CHAPTER 12

The Epilogue (175a9–176d5)

1 Pulling Strings Together (175a9–d5)

At this point, Socrates undertakes to summarise the key moves of the investigation dedicated to Zeus in a manner that has no exact parallel in any other Socratic dialogue of Plato. He assesses the current *status quaestionis*, indicates where the enquiry has gone wrong, identifies the main reasons why it went wrong, and assumes partial responsibility for that failure. Once again, we shall have the opportunity to entertain side by side the two competing conceptions of self-knowledge at work in the dialogue: on the one hand, Critias' conception of knowing oneself in the sense of having a 'science of science' that confers on the temperate person a higher-order cognitive capacity both substantive and directive and, on the other, Socrates' conception of temperance as one of the greatest goods that one can acquire through a certain kind of *logoi*, arguments, and as involving the capacity to discover what oneself and others know or do not know. Dialectically, Socrates' critical observations concern the preceding argument and target the 'science of science' alone. Philosophically, however, as I shall argue, some of these observations also raise problems for the Socratic method as a way of judging knowledge and ignorance in oneself and others. If this is correct, the passage quoted below constitutes a unique instance of sustained self-criticism on Socrates' part. While he preserves the intuition that temperance is a form of *epistêmê* and has a distinct object, and while he implicitly acknowledges that his method has a certain use, he also points to the weaknesses of the latter and directs us to new ways of gaining understanding.

> Do you see, then, Critias, that my earlier fears were reasonable and that I was rightly accusing myself of failing to bring under scrutiny anything worthwhile about temperance? For if I had been of any use for conducting a good

> search, it wouldn't have been the case that what is agreed to be the finest of all things would somehow have appeared to us to be of no benefit. And now, you see, we are vanquished on all fronts, and are unable to discover to which one of the things there are the lawgiver attached this name, temperance. Nonetheless we have made many concessions which were not forced upon us[1] by the argument. For, as a matter of fact, we conceded that there is a science of science, even though the argument neither allowed nor asserted that there is. Again, although the argument did not allow this, we conceded that the temperate man knows through this science the functions of the other sciences as well, so that we would find him knowledgeable both of knowing *what* things he knows *that* he knows them and of knowing *what* things he does not know *that* he doesn't know them. And we granted this in the most bountiful manner, without examining the impossibility of somehow knowing things that one doesn't know in any way at all; for the concession we agreed on amounts to saying that one knows about them that one doesn't know them. And yet, as I think, this might appear more irrational than anything. However, although the enquiry has shown us to be so soft and lacking in rigour, it cannot do any better in finding the truth, but derided it [sc. the truth] to such an extent that the very thing which, by agreeing with each other and by moulding it together, we earlier posited to be temperance the enquiry has with the utmost contempt shown to be useless. (175a9–d5, emphasis added)

Socrates now steps back from the rigid framework of dialectical exchange and speaks his own mind: the search has failed and he primarily blames himself, but also Critias, for that result. First, he accuses himself of failing to contribute anything valuable to the enquiry about *sôphrosynê* and gives an argument to support that claim (175a9–b2). Then, he specifies the ultimate consequence of their defeat (175b2–4). Next, he identifies the elements of the investigation that he considers particularly problematic and indicates why they are objectionable (175b4–c8). Finally, he criticises the enquiry as well as the enquirers, i.e. himself and Critias, for reaching an absurd conclusion about temperance and for heaping ridicule on the truth (175c8–d5). We shall discuss these charges in succession, first, in respect of the dialectical argument concerning the 'science of science' and, subsequently, in respect of Socrates' own method for attaining self-knowledge.

Again using the vocabulary of vision, Socrates wonders whether Critias can 'see' (175a9)[2] that Socrates has been vindicated regarding the fear that

[1] Although the dative plural ἡμῖν goes with συμβαίνοντα, it is difficult to render this phrase. Literally, Socrates refers to concessions that 'were not encountered by us [ἡμῖν] in the course of the argument [ἐν τῷ λόγῳ: 175b5]'. I take this to mean that the concessions that he and Critias made did not follow from or were not entailed by the argument. I shall say more about this point below.

[2] On the significance of this usage of the verb, see Chapter 10, note 92.

he expressed sometime in the past (*palai*: 175a9), when he blamed himself, rightly as it turned out, 'for failing to bring under scrutiny anything worthwhile about temperance' (175a9–11). This earlier point in time does not lie outside the dialogue,[3] nor is Socrates insincere when he says that he was right to inculpate himself.[4] The contrast that he draws between *palai*, some time back (when he experienced the aforementioned fear), and *nyn* (175b2), 'now', i.e. now that his suspicion has been confirmed, is situated within the dialogue and points to an earlier passage where Socrates expressed his own unease, using the same words as he is using here too. That is, in addressing the question of whether temperance as 'science of science' is beneficial, the Argument from Benefit suggests that it might be beneficial if it involved substantive knowledge or knowledge-what (171d1–172a3); as things stand, however, it seems that the 'science of science' does not entail knowledge-what but only knowledge-that (170a6–171c10); therefore, it cannot produce beneficial results on its own, but can only enhance one's performance in learning or practising some first-order art (172b1–8). Having reached that interim conclusion, Socrates remarked that 'perhaps we did not enquire about anything worthwhile' (172c4–5),[5] but that he and Critias have carelessly agreed that knowledge-*what* would be beneficial for mankind. Moreover, he confessed his fear (*phoboimên*: 172e6) that he and his interlocutor were not conducting the examination correctly (172e4–6).

Now, in the close of the investigation, he refers to the content of that fear[6] in a strikingly similar manner: 'I was rightly accusing myself', he says, 'of failing to bring under scrutiny anything worthwhile[7] about temperance' (175a10–11). Note that, in the earlier instance, Socrates did not necessarily imply that he is incompetent, whereas in the later instance he does. In the former case the search was still underway, whereas in the latter the investigation has been completed and he is in a position to assess it. Also notice that earlier (*palai*) Socrates appeared to hold both himself and Critias responsible for the absurd idea that temperance or the 'science of

[3] Lampert 2010, 226, takes πάλαι (175a9) to indicate a time before the battle of Potidaea, during which, as Socrates now realises, he was talking about philosophy in the wrong way. 'Failure and blame are altogether fitting; he [sc. Socrates] is right to fear that he did nothing useful in presenting *sôphrosynê* as he did. Socrates justly accuses himself long before anyone else accuses him'.

[4] According to Lampert 2010, Socrates is deliberately lying here, for he has not failed but succeeded in his purpose, i.e. to discover the state of philosophy in Athens and render Critias aware of his own perplexity.

[5] οὐδὲν χρηστόν: 172c4–5.

[6] Compare Tuozzo 2011, 288. Schmid 1998, 148, claims that Socrates' fear was expressed in 166c–d, where he says that he might not know how to investigate beautifully.

[7] οὐδὲν χρηστόν: 175a10.

science' brings only lesser benefits (172c4–5), whereas now, in referring to that earlier occasion, he focuses on his own inadequacy as an enquirer (175a9–11).[8] On what grounds does Socrates infer that, in the end, he has been unable to entertain anything pertinent or valuable regarding the nature of temperance? His reasoning is this: if the enquiry had been conducted correctly, its outcome would have been consistent with (or would have confirmed) the commonly shared belief[9] that temperance is the finest of all things.[10] However, the investigation indicated that temperance is useless and hence not fine at all. Therefore, Socrates concludes that something went seriously wrong with the search and, furthermore, that, for his own part, he failed to contribute anything useful so as to ensure the quality[11] of the enquiry (175a11–b2). In this way he underscores the strength of his conviction that *sôphrosynê* is among the greatest goods and his affinity with the Zalmoxian view that temperance in the soul is the source of every good for man (156e–157a), while he decisively distances himself from the Critianic conception of temperance as a strictly reflexive, higher-order science.

