument from Relatives in the *Charmides*, namely that the strict reflexivity exhibited by the ‘science of science’ is at the very least problematic. And both dialogues provide incentives for us to think harder about reflexive relatives and relations and try out alternative options of construing *epistêmê* in ways that involve reflexivity of some innocuous kind. In addition, these two works raise similar clusters of issues related to the question of whether the central argument in each work requires the assumption that there are Forms or can function without appealing to these entities.⁹⁰ Is this similarity a mere coincidence? Or is it due to a deliberate choice that Plato makes, i.e. to follow the same strategy in both dialogues? In my analysis, I occasionally draw attention to such questions, and I hope that some readers will take them up.

At the level of drama too, there are striking parallels between the *Theaetetus* and the *Charmides*. War and death cast their long shadow on both dialogues. The former is a sort of funeral oration for the great mathematician Theaetetus, as he is brought back mortally wounded from the battlefield. The latter relays, as mentioned, an encounter supposed to have taken place upon Socrates’ return from the battle of

⁹⁰ Cherniss 1936, 447 n. 11, cites *inter alia Charm.* 176a as evidence for the claim that ‘the dialogues of search, by demonstrating the hopelessness of all other expedients, show that the definitions requisite to normative ethics are possible only on the assumption that there exist, apart from phenomena, substantive objects of these definitions which alone are the source of the values attaching to phenomenal existence’.

Potidaea, which took the lives of many Athenians and gave a foretaste of heavier losses to come. In sharp contrast to their historical settings, the narratives constituting the main body of both works convey the liveliness and pleasure of dialectical exchanges and show how these can be used for philosophical and pedagogical ends. In addition to these general similarities, however, there are also dramatic elements that are most fully understood if we read the *Charmides* in the light of the *Theaetetus* and vice versa. One such example concerns the respective protagonists of the two dialogues and the relations they are depicted as having with each other.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates famously describes himself as a barren midwife, who is able to assist men pregnant with thoughts to bring forth their offspring, examine whether these latter are real or merely wind-egg, and also act as a sort of matchmaker. Assuming that philosophical education differs from sophistic education, Socrates can distinguish youths disposed towards the former from others inclined towards the latter and pair each of them with an appropriate mentor. The *Theaetetus* exhibits Socratic midwifery at its best. Socrates is represented as applying his skill to a youth who has an active and creative mind, has received excellent mathematical training, has acquired the ability to think theoretically and abstractly, and is likely to be pregnant with thoughts. He is modest and appropriately respectful, but intellectually enterprising and independent. He shows no trace of reluctance, cowardice, or deference to authority. On the contrary, he labours bravely to give birth to his ideas and makes substantial progress in trying to defend them. Theaetetus grows in self-knowledge right before our eyes and, as Socrates observes, he appears ready to explore new theories and likely to show gentleness to other people less gifted than himself. The opening scene of the *Theaetetus* confirms what we know from independent evidence as well, namely that Theaetetus lived up to promise. Within the frame of the dialogue, Theaetetus finds in Socrates the right match and draws from Socrates' midwifery a net gain: he gradually improves in self-understanding and shows himself keenly aware of the advances that the Socratic method enabled him to make (*Tht.* 200b–c).

Consider now the *Charmides* in the light of the above remarks. From the very beginning of the dialogue, one cannot suppress the suspicion that Charmides may not be able to benefit from talking with Socrates but is more likely to gravitate towards a different sort of mentor. While Charmides appears *prima facie* promising on account of his beauty, ancestry, education, and manner, it becomes increasingly more questionable whether he really has a talent for philosophy or the tenacity to pursue the

enquiry about temperance beyond a certain point. After two failed attempts to define the virtue by looking into himself and expressing his own belief about temperance, he gives up. Rather than examining himself and his own beliefs, he submits for investigation the claim of someone else, namely his guardian Critias. And when Critias takes over, the youth withdraws from the conversation and reappears only in the last scene. Generally, Charmides' definitions of temperance as well as his attitudes and demeanour indicate a deferential attitude towards tradition, a certain intellectual laziness, and a docile and passive mind. Even though he is portrayed at a slightly younger age than Theaetetus, he appears far more immature than Theaetetus regarding his mental and psychological development. He shows nothing like Theaetetus' intellectual drive or his ability to conceive and bring forth his own thoughts.

