PHILOSOPHY, ELENCHUS, AND CHARMIDES' DEFINITIONS OF ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ

MARINA BERZINS MCCOY

I

Gregory Vlastos's important and influential account of Socratic elenchus set the standard in many ways for articulating its nature. Vlastos suggests in "The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All" (1994) that Socrates means to do more than simply refute a faulty proposition (*p*); he often takes the refutation of such a proposition to prove the opposite (*not-p*). While recognizing that the refutation of *p* does not, of course, logically prove that *not-p* is true, Vlastos explains that, in Socrates' view, further inquiry will always show that a false belief entails a set of inconsistent beliefs, while Socrates' beliefs are self-consistent and cannot be elenchically refuted.[1] Recent commentators have criticized the adequacy of Vlastos's model for a wide range of reasons: for example, some question the constructivist nature of Vlastos's account (cf. Benson 1987 and 2002, who argues that the elenchus only shows the inconsistency of an interlocutor's beliefs), while others suggest that there might not be any universal elenchic method at all (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 2002, Carpenter and Polansky 2002, and Tarrant 2000 and 2002).

This latter group of commentators has persuasively shown that Socrates' methods vary somewhat from dialogue to dialogue and from person to person. A better approach for the interpreter of Plato might

1 Vlastos 1994.4. Passages that insist on the importance of an interlocutor using his own beliefs include *Protagoras* 331c5–9, *Crito* 49c–d, *Gorgias* 500b, *Meno* 84a, and *Republic* 346a.

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therefore be to see how Socrates' elenchus functions in the particular dialogue at hand and what comments Socrates offers there that might help us as readers to understand his intentions in that particular context. Even if there is no universal method of elenchus, it can safely be assumed that Socrates has *some* purpose in mind when he asks questions. Moreover, examining his way of questioning in one dialogue might also contribute to our understanding of Plato's thinking about philosophy in a more general way, even if Socrates' method is not identical in each dialogue. It might, for example, be the case that Plato has Socrates pursue varying forms of questioning in order to explore the power and the limits of philosophical questioning and conversation.

The *Charmides* is a helpful dialogue in this respect, as it seems concerned with both the value and the limits of one example of Socratic questioning. In the *Charmides*, Socrates refutes specific definitions offered up by Charmides and also reflects more generally on the connections between a person's character, perception, and beliefs. Socrates suggests that elenchic success would mean affecting both Charmides' perceptions of the questions at hand and the very state of his soul or character. That is, Socrates seems to hope that Charmides will (1) see the shortcomings of his own beliefs; (2) embark upon an earnest quest to replace his poorly thought out beliefs with better ones; and (3) see how a deficiency in his beliefs reflects a personal deficiency in himself.

However, while the elenchus seems to be successful in getting Charmides to recognize the insufficiency of his own beliefs, Charmides does not pursue further inquiry into the matter (despite Socrates' encouragements to do so), nor does he seem fundamentally affected in character. Plato sets up a dialogue in which Socrates fails to meet some of his own standards of elenchic success. This is quite puzzling, and a few commentators have offered explanations for why this might be the case. Drew Hyland focuses (1981, esp. 145–48) on the state of Charmides' soul and suggests that it shows that philosophy is useless for making those virtuous who are not already virtuous by nature. W. T. Schmid claims that virtue cannot be taught if a student is unwilling to seek self-knowledge and make a commitment to rationality.[2]

The *Charmides* is not the only dialogue in which a character seems

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2 Schmid 1998.61–84. Schmid argues that Charmides cannot progress because he chooses not to invest in the process of self-knowledge through a commitment to rationality as such.

fundamentally unchanged by Socrates' questions. While there may not be a universal method for the elenchus, the failure of Socrates' questions to affect the character, beliefs, or basic commitments of his interlocutors seems to pervade the dialogues. (In fact, more often than not, Socrates' interlocutors think that it is not themselves, but Socrates, who is the root of the problem.[3]) Looking to the *Protagoras*, Charles Griswold locates the failure of Socrates and Protagoras to have a philosophical conversation in the divide between the commitments of the philosopher and the non-philosopher. Philosophical discourse requires the self-sufficiency of relying on one's own beliefs, a moral commitment to holding oneself accountable to rationality itself, and being responsible enough to stand by or abandon one's beliefs in light of whatever reason dictates.[4]

These commentators, then, accept the view that general philosophical commitments are necessary if philosophical conversation is to be successful, and I largely agree. Reason and argument are not, in Plato's view, values to which all—or perhaps even many—of Socrates' interloctuors commit. However, Charmides is an interesting case, for, at times, Charmides *does* seem to fulfill some of Socrates' conditions for successful philosophical questioning: he seems really to want to understand what σωφροσύνη is, and he does for a time rely upon his own beliefs when questioned.[5] Socrates himself both emphasizes the necessity of relying upon one's own perceptions and draws his audience's attention to the fact that Charmides earnestly tries to speak according to his own beliefs at one point in the dialogue. So the dialogue raises the question as to why Charmides, in the end, reverts to relying upon others' beliefs. It therefore offers the opportunity to see whether Plato thought that reliance upon one's own beliefs and a concern for the truth could themselves be encouraged by Socrates' questions or whether something else might be necessary.[6]

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3 Consider just a few examples: Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, Meletus in the *Apology,* and Thrasymachus in the *Republic;* all blame Socrates and not themselves for the outcome of the conversation.

4 See Griswold 1999 for a thorough look at this issue in the *Protagoras*.

5 I generally leave σωφροσύνη untranslated here, as part of the question at hand is what it means. Extended quotations are from West and West 1986, who give the open-ended translation of "sound-mindedness." References in Greek are to Burnet 1983.

6 The whole question as to what is meant by "success" in the elenchus is an open one. However, it would seem to include, at minimum, an awareness of the need for philosophical inquiry into the nature of virtue. Ideally it might also mean specific progress in one's understanding of the subject matter at hand; for example, Theaetetus in the

Charmides offers three definitions of σωφροσύνη. Although each is refuted through Socrates' elenchus, I shall argue below that the refutation of the second definition is especially interesting because this definition reveals that Charmides displays a commitment to the moral authority of others that is fundamentally anti-philosophical. One of Socrates' aims is to undermine Charmides' faith in this understanding of σωφροσύνη. The elenchus does temporarily shake Charmides' conviction that authority is a reliable guide to moral belief. However, in the end, Charmides reverts to his commitment to moral authority and rejects the possibility that he can discover the truth for himself. I shall argue that Charmides' problem is precisely his vacillation between unquestioning reliance upon his own beliefs and complete abandonment of his beliefs in favor of following the beliefs of others. In place of either extreme, the dialogue suggests that a simultaneous commitment to one's own beliefs and an openness to the claims of others against those beliefs—a sort of moderation about the state of one's own moral beliefs—is necessary for philosophical progress. What Charmides fails to recognize is the possibility of a state of human knowledge that is in between complete knowledge and complete ignorance. The *Charmides* implicitly argues for a kind of philosophical σωφροσύνη as a condition for philosophical inquiry.[7]

II

From the beginning of the dialogue, there are hints that Charmides is not moderate in any ordinary sense of the word. Critias first introduces Charmides to Socrates under the pretense that Socrates is a doctor with a cure for Charmides' headaches. As Hyland suggests (1981), these headaches

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Theaetetus is an individual who both earnestly seeks the truth about the nature of knowledge, even when his earlier definitions fail, and seems to give better and better definitions about what knowledge is, even if no final definition of knowledge seems adequate. Charmides, in contrast, simply reverts to his original beliefs and shows little interest in further philosophical inquiry at the end of the dialogue.

