

Copyright

by

Laura Rabinowitz

2014

**The Dissertation Committee for Laura Rabinowitz
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

Harmony of City and Soul: Plato and the Classical Virtue of Moderation

Committee:

Lorraine Pangle, Co-Supervisor

Devin Stauffer, Co-Supervisor

Thomas Pangle

Gary Jacobsohn

Sharon Krause

Harmony of City and Soul: Plato and the Classical Virtue of Moderation

by

Laura Rabinowitz, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2014

Harmony of City and Soul: Plato and the Classical Virtue of Moderation

Laura Rabinowitz, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisors: Lorraine Pangle and Devin Stauffer

This study examines and defends moderation as a moral, political, and philosophic virtue. I argue that modern political theory, despite its success in curbing certain excesses, is unable to account fully for our contemporary struggles with immoderation because it fails to treat moderation as a holistic virtue. To address this theoretical deficit, and to recover the unity of a virtue that has become fragmented and neglected in our age, I turn to the treatment of moderation found in Plato's *Charmides* and *Republic*—the two dialogues in which Socrates asks and answers the question: what is moderation? I argue that Plato's *Charmides* is not an early dialogue to be left behind as we move on to the *Republic*. Rather, it is through the interplay between the two dialogues that a full picture of moderation as a harmony of the city and soul emerges.

Lessons learned from the *Charmides* must be remembered in order to temper the utopian ambitions inspired by Plato's *Republic*. Moderating our own hopes for a world in which reason reigns, we see the need for cultivating both self and civic restraint in the absence of a perfectly harmonious whole. Nevertheless, moderation in the form of a genuine harmony orchestrated by reason remains a model of excellence, best embodied by Socrates himself. Understanding moderation in this light, we can see most clearly the sources in human nature of what Plato's Socrates calls the “many limbs” of immoderation, from hedonism to tyranny. More important, in understanding Socratic moderation we recover a compelling vision of the virtue.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: CHARMIDES	32
CHAPTER 2: CRITIAS	76
CHAPTER 3: MODERATION IN PLATO’S REPUBLIC	138
CHAPTER 4: HARMONY OF CITY AND SOUL	187
CONCLUSION	213
BIBLIOGRAPHY	221

INTRODUCTION

A Contemporary Case for Recovering the Classical Account of Moderation

The primary aim of this dissertation is to recover an understanding of moderation, or *sōphrosunē*, as a classical virtue in all its complexity. Although moderation does not always play a prominent role in contemporary moral and political discourse, it is still a virtue necessary for citizens of a liberal democracy. Moreover, since moderation does not spring naturally from the soil of humanity, but requires careful cultivation, it is especially in need of our attention. As one of the central virtues of classical thought, moderation receives sustained consideration by the greatest political philosophers of antiquity. But above all, it was Plato who canonized moderation's place in the tetrad of cardinal virtues—wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation—and it is in his writings that we find the most developed presentation of the virtue.¹

As will be discussed further below, *sōphrosunē* has a breadth and depth of meaning that our contemporary use of “moderation” or “temperance” fails to capture. Edith Hamilton describes the matter well when she says, “The truth is that this quality,

¹ As classicist Helen North argues, “Plato contributed more generously to the development of *sophrosyne* than did any other writer of any period.” Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*, *Cornell Studies in Classical Philology* 35 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 151.

this *sōphrosunē*, which to the Greeks was an ideal second to none in importance, is not among our ideals. We have lost the conception of it.”² While a full account of how we have moved from the classical concept of *sōphrosunē* to today’s understanding of moderation is beyond the scope of this study, my limited purpose in this introduction is to highlight a pivotal transformation that can be seen in the meaning of moderation from the ancient to the early modern period. This transformation has emphasized a part of what the ancients understood by moderation—but only a part. Seeing the change moderation undergoes in modern political thought will help explain how we have arrived at the strange position we find ourselves in today, having achieved one sense of moderation at the expense of another.

Moderation’s Place in Modernity

One important sense of *immoderation* is religious and political extremism. Many prominent early modern political philosophers saw this as the most dangerous form of the vice, and so were most concerned with the form of the virtue that would resist it. Measured by the standard of preventing religious and political extremism, it cannot be denied that the modern project has been in large part a success. At least today within the United States, where that movement has exercised so much of its influence, the poles of

² Quoted in W. Thomas Schmid, *Plato’s Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 20.

our political and religious divisions exist within a relatively circumscribed and peaceful sphere.³

The theoretical foundations of this conception of moderation can be seen in the writings of some of the most influential early modern political philosophers. Both Thomas Hobbes and Montesquieu attempted to cultivate moderation in individuals largely as a means to achieving this kind of widespread political and religious moderation, the ending of civil and religious strife for the sake of security and prosperity. The success of their attempts depended in large part upon the ability to redirect much of human passion and competition away from the factious and violent realm of political and religious struggle and toward more sober and mundane goods and goals. This redirection was achieved in large part through an emphasis placed upon the ameliorative effects of commerce. Nevertheless, while a large degree of moderation on this grand political and religious scale has been achieved, especially as capitalism and acquisitiveness have taken on a life of their own, we find ourselves facing a problematic increase of immoderation within the private realm. Human desire being a many-headed Hydra, the attempt of the moderns to lop off what may be its most dangerous heads has led to the growth of others.

But what place, exactly, was moderation intended to have in modern life? Modern liberalism differs radically from the classical tradition insofar as it rejects the exercise of

³ See, for example, Stephen Macedo, "Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion: Defending the Moderate Hegemony of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 26 (1998).

virtue as the proper end of a polity. But it still requires that its citizens possess certain virtues as the means to the ends that the state rightfully pursues: security, comfort, and freedom. Thus one can find even within the work of Hobbes, the great debunker of classical virtue and the philosophic precursor of liberalism, a recognition of the importance of certain virtues and an attempt to inculcate them.⁴ Hobbes' teaching on the need for a new morality is most evident in his articulation of the laws of nature. Although the first of Hobbes' laws of nature are fairly straightforward (first, seek peace; second, be willing to form contracts toward that end), they become more didactic as the list proceeds. And while all the laws of nature derive their legitimacy from the single aim that Hobbes regards as legitimate, namely the need for self-preservation, one begins to see that many more natural laws are needed to channel and tame the less peaceful passions so as to make them accord with this end. We find, for example, that the laws of nature exhort us to be grateful, complaisant, and forgiving, as well as to avoid contumely, pride,

⁴ For all his infamously illiberal theories, such as the absolute right of the sovereign, Hobbes can be credited with paving the way toward liberalism insofar as we find within his thought the emergence and defense of the primacy of individual rights, a development crucial to the political and moral outlook that welcomes the liberal view of the state. The basis of the Hobbesian state is, after all, the consent of individuals. Its purpose is to protect their rights and ensure, above all, their security, while allowing as much freedom as possible. For a more thorough discussion of Hobbes' liberalism, see J. Judd Owen, "The Tolerant Leviathan: Hobbes and the Paradox of Liberalism," *Polity* 73, 1 (2005): 130-148.

and arrogance. Indeed, they even forbid drunkenness and other forms of intemperance that might lead to our destruction.⁵

Thus, on Hobbes' account, moderation includes a form of private temperance. But even the other natural laws mentioned above could be seen as falling under the umbrella of a new kind of moderation. As Peter Hayes argues, Hobbes, with his "bourgeois moderation," aims to create a "new social order...that depends upon the mutual observance of moderate behavior."⁶ To this end, Hobbes' natural laws "provide precepts of behavior in civil society that form the social equivalent of private temperance."⁷ Hayes does not go so far as to say that private temperance is actually achieved, for, as he explains, Hobbes' concern is not so much how we feel as how we act. We can be as inwardly proud or greedy as we want, so long as we realize that it is worthwhile to restrain ourselves when doing so serves the long-term interest of civil order. Hayes argues, "This calculated split between belief and behavior takes selfishness beyond ruthless competition to become a form of enlightened self-interest that looks to long-term consequences and reciprocal benefits."⁸ But what is important to note is that contrary to classical notions of the virtue, here no emphasis is placed upon moderation as the

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), I.xv.

⁶ Peter Hayes, "Hobbes's Bourgeois Moderation," *Polity* 31 (1998): 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

achievement of harmony between reason and appetite within the soul. Moderate behavior, far from being the expression of desire that has been tempered through and through, is simply an instance of pragmatic restraint.

If one can discern the beginnings of a distinctly modern understanding of moderation in liberalism's great precursor Hobbes, it is even more explicit in those more traditionally recognized as liberalism's defenders. Most notable is the understanding of moderation found in the work of Montesquieu. As we will see below, Montesquieu's emphasis upon the spirit of commerce brings to light a form of individual moderation that is akin to Hobbes' understanding.⁹ Along with commerce, the virtue of moderation comes to play an especially prominent role in the work of Montesquieu, who provides the bridge to our contemporary situation insofar as he was of great influence upon the founders. As Thomas Pangle notes in *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, "no moral virtue receives such regular and oft-repeated praise from the *Federalist* [as moderation]; and no virtue had been accorded an equal importance in the *Spirit of the Laws*, the work to which the new Publius refers more often than to any other."¹⁰

⁹ Along similar lines, Radasanu describes Montesquieu's moderation as "Machiavellian." See Andrea Radasanu, "Montesquieu on Moderation, Monarchy and Reform," *History of Political Thought* 3, 2 (2010): 288.

¹⁰ Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 89.

Several scholars have noted that the role and importance of moderation in Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* evolves and grows as the work progresses.¹¹ Moderation first appears as the principle of aristocratic republics: an ability of the ruling class to exercise the enlightened self-restraint required to hide rather than flaunt their superiority over the populace: "modesty and simplicity of manners are the strength of nobles in an aristocracy."¹² Initially nothing more than the defining principle of aristocratic republics, moderation becomes the defining trait of all non-despotic, i.e. superior, political systems.¹³ The connection between these two uses of the term "moderation" can be seen, as Pangle explains, when one considers the need for all governments to restrain themselves from harming their citizens' security.¹⁴ But, as Montesquieu argues, more effective than the restraint and moderation exercised by aristocrats are the safeguards provided by governmental checks and balances.¹⁵ Thus, in Craiutu's words, we find in Montesquieu's thought a completion of "the transition from

¹¹ See, for example, Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 90 and Aurelian Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748-1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), Chapter 2.

¹² Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Cohler et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.4 and 5.8. See Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 89-90.

¹³ See Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 3.9-10. On this point see Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 90 and Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*, 40.

¹⁴ Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 90.

¹⁵ Ibid.

[moderation as] character trait to a fundamental constitutional principle.”¹⁶ When it comes to moderation in citizens themselves, that can be achieved through the “spirit of commerce,” which goes hand in hand with a concern for property rights and thereby for security.¹⁷ “The spirit of commerce,” Montesquieu argues, “brings with it that of frugality, economy, moderation, work, prudence, tranquility, order and regulation.”¹⁸

It is this Montesquieuian spirit of moderation that most influenced the American founders, who viewed the individual virtue “not so much as a divine or noble and graceful coordination of appetite with reason for its own sake, but rather the enlightened, calm, and prudent pursuit of security and ease...”¹⁹ Moderation in this sense, along with

¹⁶ For an especially illuminating discussion of moderation as the virtue of political institutions, see Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*, Chapter 2. Craiutu notes that “What makes Montesquieu’s case interesting for us is that he no longer regarded moderation primarily as an exclusive virtue of well-ordered souls (a prominent theme in classical political philosophy, beginning with Plato), but as an essential feature of a certain type of government, that is, a *moderate government*.” It is worth noting that Montesquieu uses the very notion of harmony emphasized by Plato to describe a moderate form of government (on this point see Craiutu, 38-39 and 48-49). But it is precisely Montesquieu’s relative neglect of moderation as a virtue of well-ordered souls that makes him of particular interest to us.

¹⁷ Ibid., 90.

¹⁸ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 5.6. Superseding the moderation possessed both by aristocratic regimes and by all forms of good government is the “moderation” possessed by the law-giver. For Montesquieu, moderation as the spirit of the lawgiver comes to mean something closer to prudential reasoning in the service of the modern ends of the state: security and protection of property. The moderate lawgiver possesses the ability to overlook the necessities of a strict justice in favor of the ends of property and security (Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 91).

¹⁹ Pangle, *Modern Republicanism*, 92. See also Radasanu, “Montesquieu on Moderation,” 288: “Montesquieu works to undercut traditional notions of moderation that call to mind

its co-worker commerce, both work toward softening political and religious fanaticism, furthering the project begun by Hobbes. But what is essential to see is the subtle transformation in the meaning of moderation that is achieved by this attempt to rein in our more fanatical passions. The understanding of moderation as the curbing of moral indignation and fervor in favor of complaisance and a willingness to get along for the sake of a shared interest in security begins to overshadow moderation in the sense of temperance, or self-restraint with regard to our desire for more.²⁰ Thus, there arises a splitting of the virtue between moderation understood as a softening of moral indignation or a tempering of fanaticism, and moderation understood as temperance or frugality.²¹ In addition, we find an emphasis upon the external manifestations of moderation as opposed to the internal possession of it. Finally, to the extent that any form of this virtue is encouraged, it is viewed not as an end in itself, but as desirable only insofar as it promotes the security and prosperity of the individual and of the nation.

continence and the ordering of the passions for the sake of living a good life. He wants to reclaim moderation for modern political philosophy and must redefine it in order to achieve his end.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Pangle (*Modern Republicanism*, 92) notes that this fracturing of the virtue is illustrated in Benjamin Franklin’s articulation of virtues in his autobiography. He lists temperance, frugality, and moderation all as distinct virtues, with moderation requiring that one “avoid extremes” and “forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.” See Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 103.

Moderation Today

In light of the modern re-conception of moderation, I would argue that while we have achieved within the U.S. a large degree of moderation when it comes to political extremism and religious fanaticism, the other sides to this virtue, temperance and frugality, have seen better days. The unleashing of acquisitiveness and redirection of the passions from otherworldly aspirations to the commercial goods of the here and now has led to troubling excesses in the private realm, the results of which are beginning to create political consequences and concerns of their own. The neglect of these other meanings of moderation has proven to be—contrary to the vision of the early moderns—politically problematic.

There is, in fact, a growing concern about our lack of moderation, a concern that can be seen in an increased awareness of the need for self-restraint. But before detailing some of these concerns, it is important to note that they are rarely discussed using the moral language of moderation; despite the fact that we need a fuller awareness and possession of this virtue, we are strangely loath to talk about it. This fits, of course, with the more general contemporary aversion to speak of virtue at all. Peter Berkowitz, in his work *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*, describes the way in which contemporary liberalism stands in a somewhat awkward position relative to virtue: “Despite the groundswell of enthusiasm for the study and practice of virtue, the mere

mention of the term still causes acute discomfort for many.”²² As Berkowitz explains, whether it conjures up “prudish nineteenth century Victorian morality” or the “musty metaphysical doctrines associated with Aristotle and Aquinas,” “virtue” just isn’t a word that sits easily with us.²³

This general aversion to virtue is especially conspicuous when it comes to moderation, and can be seen by surveying some of our most prominent contemporary political problems.²⁴ On the most obvious level of temperance, one can note the growing concern over America’s obesity epidemic which, with childhood obesity rates tripling over the past three decades, is likely to be one of the biggest burdens on future health care costs.²⁵ Such concerns have prompted Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign, an attempt to combat childhood obesity, the stakes of which she takes to be “the physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation.”²⁶ Mrs. Obama’s proposed solution, which is by no means a bad one, is to try to

²² Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), x.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Linda Rabieh makes this same case regarding the virtue of courage. See Linda Rabieh, *Plato and the Virtue of Courage* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 19.

²⁵ Obesity has been recently identified as one of the “top three social burdens generated by human beings.” See Richard Dobbs et al., “How the world could better fight obesity,” *McKinsey & Company*, http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/economic_studies/how_the_world_could_better_fight_obesity.

²⁶ “Let’s Move.” <http://www.letsmove.gov/>.

get youth exercising more, eating healthier foods, making smarter choices, and establishing better habits. What is striking about reading her descriptions of this problem and how to fix it, however, is that while she points again and again to the fact of sheer excess and overindulgence, there is notably little said to suggest that what we might really need to cultivate is a capacity for restraint, and even less direction as to how that might be accomplished.²⁷ At no point does either the vice of immoderation or the virtue of moderation arise in any explicit manner. Nevertheless, moderation is clearly a significant part of what the problem requires.²⁸

In addition to the need for moderation with regard to our eating habits, there is the need for moderation when it comes to our spending habits—a need that often sits in

²⁷ Michelle Obama's campaign at least encourages a kind of habituation that lends itself to moderation. More questionable are the long-term results of our most scientifically advanced solution to curbing the childhood obesity epidemic: weight loss surgery. The *New York Times* article "Young, Obese and in Surgery," follows the experience of a young woman who undergoes laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding. Afraid she will prove unable to follow the eating regimen that must accompany her procedure, the woman is told by her doctor, "The key is moderation." She replies, unsurprisingly, "I'm not good at moderation." Here the necessity of moderation is recognized, and yet no guidance is available for how to achieve it. See Anemona Hartocollis, "Young, Obese and in Surgery," *New York Times*, January 7, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/health/young-obese-and-getting-weight-loss-surgery.html>.

²⁸ It is important to stress that moderation alone is not a complete solution to this multifaceted problem, but simply that it is a critical *part* of the solution. As stated in a recent McKinsey Global Institute report, "Education and personal responsibility are critical elements of any program aiming to reduce obesity, but they are not sufficient on their own." See Richard Dobbs et al., "How the world could better fight obesity," *McKinsey & Company*, http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/economic_studies/how_the_world_could_better_fight_obesity.

uneasy tension with the early modern emphasis upon the acquisitiveness that drives capitalism. In William Galston's work *Liberal Purposes*, he discusses what he calls the "liberal virtues," among which is moderation. As Galston argues, modern market economies must strike a balance:

...between ascetic self-denial and untrammelled self-indulgence... For although market economies rely upon the liberation and multiplication of consumer desires, they cannot prosper in the long run without a certain level of saving, which rests on the ability to subordinate immediate gratification to longer-run self interest.²⁹

For evidence that we lack the moderation necessary to strike this kind of balance, one need only consider the financial collapse brought on by the housing crisis, not to mention our inordinate national debt. We know neither as individuals nor as a nation how to restrain our desire for more, what the ancients referred to as *pleonexia*, a lack of restraint that is ultimately unsustainable.³⁰

The result is often political rhetoric that sidesteps the true problem. For example, President Obama, in a speech regarding the deficit, notes the tough choices that have to be made to reduce it, and the inconvenient fact that "most Americans tend to dislike government spending in the abstract, but like the stuff that it buys."³¹ He does not, however, go so far as to suggest that we might need to restrain or moderate our desire for

²⁹ William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 223.

³⁰ Compare Sophie Bourgault, "Prolegomena to a rehabilitation of Platonic moderation," *Dissensus* 5 (2013): 122-123.

³¹ "President Obama's Speech On Deficit Cutting," <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/13/135383045/president-obamas-speech-on-deficit-cutting>.

all that “stuff” in the first place. But if, as Galston argues, “the greatest vices of popular governments are the propensity to gratify short-term desires at the expense of long-term interests,” it is likely that the very demands we make of government are in need of moderation.³² In other words, our hopes and expectations as to what the government ought to provide too often exceed the bounds of what can reasonably be desired.

Moderation has also become a virtue of increasingly urgent importance in light of growing and global concerns about our environment. According to scientists in the Global Footprint Network, growth rates are currently rising at a pace that far outstrips the rate at which the earth’s resources can be sustainably replenished.³³ We have an obvious and escalating need for more sustainable practices. It is thus unsurprising that thinkers concerned with environmental issues have identified moderation as a critical virtue. For instance, in his work *Rethinking Green Politics: Nature, Virtue and Progress*, John Barry gives moderation a place of high rank among the virtues that will be necessary for a new and more ecological morality. According to Barry, “In line with the classical view, green political economy holds that temperance and the avoidance of excess are virtues....”³⁴ While finding the excessively consumer driven model of economy problematic, he does not insist upon ascetic self-denial or the condemnation of consumption wholesale. Barry

³² Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, 224.

³³ See Thomas Friedman, “The Earth is Full,” http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/08/opinion/08friedman.html?_r=2&ref=opinion.

³⁴ John Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics: Nature, Virtue and Progress* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 164.

recognizes the benefits of consumption, including, in a Montesquieuan spirit, its “‘civilizing’ effects.”³⁵ The alternative to the status quo, he argues, “is not the abolition of consumption and the benefits derived from it, but rather the integration of consumption with production on the basis of self-reliance and moderation.”³⁶ But how do we, as individuals and as a nation, achieve this moderation?

In sum, we see in these instances of national and even global concern reasons to pay more attention to the virtue of moderation, and particularly to seek out a wider and richer notion of moderation than that to which we have become accustomed. The questions of how to teach our children self-restraint, of how to curb the human desire for more, of how to stop ourselves from placing unreasonable hopes and demands upon our government and even upon the planet we inhabit, are not easy questions to answer.³⁷ If it is true that moderation is a virtue we will need more of in times to come, then we need a better understanding not only of what exactly it entails, but also of how it can be achieved. Moreover, for those of us who are skeptical as to the goodness of this virtue, we need an argument as to why it should be desired, both by individuals and the community. For these reasons, I believe there is much to be gained by turning to the sustained study of moderation offered to us within classical political thought and especially the philosophy of Plato. Plato provides an account of the virtue unprecedented

³⁵ Ibid., 182.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For a significant contribution to offering a Platonic perspective on these issues see Bourgault “Prolegomena,” 137 ff.

in his time and unsurpassed in ours. Through his thought we might recover a sense of the unity and depth of the virtue of moderation that has been lost. And as we will see, just as we live in a time in which the virtue of moderation seems in need of a revival and defense, so too did Plato. In coming to understand the case he made for moderation against a growing current of immoderation, we may find the guidance we need to re-evaluate and recover moderation for ourselves.

Study of Moderation in the Context of Classical Political Thought

Although there is no shortage of scholarship on Plato and even a recent spate of work on the virtue of moderation, when it comes to the combination of the two—a study of moderation in Plato—there is a surprising gap in the literature.³⁸ To begin with the second half of this equation, my study aims to complement a body of scholarship on moderation by providing a study of this virtue in Plato’s thought. Significant works on moderation include Aurelian Craiutu’s *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*, Harry Clor’s *On Moderation: Recovering an Ancient Virtue in a Modern World*, and Helen North’s *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*.

³⁸ This recent increase of interest in moderation follows a long period of neglect. On this point see Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*, 16.

Craiutu's book provides a fascinating study of moderation in French political thought from 1748-1830, particularly as a virtue of institutional and constitutional arrangements. He touches in an opening chapter on moderation in classical thought, recognizing its importance there, but looks for the most part to Aristotle rather than Plato.³⁹ Indeed, scholars often turn to Aristotle for a discussion of moderation because of his doctrine of the mean. But when it comes to the actual virtue of *sōphrosunē* (as I will discuss further below), Aristotle gives a surprisingly limited account, one that lacks the scope of Plato's treatment of the virtue. Moreover, Craiutu, in looking at moderation in modern thought, studies authors who "follow a trajectory away from an emphasis on moderation as a personal trait to a view of moderation as a virtue that inheres within political institutions and institutional arrangements."⁴⁰ My study by contrast stresses the importance, precisely because of this modern trajectory, of rediscovering a robust notion of moderation as a personal trait, or individual virtue. In doing so I aim to complement Craiutu's ultimate goal of rediscovering what he calls the "lost archipelago" of moderation, providing a more holistic view of the virtue as found in Plato's thought.⁴¹

North's work presents an impressively thorough, if compendious, account of what appears to be nearly every significant mention of the virtue, by name and by implication,

³⁹ Ibid., 20-26.

⁴⁰ Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds*, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1 and 238: "Political moderation forms a distinct and diverse tradition of thought, resembling an *archipelago* consisting of various 'islands' that represent a wide array of ideas and modes of argument and action, an archipelago whose precise contours are yet to be discovered and fully appreciated by political theorists."

from the heroic and archaic periods to its use in patristic literature. On the whole, she has created a tremendous resource for anyone studying moderation. But her treatment of Plato, to which she devotes only a chapter, is by her own admission limited in its depth (with, for example, only eight pages on the whole of the *Republic*). In addition to expanding greatly upon North's treatment of Plato, my interpretation of his dialogues diverges significantly from hers, which depends heavily upon an interpretation of his purported early works as being more under the influence of Socrates than his purported later works. North's study, for all its virtues, fails to capture the complexity and richness of Plato's teaching on moderation.

In the spirit with which it explores and defends moderation, Clor's work is closest to my own. His book offers a study of moderation as a political, personal, and philosophic virtue. On the whole, Clor provides an illuminating exposition and defense of the virtue for a contemporary audience, one with which I am largely in agreement. But Clor for the most part avoids close textual analysis of philosophical sources. Moreover, despite the suggestion of his title, Clor does not actually provide any extended analysis of the virtue as understood by the ancients. Insofar as he touches upon classical accounts of the virtue, his focus is (along with Craiutu's) primarily on Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Without noting Aristotle's strikingly narrow definition of *sōphrosunē*, Clor argues that "we can plausibly say that every Aristotelian virtue is a form of moderation." Thus, he views Aristotle as providing a "comprehensive view of what moderation means," in

contrast to “the narrower or more limited mode of definition” found in Plato’s *Republic*.⁴² My study aims to show, contrary to this impression, that a more comprehensive view may be found in Plato’s thought. Although Clor’s work greatly complements mine, there is little overlap between our two studies as Clor is not primarily interested in Plato’s specific teaching on the virtue.

Just as those who study moderation have yet to provide an extended study of the virtue as it is explored in Plato, so too have political theorists who study Plato largely failed to provide an extended study of the virtue in his work. One recent exception is Sophie Bourgault, who makes an insightful and persuasive case for the importance of studying Platonic moderation in her essay: “Prolegomena to a rehabilitation of Platonic moderation.” As Bourgault explains, “Apart from a few articles devoted to the early dialogue *Charmides*, there has not been any sustained study of Platonic moderation in political theory.”⁴³ “And yet,” Bourgault continues:

Ernest Barker considers *sophrosyne* to be “the motive of the whole State in the *Laws*,” Leo Strauss sums up the entire *Republic* as “an act of moderation,” Werner Jaeger regards moderation as the focal point of Plato’s *paideia*, Hannah Arendt refers to it as “one of the political virtues par excellence,” and R. F. Stalley insists that *sophrosyne* is “the *raison d’être*” of all institutions described in the *Laws*.⁴⁴

⁴² Harry Clor, *On Moderation: Defending an Ancient Virtue in a Modern World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 26-27.

⁴³ Bourgault, “Prolegomena,” 123.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Bourgault provides a perceptive explanation for this surprising coincidence of recognition and neglect. In general, her article is a superb introduction to the virtue in Plato's thought, and I am for the most part in agreement with her reading of the virtue. But "Prolegomena to a rehabilitation of Platonic moderation," is, as the title admits, only a beginning.

Further progress in understanding Platonic moderation has been made recently by Benjamin Lorch in his essay "The Choice of Lives and the Virtue of Moderation."⁴⁵ In this thoughtful study Lorch focuses on the problem of moral weakness or *akrasia*, examining moderation in Book IV of the *Republic*. Lorch carefully draws out the tension between moderation understood as mastery and moderation understood as harmony. But in addition to providing a more comprehensive treatment of moderation, I ultimately disagree with Lorch's analysis of Book IV's definitions, providing an alternate reading of moderation in the *Republic*.

In sum, what all the above works inspire but fail to provide is a sustained analysis of Plato's philosophic presentation of moderation. Before going into the specifics of my focus on Plato, I would like to make a few general remarks about the core questions driving my study of *sōphrosunē* in Plato's thought, questions that I believe have been left open by the extant work done on moderation.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Lorch, "The Choice of Lives and the Virtue of Moderation," *Interpretation* 39/3 (2012): 235-252.

What is Sōphrosunē?

The question of what *sōphrosunē* is, while seemingly simple, is not easy to answer. As the discussion above illustrates, “moderation” in its modern and contemporary uses has a variety of meanings. In ordinary discourse, moderation is often understood as the avoidance of extremes. Indeed, this understanding is nothing new. As the inscription at the temple of Apollo at Delphi reads, “*mēden agan*” (nothing in excess). But while this is surely part of what moderation means, to have it stand for the whole would be misleadingly simple. If it were true, one might be inclined to conclude, “everything in moderation, moderation included.” But one could argue, as Aristotle’s account of the virtues makes clear, that there is no excess to avoid in the case of the virtues themselves. All of Aristotle’s virtues point toward a mean, understood not simply as a middle point or quantity (as 3 would be between 1 and 5), but rather to the proper amount of something as established by right reason (which could very well be closer to one extreme than the other).