In the last scene of the *Charmides*, the young man pleads menacingly with Socrates to take him into his care, and we are left to wonder whether this will happen. The *Theaetetus*, however, gives us reason to suspect that the association between Charmides and Socrates could never work. In the midwifery passage, Socrates says that, while he exercises his art to help men who seem pregnant to bring forth their thoughts and determine whether these latter are fertile truths or mere phantoms (*Tht.* 150b–151a), he declines to attend to people who somehow do not seem to him to be pregnant or have need of him (151b). In such cases, he continues, with the best will in the world he acts as a matchmaker and sends the barren youth over to Prodicus or some other *sophos*, wise man or sophist (151b). In the *Charmides*, Socrates characterises Critias, without naming him, as a *sophos*, wise man or sophist, and points to him as the likely source of the definition of temperance as 'doing one's own' (161b4–c1). Even though Critias was not a professional teacher like Hippias or Prodicus, he was familiar with the sophists' teachings and was probably perceived as a sophist by many. As for Charmides, when we compare him with Theaetetus, we get the impression that his mind is rather barren and, unlike Theaetetus' mind, it needs to be sown by something else's seed.⁹¹ The last scene of the *Charmides* suggests that, in fact, a matchmaking has already taken place and Socrates' services will not be needed. Charmides is portrayed as being already under the influence of Critias, and as for Plato's

⁹¹ As Burnyeat 1977 notes, from the point of view of Socratic midwifery Charmides and Socrates are a bad match. See Chapter 12, 298–9 and notes 50 and 51.

audiences, they are in a position to know that the seeds that Critias will plant in his ward's soul shall bring a bitter harvest.

8 **Why Did Plato Write the *Charmides*?**

In the end, why did Plato write the *Charmides*? To my mind, there is no single or definitive answer to that question, nor is it fruitful to look for one. Although Plato's choice of interlocutors and of the views defended by them (and especially by Critias) may be intended to anchor the dialogue in historical reality, we simply do not have available the sort of information that would enable us to distinguish firmly between the real and the fictional elements of Plato's craftsmanship. Even greater opacity surrounds Plato's own attitudes and feelings towards his own relatives. Their ambiguous portraits in the *Charmides* may reflect his ambivalent feelings towards them, or serve dramatic and philosophical purposes, or both. Furthermore, although the *Charmides* drives a sort of wedge between the character Socrates and his interlocutors and indicates that the former cannot be held responsible for the thoughts and deeds of the latter, there is no firm evidence that Plato composed the dialogue primarily for apologetic purposes.

In short, we cannot really tell whether or to what extent the *Charmides* is a biographical text. As I have said, my own study of the dialogue does not exclude the possibility of such readings, but also does not pursue or confirm it. To put my cards on the table, I assume that the main reasons why Plato wrote the *Charmides* are philosophical.⁹² And while the drama and the argument are intermeshed so as to form a coherent whole, the plot and characters of the work are chosen chiefly for the sake of its philosophical content and not the other way around.⁹³ Of course, these assumptions need not be accepted by every interpreter of the dialogue; in fact, many would reject them. However, they do shape in part the perspective and goals of my own approach, and do underpin the interpretation of the dialogue that I offer.

I hope to show that the philosophical value of the *Charmides* is considerable and lies in the systematic exploration of its stated topic: the nature of *sôphrosynê*,⁹⁴ as well as the pros and cons of different accounts of *sôphrosynê*; first in terms of ways of behaving, then in terms of good actions falling

⁹² As indicated, there is no scholarly consensus on that point.

⁹³ Compare Myles Burnyeat's remarks with regard to the character of Thrasymachus in Burnyeat 2003.

⁹⁴ See also Tsouna 2017.

within the domain of one's expertise, and finally in terms of self-knowledge understood in a certain manner, namely as a strictly reflexive, higher-order scientific knowledge. I take it that a crucial element of the dialogue is the regular if implicit contrast that Socrates suggests between Critias', as it were, technocratic conception of self-knowledge as a 'science of science' and a different conception attributed, within the *Charmides* as well as in other texts, to Socrates himself. The philosophical importance of that contrast is this: it forces us to reflect critically about the ideal, defended by Critias, of a higher-order scientific knowledge both reflexive and directive that represents a model of successful political governance. Comparison and contrast of this latter with the model of Socratic self-knowledge – a sort of knowledge that is neither reflexive nor directive but necessary for personal improvement – is a strategy designed to help the readers of the dialogue discern the weaknesses of the Critianic model, but also the shortcomings of Socrates' philosophy and method. Thus, the readers are guided to look towards alternative models of an *epistêmê* related specifically to political governance. Two of them are developed, respectively, in the *Republic* and the *Statesman*, but nothing prevents the readers of the *Charmides* to pursue some of its themes outside Plato's works as well.