Turning to the criticisms that he levels in retrospect against the search, we find that they stretch back to Socrates' two-pronged *aporia* and the two arguments motivated, respectively, by each of the questions constituting that puzzle: whether or not a 'science of science' is possible, and whether or not, assuming that it is possible, it is good for us (167b1–4). Recall that, in order to keep the investigation alive, the interlocutors agreed to make certain concessions concerning the possibility as well as the content of the science under debate. Summing up the latter, Socrates challenges the legitimacy of these moves and thus fires a final shot at Critianic temperance.

At the outset, he indicates that the failure to conduct the search properly is not merely axiological and epistemic, but has ontological and semantic aspects as well. When he had to defend himself against Critias' imputation that he only cared for victory over his dialectical opponent rather than truth (166c3–6), he said that his sole motivation in cross-examining Critias was to ensure that he did not believe he knew something that he did not know (166c7–d2) and that he engaged in this questioning primarily for his

[8] δικαίως ἐμαυτὸν ἠτιώμην: 175b10.

[9] ὁμολογεῖται at 175b1 may concern either the agreement of most people that temperance is κάλλιστον πάντων (175a11), the finest of all things, or the agreement of Socrates and Critias on that point.

[10] κάλλιστον πάντων: 175a11. See Tuckey 1951, 88.

[11] εἴ τι ἐμοῦ ὄφελος ἦν πρὸς τὸ καλῶς ζητεῖν: 175b1–2.

own sake but also, to some extent, for the sake of his friends (166d2–4). Subsequently, he briefly explained his meaning: he, as well as Critias, assumes that it is good for almost everybody to acquire epistemic clarity regarding the nature of each being (166d4–7).[12] Now that the enquiry has reached its end, he realises that he and Critias were unsuccessful in their efforts to identify and individuate the entity that the name '*sôphrosynê*' was assigned to (175b3–4). Socrates does not disclose who is the lawgiver that attached this word to the corresponding thing (175b3–4). It could be the aforementioned 'great man' (169a1–7), or an expert who would act under the direction of a dialectician,[13] or a divinity. In any case, Socrates' judgement that they have been defeated in every way (175b2–3) has to do with being as well as knowledge, correct naming as well as truth.

The first concession that he targets is that 'there is a "science of science"' (175b6). He and Critias made that concession[14] even though, as he points out, it was neither allowed nor asserted by the argument.[15] Is this criticism justified? And can it be laid at Socrates' own door? The answer, I suggest, is affirmative on both counts. Recall the conclusion of the Argument from Relatives, which addresses the question whether a science solely directed towards itself and no other object is credible or possible. There, after examining different groups of analogues, the interlocutors agree that strictly reflexive constructions of relatives appear in some cases strange and in others impossible (168e3–7). And Socrates adds that, even if some people find such constructions credible (169a1), only an expert in division would be capable of settling the issue in a definitive manner (169a1–7). But although, according to my analysis, the Argument from Relatives does provide adequate grounds for its tentative conclusion, and although Socrates appears quite convinced that strict reflexivity is problematic or incoherent, nonetheless he subsequently proposes to his interlocutor the following move: 'if it seems right, Critias, he said, let us now grant this view, that it is possible that there is a "science of science" – we can investigate on another occasion whether or not this is the case' (169d2–5). Critias consents and thus they proceed to investigate the second part of the *aporia*, i.e. how temperance is beneficial for us. Socrates, then, is the interlocutor who took the initiative of introducing that concession into the enquiry and, therefore, is primarily responsible for it. Is he to blame? He is,

[12] γίγνεσθαι καταφανὲς ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ὅπῃ ἔχει: 166d5–6.

[13] Compare the 'lawgiver' in the *Cratylus*, who assigned (and continues to assign) names to things. According to Sedley 2003, the 'lawgiver' is not a dialectician, although to accomplish his task well he ought to follow the instructions of a dialectician.

[14] συνεχωρήσαμεν: 175b6. [15] οὐκ ἐόντος τοῦ λόγου οὐδὲ φάσκοντος εἶναι: 175b7.

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because, as he suggests in his summary, the concession under consideration has no appropriate warrant. While it serves a dialectical purpose, it lacks epistemic justification. It is neither stated nor implied by the Argument from Relatives. Worse, the concession grants what the Argument from Relatives denies, i.e. that there can be such a thing as a science of itself (175b6–7).

The next concession that Socrates now denounces as arbitrary is that the person endowed with the 'science of science', i.e. the temperate person, would have substantive knowledge: he would expertly know through the 'science of science' the respective functions or works (*erga*) of the other sciences (175b7–c1). Socrates and Critias assumed that the temperate person's knowledge is 'of both *what* things he knows *that* he knows them and *what* things he doesn't know *that* he doesn't know them' (175c2–3, emphasis added). However, Socrates now declares, the argument did not allow this concession (175c1),[16] or indeed contradicted it. Again, it seems to me, Socrates is absolutely right. And again, the blame must be placed primarily on himself. Consider: early in their conversation, Socrates and Critias debated the issue of whether or not the *epistêmê* supposed to be equivalent to temperance is comparable to the other sciences and arts regarding the nature of its object. Socrates maintained that the science in question must be craftlike: like the other arts and sciences, it must be of an object or subject-matter distinct from temperance itself. On the other hand, Critias contended that temperance is unlike the other arts or sciences in this respect: while the latter are aliorelative, temperance is strictly reflexive: it is a science only of science (i.e. of itself and the other sciences) and of no other object. As we saw, Socrates allowed Critias to get his own way and, from that point onwards, helped him fully articulate the notion of a 'science of science' before submitting it for investigation. Then the interlocutors came to agree that temperance is a science of science and non-science (166e7–9) and that, therefore (167a1), the temperate man alone will be able to judge *what* himself and others know and do not know (167a1–5). Thanks to Socrates' interventions, it became clear that Critias understood temperance as an *epistêmê* that is both strictly reflexive and substantive: a science of nothing but science, which, however, involves access to substantive content. 'This', Socrates concluded on Critias' behalf, 'is what being temperate or temperance or knowing oneself is, to know both what one knows and what one doesn't' (167a5–8).

[16] οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἐῶντος τοῦ λόγου: 175c1.

The idea that Critias' 'science of science' entails both knowledge-that (discriminatory knowledge) and knowledge-what (substantive knowledge) was initially taken for granted. However, in the early stages of the Argument from Benefit (170a6–171c10), Socrates' questioning led Critias to admit that, while the temperate man can discern *epistêmê* from the absence of *epistêmê* and the expert from the charlatan, he cannot identify any given science as the science it is or any given expert as the expert he/she is. Conversely, the argument ran, while the first-order experts know what their scientific knowledge is *of*, they cannot tell that what they have is *epistêmê*, i.e. scientific knowledge. Subsequently, the two interlocutors briefly entertained the possibility that temperance as solely discriminatory knowledge (knowledge-that) might bring certain lesser advantages to those who have it (172b1–8) but found that hypothesis unacceptable. For, as Socrates pointed out, it appeared to imply that temperance is virtually worthless (172c4–6). And yet, immediately afterwards, Socrates suggested to Critias the following course of action:

> Suppose that we grant that it is possible to know scientific knowledge and, moreover, we do not withdraw but concede that temperance is what we said from the beginning it is, to know both *what* one knows and *what* one does not know. And having conceded all this let us yet better investigate whether something, if it is of that sort, will also be of benefit to us. (172c7–d1, emphasis added)

In addition to granting the possibility of a 'science of science', here Socrates proposes that they also grant that the latter would have substantive content. Dialectically, this is a shrewd suggestion. For it offers an alternative to the absurd idea that temperance as knowledge-that brings only lesser benefits; and it makes the 'science of science' appear less strange and less thin than it otherwise would. Philosophically, however, the concession that temperance involves knowledge-what as well as knowledge-that seems inconsistent with the reasoning outlined above (170a6–171c10), which points in exactly the opposite direction. Moreover, it does not receive support or justification from any other element of the text. So long as Socrates was engaged in the dialectical debate, he had to rely on it. Now that the debate is over and he is passing judgement on its quality, he deprecates that move.