If one of the primary meanings of *sōphrosunē* in the classical context is the ability to have one’s desire, especially one’s desire for pleasure, be in accord with reason, then it is not necessarily the case that to be *sophron* would be to engage in all pleasures in some middling way.⁴⁶ For example, as Socrates suggests at the end of Book One of

⁴⁶ “But not every action admits of a mean condition, nor does every feeling, for some of them as soon as they are named are understood as having baseness involved with them, such as joy at others’ misfortunes, shamelessness, and envy...But just as there is no excess or deficiency of [moderation] or courage, because the mean is in a certain way an extreme, so there is no mean condition or excess and deficiency of those other things, but

Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, his own moderation entails at once a near abstinence when it comes to certain pleasures and an indulgence when it comes to others.⁴⁷ Furthermore, to suggest that moderation means simply nothing in excess fundamentally fails to answer the question of what moderation is or means. For by what standard do we judge what counts as excess and what does not? In short, moderation must entail knowledge of a more guiding and determinate sort than simply an ability to size up the middle way between two apparent extremes.

The question of precisely what moderation is becomes even more complex when one considers its manifold applications. While Aristotle defines moderation narrowly, as a virtue which pertains only to the pleasures of the body (most precisely those involving touch), its meaning throughout classical thought is much more varied. Although these variations are scattered throughout Plato's works, one gets the best sense of the variety of moderation's meanings by turning to Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

however one does them one is in the wrong; in general there is no mean in excess and in deficiency, nor any excess or deficiency of the mean condition" (*Ethics* 2.6). All translations of Aristotle's *Ethics* are from *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2002).

⁴⁷ Socrates asks Antiphon, "Do you think that anything is more responsible for my not being enslaved to stomach or sleep or lust than that I have other things more pleasant than these that delight not only in their use but also by providing hopes that they will benefit always?" (*Memorabilia* I.6.8). All translations of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* are from *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy L. Bonnette (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). For a study of moderation in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* see Benjamin Lorch, "Moderation and Socratic Education in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*," *Polis* 26, 2 (2009): 185-203.

In Book One, Chapter One of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon lists seven sets of “what is” questions about which Socrates always conversed. Central in this list is the question, “What is moderation?” and moderation proves to be a central theme in the book as a whole. Its precise meaning, however, is not apparent. As Leo Strauss notes, “*sophrosyne* has a wide range of meaning extending from the high and profound moderation of a Socrates to mere self control regarding the pleasures of the body.”⁴⁸ But just what does this “profound” moderation entail and what, if any, is its connection to the “mere self control” of bodily continence? The presentation of Socrates’ virtue as nothing more than an extraordinary degree of mastery over his body stands in marked contrast to the elevated understanding of moderation that we find in Book III, where Socrates describes moderation as indistinguishable from wisdom. More puzzling still is the fact that in the first chapter of the *Memorabilia*, moderation is understood in terms of one’s proper relation toward the gods. This form of moderation is touched upon through a discussion of moderation’s contrary: madness (I.1.16). The overriding impression Xenophon gives his readers is that Socrates, by contrast to the “mad” sophists and natural philosophers, was “moderate” concerning the gods.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Leo Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004): 79.

⁴⁹ In this way, moderation first appears as part of Xenophon’s defense of Socrates against the charge of impiety. Xenophon insists that Socrates “did not converse about the nature of all things in the way most of the others did—examining what the sophists call the cosmos: how it is, and which necessities are responsible for the coming to be of each of the heavenly things” (I.1.11). Xenophon thereby distances Socrates from an activity that had come to be associated with impiety and atheism. As he goes on to explain, Socrates

As we see throughout the works of Plato and Xenophon, the most prominent of Socrates' students, this single virtue of *sōphrosunē* applies to anything from how much one eats and drinks, to one's desire for money, honor, or a beloved, to one's proper stance toward the gods, and even to wisdom itself. Can the puzzle of this vast variation in the meaning of *sōphrosunē* be chalked up to simple equivocation or a matter of "family resemblance," or is there some single thread that binds all these uses of moderation together? My study of moderation throughout Plato's dialogues aims to find what unity there may be to this virtue.

To What Extent Is Moderation Possible and How Is It Achieved?

The second question I address is to what extent moderation, tentatively and perhaps only partially defined as having one's desires in harmony with reason, is possible. In some sense and to some degree moderation is clearly possible. Most of us restrain our desires in one way or another some, if not most, of the time. But this very formulation points to the question I have in mind. To what degree is moderation, *as opposed to self-restraint*, possible? The difference between the two is outlined most clearly in Aristotle's *Ethics*. In the case of self-restraint, one's desire is fundamentally in conflict with reason, if subordinate to it, whereas to acquire the virtue of moderation is to have one's desiring come to be in harmony with reason (*Ethics* 1119b15). This seems to

thought those who engaged in these investigations were not simply foolish, but behaved like madmen.

be the great promise of moderation: an un-conflicted soul. The moderate person has no need for self-restraint for such a person does not have desires that are at odds with his or her reasoning. Moderation then would seem not to be a matter of becoming one's own master, for this would imply that there are still desires needing to be tamed, but rather a complete unity and harmony of the soul. Self-restraint is only necessary when one continues to be moved by certain pleasures that conflict with what one reasons to be good.

On this account, the very need for self-restraint seems to be a sign of one's failure to become truly virtuous, insofar as one's character remains base. Even if we are able to restrain ourselves and obey principles which have not yet become a part of our nature (*Ethics* 1152a30), or which perhaps can never become a part of our nature, we seem to remain like children repeating and obeying the words of our tutors. In some way we are still unmoved by what we tell ourselves is good. In this light, it becomes a question how reliable our ability to restrain ourselves will be, especially in the absence of shame or fear of punishment for our misbehavior. We are more likely to be unrestrained in the moment and feel regret later (1150b30). To what extent can the soul be brought into the genuine unity of reason and desire that moderation promises?

A related question is that of how one acquires moderation. In Xenophon we see reason to believe that moderation is difficult to achieve, or at the very least particularly difficult to maintain. In an attempt to explain the immoderation of Alcibiades, and ultimately Socrates' failure to teach Alcibiades moderation, Xenophon says that those

who “claim to philosophize” think that no one who has become moderate would become insolent, “nor would anyone who had learned anything else that can be learned ever lose that knowledge” (I.2.19). Xenophon, by contrast, sees that

just as those who do not practice forget verses composed in meter, so also forgetfulness occurs in those neglecting the speeches that teach. And when someone forgets the speeches that admonish, he has forgotten also what the soul experienced when it desired moderation. (I.2.21)

Just what does the soul experience when it desires moderation? And what precisely is the content of the speeches that admonish, or the knowledge by which moderation is attained? What is the role of habituation in the acquisition of this virtue, and what practice is required for moderation to be maintained?

What is the Proper Role of Moderation in Politics?

Xenophon’s need to defend Socrates on account of his failure to teach Alcibiades moderation becomes clear when one considers the political consequences that follow from a lack of the virtue. It is also especially within a political context that one sees why it is crucial to understand what kind of moderation is possible and how it can be achieved. Thus my third major question about moderation concerns its proper role in politics. Exploring this question will help us judge the place of moderation both in civic education and in political leadership. What kind of moderation do we want in our citizens and leaders, and how can we get it?

One of the best places to see the political questions surrounding moderation is in Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*. From Athens to Sparta and Alcibiades to Archidamus,

the question of the proper possession of moderation, in populations at large and especially in political leaders, is one that runs throughout Thucydides' account. The most obvious example of moderation in Thucydides' work is Sparta. Led by Archidamus, the Spartans are often taken to embody the virtue as it is conventionally understood. As Thucydides notes early in his work, the Spartans were unique in their abstention from displays of luxury, both in private and in public affairs.⁵⁰ In addition to their modesty, the character of Spartan moderation is said to consist in the calm with which they deliberate before taking action. According to Archidamus, such calm is not a sign of cowardice but rather a "wise moderation" thanks to which they "alone do not become insolent in success and give way less than others in misfortune" (1.84.1).⁵¹ But is this form of moderation truly wise? According to the Corinthians, Spartan "moderation" was exercised to the detriment of all of Greece and to Sparta herself, having allowed Athens free reign over the Hellenes.

That the Spartans possess a kind of moderation is indisputable, but their moderation, as Thucydides himself intimates, is problematic. The city has always been under a powerful compulsion to exercise moderation; even in times of peace they must remain severely disciplined and closely united, and must restrain any desire for foreign

⁵⁰ The city and its citizens were both characterized by restraint; the former "not adorned with magnificent temples and public edifices" (1.10.2), the latter the first among the Greeks to adopt the "modest style of dressing... the rich doing their best to assimilate their way of life to that of the common people" (1.6.4).

⁵¹ All translations of Thucydides are from *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Free Press, 2008).

conquest given their preoccupation with an ongoing conquest of the enslaved helots at home. Since external constraints are largely responsible for Spartan moderation, one might wonder whether they choose their moderation not because they genuinely recognize it as a worthwhile virtue, but simply because they have no other choice. The weakness of this compulsory self-restraint can be seen most glaringly in the story of Pausanias, the Spartan commander whose desire is unleashed the moment he steps outside the Spartan sphere of influence. Even in the case of ordinary citizens, Spartan moderation seems to depend upon ignorance (in Archidamus' words, they have too little learning to question the laws) along with severe military discipline and the power of shame to keep impulses in check. In Sparta we see a prime example of moderation that is the result of contingent external forces, as opposed to an internal harmony of passion and reason or a guiding knowledge possessed by its citizens.⁵²

Are there less problematic forms of moderation to be had in a city and can they be achieved in any other way? Or is severe Spartan discipline the surest way of rendering any population moderate? Moderation of a more promising sort can certainly be found in individuals in Thucydides' work. Diodotus, for example, seems to possess a form of moderation that stems from a fuller understanding of human nature than that had by either the Spartans or the rest of the Athenians. A private man who intervenes once in politics to dissuade the Athenians from lashing out in revenge against the Mytilenians, Diodotus shows a grasp of the unique interplay between hope and desire that will always

⁵² Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014): 171.

tempt humanity to act immoderately and against reason. But is the understanding of moderation possessed by individuals like Diodotus available to populations at large? And if not, what prevents it? Is there a compromise to be had between moderation as restraint grounded in habit and compulsion, and a more genuine moderation that springs from an understanding of the human condition and its limits?

Is Moderation Desirable?

The final question this dissertation addresses is that of whether moderation is truly desirable. While the notion of a harmony of the soul might have some immediate appeal, that is not to say its goodness is self-evident. As Helen North argues, the time of the Peloponnesian War marked more broadly a turning point in Greek thought away from simple praise of moderation toward a harsh critique of it.⁵³ As Thucydides tells us, moderate individuals were the first to fall victim to the violence that spread over Greece following the Corcyrean civil war. In Thucydides' account of the revolution in morality that swept across Greece in the wake of this strife, moderation ceased to be viewed as a virtue and came to be seen as a vice. As Thucydides explains, *sōphrosunē* came to be seen as nothing more than a "cloak for unmanliness" (3.82.4). The fate of moderate men ultimately serves to raise the truly radical question: Is moderation even a virtue? Not only might the moderate be seen as naively vulnerable in times of crisis, but even in times of

⁵³ Helen North, "A Period of Opposition to Sophrosyne in Greek Thought," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947): 1-17.

peace one could wonder whether they are fools for denying themselves what they desire. One need not be a hedonist to scoff at the tempering of the passions entailed in moderation. It appears unlikely that the peaks of the human experience and achievement are reached by means of half-measures and lukewarm sentiments.⁵⁴ Moderation, it seems, has always to contend with more captivating and powerful rivals.

Because of this, I turn to Plato, whose work as a whole aims to vindicate moderation in light of such challenges. Indeed, Plato himself presents critiques of moderation in dramatic form through the mouths of his characters: hostility toward moderation finds perhaps its greatest expression in Callicles' vehement attack upon self-restraint in Plato's *Gorgias*. And it is not only Plato's villains who attack moderation: Socrates himself makes yet another case against moderation in the *Phaedrus*. Having first made a speech against *eros* and in favor of moderation, in the famous Palinode Socrates makes the case for madness over and against moderation. As Socrates explains, the ancients did not believe that madness was shameful or a term for reproach. To the contrary, erotic madness is given to human beings by the gods for the greatest good fortune and as the greatest gift. In short, divine madness as a source of guidance, insight, and inspiration is far superior to human moderation. Thus, while Plato's corpus as a whole aims to vindicate moderation over madness and self-restraint over unleashed

⁵⁴ In a critique perhaps put best by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, chaos within the soul, not harmony, may be the true source of greatness: "I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1976), 129. For a similar description of challenges that can be made against moderation (including a response to Nietzsche) see Clor, *On Moderation*, 10 and 48 ff.

hedonism, he shows himself to be neither unaware of nor entirely unsympathetic to arguments that can be made against the desirability of moderation.

What then was his argument for it? This is the question I aim to answer in the following study of moderation in Plato's *Charmides* and *Republic*—the two dialogues in which Plato asks and answers the question: what is moderation? Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the *Charmides*, Plato's aporetic dialogue devoted to the virtue. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the opening books of the *Republic*, culminating in an analysis of Book IV's definition of the moderation as a harmony of the city and of the soul.

CHAPTER 1: CHARMIDES

Introduction to the Dialogue: Context and Characters⁵⁵

The *Charmides* opens in the voice of Socrates, recalling a conversation he once had with Charmides and Critias.⁵⁶ We know neither when Socrates is speaking nor to whom. There are a few textual clues as to who Socrates' addressee may or may not be. For example, from the dialogue's opening, one can gather that whoever Socrates is speaking to, he is familiar enough with Athens and Socrates' circle to understand a reference to the wrestling school of Taureas and to know who Chaerephon is. And yet he seems unfamiliar with the details of Athens' involvement in the war. There are various theories as to what kind of person might fit this profile. Christopher Bruell, for example, suggests that Socrates is addressing a foreigner who has been in Athens long enough to have become familiar with Socrates' usual haunts and companions. But it is also possible

⁵⁵ All parenthetical references in this chapter are to Plato's *Charmides*, unless otherwise noted. Translations are from *Charmides*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986) with the occasional emendation of my own.

⁵⁶ For helpful discussions of the division of Platonic dialogues between those narrated and those performed see Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 58 and Laurence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5. Other dialogues narrated by Socrates to an unknown audience include the *Republic* and *Lysis*.

that Socrates is speaking years after his conversation with Charmides took place. In this case his addressee could be a young Athenian, unfamiliar with the details of a battle that occurred before his time. Conclusions drawn from the few hints we have remain largely speculative.⁵⁷

If we can only speculate as to who this unidentified person is, doing so may miss the mark. Plato appears to have left the identity of Socrates' audience purposefully ambiguous. In writing a frameless, narrated dialogue, in which Socrates confides in the listener to a surprising degree, Plato allows the reader to begin to feel as though Socrates were speaking to him or her directly. The form of the *Charmides*, which draws one in with an intimacy unrivaled by other dialogues, seems especially well suited to its subject.⁵⁸ If all Platonic dialogues depend upon the active participation of the reader, then perhaps none more so than the *Charmides*, which ultimately encourages each individual to turn inward, in search of self-knowledge and the moderation it may bring.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Christopher Bruell, "Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge: An Interpretation of Plato's *Charmides*," *Interpretation* 6, 3 (1977): 142. For additional commentary on the unnamed addressee see Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 148-150, and 235-236, who argues that the auditor is none other than Plato. For yet another argument see Benardete, who concludes the auditor is "a Theodorus." Seth Benardete, "On Interpreting Plato's *Charmides*," in *The Argument of the Action* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 231.

⁵⁸ See Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 7 and 172-173 n.13. Schmid notes that "the *Charmides* narrative is unique in the dialogues for its interior, subjective representation of Socratic *eros*."

⁵⁹ As Jacob Klein puts it, "Usually it is not important to know how many people are listening and who they are. (In some cases it may well be.) But it is of crucial importance to realize that we, the readers, belong to them and belong to them in the sense of silently

This purposeful lack of clarity surrounding Socrates' narration stands in marked contrast to the clarity with which Plato situates the narrative itself. When it comes to the conversation Socrates recalls, there is no question as to when it happened or who it involved. The context and characters of Plato's dialogues often color their content, and this is especially so in the *Charmides*. Socrates recalls a conversation that took place during a turning point in Athenian history with two individuals who would have appeared far from neutral in readers' eyes. To appreciate fully what it means to have Critias and Charmides in a dialogue on moderation, set as Athens enters the war that will end its empire, we must take a closer look at the remarkable context and characters of the *Charmides*.

The Peloponnesian War

In the first line of the *Charmides*, Socrates recalls that he had just returned to Athens from the army camp at Potidaea. With this opening, Plato sets the stage of the *Charmides* against a backdrop of war.⁶⁰ Socrates had been in Potidaea as part of an effort early in the Peloponnesian War to crush a revolt against the Athenian empire, a siege that would continue for well over a year. By the time Socrates returned to Athens in May of

active participants.” See Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 6.

⁶⁰ I agree with Schmid that the too often neglected prologue of the *Charmides* puts in place certain themes that are of use for understanding the dialogue more generally. For a comparable study see Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, Prologue.

429 it had been hit for the first time by the plague. Among those who returned with Socrates would have been Alcibiades, who claims to owe his very survival to Socrates.⁶¹ But Socrates shows little interest in talking about Potidaea, much less the heroic acts he performed there. He is interested not in the state of things abroad with regard to the war, but in the state of things in Athens with regard to philosophy. And the virtue he will go on to discuss is not the wartime virtue of courage but rather moderation—what it is, and ultimately whether or not it is a virtue at all.

In this way the *Charmides* brings to the fore a question that is on the minds of many during this time of extremes. As discussed in our introduction, a revolution in morality swept across Greece over the course of the Peloponnesian War, one in which moderation came to be seen more as a vice than a virtue.⁶² And yet, viewed from another perspective, the war could be taken as vindicating the virtue. After all, the Spartans, known for their moderation, conquered the Athenians, known for their *pleonexia* and hubris. But as discussed above, there is an inadequacy and even ugliness to the Spartan version of moderation, a form of restraint grounded in their need to maintain an ongoing oppression of the helots. In short, the war either calls into question the virtue of moderation altogether, or vindicates a version of it that is equally questionable. The challenge of the *Charmides* will be not only to determine whether moderation is a virtue, but what form the virtue must take to be truly good.

⁶¹ See Plato's *Symposium* 220c-221c.

⁶² For a thorough account of this shift see North, "A Period of Opposition."

By the end of the Peloponnesian War, moderation itself seems to be one of its many casualties. Its absence is nowhere clearer than in Athens, where the loss of the war gives rise to the rule of the Thirty, a group of oligarchs who come to power with Sparta's support. The Thirty seem promising at first. Plato himself was encouraged and tempted to join them. But the actions of the Thirty quickly earn this regime the title Thirty Tyrants. Charmides and Critias were both among the Thirty's ranks, with Critias playing an especially prominent role. Before turning to the dialogue proper, we must also take a closer look at each of these characters, beginning with the dialogue's namesake, Charmides.

Charmides

As bright as he was beautiful, Charmides was a young man with enormous promise. Born into the upper echelons of Athenian society, he kept company with the city's intellectual and political elite. In the *Protagoras*, for example, we find him with no less than Pericles' sons, listening to Protagoras at the home of Callias, one of Athens' wealthiest patrons of the sophists (*Protagoras* 315a). Socrates was also there that day, and we can imagine the impression he must have made on the young Charmides. Just three years later, the two would have the conversation we witness in the *Charmides*, by the end of which the young man vows to "follow and not abandon [Socrates]" (167d).⁶³

⁶³ On the dramatic dates of the *Protagoras* and *Charmides* see Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 309-312.

Charmides in large part followed through with this intention. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades goes so far as to say that Charmides became, like him, one of Socrates' unrequited lovers (*Symposium* 222b). But whatever likeness Alcibiades draws between Charmides' relationship with Socrates and his own, it is clear that there were some important differences. While Alcibiades "stopped [his] ears and took off in flight" from Socrates, refusing to "grow old beside him," Charmides appears to have remained a closer companion.⁶⁴ And while Socrates discouraged Alcibiades' political ambitions,⁶⁵ he encouraged Charmides to overcome the "awe and fear" that kept him from speaking before the Athenian Assembly, exhorting Charmides not to "neglect the city's affairs, if due to [him] they can be in a somewhat better state" (*Memorabilia* III.7.9).

We know little about Charmides' actual involvement in political affairs prior to his falling greatly out of favor in 415, when he was one of many (including Alcibiades) accused of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries. Over a dozen men with Socratic connections were implicated in this profanation, which occurred shortly after the mutilation of the city's herms.⁶⁶ Not only were those involved charged with impiety, but

⁶⁴ *Symposium*, 216a. All translations of Plato's *Symposium* are from *Plato's Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁶⁵ Alcibiades describes it as follows: "[Socrates] compels me to agree that, though I am still in need of much myself, I neglect myself and handle instead the affairs of the Athenians" (*Symposium* 216a).

⁶⁶ See Thucydides 6.27-29, 53, 60-61. As will be discussed further below, Critias was implicated in the mutilation of the herms. For a full list of those implicated, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 18.

they were also suspected of plotting to overthrow the democracy.⁶⁷ Charmides' property was taken and he was condemned to death *in absentia*. It is unclear what Charmides did in the meantime, but, according to Debra Nails, the charges against him would have been largely forgotten by 407.⁶⁸ In Xenophon's *Symposium*, we find a lighthearted Charmides making the best of his poverty, which seems to have brought with it a kind of freedom and to have made him more trusted in the eyes of his fellow citizens. He notes that when he was wealthy, he was reproached for spending time with Socrates, but now that he is poor, "it's no longer of any concern to anyone" (*Symposium* 4.32).

If Charmides had become by this point a man trusted by his fellow citizens, or at least of little concern to anyone, he would not remain so for long. Following the end of the Peloponnesian War, he was chosen by the notorious Thirty to be one of the ten ruling in the Piraeus. We know few details about Charmides' own actions as one of the ten, but he remains guilty by association with a regime that in Plato's own words made the former government—flawed as it was—seem as "precious as gold" (Plato, *Seventh Letter*).

Charmides' close connection with Critias is especially incriminating, for while we know

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Nails explains: "It is Xenophon...well supported on this occasion by Diogenes...who describes the city's reversal in 407, when Alcibiades III was recalled to Athens, his sentence overturned, the curse on him retracted, and compensation promised for his confiscated property. The profanation of which Alcibiades III, Charmides, Axiochus, and Adeimantus had been accused by Agariste III...was now treated as never having happened at all...Charmides, with less clout than Alcibiades III, may well have found himself in 407 back in a city depleted through long years of war, without resources at a time when his cousin Critias IV s.v. was in exile in Thessaly." Ibid., 92.

little of the role Charmides played during that time, we do know that Critias was, as one classicist puts it, “at the forefront of what amounted to a reign of terror.”⁶⁹ Charmides meets his death fighting alongside Critias in defense of the Thirty.

Critias

Critias became Charmides’ guardian after the death of the boy’s father.⁷⁰ He too belonged to Athens’ elite. His genealogy could be traced to some of the first families to rule the city and he shared with Charmides ties to the famous lawmaker and poet Solon. Critias also makes an appearance in Plato’s *Protagoras*, counseling his companions not to take sides prematurely in the argument between Protagoras and Socrates, but rather to encourage the two to see their discussion through to its end (*Protagoras* 336d-e).⁷¹ In the *Charmides* we see that Critias, while not Socrates’ equal, is both intelligent and learned. He was a prolific writer, producing works of both prose and poetry.

As with Charmides, our knowledge of Critias’ public record is blank until he is implicated in the impious acts of 415. Critias, a close companion of Alcibiades, was

⁶⁹ Donald Norman Levin, "Critias," in *The Older Sophists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 241.

⁷⁰ Unless otherwise noted, the following factual references regarding Critias are from Nails, *The People of Plato*, 108-111.

⁷¹ There is still some controversy as to whether or not the Critias who appears in the Platonic dialogue by that name as well as in the *Timaeus* is the Critias IV of concern to us here, or Critias III (the grandfather of Critias IV). For a convincing argument in favor of understanding the Critias of these two dialogues to be Critias III, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 106-108.

accused but soon exonerated of participating in the mutilation of the herms. Still, he spent some time in exile from Athens, during which he supported a democratic rebellion in Thessaly. Whatever his sympathies for democracy may have been in Thessaly, they seem to have disappeared by the time he returned to Athens and became one of the Thirty.

As Xenophon reports, when the Thirty came into power they were initially in charge of writing a constitution. But they delayed doing so, meanwhile appointing a Senate and other magistrates at their discretion. With what Xenophon describes as a desire to “become free to do just as they pleased with the state,” the Thirty obtained the backing of a Spartan garrison and began arresting not only “scoundrels and persons of little account,” but any who seemed a threat to their rule. In the guise of allowing broader participation in their rule, they brought 3,000 more into their ranks and then seized the arms of all other citizens. Having done this, Xenophon reports that the Thirty felt “at length free to do whatever they pleased.” In addition to murdering many Athenian citizens on the grounds of nothing more than personal enmity, they resolved that each member of the Thirty choose a metic to be put to death so that his confiscated property could be used to pay for their guards (*Hellenica* II.iii.1-22).⁷²

In all this Critias led the way, being singled out as the most cruel and bloodthirsty of the Thirty.⁷³ Most damning is how he dealt with one of the few who spoke up against

⁷² All translations are from Xenophon *Hellenica* vol. 1 in Loeb Classic Library, trans. C. L. Brownson (London: Heinemann, 1919).

⁷³ See Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* I.2.12, and Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*, in *Older Sophists*, 242.

their actions. Theramenes, a former friend of Critias and member of the regime, refused to pick a metic to be killed and openly objected to the unjust murders of innocent and worthy men. Critias, in defiance of both the will of the Senate, which sided with Theramenes, and the spirit of the rule of law, which held it illegal to kill any of the Three Thousand, struck Theramenes off the roll and had him killed (see *Hellenica* II.iii.15-56).

Critias, Charmides, and Socrates

Judged by his deeds as a member of the Thirty, Critias might easily be seen as the most wicked character to appear in a Platonic dialogue. And yet, were one to read the *Charmides* having never heard of him, it would be hard to imagine that he would go on to play a leading role in one of the most hated regimes to preside over Athens. Whatever his faults, Critias hardly looks the part of a tyrannical murderer—much less does Charmides appear destined to be his accomplice. Plato refuses to portray either individual as simply a villain, forcing readers to face the complexity of Critias' and Charmides' characters and to ask why these men took the paths that they did.

One also cannot help but wonder what influence Socrates had on the direction they took. The ties between Socrates, Charmides, and Critias were well known. True, those between Critias and Socrates had worn especially thin by the time the Thirty came to power. But that did not stop many Athenian citizens from holding Socrates responsible for the man Critias had become, a contributing factor in the charges that led to Socrates'

trial.⁷⁴ According to Xenophon's report of Socrates' accusers, it was Critias, along with Alcibiades, who "harmed the city most," after becoming Socrates' associate. "For Critias was the most thievish, violent, and murderous of all in the oligarchy" (*Memorabilia* I.2.12). Xenophon does his best to distance Socrates from Critias' later career and character, arguing that Critias was able to overpower his ignoble desires for as long as he had Socrates as an ally. Xenophon argues that it was Critias' time in Thessaly away from Socrates that corrupted him, not their time together. Xenophon also makes it clear that Socrates had become an open critic of Critias, both in his personal conduct and as a leader of the Thirty (see *Memorabilia* I.2.29-39).

Similarly, in the *Apology*, Plato's Socrates goes out of his way to make it clear that he refused to act unjustly on behalf of the Thirty. Having been ordered along with three other men to arrest Leon the Salaminian, a just man who was going to be killed by the oligarchs, Socrates was the only one of the four to refuse. "The other four," he reports, "went to Salamis and arrested Leon, but I departed and went home. And perhaps

⁷⁴ If Aeschines is to be believed, Critias' association with Socrates was *the* main cause for the latter's execution: "Men of Athens, you executed Socrates the sophist because he was shown to have educated Critias, one of the Thirty who put down the democracy." Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 173, translation provided by Gregory Vlastos in "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy" in *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1994), 87-108. According to Vlastos, "This shows that half a century after Socrates' death a lot-selected jury—a fair sample of Athenian public opinion—was expected to agree without argument that Socrates had been put to death because he had been the teacher of the man who stood in living memory as the leader of the most savagely anti-democratic regime Athens had ever known" ("The Historical Socrates," 87-88). See this same essay for a detailed account of the suspicion that Socrates was himself a crypto-oligarch.