Independently of its relevance to political governance, the conception of temperance as a 'science of science' is philosophically remarkable in its own right. To my mind, an important part of Plato's motivation for composing the *Charmides* is, precisely, the elaboration, criticism, and refutation of that view and, in particular, of the idea that there can be a strictly reflexive *epistêmê*, i.e. a science uniquely and exclusively related to itself and not to any object distinct from itself. Whether this position circulated in intellectual circles or was invented by Plato, I believe that Plato takes it seriously⁹⁵ and is genuinely intrigued by the logical, psychological, ethical, and political issues that can be raised in that connection. He takes care to show to his audiences why the view under discussion might be attractive and to whom. And he undertakes to explore it in earnest. This is an important task. Historically, some version of the view under consideration can be associated with the ideology of the Thirty, but also is present in the model of governance proposed by John Stuart Mill,⁹⁶ as well as in contemporary models that assign to expert technocrats a prominent role in politics. Logically and epistemologically, the investigation launched by Plato's Socrates regarding the conceivability of a strictly reflexive *epistêmê* or the

⁹⁵ On the question of why Plato would be interested in such a concept, see also above, 25–7, 38.

⁹⁶ See Schofield 2006, ch. 4: 136–93.

benefits that might derive from it constitutes a platform for Plato in order to do significant work on relatives and relations,⁹⁷ expose certain syntactic and semantic aspects of reflexivity, and explore specifically the notion of reflexive *epistêmê* and its purported function and content. Ethically, the investigation of the ‘science of science’ in the *Charmides* highlights the eudaemonistic expectations underlying the idea of political expertise and, I believe, intimates that we should search for other forms of higher-order understanding involving some sort of reflectiveness and also bearing on ethics and the well-being of society.

There is yet another cluster of reasons why, it seems to me, Plato chose to write the *Charmides*. They are related, I think, to indirect criticisms concerning certain aspects of Socratic philosophy as it is represented in Plato’s so-called Socratic dialogues. On my reading, the Socratic notion of self-knowledge is only obliquely present throughout the dialogue. But even though it is not the direct target of the elenchus, the argument in the second half of the *Charmides* guides us to examine whether Socrates’ claim of being able to detect knowledge and ignorance in both oneself and others, as well as the method by which he is supposed to achieve that result, may not be vulnerable to some of the objections raised against the ‘science of science’. On the one hand, Socratic self-knowledge, i.e. the capacity of judging what oneself and others know or do not know by means of the elenchus, does not involve strict reflexivity and hence is not vulnerable to objections raised by the Argument from Relatives. On the other hand, towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates himself raises the worry that it may be ‘impossible for a man to know, in some sort of way, things that he does not know at all’ (175c). Whether this is as serious a problem for Socratic self-knowledge remains to be examined by those who are inclined to do so.⁹⁸ In any case, the fact that, in his final summary of the refutation of the ‘science of science’, Socrates criticises his own method strongly suggests that Plato composed the *Charmides* in a critical mode and probably with this aim in mind: to disengage himself in an oblique and qualified manner from the Socratic views and method, and direct his audience towards the substantive philosophical doctrines and methods elaborated in the so-called middle and late Platonic works.⁹⁹

A serious criticism against Socrates bears specifically on the political dimensions of the argument in the *Charmides*. Not only does the investigation reveal the fatal flaws of Critias’ conception of temperance as

⁹⁷ See Duncombe 2020, *passim*. ⁹⁸ On this point, see Tsouna 2017.

⁹⁹ See also above, 35–6, and Chapter 12, 273–86.

a 'science of science' conveying supreme cognitive authority to the temperate ruler. It also brings into the open Socrates' fundamental inability to provide an alternative model to the nightmarish society of the 'dream'. Indeed, Socrates' dialectical moves, which include the promising suggestion that happiness is the exclusive object of the *epistêmê* of good and evil, concern the happiness of the individual but not of the political community in its entirety. Recall that, in the *Apology*, Socrates confirms that his endeavours to gain self-knowledge and improve the souls of his fellow-citizens were conducted on a strictly private basis; more active involvement in politics would have been incompatible with his philosophical mission and would have put his life at risk. Consistently with these claims, the *Charmides* suggests that Socrates' philosophy and method can make us better people, but cannot improve society as a whole. To pursue this latter goal, we need to leave behind the ethical paradigm offered by Socrates and consider the paradigms of the statesman or of the Philosopher-King.

This is all I have to say in the way of an introduction to the main part of this book. I hope to have given some sense of the agenda that I shall follow, and also I hope to have made sufficiently clear my intention to engage with the *Charmides* and the secondary literature in a dialectical spirit rather than a dogmatic mode.