A third, related objection is this: according to Socrates, the latter concession that he and Critias agreed on[17] appears to entail

[17] ὁμολογία: 175c7.

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a contradiction. It is equivalent to claiming that one can know *somehow* what one does not know *in any way at all* (175c5–7)[18] or, in short, that one knows what one does not know (175c6–7). This time Socrates and Critias are equally to blame, since neither of them thought of examining the paradoxical nature of that claim, while, as Socrates points out, it might seem totally incoherent.[19] Leaving aside for the moment Socrates' own vulnerability to that criticism, we should concentrate on its direct target: the 'science of science'. The interlocutors have agreed, first, that it is science of *anepistêmosynê* (the absence of science) as well as of *epistêmê* (167c1–3) and, second, that the person who possesses it has knowledge of what things he knows that he knows them and what things he doesn't know that he doesn't know them (167a1–8, 172c7–d1). At first glance, does either of these views appear paradoxical or self-contradictory? I think that Socrates is right: both do, even though, as Socrates observes with biting irony, he and Critias granted them as premises 'in the most bountiful manner' (175c4).[20] There is something distinctly odd in the idea that one can have *epistêmê* of the privation of *epistêmê*, although that idea admits of different elaborations that can render it comprehensible or acceptable. Likewise, the assumption that one can know, in a robust epistemic sense of 'know', *what* one does not know sounds self-contradictory and therefore requires explanation and defence. The absurdity arises when 'what' is read as a relative pronoun, 'that which', but not when it is read as introducing an indirect question. Socrates probably realises that the absurdity turns on something like this, which would explain why he sets the issue aside as too diversionary to pursue here.[21]

Jointly as well as severally, the three criticisms discussed above lend additional support to the conclusions reached, respectively, by the Argument from Relatives and the Argument from Benefit. Socrates highlights the fact that, despite the unwarranted concessions that he and Critias made in the course of the enquiry, they have been unable to defend either the possibility of a 'science of science' or the idea that the latter would bring any substantial benefit. In truth, if these concessions had not been granted, the argument would have ended long ago. Critianic temperance proved to be too problematic to survive dialectical scrutiny, mainly because it was

[18] οὐδ'ἐπισκεψάμενοι τὸ ἀδύνατον εἶναι ἅ τις μὴ οἶδεν μηδαμῶς ταῦτα εἰδέναι ἁμῶς γέ πως: 175c4–5.
[19] Cf. οὐδενὸς ὅτου οὐχὶ ἀλογώτερον τοῦτ'ἂν φανείη: 175c7–8.
[20] This use of παντάπασι μεγαλοπρεπῶς (175c3–4) is ironic. Socrates' point is that he and Critias have been excessively generous in granting all these concessions. It is worth noting that the concessionary method is a well-known rhetorical device: see Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* and *On Not-Being*.
[21] It is a kind of issue that belongs to the *Euthydemus*.

constructed as a science both strictly reflexive and intransparent with regard to the objects of science or the sciences. While we may choose to revisit, modify, and defend it anew, the interlocutors of the *Charmides* must leave it behind. Socratic self-knowledge, however, remains on offer and it is important to examine whether the aforementioned criticisms affect it or in what way.

In outline, the stance that I wish to take is as follows. Socratic self-criticism can be interpreted in many ways and, as mentioned, the consensus of interpreters of the *Charmides* is that, in this work, Plato's Socrates criticises central features of his own philosophical outlook (notably the views that virtue is relevantly analogous to the arts, that virtue is a form of knowledge, and that that kind of knowledge is necessary and sufficient for happiness), highlights the paradox lying at the heart of his principal method, and suggests that the latter should be abandoned in favour of other methods of philosophical investigation. In the present monograph I have challenged this sort of approach and argued for a more complex and nuanced account of what is going on in the dialogue. On my view, while the debate between Socrates and Critias does problematise key elements of the Socratic philosophy and method, it invites us to rethink rather than reject the latter and to erect rather than sever bridges between the so-called Socratic and the so-called Platonic writings of Plato. I propose that Socrates' final summary of the debate be read in the same spirit. Although, as I shall maintain, some of his criticisms against the 'science of science' can also raise problems for the Socratic method of questioning and the conception of self-knowledge associated with it, they are not entirely decisive, and they serve a constructive rather than a destructive purpose. On the one side, Socrates points to the limitations of the dialectical method and his own weaknesses as a questioner. On the other, his final observations do not imply that dialectical questioning is useless but rather that it is insufficient. Cross-examining oneself and others regarding what one knows and what one does not know can take us only part of the way towards virtue and truth. Much more is needed in order to pursue the goal that Critianic temperance blatantly failed to claim for itself, but also that the Socratic search for self-knowledge could never attain on its own: the happiness of both the individual and the state. I wish to elaborate and defend these suggestions.

In the *Apology* and other Socratic dialogues Socrates professes to be ignorant about 'the most important things' but, nonetheless, cross-examines his interlocutors about such subjects with the explicit purpose of judging what he himself and others know or do not know but believe

they know. The latter two criticisms that he raises against the argument with Critias, then, can be addressed to him as well: first, is it not arbitrary to assume that he can make substantive judgements about epistemic content, if he is ignorant of that content? And second, doesn't his method of cross-examination imply a paradox, namely that one can be in a position to know what one does not know? Both objections appear *prima facie* plausible, but neither, I submit, is conclusive. Let me briefly explain why. Regarding the former issue, one might point out that, despite their obvious differences, Critias' temperate man and Plato's Socrates find themselves in a comparable epistemic predicament: they have no expert understanding of the objects that they are, respectively, supposed to judge. The former has only knowledge-that, but nonetheless passes judgement on *what* people know and do not know and distinguishes accordingly between experts and laypeople. The latter disavows having knowledge, but nonetheless claims that he is able to tell *what* he himself and others know or do not know. As for the temperate man, so for Socrates it would seem that the challenge consists in establishing the legitimacy of such judgements. Can Socrates do any better than Critias in this regard? I suggest that he can, by appealing to the dialectical nature of his method. That is, he can plausibly contend that, insofar as he limits himself to the role of the questioner and the argument proceeds by means of premises or concessions endorsed by the interlocutor, he does not necessarily need to have expertise in the subject under discussion. It is the interlocutor who is represented as an expert, not Socrates himself.[22]

Regarding the charge that it seems irrational to claim that one can know in some way what one doesn't know in any way at all (175c5–6), Socrates' phrasing appears calculated to bring to mind Meno's paradox (*Men.* 80d5–e5).[23] Plato's purpose, I suggest, is to point to the theory of recollection that constitutes his own answer to that paradox, and also allude to a contrast drawn in the *Meno* between different types of

[22] This does not entail that Socrates needs no knowledge at all in order to cross-examine his interlocutors – it only entails that he needs no *expert* or *scientific* knowledge in order to do so. Arguably, Socrates still needs knowledge of how to conduct a dialectical investigation, how to use the principle of non-contradiction, how to recognise absurdities, etc. Whether or not these latter amount to or involve substantive knowledge claims is a matter of debate.