I would have died because of this, if that government had not been quickly overthrown” (*Apology* 32d).⁷⁵

These examples suffice to show that Socrates stood at some distance from the political activity of Thirty. But the same could be said of his relationship with the Athenian democracy. And all this still fails to answer fully the question of what influence Socrates had on Critias earlier in his life. In the *Charmides*, Critias appears fairly well versed in the hallmarks of Socratic thought. What effect did Socrates’ ideas have upon him? Were they somehow the source of Critias’ corruption? Is Socrates responsible for Critias’ immoderation? And when it comes to Charmides, what are we to make of Socrates’ apparent encouragement of his involvement in politics given his subsequent participation in a regime that Plato himself had the good sense to avoid? Was Charmides simply trying, as Socrates himself had prompted him, to do what little he could to make the city’s affairs in a somewhat better state? Or was he of the same mind as his guardian Critias? After all, he died alongside him in battle against those trying to overthrow the Thirty. How did someone so promising become involved in such a horrific regime?

Ultimately we face the question pointed out by Xenophon: why did Socrates teach “his companions political affairs before he taught them to be moderate?” (I.2.17). Will this dialogue serve as a second “apology” for Socrates, or will he not be absolved of all responsibility for the fate of Critias and Charmides? What did Plato want us to learn from seeing the two as we do in this dialogue, knowing what would become of them? Will a

⁷⁵ All translations of the *Apology* are from *Four Texts on Socrates*, ed. and trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

closer look at Critias and Charmides reveal the seeds of tyranny? How will this help us to understand what moderation is and what stands in the way of obtaining it? We will be looking for answers to these questions in our examination of the dialogue to follow.

Socrates' Self-Restraint and the Stripping of Charmides' Soul

The *Charmides* opens with Socrates recalling that he had been away from Athens for some time. Having arrived from Potidaea the evening before, he gladly visited his old haunts, in particular the wrestling school of Tauraeus, the one across from the temple of the Queen.⁷⁶ He found many people there, some he knew, others not, and having arrived unexpectedly, was greeted by many. From their midst sprang Chaerephon—"that madman"—who, running over to Socrates, expressed great surprise and joy at his survival of a battle in which they heard so many had been killed.

Out of the grim and foreboding background of war leaps the ecstatic Chaerephon, our first and largely comical instantiation of immoderation. What might be the serious meaning behind this laughable example of madness? How might it help illustrate by contrast what the sound-mindedness of moderation entails? Most obviously, Chaerephon lacks restraint. In this opening scene his outward actions perfectly express his inner

⁷⁶ Hyland notes that the "physical proximity of the gymnasium, or 'temple of the body,' to the temple of the dead ... may symbolize a forthcoming relation between *sophrosyne* and human finitude upon which we must subsequently reflect." See Drew Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), 30.

emotions. As his heart leaps with joy, so too does his body. Charming as his transparency might be, it also betrays a problematic lack of self-control. Would it be as charming, for instance, if he reacted with the same immediacy and lack of reserve upon experiencing not joy, but anger? In this sense, Chaerephon's madness represents an inability to place any distance between one's inner thoughts or feelings and one's outward appearance or actions.

What of the thoughts and feelings themselves? There are two issues at work in Chaerephon's reaction to Socrates' return. The first is the simple, very human fact that Chaerephon is elated to find his beloved friend still alive. But the extreme joy Chaerephon feels on account of Socrates' survival is bound to be replaced, sooner or later, by an equally extreme misery.⁷⁷ As natural as happiness for the survival of his friend might be, Chaerephon's reaction still bespeaks a lack of preparation for the inevitable. In this way his madness represents a failure to be resigned to human mortality, pointing to a connection between moderation and an acceptance human nature's limits.

Finally, Chaerephon is particularly surprised that Socrates, of all people, survived the battle. He seems to have thought that surely Socrates would be a goner. Is there something about Socrates' virtues that Chaerephon fails to appreciate? We know from the *Apology* that Chaerephon had the highest esteem for Socrates' wisdom, but he seems

⁷⁷ Bruell notes the connection between Chaerephon's madness and his joy at Socrates' survival. See Bruell, "Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 142. The connection between excessive mourning and immoderation is explored more fully Socrates' critique of Achilles in the *Republic* (see 388a ff.).

unaware of the full range of Socrates' strengths and abilities, unable even to imagine how he survived.⁷⁸ Does this point to a more serious connection between immoderation and a failure to grasp philosophic virtue in its relation to virtue more broadly understood? We will have to keep this question in mind as we continue through the dialogue. For now, it is interesting to note that Chaerephon, who leads Socrates over to Critias, unwittingly encourages the association that will prove more fatal to Socrates than any battle.

In the section that follows we are prompted to reflect upon the human response to beauty, known for inspiring its own form of madness. After answering questions about the battle, Socrates pursues his own interest. He asks about the news in Athens, how things stand with philosophy, and whether any of the young have become distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both.⁷⁹ Critias looks toward the door of the gymnasium, where a crowd is entering. "About the beautiful ones," he says, "you'll soon know. For those entering happen to be heralds and lovers of the one reputed to be the most beautiful" (154a). Critias explains that he is referring to his cousin Charmides. Socrates, swearing by Zeus, exclaims that he not only knows who Charmides is, but had previously noticed that even as a boy he was in no way ordinary. Critias says that Socrates will soon know what sort of a person he has become, and Charmides enters the room. Socrates says to his nameless companion,

⁷⁸ According to Socrates' testimony in the *Apology*, it was Chaerephon who asked the oracle at Delphi whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates (*Apology* 20e-21a).

⁷⁹ The word here translated as beauty is *kalos*, which also carries the meaning of noble and will in certain contexts be translated as such.

Now nothing is to be measured by me, comrade, for I am simply a white line when it comes to those who are beautiful, because almost all who have just reached maturity appear beautiful to me. But especially then he appeared wondrous to me in both stature and beauty, and indeed, at least in my opinion, all the others were in love with him, so excited and confused had they become as he came in...Now this was not wondrous on the part of us men; but turning my attention to the boys, I noticed that none of them, not even the littlest, looked anywhere else, but all were contemplating him as if he were a statue. (154b-c)

Here Socrates describes the near universal reaction to human beauty, but most interesting are the subtle ways in which Socrates' own response differs from that of the others.

Socrates says it seemed to him that "all the others" were in love with Charmides, and yet he gives no indication that he himself was similarly moved. While everyone else is watching Charmides, Socrates is busy watching everyone else and observing their reactions, having already observed his own. What allows Socrates to escape being entirely captivated by Charmides?

We can begin with what Socrates describes as his tendency to be a "white line," or useless measure, when it comes to the beautiful.⁸⁰ In Socrates' eyes, all young boys are equally beautiful. Socrates' broader, more universal appreciation of beauty allows him to see Charmides, beautiful as he may be, as simply one of an innumerable number of boys who, just reaching maturity, are bound to appear beautiful. He admits that Charmides struck him as an especially impressive instance, but he has still deprived Charmides of any claim to incomparable beauty. Perhaps this is what makes it easier for Socrates to

⁸⁰ West and West helpfully explain this "proverbial expression taken from stonecutter's idiom. The mason used a line rubbed with chalk to mark the stones. On white marble, a white chalk mark would be barely visible." See West and West, *Charmides*, 15 n. 6. Compare *Republic* 5.474.

turn his eyes from the beautiful Charmides toward what seems to interest him more, namely how others react to this beauty.

Socrates says it was especially wondrous that not only were the men mesmerized by Charmides, but so too were even the littlest of the boys. In other words, the force of Charmides' beauty was not sexual, or at least not exclusively so. What is it about Charmides that enchants even children? Socrates says that they contemplated him as if he were a statue.⁸¹ Charmides appears as a living and breathing work of art—a walking embodiment of perfection. To borrow the words of Chekhov, he must have had

that beauty, the contemplation of which—God knows why!—inspires in one the conviction that one is seeing correct features... [E]very movement of the young body all go together in one complete harmonious accord in which nature has not blundered over the smallest line.⁸²

But to return to the image of the statue, however beautiful the surface may be, there is nothing necessarily wondrous about the stone from which it is made. Charmides'

⁸¹ Cf. *Phaedrus* 252d-e: "And so each person picks out from the beautiful ones his love after his fashion; and he constructs and adorns for himself a sort of statue of that one, as a god, for him to honor and celebrate." Socrates lived during what has come to be called the period of high classical style in Greek sculpture. For a very interesting account of sculpture from this time, particularly its tendency to inspire wonder in the viewer, see Richard Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2010).

⁸² This lovely description is from a similar scene in Chekhov's short story *The Beauties*. There everyone from a young boy to even an old man, "gruff and indifferent to women and the beauties of nature," finds himself moved by the beauty of a young woman. Here too the viewer's thoughts turn to sculpture. He imagines the ideal woman would have to have all the same features, but that "the sculptor would need a great creative genius to mold them." See Anton Chekhov, *The Beauties*, in *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories (A Norton Critical Edition)*, ed. Cathy Popkin (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

beautiful body invites those who see it to imagine that an equally beautiful soul lies within, one that will complete the perfect harmony of his person.⁸³ But is Charmides truly beautiful through and through? As becomes clear in the section to follow, Socrates knows better than to assume what he does not know.

Chaerephon, never shy to speak his mind, tells Socrates that as beautiful as Charmides' face might be, if they get him to strip, he will seem "faceless, so altogether beautiful is he in his looks" (154d). In response, Socrates concedes that Charmides is not a man to be withstood, *if* "he has one little thing besides" (154d). Charmides must prove to be not only beautiful with regard to his body, but well-born with regard to his soul. Socrates tells Critias that it would of course be fitting for Charmides to be of a good nature given the family he comes from, flattering Critias' pride in the legacy of his lineage. Critias assures him that Charmides is not only a gentleman, but also philosophic and poetic. Socrates acknowledges that this beautiful quality, the one of being poetic, can be found in Critias' family as far back as Solon. But Socrates still wishes to see Charmides' soul for himself, and asks Critias to call the boy over so that they can "strip his soul and contemplate it before contemplating his looks" (154e). There would, he adds, be nothing shameful in Charmides conversing with him, especially in front of his guardian and cousin Critias. Critias agrees, but, perhaps in an effort to make clear that he will still be setting the parameters of the discussion, he calls Charmides over under a

⁸³ See Xenophon's *Memorabilia* III.10.

strange pretense: Socrates is to pretend that he is a doctor who can cure the morning headaches Charmides has recently been having.

The significance of Charmides' headaches can only be realized if we keep in mind the fact that the plague—a disease that “first settled in the head”—had just struck Athens.⁸⁴ The plague was noted for the indifference with which it visited its horrors upon the old and young, weak and strong. It would have been hard to suffer from a headache at this time without having some fear that worse symptoms were to follow. Charmides, in these circumstances, might not have felt the sense of invincibility that usually attends the young. There is then a very dark subtext to this ruse—Socrates is to play the physician capable of curing Charmides' headaches at a time when doctors stood by helpless as scores died from the plague.⁸⁵

For the second time a grim reference is accompanied by comic relief. Socrates describes how much laughter was produced when, as Charmides approached, everyone tried to make room by shoving his neighbor aside, such that the man sitting on one end

⁸⁴ Thucydides reports the plague as having arrived in Athens in the summer of 430. See Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.47.3 and 2.49.7 where he describes its symptoms. There is some speculation in the literature that these morning headaches are nothing other than hangovers, indicating Charmides' lack of moderation. See, for example, Mark L. McPherran, "Socrates and Zalmoxis on Drugs, Charms and Purification," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 37 (2004): 14-15. I am indebted to Laurence Lampert for what I believe is the more compelling link he draws between Charmides' headaches and the plague. See Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 162.

⁸⁵ Even this is an understatement. Thucydides notes that not only were physicians “ignorant...of the proper way to treat it, but they died themselves the most thickly, as they visited the sick most often” (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.47.4).

had to stand up and the other was pushed so hard he fell off sideways. Again we find a humorous scene with a more serious meaning. The laughter that ensued was at least in part the diffusion of a very real tension in the room. Many wanted Charmides for themselves. At first Charmides' beauty inspired an almost incapacitating awe. But awe quickly gives way to desire for the exclusive possession of the beauty one was at first content simply to behold.⁸⁶ We see here the playful beginnings of a willingness to use force to obtain the beautiful object of desire.⁸⁷ One can easily see how this playful competition, which took the shape of a harmless physical struggle ending in laughter, could come in much darker forms.

The comic competition here comes to an easy resolution: Charmides sits between Socrates and Critias. What Socrates describes as happening next is worth quoting in full:

Then indeed, my friend, I was in perplexity, and my former boldness, which I had as I was expecting to converse with [Charmides] quite easily, had been knocked out of me. For when, as Critias was saying that I was the one who had knowledge of the drug, he looked at me with his eyes in such an irresistible way and was drawing himself up to ask a question, while everyone in the wrestling school flowed around us in a complete circle—then indeed, O noble one, I saw inside his cloak, I was inflamed, I was no longer in control of myself, and I held Cydias to be wisest in erotic matters, who, speaking about a beautiful boy, advised someone that “a fawn coming opposite a lion should beware lest he be taken as a portion of meat.” I myself seemed to myself to have been caught by such a creature. Nevertheless, when he asked me if I had knowledge of the drug for the

⁸⁶ Contrast this movement with the final rung of the *Symposium*'s ladder of love, where desire gives way to a simple beholding of the forms (see *Symposium* 211d).

⁸⁷ Schmid (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 6) notes that the “theme of desire for beautiful or noble things (*ta kala*) and the willingness to use violent means to obtain them” is a recurring theme in the dialogue.

head, with difficulty I somehow answered that I had knowledge of it.
(155c-e)

In this passage we catch a rare glimpse into the inner-workings of Socrates' soul, which, compared to Chaerephon's, is harder to read from the outside. One finds a similar scene with Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (see 336d-e). There Socrates claims to be nearly rendered speechless by fear rather than desire. In each case, it is hard to tell whether or not Socrates is exaggerating. Here it is possible that Socrates overstates the effect Charmides had upon him for the sake of the friend to whom he is relating his experience (note he addresses his audience twice in this sequence, once at 155c5 and again at 155d3). This would not be the first time Socrates seems to exaggerate eros' effects on him for the sake of a friend who may be more susceptible to such charms (consider Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I.3.8-15). As it happens, Charmides himself will later accuse Socrates of doing this very thing (Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.27).⁸⁸ But even if Socrates is not *as* susceptible to eros' pull as others may be, he was surely not immune. Moreover, Plato, who so often abstracts from the body, here makes a point of drawing our attention to Socrates' body. For these reasons, it seems worth taking Socrates' story at face value so as to be able to draw from it whatever lessons Socrates wished to convey, even if by means of an exaggerated account.

Given the speed with which Socrates, albeit with difficulty, recovers enough self-possession to answer Charmides' question, it would have been hard for anyone to have a

⁸⁸ On this point see Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 173.

clear sense of what he had just experienced. But what exactly does Socrates experience and how does he recover so quickly? Having been able to withstand Charmides' beauty moments ago, Socrates seems to have let his guard down and finds himself perplexed or at a loss when his confidence—or more accurately over-confidence—is suddenly knocked out of him. He had been able to resist the beauty of Charmides' physical appearance earlier in part because he had turned his focus toward the question of Charmides' soul. But now, athwart his best intentions, Socrates unexpectedly catches a glimpse of Charmides' body and finds his own body inflamed.

What is so striking about this passage is how Socrates describes in such detail the confluence of elements that created this moment in which he found himself overwhelmed. There is no way that Socrates could have known in advance what effect all of these factors in combination would have upon him—the way in which Charmides looked at him, Critias' ruse, how all the others flowed around them—let alone anticipate the tipping point: his inadvertently seeing inside Charmides' cloak. Something about the expression in Charmides' eyes must have awakened in Socrates the same hope that Charmides had earlier inspired in everyone else—that Charmides' soul may be as beautiful as his body. That combined with the power Critias' ruse has given Socrates with regard to Charmides, the way in which Charmides looks to *him* and no other, seems to have elicited a reaction in Socrates that catches him by surprise. The scene brings vividly to light the limits of even the most self-possessed—there are certain things that are simply beyond our control. None of us can be fully prepared for the unanticipated

circumstances we might find ourselves in, as well as the unexpected and largely involuntary reactions we might have.⁸⁹

Short of being able to predict the future, no one can be entirely certain of how he or she will react in every case. Less important than Socrates' immediate, reflexive response, is his extremely rapid recovery. How did he manage this? Upon becoming "inflamed," Socrates said that he was no longer in control of himself, or, translated more literally, "I was no longer in myself" (155d). Here we have our first pointer to the strange fact of self-reflection, and the multiplicity of the self that it implies. To anticipate the definition of moderation that we will find in the *Republic*, one could say that in this moment the previous harmony of Socrates' person is disturbed when division arises between the part of him that is dispassionately curious to learn about Charmides' soul and the part of him that suddenly develops a keen interest in possessing Charmides as his own.⁹⁰ What is important to note is that Socrates clearly associates his truest self with the former rather than the latter interest.

⁸⁹ As Baumeister and Tierney put it, "Strictly speaking, 'impulse control' is a misnomer. You don't really control the impulses. Even someone as preternaturally disciplined as Barack Obama can't avoid stray impulses to smoke a cigarette. What he can control is how he reacts: Does he ignore the impulse, or chew a Nicorette, or sneak out for a smoke?" Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 37.

⁹⁰ In Schmid's words, in the scene that follows "Socrates [is] able, by means of his self-control and recollection of Cydias' wisdom, to reunify his momentarily fragmented self and reidentify with his rational interests." See Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 44.

Self-reflection and its relation to self-knowledge will be explored in depth as the dialogue continues. For now, there are just a few points to be made. Socrates, in the very moment that he seems to have lost self-possession, still remained aware of that very fact, meaning he had not lost himself entirely—or, if he had, it seems only to have lasted an instant. For not only was he a keen observer of the wave of passion that washed over his body, but his mind was immediately occupied not by blind desire for Charmides, but by thoughts about a poet. He thinks of Cydias who had once warned that those approaching a beautiful boy, like a fawn coming opposite a lion, not be taken as a portion of meat. And he thinks to himself “Cydias is the wisest in erotic matters.” In the midst of experiencing an intense passion, Socrates is able to reflect upon the danger of that passion and call to mind a previous warning from a poet who he can now recognize as wiser than himself.⁹¹

Needless to say, this is not the most natural train of thought one might imagine most men in Socrates’ position having. The ease with which Socrates moves from experiencing an intense passion, to observing that he is no longer himself, to reflecting upon his experience within the context of his wisdom relative to a poet’s, can only be explained when one considers the habits of mind Socrates has to have formed in the course of living a philosophic life, i.e. one guided by his love of wisdom.⁹² Every

⁹¹ Compare Bruell, “Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge,” 146.

⁹² Pangle provides a helpful description of the kind of knowledge Socrates possesses and its relation to self-control in *Virtue is Knowledge*, 125: “A wise person’s knowledge will be more steadily available because he has schooled himself to keep it in view, but at

experience, even one of what would otherwise be a blinding passion, becomes an opportunity for reflection.

By virtue of this train of thought Socrates has recovered enough self-possession to play along with Critias' ruse, professing to have knowledge of a drug to cure Charmides' headaches. There is some debate in the literature as to the authenticity of the story Socrates goes on to tell. Critias could not have thought that Socrates actually possessed knowledge of how to cure headaches, and it would be an incredible coincidence if, as Socrates goes on to claim, he just happened to have come across such a cure while he was in the army. Still, as will be discussed more below, the story should not be dismissed out of hand as pure fiction.

Socrates explains to Charmides that the drug is a certain leaf that accompanied by an incantation can make one healthy. Without the incantation, there is no benefit to be gained from the leaf. Charmides replies that he will take the incantation and write it down, to which Socrates responds, "If you persuade me, or even if you don't?" (156a). This would seem to be Charmides' first test in moderation—a virtue commonly associated with persuasion rather than force. The answer seems so obvious to Charmides that he laughs and says, "If I persuade you, Socrates" (156a).⁹³ At this point it becomes

moments of temptation he will still need vigilance to do so, rather as a good hiker needs vigilance not to slip on a steep path, but being a good hiker, he will exercise that vigilance and will not slip." See also 43.

⁹³ If it is right that Charmides knows that Socrates is not a doctor, then his laugh could be in response to what has now become an inside joke.

clear that Charmides knows Socrates' name. In fact, he goes on to say "there is no little talk about you among those of our age, and as for me even as a boy I remember your associating with Critias here" (156a).⁹⁴ Charmides not only knows Socrates' name, but he has some idea of who he is—in short, he knows Socrates is no physician. Now that Socrates knows that Charmides knows this, he says that he can speak more frankly about the incantation, just what sort it happens to be and what power it has. Through the veil of Critias' ruse, Socrates will go on to speak more frankly about what he might truly be able to offer Charmides.⁹⁵ While he may not be a doctor of the body, he could prove to be one of the soul.

Socrates asks Charmides whether he has noticed that when a patient has pain in his eyes, good doctors do not attempt to doctor the eyes alone, but treat the head as well, and also consider it mindless to treat the head without treating the whole body. Charmides responds that he has noticed this and agrees entirely with their method. (At this point, Socrates tells his nameless companion that he began, little by little, to regain his courage and come back to life. As Socrates regains control of the conversation, seeing how it can be steered toward an examination of the boy's soul, he becomes more fully

⁹⁴ Compare *Laches* 180e-181a.

⁹⁵ In the *Protagoras* Socrates speaks of the need to be a doctor expert in matters of the soul (313e). In the *Gorgias* (521e) Socrates draws an analogy between himself and the doctor. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates draws an extended analogy between the medical art which treats the body and the rhetorical art which treats the soul, placing the same emphasis upon the necessity of understanding the whole that we will see in the discussion that follows (see *Phaedrus* 270b ff.) In Book IV of the *Republic*, we will see Socrates provide a prescription for the health of the soul.

himself.) Socrates goes on to explain to Charmides that while he was in the army camp, he learned the incantation from one of the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis, who are reputed to immortalize men.⁹⁶ The doctor told Socrates that according to Zalmoxis, their king who is a god, just as one cannot care for a part of the body without caring for the whole of the body, one cannot care for the body without caring for the soul. According to Thracian medicine, everything both good and bad for the body and for the whole human being flows from the soul, which one ought to treat first and foremost, if the body is to be in a good condition. The soul must be treated with incantations, which are beautiful speeches. From such speeches moderation comes to be in souls, and once it is there, “it is easy to provide health both for the head and for the rest of the body” (157a).

What of this remarkable account is Charmides meant to believe? Is Socrates here playing one quack, channeling another? Many commentators are inclined to view his story as pure invention. If Socrates were making this story up out of whole cloth, it would not be the only time he seems to have done such a thing (see *Phaedrus* 275b). But McPherran rightly argues that “this piece of text does not appear to be woven of purely fictional threads.”⁹⁷ McPherran notes that the Thracians were believed to possess “special powers of music and healing,” Socrates had indeed been on military campaign near Thrace, and Zalmoxis was in fact a Thracian deity, whom Herodotus links to tales of

⁹⁶ For a brief discussion of Zalmoxis see W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 174-176.

⁹⁷ McPherran, “Socrates and Zalmoxis,” 16.

immortality.⁹⁸ It would have been up to Charmides, as much as it is to readers, to determine just which elements of this account might be true and which false. The very ability to do so might be a test of one's moderation, if part of moderation proves to be, as it is tentatively defined later in the dialogue, an ability to distinguish knowledge from non-knowledge.

Leaving aside for now the bolder claims of Socrates' story, namely the hearsay accounts of Zalmoxis' status as a god and of Thracian doctors' ability to immortalize men, what are we to make of the basic theory in its own right? Take first the principle of Greek medicine: to successfully treat a part of the body, you must treat the whole. Needless to say, this is hardly a founding tenet of modern medicine. If someone comes to the doctor with cataracts, there is no doubt that this person's eyes can be successfully treated without any attention needing to be paid to the rest of the body. Still, it is equally true that when it comes to many more prevalent and vexing diseases, it would be foolish to think the part could be treated on its own. In the case of heart disease (a leading cause of death worldwide), for example, we clearly have a part that could not possibly be treated without care given to the whole. If someone has heart disease, it is likely because he or she also has diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. In addition to medication, any good doctor would have to encourage modifications in diet and exercise. In other words, our doctors must also "turn to the whole body with their regimens and attempt to

⁹⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

treat and doctor the part along with the whole” (156c). As a general principle, caring for the whole of the body as opposed to just a part is not as dubious as it might first seem.⁹⁹

What of the Thracian addition? Is there anything to the idea that one does not go far enough even in treating the whole of the body if no care is given to the soul? In this respect we may stand to learn as much from the Thracians as did the Greeks. To extend the case above, there is no pill a doctor could prescribe to induce the change of mind and spirit necessary to reverse a lifetime of poor diet and exercise. This case is not so different from one in which there is no benefit from the leaf without the incantation. It is not such a stretch to say that just as Thracian medicine calls for incantations that produce moderation along with the drug, we too may be in need of speeches that teach moderation in addition to even our most sophisticated medicinal cures. No medicine or surgery can produce virtue. For this we may very well need, as Socrates’ Thracian says, beautiful speeches.

But so far we have only been speaking of the good that might come to the body from proper care of the soul. It must be remembered that the Thracian had promised much more. According to Socrates, he had said that *everything* both good and bad, for the body *and for the whole human being*, flows from the soul. Bearing this in mind, it seems all the more crucial to learn the beautiful speeches that produce moderation in the soul.

⁹⁹ On this point see Sophie Bourgault, “Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life,” in *The Philosophy of Viagra: Bioethical Responses to the Viagrification of the Modern World*, ed. Thorsten Botz-Borstein (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2011), 13-14.

But the nature and content of these beautiful speeches will remain a mystery.¹⁰⁰ When Socrates goes on to explain to Charmides that he can only have the drug if he is first willing to chant the incantations that produce moderation, Critias intervenes. He insists that while Charmides' headaches would "be a godsend for the youth if he will be compelled because of his head to become better also in his thought," Charmides is already by far the most moderate of all his peers (157c-d).

Socrates tells Charmides that it would be just if he were, as Critias says, second to none in all respects, adding that it would be hard to find two families in Athens more likely to produce someone "more beautiful and better than those from which you were born" (157e). Socrates goes on to trace Charmides' lineage, distinguished "in beauty and virtue, and in the rest of what is called happiness" (157e-158a). He goes so far as to say that it is likely for him to be "first in everything," and grants that in terms of looks he brings shame on none of his forebears. *If* his nature is, as Critias maintains, also "sufficient in terms of moderation and in other respects," then blessed did his mother bear him (158b); he can skip the incantations and be given the drug right away. "So," Socrates

¹⁰⁰ A number of commentators assume that the speeches are the Socratic dialectic that is to follow, but there do not seem to be any grounds for making this assumption. See, for example, Matthias Vorwerk, "Plato on Virtue: Definitions of ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ in Plato's Charmides and in Plotinus Enneads 1.2 (19)," *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 122, No. 1 (2001): 32 fn. 12 and Bourgauf, "Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life," 13. C.f., Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 15. Schmid acknowledges the dialogue leaves this ambiguous. The word used here for charms, *epōdai*, is more often associated in Plato with the moral education that would need to precede training in dialectics. For more on the role of *epodai* in Plato's work see George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 205.

says to Charmides, “tell me yourself whether you agree with [Critias] and say that you already have a sufficient share of moderation, or that you are in need” (158c). With this, Socrates has brought the conversation to where he had wanted it to start: a stripping of Charmides’ soul to see whether he is as well born in this respect as he is with regard to his body.