9 Postscript: Practical Matters

The book is divided into twelve chapters. The current chapter has presented a fairly detailed introduction that aims to convey a sense of the main dramatic and philosophical issues of the *Charmides*, outline its historical subtext, and provide a scholarly context for the interpretation that I shall defend. Chapters 2 to 12 roughly follow the drama and argument as they are developed in the *Charmides*. Chapter 12 serves also as a conclusion to the book, since it discusses how Socrates draws together the results of the argument that we have gone through, especially in the second part of the dialogue, and also comments on the dramatic closure of the work. Even though this structure largely reflects what I take to be natural pauses or, if you wish, natural joints of Plato's text, there is nothing rigidly normative about it. The boundaries of the successive phases of argument can be blurry, and it is worth exploring different ways of carving it up. The chapters' length is unequal. It depends partly on the length of the passage under discussion in each chapter and the wealth of dramatic detail, but also, first and foremost, on the importance of the philosophical issues that are raised and debated by the dialogue's interlocutors. In the earlier

chapters I have translated excerpts of the Greek text, but the Argument from Relatives is translated in its entirety and the Argument from Benefit is translated for the greatest part. These arguments are especially complicated and difficult to follow, and I believe that it will be helpful to the reader to have the text under their eyes in order to assess more easily the analysis that I propose. Stephanus page references usually include line numbers, but in the current chapter, for instance, they do not because such degree of precision is not necessary. A new translation of the *Charmides* is also included in an Appendix at the end of the book.

I wish this book to be accessible to philosophers as well as classicists, and experts that do not read Greek as well as those who do. To that end, Greek words and phrases are standardly transliterated in the main text and always translated or glossed over in their first occurrence, as well as at regular intervals throughout the discussion. I use Greek characters in the footnotes when I deem it important to cite parts of the text or when I address specifically linguistic or technical issues. Frequently occurring terms, in particular ‘*sôphrosynê*’, ‘*epistêmê*’, ‘*technê*’, and ‘*kalon*’, are always transliterated in the main text and frequently transliterated in the footnotes as well. In these cases too, I translate the terms on their first occurrence in every chapter and then use, indiscriminately, either the transliterated term or the corresponding translation or both. To mark the striking peculiarity of the definitions of temperance as ‘doing one’s own’ and, later in the dialogue, as ‘science of itself and the other sciences’ or ‘science of science’ simpliciter, I use quotes. The use of emphases in the translation in some cases renders what I believe to be emphasised, for example, by word-order in Plato’s text, while in other cases it aims to highlight points taken up in interpretation. As indicated, I take it that the terms ‘*technê*’ (art or craft or expertise) and ‘*epistêmê*’ (science, expertise, scientific knowledge, scientific or expert understanding) are used interchangeably in some contexts but synecdochically in others: ‘*epistêmê*’ captures the specifically cognitive aspect of expert knowledge in a way that ‘*technê*’ does not, and this explains why ‘*epistêmê*’ and not ‘*technê*’ is the term used to convey Critias’ definition of temperance as a governing science orientated solely towards itself. I try to render these nuances in both the translation and the evaluation of the dialogue’s arguments.

The Bibliography contains the books and articles that inform my own interpretation. To the extent that it proved possible, I acknowledge my engagement with the secondary literature in the footnotes. However, it seems appropriate to single out the book by Thomas Tuozzo, *Plato’s Charmides: Positive Elenchus in a ‘Socratic’ Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2011),

which has been for me a valuable source of historical information and philosophical reflection; Matthew Duncombe's PhD dissertation and his monograph *Ancient Relativity* (Oxford, 2020); published work by Victor Caston, Thomas Johansen, and M. M. McCabe on the Argument from Relatives (or, as some call it, the Relations Argument); van der Ben's commentary on the *Charmides* (Amsterdam, 1985); and also the monographs by T. G. Tuckey (Cambridge, 1952), B. Witte (Berlin, 1970), and W. T. Schmid (Albany, NY, 1998). David Sedley's interpretation of the *Theaetetus* informs the parallels that I draw between that dialogue and the *Charmides*, and Malcolm Schofield's account of Plato's models for political science is fundamental for my own discussion of the political aspects of Critias' conception of a 'science of itself and the other sciences'. Myles Burnyeat's remarks on the complex roles of Platonic characters lie at the basis of my approach to the characters of Charmides and Critias, and his analysis of the 'dream' in the *Theaetetus* inspires my attempt to make sense of the harrowing 'dream' of the *Charmides*. I anticipate with interest and pleasure Raphael Woolf's book *Plato's Charmides*, which will be part of the series *Cambridge Studies in the Dialogues of Plato* edited by M. M. McCabe and published by Cambridge University Press. So far as we are able to judge, our studies will not overlap but rather complement each other. My translation is greatly indebted to the translations by W. R. M. Lamb and R. K. Sprague, and occasionally to other translations of the dialogue as well, for instance the recent translation by C. Moore and C. C. Raymond (2019). It is divided in sections approximately corresponding to the chapters of the book and their subdivisions. Generally, I tried to make the volume as reader-friendly as I could, and I hope that the reader will not be too frustrated in places where I have not succeeded in that aim. Without any further delay, we should now turn to our text.