[23] Compare Tuckey 1951, 89: 'this is clearly a reference to the expression εἰδέναι ἅ τις οἶδεν καὶ ἃ μὴ οἶδεν'. Tuckey contends that, if knowing in some way what one does not know were impossible, Socrates' claim to know that he doesn't know would be invalidated (Tuckey 1951, 90). However, Tuckey does not pay attention to the exact way in which Socrates phrases this criticism: he does not reject the idea that one knows *in some way* things that one does not know (as Tuckey claims), but challenges the assumption that one can know *in some way* (175c5–6) what one does not know *in any way* (175b5).

searchers. On the one hand, people who are affected by Meno's paradox turn into lazy, fainthearted, soft investigators (*malakois*: 81d7), while, on the other, enquirers who engage in recollection work hard and energetically in order to achieve their goal (81d5–e1). Recollection, however, is not available to the interlocutors of the *Charmides*. For in the *Charmides* Plato has not (yet) put the theory on the table and, moreover, Socrates and Critias are arguing in a way that does not favour recollection. Therefore, Socrates is in no better position than Critias to respond to the charge of incoherence. His observations concerning their performance in the search closely parallel the remarks concerning enquirers in the *Meno*. Namely, like the slow and soft searchers of the *Meno*,[24] the senior searchers of the *Charmide*s have been shown to be mild and not hard, pliable and not firm.[25] Socrates describes himself and Critias as *euêthêkoi*, gentle but also simple-minded, where they should have been *sklêroi*, unyielding. Presumably, he refers to the fact that they made concessions that they should not have made. Instead, they ought to have followed the logical implications of their argument, as the brave enquirers of the *Meno* follow assiduously and energetically the path to knowledge (*Men*. 81e1).[26]

So, viewed from the perspective of Plato's Socrates, his denunciation of the concessions arbitrarily granted in the debate has a self-critical but also a protreptic and forward-looking function. He guides us to reassess his own assumptions, look for solutions to our perplexities in other Platonic texts, and entertain alternative or complementary options. Nonetheless, there is no indication that he definitely rejects his favourite method of investigation or the conception of self-knowledge attached to it. Even when he comments ironically on the paradoxical nature of the admission that one can know what one does not know, he chooses his words carefully. He does not assert that the aforementioned admission *is* irrational, but only that it *might seem* irrational (*Charm*. 175c8)[27] and, therefore, ought to have been examined during the debate (175c4).

[24] Cf. ἀργούς (*Men*. 81d6), μαλακοῖς (81d7). [25] εὐηθικῶν καὶ οὐ σκληρῶν (175e8–d1).

[26] Compare and contrast the interpretation offered by Lampert 2010, 229–30. Lampert maintains that Socrates' judgement that they have been 'simple and not hard' is obviously false, as is the judgement that the enquiry is 'no more able to discover the truth' (cf. 229 and n. 111). 'The enquiry laughs neither at them nor at itself but at the very truth it made apparent to them: that sophrosyne is unbeneficial when understood as what they agreed to and fabricated together "then"' (229), i.e. before Potidaea. Indeed, Lampert continues, it was ridiculously unprofitable 'to attempt to transmit the true understanding of sophrosyne to Critias in the way [Socrates] did' (229). The enquiry narrated in the *Charmides* has been successful because it has forced Socrates 'to view the unbeneficial character of his pre-Potidaean teaching' and to realise that 'his attempt to transmit his philosophy to Critias in fact helped corrupt him' (229).

[27] Contra Tuckey 1951, 89–90.

Socrates' most revealing comments, however, concern his own inadequacy as a participant in the debate and the failure of his method to effectively pursue the truth. For they indicate his attitude as well as Plato's vis-à-vis the Socratic method and, moreover, give us grounds in order to determine our own stance on this matter.

As we saw, while Socrates considers Critias partly responsible[28] for the absurd conclusion of their investigation,[29] nonetheless he primarily blames himself.[30] This is the only occasion in Plato's Socratic dialogues where the principal character accuses himself in that manner or explains why he feels obliged to do so. Moreover, his negative self-assessment concerns his overall performance as a searcher, not merely some point of detail. As we saw, he holds himself accountable for failing 'to bring under scrutiny anything useful about *sôphrosynê*' (175a10–11) or contribute in any significant way to the effort of conducting a proper investigation (175b1–2). In the light of the above discussion, we should take him at his word. He really believes (and is right to believe) that he is blameworthy, first of all, for proposing to grant premises already refuted in argument and for leaving unquestioned an assumption that appears incoherent.[31]

This is a breakthrough for Plato's Socrates. It is the only instance in Plato's Socratic dialogues in which he openly acknowledges that he has played a leading role in the elenchus and holds himself accountable for the shape, quality, and outcome of the latter. Thus he underscores the paramount influence he has exercised as questioner in a dialectical setting. Not only have his questions elicited from the interlocutor the premises of the argument and determined its form and direction, he has also made proposals and taken initiatives that have kept the argument going for a while. These include the controversial concessions mentioned above and many other elements as well; for example, the counterexamples examined by the Argument from Relatives and the fictional societies entertained by the Argument from Benefit. Socrates' self-criticism has, I suggest, an

[28] See Socrates' use of the first-person plural at, for example, 175b3–7, c1, c4, d4.

[29] Contrast Schmid 1998, 148: 'Socrates assumes complete personal responsibility for the inquiry' and 'this absolves Critias'. But this needn't be the case. The fact that Socrates focuses on his own deficiencies does not preclude Critias being to blame as well. And there is strong indication that Socrates holds the two of them jointly responsible for the outcome of the debate (see previous note).

[30] Socrates' attitude appears all the more puzzling because, at different points of the dialogue, he repeatedly stressed that the investigation was a joint concern of Critias and himself (e.g. 162e2–5, 166d8–e2, 169d2–5, 172c4–173a1).

[31] There are no grounds for surmising that Socrates is being ironical here. Nor is there any reason to think that he takes 'complete personal responsibility for the inquiry' merely in order to protect Critias' pride (see Schmid 1998, 148).

important implication, namely that he partly appropriates the arguments constituting the preceding debate. He claims them as *his* arguments as well as Critias' own.[32]

Towards the end of his account, however, Socrates indicates that the failure of both of them to determine the nature of *sôphrosynê* has been caused not only by their incompetence as debaters but also, importantly, by the method they have used. For he remarks that the *zêtêsis* (enquiry or method of enquiry) has not fared better than themselves (175c8–d5). While it has made manifest the clumsiness of Socrates and Critias, the *zêtêsis* itself has not been abler than they have been to discover the truth.[33] It has only managed to make a monstrous joke at the truth's expense[34] by reaching the hybristic conclusion[35] that temperance, as the interlocutors conceived of it, is totally worthless.

This is not the only time in Plato's Socratic dialogues that the participants in a debate are ridiculed by a personified element of the investigation. For instance, Socrates urges Laches to show endurance, as the *logos* (argument) commands, and to continue the search so that courage will not laugh at them for failing to search for it courageously (*Lach*. 194a1–5). Nor is it the only time in the *Charmides* that *logos* appears endowed with some kind of agency. For example, in the opening scene, Socrates claims that the *kaloi logoi*, beautiful arguments, constituting the charm of Zalmoxis have the power to cure the soul (157a3–5). Also, when Socrates summarises the unacceptable concessions that he and Critias made, he uses metaphorical language to personify the *logos*: it did not allow the possibility of strictly reflexive knowledge (175b6–7) or the assumption that the 'science of science' entails knowing-what (175c1); nonetheless, the interlocutors slighted the *logos* and were duly defeated. We were not told by whom, but the obvious victor is the *logos*.[36] He has been stronger where they have been weaker, crafty where they have been simpletons, more resourceful than them in finding the means to prevail.

[32] Frede 1992 questions whether or how a dialectical argument can reasonably be considered to belong to the questioner. I submit that the passage of the *Charmides* under discussion sheds light on that question.