Before turning to Charmides’ answer, it is worth stopping to consider the line of thought raised by Socrates’ repeated emphasis upon Charmides’ and Critias’ shared lineage. Along with his name, the first thing Socrates wanted to know about Charmides was who his father is,¹⁰¹ and this is now the second time that Socrates has noted the boy’s illustrious family background (first at 154e-155a when he suggested Charmides’ poetic quality might be traced to his and Critias’ shared ties to Solon). In this latest case, Socrates goes on at length describing the two sides of Charmides’ family and why he should be bound to surpass all others in beauty and virtue. Socrates is clearly playing upon the aristocratic prejudice that virtue can be inherited along with looks. His emphasis upon Charmides’ family background, which would have involved what the Athenians considered “good breeding,” raises the vexing question of nature versus nurture. To what extent does possession of the virtue of moderation depend upon the disposition with

¹⁰¹ As West and West note, Socrates asks literally, “Who and whose [or, ‘of what’] is he?” pointing, as they say, to “a major theme of the dialogue: *Who* is Charmides...and *who* or *what* is responsible for his being such as he is?” See West and West, *Charmides*, 15, fn. 5.

which one happens to be born? Are there certain inherited, or natural prerequisites to the attainment of this virtue, or is it something that theoretically anyone could achieve?

Returning to the text, what might have been the more immediate purpose behind Socrates' lengthy praise of Charmides' background? For one thing, Socrates seems to be trying to raise Charmides' confidence, encouraging him in the thought that he already possesses all he could possibly need, setting him up for a potentially transformative revelation to the contrary. Socrates must have also been interested in seeing how Charmides would handle such high praise. In terms of what it reveals, Charmides' reaction does not disappoint: "Blushing, Charmides first appeared even more beautiful—for a sense of shame suited his age—and then he also answered in no ignoble way" (158c).¹⁰² Charmides explains that it is unreasonable (*alogon*) for him to answer. If he were to say that he is not moderate, not only would it be strange to speak against himself in this way, but it would also be strange for him to speak against Critias and many others who believe him to be so. Then again, to praise himself and say that he is moderate might seem in equally bad taste.

Charmides' blush is the second involuntary bodily reaction of the dialogue. It brings out more clearly than did Socrates' case of inflammation the fascinating connection that obtains in human beings between soul and body, mind and matter. In

¹⁰² For a similar instance of a youth blushing on account of shame see *Protagoras* 312a. For a collection of instances of blushing in Plato's work, see Paul W. Gooch, "Red Faces in Plato," *The Classical Journal*, 1987-1988: 124-127. Gooch curiously omits Charmides' blush from his account.

what Darwin calls the “most peculiar and most human of all sensations,” we find an involuntary reaction of the body caused by certain thoughts—thoughts crucially shaped by our opinions as to what is right and wrong, proper and improper.¹⁰³ With Charmides’ blush we read upon his body the writing of his soul, but how exactly to translate it?

In bringing Charmides to blush, Socrates has begun to succeed in what could very well be one of his main purposes in speaking to the boy: to make Charmides more self-conscious and ultimately more self-reflective. Of course, the visceral self-consciousness revealed by Charmides’ blush is not yet the mature version Socrates might hope eventually to encourage. At present, Charmides’ self-consciousness consists primarily in a concern for how he appears not in his own eyes, but in the eyes of others. As Charmides eloquently explains, his dilemma consists in not wishing to offend or annoy, either by praising himself or by speaking against himself and those who praise him. It is worth noting that Charmides presents his dilemma as either to say that he is moderate or to say that he is not. It does not occur to Charmides to say that he does not know if he is sufficiently moderate because he thinks he knows that he is.

Charmides believes himself to be moderate, but, in line with this moderation, is not so arrogant as to say so. His blush reveals the sincerity with which his pride is

¹⁰³ Darwin continues: “We can cause laughing by tickling the skin, weeping or frowning by a blow, trembling from the fear of pain, and so forth; but we cannot cause a blush...by any action on the body. It is the mind which must be affected.” Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 310.

followed by shame.¹⁰⁴ Charmides shows that he possesses the elements of conventional moderation that he will go on to offer in his definitions for the virtue: quietness and a sense of shame. He recognizes that it is improper for him to speak; rather than loudly or arrogantly proclaim his moderation, he explains the *alogos* nature of his position. He is quiet because he possesses shame—the check upon *hubris* commonly understood to be nothing other than moderation.

Charmides' flushed cheeks make his body all the more beautiful because they reveal the beauty of his soul, a soul concerned with and touched by virtue. But Socrates makes it clear that this beauty is not without qualification—it suits his age. In other words, it is fitting for now, but he must eventually grow out of it into a more mature version. As we will see, the nature of Charmides' nobility is not only conventional but also largely unreflective, and the very possession of it prevents him from questioning and investigating. Socrates will try to provide Charmides with a way around the conventions that hinder him.

¹⁰⁴ Although I focus below on Socrates' attempt to help Charmides mature beyond his feeling of shame, this is not to discount the importance of Charmides having felt shame in the first place. For a thoughtful account on Plato's treatment of shame and its salutary effects, see Christina Tarnopolsky, "Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame," *Political Theory* 32, 4 (2004). In Socrates' interaction with Charmides and later with Critias, we see examples of shaming that create the effect Tarnopolsky identifies: "a potentially salutary discomfort and perplexity in the patient...that is necessary for self-consciousness, self-reflection, self-criticism, and moral and political deliberation" (*Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, 479).

Charmides' Definitions

As a solution to Charmides' dilemma Socrates proposes that they investigate together. Socrates suggests that if Charmides is moderate, then he should be able to offer some opinion as to what moderation is. "For surely," Socrates says, "it is necessary that it, being in you, if it *is* in you, furnish some perception from which you have some opinion about it as to what and what sort of thing moderation is" (159a). Charmides supposes this is the case, and Socrates adds that assuming Charmides has knowledge of Greek, he should be able to say what moderation appears to him to be. Charmides' response, "perhaps," registers a legitimate doubt as to the ease with which he should be able to define moderation.

In the first place, Socrates speaks of moderation as if it were no different from any other object which, when present, furnishes various perceptions from which one can form opinions. But in what sense exactly is moderation *in* someone, and what perceptions exactly could it furnish? Surely moderation is not some *thing* that one can smell, touch, taste, hear or see in any literal sense. At the very least, Socrates' proposal shows that the act of self-reflection depends upon using language in a strange and largely metaphorical way. But this brings us to the question of whether it is so clear that with knowledge of Greek Charmides has all he needs to be able to express whatever it is that he finds within himself. It is far from obvious that all our experiences can be put clearly into words, especially our experience of the internal possession of a virtue. Even if moderation were

something that one knows when one “sees” it, or “feels” when one has it, it could still remain a challenge to capture whatever that *is* in speech. Moreover it is unclear that in recognizing moderation one is ever recognizing something as singular as the single word “moderation” might imply. With this one word we identify an indefinite number of experiences, impressions, reactions, and inclinations. The challenge in forming a definition is to find some general statement that captures what all these manifold instances seem to share. The gathering together of the similarities that run through our varied perceptions and the identification of those that are most essential is surely a more difficult task than Socrates has made it seem.

If it is true that any raw experience of moderation (if there is such an experience) might be hard to capture in words, or that any general definition distilled from a variety of particular experiences might take some effort to reach, is it not more likely that Charmides will express in speech what he has heard in speech? And rather than first experiencing moderation as something announcing itself (in Greek) from within, Charmides’ first exposure to the meaning of moderation is likelier to have been in hearing others talk about it, in learning its meaning as he learned his language.¹⁰⁵ Socrates will soon confirm that this is the very version of the virtue Charmides offers in his first definition, namely “what *they say*” is moderation. For now, we can say that far

¹⁰⁵ Compare Bruell, “Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge,” 152: “[D]oes not ‘speaking Greek’—and therefore, what one has heard—have more to do with one’s opinion about moderation than Socrates’ formulation allows?” See also Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 171: “Charmides’ first answer...comes ultimately from what Charmides learned while learning to speak Greek.”

from making clear the ease with which Charmides ought to be able to say what moderation is, Socrates' line of thought has raised the challenges involved in capturing the meaning of a virtue.

Moderation as a Certain Quietness

After some understandable hesitation and difficulty, Charmides offers his first definition of moderation.¹⁰⁶ Moderation, in his opinion, is doing everything in an orderly and quiet fashion, not only walking in the streets and conversing, but everything else in the same way. In sum, moderation is “a certain quietness” (159b).¹⁰⁷ Charmides essentially defines moderation as a particular way of carrying oneself, regardless of what one is doing. It is the very way we have seen him carrying himself: the opposite, for example, of how we have seen Chaerephon carries himself. If Chaerephon's behavior indicated a lack of self-control, then Charmides may have captured something significant about how one who possesses moderation would appear. But this points to the difficulty with Charmides' definition—it does not go far enough beyond the level of appearance. It is doubtful that Charmides himself is aware of whatever truth might lie beneath the surface of his own definition.

¹⁰⁶ For a helpful discussion of how Charmides' definitions relate to traditional understandings of the virtue see Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁷ The word translated as “quietness” is *hēsuchēi*, which can mean quietly, gently, or slowly. Socrates will take advantage of these multiple meanings in the argument to follow.

Socrates is clearly interested in pushing Charmides beyond this first attempt at understanding the meaning of moderation, which he grants is in line with what many say. He begins his refutation by getting Charmides to agree that moderation is among the beautiful things. Then, through an ever-growing distortion of Charmides' meaning, eliding first the difference between doing something quietly with doing something slowly, Socrates has Charmides concede that a number of activities are done more beautifully when done swiftly and keenly, rather than quietly, slowly, and with difficulty.

How might one defend Charmides' definition against Socrates' refutation? Socrates clearly distorts Charmides' meaning, dropping entirely his reference to orderly behavior.¹⁰⁸ Charmides' intention seems best captured by thinking of someone who does everything with a certain serenity or self-possession. Surely in proposing that being moderate meant acting in a quiet and orderly way, Charmides did not mean to define moderation as doing everything slowly and with difficulty. Even more problematic is the fact that the argument as a whole rests upon the false assumption that if moderation is among the beautiful things, any and every beautiful thing must be moderate. This would be akin to arguing that since human beings are living creatures, every living creature must be a human being. Socrates' argument is so unsound that its main purpose could not possibly be to provide an adequate refutation of Charmides' definition, leaving us

¹⁰⁸ *Kosmos* is almost always a feature closely linked with moderation in Greek thought and will prove to be a central feature in Plato's understanding of the virtue. For more on the relationship between moderation and order see North, *Sophrosyne*, especially 29.

wondering what its true purpose might be. A clue can be found in Socrates' description of the way in which Charmides investigates for a second time.

Socrates advises Charmides to “apply his mind more” and investigate “courageously,” and he notes that when Charmides makes his second attempt he *pauses* and courageously investigates (160d-e). Charmides proceeds with a slowness that is not ugly but fitting. It is evidence of the care with which, aided by courage, he investigates himself more thoroughly. By noting Charmides' courage, Socrates draws our attention to the fact that if there is beauty to the way Charmides investigates here, it cannot be attributed solely to the presence of moderation. Correcting for the flaw in Socrates' argument, we see that the most beautiful actions may be those that combine the virtues, striking a proper balance between them.

But this brings us to the more fundamental question raised by Socrates' first refutation. What of the unexamined assumption that every moderate action is beautiful? Must we not also question this? The idea that one might need to turn to a standard beyond beauty for identifying the virtue of moderation will be confirmed in the discussion that follows.

Moderation as Reverence or a Sense of Shame

For his second definition, Charmides says that moderation, in his opinion, is that which makes a human being feel ashamed and modest, and moderation is just what

reverence or a sense of shame is.¹⁰⁹ Charmides' second definition would seem to be more promising than his first. He has, just as Socrates encouraged him to do, tried to express what it is inside him that makes him moderate. As we saw earlier, his quietness was the result of his shame, which he here identifies as rooted in *aidos*. Strikingly, Socrates will refute this more promising definition even more quickly than he did the first. His argument is short enough that we can quote it in full.

“Well then,” I said. “Weren’t you [Charmides] just agreeing that moderation is something beautiful?” “Quite so,” he said. “Then are the moderate men also good?” “Yes.” “So would that which produces men who are not good be a good?” “Of course not.” “So then it is not only something beautiful but also good.” “Yes, in my opinion.” “What then?” I said. “Don’t you trust that Homer speaks beautifully when he says, ‘Respectfulness is not good for a needy man’?” “I do,” he said. “Then reverence, it seems, is a non-good and a good.” “It appears so.” “Then moderation would not be reverence, if it does happen to be the good while reverence is something no more good than bad.” (160e-161a)

In the final line of Socrates' argument he puzzlingly refers to moderation as “*the* good.”

Could moderation possibly be *the* good? Or is it not more likely *a* good? But if moderation is simply *a* good, then would this mean that it could sometimes come into conflict with other goods?¹¹⁰ Or is there a way in which moderation could prove to be good in any and every circumstance? This seems to be the very question at issue with regard to reverence or a sense of shame in Socrates' Homeric example. While a sense of

¹⁰⁹ The word Charmides uses is *aidos*, which can also mean respect (for oneself and toward another).

¹¹⁰ In the *Euthydemus* (279a ff.) Socrates along with Clinias identifies a number of goods one of which is moderation.

shame is in many cases considered a good, in cases of pressing need, it can stand in conflict with other goods, such as survival or knowledge.

But even if one argues that a person's greater good is served by abandoning his shame, can one go so far as to say that in doing so one is acting beautifully? Does one even "speak beautifully" in suggesting this course of action? Would not the more beautiful speech be the one that counsels the more beautiful act, namely the refusal to abandon one's sense of shame, whatever the circumstances? Socrates' Homeric example, upon reflection, challenges Charmides' assumption that the beautiful and the good always coincide.¹¹¹ The immediate drama of the dialogue reflects this same tension, as we see Charmides' reverence for Homer's authority leads him to accept Socrates' refutation with as much complacency as he did the first. Reverence stands in the way of the good that might come from questioning the argument.¹¹²

¹¹¹ In his assumption that the noble and the good always coincide, the young Charmides shows himself to be more moral and, possibly, more naïve than the young Alcibiades. The latter, upon being asked by Socrates whether all beautiful things are good, or some good and others not, answers: "For my part, Socrates, I think that some of what's beautiful is bad" (*Alcibiades I* 115a). All translations of *Alcibiades I* are from *Socrates and Alcibiades*, ed. Albert Keith Whitaker, trans. David M. Johnson (Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2003).

¹¹² As it happens, Socrates quotes this very same Homeric passage in the *Laches* (201b). There he tells Laches and Nicias that having recognized their need for a teacher of courage, they should not let anything prevent them from seeking one out. If anyone should laugh at them for needing a teacher at their age, they should confront them with Homer's saying, that shame is no good for a man in need. It is worth noting that these are not even Homer's words, but words Homer puts in the mouth of Telemachus.

It soon becomes clear that Charmides has had enough of investigating himself for now. Having had his first two definitions of moderation dismissed by Socrates, he offers a third: moderation as “doing one’s own things” (161b). Abandoning entirely the procedure of looking for a definition of moderation based on what he sees in himself, Charmides again offers one that he has heard from someone else, this time not from the many but from one reputed to be wise. Socrates chastises Charmides for doing so—calling him a wretch¹¹³—but he does not try to steer him back toward examining himself. In fact, the rest of Socrates’ dialogue with Charmides is geared toward drawing in Critias, whom Socrates immediately credits with Charmides’ newest definition.

Critias is quick to disavow the definition, and Charmides asks Socrates what difference it makes from whom he heard it.¹¹⁴ Socrates concedes that what must be investigated is not who said moderation is doing one’s own things, but whether or not it is true. “Now you’re speaking correctly,” says Charmides. “By Zeus,” exclaims Socrates,

¹¹³ The term translated as “wretch,” although used somewhat playfully here, is a harsh term, meaning literally “defiled one.” Socrates will also call Critias a wretch before the dialogue is over. It is relatively uncommon in Plato—the only other dialogue in which it appears twice is the *Republic*, where Socrates uses the term once in relation to oligarchs, and again in relation to the tyrant (562d and 589e). Compare also the *Theages*, where Socrates calls Theages a wretch directly after his admission that he desires to be a tyrant (*Theages* 125a). See also *Phaedrus* 236e.

¹¹⁴ Eisenstadt’s explanation for this disavowal—namely that Critias does not want to publicly admit that he agrees doing one’s own things, understood as ruling over others, is his understanding of moderation—is implausible given that Critias is later willing to accept the definition as his own. See Michael Eisenstadt, “Critias: Definitions of ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ in Plato’s ‘Charmides’,” *Hermes* 136 (2008): 492-495.

apparently surprised by how quickly Charmides has turned from trusting a statement simply because the authoritative Homer said it, to no longer caring who speaks (161c).

But, as Socrates suspects, Charmides knows and cares about this latest definition because he has heard it from another, more immediate authority figure: his guardian Critias. Perhaps Charmides, who once saw Socrates defeat the great Protagoras in argument, is eager to see whether he will call Critias' authority on the matter of moderation into question. Charmides and Socrates even appear to become co-conspirators, working together to prod Critias into taking Charmides' place. It seems that for now Socrates has seen enough of what he was looking for in Charmides' soul, and that he is happy to oblige in Charmides' wish that he test, and likely refute, Critias' understanding of the virtue. Before turning from Socrates' conversation with Charmides to his conversation with Critias, which will take up the remainder of the dialogue, it is worth pausing to sum up what we have learned about Charmides.

We have seen that Charmides is an extremely beautiful young man with a very illustrious family background. When he walked into the gymnasium, he wielded a certain power over everyone in the room, immediately becoming an object of awe and desire. And yet it is striking that despite all this he does not seem to be at all arrogant or willful. He possesses a modest and gentle nature, which fits with ease into the conventional mould of moderation. But perhaps because being beautiful in this way comes so naturally to him and is met with such unanimous praise, Charmides has had little cause to reflect upon his own virtue.

When the opportunity presents itself to investigate along with Socrates, Charmides, who took note of Socrates long ago, is extremely eager. And yet he proves reluctant to be an active participant in the investigation (158e ff). The courage with which he investigates in giving his second definition shows that he is not completely lacking in the boldness he will need to move from a conventional understanding of moderation to a deeper understanding of the virtue and of himself—but he will need a lot more of it. With regard to Socrates’ refutations, Charmides remains ever acquiescent, failing to object to even the most obvious exaggerations and distortions in Socrates’ arguments. As much as his modesty speaks in his favor, his very sense of shame, which manifests itself most in his deference to the authority and opinions of others, hinders him in the search for knowledge of himself and the meaning of moderation. The question seems to be whether Charmides is capable of maturing beyond the beauty and modesty that, for now, suit his age. In the passages to come, we will get some indication that he is not hopelessly subservient.¹¹⁵ Charmides shows himself willing to be at least playfully insubordinate, goading his guardian Critias into proving he knew what he meant when he said that moderation was doing one’s own things.

¹¹⁵ Lampert also notes that Charmides has not “escaped the conventional,” but by contrast suggests that he “in all likelihood never will.” See *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 172.

CHAPTER 2: CRITIAS

We reached a turning point in the dialogue at the end of the previous chapter. With Charmides' proposal of doing one's own things as a definition for moderation, the focus of the conversation shifts from an examination of Charmides to an examination of moderation itself. This search for moderation is filtered through the lens of a new interlocutor: Critias takes Charmides' place in conversation with Socrates. As the dialogue between these two develops, it becomes increasingly intellectual and abstract. Parts of the remainder of the *Charmides* are so abstruse that it can be difficult even to see how the discussion still relates to the topic of moderation. As several commentators have noted, the epistemological discussions that dominate the latter part of the *Charmides* would seem to find a more fitting home in the *Theaetetus*.¹¹⁶ Some even go so far as to maintain that the actual focus of the dialogue is not moderation at all, but rather knowledge.¹¹⁷ But it would be a mistake to think that moderation and knowledge, in

¹¹⁶ T.G.Tuckey, quoting Shorey, notes that "many feel the same distaste for [the latter parts of the dialogue] as they do for the subtler parts of the *Theaetetus*." See T. G. Tuckey, *Plato's Charmides* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1968), 1. Sprague, in the introduction to her translation of the *Charmides*, finds the "aridities" of the end of the *Charmides* earn it a greater resemblance to the *Parmenides* than to other early dialogues (*Laches and Charmides*, 53). See *Plato: Laches and Charmides*, trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 53.

¹¹⁷ Charles Kahn for example, goes too far when he argues that "The search for moral knowledge ... takes a reflexive turn to self-knowledge that loses all contact with the

particular self-knowledge, are not intimately related.¹¹⁸ The challenge is to understand how. For this reason, as we proceed it will be important not to lose sight of the more familiar themes and questions surrounding moderation that arose in the first part of the dialogue.

We must also be aware of a significant subtext to the conversation between Socrates and Critias. As alluded to earlier in the dialogue, Socrates and Critias have a longstanding association (156a). The ideas that unfold in the *Charmides* are clearly topics they have discussed before.¹¹⁹ And at several points Critias appears to be parroting a number of Socratic sayings. But we also see Critias trying to make his mark as an intellectual in his own right, offering his own interpretations of texts and oracles, interpretations that differ in significant ways from those of Socrates. The differences between how Socrates and Critias understand the meaning of moderation shed light on Plato's conception of the virtue.

Moderation as Doing One's Own Things

We ended the last chapter with Charmides offering his third and final definition for moderation: "doing one's own things," a definition he had heard from someone else. Socrates insists that whoever told Charmides that moderation is doing one's own things

ordinary meaning of *sōphrosunē*." See *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 191.

¹¹⁸ On the relationship between virtue and knowledge see Pangle, *Virtue is Knowledge*.

¹¹⁹ Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 178.

must have been speaking in riddles. To prove his point, Socrates interprets the phrase in a literal and laughable way. Socrates argues that the phrase sounds as if it means that a writer ought only write or read his own name, a weaver weave only his own cloak, a cobbler cobble only his own shoes.¹²⁰ Each case is a matter of “doing something,” so, strictly speaking, this is what it would mean to do only one’s own things. Surely, Socrates contends, a city managed under a law that bid each to do one’s own things in this way would not be managed well.¹²¹ If to manage moderately is to manage well, then this doing of one’s own things could not possibly be moderation.

For the first time in the dialogue, Socrates has brought in the good of the city as a standard by which one can judge whether or not something qualifies as moderate. The idea of moderation as a ruling art will be returned to at the end of the dialogue.¹²² For now we need only note that Socrates makes this mockery of “doing one’s own things” in order to goad Critias into the discussion. Did Charmides hear this ridiculous definition

¹²⁰ Hippias the sophist appears to be someone who does, or makes, his own things in this way, from a ring on his finger to the shoes on his feet. In Plato’s *Lesser Hippias* (368b-c) Socrates says to him: “I once heard you boasting... You asserted that you had once come to Olympia, having all you had about your body as your own works.” Translations of the *Lesser Hippias* are from *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Thomas Pangle and trans. James Leake (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹²¹ Socrates introduces this very meaning of doing one’s own things in the *Republic*, only to replace it with the one person, one job principle (see 369e ff.).

¹²² For a comparison of the two cities envisioned under moderation as it is understood here and as it is understood later in the dialogue see Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 127.

from some fool, Socrates asks? Charmides insists that he heard it from someone reputed to be quite wise. “Then,” Socrates says, “more than anything he put it forward as a riddle, being aware that it is hard to recognize whatever doing one’s own things is” (162b).

Although Socrates suspects that Charmides heard this definition of moderation from Critias, the original riddler he has in mind is likely none other than himself.¹²³ For, as we will soon see, Critias does not appreciate the challenge involved in determining the meaning of doing one’s own things.

Charmides, unable himself to explain what doing one’s own things might mean, says “perhaps nothing prevents the one who said it from knowing what he had in mind,” and, laughing slightly, he glances at Critias (162b). Socrates pauses in his narration to relate the following to his nameless companion:

It had long been clear that Critias was anxious to contend and win honor before both Charmides and those present; and having held himself back with difficulty earlier, he now became unable to. In my opinion what I suspected is more true than anything, that Charmides had heard this answer about moderation from Critias. Now Charmides, not wishing himself to give an account of the answer but for Critias to, kept prodding him and pointing out that he had been refuted. But he didn’t endure this, and it was my opinion that Critias was angry with him, just as a poet is with an actor who recites his poems badly. So he looked at him and said, “Do you suppose Charmides, that if *you* don’t know what he had in mind who said that moderation is doing one’s own things, therefore he doesn’t know either?” (162c-e)

Critias, who is able to contain himself only with difficulty, shares little of the form of moderation expressed in Charmides as quietness or modesty. Critias is capable of some

¹²³ This is a point on which most commentators agree. If not directly from Socrates, it is possible Critias heard about Socrates’ emphasis upon “doing one’s own things” from Alcibiades. See *Alcibiades I* 127a ff.

self-restraint but is soon overcome by his desire for honor. Socrates likens him not to a philosopher but to a poet, one who reacts with anger when he hears his lines garbled by a bad actor. Critias is possessive over his own words, which he seems to care about more insofar as they represent him than insofar as they represent the truth.

Earlier in the dialogue Critias seemed very warm, even fatherly, toward Charmides, gladly touting his talents. We see how quickly his attitude changes as soon as the boy becomes an embarrassment. One can certainly empathize with Critias' desire not to be made a fool of, and it is hard to blame him for being irritated by Charmides, who has been acting a bit like a rascal.¹²⁴ The difficulty is that Critias is unable to react to the situation with grace or patience. His response to Charmides would be witty were it delivered playfully rather than in anger. But Critias has a short fuse, and not much of a sense of humor; his excessive pride is easily wounded.

Socrates has to calm Critias through flattery, appealing to the very sense of self-importance and love of honor that were the source of his anger. It is no wonder, Socrates says, that Charmides at his age is ignorant. But surely Critias, because of his age and the care he has taken, will know what the one who said moderation is doing one's own things meant. Socrates says he will gladly continue the investigation with Critias if he is willing to take over the argument from Charmides. Critias is willing and eager to take up the argument.

¹²⁴ Beversluis, for example, thinks Critias' irritation is "perfectly understandable." See John Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142.

In contrast to how Socrates' search for moderation with Charmides began, there is no suggestion here that the procedure for examining moderation depends on Critias looking for moderation within himself.¹²⁵ Socrates does not insist that Critias' ability to say what moderation is depends on his possessing the virtue, although his ability to *understand* it might. With this change in procedure, it is important to recognize that the purpose of the conversation has also changed. To see this more clearly, it is worth reviewing how the investigation of moderation began. The topic of moderation was introduced in the context of the cure Socrates claimed to have for Charmides' headaches. He spoke of a drug that must be accompanied by an incantation of beautiful speeches from which moderation comes to be in souls. It looked as though Socrates would have told Charmides the incantations had Critias not interrupted on Charmides' behalf, insisting that the boy was already quite moderate. Socrates agreed that if Charmides was sufficiently moderate, they could skip the incantations and go straight to the drug. But when Charmides found himself unable to say tactfully whether or not he was in adequate possession of the virtue, Socrates proposed that they investigate together. The premise of this investigation is that if moderation is in Charmides, it will furnish some perception. From this perception Charmides should be able to form an opinion which, knowing Greek, he ought to be able to express.

¹²⁵ Bruell notes that although Socrates has Critias accept this definition as his own, "Socrates had not spoken of or indicated a desire to examine or strip Critias" ("Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 159).

So when Charmides asked Socrates what difference the source of his third definition made, Socrates should have answered that it made all the difference. The entire procedure Socrates had outlined, the aim of which was to find out whether Charmides possesses moderation, depended entirely on Charmides looking for moderation within himself.¹²⁶ Instead of reminding Charmides of this, Socrates agrees with Charmides when he says that what matters is not the origin of the definition, but whether or not it is true. This marks an unstated turning point in the discussion, which shifts from an investigation of moderation within Charmides to an investigation of moderation itself.¹²⁷

But it is not *just* an investigation of moderation itself. Socrates makes a point of having Critias accept the new definition as his own. As we saw at the close of the last chapter, although Charmides does not say it, we have reason to believe that he wants this particular definition to be investigated *because* it belongs to Critias. Charmides wants to see whether Critias will prove any more resistant to Socrates' refutations than he did. Socrates, for his part, is happy to oblige. He seems to recognize that for Charmides to pursue this matter any further, he first needs to be freed of Critias' influence. Thus, the conversation that follows serves the dual purpose of drawing certain questions to

¹²⁶ Compare Bruell, "Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 156: "For to continue the discussion in the way [Charmides] now proposed was to divorce it from the Socratic procedure for discovering whether or not he possessed moderation and to that extent to leave that question behind."

¹²⁷ Bruell aptly warns that while the following discussion seems to be concerned only with the question of moderation, we must beware of how what follows is still shaped by Critias' character and not "simply 'philosophic'" ("Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 159).