7 Hyland 1981 makes a persuasive case for the importance of the ideal of "philosophical openness" to σωφροσύνη in the dialogue more generally. However, Hyland does not see the elenchus as having a role in effecting such a state, whereas I want to claim that Socrates, at least, hopes to succeed by persuading Charmides to be more philosophically open. I add that a particular view of knowledge is needed if the elenchus is to be successful. Hyland argues that for the elenchus to be successful, the person being questioned must already be virtuous by nature, a claim that I dispute here.

might indicate a hangover, for Charmides says that lately he has been "heavy of head in the morning" (155b); Charmides has some larger underlying disorder that needs to be addressed. Socrates seems to think that the illness is related to Charmides' moderation or lack thereof, for it is *Socrates* who first introduces the topic of σωφροσύνη, wondering aloud about what it is and whether Charmides needs the incantations that introduce it into souls (157a3–9). Socrates explains that the whole of a sick person, not only part, needs curing, suggesting that Charmides' character is the ultimate cause of his headaches; Socrates even says directly that the problem lies in Charmides' soul (156b3–c5, 156e2). Socrates suspects that Charmides is not moderate (Bruell 1977.148). Charmides' immoderate state does not fundamentally change through the course of the dialogue. Near the conclusion, both Charmides and Critias playfully threaten Socrates with violence if he does not comply with their wishes (176c8–d5). These undertones of violence foreshadow Critias and Charmides' joining with the Thirty Tyrants. We readers know that the elenchus is unsuccessful in changing Charmides.

However, at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates also sets up the expectation that he might be capable of healing Charmides' soul. When Charmides asks whether Socrates has a drug that can cure his headache, Socrates claims that, although he does have knowledge of it, an incantation must be chanted along with the leaf to make it effective (155e). Charmides asks whether he might write down the incantation, but Socrates suggests that he, Socrates, must first be persuaded to give it to him. Socrates says that the incantation cannot heal Charmides' head alone, but must heal his entire body (156b–c); he cannot treat only one part of Charmides, but must attend to the whole. If we take the "incantation" to represent the Socratic elenchus that follows in the dialogue—as no actual magical incantation is ever chanted—then Socrates' goal would seem to be for the elenchus to have a fundamental effect on the inner state of Charmides' soul.[8] While it might

8 However, Charmides himself does not take the elenchus to be the incantation; instead, he continues to hold out hope at the end of the dialogue that he will finally get the incantation if he sees Socrates again. Socrates' use of the image of a drug and incantation is strongly reminiscent of Gorgias's claims in his *Encomium to Helen* that the spoken word has the same relation to the mind that drugs have to the body; the spoken word can transform the mind. As Gorgias clearly saw persuasive speech as independent of any sort of objective truth, perhaps Charmides mistakenly expects that Socrates will merely persuade him of whatever Socrates believes to be true. Socrates, of course, has just the opposite aim in mind.

seem unreasonable to ask for the transformation of Charmides' character or moral ideals after a single encounter with Socrates, it is Plato himself who sets up these expectations in the dialogue. After all, it is Socrates (not Critias or Charmides) who first implies that words, rather than drugs alone, will best address Charmides' troubles (155e), and it is Socrates who sees Charmides as lacking σωφροσύνη.

But how might such a transformation take place? Fortunately, Socrates elaborates upon a connection between one's definitions and the inner state of one's soul. Before questioning Charmides, Socrates tells him (159a):

> It is clear that if sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη) is present to you, you can offer some opinion (δοξάζειν) about it. For surely it is necessary that it, being in you, if it is in you, furnish some perception (αἴσθησιν*)* from which you have some opinion (δόξα) about it as to what and what sort of thing sound-mindedness is.[9]

Socrates here connects three key elements to one another: the state of Charmides' soul, his perception of what sound-mindedness is, and, lastly, an opinion that arises out of that perception. Socrates states that, in the best possible case, Charmides has σωφροσύνη in him, can therefore perceive something about its nature, and so can offer an opinion about it. Socrates thereby makes explicit a connection between self-knowledge and the intellectual knowledge of moral virtues (if one has the virtue in question to begin with). That is, Socrates claims that anyone—philosopher or not—can offer some account of the nature of a virtue based upon a real perception of the virtue in question, if he possesses that virtue.

At 159a, Socrates also links the person's perception (αἴσθησις) to his opinion (δόξα) about the virtue in question. Interestingly, Socrates does not directly connect the presence of a virtue in a person's soul to his own opinion about what σωφροσύνη is. An individual also has a perception (αἴσθησις) of σωφροσύνη separate from the actual existent σωφροσύνη.

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9 Throughout this paper, I translate αἴσθησις as "perception," following West and West, rather than the more specific "sense perception"; see also Liddell and Scott. Αἴσθησις might be used in an analogical sense here, just as one can also "perceive" something in English without using one of the ordinary senses of sight, hearing, etc. It is hard to see how αἴσθησις could refer to one of the ordinary senses in this context.

Socrates implies that, while a person might correctly "sense" what σωφροσύνη is, she might not immediately be able to transform that perception into language or an opinion that adequately describes such a perception. Socrates differentiates between perceiving something true about the nature of σωφροσύνη and being able to offer a full account or description of it. This might explain the existence of moral people who seem to possess all the virtues, embodying the virtues in their everyday actions, but who can only speak about their nature in a partial or unsatisfying way.[10]

But what about the opposite situation, where the person being examined lacks the virtue altogether? Will the elenchus aid her in better understanding the nature of the virtue in question and lead to the recognition of her own ignorance, or will it simply be useless? The passage above does not explicitly address the case of an absent virtue, saying only that *if* one has the virtue, then one will have a perception of and an opinion about it. One might argue that if a virtue is absent, then a person will have nothing interesting to say about that virtue. However, several times in the course of his discussion, Socrates pushes Charmides to return to his own δόξαι as to the nature of the definition, even though he already believes that Charmides lacks σωφροσύνη (e.g., 160d–e). Socrates is still interested in Charmides' delving deeply into his soul to explore what he *really* thinks. Socrates suggests that there is a connection between Charmides' character, perceptions, and opinions. Socrates must believe that there is some value in Charmides' attending to his own perceptions even if he does lack the virtue, particularly since Socrates already seems to believe that Charmides is not moderate.