[33] οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον εὑρεῖν δύναται τὴν ἀλήθειαν: 175d1–2. [34] Cf. καταγέλασεν: 175d2.

[35] πάνυ ὑβριστικῶς (175d4), rendered 'with the utmost contempt'. As has been noted in the literature, the verb ὑβρίζω and its cognates typically have negative connotations. Mainly, it occurs 'in contexts of emphatic denial, objection, or rejection, often coupled with derision' (van der Ben 1985, 96 n. 5).

[36] Most commentators attribute this claim to Socrates but, in truth, it can only be inferred. All that Socrates says is: νῦν δὲ πανταχῇ ἡττώμεθα (175b2–3), we are now defeated on all fronts, without, however, identifying who came out victorious.

However, the final lines of Socrates' summary stand out. For there, he distinguishes the *zêtêsis* from those who conducted it, censures the *zêtêsis* itself for its incapacity to discover the truth and for turning it into a laughingstock (175d1–2),[37] and suggests that his method of investigation proved unequal to the task at hand. Indeed, while in the conversation between Socrates and Charmides the elenchus worked reasonably well for pedagogical and protreptic purposes, in the debate between Socrates and Critias it proved incapable of pursuing effectively 'a good common to almost all men' (166d5): to illuminate the nature of each being (166d5–6) including, specifically, the nature of temperance. Instead, by following the rules of the Socratic method and making unwarranted concessions as they went along, the interlocutors brought forth something not real but fictional, an offspring of cooperative dialectical activity and consensus: a science of science, i.e. 'the very thing that, by agreeing with each other and by moulding it together, we earlier posited to be temperance' (175d3–4).[38] For all its shortcomings, the *zêtêsis* has succeeded in showing that, in all probability, the 'science of science' is not a reality but only a likeness both artificial and unattractive. On the positive side, it has yielded rich philosophical insights and a deeper understanding of both its central topic, temperance, and related issues in ethics and politics as well as logic and semantics. Nonetheless, Socrates' critical remarks expose the limitations of the elenchus as a method of enquiry and make evident the need for alternative or complementary philosophical methods aiming at the truth. In this respect, as in many others, the *Charmides* is a forward-looking dialogue, since it points to the innovations of the *Meno*, the breakthrough of the *Republic*, and the methodological and systematic achievements of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

2 Socrates' Last Address to Charmides (175d5–176a5)

> So far as I am concerned, I am not so upset. However, I said, I am very upset indeed on your own account, if it turns out that, although you have an appearance like yours and moreover are perfectly temperate in your soul, you will draw no profit from this temperance, nor will it by its presence in any way benefit you in your life. And I feel still more upset on account of the charm which I learnt from the Thracian, if I have taken so much trouble to learn it while it has no worth at all. As a matter of fact, I really do not think

[37] I disagree with Tuozzo 2011, 290, who takes Socrates' claim that the enquiry has turned hybristic as a piece of irony.

[38] ὅ ἡμεῖς πάλαι συνομολογοῦντες καὶ συμπλάττοντες ἐτιθέμεθα σωφροσύνην εἶναι: 175d3–4.

> that this is the case. Rather, I am a bad enquirer. For temperance is surely a great good and, if you do possess it, you are blessed. So, see[39] whether you have it and stand in no need of the charm. For if you have it, I would rather advise you to consider me to be a fool unable to investigate anything whatsoever by means of argument, but yourself to be as happy as you are temperate. (175d5–176a5)

Charmides has been completely silent during the conversation between the two older men. However, Socrates indicates that the youth has been present and has been following the debate. There is no way to tell whether he has paid attention or how much he has really taken in. Nonetheless, he has certainly registered that temperance as a 'science of science' would probably bring no benefit, and he has listened to Socrates' disparaging remarks concerning the quality of both enquirers and of the enquiry itself. Evidently, Socrates worries about this and, therefore, he switches his attention from Critias to the youth and addresses him with a short protreptic speech brilliantly illustrating Socratic pedagogy.

By way of ring composition, he alludes to the dominant themes of the prologue: physical beauty and psychic beauty (175d7–e2), the charm of Zalmoxis and the *logoi* that constitute it, the power of these latter to engender temperance in one's soul, the idea that temperance is one of the greatest goods that essentially contributes to happiness (175e6–176a1), and his own capacity to use the charm as a Zalmoxian physician would (175e3–5). He expresses his frustration at the result of the investigation, not so much on his own behalf as on behalf of Charmides (175d5–e2) and also of the charm (175e2–5). He urges Charmides to disbelieve the absurd conclusion that temperance is useless (175e5–176a1), blames himself again for being a poor searcher (175e6), states his conviction that temperance has very great value (175e7), and exhorts the youth to continue his self-examination in order to find out whether he possesses it (176a1–5). To impress upon Charmides the urgency of that task, he suggests to him that temperance and happiness are interlaced and that the youth should consider himself as happy as he is temperate (176a4–5). Again, he may appear to intimate that temperance is scalar and one may have it to a greater or lesser degree (cf. 158c1–4). While he gives no further indication about this matter, there are other aspects of his address that call for comment.

To begin, it is worth noting the seamless manner in which Socrates reassumes his relation with Charmides precisely from where he left it some time ago. As in the prologue of the dialogue so in the epilogue, his interest

[39] Cf. note 3 in this chapter.

in the beautiful youth appears sincere and his objective clear and firm. Namely, he wants to encourage the young man to engage systematically in dialectical *logoi*, follow the path of self-examination and self-discovery, and persevere despite the difficulties of this enterprise. We should take him seriously when he says that the conclusion of the search makes him feel more resentful with regard to Charmides than with regard to himself (175d5–6). His vexation is not empty talk,[40] but derives from his experience as an educator of young people and his understanding of their psychological vulnerabilities and needs.

While he himself disavowed knowing what temperance is (165b5–c3), Charmides appears to initially have deceived himself in that respect. As we saw, his guardian asserted that the youth is more temperate than all his peers (157d6–8) and, moreover, looking into himself, Charmides found that he possessed features that he took to belong essentially to temperance, i.e. decorum and a sense of shame. Nonetheless, his efforts to articulate what temperance is have been refuted and, as if that were not enough to discourage him, he has also witnessed a debate between two people that he considers authoritative, i.e. Critias and Socrates, suggesting that temperance is probably incoherent or, at any rate, useless. At this point, therefore, he probably feels confused and dismayed. Consequently, as Socrates well knows, he may feel inclined to withdraw his trust in argument and abandon philosophy altogether. It is just this reaction, I think, that Socrates' brief speech aims to forestall.

In order to do so, Socrates makes two complementary moves: he blames himself rather than the Zalmoxian incantation for the failure of the search (175e5–7, 176a2–5); and he emphatically reiterates his belief that temperance has paramount value for human happiness (175e7–176a1, 4–5). Consistently with his earlier remarks to Critias, he tells Charmides that he is an incompetent enquirer (*zêtêtês*: 175e6) but, importantly, does not repeat any one of his earlier criticisms concerning the search (*zêtêsis*). Such criticisms would not do Charmides any good, and he would most probably misunderstand them. On the other hand, if his confidence in the value of temperance were bolstered, and if he could be made to see that the collapse of the investigation was due to the incompetence of those who conducted it[41] and not the enquiry itself, this would be a net gain. Thus, Socrates' exhortation to Charmides seems to

[40] Contrast Lampert 2010, 230, according to whom 'there's no reason to believe that Socrates is at all annoyed, for his inquiry fulfilled his intentions completely'.