Charmides' attention, while also challenging Critias' authority, thereby freeing Charmides to investigate for himself what the virtue of moderation is, and whether or not he has it.¹²⁸

Critias adopts "doing one's own things" as his own

When Critias agrees to take over the argument, Socrates asks him whether he also agrees with the previously stated claim, that craftsmen make something. Socrates had in fact spoken earlier of craftsmen *doing* something (161e), a difference Critias will soon put to use.¹²⁹ For now Critias concedes that craftsmen do make something; they make their own things along with those of others and nothing prevents them from being moderate in doing so. How then, Socrates asks, can Critias still maintain that moderation is doing one's own things? Wiser to Socrates' switching of terms than Charmides was, Critias argues that in agreeing that nothing prevents those who *make* the things of others from being moderate, he has hardly conceded that those who *do* the things of others are moderate. Socrates then asks Critias whether he does not consider making and doing to be the same, thereby prompting Critias to elaborate his distinction between them.

Critias begins by saying that he distinguishes making not only from doing but also

¹²⁸ Schmid (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 31) also recognizes that "Socrates might regard Charmides rather than Critias, as the person more likely to benefit from his dialogue with the latter."

¹²⁹ The phrase "*doing one's own things*" is "*to ta heautou prattein*." The verb translated as "make" is "*poiein*," and as "work" is "*ergon*."

from working. He has learned from Hesiod that “work is no disgrace” (163b). In saying this, Critias argues, contrary to the obvious meaning of Hesiod’s words, that one should not understand Hesiod to suggest that there is nothing disgraceful about “work” like cobbling, fish selling, or prostitution. Hesiod must have drawn distinctions, as Critias does, between making, doing, and working. Critias goes on to argue that making can become a disgrace, when a thing is not made nobly. But when a thing is made nobly and beneficially, this kind of making may rightfully be called working and doing. And only things such as this can be considered one’s own, while everything harmful is alien.

The essential distinction Critias has drawn is between making on one hand, and doing and working on the other. Nothing prevents one who makes things for others from being moderate, provided his makings are of the sort that are noble and beneficial—in other words, the kind of making that can properly be called a working or doing of what may truly be considered one’s own things. Rather than understanding “one’s own” as possessions literally belonging to oneself, like one’s name, shoes, or clothing, Critias interprets one’s own as that which is noble and beneficial as opposed to harmful. By this account, working and doing are equivalent; neither, if properly identified, can ever be a disgrace. Critias’ introduction of the term “working” is superfluous to his argument. He seems to have brought it in only so as to make use of Hesiod, putting his own especially aristocratic stamp on that famous poet’s words.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ See Hesiod, *Works and Days* 311. The reference to Hesiod is of particular interest since we know from Xenophon that Socrates was accused of using this very line to “teach his companions to be doers of mischief and skilled at tyranny.” According to the accuser,

Socrates had used the concern of the city as a whole to dismiss the first understanding of doing one's own things. Doing one's own things understood as each individual being radically self-sufficient was eliminated as a plausible meaning for moderation insofar as this did not make for a well-managed city. Indeed, it is hard to see how a group of entirely self-sufficient individuals could form a city at all. This conception of doing one's own things seems to deny the foundation of necessity upon which, as Socrates suggests in the *Republic*, cities are built (see *Republic* 369b ff.). Socrates has implied that behaving moderately on the level of the individual must in some way be conducive to the well-ordered, moderate operation of a city as a whole. What then is the proper way of doing one's own things within the context of a city?

Socrates does not go on to evaluate Critias' explanation of the phrase by the standard of the city, but what is revealed by doing so? Would a city be well managed according to a law that bid everyone to do one's own things in the way Critias would have them? There is a way in which Critias' definition fails to confront productively the necessities of a city. A city in which no one ever did any disgraceful works such as prostitution would doubtless be admirable, but a city ordered by Critias' excessively

Socrates argued that with these words Hesiod "bids one to refrain from no work, however unjust or shameful, but to do even these for gain." Xenophon, in a less than fully convincing defense of Socrates, claims that Socrates "thoroughly agreed that being a worker is both beneficial for a human being and good...those who do something good both work and are good workers, but those who play dice or do something else wicked and unprofitable he called idlers" (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.56). On this point see Robert Bartlett, "An Introduction to Hesiod's Works and Days," *The Review of Politics* 68, 2 (2006): 97-198.

aristocratic standards would also seem to be one where all would go shoeless. Or, more likely, a certain subclass of individuals would be responsible for all such “disgraceful” works. The ordering of a city implied by Critias’ statement is characteristically oligarchic, marking off a gentlemanly class—those considered both noble and good—from a lower class consigned to undesirable, but necessary work.¹³¹

The extreme disdain Critias shows for the banausic arts and the laborers who attend to a city’s most basic needs hardly seems conducive to a well-ordered society, at least if that order is to be at all harmonious. Harmony is a standard we will see play a significant role in both the happiness and strength of a city as described in the *Republic*, where Socrates gives what has become his most well-known articulation of doing one’s own things. Doing one’s own things in Socrates’ city in speech amounts to each individual in the city doing the task to which he or she is most suited by nature. While an undeniable hierarchy is established by virtue of this principle, each part or class is acknowledged and valued as a contributor to the whole, a feature important in helping to prevent faction. In the *Republic*, Socrates identifies this understanding of doing one’s own things with justice, but especially insofar as it involves a harmony and friendship among the parts it proves indistinguishable from the definition Socrates first provides for moderation. This riddle in its own right will be discussed in our chapter on the *Republic*.

Returning to the discussion at hand, solving the present riddle of what it could possibly mean to do one’s own things depends on determining the precise meaning of

¹³¹ See Vlastos, “The Historical Socrates,” 99-100.

“doing” and “one’s own.” Socrates had emphasized how difficult it is to know the meaning of this phrase, but Critias has given no indication that he appreciates the challenge. For Critias, doing one’s own things means doing what is noble and beneficial. Still, precisely what Critias means by these words remains so unclear that he might as well be speaking in riddles. From what he has said so far, we can only gather that, in Critias’ mind, not all activities are dignified enough to be properly called doings, and what is harmful cannot properly be considered one’s own. But this leaves us far from knowing the positive content behind doing one’s own things in Critias’ understanding. What precisely does Critias have in mind when he refers to the noble and the beneficial?

Moderation as the Doing of Good Things

Socrates suggests one possibility for what Critias might have meant. He says that just as Critias was beginning, he *almost* understood his argument: “you call things good that are kindred to oneself and one’s own, and you call the makings of good things doings” (163d). After referring to Prodicus, from whom he has heard ten thousand such distinctions among names, Socrates tells Critias to “set down the names however you wish, but only make clear to what you are referring whatever name you say” (163d). Go back again from the beginning, Socrates says, and define it more plainly—the doing or making (however Critias wants to name it) of good things, is this what he says moderation is? Critias agrees. So, Socrates asks, he who does bad things is not moderate, but he who does good things is? Critias responds by asking Socrates whether, in *his*

opinion, this isn't so. Socrates retorts that it is not his own opinion, but what Critias says that is under investigation.

At this point it is worth pausing to notice that something strange is going on. In the first place, the definition Socrates has disguised as a simple summing up or clarification of Critias' argument is significantly different from what Critias had said. And the fact that Socrates stresses that he *almost* understood Critias' meaning, and only as he was just *starting* to speak, suggests that in the end what Critias meant was quite different from Socrates' first suspicion of what he might mean. In other words, Socrates thought Critias' distinction was going to hinge on the good—if it had, he would have understood him. But Critias said nothing about the good. Socrates' apparent clarification of Critias' statement marks a new beginning insofar as it introduces the good, whereas Critias has only spoken of the noble and the beneficial. Critias then has every reason to ask Socrates whether the notion that doing one's own things is doing the good things is *his* opinion on the matter, since Socrates is the one to have made that suggestion. And it is all the more strange for Socrates to insist in response that they are investigating not what he thinks but what Critias has *said*, since Socrates knows full well that Critias never *said* anything about the good.

This switch from what Critias had spoken of, the noble and the beneficial, to Socrates' suggestion of the good is not inconsequential, especially if we keep in mind

what we observed in the earlier discussion between Socrates and Charmides.¹³² It is far from clear that the good, the noble, and the beneficial always coincide. Many commentators, in their eagerness to reduce Critias to the tyrant he will become, read Critias especially critically here, attributing to him an equation of one's own with the good, a position that amounts to nothing more than a "calculating, narrow egoism."¹³³ This sort of interpretation either ignores completely, or quickly passes over, the concern Critias has shown for the noble, as well as his love of honor, attachments not captured by a "calculating, narrow egoism." It is important to see that Critias' love of the noble and attachment to honor, both potentially admirable elements of his character, are part and parcel of what we saw earlier to be an excessively oligarchic inclination. As Socrates will bring out later (169b), Critias, son of Callaeschrus, is a mix of both beautiful and ugly qualities.

Given Critias' clear interest in honor and the noble, it seems most likely, as Critias suspects, that this new emphasis on the good is Socrates' opinion on the matter. As we will see, this is just the first of many instances in which Socrates will steer the

¹³² Compare Lampert (*How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 182), who notes that "Socrates' substitution of *good* for *kalon and useful* anticipates just where the fundamental difference between them will be found: in their respective notions of the good."

¹³³ For example, Schmid (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 34) insists that "Critias' underlying thought is clear: the true meaning of *sōphrosunē* does not consist in making or even doing what is beautiful; it rather focuses on the idea of procuring benefit for oneself and avoiding all harm as "alien." Schmid goes on to describe Critias as a "decadent aristocrat," with no genuine concern for nobility. Lampert gives a similar interpretation of Critias, also describing him as operating on the basis of a "private, calculating egoism" (*How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 181).

conversation with Critias. Still, what is meant by the good remains a mystery. Socrates insists that Critias use whatever term he likes so long as he makes the object it refers to clear. Not only has Socrates done his own dubious switching of terms, but we have yet to find out what should be attached to each of them. Whatever Socrates' intentions might be, Critias is willing to accept the words as his own. Whether Critias understands how this view differs from his own remains to be seen.

For now, Critias asserts that the one who makes bad things is not moderate, whereas the one who makes good things is, and he gives his new definition of the virtue: the doing of good things is moderation. Socrates says that perhaps nothing prevents Critias from speaking the truth. Having been the source of this new definition, it is not surprising that Socrates finds it more promising. But the fact that Critias may speak the truth does not mean he understands it. This discrepancy between knowing and not knowing will be the thrust of Socrates' next query. Socrates says he wonders about something: does Critias believe those who are moderate are ignorant of being moderate? Critias does not believe so. But Socrates reminds Critias that he had earlier said that nothing prevents craftsmen who make the things of others from being moderate, and he goes on to raise a problem for Critias' position.

Socrates begins by gaining Critias' agreement on the following points: A doctor who makes someone healthy makes beneficial things both for himself and for the one he doctors. In doing this, the doctor does what is needed, and the one who does what is needed is moderate. Socrates then asks Critias whether it is necessary for the doctor to

recognize when he is doctoring beneficially and when not, as well as for each of the craftsmen to recognize when he is going to profit from the work he is doing and when not.¹³⁴ When Critias answers, “perhaps not,” Socrates points out that sometimes the doctor will not know himself whether he has done something beneficially or harmfully. “And yet having done it beneficially, as your argument has it, he did it moderately” (164c). Critias admits he had said this. Socrates then asks him whether it seems that “sometimes he who does something beneficially does it moderately and is moderate, but is ignorant of being moderate himself” (164c). Critias is adamant that this could not possibly be so.

Just what is Socrates driving at with this argument? As noted above, Socrates begins by reminding Critias that he has said that nothing prevents the craftsman who does his own things from being moderate. The force of this argument is to suggest that a certain kind of ignorance may prevent the craftsman from being moderate in doing his own things. What is the precise nature of the ignorance in question? At first it sounds like Socrates is suggesting that a doctor may cure a patient just by luck. Such a case seems analogous to the possibility that Critias happened to be speaking the truth about moderation without fully understanding how or why. He would be similar to the doctor who does the beneficial thing in treating a patient without even realizing it, an act that would not seem to be in keeping with the individual’s status as a doctor. The point here seems similar to one made by Thrasymachus in the *Republic*—an expert qua expert must

¹³⁴ The word here translated as “recognize” is *gignōsko*.

be understood as someone who is fully aware of what he or she is doing, and does not just happen upon it by chance. Thrasymachus asks Socrates, “Do you call a man who makes mistakes about the sick a doctor because of the very mistake he is making?” (*Republic* 340d). As Thrasymachus summarizes: “in precise speech...none of the craftsmen makes mistakes. The man who makes mistakes makes them on account of a failure in knowledge, and in that respect is no craftsmen” (*Republic* 340d-e). A doctor, insofar as he or she is a doctor, cures by knowledge, not by luck.

But the second example makes one wonder whether some amount of chance might not always be involved in profiting as a craftsman as well. When Socrates asks whether every craftsman must know when he is going to profit and when not, he hints at more significant limits to knowledge, limits he will return to at the end of his conversation with Critias when the dialogue comes full circle (174b). The first difficulty in this case can be seen especially clearly if one considers the example of the worker Hesiod had in mind: the farmer. The farmer surely knows what is needful insofar as he is a farmer—he must plant his crops and tend his land. If all goes well, he and whomever he sells his crops to are bound to benefit. But how could he ever be certain that he will profit when he remains entirely at the mercy of the weather? Once we grant our limited ability to predict the future, the sphere within which we can know with certainty our ability to profit radically shrinks.¹³⁵ If, as Socrates suggests here, being moderate involves doing what is needed, insofar as we have to act in the present without certainty as to whether we

¹³⁵ See Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.6-8.

will benefit or profit in the future, the crucial knowledge to have would be this awareness both of what we know and of the limits to what we can know—that is, knowledge of our ignorance.

But a farmer or doctor or craftsman could be ignorant in an even more fundamental way than in regard to the future. As Socrates has indicated earlier in the dialogue, more important than the body is the soul. And insofar as one tends to things of the body, one fails, as Socrates puts it in another dialogue, to know oneself and to do one's own things. In conversation with Critias' friend Alcibiades, Socrates puts the point this way:

So farmers and craftsmen fall far short of knowing themselves. For they don't even know what belongs to them, it seems, but something further removed than what belongs to them, at least as far as their arts are concerned. For they know the things that belong to the body, the things with which the body is tended...So if moderation is knowing oneself, none of these is moderate because of his art.
(*Alcibiades I* 131a-b)

Without a clear picture of one's true self, one cannot know the good. One could be doing either the beneficial or the harmful without, as Socrates puts it, *knowing himself* what he is doing.¹³⁶ Here we see why Socrates embedded this phrase *gignōskei heauton* within his argument. He succeeds in cornering Critias while at the same time offering him a phrase

¹³⁶ In the above points I have followed Bruell ("Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 163) who writes: "For while one might say that the doers of good things are moderate only insofar as they know the goodness of what they do, an uncertainty about the goodness of what he does belongs to the artisan as such. He cannot know, without divination, whether his work will have a successful outcome; he does not know as artisan the goodness of the end his art serves (e.g., it is not by his science that a medical man knows the goodness of health); and he does not know by his art the circumstances in which its practice is beneficial."

which serves as a trap door through which Critias escapes. Critias latches on to this concept and turns his focus to a new definition of moderation: knowing oneself.¹³⁷ Critias proceeds to argue that being moderate is nearly equivalent to knowing oneself, so it is impossible for someone to be moderate without knowing it.¹³⁸ To come to see the true meaning of doing's one's own things, we must understand what one's own means in the most significant way. We must consider a good that goes beyond the limited ends toward which each of the arts aim, asking what is the ultimate good for ourselves? Having raised this question, Socrates then offers Critias—and Plato his readers—the key of self-knowledge.¹³⁹

Knowing Oneself and Moderation

Critias heeds Socrates' prompting, taking advantage of his mention of the doctor knowing himself to launch into his second extended speech. He insists that he would rather take back what he had previously said than concede that someone who is ignorant

¹³⁷ As Tuckey (*Plato's Charmides*, 24) puts it, Critias' reply "gives the impression that he is thinking: 'Oh, of course! Why didn't I think of that before?'" See also Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 190 fn. 13. See also Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 185.

¹³⁸ Bruell ("Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 165) understands the problem here to be one of boasting—a vice incompatible with moderation.

¹³⁹ Beversluis (*Cross-Examining Socrates*, 146) thinks the lack of knowledge in question is the doctor's inability to know whether or not his or her patient will be cured, but that "a temperate doctor is not one who *cures* his patients but one who *does his best* to cure them by conscientiously doing what is in their best medical interests." This underestimates the kind of knowledge necessary for acting moderately in a Socratic sense.

of himself is moderate because “this is almost what moderation is: knowing oneself” (164d). Having earlier supported his argument with a novel interpretation of Hesiod, Critias now finds grounds for his position in what appears to be an equally eccentric interpretation of the Delphic inscription:

This inscription in my opinion was put up as if it were a greeting of the god to those entering, instead of ‘rejoice,’ in the view that this greeting, ‘rejoice,’ is not correct, and that they should not exhort each other to this, but to be moderate.¹⁴⁰ Thus the god addresses those entering the temple somewhat differently than do human beings. Such was the thinking of the one who put it up when he put it up, in my opinion. And he says to whoever enters nothing other than ‘be moderate’ he asserts. He says it, of course, in a rather riddlesome way, like a diviner. For ‘know yourself’ and ‘be moderate’ are the same, as the inscription and I assert. Yet someone might perhaps suppose they are different, which is what happened in my opinion to those who put up the later inscriptions ‘Nothing too much’ and ‘A pledge, and bane is near.’ For they supposed that ‘Know yourself’ is a counsel, not a greeting by the god for the sake of those entering. And then, so that they too might put up counsels no less useful, they wrote these and put them up. (164d-165a)

In telling this story Critias seems to be trying to outshine Socrates, whom he would have heard years ago offer his own account as to the origins of the Delphic inscriptions.

During the conversation depicted in Plato’s *Protagoras*, at which both Critias and Charmides were present, Socrates describes the seven wise men as having “offered up the first fruits of wisdom to Apollo at the temple of Delphi, where they wrote the things that indeed all recite, ‘Know Thyself’ and ‘Nothing in Excess’” (*Protagoras* 343a-b).¹⁴¹

Critias here offers his own account of the inscriptions.

¹⁴⁰ The customary Greek greeting *khaire* translates as “rejoice.”

¹⁴¹ All translations of the *Protagoras* are from *Protagoras*” and “*Meno*,” trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

According to Critias, the one who wrote the key inscription wrote it to be a greeting worthy of a god. Critias' suggestion is somewhat puzzling, but it can be understood at least in part with the help of one of Plato's letters. In a letter to Dionysius, Plato explains his reason for avoiding the customary greeting of wishing the other joy in favor of his own preferred way of beginning letters to friends by wishing they do well (*euprattein*). Plato chastises Dionysius, who was said to have addressed the god at Delphi in the usual way, wishing him joy and a tyrant's life of pleasure. Plato, by contrast, insists that he would never exhort a man, much less a god, to enjoy himself, since gods live lives beyond pleasure and pain, and for men, pleasures are only the source of harm, "breeding stupidity, forgetfulness, senselessness, and hubris in the soul" (Plato, *Third Letter*).

Here Critias provides a similarly improved greeting. Better than wishing someone rejoice, a god would wish for the other to know himself. The inscription is meant not as a counsel but as a greeting from one knower to another. In this way, Critias presents himself as pious, but his piety is marked by his own relatively exclusive understanding of what the god at Delphi had in mind.¹⁴² Critias attributes to the god a wisdom superior to

¹⁴² A number of scholars interpret this passage in light of the belief that Critias is an atheist (for example, Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 38 and Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 188). This belief is largely grounded in the assumption that Critias was the author of the satyr play *Sisyphus*. A single fragment from this play remains, one in which the character Sisyphus describes a clever man who invented the gods to keep human beings in order. There are a number of problems with interpreting Critias and this passage in light of this fragment. First, it is unclear whether Critias or Euripides authored the play. Second, even if Critias had been the author, ascribing to him the beliefs of one of his characters is problematic. This is especially so when, as Sutton, referencing Dihle, notes, nothing in any of the other preserved fragments of Critias' writings confirm the theory that he is an atheist. For a summary of the ways in which this

that of most, but not all, human beings. The god, according to Critias, emphasizes knowledge and in the same spirit seems to speak especially to would-be knowers. Critias' claim is that "know thyself" is a riddlesome way of saying "be moderate." Traditionally the phrase "know thyself" meant to know one's place, especially in relation to the gods.¹⁴³ Critias' interpretation of the inscription as a greeting rather than a counsel levels the traditional hierarchy between gods and human beings—at least those superior human beings who, like Critias, are in the know. Despite being a mere mortal, Critias certainly seems to think that he knows the mind of the god fairly well, at least no less well than the person who transcribed the god's inscriptions.¹⁴⁴

Critias is adamantly attached to his new definition. He tells Socrates that he is taking back everything he had said before. Maybe Socrates had been speaking more

fragment and its relation to Critias' own beliefs has been interpreted see Dana Sutton, "Critias and Atheism," *The Classical Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 1 (1981): 33-38. As the dialogue progresses, Socrates repeatedly draws attention to Critias' belief in prophecy (174c and 174a1), making it implausible that he was an atheist (this is not to say his faith was orthodox).

¹⁴³ See North, *Sophrosyne*, especially Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁴ Offering an explanation for the origin of the Delphic inscriptions is not necessarily an impious act—their origin was apparently always disputed. According to Eliza Gregory Wilkins ("Know Thyself" in Greek and Latin Literature", 5-6), "The original authorship of the sayings is an open question now as of old." Wilkins summarizes the status of the Delphic inscriptions origins by quoting Porphyry: "Whether Phemonoe, through whom the Pythian God is said to have first distributed favors to men, uttered this (gnothi sauton) . . . or Phanothea, the priestess of Delphi, or whether it was a dedication of Bias or Thales or Chilon, started by some divine inspiration . . . or whether it was before Chilon . . . as Aristotle says in his work on Philosophy, whosoever it was . . . let the question of its origin lie in dispute."

correctly, or maybe Critias had been, but either way nothing was especially clear. But now, if Socrates disputes that moderation is oneself knowing oneself (*to gignōskein auton heauton*), Critias is willing to give an account of it. This response reveals more about Critias' character. We see here the high premium he places on knowledge, a point that will be reinforced throughout the remainder of the dialogue. And in keeping with the value he places on knowing, it seems laudable that Critias is willing to let go of something he said earlier, rather than insist stubbornly upon the truth of what has now been shown to be incoherent or obviously false.

The difficulty is that Critias' willingness to admit he may have *spoken* incorrectly seems rooted in an overconfidence that he could not possibly be *thinking* incorrectly. He gives no indication of feeling himself to be at all confused or uncertain. Critias feels no need to ensure that there is no contradiction between the thought that prompted him to speak as he did earlier and the one that prompts him now to speak in a contradictory way. Critias fails to take each aspect of his and Socrates' speech seriously enough to become aware of or concerned by his own inconsistencies. Rather than try to reconcile his previous speech with his current position, Critias is happy simply to abandon his previous argument. In this way he shows a lack of care for himself, a point Socrates will draw attention to later in the dialogue. Critias prides himself on the importance he places upon knowledge, but he refuses to recognize anything that might indicate his own lack of it. His very pride in being a knower prevents him from becoming one.

Socrates begins to consider Critias' new definition in the following way. If

moderation is a kind of recognition (*gignōskein*) then it must be a kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*) and must therefore be *of* something. Critias responds that it is indeed a kind of knowledge, namely knowledge of oneself. Without commenting on this reply, Socrates goes on to give examples of two other kinds of knowledge (*epistēmē*), medicine and architecture. Medicine is a knowledge, namely the knowledge of health, which produces the condition of health, which is a benefit to us. Architecture is a knowledge of building houses, which produces houses which are a benefit to us, and so on with the other arts (*technē*). If moderation is a knowledge (*epistēmē*) of the self, then what noble result does it produce that makes it worthy of the name?

Critias replies that Socrates is not enquiring correctly by assuming that all forms of knowledge are alike. What product, for example, do the arts (*technē*) of calculation or geometry produce that is akin to a house produced by house-building or a coat by weaving? The distinction Critias draws between different kinds of sciences, practical and theoretical, seems a legitimate one and a point that Socrates concedes.¹⁴⁵ But if doctoring produces the health of the body, one wonders whether moderation might not produce the health of the soul.¹⁴⁶ For now, however, Socrates drops entirely the question of what moderation provides for us that makes it worthy of the name. He instead steers the conversation in a different direction.

Before moving forward, it is worth noting that Critias could have objected when

¹⁴⁵ The Stranger draws the same distinction in Plato's *Statesman* (see 258d-e).

¹⁴⁶ This suggestion is made by Tuckey, *Plato's Charmides*, 32.

Socrates first equated recognition of oneself with knowledge. Depending on what one means by the terms, one is not necessarily a form of the other.¹⁴⁷ In the passages to follow we will be prompted to reflect upon the nature and spectrum of knowing, from opinion to knowledge, perception to science. As Socrates suggested earlier in the dialogue, we need to remain aware of what precisely is being referred to whenever a word is being used, keeping in mind that there are different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing. In the section that follows, to help avoid making Charmides' mistake of assuming we know the exact meaning of a word just because it is familiar, I will often refer to the original Greek terms at issue.

Knowledge of Knowledge

Directly after Critias drives home the point, with which Socrates agrees, that the knowledge that comprises moderation, namely knowledge of oneself, is different from the other forms of knowledge, Socrates says the following: But in each of these cases, I can point out to you what the knowledge is of, different from the knowledge itself. For example, calculation is concerned with the even and the odd, which are themselves distinct from calculation. Similarly, weighing is concerned with the heavy and the light, which are themselves distinct from weighing. What then, Socrates asks, is moderation a

¹⁴⁷ For discussions of this step in the argument see Tuckey, *Plato's Charmides*, 30-31, 49-50, 57; Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy*, 95-96; and Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 43.

knowledge *of* that is different from moderation itself?¹⁴⁸ In this way, Socrates sets Critias up to argue that the knowledge at issue differs from all other knowledges in this respect as well—that it has itself as its subject. Critias takes the bait: He says Socrates has come to the very way in which moderation differs from all the other knowledges, for while the others are knowledges of something else and not of themselves, it alone is a knowledge both of the other knowledges and itself of itself. Notice Critias here adds knowledge of the other knowledges, whereas Socrates will soon add and emphasize knowledge of non-knowledge.

Now why might Socrates have driven the argument in this direction? After all, Critias had provided a subject for the knowledge that is moderation, namely the subject of the self. The self would seem at first glance to be a subject of knowledge as distinct from the knowledge that comprises moderation as even and odd are from the knowledge that comprises calculation. Why then does the conversation turn from the comprehensible notion of self-knowledge to a more abstract discussion of knowledge of knowledge? As we will see, the discussion of knowledge of knowledge brings out what is strange about the apparently accessible idea of self-knowledge. For in taking the self as the object of our knowledge, we are attempting to know as an object what is in its essence a subject.¹⁴⁹ And if what we mean by the self is primarily a knower, then in speaking of knowledge of the self, we are speaking of a peculiar kind of reflexive knowledge, a knowledge of a

¹⁴⁸ Compare *Republic* 438c-d.

¹⁴⁹ On this point see Bruell, “Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge,” 171-172 and 175-176.

knower. But to what extent and about what things are we knowers? As will be confirmed in the section to come, Socrates wants Critias to reflect on whether or not knowledge of knowledge is possible. In other words, do we know what we think we know, and what kind of certainty is available to us?

But Critias has his own theory as to what is motivating Socrates. After maintaining that moderation is a knowledge of other knowledges and itself of itself, Critias accuses Socrates of being far from unaware of this and contends the following: “for you are doing, I suppose, what you just denied you were doing. You are attempting to refute me and letting go of what the argument is about” (166c). Socrates responds as though he is shocked by such an accusation:

“What a thing you are doing,” I said, “by believing even if I do refute you, that I am refuting for the sake of anything other than that for the sake of which I would also search through myself as to what I say, fearing that unawares I might ever suppose that I know something when I don’t know. So I do assert that this is what I am doing now: investigating the argument most of all for the sake of myself, but perhaps also for my other suitable companions. Or don’t you suppose that it is a common good for almost all human beings that each thing that exists should become clearly apparent just as it is?” (166c-d)

Critias says he very much thinks so, and Socrates tells him in that case to be courageous and, without caring who is being refuted, to apply his mind to the argument. This is the second time Socrates has had to urge his interlocutor to be courageous in his search for the truth. The first was when Socrates told Charmides to be courageous in his self-examination (160d). The goodness of having things revealed as they are is not as obvious to us as Socrates makes it seem. Courage is needed in our attempts to make each thing that exists become apparent just as it is because we fear what we might find and what we

stand to lose.