Perhaps Socrates thinks that his questions might work in the reverse of the order outlined at 159a. That is, the elenchus might show one the inadequacy of one's own opinions, in turn suggesting a problem with one's perceptions of the virtue, finally leading to a recognition of a need for a change in one's character. Of course there is no guarantee that this will take place. For example, if an individual attributes his difficulty to a simple misstatement of what he believes to be his correct perception of the virtue, he might never bother to acknowledge a problem with his perception of it in

10 Consider, for example, Laches, who has some worthwhile ideas about courage even if he is not able to offer a perfect definition to Socrates in the *Laches*, or Glaucon and Adeimantus's sense that justice is good in itself, without knowing precisely why in Book 2 of the *Republic*.

the first place. This happens quite often with Socrates' interlocutors—they try to restate the same general idea in different words, rather than questioning their fundamental approach to the subject, and eventually becoming angry with Socrates for apparently mistreating what they "really" mean to say.[11]

Socrates seems hopeful that the elenchus can affect perceptions and even character. However, there is nothing that can be done to force an interlocutor to attend to the state of his soul and his perception of a virtue, and not just wonder whether he has articulated his perception of the situation adequately. Charmides' success or failure in the elenchus will be inexorably linked to his self-perception. He must be willing to acknowledge what Socrates outlines for him here, that opinions are rooted in his character and not only his intellect. That is, philosophical progress might require openness to the possibility that a limitation of beliefs also means a corresponding limitation in character and not only in one's intellectual position. Socrates' subsequent questions will address the deficiencies of Charmides' ideas insofar as they are also connected to his basic values and commitments. Socrates' questions are rhetorical in that they are designed with his interlocutor's character in mind. The Socratic elenchus is not abstracted from the character of those whom it questions; here it concerns itself with the ideas of the living, breathing Charmides.

III

In my discussion, I will concentrate on each definition and ensuing interchange with Socrates and how it illuminates Charmides' character and perceptions of σωφροσύνη, rather than giving a full analysis of each argument, as my primary aim is to examine Socrates' rhetorical strategy with the elenchus. Charmides' first definition of σωφροσύνη is "doing everything decorously and quietly" (159b3). His examples are walking in the street, conversing, and, in general, acting decorously. He later restates his definition as "a certain quietness." Socrates asks whether sound-mindedness is among beautiful or noble things (καλῶν), and Charmides affirms that it is. Socrates then examines whether there are not other beautiful things that are done swiftly and vigorously rather than quietly, for example, writing, wres-

11 See, for example, Meno in the *Apology* or Thrasymachus in the *Republic* as examples of characters who accuse Socrates of twisting their ideas.

tling, and learning. These activities of the soul and of the body would seem to be most beautiful when performed *swiftly* rather than quietly. Socrates concludes that moderation is not quietness or a quiet life.

Socrates' argument is potentially open to objections—after all, he has only shown that there are *some* beautiful things that are not quiet. However, it could be that moderation is a term that we use only to describe certain activities (all of which should be performed quietly), while other sorts of beautiful things that ought not be done quietly are unrelated to moderation. That is, the category of what is καλός might be larger than the category of what is moderate/quiet, in which case, the fact that there are activities that are noble but not quiet is no objection to Charmides' definition. Charmides might easily enough modify his initial definition in order to respond to Socrates' counterexamples. For example, he might claim that σωφροσύνη only concerns certain activities, e.g., those concerned with physical pleasures or those concerned with public decorum. If Charmides is genuinely committed to the idea that σωφροσύνη is a sort of quietness, he ought to be able to respond to the flaw in Socrates' argument. Or he might try to narrow the definition in slightly different terms in order to overcome the problem (doing "everything" quietly is no doubt too broad). But Charmides does none of these things and seems altogether happy to give up the argument quickly. He hardly seems committed to the truth of his first definition.

There are other textual indications that Charmides gives Socrates an uncontroversial popular definition in place of his own genuine beliefs and perceptions about moderation. Before Charmides gives this first definition, Socrates (as narrator of the dialogue) says that Charmides hesitated and wasn't entirely willing to answer (159b). Charmides frequently speaks tentatively, often responding with such non-committal remarks as "it appears so" and the like, indicating a hesitancy to commit to this understanding of moderation. Perhaps the first definition shows Charmides attending to *others'* opinions about moderation, revealing a concern for giving a "respectable" answer to the question.

The definition itself also exhibits a concern with avoiding confrontation with others: if moderation means to act decorously, quietly, and so on, then moderation is essentially about avoiding the disturbance of others. However, Charmides has shown himself to be anything but concerned not to disturb others. At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates makes clear that Charmides inflames desire and sparks excitement and confusion in those who surround him (154c2). Charmides seems to enjoy and to encourage

such reactions in others, for Socrates notes that Charmides deliberately sits between Socrates and Critias, and gives Socrates what he describes as an irresistible look (155c–d). We cannot, therefore, take Charmides' claim that σωφροσύνη is quietness as reflective of his own character. Socrates does not believe that Charmides really believes in his initial definition and so can easily dispose of the argument.

Socrates next exhorts Charmides to look to himself before he offers a second definition (160d6–e1):

> "Back again, then, Charmides," I said, "apply your mind more and look into yourself (εἰς σεαυτὸν ἐμβλέψας): think over what sort of person sound-mindedness, by being present, makes you, and what sort of thing it is that would produce someone like that; and reckoning all this together, say well and courageously what it appears to you to be (τί σοι φαίνεται εἶναι)."

This passage further reinforces the idea that Socrates believes that the first definition did not stem from considered self-examination. Again, Charmides is encouraged to reflect first upon what his own nature is and only then to abstract a definition of σωφροσύνη from that personal reflection upon the ways that his soul's state might be exhibited in his life.