[41] By denouncing himself as a bad enquirer, Socrates implicitly undermines the authority of Critias as well. For both of them are responsible for the poor result of the argument, and Charmides is prompted to register that fact.

amount to this: dismiss what you have heard during the last hour or so; uphold the Zalmoxian conviction, which is also my (sc. Socrates') own conviction, that temperance is one of the greatest goods and its possession secures one's happiness; and, motivated by this belief, continue to examine yourself to discern the truth of the matter, namely whether your soul does have temperance or, alternatively, needs to be treated and healed. From the pedagogical point of view, then, Socrates' principal concern is to make sure that Charmides will not lose his faith in the power of philosophical arguments, for his happiness depends on them.

In the famous passage against misology in the *Phaedo*, Socrates exhibits a similar concern and makes a comparable move. According to the narration, when he realised that the arguments of Simmias and Cebes had spread among those present confusion and doubt 'not only about what had already been said but also about what was going to be said about the soul's immortality' (*Phd*. 88c), he tried to heal their sense of defeat, reinforce their confidence, and encourage them to join him in pursuing the enquiry (88e–89c). Then, caressing Phaedo's beautiful curls, he gently warned him as well as his other companions against becoming a misologue, hater of *logoi* (89b–e), for, as he claimed, no greater misfortune could happen to anyone than that of developing a dislike for argument (89d). Just as some men become misanthropes, haters of people, because they try to form human relations without having a critical understanding of human nature and consequently become disappointed (89d–e), so others become misologues, haters of *logoi*, because they engage in arguments without having the requisite skill and thus form the impression that no argument is trustworthy and every argument fluctuates between truth and untruth (90b–c). This attitude, Socrates contends, is 'a pitiable affection' (90c8) and one must guard against it. 'We should not allow into our soul the belief that *logoi* have nothing sound about them. Instead, we should greatly prefer to believe that it is we ourselves who are not yet sound, and we should pursue with courage and eagerness the goal of becoming sound, you and the others for the sake of your whole life still lying ahead and I for the sake of death itself' (90d9–91a1).

Naturally, Socrates' exhortation to Charmides does not have the poignancy of the aforementioned scene in the *Phaedo*. Nor does Charmides have many common points with Phaedo, since one character represents a privileged aristocrat while, according to certain doxographers, the other portrays a captive of war compelled to work for a while as a male prostitute and eventually freed by Crito at Socrates' request. Nevertheless, both these personages are young and inexperienced in argument, both attend the

greatest part of the conversation as listeners rather than talkers, and both experience confusion or worse. We are told that Phaedo silently follows the conversation between Socrates and his interlocutors and becomes depressed. Similarly, after being thrice refuted by Socrates and after witnessing his guardian's refutation as well, Charmides probably feels incredulous and overwhelmed. Therefore, Socrates applies closely resembling therapeutic strategies in these two cases. He blames the arguers rather than the argument for being inadequate, and he urges his addressee to remain hopeful and press on.

As in the *Phaedo*, so in the *Charmides* Socrates attempts to imprint on the mind of his young interlocutors the great value of philosophical discourses and the cardinal role of philosophical argument in order to both seek truth and attain well-being. And as in the former dialogue, so in the latter he closely relates the practice of such *logoi* to the attainment of psychic health. In the *Phaedo*, he suggests that the pursuit of 'healthy *logoi*' results in becoming healthy oneself (90d9–91a1). The *Charmides* can reasonably be taken to advocate a similar approach. For, here, Socrates appears to endorse on his own account the Zalmoxian view that temperance is the source of holistic health and grows in one's soul by means of *kaloi logoi*, beautiful arguments. I suggest that this deeply held belief lies at the basis of Socrates' exhortation to young Charmides, and also of much else.

3 The Final Scene (176a6–d5)

> Then Charmides retorted: 'by Zeus, Socrates, I really do not know whether I have temperance or whether I don't. For how could I know something regarding which, as you yourself say, not even you and Critias[42] are able to discover what on earth it is? However, I do not entirely believe you, and I think, Socrates, that I am much in need of the charm. And, so far as I am concerned, there is no obstacle to my being charmed by you for as many days as it takes, until you say that it is enough'. (176a6–b4)

Charmides' reaction seems predictably modest and recalls the early stages of his encounter with Socrates. There, he was asked by Socrates whether or not he sufficiently partook of temperance (158c1–4) and was reluctant to answer that question. For if he denied having temperance, he would expose both himself and his guardian, whereas if he admitted possessing the virtue, he might appear to brag (158c5–d6). Even after agreeing to submit himself

[42] Cf. ὑμεῖς: 176a8.

to scrutiny, he was initially hesitant to say what temperance seemed to him to be (159b1–2). Here, he appears completely at a loss as to whether or not he has temperance, because, as he indicates, he finds it discouraging that people as intelligent and experienced as Socrates and Critias have been unsuccessful in the search for the nature of *sôphrosynê*. In both instances, the youth appeals to the story of Zalmoxis in order to seek remedy for his ignorance (158e2, 176b2–4). And in both instances, he shows himself eager to submit to the charm of *kaloi logoi*, beautiful arguments, in whatever manner (158e4–5) and for as long as (176b3–4) Socrates considers necessary.

Nonetheless, Charmides has made some progress. On the one hand, according to his own admission, his initial reluctance to say whether or not he was temperate was due to modesty and a sense of decorum: he probably believed that he was temperate but did not judge it appropriate to say so. On the other hand, having being examined by Socrates and having subsequently followed the debate between the latter and Critias, he now appears genuinely convinced that he does not know what temperance is or whether he himself has it. In this way, then, the elenchus has had a beneficial effect on the young man. We may infer that, precisely because Charmides has acquired that piece of self-knowledge, he is now asking for Socrates' assistance in order to examine himself further.

Questions can be raised, however, about Charmides' real motivation. Does it spring from self-understanding or from emotion, from the drive to find the truth or from the need to rely on authority and the ministrations of a conventional teacher? Has Charmides been able to follow the arguments by which the successive definitions of temperance proposed in the dialogue have been refuted? Or does he simply feel baffled by the debate between the two older men and conclude that he can never succeed on his own where they have failed? Plato does not settle these questions within the dialogue, but they are legitimate and deserve to be pursued. In the current situation, we can say at least that Charmides' attitude is positive and gives reason for hope. For he recognises that he needs the charm and turns himself over to Socrates for treatment. He shows trust in Socrates, much as a patient shows trust in a competent doctor. As the patient will not refuse treatment and will not press the doctor to end it prematurely, so Charmides says that he will not refuse the charm of Zalmoxis but will take it as long as it is necessary according to Socrates' judgement. The characters play to the end of the dialogue the roles assigned to them by Critias in the opening scene. Socrates plays the doctor and Charmides the patient. As for Critias, he takes his ward's decision to be proof of his virtue and admonishes him to remain close to Socrates and never leave his side (176b5–8). In the

immediate sequel, however, the ambience changes abruptly and a threatening cloud hangs over the characters. The tensions and ambiguities of the cousins come into the open, and the words that they exchange with each other as well as with Socrates point to the grim reality of their historical counterparts.