Critias' immediate fear is a loss of his good reputation. But he is emboldened enough to reassert his belief that moderation alone is knowledge itself of itself and of all the other knowledges. Now as we saw, Socrates had set Critias up to argue that moderation was a knowledge of itself, but "of other knowledges" seems to have been Critias' own addition. Critias stresses moderation as an all-encompassing or ruling knowledge. Socrates, by contrast, highlights the importance of knowing what one doesn't know, asking whether moderation would not also be a knowledge of *non*-knowledge.¹⁵⁰ Altogether, Critias replies. That established, Socrates draws the following conclusion:

Then only the moderate one will himself both know (*gignōsko*) himself and be able to examine both what he happens to know (*eidos*) and what he does not; in the same way it will be possible for him to investigate others in regard to what someone knows and supposes, if he does know, and what he himself supposes he knows but does not know. No one else will be able to. And this is what being moderate and moderation, and oneself knowing (*gignōsko*) oneself are: knowing (*eidenai*) both what one knows and what one does not know. (167a)¹⁵¹

Critias agrees that this is what he is saying. What exactly has he agreed to? In the first place, Socrates has distinguished two kinds of knowing or capacities to know. He says that the one who is moderate, and *only* this one, will *both* know (or recognize) himself (*eauton gnōsetai*) and be able to examine what he happens to know (*eidenai*) and

¹⁵⁰ The importance of this difference is noted by Lampert. *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 200 ff.

¹⁵¹ Dyson and Schmid both take this to be the most significant definition of moderation offered in the dialogue. See M. Dyson, "Some problems concerning Knowledge in Plato's 'Charmides,'" *Phronesis* 19, 2 (1974) and Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 105.

what not. In other words, there is a kind of self-knowledge or recognition that is distinguished from the ability to examine what one knows and does not know. This ability in turn seems distinct from but connected to an ability to examine the claims of knowledge made by others. Socrates speaks here of an *ability* to examine claims to knowledge, both one's own and others'. In other words, his emphasis is on an activity of investigation rather than on the static possession of a body of knowledge.

It is worth considering this passage in light of the long statement Socrates made just preceding it. Socrates had insisted that his refutations of Critias were for the sake of the same end as his examinations of his own opinions. The motivation in each case is a fear of thinking that he knows something that he does not in fact know. Socrates here describes the very activity he himself is engaged in—a refutation of others that is somehow intimately connected with his examination of his own opinions and is an important element in his quest for self-knowledge.¹⁵² Self-knowledge, for Socrates, is not a Cartesian effort to be carried out simply by reflecting upon one's self by oneself. For reasons that are not yet clear, one needs to know others to know oneself.

Back Again

It is important to keep this goal of self-knowledge in mind, for it illuminates a number of the strange features of the passages to follow. In the arguments to come,

¹⁵² For another suggestion that Socrates' dialogues with others are connected with his search for knowledge of himself, see *Theaetetus* 144d-e and *Alcibiades I* 132d ff.

Socrates will examine the possibility of knowledge of knowledge, but in such a way as to allow us to reflect upon what it might mean to know ourselves. At this point, Socrates marks at least a partial break in the argument: “Back again,” he says, “third time for the Savior” (167a). Now that they have located a potential definition for moderation—a knowledge of itself, the other knowledges, and non-knowledge—two things must be considered anew: First, whether this kind of knowledge is possible, and second, if it is possible, what benefit comes from it. Of course, Socrates is here speaking of investigating the possibility and benefit of the very aim he described himself as pursuing at 166b.¹⁵³ The benefit as he described it there was that things would come to be seen clearly as they are. But at this point Socrates claims to be at a loss. The perplexity Socrates presents to Critias centers around the reflexivity of the kind of knowledge (the knowledge of knowledge) that they have proposed moderation entails. Socrates suggests to Critias that this kind of reflexivity seems impossible in other all cases. There are two parts to the argument Socrates makes. It will be worth describing them both in full, before taking a closer look at their meaning.

Socrates begins by asking Critias to consider the possibility of a series of

¹⁵³ Schmid (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 43) notes, “the drama of the *Charmides* makes evident, at the very beginning of the inquiry into the possibility and benefit of self-knowledge—an inquiry that will end aporetically—that some form of knowledge of knowledge and ignorance *is* possible.” Eisenstadt (“Definitions of ΣΩΦΟΠΡΟΣΥΝΗ”) observes that the possibility of knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge is noted at the very beginning of the dialogue as a whole, when Socrates notes that he knew some of the people present at the gymnasium and did not know (and presumably knew he did not know) others.

analogous examples, each entailing an activity or capacity that is directed at itself rather than at its characteristic object. The examples are as follows: a seeing that does not see color, but sees itself and the other seeings and non-seeings; a hearing that hears no sound, but hears itself and the other hearings and non-hearings; a kind of perception of perceptions and of itself that perceives nothing of what the other perceptions perceive; a kind of desire that is a desire of no pleasure, but is of itself and of the other desires; a kind of erotic love such that it happens to be a love of nothing beautiful, but is of itself and of the other loves; a kind of fear that fears itself and the other fears, but fears not even one of the terrible things; an opinion that is an opinion of opinion and of itself, but which opines nothing of what the others opine.

Socrates gains Critias' agreement as to the impossibility of each of these kinds of reflexivity. He then points out that if these cases are impossible, it would be strange if there is, as they assert, "a kind of knowledge such that it is a knowledge of nothing learned, but is a knowledge of itself and of the other knowledges" (168a). Still, rather than deny that there is such a thing, Socrates insists they investigate further. He extends the problem of reflexivity to a second set of examples, presenting the following line of argument: The knowledge of which they have been speaking is a knowledge *of* something; in other words, it has a kind of power or capacity (*dunamis*) so that it is of something. Socrates then draws an analogy between this power and, for example, the power that "the greater" has such that it is greater *than* something, namely something

less.¹⁵⁴

What would be the result if one directed this kind of capacity toward itself? If the greater were greater than itself, it would also be less than itself. Socrates extends this problem to other instances: double and half; more and less; heavier and lighter; older and younger. Socrates wonders, will everything else if it “has its own power with regard to itself also have that being with regard to which its power is?” (168d). Returning to the examples with which he began, he concludes that if hearing is going to hear itself, it must have a sound. Likewise, if vision is going to see itself, it must have color. Socrates asks Critias whether he sees that of the things they have gone through, those of the second set (the contraries) seem impossible, while the existence of others (presumably those of the first set), they strongly distrust. Critias agrees, and Socrates concludes:

However, hearing and seeing, again, and further, a motion itself moving itself, and a heat kindling, and again, all such things, might afford distrust to some, but perhaps not to certain others. Some great man, my friend, is needed, who will draw this distinction capably in everything: whether none of the things that are has itself by nature its own power with regard to itself except knowledge, but has it with regard to something else, or whether some have it and others don’t; and again, if there are some things that themselves have it with regard to themselves, whether among them is a knowledge that we assert is moderation. (168e-169a)

What is the meaning of this line of argument? Critias is most adamant in his denial of the first of these possibilities—a seeing that sees no color, but sees itself and the other seeings and non-seeings. Strictly speaking, this denial is correct, as Socrates confirms toward the close of the argument: seeing, if it is going to see itself, would have

¹⁵⁴ West and West (*Charmides*, 42 n. 53) explain that the genitive *tinós* is the word used in both the expressions “*of* something” and “*than* something,” making for a seamless transition between these arguments in the original Greek.

to have color—a quality it obviously lacks.¹⁵⁵ But in the conclusion to this line of argument Socrates hints at another kind of seeing, one that makes a kind of reflexivity possible. He says: “So you *see*, Critias, that of the things we have gone through, some appear impossible...” (168e).¹⁵⁶ A literal seeing that sees no color is impossible, but Socrates here draws attention to a different kind of seeing, one that goes by the same name, but is not bound to objects with color. There is no literal seeing of seeing, but there is a seeing with the mind’s eye. Similarly, although there is no hearing with the ears that hears no sound, we can hear our own thoughts or a tune we sing to ourselves.

Not only can we see what has no color and hear what has no sound, but we can, as Socrates indicates in his third example, more generally perceive our own perceiving.¹⁵⁷ We can be aware of our own awareness. In other words, human beings possess not only perception but also apperception. It is important to recognize that *this* kind of perceiving is akin to the perceiving of our senses, but not identical to it. If then a certain kind of perception of perception is possible, the suggestion is that so too might a kind of

¹⁵⁵ J. Noel Hubler in “The Perils of Self-Perception: Explanations of Apperception in the Greek Commentaries on Aristotle,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 59, 2 (2005): 296, puts the point as follows: “Sight is not visible because it does not materially receive the form of its object. Sight does not become red when it sees red. If it did, it would be visible. Since it is not colored, it cannot be the object of its own power, for the proper object of vision is color. Hence the power of sight cannot perceive its own operation.” Hubler is here summarizing Alexander’s summary of the relevant passage in Aristotle’s *De Sensu* III.ii.

¹⁵⁶ This point is observed by most commentators. See, for example, Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 95 and Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 205.

¹⁵⁷ Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 90.

knowledge of knowledge be possible. In each case, one needs to bear in mind that while the same words are being used, what they signify may be similar but not identical. The *kind* of knowledge one would have of knowledge might be akin to, but not the same, as the other kinds of knowledge.

Socrates follows his examples of perception with the examples of desire, wish, eros, fear, and opinion, asking in each case whether reflexive cases are possible. It is easy in many of these cases to imagine the capacity directed toward itself. For example, when in the depths of ennui one might desire desire, and it is not uncommon for a person to speak of loving love. The fear of fear itself, is of course an idea with which Roosevelt has made us familiar. And, most obvious of all, it is possible to have an opinion about opinions—for example, about their status in relation to knowledge. The purpose of these examples cannot then be to rule out the possibility of reflexive powers. What other purpose might they serve? The passage as a whole seems meant to direct our attention toward the nature of the human self, especially of the soul, and to urge us to reflect on what it means for the self to have this reflexive power. That all these examples point in this direction is confirmed when Socrates sums up the argument. “Hearing and seeing,” he says, “and further a motion itself moving itself, and a heat kindling, and again, all such things, might afford distrust to some, but perhaps not to certain others.”¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵⁸ This distinction reminds of one drawn by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* between the initiated and uninitiated, the latter being those who “believe that nothing else is except whatever they are capable of getting a tight grip on with their hands, but actions, becomings, and everything invisible they don’t accept as in the class of being”

penultimate example of motion moving itself is the definition of the soul offered in both the *Phaedrus* (245d-246a) and in the *Laws* (895a-896b).¹⁵⁹

The reference to heat kindling reminds of Socrates' description of his own person becoming inflamed earlier in the dialogue. Recall in that context we saw Socrates exercise self-control or self-mastery, on the way to achieving what seemed a kind of moderation. With his next set of examples, Socrates prompts us to puzzle over the very notion of self-mastery, for if we are masters of ourselves, are we not also slaves to ourselves?¹⁶⁰ This is the kind of question raised by Socrates' final set of reflections, beginning with the greater and the less.¹⁶¹ The question of whether or how we are able to stand in relation to ourselves in this way is especially pertinent to the virtue of moderation. Socrates puts the point this way in the *Republic*: "Moderation is surely a certain kind of order and mastery of certain kinds of pleasures and desires, as men say when they use—I don't know in what way—the phrase 'stronger than himself'; and some

(*Theaetetus* 155e). All translations of the *Theaetetus* are from *Plato's Theaetetus*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹⁵⁹ See Klein, *Plato's Meno*, 25; Bruell, "Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 175; and Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 98.

¹⁶⁰ See Clor, *On Moderation*, 27-28: "The concept of moderation presupposes both the necessity and possibility of a kind of self-mastery...But as Plato noted, there is a perplexity here. What is controlling what? That the 'I' which masters and the 'I' which is mastered are one and the same is an unintelligible proposition. It must be that some part of me is in control of some other part. The self is divided."

¹⁶¹ Schmid recognizes there may be a connection between this discussion and moderation itself, but fails to make the correct connection. See Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 190 fn. 12.

other phrases of the sort are used..." (430e). Socrates insists that there is something ridiculous about the phrase "stronger than himself," "if the same *himself* is referred to in all of them" (431a). Of course, we see Socrates in this dialogue describe himself as being "outside of himself," a phrase that would seem no less ridiculous.

The phrase is less ridiculous if we are referring to different parts of ourselves, and this is how Socrates will go on to explain moderation in the *Republic*. But it is important to see here yet another problem. If there are different parts of ourselves, especially parts that are at odds with each other, with which do we most identify? As Bruell points out, of the sets of examples Socrates provides, we seem to identify more with the second set than the first: "we remain what we are without the ability to see and hear, but not without the ability to desire, want, love, fear and think."¹⁶² So, although I am the one seeing, I am not my sight. My identity is more aligned with the part of me that is aware of my perceptions than with the various parts of me that see, hear, smell, taste and touch. But this distinction is less clear in the case of desires, wishes, longings, fears and opinions. It can be much more difficult, perhaps impossible, to disentangle a person's identity from the desires, wishes, longings, fears and opinions that he or she has.

This observation can help us to see more clearly what is at stake for Socrates in self-knowledge, or what the weight is of the particular fear he expressed earlier in the dialogue—the fear of thinking that he knows something he does not know. Insofar as one holds in one's heart a false conviction, without knowing it to be false, one fails to know

¹⁶² Bruell, "Socratic Politics and Self-knowledge," 175.

one's true self. Part of achieving knowledge of ourselves involves standing at a certain critical remove or distance from our own experiences. To gain perspective on our own experience, we need to be in a position to perceive our own perceptions and have opinions about our own opinions—in other words, to acquire the kind of theoretical distance that allows for self-reflection. This ability is crucial for the virtue of moderation, and its partner self-restraint.¹⁶³ But this kind of distance and self knowledge can be especially difficult to attain. In part, it is more difficult because it may strike us at first as easy or obvious. We have access to our own thoughts and feelings in a way we do not have for those of others. For example, we saw early in the dialogue that a person like Chaerephon is fairly transparent when it comes to the outward expression of his inner sentiments, but it is much harder to read a typical person's thoughts. Still, it may prove harder than one would anticipate to know our own thoughts. As Socrates has suggested more than once, it takes a certain courage along with a real effort to apply one's mind to oneself, and to articulate with clarity and precision the nature of one's own inner experience. One risks through this process losing elements of one's own self-understanding that one holds dear. As we saw in Charmides' case, he may need to part with his own impression of himself as someone possessing virtue. Critias may need to part with his view of himself as a knower.

If we return to the drama of the dialogue, we will see that Critias is soon brought against his will to this very realization. Socrates concludes this line of argument by

¹⁶³ On the importance of self-consciousness and psychological distancing for moderation see Clor, *On Moderation*, 75-81.

emphasizing that some great man would be needed to determine which things have this reflexive power and which not, and whether knowledge is among those things that do. Socrates insists that he himself is not up to this task, and that while he divines that moderation is something beneficial and good, until knowledge of knowledge is shown to be both possible and beneficial, he cannot accept it as the definition of moderation. He implores Critias, who maintains that moderation is a knowledge of knowledge, and particularly of non-knowledge, to demonstrate that this is both possible and beneficial. In effect, he invites Critias to prove that he is that great man, the great man he surely believes—and wants everyone else to believe—himself to be.

Critias fails to live up to this challenge. Socrates relates the following to his companion:

When Critias heard this and saw me in perplexity, then, just as those who see people yawning right across from them have the same happen to them, so he too in my opinion was compelled by my perplexity and was caught by perplexity himself. Now since he is well-reputed on every occasion, he was ashamed before those present, and he was neither willing to concede to me that he was unable to draw the distinctions I called upon him to make, nor did he say anything plain, concealing his perplexity. (169c-d)

Whatever Critias said to try to conceal his perplexity, Socrates does not bother to relate it to his companion. Socrates has succeeded in bringing Critias to a moment of *aporia*. But whereas Socrates actively investigates and admits the possibility of his own lack of knowledge and perplexity, Critias can only be brought to do so by a form of a passing, involuntary reaction, which Socrates likens to a yawn. His attachment to his own honor and reputation prevents him from genuinely addressing his true condition. In stark

contrast to Socrates, Critias fails to embrace the recognition of what he does not know as an important feature of his self-knowledge.

Knowledge of What?

At this point, Socrates has succeeded in embarrassing Critias, who is unable to recover or find a graceful transition. They have reached enough of an impasse that Socrates has to intervene “so that the argument might go forward” (169d). He proposes that they simply assume for now that knowledge of knowledge is possible—they can investigate another time whether or not that is actually the case. The remainder of the dialogue will be geared toward bringing out what Critias hopes to gain from a knowledge of knowledge, and trying to disabuse him of these hopes.

Socrates begins by turning to what had been their second concern (after considering the possibility of knowledge of knowledge), that of benefit, by way of wondering exactly what knowledge of knowledge is the knowledge *of*? What is its content? Specifically, Socrates asks, how does one by virtue of knowledge of knowledge, know *what* one knows or *what* not, as opposed to merely *that* one knows or *that* one does not? It is unclear whether a knowledge of knowledge provides us with any of the content that typically makes knowledge beneficial.

How are we to make sense of this strange turn in the argument? The suggestion seems to be that strictly speaking, someone with a knowledge of knowledge will have the ability to distinguish only between what is and what is not knowledge. In short, if

moderation is nothing but a general knowledge of knowledge, then whoever possesses it will be unable to recognize any particular knowledge as the particular knowledge that it is. For example, a person with knowledge of knowledge placed in a room with a doctor and an architect would be able to recognize that each possessed knowledge, but not have any clue as to who to go to for a headache. In investigating others, such a one would only be able to determine that a person either has or does not have some kind of knowledge, but in the case of having knowledge, would not be able to know what kind of knowledge the person has.¹⁶⁴ It then becomes a question whether the person with a knowledge of knowledge will be of any use when it comes to investigating others in regard to any particular claims to knowledge. It seems more likely that one would need not a general knowledge of knowledge, but a specific knowledge of particulars. In other words, only the expert could properly judge the merits of one who claims expertise.

The core suggestion that one would need to know *something* about the subject matter of the various arts or knowledges to distinguish between them is sound. But how much would one have to know? To get over the hurdle Socrates erects here, namely being able to distinguish between someone claiming to be a doctor and someone claiming to be an architect, one would need only the most elementary acquaintance with each art, say

¹⁶⁴ Dyson puts it as follows: “The basis of the whole argument is the proposition that [knowledge of knowledge] can distinguish only that, of a given selection one thing is knowledge and another is not...From the viewpoint of [knowledge of knowledge] these entities [of which the selection is composed] will be no more than, as it were, so many unspecified lots of knowledge and ignorance, and [knowledge of knowledge] will tell its possessor only that, of these *unspecified* lots, this one is knowledge etc.” See Dyson, “Some problems concerning Knowledge,” 109.

the ability to tell the difference between a stethoscope and a hammer.¹⁶⁵ That knowledge of knowledge might need this basic supplement seems no great mark against it. The greater difficulty comes out in the example Socrates goes on to provide.

Socrates returns to the case of the quack versus the doctor. Someone with moderation, understood as nothing other than the knowledge of knowledge, would not be able to distinguish the quack from the true doctor, insofar as each has a kind of knowledge. In other words, someone may claim to have knowledge of medicine, but only actually possess knowledge of how to be a good charlatan. To be a successful quack, one would actually need to know a fair amount about medicine, or at least how to speak as if one does. In investigating such a person, wouldn't one need to know a fair amount about the subject matter of their professed knowledge? It seems likely one would need to know at least as much as, if not more than, the person pretending knows. In common practice, we grant that experts are needed to investigate professed experts, an activity that involves delving into the details of the subject matter.

Still, in the process of such an investigation, it would be of great benefit to have a knowledge of knowledge, if by that we mean an awareness of what qualifies as knowledge and what does not and an ability to question others as to whether they really know what they think they know. The mistake is to divorce this knowledge of knowledge

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 110: "Plato first takes the inability of K.K. [knowledge of knowledge] to identify anything else than knowledge to ensure that its possessor will also fail to identify the entities...But it is a mistake to assume that the identification of the lots lies only in the province of K. K....In short, the entities to be approved as knowledge or ignorance do not exist in a vacuum but are contextually identified."

from knowledge as we ordinarily encounter it, i.e. as knowledge of a certain sort, with a particular content. Socrates, as he continues, subtly draws attention to the absurdity of taking too far the idea of knowledge of knowledge divorced from any particular expertise. For in actuality, his argument has not granted those who practice the arts any knowledge or expertise at all. If the one who is moderate is the only person with a claim to knowledge of knowledge, then none of the practitioners of the arts have knowledge. The one who has knowledge of knowledge has knowledge without substance, and the ones who practice the arts would have substance without knowledge. In other words, knowledge of any actual subject is nowhere to be found—no one knows anything.

The idea of knowledge of knowledge appeals to Critias because it seems to be a shortcut to mastering all the other knowledges.¹⁶⁶ But Socrates brings out here the fact that no such shortcut exists. One needs to delve into the details of the particular kinds of knowledge, in addition to bearing in mind the question of what qualifies as knowledge in general. This leads one to wonder, of all the particular kinds of knowledge in which one could become an expert, which matters most?

A Life Without Error

After bringing out these difficulties, Socrates asks Critias what benefit moderation is to them. For had it been able to provide what they had hoped, not only the ability to know what one knows and does not know, but also to be able to investigate others in this

¹⁶⁶ Compare West and West, *Charmides*, 49-50, n 61.

regard, the result would be “grandly beneficial” (171d):

We would live through life without error, we ourselves and those who have moderation, 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. And to others whom we rule we would not turn over anything to be done except what they would do correctly when they did it; and this would be what they had knowledge of. And a household managed by moderation would be beautifully managed, as would a city so governed, and everything else that moderation would rule. For with error taken away and correctness leading, it is necessary for those so situated to do beautifully and well in every doing, and for those who do well to be happy. (171e-172a)

Critias is enamored with this idea of a ruling knowledge and is unable to see why it might not be possible. We see how quickly he has forgotten the *aporia* he was brought to earlier. But what exactly is the nature of the kind of rulers Socrates has described?

Many mistake this picture for the one we see in the *Republic*, assuming that Socrates is here proposing the rule of philosopher kings.¹⁶⁷ While it certainly bears some resemblance, it is important to see that what we find here is a pale reflection of philosophic rule. Indeed, the difference between this picture and the one we find in the *Republic* speaks to one of the fundamental differences between Critias and Socrates. The city envisioned here in the *Charmides* is a picture of scientific, not philosophic rule—a city run by technocrats, not philosophers. Nothing is said about how the ends of the city are directed, only that the means to all its given ends will be pursued without error. Of course, Critias, not being philosophic himself, would not be the first to appreciate this difference.

¹⁶⁷ Kahn (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 205) describes this city as a “caricature version of the Platonic polis.”

Critias fails to see that no single person will ever be able to possess this ruling art. He is enchanted by and drawn to a vision of absolute political rule. But what reflection upon the discussion up to now has revealed is that politics is and will always be a realm of imperfection and uncertainty. Even the best rulers must always rely on and trust the knowledge of others, the competency of whom they can never be entirely certain. The realm of politics will never be free from error.¹⁶⁸

Perhaps sensing that Critias is not convinced of this impossibility, Socrates will go on to investigate whether having this kind of knowledge—if it were possible—would benefit us. But before doing so, he gives us a glimpse of what he suggests is a lesser, but more realistic way of thinking about this knowledge of knowledge. He asks Critias the following:

Does what we are now discovering moderation to be—having knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge—have this good: that he who has it will learn more easily whatever else he learns and that everything will appear more distinct to him, since in addition to each thing he learns, he will also discern the knowledge? And that he will examine others more beautifully about whatever he himself has learned, while those who examine without this will do it more weakly and poorly? (172b)

Critias unenthusiastically answers that this might be so. In the thrall of a more exalted vision of moderation and the capacity to know, he fails to see how greatly one might benefit from this “lesser” version of knowledge of knowledge.

Since Critias clearly has not been convinced of the impossibility of possessing

¹⁶⁸ For a longer discussion and perceptive analysis of the nature of Critias’ immoderation see Paul Stern, “Tyranny and Self-Knowledge: Critias and Socrates in Plato’s *Charmides*,” *The American Political Science Review* 93, 2 (1999): 399-412.

moderation in the grand sense, Socrates turns to the question of its benefit. He emphasizes the strangeness of his own realizations that he is about to present, realizations which Critias will also find strange, especially coming from Socrates. Indeed, it is surprising for Socrates of all people to appear, as Critias soon puts it, to be dishonoring knowledge. But Socrates insists that it is not clear to him that moderation as it has been defined, that is, as a knowledge of knowledge, produces a good for them.

Socrates, with what seems here to be a faux humility, concedes that he may just be being foolish, but that it is “necessary to investigate just what appears and not to pass by indifferently if one is concerned for oneself even a little” (173a). Critias agrees that this is beautifully spoken, although it is worth recalling the many times throughout the dialogue that we have seen Critias fail to care for himself in this way. Still, he does at this point seem genuinely interested in and troubled by whatever it is Socrates may have in mind. Exaggerating the tentative nature of the suggestion to follow, Socrates asks Critias to “hear [his] dream” (173a).

In Socrates’ dream, he imagines a world ruled by moderation, as they have now defined it, one in which everything is done according to knowledge. In such a world, no one would be deceived by someone claiming to be a pilot who was not, or someone pretending to be a doctor or general, or anyone else claiming to have a knowledge he lacked. As a result, more than now, our bodies would be healthy, and those at sea and in war would be safe. And all our things, clothing, shoes, and possessions would all be made more artfully, having employed true craftsmen. Socrates then adds a capstone to

this knowledge, conceding, if Critias wishes, that divination too is a kind of knowledge, of what is going to be, and that in this case too moderation could establish true diviners. In this way, the human race would act and live knowledgeably, for moderation would never let non-knowledge find its way in as a fellow worker. This much Socrates says he can follow. But, he says, “that in acting knowledgeably we would do well and be happy—this we are not yet able to learn my dear Critias” (173d).¹⁶⁹

Socrates’ dream of a world ruled by moderation, as they have here defined it, stresses the benefits to be gained by our bodies and in our physical possessions, but says nothing about any benefit that would be procured for our souls. A world ruled in this way improves our mortal condition, but is far from providing a solution to it. Insofar as this is the case, Socrates underscores that to live without error is not necessarily to do well and be happy.

Here Critias appears more surprised than he has been in the entire conversation. He tells Socrates that he will not easily find another meaning of doing well if he dishonors knowledge. In a comic reply, Socrates asks Critias to teach him one small thing—what does he mean by knowledgeably? Is he referring to the kind of knowledge involved in shoemaking? Or perhaps working with bronze (173e)? Socrates agrees that

¹⁶⁹ The example of the pilot is strange and stands out, in part because the art of piloting has not been previously mentioned in the dialogue. Also, it is hard to imagine a case in which someone would want to deceive another in this way. Surely a fake pilot would not want to face the consequences of having convinced others of his or her expertise if doing so meant being out in the middle of the ocean without any actual knowledge of how to pilot a ship. It may be that this is a stand-in for political rule, given the ship of state analogy Socrates will use in the *Republic*.

the happy man is defined well as one of those who live knowledgably, but he presses Critias to identify which of the knowledges it is that makes one happy. Perhaps, Socrates says, Critias has in mind the diviner, “one who knows everything that is going to be” (174a). Critias says the he has in mind him, and someone else. “Who?” Socrates asks. But before Critias can answer, Socrates offers the case of one who “might know, besides what is to be, also everything that has happened and what is now, and be ignorant of nothing” (174a)—a person possessing an omniscient, god-like form of knowledge.

Socrates again urges Critias to identify which knowledge makes such a person happy. Which one is it in particular? Tell me, Socrates says, “the one that *I* particularly speak of” (174b emphasis added). Critias answers, “the knowledge of good and bad,” and Socrates responds by calling him a wretch, accusing Critias of having dragged him in a circle (174b). Of course, as we have seen, it is Socrates who has led the argument around in this circle, which began with his suggestion that doing one’s own things is doing the good things, and now ends with an emphasis upon the importance of knowing what the good is.