Socrates reports that, before Charmides offered his second definition, he paused and "quite courageously investigated it thoroughly with regard to himself" (160e2–3). Socrates' description makes clear that Charmides makes a serious attempt to draw upon himself, to think about himself, in order to gain a perception that will lead to his stated opinion.[12] His second definition of σωφροσύνη is as follows: "sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη) makes a human being have a sense of shame and be ashamed, and sound-mindedness (σωφροσύνη) is just what respectfulness (αἰδὼς) is" (160e3–4). In brief, σωφροσύνη is reducible to αἰδώς, "shame" or "respectfulness." Plato takes great pains to point out that Charmides seeks this definition in earnest: this suggests that Charmides is motivated by a genuine concern with αἰδώς and that he offers this opinion as a reasonable definition

12 For this reason, I think Schmid's assessment that Charmides is unwilling to examine himself and to seek self-knowledge does not ring true to his actions here. Charmides attempts to look into himself; the question is why his attempts prove to be so unsuccessful despite his willingness to do so.

of moderation that stems from an examination of his own activities and self-perception.

If Charmides is concerned to avoid those actions that would shame him, the key question is, what does he mean by αἰδώς? I suggest that Charmides understands αἰδώς to be the ability to respect authority about the good and bad, the noble and base. There are four major indications that Charmides really believes σωφροσύνη means respecting authority.[13] First, the ruse of Charmides' need to submit to a "chant" in order to cure his headache suggests that Charmides considers respect for authority important. It is Critias who first suggests that Socrates pretend that he has knowledge of a drug for the head (155b4–5), although it is Socrates who tells Charmides that there is an incantation that must accompany the drug if it is to be effective (155e6–9). Critias's introduction of Socrates to Charmides as the possessor of a cure allows Socrates to take on the role of an expert, while Critias plays the role of being the expert about who the experts are. Socrates, in turn, affirms that his own ability is derived from the expertise of a Thracian doctor of Zalmoxis (who is said to be a god and king); the prescription is for Charmides to submit his soul to Socrates. Critias assures Charmides that Socrates is an expert, and Socrates himself speaks with the authority of a doctor. Socrates finds an appeal to authority a rhetorically promising way of engaging Charmides in the elenchus in the first place.

Second, before Charmides can respond to the proposal that Socrates cure him, Critias interrupts to assure Socrates of his nephew's moderation. When Socrates asks Charmides whether he possesses moderation, Charmides says that it would be difficult to respond, for (158c8–d6):

> If . . . I say that I am not sound-minded, not only is it strange for one to say such things against oneself, but besides, I will give the lie to Critias here and many others, in whose opinion I am sound-minded, as he was saying. But again, if I say I am and praise myself, perhaps it will appear onerous. So I cannot answer you.

Charmides is concerned not to appear disrespectful to his guardian and others present; he thinks that his opinions ought to mirror those of others

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13 I am largely in agreement with Schmid's argument that Charmides puts blind trust in Critias and that his definition here is a reflection of that trust; see Schmid 1981.

around him. When it seems that outside opinion is divided, he is at a loss as to what to do.

Third, Charmides exhibits his view of sound-mindedness as respect for authority in *the way* he abandons his second definition. Socrates' response to this definition is peculiar. He gives no real argument, instead citing Homer's authority on the matter. Socrates asks whether moderation is beautiful or not, and whether the moderate are good men or not, and Charmides agrees to both counts. Then Socrates asks Charmides whether or not he trusts (πιστεύεις) Homer when he says that "αἰδὼς is not good for a needy man" (161a2–4), and Charmides quickly agrees. Socrates concludes that αἰδώς is sometimes good and sometimes bad, and so cannot be σωφροσύνη. While Charmides agrees that Socrates has spoken correctly, his actions reveal that he is not altogether persuaded. For the very act of allowing his definition to be defeated by the mere quotation of Homer—unaccompanied by an argument or any explanation of what Homer had in mind, or even an anecdotal example of the potential harm of αἰδώς—paradoxically reveals the young man's respect for both Socrates' *and* Homer's authority.

Charmides' acceptance of this passage from Homer is even more perplexing when one considers its origin. The passage is a quotation of Telemakhos in Book 17 of the *Odyssey*: αἰδὼς δ' οὐκ ἀγαθὴ κεχρημένῳ ἀνδρὶ παρεῖναι (*Od.* 17.347). Telemakhos and Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, have entered Odysseus's home, planning their revenge upon the suitors who have overrun the house. Telemakhos orders the swineherd Eumaios to speak these words to the "beggar" Odysseus when Eumaios hands Odysseus a piece of bread; Eumaios is to tell him to beg for food from the suitors. The superficial meaning is simply that the beggar is in no state to be ashamed of begging for food; his hunger must be satiated, so the usual sense of shame that would restrain one from begging is inappropriate here. Telemakhos's statement, at first, simply suggests that a certain sort of practical wisdom is needed to decide when one ought to be ashamed and when one ought not be; clearly some contexts actually require the abandonment of an otherwise noble sense of shame.

Perhaps Charmides takes Socrates's quotation of Homer to demonstrate that since αἰδώς is not appropriate in all contexts, if σωφροσύνη is universally good, then σωφροσύνη cannot be αἰδώς. That is, Charmides sees this passage as an example of a case where αἰδώς is not a good and so rejects his own claim that αἰδώς is an appropriate definition of σωφροσύνη. He need not have done so. After all, one could reject Homer's assessment of

the beggar's situation and say that begging simply is not shameful if one is starving; σωφροσύνη might still be reducible to a sense of shame. The question would then be how to go on to determine what sorts of actions are or are not shameful in different contexts. However, to save his own definition, Charmides would then have to reject the authority of Homer here and say that Homer was incorrect. But his very understanding of σωφροσύνη disallows the rejection of an external moral authority, as σωφροσύνη is defined in the first place as a sense of respect for such authority. Socrates seems to have put Charmides into a bit of a bind: he can either reject his definition of σωφροσύνη as a sense of αἰδώς, and thereby exhibit his respect for Homer's authority, or he can hold onto his definition, but only by rejecting a major source of moral authority in the Greek world. Understood in this way, it is no wonder that Charmides is at a loss as to what to say.

However, Socrates may have had another idea in mind in quoting this passage. The message about the appropriateness of αἰδώς is repeated a few moments later when Eumaios speaks to Odysseus.[14] When Odysseus hears these words, he asks Zeus to bless Telemakhos, that his son might have all that his heart desires (*Od*. 17.352–54). That is, Odysseus interprets the swineherd's words as a special message from Telemakhos. Telemakhos clearly does not mean that Odysseus ought not be ashamed to beg for food; he knows that the beggar is really his father and the rightful ruler of Ithaka. He therefore must mean something different than what Eumaios thinks that he means. Perhaps Telemakhos is trying to communicate the following to his father: any sense of αἰδώς connected to self-restraint is not appropriate for him in his current condition. The suitors do not know who this beggar really is; as such, their understanding of what is good or bad is not the appropriate one to follow. Moreover, Odysseus will have to be anything but self-restrained if he is to slaughter the suitors; the brutal battle that follows is the primary means by which Odysseus must restore his former status in the household and restore his sense of honor. Odysseus cannot be moderate in battle if he is to accomplish his task against the overwhelming odds of defeating the suitors; courage of the sort that he will need is at odds with such restraint.