> Well, Charmides, said Critias, it will be proof for me that you are temperate if you do this: if you turn yourself over to Socrates to be charmed and do not leave his side much or little. – Be sure, he said, that I shall follow him and shall not leave his side. For I would be doing something bad if I didn't obey you, my guardian, and if I did not do what you order. – Indeed, he said, I do so order. – I shall do it, then, he said, beginning this very day. – You two, I said, what are you planning [*bouleuesthon*] to do? – Nothing, Charmides replied, we have already made a plan [*bebouleumetha*]. – Will you use force then, I said, and won't you give me preliminary hearing [*anakrisis*]? – Be sure that I shall use force, he answered, since this man here gives the command. Consider again [*bouleuou*] what you will do about this. – But there is nothing left to consider [*boulê*], I said. For when you attempt any operation [*epicheirounti*] and use force, no human being will be able to oppose you. – Well then, he replied, do not oppose me either. – Very well, I said, I shall not. (176b5–d5)

The structure of the dialogue's last scene is comparable to that of the prologue. All three main characters are on stage and have specific roles to play. Critias decides what these roles will be and distributes them to the other two personages. Charmides obediently follows his guardian's instructions. And Socrates appears to comply as well. In the opening scene, he agrees to participate in Critias' ruse and present himself as a doctor able to treat the youth's headache. In the final act, he comes under pressure from the two cousins to keep Charmides by his side and treat him with *logoi* for the foreseeable future. However, the relations between the protagonists are markedly different on these two occasions. While the prologue represents the two older men conspiring together in order to attract Charmides and submit him to Socratic interrogation, the last part of the epilogue portrays the two cousins in cahoots with each other in order to bring Socrates to heel. Relations have shifted, an allegiance has been formed, and the cousins appear determined to work together towards a common end.

The narrator highlights these new dynamics to maximal effect. His directions to the audience are subtle and layered, presuppose knowledge of the relevant historical facts, and suggest different perspectives from

which we can contemplate the characters and their interactions.[43] On the one hand, he guides us to look back to the earlier stages of the dialogue with sharpened sensibility and enhanced hindsight. We can do so either from the vantage point of an external observer or from the position of one of the characters in the narrated dialogue or from the standpoint of the narrator and his anonymous friend. On the other hand, Socrates' narration of the last episode points beyond the frame of the *Charmides* to the future events involving Critias, Charmides, and also Socrates. Indeed, the apparently playful banter between these personages foreshadows the relations of power that will bind the cousins to each other, their autocratic and violent rule over Athens, and Socrates' calm resistance to their unjust commands. Nonetheless, as Plato's audiences know, Socrates will not be absolved from the taint of association with Critias and, as many plausibly believe, will be condemned to death in part because of it.

It is impossible to be sure about Plato's intentions in composing this scene. Its consummate artistry tempts one to speculate about his considered view regarding his relatives and their political deeds. I am inclined to think that he wants to highlight the violent streak in the characters of his cousins and express his abhorrence at their methods of exercising political power. The account that I give below is consistent with that assumption, but of course other interpretations of this remarkable passage are defensible as well.

In the first place, Charmides (176a6–b4) and then Critias (176b5–8) return to the issue explicitly raised in the prologue: the question of whether Charmides has *sôphrosynê* or needs to be treated by beautiful *logoi* in order to acquire it. Their initial reactions are in line with their characters. As we saw, Charmides appears confused and at a loss, admits that he doesn't know whether he is temperate, acknowledges his need for the charm of Zalmoxis, and expresses his desire to receive treatment from Socrates. As in the opening scene, so here he speaks in a manner befitting his age, education, and rank: with modesty and decorum, and not without charm. To the very end of the encounter, then, he exhibits the features that he believed to be distinguishing marks of temperance (159b5–6, 160e4–5).

[43] There is no consensus concerning the interactions between the characters in the final scene. Many consider the latter crucially important and interpret the words exchanged between the three protagonists in different ways in order to corroborate radically different accounts of the dialogue and its main purpose. Tsouna 2017 offers a selective survey of such views. Others, however, consider the scene unimportant: for example, Tuckey 1951, 89, believes that 'this concluding section of the dialogue requires but little comment'.

Critias' initial reaction also conforms to his character sketch. He takes the youth's desire to associate with Socrates to be proof of his temperance, presumably because it seems motivated by a sort of self-knowledge and a tendency to 'mind one's own'. By submitting himself to Socratic dialectic, Charmides does exactly what his guardian considers appropriate for him to do: sharpen his mind and develop his skills in debate (157c7–d1). According to Critias' own lights, if Socrates agrees to train the young man, he too will 'do his own': he will do something that is good. At the dramatic level, therefore, the conceptions of temperance proposed by Charmides and Critias in the first half of the dialogue remain alive to the very end. If this is correct, it implies that neither of these personages has abandoned his beliefs about temperance, even though they have been refuted by the elenchus. Nor has Critias changed his mind in respect of his claim that Charmides is temperate (157d6–8), despite the fact that the elenchus indicated that he is not. In short, we have reason to suspect that the elenchus did not manage to convince the two cousins that they were mistaken in their views. Perhaps they did not participate in the investigation with the right spirit. Or perhaps they were not able to follow the argument or some part of it.

Their next exchange is especially revelatory. Charmides emphatically repeats that he will follow Socrates and will not leave his side, but also discloses his main motivation for doing so. He will frequent Socrates less because he wants to discover something important about himself and more because (*gar*: 176c1) he wishes to obey Critias' orders (176c1–2). We should focus on the newly introduced concepts of obedience and command. From this point onwards, they will dominate the interactions between the personages, and they will constitute the principal vehicle by which Plato will bring the historical context to bear on the resolution of the dialogue's plot. Indeed, Critias hastens to adopt this vocabulary. He tells Charmides that these indeed are his orders (*keleuô*: 176c3) and, sure enough, Charmides responds that he shall immediately put them into effect (176c4). The playful tone of the exchange does not conceal the serious nature of what is being conveyed. Critias is the leader and Charmides the follower, and the latter does everything he can to please the former. He endeavours to associate with Socrates chiefly because he anticipates his guardian's wishes. But it is doubtful that he values Socrates' company and conversation in its own right.

At this point, Socrates intervenes to ask his companions what they have been planning (*bouleuesthon*: 176c5). We should pause to consider his choice of this word. The verb *bouleuesthai* ('to plan', 'to deliberate') and

its cognates are frequently used in judicial and forensic contexts and often refer to both the process of a jury's deliberation and the decision resulting from it. Charmides too employs this verb when he responds in a terse and decisive manner to Socrates' query: '*bebouleumetha*', he says (176c6), 'we have already made a plan', or alternatively 'we have deliberated and have reached a verdict'. Socrates highlights the inappropriateness of this statement when he incredulously asks whether the cousins intend to use force without according him an *anakrisis*, preliminary hearing (167c7). The latter noun too carries forensic connotations, since it can refer, technically, to the preliminary interrogation that precedes the trial of a case at court. Socrates, then, places himself in the position of a defendant who will not be given the opportunity to speak before his case is tried; rather, he will be compelled (*biasêi*: 176c7) to submit to a verdict about which there is no possibility of appeal. No one familiar with the summary executions ordered by the Thirty can fail to think of them in this connection. In the fictional microcosm of the dialogue the cousins' conduct conforms to the same authoritarian pattern as they will later enact on the stage of history.

The sequel of the passage makes clear that these gruesome associations are deliberately woven into the narrative. For, suddenly, the character of Charmides undergoes a radical change. His earlier reticence disappears together with his modesty and deference. He addresses Socrates as if he were his subordinate and issues a threat: Socrates should carefully consider what to do (176c9) for he, Charmides, is prepared to use force against him in accordance with Critias' orders (176c8–9). Nothing within the dialogue justifies that conduct, but everything we know about Charmides' time in power is consistent with it. As Critias' right-hand man in the military junta of the Thirty, the golden youth of our dialogue will put aside his velvet gloves to show his iron fists.

Consider how Socrates' reaction orientates the readers towards a future unknown to the protagonists of the dialogue but very present in the minds of its readers. There is really no point for him, he says, in deliberating about anything (cf. *boulê*), since his young friend has already decided to attempt such an operation (*epicheirein*: 176d2)[44] and to make use of force

[44] I render ἐπιχειροῦντι by 'when you attempt any operation' in order to preserve the military nuance that the verb may have. Compare Tuozzo 2011, 300: 'when you set your hand to something'. According to Lampert 2010, 232–4, this verb points to the first and the last recognition scenes of Odysseus' return to Ithaca. In the cases of both Socrates' return to Athens from Potidaea and Odysseus' return to Ithaca, those who recognise the heroes do not really know them. Both Socrates and Odysseus come in order to bring a new order, 'an order that sees to its successful succession by transmitting its core only to its like', 'a new politics' (232).