To the very end Critias clings to his idea of a ruling knowledge of knowledge, suggesting that the knowledge of the good and the bad is simply one more kind of knowledge that can fall under its domain. Critias fails to appreciate both the primary importance of knowing the good and the difficulty with which one might come to know it. When it comes to knowing what moderation is, Socrates concludes that they are “unable to discover whichever of the things that are that the lawgiver set this name upon,

‘moderation’” (175b). Socrates’ fear that he was investigating nothing useful about moderation was right all along. He blames his own failure to inquire beautifully as having caused moderation, which had been agreed upon as most beautiful, to appear unbeneficial. Notice Socrates suggests here that if he had the lesser version of knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge described above, i.e., an ability to investigate more beautifully, they may have been able to discover what moderation is.

Socrates summarizes for Critias all that they have conceded in their argument, without knowing it to be true: that there is a knowledge of knowledge, that such a knowledge can recognize the works of particular knowledges; that someone can know what he does not know. The argument, he says, has hubristically made “apparent to us that what we were long agreeing to and fabricating together and setting down to be moderation is unbeneficial” (175d). Socrates has demonstrated to Critias that knowledge of knowledge without knowledge of the good is unbeneficial. And, although he says here that they have not shown that it is possible to know what one does not know, he has also pointed out the extent to which this argument has shown that they do not know what moderation is.

Socrates turns back to Charmides, and laments what a shame it would be if Charmides were most moderate in his soul and yet would not profit from it. But he concludes that it is more likely that he is just a poor inquirer, and that moderation is some great good—if Charmides has it, he is blessed. But see, Socrates says, whether you are moderate. Charmides responds by here admitting what at the start of the dialogue he

would not admit: he does not know whether or not he is moderate. How, he asks, could he know what neither Socrates nor Critias could discover? And yet, he adds, he does not quite believe that Socrates does not know—and he wishes now to hear from him the Thracian incantation, the one that makes a person moderate. Critias takes this as evidence of Charmides' moderation, and bids him to submit to Socrates and not abandon him. The dialogue ends with Charmides playfully, but also portentously, expressing his willingness to use violence toward this end, since, he says, Critias orders it.

Conclusion

Charmides and Critias

When introducing this dialogue, we wondered whether Plato wrote it in part to defend Socrates against suspicions that he had corrupted Charmides and Critias. It is difficult to read the *Charmides* without looking for some explanation as to how these two men became members of the infamous Thirty Tyrants. With what may be our own desire to exonerate Socrates, it is particularly tempting to look for some clear and unambiguous indication of crooked minds and warped souls. If Charmides and Critias were simply bad seeds, then Socrates could not have either caused or prevented their growing into tyrants.

Certainly we find character flaws in both Charmides and Critias. Commentators are understandably eager to point them out, and most give negative appraisals of the

pair.¹⁷⁰ When it comes to Charmides, Hyland wavers between seeing him as nothing but a young carouser who by nature fails to possess moderation and granting that he may possess the virtue in *some* form.¹⁷¹ In either case, he thinks Charmides is not nearly as intelligent as Critias advertises him to be.¹⁷² Zuckert and Schmid are especially harsh in their verdicts on the young Charmides. The former argues that the “intellectually lazy” Charmides neither “values nor possesses intellectual independence or self-control.”¹⁷³ The latter ultimately argues that “Charmides does not prove to be *sophron* at the end of

¹⁷⁰ Notable exceptions to this general trend are Beversluis, Kahn, and Tuckey. In his attempt to defend all of Socrates’ interlocutors against a long-held pro-Socrates bias, Beversluis (*Cross-Examining Socrates*) provides an important counterpoint to many studies. But he tends to go too far in defending Charmides and especially Critias. I agree with Kahn’s suggestion that in this dialogue Plato “wants to present Critias as a relatively young man who has not yet begun his sinister political career, and to show Charmides as a modest teenager of unlimited promise.” But I think Kahn goes too far in arguing that “Plato seems to go out of his way to depict Socrates on terms of intimate friendship with both men” (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 185-186). As I will argue below, this is much more true with regard to Charmides than Critias. Finally, although I think Tuckey (*Plato’s Charmides*, 4) is absolutely right to say that both characters are portrayed as “human and sympathetic,” it is not quite right to say that in the dialogue “there is no hint of their later enormities.”

¹⁷¹ Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy*, compare 42 with 56. Lampert (*How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 172, 176-177) similarly concedes that Charmides possesses moderation “in the common sense.” But Lampert ultimately argues that Charmides is unlikely ever to escape convention and that he “will always do the things of others, particularly of his present and future guardian Critias.”

¹⁷² Ibid., 60.

¹⁷³ Catherine Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 241.

this conversation, quite the contrary.” Schmid concludes that Charmides represents “spoiled youthful beauty-appetite incarnate.”¹⁷⁴

These especially critical interpretations of Charmides have the aforementioned benefit of absolving Socrates of any guilt with regard to Charmides’ future conduct. By reducing Charmides to the immoderate tyrant he will one day become (*before* he has done anything fully to warrant this judgment), one is able easily to argue that Socrates could not have corrupted someone who is already corrupt. But one difficulty in judging Charmides this way is explaining why, according to Plato and Xenophon, Socrates continued what appeared to be a friendly association with him. In the *Symposium* (222b), Plato’s Alcibiades suggests that there must have been quite a bit of interaction between Charmides and Socrates subsequent to the conversation we witness in the *Charmides*. In the *Theages*, Plato has Socrates himself mention a time when he freely offers Charmides friendly advice (*Theages*, 128e). Xenophon describes a time when Socrates acted on behalf of Plato *and* Charmides (*Memorabilia* III.6.1). He also reports numerous interactions between the two, including a conversation in which Socrates praises Charmides’ ability to give sound guidance to those with whom he converses in private. Socrates goes so far as to encourage Charmides to extend his influence by becoming more involved in politics (*Memorabilia* III.7).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 151. Lampert (*How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 177), while not quite as critical, does maintain that Charmides “will have nothing to do with philosophy. Therefore, Socrates will have nothing to do with him.”

¹⁷⁵ See also Xenophon’s *Symposium*.

All these interactions had to have happened after the encounter described in the *Charmides*. If Charmides as we see him in this dialogue is already as hopelessly degenerate as certain commentators make him sound, why would Socrates have remained so involved with him, praise him, and encourage him to have more influence on the city's affairs?¹⁷⁶ In my view, the condemnations of Charmides described above go too far—certainly farther than Socrates went in his own criticism. Yes, Socrates playfully rebukes Charmides, calling him a wretch when he offers his third definition for moderation, the one which is Critias' rather than his own. But this is after Socrates has praised Charmides for courageously examining himself in order to produce his second definition. When Charmides looks to Critias, he deserves rebuke, but when Charmides looks into himself, he shows promise.¹⁷⁷

Socrates' patient understanding of the young Charmides' failings stands in marked contrast to Critias' impatient reaction, not to mention that of those commentators who are no less severe in their appraisal of the boy. Socrates gracefully forgives Charmides' shortcomings, excusing his ignorance on account of his age—as should we. It is unfair to expect a teenager either to know or fully to possess moderation, especially by any Socratic standard. Socrates certainly does not expect as much. Moreover, we must

¹⁷⁶ This is not to suggest that Plato's dialogues are bound in every way by historical facts, much less that they are simply transcripts of actual events. Plato would have been free to use his artistic license to depict Charmides as worse than he actually was in order to bring out a lesson about immoderation. But, as I will argue below, based on the content of the dialogue itself, this does not appear to be the choice that Plato made.

¹⁷⁷ Compare Tuckey (*Plato's Charmides*, 4): "Charmides is represented as a paragon of youthful virtue. The only bad suggestion about him is his close association with Critias."

not forget that this is the very virtue we as readers are trying to understand, presumably because of our own ignorance and the sheer difficulty of the matter. In evaluating Charmides' performance and character as revealed in this dialogue, we must not only keep in mind his age, but also his audience. Charmides may be willing to bear some of Critias' anger, even to provoke it, but he is still clearly concerned not to go too far in embarrassing himself, his admirers, and, most of all, his guardian. A public conversation, one presided over by the critical, proud, and short-tempered Critias, could not possibly have been an environment especially conducive to genuine self-reflection, particularly for someone like Charmides.

To his credit, Charmides seems to have sensed fairly quickly that he did not have as firm a grasp on what moderation is, and whether or not he possesses it, as he first assumed. The discomfort caused by this realization explains why he wanted to take himself out of the spotlight and turn the conversation over to Critias. But it was not just a matter of wanting to direct attention away from himself; he wants to see whether Critias knows any better than he does.¹⁷⁸ Socrates is equally eager to turn from Charmides to Critias, not because Charmides is without promise, but so that his promise might be realized. Socrates recognizes that Critias' hold on Charmides must be broken before Charmides can reach his full potential. This recognition is a large part of why Socrates is eager to engage and eventually refute Critias, always with a view to how Charmides

¹⁷⁸ This point is missed by Schmid (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 69) who reads Charmides' offering of Critias' definition as "not merely an intellectual, but also a moral failure."

might benefit. By exposing Critias' lack of knowledge, Socrates helps liberate Charmides from Critias' influence as well as from the shame that at the start of the dialogue prevents him from fully confronting and admitting his own ignorance. Once Charmides is shown Critias' ignorance, he feels free to admit openly his own (176a).

Critias, by contrast, is never willing to admit his own ignorance. Quite the contrary, he tries to hide it (169c-d). And in Critias' case, he should be ashamed. Socrates is right in suggesting that because of Critias' age and the care he has taken—or by this point *should* have taken—more is to be expected of him than of Charmides. As with Charmides, commentators are quick to point out Critias' faults, and in his case they are more justified.¹⁷⁹ It is easier to bridge the gap between the Critias of the *Charmides* and the Critias of the Thirty Tyrants. We see, for example, in Critias' treatment of Socrates and Charmides at the opening of the dialogue a certain willingness to use and manipulate others. Throughout the dialogue, he shows himself to be a prideful honor-seeker. He has an elevated opinion of himself and of his own capacities, in particular his capacity to know. Most problematic is his attachment to the idea of a kind of ruling knowledge.

Given what we know about the absolute rule Critias exercised as a member of the Thirty Tyrants, it seems likely that he ultimately deemed himself that single great man, the one in possession of knowledge fit for ruling others.¹⁸⁰ This unfortunate fact seems to

¹⁷⁹ Schmid is again a good example of a particularly harsh appraisal. He describes Critias as “sophistic-poetic/beautiful willful-tyrannic/ugliness incarnate” (*The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 151).

¹⁸⁰ Compare Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 208.

be vividly portrayed in Xenophon's account of the execution of Theramenes, described in our introduction to the dialogue. As noted above, Theramenes was a member of the Thirty Tyrants who refused to obey orders to kill one of Athens' metics (for no other reason than to steal the dead metic's money). Theramenes criticized the regime's unjust murders of innocent and worthy men. In Theramenes' trial, he persuaded the Senate of his innocence. But Critias defied both the will of the Senate and the spirit of the rule of law, which held it illegal to kill any leading members of the regime, striking Theramenes off the roll of Three Thousand, and having him killed (see *Hellenica* II.iii.15-56). Critias justified this action by declaring himself the only one capable of seeing through Theramenes' deception of the Senate. Xenophon reports Critias announcing the following: "Senators, I deem it the duty of a leader who is what he ought to be, in case he sees that his friends are being deceived, not to permit it" (*Hellenica* II. iii.51). Critias thought not only that he knew, but that he could recognize ignorance in others. It appears Critias believed himself possessed of a knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge, a ruling knowledge that allowed, in the end, for no discussion or debate.

Still, it is important to balance Critias' faults as we see them in this dialogue with an acknowledgement of his virtues. Critias is intelligent and often more competent than most of Socrates' interlocutors. He correctly identifies and corrects what are a few rather sophistic moves in Socrates' arguments (see 163a-b and 165e-166a). He has, in short, a certain level of intellectual sophistication. This is no surprise if we remember that Critias was a prolific and accomplished writer. He is a man who had an appreciation for and

devoted a significant amount of time to intellectual pursuits. In this way he has more in common with Socrates, and Plato, than most.

Critias' intellectualism is important to recognize because it is part and parcel of his particular brand of immoderation. Critias' enthusiasm is for a kind of ruling *knowledge*. We see in the *Charmides* his interest in a line of thought that could—and does—get taken in a dangerous direction. The thought, though, is far from foreign to both Socrates and Plato. The temptation to have knowledge rule through philosopher kings is explored in depth in the imagined city of Plato's *Republic*. Plato was not only interested in philosophers ruling in imagined cities; he tells us in his *Seventh Letter* that he was tempted to rule alongside Critias and Charmides when the Thirty first rose to power.¹⁸¹ One wonders whether in the picture Plato paints of Charmides in this dialogue we are meant to see someone not *so* different from Plato himself. For Charmides seems in key respects a truly promising young man, one who has the sense, at least at the end of this dialogue, to follow Socrates, not Critias.

In sum, the picture Plato paints of Charmides and Critias does not make it seem as though their careers in the Thirty Tyrants were inevitable. It is important that we not condemn Charmides and Critias as if they were already tyrants. Doing so too conveniently removes from the table difficult and important questions. The dialogue is

¹⁸¹ That Plato needed to watch and wait to see how a regime with Critias and Charmides at its helm would be run is yet another indication that even by the time the Thirty came to power, Charmides and Critias could not have been seen as wholly corrupt.

unsettling in part because Plato does not present us with monsters.¹⁸² If evil is to be found in Charmides and Critias it is, in W.H. Auden's words, an evil that is "unspectacular and always human" one that "shares our bed and eats at our own table."¹⁸³ Plato, who in writing about Critias and Charmides, writes about his own kin, must have known this well.¹⁸⁴

By writing a dialogue on moderation with two intelligent and in many ways impressive individuals who we know went on to embody immoderation, Plato underscores just how difficult moderation is to achieve. Seeing why Socrates should not be blamed for Critias' and Charmides' immoderation requires seeing more fully all that is involved in acquiring moderation. We cannot know where Critias and particularly Charmides lost their way, but Plato gives us some sense of the long road that needs to be traveled to acquire moderation. To have a sense of all that moderation requires, it is worth reviewing what we have seen in the dialogue, especially in Socrates as a model of moderation.

¹⁸² On these points compare Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 220: "Critias is not the victim of an evil nature, nor did Socrates corrupt him by an evil doctrine. Instead, Socrates corrupted Critias by opening a path to the natural human dream of an enlightened human community founded and administered by enlightened knowers."

¹⁸³ This quotation is from W. H. Auden's poem "Herman Melville," in *W. H. Auden Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 251.

¹⁸⁴ I disagree with Kahn (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 186), who, quoting Burnet, takes Plato to be "glorifying the whole [family] connection," as well as expressing "pride in his own family."

Socratic Moderation

Socrates' moderation is dramatically contrasted early in the dialogue not with the immoderation of either Charmides or Critias, but with what Socrates calls Chaerephon's madness. As we saw, Chaerephon's immoderation is characterized generally by a lack of self-possession. He is unable to place any distance between his inner thoughts and feelings and his outer appearance and actions. There seem to be two sources for his immoderation: death and desire. Chaerephon first displayed his madness in the excessive joy with which he celebrated Socrates' escape from death at Potidaea and later with his inappropriate expression of desire for the beauty of Charmides' body.

In both cases, Socrates stands in marked contrast to Chaerephon. Socrates is able throughout the dialogue to remain composed and in possession of himself. Although not entirely without the same impulses as Chaerephon, Socrates is able to react to these impulses differently. Socrates was not indifferent to his own survival, but he does not give in to an excessive celebration of life as Chaerephon does. Socrates appears able to maintain possession of himself even in the face of death, an ability that helped him to survive in the first place. Alcibiades notes that at Potidaea, when Athenian soldiers were engaged in a chaotic retreat, Socrates proved to be more collected or "in his senses"¹⁸⁵ than even the brave general Laches (Plato, *Symposium*, 221b).

This last point touches on another problem we had noted in Chaerephon: he seemed not to realize that Socrates is capable of such courage. Socrates' courage serves

¹⁸⁵ The word used is *emphron*.

as an important corrective to a prevailing opinion that moderation and courage are mutually exclusive, an opinion that became only more deeply entrenched as the war continued. Not only does Socrates possess conventional courage, but he has the intellectual courage necessary for moderation. As Socrates suggests multiple times to both Charmides and Critias, one needs to be bold and courageous both to engage in the self-examination necessary for attaining moderation and to admit what one does not know.

We get a clearer picture of what lies behind Socrates' composure when he relates his reaction to Charmides' beauty. Like Chaerephon, Socrates is impressed by the beauty of Charmides' body. But he is even more interested in the possibility of Charmides possessing a beautiful soul. Were Charmides to have both, Socrates says he could not be withstood by anyone. Even before Socrates has determined whether or not Charmides has a beautiful soul, he finds himself momentarily at Charmides' mercy, caught off-guard by the strength of his own desire after inadvertently seeing inside Charmides' cloak. But in contrast to Chaerephon, Socrates is able quickly to regain possession of himself.

Socrates' characterization of this experience as one in which he is outside of himself shows that he identifies his true self not with his physical desires—despite the fact that they are *his*—but with his thoughts, his questions, and above all his desire for wisdom. Socrates returns to himself through the wise words of Cydias, who warns against becoming a young beauty's prey. Socrates' moderation is the result of an ability to monitor and evaluate himself and to unify his temporarily fragmented identity by keeping

firmly in mind the concerns that are most important. Socrates knows himself and the kinds of activities through which he is most himself—he knows, in short, what it means to do his own things.

We noted earlier that the habit of mind Socrates displays here is one that he seems to have developed from engaging in a lifetime of thoughtful reflection. We see the kinds of things Socrates has reflected upon in the questions and concerns he draws to Charmides' attention, first in their own conversation, and then through his conversation with Critias. When Socrates first instructs Charmides to say what moderation is, he urges him to look within his own experience of the virtue and put this experience to words. We noted that the task Socrates has assigned to Charmides is much more difficult than it first appears. Charmides must look carefully at his own experiences and begin the hard work of introspection, identifying and disentangling his own impression of himself and of virtue from what he has learned from others.

Socrates presses Charmides to think more clearly about what kind of benefit will come of being virtuous. In particular, Socrates draws his attention to the good and the noble and the possible conflict between them.¹⁸⁶ His presentation of the hopes inspired by Thracian medicine, that a perfect soul might lead to a perfect body, and possibly to immortality, brings out the heights of the hopes Charmides may attach to virtue. But a shadow is cast over these hopes by the rest of the dialogue. Far from linking moderation

¹⁸⁶ Pangle draws attention to this need for active self examination, in particular about the relationship between the good and the noble, in the context of Plato's *Gorgias* in *Virtue is Knowledge*, 69: "Socratic medicine requires, it seems, not the passive acquiescence one gives a doctor but active engagement, questioning, and self examination."

to the possibility of becoming immortal, Socrates and Critias are unable to show that it is of *any* benefit.

Charmides' challenge is to figure out what exactly moderation is and what kind of good it is. To do so, he needs to figure out what *he* is. What are the possibilities and limits that define our humanity? In order to determine who he is and what is good for him, Charmides needs to transcend his reverence for the ideas of others. But he also needs to beware that the pendulum not swing too far in the opposite direction. As Socrates suggests in his conversation with Critias, knowing oneself involves an investigation both of one's own opinions and those of others, always maintaining a healthy skepticism as to the certainty of one's own knowledge. As important as any answers Socrates finds is his awareness of the need to continually reaffirm them, continually doubting and re-securing his own knowledge.

We see in Critias an example of the problem of being too self-assured and confident in one's own knowledge. The *Charmides* provides us with a refutation of Critias and of his understanding of moderation as a kind of ruling knowledge that lacks knowledge of the good—an understanding which, far from capturing moderation, is a recipe for its opposite. For a true definition of moderation, one grounded not in what one knows, but in an awareness of ignorance and the corresponding *desire* to know, especially to know the good, we must turn to the *Republic*. The moderation we find there is not the ruling knowledge Critias wishes it to be. But it is a moderation that may deliver on the hope with which Socrates leaves Charmides: “that you yourself, so far as you are

moderate, are also that much happier” (176a).

CHAPTER 3: MODERATION IN PLATO'S REPUBLIC

Introduction to the Dialogue

Connections to the Charmides

Plato's use of narration is the first of a number of indications that the *Charmides* and *Republic* should be considered in relation to one another. The *Republic*, like the *Charmides*, is one of a small minority of Platonic dialogues that is both frameless and narrated by Socrates.¹⁸⁷ It opens in Socrates' voice:

I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston, to pray to the goddess; and, at the same time, I wanted to observe how they would put on the festival, since they were holding it for the first time. (327a)¹⁸⁸

Socrates goes on to tell of how, while on their way to the Piraeus, he and Glaucon are accosted by Polemarchus, son of Cephalus, and a group of Polemarchus' friends, including Glaucon's brother Adeimantus. In a way that is reminiscent of *Charmides*' suggestion that he would be willing to use violence against Socrates (*Charmides*, 176c), Polemarchus and his gang of friends playfully coerce the outnumbered Socrates and

¹⁸⁷ The narration of the *Republic* differs from the *Charmides* in that Socrates never breaks his narration to speak directly to his present audience. On narrated dialogues see footnote 56 above.

¹⁸⁸ All parenthetical references in this chapter are to Plato's *Republic*, unless otherwise noted. Translations are often from *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), with occasional emendations of my own.

Glaucon into joining them at Cephalus' home. The rest of the *Republic* is Socrates' narration of the long conversation that was held there.

In the *Charmides* we saw the dramatic date of the dialogue identified clearly in its opening reference to the battle of Potidaea. When is the "yesterday" to which Socrates refers in the opening of the *Republic*? The dramatic date of the *Republic* has long been debated because of what appears to be strong evidence for competing dates along with a number of anachronistic references within the dialogue. Debra Nails describes the scholarly debate on this subject as having reached a "contemporary standstill."¹⁸⁹ The two dates most commonly proposed are 411/410 or 422/421, but "there have been scores of arguments bearing on several dramatic dates for the *Republic* ranging from 424-408."¹⁹⁰ Some conclude that Plato purposefully made it impossible to date the dialogue so as to make it timeless.¹⁹¹

If the dialogue is meant to have a date, the one most interesting for our study has been recently proposed by Laurence Lampert. Lampert argues for the dramatic date of 429, earlier than any of those previously noted.¹⁹² According to Lampert, Plato indicates

¹⁸⁹ Debra Nails, "The Dramatic Date of Plato's *Republic*," *The Classical Journal* 93, 4 (1998): 383.

¹⁹⁰ For an overview of the various positions taken on the dramatic date of the *Republic* as well as the difficulties one faces in trying to date the dialogue see Nails, "The Dramatic Date of Plato's *Republic*."

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 183. See, for example, Kent Moors, "The Argument Against a Dramatic Date for Plato's *Republic*," *Polis* 7, 1 (1988): 6-31.

¹⁹² For Lampert's complete argument see *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 405-411.

the dramatic date of the *Republic* in the dialogue's first sentence, just as he did in the *Charmides*.¹⁹³ In the opening line of the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates refer to a festival that is being held for the first time. At the end of Book I, we learn that this is the festival of Bendis (354a). As Lampert puts it, "[o]ne event and one event only fixes the dramatic date of the *Republic*—the day the Athenians introduced Thracian Bendis as an official god of their city cult."¹⁹⁴ Lampert's persuasive suggestion is that with his opening reference to a widely known, singular event, "Plato made easy for his contemporaries [what] has become difficult for us."¹⁹⁵ If Lampert is right in his interpretation of this difficult matter, then the drama of the *Republic*, taking place in 429, occurs just weeks after the drama of the *Charmides*. This would, in Lampert's words, make the *Charmides* the "unexpected introduction to the *Republic*."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 405.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 241 and 11: "*Charmides* and the *Republic* are twinned dialogues with *Charmides* serving as a kind of introduction to the *Republic*." Because Lampert's focus is on the development of Socratic philosophy, despite emphasizing the connection between Plato's *Charmides* and *Republic*, he pays little attention to the link of moderation. Schmid devotes a six page Appendix to the *Republic*, but ultimately believes "the intellectual worlds of the two dialogues are very different." See Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 159-164.

Lampert's argument for this particular link between the *Charmides* and the *Republic* is both plausible and persuasive, but not decisive.¹⁹⁷ It is, as all proposed dramatic dates for the *Republic* are likely to be—and remain—controversial.¹⁹⁸ Fascinating as it may be, the possibility of a dramatic date of 429 is not the only reason to read the *Republic* alongside the *Charmides*. Leaving aside the disputed question of the *Republic*'s dramatic date, other close connections are to be found between these two dialogues. In addition to being among a handful of dialogues narrated by Socrates, the dialogues contain important ties between their characters. Plato's *Charmides* and *Republic* are both rare dialogues in which Plato has his own relatives serve as Socrates' chief interlocutors. As we saw in the *Charmides*, Socrates speaks with Charmides, Plato's uncle, and Critias, Plato's distant cousin. The family relation is even closer in the *Republic*, where Socrates converses for the majority of the dialogue with Plato's brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus.

¹⁹⁷ There are a number of points on which Lampert's argument could be disputed. For one, he insists that Plato's reference to the festival of Bendis should trump all other references that date the dialogue because "Plato put it first" (*How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 405). There is something to this logic, but it is not necessarily the case that what comes first in a dialogue is more important than what comes later, or that Plato's intention in mentioning this festival was to indicate the date of the dialogue. Even if one accepts that the opening reference to the festival should trump all other means by which we may date the dialogue, when the festival took place is also a matter of dispute. For an alternative argument see Nails, "The Dramatic Date of Plato's *Republic*," 388.

¹⁹⁸ Lampert himself acknowledges the need for an exegesis that confirms and supports his chronological claims: "That the exegesis can support the chronology means more for us than it would for Plato's contemporaries, because chronological cues that sufficed for them are often no longer enough." See *ibid.*, 11-12.

The fates of the characters in these dialogues are also closely intertwined.¹⁹⁹

Three of the men present at the *Republic* will later become victims of the Thirty.

Niceratus and Polemarchus are both murdered, with Polemarchus's brother Lysias just barely escaping the Thirty's grasp. Lysias, son of Cephalus, writes of how his family, asmetics, were those unjustly targeted by the Thirty for their wealth. Polemarchus was arrested and ordered to drink hemlock, "with no statement made as to the reason for his execution: still less was he allowed to be tried and defend himself."²⁰⁰

The fate that young men present during the *Republic* will one day suffer at the hands of unjust men adds gravity to the dialogue's focus on the topic of justice. But it also points to the question of the relation between justice and moderation. As we saw in the *Charmides*, the injustice of men like Critias and the rest of the Thirty is rooted in their immoderation. In an attempt to "justify" the actions of the Thirty, Critias is even reported to have said, "It is not possible for those who wish to have a greater share (*tois pleonektein boulomenois*) not to put out of the way those most capable of preventing them."²⁰¹ Lysias brings vividly to light the consequences of this view in his case against

¹⁹⁹ Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic*, 249.

²⁰⁰ See Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 1-23; translation from *Lysias*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1930). In Balot's words, "Whether oligarch or democrat, everyone agreed that the Thirty, driven by greed for power and wealth, had committed serious crimes against their fellow citizens." Ryan K. Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 220. On the relationship between the oligarchic revolutions and greed see 219-224.

²⁰¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.3.16.

Eratosthenes, member of the Thirty: “my brother...was put to death by Eratosthenes, who was neither suffering under any private wrong himself, nor found him offending against the State, but merely sought to gratify his own lawless passions.”²⁰²

This link between the vices of immoderation and injustice and their corresponding virtues, dramatically presented by Plato through his dark and often sobering use of historical figures, is explored in depth in Plato’s *Republic*.²⁰³ For although the *Republic* is most famous for its treatment of justice, the dialogue directs its readers as much, if not ultimately more, to a consideration of moderation. Not only does the importance of moderation for both the individual and the city rival and at some points seem even to exceed that of justice, but there is also the curious matter of justice itself being defined as almost indistinguishable from moderation.²⁰⁴ Thus, the most important, thematic connection between the dialogues for the purposes of our study is the attention paid in each to the virtue of moderation. In the following two chapters, I follow the thread of moderation throughout the early books of the *Republic*, ending with a study of Book IV’s definition of the virtue. There we find the answer to the question of the *Charmides*: what is moderation?

²⁰² Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes*, 23.

²⁰³ Balot, *Greed and Injustice*, 236 notes that “Plato’s representation of Thrasymachus’s views, along with the expansion of his position by Glaucon and Adeimantus, focuses attention on greed and injustice as the central moral problems he wants to address.”

²⁰⁴ Roslyn Weiss in *Philosophers in the Republic, Plato's Two Paradigms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 169-172 provides thoughtful observations on many of the surprising results of this equation of moderation with justice.