Read in this light, Socrates' words promote the deliberate abandonment of moderation in certain contexts. The Homeric passage does not show

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14 The second occurrence is at *Odyssey* 17.352. The words are slightly different the second time: αἰδῶ δ'οὐκ ἀγαθήν φησ' ἔμμεναι ἀνδρὶ προίκτῃ.

that attention to a public sense of shame and honor is bad per se; after all, one of Odysseus's primary objectives is to restore his honor. But the suitors' perceptions of him cannot be the standard by which he is to judge his own actions. Odysseus cannot make the mistake of becoming the beggar that he appears to be and forgetting who he really is. In addition, the passage seems to say that Odysseus's current condition of being needy, of lacking the status and power that properly belong to him, is no excuse for holding back. That is, the meaning of the words the second time around actually reverses their first meaning: the beggar/Odysseus is not supposed to forget a sense of shame but rather he must strive to overcome his current condition out of a proper sense of shame. Why, then, does Socrates quote this passage to Charmides?

Charmides cannot rely upon his own beliefs, because his real belief is that he should not rely on his own beliefs. The problem for Socrates is how to get Charmides out of this "circle." His solution is rhetorically ingenious: he cites Homer, a revered cultural authority, showing that this authority himself advocates courage rather than decorum and self-reliance rather than reliance on the standards of a group. Socrates implies that even those much more knowledgeable than Charmides know that sometimes αἰδώς is insufficient. Socrates wants Charmides to see himself in the role of Odysseus, that is, in the role of the person who is in need. Like Odysseus, Charmides lacks something; in Charmides' case, it is the right definition and/or perception of σωφροσύνη. Charmides clearly understands moderation to consist of blindly following public standards of approval and disapproval. However, if the public itself is not good—just as the suitors are not good—then there is reason for Charmides *not* to follow these standards. First, Charmides needs to look to a broader vision of what is good than what one particular group of people believes to be true. If he is to make philosophical progress, Charmides must have a larger concern for truth than what pleases his immediate audience. Second, Socrates seems to want to get beyond Charmides' restraint in pursuing these difficult philosophical questions about the nature of σωφροσύνη. Charmides is far too concerned with what people will think about what he says, at the expense of passionate inquiry. Other Platonic dialogues emphasize the μανία involved in philosophical inquiry (see, e.g., *Phaedrus* 249d4–e4); the intellectual self-restraint and timidity of Charmides hardly characterize the person who loves wisdom. If Charmides is going to be able to discover the nature of σωφροσύνη, what he needs most is not more restraint in his inquiry but more courage. This implies that σωφροσύνη is, as its English counterpart "moderation" suggests, not an absolute state of

being but rather an appropriate state of being between two extremes. Charmides needs to attend to his own opinions *and* to question them; he needs to rely upon his current beliefs as a starting point *and* courageously to try to overcome his current state of neediness or lack of the truth.

However, Charmides seems not to abandon his preoccupation with the opinions of others, despite this appeal to Odysseus as a heroic model of action. For in his third definition, Charmides no longer looks into himself but recalls hearing another say that σωφροσύνη is "doing one's own things" (161b5–7) or "minding one's own business."[15] Socrates proceeds quickly to dispense with this definition, as well as with Charmides. We might be surprised at the rejection of the third definition, so similar to Socrates' definition of justice in the *Republic* at 433a.[16] Charmides' statement that he has heard this definition from someone else (161b5–7) and Critias's denial that he is its author, while affirming that its originator is reputed to be wise (162b2–3), suggest that they might understand it to be Socrates' own idea. However, Socrates interprets "doing one's own things" in a way quite different from its meaning in the *Republic*. For example, he suggests that doing one's own things would entail only writing one's own name, and not those of others, or it would mean a city in which each person cobbled his own shoes, wove his own cloak, and so on (161d3–62a2)—just the opposite of its meaning in the *Republic*. Perhaps Socrates so interprets the definition to test whether Charmides understands it in even a rudimentary sense, because Socrates suspects that the definition does not arise from Charmides' own perceptions of moderation. Thus Socrates notes that it is hard to recognize what doing one's own things is (162b4–6). Charmides must admit that he does not know what he means when he repeats this definition, though (in his first indication of healthy skepticism), Charmides glances at Critias and wonders whether even the one who said it knows what he had in mind.

By the end of the elenchic interchange between Charmides and Socrates, Charmides has abandoned any attempt to connect closely his own soul, perception of its virtues, and philosophical examination of such perceptions. However, Charmides also is a little less willing to rely so much upon Critias's authority. He seems curious as to whether Critias knows what he is talking about; he is interested in whether his guardian really possesses

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15 The former is West and West's more literal translation, the latter the usual rendition of the phrase, especially in translations of the *Republic*, e.g., Allan Bloom's.

16 Bruell 1977.157 and Hyland 1981.71 also note the similarity.

the knowledge that one would expect him to have about such matters. All along, Charmides has been genuinely interested in whether he himself possesses the virtue of σωφροσύνη: when Socrates first asks Charmides whether they should inquire into whether Charmides possesses σωφροσύνη or let it go, Charmides says that he would like to pursue this more than anything (158e2–6). He clearly cares whether he possesses this virtue or not; and if he senses his own lack of moderation at all and connects it to his headaches, he also wants the cure from Socrates. So Charmides wonders about what σωφροσύνη is, whether his own soul embodies it or not, and whether Critias himself understands what it is. That is, the elenchus seems to have had at least this success: Charmides is questioning the nature of these things. Will this state of wonder lead Charmides to want to philosophize about σωφροσύνη, despite the difficulties, and to seek to understand himself better?[17]

I suggest that the main reason that Socrates engages with Critias in the discussion of the last definition of σωφροσύνη is for Charmides' benefit. Charmides needs to see that, whatever his troubles, turning to Critias as a moral authority is not the best approach, because Critias himself lacks knowledge of these matters. Nor should Socrates replace Critias as the source of moral belief. The dialogue ends without a final definition of σωφροσύνη; following Socrates's definition of σωφροσύνη is not an option for Charmides because, by the end of the dialogue, *no one* seems to know how to define it. Socrates might hope that Charmides will return to himself in his inquiry into the nature of σωφροσύνη. Charmides will be faced with a choice to rely either upon himself or upon others as a source of his moral beliefs. However, as the next sections of the dialogue will show, both options will be riddled with problems.