(*biazomenôi*: 176d1). The general point is correct: deliberation can take place only if one has the possibility of choice. But why does Socrates suggest that he has no choice? Surely it is entirely up to him whether he accepts or refuses the cousins' request. And it is not plausible to surmise that any violence could be exercised against him in the safety of the gymnasium and by his own friends. In brief, nothing in the dialogue can explain Socrates' statement. Plato directs the readers, however, to think of a future time, when nobody will be safe from the cousins' reach and Charmides will be in a position to lay his hands on[45] Socrates and every other Athenian that might oppose him.

It is not accidental that Socrates uses a future-tensed verb to refer to the time when Charmides will be irresistible. 'No human being *will be able* to oppose you' (176d2–3, my emphasis),[46] he tells the youth prophetically, speaking both as the relevant character of the dialogue and as an authorial voice that, from within the dialogue, points to what will come to be. Also, at the very end of the scene, Socrates indulges in a characteristic piece of irony when he refers implicitly to an event that he relays in the *Apology* and that can be confirmed by other sources as well. Namely, while Charmides warns him not to oppose him on the present occasion (176d4),[47] Socrates replies that he won't oppose him *in the future* (176d5)[48] but will follow his orders. In fact, when the Thirty commanded Socrates to arrest Leon of Salamis and bring him in to be summarily executed, Socrates disobeyed them and went home (*Ap*. 32c4–e1).

To end this study, let us look again at the portraits of the protagonists, taking into consideration the dialogue's final scene.

Both as a narrator and as a discussant, Socrates remains the same familiar figure from the opening scene to his critical summary of the argument. He cares for philosophy and beautiful youths, privileges the soul over the body, identifies virtue and, specifically, temperance with psychic health, uses the elenchus for protreptic and pedagogic purposes as well as for the purpose of conducting a serious dialectical investigation, and claims to be indifferent to dialectical victory but wholly committed to the search for truth. In the second part of the investigation he often transcends the limits of the dialogue frame by pointing to views developed in other dialogues. Dramatically, he remains firmly located in the spatio-temporal context of the *Charmides* and makes no overt allusions to future historical events.

[45] This is the literal meaning of ἐπιχειροῦντι at 176d2.
[46] οὐδεὶς οἵός τ' ἔσται ἐναντιοῦσθαι ἀνθρώπων: 176d3.
[47] μηδὲ σὺ ἐναντιοῦ: 176d4.
[48] οὐκ ἐναντιώσομαι: 176d5.

However, in the final lines of the *Charmides*, Socrates' personality and manner alter.[49] He seems distanced from the other two characters, not very concerned with the decision that they reached on his account, and indifferent to the prospect of keeping Charmides close to him and enchanting him with *logoi*. He acts as if he were not fully present, as if his mind has wandered somewhere else. His replies to Charmides become increasingly ambiguous and metaphorical, turning away from the present and pointing towards a distant future. On the one hand, in the opening scene of the dialogue, Socrates is depicted as a rather earthly man, while Charmides is portrayed as a distant young god. On the other hand, in the epilogue's last scene, these elements of their respective portraits get reversed. Charmides comes across as unreflective and brutal, whereas Socrates seems detached from his surroundings and the threats that they might pose. It is as if he belonged to a different sphere, not entirely human. Those familiar with the historical facts are bound to remember that Socrates will eventually oppose those that 'no human being will be able to oppose' (176d2–3).

Critias' portrait retains its carefully calculated ambiguity through most of the conversation. On the one hand, as we have seen, Critias appears appreciative of Socrates, proud of his ward and wishing him to receive a good education, cognisant of the value of dialectical conversation, an experienced and ingenious interlocutor, and a person of considerable intelligence and some intellectual integrity as well. On the other hand, the narrator represents him as a man disposed towards irascibility and exaggeration, excessively mindful of his reputation, and intensely interested in politics and one's entitlement to rule. Socrates' successive thought-experiments, and especially the 'dream', intimate that Critias is more interested in power and effectiveness than in the well-being of the citizens and the state. Both in the opening and in the closing scenes of the dialogue he assumes leadership by giving directions to the other two personages as to what they should do. But while on the former occasion he proposes a ruse and asks for Socrates' cooperation, on the latter he merely issues his orders and expects to be obeyed. His use of military vocabulary (176c3) suggests that manipulation will eventually give way to naked force. Looking at the development of Critias' character from the perspective of the final scene, we can see that his sense of privilege and his ambitions and passions await the appropriate opportunity to express themselves in action.

Charmides is the character that the dialogue is named after. This is chiefly because of the exceptional promise he appears to hold for his own

[49] See also Hyland 1981, 146, who interprets Charmides' transformation in a different way than I do.

future and the future of Athens itself. Nonetheless, as I have argued, his gifts appear partly offset by the negative elements of his character. On the one hand, he is depicted in the course of the dialogue as a youth of great beauty and some promise, talented in poetry and with a penchant for philosophy, well born and traditionally educated, familiar with dialectical debate and ready to engage in it, and endowed with modesty and commendable decorum. Both his beliefs about temperance and his own demeanour may seem consistent with these features. On the other hand, Charmides' portrait exhibits less reassuring elements too. He appears to be coy, occasionally sly, somewhat spoilt by his guardian's flattery and the admiration of his peers, a little roguish, frequently passive, and always eager to please Critias. His evident reverence for authority is not helpful for philosophy, and his response to the Socratic method leaves something to be desired. In the dialogue's prologue, he asks Socrates to write down for him the charm of Zalmoxis, thus intimating that he does not really want to bother with it. In the epilogue, he acknowledges his need to be charmed by Socrates, but seems clueless as to what this might entail. Generally, he does not really seem to have a philosophical nature. In that respect he fares badly if compared with Theaetetus, a youth of physical ugliness but exceptional philosophical gifts. All the same, he does retain his boyish charm until the dialogue's final scene.

At that point, however, Charmides' character undergoes a transformation. His respect for Critias' authority and his desire to please his guardian motivate his submission to the latter's wishes. He speaks like a soldier sworn to obey his general, a militant who considers his orders adequate justification for his deeds. Humorously, he tells Socrates in so many words that he will use force against him if needed. He seems to have no qualms about threatening, however playfully, the man that he has earlier approached with trust and respect. In the end, then, Charmides is portrayed as a bully and his youthful grace is lost. Like the other two characters, but in a more spectacular manner, Charmides suffers a change that points far beyond the frame of the dialogue. We are guided to look at him telescopically, from the vantage point of his own maturity, in the setting of Athens after its defeat in the Great War and the establishment of the Thirty. We are in a position to know that the cousins' grand plan of compelling Socrates to undertake Charmides' education came to nothing and that, in the course of time, Charmides' physical beauty came to be coupled with a deformed soul. We can also better understand Socrates' quiet and distant manner in the final scene. Even though he agrees not to oppose the cousins' orders, he appears to realise that his association with the young man will not last long. To borrow

a famous metaphor from the *Theaetetus*, Socrates can discern that Charmides is not likely to carry any real offspring that Socrates could assist him to deliver.[50] Instead, Charmides will have to be paired with a partner more suitable to his own nature: a wise man such as Prodicus or, more likely, Critias himself.[51]

[50] See the discussion by Burnyeat 1977.
[51] In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes himself as a matchmaker concluding suitable matches between young men who have no need of his midwifery and *sophoi* such as Prodicus (*Tht.* 151b1–6).

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