IV

Although he had originally been most interested in discovering the nature of Charmides' soul, Socrates goes on to engage in an argument with Critias about what σωφροσύνη is. Socrates seems motivated in part to undermine Critias's authority with Charmides. By showing that even Critias—the source of this last definition for Charmides—cannot defend this definition

17 Roochnik 2002 gives an excellent account of the role of wonder and self-recognition in philosophical activity.

of σωφροσύνη, Socrates attempts to show Charmides that he must return to himself in seeking a definition. At the same time, this series of arguments with Critias also illustrates more specifically what is problematic about treating σωφροσύνη as reliance upon authority. Charmides needs not only (1) to know *that* he does not know what sound-mindedness is, but also (2) to learn *what,* in particular, is problematic about this last definition. Perhaps Socrates hopes that if Critias is defeated in argument, Charmides will acknowledge that reliance upon authority is inadequate and so turn back to the difficult pursuit of the truth from the point at which he and Socrates had left off.

While the argument between Critias and Socrates is far too nuanced to examine in detail here, a few key points can be made for the purpose of understanding how Socrates' argument is intended to affect Charmides.[18] First, Socrates' reflections on the impossibility of a universal knowledge of knowledge also reveal an important problem with an absolute reliance upon moral authority. The key problem Socrates and Critias examine is whether there is an ἐπιστήμη of ἐπιστήμη. Near the conclusion of their discussion, Socrates makes an interesting claim about the potential value as moral authorities of those who possess knowledge. He says that *if* it were possible to know what one did and did not know, then σωφροσύνη would always be beneficial to us, whether we personally possessed it or not. Socrates says, "We would live through life without error, we ourselves and those who have σωφροσύνη, and all others who were ruled by us. For we ourselves would not attempt to do what we didn't have knowledge of, but we would find those who had knowledge and hand it over to them" (171d7–e4). In other words, if there were somehow a knowledge of all other knowledge, there would also be a wonderful clarity by which we could distinguish the knowers from the non-knowers. Under these circumstances, Charmides' reliance upon respect for authority would be *ideal* for the non-knowers: those who know rule, and those who do not know obey those who do know. All would be ruled by knowledge.[19]

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18 I do not undertake a detailed examination of this argument, as my focus is on the failure of the elenchus with Charmides, not the structure of the argument with Critias. In addition, there are a number of excellent articles on the topic; see, e.g., McKim 1989.

19 In fact, Charmides' understanding of σωφροσύνη as respect for others' opinions seems closely related to Socrates' own definition of σωφροσύνη as the opinion shared by all three classes as to who rules in the perfect polis; see *Republic* 432a. In the *Charmides,* Socrates seems much more skeptical about the possibility of universal knowledge than in that section of the *Republic*.

However, Socrates' objections to the possibility of a knowledge of knowledge focus upon the apparent impossibility of knowing *what* one does not know. We cannot know what we lack knowledge of: it seems logically impossible to know what one does not know. Moreover, Socrates suggests that it is impossible to know what another knows or does not know if one is not oneself a possessor of the type of knowledge in question. For there is no overall knowledge of knowledge, and, second, even with respect to particular areas of knowledge, those who do not know cannot judge who among others has or lacks the knowledge in question. While it *would* be ideal to be able to know who knows and who does not know, Socrates concludes that no knowledge of this sort has ever appeared (172a8). For example, no one can determine whether someone else is a doctor or a quack unless he himself is a doctor (170e–71c). Non-doctors cannot distinguish between those doctors who really know medicine and those doctors who lack genuine medical knowledge; to do so would require the non-expert to know medicine, not just something more generally about knowledge. The use of the medical analogy here is significant, since Socrates himself is presented as an authority on Zalmoxian medicine, which might cure Charmides' headache. Charmides must trust that the Zalmoxian doctor is a doctor, rather than a quack, and also that Socrates has really learned his techniques. (In fact, the language of the section on medicine, which makes this doctor sound more like a magician than the practitioner of a craft, should raise precisely such questions for anyone thinking of submitting to this treatment; Charmides, however, seems to lack such skepticism.) Charmides does not possess the knowledge that would allow him to decide who possesses and who lacks such medicinal knowledge. Only a doctor can, by virtue of his knowledge, recognize another doctor and distinguish a quack from a legitimate authority. By analogy, even if there were moral experts, distinguishing those who really know the good and bad from those who only claim to know is impossible for anyone who does not himself already possess such knowledge. But in such a case, the expertise would be useless, as we would no longer need to ask the expert for advice.

There is also an important disanalogy between the doctor and the moral expert. One who lacks medical knowledge might still be able to choose a doctor wisely on the basis of the practical results of the doctor's craft. For example, we can observe which patients are cured and which are not. Socrates himself says that we would not be deceived by a doctor or a pilot who lacked knowledge, since the truth would soon be discovered

(173b–c). However, in medicine and piloting, there is widespread agreement as to what constitutes a good result or end (health or reaching one's destination safely, for example). This is not true in ethics. The fundamental problem here is that the nature of σωφροσύνη itself is in question; the characters in the dialogue lack knowledge not only of means but also of ends. Charmides cannot know whether Critias is giving him a good moral education unless Charmides already is virtuous. In that case, however, Charmides would not need a guardian to educate him morally. This is a quandary for anyone who seeks a rational reliance upon moral authority. If one lacks the knowledge of what is good and bad, then reliance upon another seems to be just what is called for; but when one is in this state, one cannot make good judgments as to whose authority to obey. It is questionable whether Socrates here thinks that moral experts exist, and it is all the more doubtful when one considers Socrates' explicit denials to this effect in other dialogues (e.g., *Protagoras* 319a–20c).

One way to solve Charmides' problem might be through philosophical inquiry: Charmides might pursue philosophy and perhaps come to know more about what he seeks, without settling for reliance upon an authority that he cannot judge. At the beginning of the dialogue, when Socrates asks him whether they should really pursue this line of inquiry, Charmides seems quite interested in exploring the issue (see 158e). In addition, near the end of the dialogue, we see a momentary glimmer of a desire for such inquiry in Charmides. When Socrates and Critias are in ἀπορία, having come to the unlikely conclusion that sound-mindedness is not beneficial, Socrates reiterates his question: is Charmides in need of the incantation still? Charmides says that he does not know whether he is or is not, wondering, "How would I know what not even you two are able to discover—namely, what ever it is—as you yourself say?" (176a7). He seems to doubt the authority of both his cousin and Socrates. Charmides achieves one important insight that Socrates has tried to show him: Charmides is not going to learn about the nature of σωφροσύνη from parroting what he has heard from others, or even by listening in on a conversation between two well-educated men discussing the subject, if those men also lack knowledge. One might hope that Charmides will return to looking into himself yet more deeply for an answer to his questions and to be willing to subject his new ideas to further questioning.

Charmides' consideration of this possibility is short-lived, however, as he goes on to say (176a8–b5):

> I however don't quite believe you, and Socrates, I suppose myself to be quite in need of the incantation. And for my part, at least, nothing prevents it from being chanted by you for as many days as it takes until you say it is sufficient.

The primary explanation for Charmides' continued dependence on moral authority follows immediately on the heels of his initial moment of skepticism about the validity of that authority: he wonders aloud how *he* could know if even *they* do not seem to know how to answer this question. That is, Charmides doubts his ability to find the truth and so retreats to blind obedience as the only available alternative. He seems to take the inability to find a final definition of σωφροσύνη as a failure of the philosophical method itself. If philosophy fails, then obedience might seem to be the only reasonable attitude, even if it is less than ideal. Charmides may think to himself that if Critias and Socrates, who are both much older, better educated individuals than he, do not know what σωφροσύνη is, then neither can he know it or expect to know it in the future.

However, Charmides seems to find the implication that no one can know what σωφροσύνη is far too uncomfortable. Charmides hardly has good reason to believe that Critias and Socrates know what σωφροσύνη is, and yet he refuses to believe that no one has knowledge of it; he prefers to put his faith in Critias. In the end, Charmides continues to rely upon an arbitrary authority and is willing to submit to Socrates' chant until Socrates deems that Charmides has sufficient knowledge. Charmides retreats to his previous belief that he must rely upon others for guidance if he lacks knowledge. While Plato clearly presents this blind obedience in a negative light, there is something entirely reasonable in Charmides' response to the difficult situation in which he finds himself. If the presupposition of Socrates' call to philosophical inquiry here is that Charmides will find a final definition if he spends long enough examining the matter, then Charmides is right to wonder whether this is all in vain. If Socrates and Critias themselves cannot find the answer, what possible hope could Charmides have for discovering it?

Alternatively, Charmides might take a more skeptical position in which he, at least, does not assume that he or others know or can know what σωφροσύνη is. As a skeptic, he might, at least, be somewhat restrained in the following of others' ideas. (One imagines, for example, that, in the conflicts between democrats and the Thirty Tyrants, a skeptic would per-

form far fewer acts of violence than those passionately committed to the justice of either side.) However, skepticism, too, seems to be an unacceptable alternative, for Charmides is interested in how to live well; his initial reason for inquiring into the nature of σωφροσύνη was to become moderate (and perhaps, even more concretely, to avoid headaches in the future). Charmides was never interested in contemplation for its own sake.

Unfortunately, the alternative that Charmides chooses—to revert back to obedience to Critias (and to Socrates, whom he still supposes will give him the incantation)—is not any better. At least it is not as innocent as it might seem. While Critias approves of Charmides' obedient attitude, saying that it is evidence of Charmides' moderation if the youth will submit to Socrates' chant and not abandon Socrates "much or little" (176b5–9), blind obedience to Critias, in particular, is exactly what Charmides does *not* need. Critias's unwillingness to admit his own insufficiencies and his ignorance of the true nature of σωφροσύνη also have a corrupting effect upon Charmides. Charmides' remarks at the end of the dialogue are particularly ominous in light of his role as one of the Thirty Tyrants, as he promises to do whatever Critias demands of him, and he and Critias then threaten violence if Socrates will not obey them (176b–d). Words, it seems, are not sufficiently powerful to overcome the problem in Charmides' soul, even if they are sufficient to overcome the assertion of a weak definition.[20] Critias will prove to be a terrible choice of a model to obey.

How does this dialogue help us to understand the nature of the elenchus, when it fails to help and may even have harmed Charmides? Richard McKim suggests that the *Charmides* reflects Plato's rejection of the elenchus as a philosophical method, to be replaced by another way of doing philosophy in the middle and late dialogues.[21] However, I think that it would be a mistake to characterize the dialogue as an example of the failure of the elenchus itself. To regard the Socratic elenchus as a scientific method for tossing out the rotten opinions and preserving the good ones in another person is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the elenchus as Socrates himself presents it here. Socrates makes clear that his questioning

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20 Socrates hints at the problem in his account of Zalmoxian medicine, stating that a drug must accompany any incantation. The elenchus may be necessary, but it is by no means sufficient. For more on this point, see Coolidge 1993, also Bruell 1977.148–49.

21 McKim 1989.60 takes the *Charmides* to be a criticism of Socratic elenchus, showing that "Socratic dialectic is . . . an ultimately inadequate mode of philosophy."

procedure is not simply an abstract method that shows the inconsistency of a set of beliefs or propositions. For Socrates has asked questions appropriate for Charmides the individual, for example, in choosing to cite Homer and to engage Critias in an examination that refutes a Socratic-sounding thesis. In addition, Socrates closely links character and the state of one's soul to one's perceptions of virtue, and even suggests a potential gap between one's perceptions and one's ability to articulate them. There is no guarantee that the person being questioned will even see the link between an inability to articulate a definition and a lack in his own soul, but this is not the failure of the elenchus per se but rather the failure—all too common—of an interlocutor to acknowledge his inadequacy. We should note, however, that this is not a problem for Charmides; he readily abandons his definitions and, in fact, seems a little bit too eager to rely upon others as a result of his belief in his own inadequacy.

Commentators who suggest that certain character traits are necessary for the elenchus to be effective are on the right path. But what are these conditions in particular? While I agree with Hyland that the Socratic elenchus is not designed to teach but only to draw out what is already within a person, it seems to be an overstatement to say (as Hyland does) that the *Charmides* shows that one must already be virtuous by nature in order for the elenchus to be effective (Hyland 1981.147). For then it is difficult to explain why Socrates engages in questioning Charmides about σωφροσύνη in the first place if he already believes that Charmides is immoderate and cannot benefit from the elenchus.

Moreover, as I argue above, Charmides seems to undergo a change during the course of the conversation, from attending to his own beliefs to then turning over the problem to others; this shift in attitude needs explanation. Schmid is right to say that a general commitment to rationality is crucial here, but Charmides does seem to have at least a general, though perhaps not deep, commitment to reason at the beginning of the dialogue. Not only does he undertake the discussion willingly, out of a genuine interest to know whether he is moderate, but his deep disappointment that Critias and Socrates seem not to understand the nature of σωφροσύνη indicates how invested he is in his belief that *someone* can give a rational account of moral matters. So it would seem that even a general interest in self-knowledge and rational inquiry is still insufficient for elenchic progress. Griswold is right to say that reliance upon one's own beliefs along with a concern for autonomy and reason are the necessary elements of good

philosophical discourse; these elements are explicitly emphasized in the *Charmides* as well.[22] However, Charmides' second definition *does* seem to reflect genuine reliance upon his own beliefs. The pressing question in this dialogue is why Charmides suffers a loss of faith in his ability to rely upon his own beliefs in the course of the conversation.

As Plato presents them, the choices available to Charmides by the time he has seen Critias's definition taken apart seem entirely tragic. Complete knowledge seems impossible, relying upon others seems not only arbitrary but also dangerous, and skepticism seems to eliminate the possibility of the moral life as well. Ordinary life demands that we seek knowledge in order to address the concrete problems of life—from the relatively minor inconvenience of a chronic headache to the larger questions of political rule implicit in the dialogue. However, the state of human knowledge is, by its nature, always to be incomplete. Additionally, even if some individuals have a better understanding of certain issues than others, just what another knows or does not know is difficult to identify. Socrates cannot even guarantee that the pursuit of philosophical questioning will produce knowledge in the end. Plato is acutely sensitive to the potentially tragic element of the human situation with respect to knowledge.

Still the situation might not be as bleak as it first appears. For we do have some indication of how Socrates, at least, wants Charmides to respond to his philosophical frustration. If we return once again to what Socrates asks of Charmides the first time that he fails to come up with an adequate definition of σωφροσύνη—"apply your mind more and look into yourself . . . say well and courageously what it appears to you to be" (160d6–e1)—a fourth possibility emerges. Charmides might very well resume the philosophical inquiry even if he has no expectation of discovering the final definition or understanding of σωφροσύνη. While Charmides sees philosophical inquiry as valuable only if someone at the end of the day's discussion is going to have a complete answer to the question at hand, another possibility is that Charmides could progress in his understanding of ethical

22 This again illustrates the differences in the use of the elenchus in different dialogues. The problem of the *Protagoras* is that Protagoras there seems completely uncommitted to reason as such, favoring other values such as reputation and wealth, while Charmides' inability to commit himself to reason stems from a deeper misunderstanding of the very nature of knowledge and expertise.

matters without ever expecting to reach a final and complete understanding. In fact, one could understand philosophical moderation to consist of precisely this, an acknowledgment of the in-between state of the human being with respect to knowledge.[23] We as human beings neither know completely the nature of the virtues nor are we in a state of complete ignorance.

The temptation, to which Charmides succumbs, is to think in an either/or manner about knowledge. Clearly, Charmides does not already have a simple insight into the idea of σωφροσύνη; if it is in him, he cannot quite seem to locate it. Simple reliance upon his own ideas in isolation from the elenchic examination of Socrates would be an extreme that Charmides would well avoid. But there is the possibility of going to the other extreme as well: Charmides rejects the very possibility that his own reflections or self can be a source of philosophical progress. The moment that Socrates suggests that Charmides has failed to give an adequate definition, Charmides leaves behind the possibility that he might have any insight into the truth—rather than keeping on in the quest, as Socrates suggests that he should. Charmides abandons himself as a source of potential knowledge (or at least improved belief) and turns entirely to others as the source for his beliefs. However, despite the fact that Socrates knows that Charmides does not have an adequate understanding of σωφροσύνη, he nonetheless wants Charmides to explore it further, to go on in his inquiries. This suggests that Socrates does not see Charmides as being in either a state of complete ignorance or complete knowledge.

After all, Charmides' definitions were not shown to be entirely inappropriate: even if σωφροσύνη is not reducible to quietness in certain activities, nonetheless it might be true that some activities are most beautiful and noble if done quietly. Socrates never argued that Charmides lacked the truth altogether, only that his definition was inadequate. The Homeric quotation used to defeat the second definition did not prove that a sense of shame was bad, only that an exploration of the nature of αἰδώς itself and the conditions under which it is and is not appropriate is also necessary. By the time Critias and Socrates argue, Charmides has made more progress than he thinks that he has made, even given a relatively short conversation. Between

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23 Hyland 1981 describes σωφροσύνη in a similar way as "responsive openness." While I agree that a *consequence* of being moderate would be being open and questioning in this way, I claim that the root of the problem is fundamentally an epistemological one: Charmides views knowledge itself as an all-or-nothing accomplishment.

the overconfidence of easy reliance upon one's own or others' beliefs apart from reason or the despair of believing knowledge to be impossible is a kind of philosophical σωφροσύνη or moderation.[24] Socrates calls upon Charmides to have the courage to acknowledge his ignorance or lack of complete understanding, together with a commitment to care for and seek the truth despite this lack. Similarly, philosophical σωφροσύνη includes an acknowledgement of the fundamental μεταξύ or in-between nature of human inquiry, so beautifully presented elsewhere in the dialogues.[25]

By the conclusion of the dialogue, Charmides lacks this orientation towards all human knowledge as being "in between" ignorance and complete knowledge. Rather, he seems to think of himself as wholly ignorant, while pretending (even to himself) that Critias has complete knowledge. One wonders if Charmides' obedience of Critias is even greater now than prior to this encounter with Socrates. For when Critias asks whether Charmides will be willing to submit to Socrates' incantation, Charmides replies, "You can count on me to follow . . . and not to abandon him [Socrates]. For I would be doing something terrible if I wouldn't obey you, my guardian, and do what you bid me" (176c1–2). Charmides is willing to submit absolutely to whatever Critias says, without questioning. Moreover, when Socrates asks whether he can protest their decision, Charmides claims that he will use force against Socrates, if need be, again if Critias so commands him. The conclusion of the dialogue implies that both Charmides and Critias will prefer force (βία) rather than counsel (βουλή) in making their decisions more generally. The dialogue ends with Charmides choosing blind obedience over philosophical inquiry, even if this leads to violence. Charmides seems even worse off now than before the conversation began. Charmides lacks philosophical courage on account of his false view of the nature of human knowledge. While the elenchus can provide an intellectual recognition of the knowledge of ignorance, it cannot take the further step of inspiring a readiness for philosophical inquiry. An understanding of the in-between state of human wisdom is necessary as well. The *Charmides* does not represent a failure of the elenchus but rather the difficulty for any

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24 Of course, I do not mean to imply that this explanation of philosophical σωφροσύνη is sufficient for understanding the nature of σωφροσύνη more generally in the dialogue.

25 E.g., in myths such as the cave analogy in the *Republic,* the image of the chariot in the *Phaedrus*, and the ascent passage of the *Symposium*.

individual to recognize and live in the in-between state that is characteristic of human knowledge.[26]

Boston College

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