Moderation in Plato's Republic

Plato's *Republic* is the text that fixes moderation's place in the tetrad of cardinal virtues, defining the virtue as a harmony of the soul. This harmony is achieved when all the parts of the soul—the spirited, the desiring, and the reasoning—share the opinion that the reasoning part ought to rule (442c-d). No longer fraught by excessive and unruly desires, desires which seem inevitably to lead to disappointment if not disaster, a harmonious soul, one at peace with itself and moved only by what is in accord with reason, seems to hold a great promise for our happiness.

But the *Republic* presents us with a number of images of moderation, some truer to its essence than others. Before we arrive at the apparently perfect picture of moderation found within Socrates' city in speech, the first image of moderation in the *Republic* comes in the form of Cephalus. Cephalus—old and withered, drained of his desires by the passing of time—represents moderation as a lukewarm, uninspiring virtue, more fitting for the old than the young.²⁰⁵ Indeed, Cephalus calls into question our ability to achieve moderation in any time other than in old age, once the passions of our youth have abated of their own accord. And perhaps it is all the better that we can only be moderate when we are old; if the virtue entails nothing other than the deadening of desire,

²⁰⁵ Here I follow Bourgaunt in arguing that Cephalus is not genuinely moderate. See Bourgaunt, "Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life." In this chapter I pursue Bourgaunt's suggestion: "Cephalus may leave the room well before Book II of the *Republic* begins, but one could still envision the rest of the work as a long and detailed answer to the old metic's limited worldview and unreflective *sophrosyne*" (18). See also Bourgaunt, "Prolegomena", 129.

then it is hard to see why anyone would be in a hurry to possess it. As Augustine says in his most famous prayer, “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.”

Or might even “not yet” be too soon? Is moderation a virtue that we should ever desire, at any age? The attacks made against justice by Glaucon and Adeimantus reveal an even greater challenge to moderation than the one embodied by Cephalus. In their attack on justice, Glaucon and Adeimantus paint a picture of the good life as one that entails the pursuit and gratification of desire after desire, from money, to sex, to rule. Through the eyes of these two young men, it is hard to see moderation as anything other than a conventional hindrance to the pursuit of happiness, one to which only a fool or coward would submit. To make a case for moderation as both possible and desirable, Socrates must reveal it to be a more youthful and appealing virtue, answering the challenge that is posed implicitly by Cephalus’ life and explicitly by Glaucon and Adeimantus’ critique.

The definition of moderation as a harmony of the soul is Socrates’ ultimate answer to this challenge. This harmony is achieved when all the parts of the soul—the spirited, the desiring, and the reasoning—share the opinion that the reasoning part ought to rule (442c-d). But this definition of moderation in the *Republic* stands in need of interpretation for more reason than one. In the first place, it is not the only definition of moderation that the dialogue provides. Before we arrive at Book IV’s definition of the virtue, we find quite a different one in Book III. There Socrates identifies the most important elements of moderation according to the multitude (*hos plethe*) as “being

obedient to the rulers, and being themselves rulers of the pleasures of drink, sex and eating” (389e). This definition stands in stark contrast to the harmony of the whole soul described in Book IV. Few commentators address the connection between these two definitions, aside from noting the disparity between them. Roslyn Weiss, for example, notes how “unusual and surprising” Book IV’s definition of the virtue is, made only more surprising in light of the more conventional definition of Book III. According to Weiss, “nothing in the dialogue up to this point prepares the reader for moderation’s distribution throughout the soul,” in Book IV.²⁰⁶

The following two chapters answer this puzzle and come to an understanding of moderation by making their way toward and then culminating in an examination of Book IV’s definition of the virtue. In the first part of the present chapter, I examine the false image of moderation presented by Cephalus and the attack upon moderation made by Glaucon and Adeimantus. The second part provides a study of the city in speech. After seeing why one must move beyond the “moderation” of the so-called healthy city, I trace the most important elements of Socrates’ education of the guardians with a view to moderation.

Through my analysis of moderation in the *Republic* leading up to Book IV’s definition, I explain the presence of conflicting definitions within the dialogue, arguing that Book III’s treatment of the virtue does in fact prepare the reader for the definition found in Book IV. Not only do we see that Socrates’ examples in Book III reveal

²⁰⁶ Weiss, *Philosophers in the Republic*, 169-170. For an alternate interpretation of Socrates’ aim in Book IV see Chapter 5 of Weiss’ *Philosophers in the Republic*.”

moderation as a virtue that must address the whole soul, but our attention is also drawn to the problematic absence of reason in the more conventional rendering of the virtue. In Chapter 4 I turn to an examination of moderation as it is defined in Book IV. In this chapter I take a closer look at the concept of harmony through an analysis of Socrates' argument for the tripartite soul, and offer concluding remarks on moderation in the *Republic*.

The Challenge to Moderation

Out with the Old: Cephalus' "Moderation"

As Aristotle puts it, "we measure our actions, some of us more, others less, against the yardstick of pleasure."²⁰⁷ Nearly the first words out of Cephalus' mouth place him in the "some of us more" category. Cephalus is eager to talk with Socrates, for, he says, "as the other pleasures, those connected with the body, wither away in me, the desires and pleasures that have to do with speeches grow the more" (328d). Socrates, for his part, is also "delighted" to talk with Cephalus, but whatever pleasure he gets from the conversation is tied to what he and others might learn from it. "The very old," he explains, "are like men who have proceeded on a certain road that perhaps we too will

²⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b39.

have to take,” and we ought “to learn from them what sort of road it is—whether it is rough and hard or easy and smooth” (328e).

In particular, Socrates wants to know how Cephalus finds the final stretch of the road. What is it like being old, having arrived at death’s doorstep? Having discovered a way to look upon old age favorably, Cephalus is pleased to tell Socrates that he, unlike many others, finds that this time of life comes as a relief rather than a burden. Most old men spend their final days lamenting and longing for the pleasures of youth, reminiscing about their past indulgences in sex, drink, and food—but not Cephalus. These others, who think they once “lived well but are now not even alive” (329b), are wrong to blame old age for their miserable state. For, Cephalus argues, if old age were to blame, then he himself and all who are old would suffer as they do. But, to the contrary, Cephalus happily embraces old age.

Cephalus takes the goodness of this stage in life to have been expressed best by Sophocles. Upon being asked whether he could still have sex with a woman, Sophocles replied: “Silence, human being. Most joyfully did I escape it, as though I had run away from a sort of frenzied and savage master” (329c). Singing in tune with Sophocles, Cephalus claims that old age brings great peace and freedom, for once the “desires cease to strain and finally relax” one can “be rid of very many mad masters” (329d). Cephalus concludes that for those who bear old age badly, the fault lies not in their age but in their character or temperament (*tropos*): “If they are orderly and content (*kosmioi kai eukoloi*)

with themselves, even old age is only troublesome within a certain measure; if they are not, then both old age...and youth alike turn out to be hard for that sort” (329d).²⁰⁸

Understanding Cephalus is our first inroad to understanding moderation in the *Republic*, but the picture he paints of this virtue is not especially clear. He says fairly plainly that the erotic passions are the despots of the soul, suggesting that he has been a slave to his desires no less than any other human being. Nevertheless, he takes pride in his own ability to stand apart from the many in the attitude that he, along with Sophocles, takes toward this servitude, viewing it as something to be escaped rather than embraced. Most believe a life of youthful passion, indulging in food, drink, and sex, is the best human life, and the one without such enjoyments hardly worth living at all. As Callicles of Plato’s *Gorgias* puts it, if to be without deeply felt erotic needs is to be happy, then “stones and corpses would be happiest” (*Gorgias* 492e).²⁰⁹ Those of this mind are faithful servants to their desires, happily possessed by youth’s mad masters and the pleasures they provide.

Cephalus makes a point of distinguishing himself from such men. He is adamant in his assertion that character is at the root of this difference. Cephalus’ character seems to be defined by his ability to look upon the passions of his youth, not as the core of his

²⁰⁸ Cephalus characterizes the man of good character as one who is both *kosmos* (ordered) and *eukolos* (content). Recall this was part of Charmides’ first definition of the virtue, the part Socrates ignored in his refutation. *Eukolos*, on the other hand, appears to be Cephalus’ more idiosyncratic contribution.

²⁰⁹ All translations of the *Gorgias* are from *Gorgias*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

being, or as expressions of his soul's deepest yearnings, but as crazed usurpers, whose difficult and disruptive demands upset the peace of his otherwise placid soul. Although no stranger to the passions of youth, Cephalus' general tendency and overall preference seems to be, as he says, to be both "orderly" and "content with himself." We can conclude that Cephalus' preference for the calmer pleasures afforded by an even temperament is what has allowed him to bear both the trials of youth and old age more easily than most (329d, 330a).

More evidence of Cephalus' character can be seen when Socrates presses him on the source of his wealth, wealth which many suspect is what truly makes old age easy for him. In response to Socrates' questions about whether he earned or inherited all his money, Cephalus describes himself as a "sort of mean between [his] grandfather and father," the former having built up a great fortune which the latter largely squandered (330b). While not greatly increasing what his father left him, Cephalus has earned over his lifetime more than he has spent, such that he can leave to his sons more than he himself inherited. Thus, although Socrates notes that Cephalus does not seem overly fond of wealth, as would be one who earned all his money, we do know that he has devoted some effort in his life to money-making and that he has been fairly successful.²¹⁰

The fact that Cephalus marks a mean between his father and grandfather lends some credence to the claim that he is of a measured character; he seems to have been

²¹⁰ According to an account given by his son Lysias, Cephalus was invited by Pericles to Athens where he "established a successful shield factory that had over a hundred slaves by 404." See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84.

drawn neither to excessive money-making nor to profligate indulgence.²¹¹ His bodily desires must not have held exclusive reign over his soul, having allowed the money-loving part of his soul to take its turn at the helm.²¹² To whatever extent he was a playboy, Cephalus also managed to be a successful businessman, suggesting his indulgences were kept within bounds. By his own admission, Cephalus has been possessed by not one but many masters, but perhaps none required too much to be sated. Part of his ability to handle old age well seems to be, as we saw at the start, his ability to adapt to new pleasures as they come along (328d). In this way his character resembles the one that Socrates will later attribute to the democratic man. Such a person, despite living in large part by the rule of pleasure, achieves a kind of moderation by sheer dispersal of desire. And, as Socrates notes, the lucky ones are those who, especially as they get older

²¹¹ C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 5.

²¹² Scholars differ widely in their interpretations of Cephalus' youthful and mature character. Reeve views him as "an attractive character," and goes so far as to say his "life is not very different in character from Socrates'." Annas, by contrast, thinks Plato here shows his "contempt" for a life devoted to money-making. Nussbaum takes Cephalus to have attached more importance to appetite than he himself knows, although she thinks that he is still genuinely relieved to be freed from the "problem" of erotic desire. Bloom takes him to have been "once very erotic," but overlooks the fact that Cephalus is not simply an inheritor of wealth but also an earner of money. For reasons stated above, I am inclined to agree with Rosen's interpretation of Cephalus as a man inclined to spend and indulge within his means. On the most important points, my reading is closest to that of Bourgault, who emphasizes that Cephalus' "moderation is not genuine; his *sophrosyne* is merely accidental." See Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 6; Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 18; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 138; Bloom, *Republic*, 313; and Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 27; Bourgault, "Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life," 17.

and “the great disturbances” have passed away, readmit into their souls some of the formerly exiled speeches, those made in favor of simplicity, moderation, measure and order (661c ff.). In Cephalus we find this same mixture, allowing him to be, as Rosen puts it, a “temperate hedonist.”²¹³

Taking a wider view of Cephalus’ life as a whole, it becomes clear that he embodies a “sort of mean” in more ways than one. As we have already seen, Cephalus is neither frugal nor profligate, neither a libertine nor an ascetic. He is friendly to both Socrates and Sophocles, and yet by no means a philosopher or intellectual himself. He is a money-maker but not a money-lover. Even as a metic Cephalus embodies a kind of mean, marking a midpoint in status between the citizen and the foreigner, living in the Piraeus, the central point of exchange between Athens and the rest of the world.²¹⁴ One could say that Cephalus is of such a middling, average character, that he does not wholeheartedly give himself over to anything.²¹⁵

If Socrates’ purpose in speaking with Cephalus is to see whether this middle road he has travelled has been hard and rough or easy and smooth, then it would seem very

²¹³ Rosen, *Republic*, 27.

²¹⁴ As Nails points out, reference to this hierarchy—citizen, metic, foreigner—is made at 562e. See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 84. On the point of metics, Bloom directs readers to Xenophon’s *The Athenian Republic*. See Bloom, *Republic*, p. 469 fn. 23. According to Xenophon, the conventional hierarchy between free citizens, metics, and slaves, had largely been leveled in Athens, where one might easily mistake one for the other (*Athenian Republic* I.10-13).

²¹⁵ To borrow a distinction from Clor, Cephalus appears more mediocre than moderate. See Clor, *On Moderation*, 48-49.

much to be the latter. Both youth and old age have been relatively easy for Cephalus in large part simply because he appears to have been blessed with a relatively easy-going nature. But if this is a blessing, it is mixed at best. Toward the end of Socrates' conversation with Cephalus, we learn that the path of his life has taken an unexpected turn. As he explains to Socrates, when a man nears the end of his journey, "fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before" (330d). Launching into his longest speech, explaining why wealth is now such an asset to him, Cephalus seems less and less like someone who bears old age easily. He tells Socrates that while a man may laugh in his youth at the tales told of what Hades has in store for those who commit injustice, upon reaching old age such stories "make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true" (330e). One must then look back upon one's life to see whether or not he has committed injustices. The one who has is weighed down by the anticipation of evil, while the one who has not is filled with "sweet and good hope" (330e).

Although by no means an outright criminal, Cephalus is clearly concerned that he has not lived his entire life on the straight and narrow. And while he places some distance between himself and the man wracked by fear (not speaking here in the first person), it is safe to say a great dread has prompted Cephalus' newfound piety. He values his wealth now insofar as it can help him repay his debts to gods and men and save him from committing further injustices (331b). But whatever taste of that "sweet and good hope" his new devotion might bring him, his continued need to sacrifice leads us to believe that Cephalus lives his last days not entirely free of "suspicion and terror" (330e). While

Cephalus is rid of the mad masters of his youth, his soul is far from tranquil, now at the mercy of extreme fear on one hand, and hope on the other.

We see that Cephalus' easygoingness has led him to be largely unreflective about the path his life ought to have taken. Cephalus managed to live the majority of his life oblivious to what would be his greatest concern at its end. Had he taken himself and his soul more seriously sooner, instead of laughing at the stories told of Hades that have now come back to haunt him, perhaps he could have confronted them more squarely than he is able to in his old age. Turning to speeches not for the pleasure they provide (cf. 328d), but rather the light they may shed upon the truth of what constitutes a good life, he could have reflected more deeply upon whether the fear most feel upon approaching death is due to a genuine premonition of things to come or simply to the "debility of old age" (330e). Was he a fool to laugh in his youth or foolish now to have the fears and hopes that he does? What path should his life have taken?

These questions are not far from those that Glaucon and Adeimantus will soon pose to Socrates. If Cephalus lacked the seriousness necessary in his youth to pursue questions concerning the good life, both Glaucon and Adeimantus are more promising in this regard. Especially in the case of Glaucon, we see that his very intensity and refusal to be satisfied by anything other than the greatest good leads him to examine more closely than Cephalus has just what one's truest good *is*. It is in their very seriousness that both Glaucon and Adeimantus have come to doubt the goodness of justice. Looking more closely at the challenge they pose to Socrates, we will see that a successful rebuttal of

their arguments requires not only a defense of justice, but also one of moderation. In the end, Socrates may be more successful when it comes to the latter than the former, sketching a form of moderation both fitting and appealing to youth, even one as inclined to immoderation as Glaucon.

Glaucon and Adeimantus' Critique of Moderation

Glaucon enters the conversation at the start of Book II, wanting to be fully persuaded by Socrates that it is “in every way better to be just than unjust” (357a-b). He begins his argument by delineating three kinds of goods (357b-d). First, there are goods that are chosen not for their consequences but for their own sake, such as harmless pleasures. Second, are goods desired both for their own sake and for their consequences, such as thinking, seeing, and being healthy. Third, are goods chosen not for themselves but for their consequences, such as exercise, medicine, or work for money’s sake. Socrates must prove that justice is the second kind of good, against the suspicion of the many that it is the third. In order to provoke the best defense of justice, Glaucon plans to launch his best attack against it, adopting a position that is not his own, but one he would like Socrates to disprove.

Glaucon’s attack has as its unspoken premise that immoderation is naturally good, a point that can best be seen in his account of the ring of Gyges. As the story goes, a shepherd happens upon a ring with the power to make its bearer invisible. Immediately upon realizing his new power, the shepherd commits adultery with the king’s wife,

murders the king, and takes over rule of the kingdom. Glaucon maintains that anyone with such a ring would do the same. Generally speaking, he argues that no one would stand by justice if able, without consequence, to take what belongs to others, stealing goods from the market, going into houses and sleeping with whomever he wants, and doing “other things as an equal to a god among humans” (360c). Every man, Glaucon claims, is naturally driven to get the better of another (359c) and desire will lead both the just and the unjust to the same place if they are each given complete license.²¹⁶

The Devil’s advocate account that Glaucon presents only makes sense on the assumption that men are by nature immoderate. They are greedy and grasping, driven by nature, as he says, to get the better of others.²¹⁷ Acting on their immoderate desires, securing for themselves what they want, men achieve their greatest good—the good of a true man—and become happy (359b).²¹⁸ The pursuit of these desires by those capable of pursuing them leads naturally to injustice because the goods Glaucon describes are limited and essentially unsharable. According to the picture Glaucon paints, men want to possess for themselves material goods, lovers, and absolute political power. And they want these things, not in some measure, but to the greatest extent possible, without any

²¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of this portion of the text see Christopher Dustin and Denise Schaeffer, “Looks Matter: Beholding Justice in the *Republic*,” *The Review of Politics* 68 (2006): 449-473.

²¹⁷ The word Glaucon uses is *pleonexia*, a common antonym for moderation. For an extended account of the role of greed in ancient Greece, see Balot, *Greed and Injustice*.

²¹⁸ This view is also expressed by Callicles of Plato’s *Gorgias*. See Balot, *Greed and Injustice*, 6 and 9-11.

limits or restraints. It is no coincidence that Glaucon's portrait of masculinity is one that would embrace the virtue of courage (*andreia*—literally “manliness” in Greek) and spurn the virtue of moderation (361b).²¹⁹ It was not uncommon at this time for moderation to be seen as nothing but cowardliness (560d).²²⁰ Just as those too weak to do injustice praise justice, those who lack the manliness needed to fulfill their desires praise moderation, passing their own incompetence or softness off as a virtue.²²¹ In short, Glaucon's account assumes that all men want the same things; some are just more capable than others of securing what they desire.

And yet, in painting this picture, Glaucon betrays a certain reservation about whether a life filled by the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and power would be

²¹⁹ It is debatable whether one who possesses the daring to do unjust deeds ought to be taken as possessing the *virtue* of courage. We are often loath to attribute any virtue to an individual who commits heinous acts. For an illuminating discussion of this question, see Rabieh, *Courage*. As will be considered later on, complications of a similar sort can arise in the case of moderation, which could be as much an instrument to unjust ends as courage.

²²⁰ This is also the argument made by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* 492a ff. See also Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 3.82.4 and North, “A Period of Opposition.”

²²¹ Compare Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* 13, where he describes weakness which has “come to masquerade in the pomp of an ascetic, mute, and expectant virtue, just as though the *very* weakness of the weak—that is, forsooth, its *being*, its working, its whole unique inevitable inseparable reality—were a voluntary result, something wished, chosen, a deed, an act of *merit*.” Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

genuinely satisfying.²²² Even the greatest immoderation would not be great enough. In the most important respect, one would remain all too human. As we saw with Cephalus, all mortal pleasures come to an end. The ring of Gyges was found on a corpse, and to a corpse it will eventually return; even the godlike power of doing whatever one pleases cannot save one from old age and death. Glaucon himself seems to recognize that there is something missing from his picture of the best life, referring vaguely to “other things” that would make one like a god among men (360c), but not quite knowing what they are.

It is likely because he recognizes that there is something missing in what amounts to the life of an immoderate tyrant that Glaucon wants so badly to be shown that a greater happiness can be secured through devotion to justice. His desire for a good that transcends the goods pursued by a tyrant can be seen in the hypothetical case he goes on to describe. Imagine, he says, a perfectly just and a perfectly unjust man (360e-362c). The unjust man has everything, including a reputation for justice, while the just man has been deprived of everything, including his good reputation. The unjust man appears by all means to have a happy fate, while the just man is whipped and racked, has his eyes burnt out, and is finally crucified. Can Socrates convince him that the just man is still better off? Glaucon describes so extreme a case because he wants to be shown that pure devotion to justice is possible, and that it is a good so great that all ordinary goods should be sacrificed for it. In other words, Glaucon expresses the hope for a good that far surpasses all the goods promised in the unrestrained pursuit and fulfillment of one’s

²²² See Devin Stauffer, *Plato’s Introduction to the Question of Justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 127.

tyrannical desires. Before looking more closely at the task Glaucon has set for Socrates, we will first turn briefly to the statement made by Adeimantus.

Adeimantus supplements Glaucon's argument in a way that gives more explicit attention to moderation. Rather than speculating as to what the deeds of those given the freedom to be unjust and immoderate might be, Adeimantus turns to the speeches made about the virtues. Consider, he says, what is said in prose and by the poets: "With one tongue they all chant that moderation and justice are fair, but hard and full of drudgery, while intemperance and injustice are sweet and easy to acquire, and shameful only by opinion and law" (363e-364a). Here, for the first time, moderation comes explicitly under attack. Why take the hard road if it is more profitable to be unjust and more pleasant to be intemperate? As Adeimantus goes on to explain, if one consults what is said by others, there is no need even to worry about being punished by the gods for one's wrongdoings; Homer himself assures us that the gods can be moved to forgiveness through prayers and sacrifices (364d-e). Adeimantus even goes so far as to raise the possibility that there are no gods at all, or at least none who care for human things (365d). But even if they do exist, if everything that is said about them suggests that they can be "persuaded and perverted by sacrifices" (365e), then they pose no real threat or deterrent to the unjust and immoderate. One could always, as Cephalus is trying to do, buy them off at the end of one's life.

In the wake of these attacks, Socrates is left with the explicit task of defending justice, although we have seen that moderation is as much in need of a defense. It is

worth noting how strange the demands of Glaucon and Adeimantus on behalf of justice in particular have become. As mentioned above, Glaucon began by describing three kinds of goods. Adeimantus closes his statement to Socrates by asking him to show that justice is among the highest kind, “those that are worth having for what comes from them *but much more* for themselves, such as seeing, hearing, thinking, and of course being healthy” (367d, emphasis added). This “much more” was not part of Glaucon’s original description (357b), and, as we saw, Glaucon’s version is even more extreme than Adeimantus’. In his desire to have justice shown to be nearly the opposite of that which is desired on account of its good consequences, Glaucon imagined justice accompanied by the worst consequences imaginable. It would seem that in wanting to see justice “extolled all by itself,” he wants to see it shown to be the first kind of good, a good that is desired simply for its own sake. But he had described these kinds of goods as akin to harmless pleasures. The good he is now asking Socrates to show justice to be is a good unlike any of those he had previously described. Justice must somehow be shown to be a good which, far from being a harmless pleasure, could be accompanied by the greatest and most painful harms, and yet still somehow be desired “in itself,” as the source of our greatest happiness.

Whether Glaucon’s demands of justice can be satisfied remains to be seen. But it is important for our purposes to ask if the same demands would ever be made of moderation, or whether moderation ever places the same demands upon us. While moderation may call for restraint, it does not seem, as justice often does, to call for

sacrifice. Unlike justice, moderation never seems to demand positive action on behalf of others. For this reason, the confusion and tension between the noble and the good that accompanies our understanding of a virtue like justice is less present in the case of moderation, which presents itself as more closely and clearly connected to the good of the individual who possesses it.²²³ Still, insofar as moderation involves self-denial, does it truly do so for the sake of the individual's own greatest good? Does it actually contribute to the happiness of its possessor, or is it, as many suspect, nothing more than an artificial restraint, denying us the pursuit of our full happiness? Will moderation prove to be a good like seeing and hearing and being healthy, one that should be desired both for its own sake and for what comes from it? We can begin to find answers to these questions by following the development of moderation through the city in speech.

The City in Speech

The Healthy City

In an attempt to satisfy the demands of Glaucon and Adeimantus, Socrates proposes that they build a city in speech. Just as it would be helpful for someone of poor

²²³ For an especially clear case of this tension between the noble and the good in the case of courage see Rabieh, *Courage*, 49. As Weiss puts it, "Moderation's advantage over justice is that it can be defended as something desirable in itself for oneself—in the sense that it is good for one to be healthy or fit in both body and soul" (*Philosophers in the Republic*, 187).

vision to be able to see a bigger version of letters before having to examine smaller ones, so too might it be easier first to investigate and observe justice in a city, where it is bigger, so as to better recognize it in the individual. Socrates himself hints at difficulties with this procedure. As he says when using the example of the letters, seeing larger ones before smaller ones would be of use only “if...they do happen to be the same” (368d). This is by no means a minor qualification, and we must be cautious of ways in which the comparison could prove as misleading as it is helpful. At any rate, having established that they will turn to cities, Socrates then suggests that if they were to watch a city coming into being, they would see along with it the coming into being of justice and injustice. Adeimantus agrees that this is probably the case (369a), and with that they embark upon the building of a city in speech.

According to Socrates, cities arise because individuals are not self-sufficient; we all have basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, and we are ill equipped to provide for these necessities on our own. Contrary to Glaucon’s picture of men as naturally competitive, Socrates describes a city as arising from cooperation, men gathering together “as partners and helpers” (369c), and working collectively, not in a spirit of sacrificial devotion to the common good, but simply as the best way to secure their individual needs. Tasks are divided up on the principle of a division of labor, under the assumption that one man will do a finer job if he devotes himself to one task as opposed to many. On this basis, the first city in speech grows until it includes everyone from farmers to cobblers to weavers to merchants.

This first city that Socrates builds is called the healthy city. And wherever the best place to look for justice might be, one wonders whether it might not have been best to look for moderation here. But would it be right to view it as the model of this virtue, from which all other cities stray? Everything about the city is certainly measured; it does not admit of excess. But insofar as that is the case, there is something both attractive and repellent about it. The city is eminently sensible. It sees perfectly to its citizens' needs and in doing so even leaves room for simple pleasures. Everything is kept within sensible bounds. Even the frequency of sex is limited so that couples do not "produce children beyond their means, keeping an eye out against poverty and war" (372b). If a city sticks simply to its needs, it seems its needs can be met. If the *raison d'être* of the city is to provide for our basic needs, then perhaps this is why the healthy city is, as Socrates calls it, the true city (372e).

And yet, there is something in human nature that screams, "Reason not the need!" As Shakespeare's King Lear protests, "Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life's as cheap as the beast's" (*King Lear*, II.iv).²²⁴ This same thought will ultimately

²²⁴ One might even wonder whether the distinctly human ability to indulge to excess is connected to our distinct ability to reason, as one poet puts it, "Let brutes and vegetals, that cannot think, / So far as drougt and nature urges, drink; / A more indulgent mistress guides our sprites, / Reason, that dares beyond our appetites, / (She would our care, as well as thirst, redress) / And with divinity [i.e., Bacchus] rewards excess." II.7-12 of Waller's "For Drinking of Healths" quoted in Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 213. As Scodel notes, Waller, far from seeing reason as counseling the restraint of excessive appetite, "represents [reason] as encouraging the truly rational man to go beyond mere thirst into an 'excess' that brings contact with inebriating 'divinity.'" For Waller the rational man is also the courageous man who 'dares' to transcend not only animal nature but also silly

prompt Glaucon to call the healthy city a city of sows, not of men. Interrupting Socrates' account, Glaucon says, "You seem to make these men have their feasts without relishes" (372c). So Socrates allows for relishes, and even desserts for the citizens of his healthy city, and yet he continues to keep all this, including their drinking, "in measure" (372d) so that they may "live out their lives in peace and health." "Dying as old men," he concludes, "they will hand down other similar lives to their offspring" (372d). But this does not satisfy Glaucon, who gives voice to that within us that ever longs for more.²²⁵ Men ought to live with relish in more ways than one. With what else, he asks Socrates, will he fatten his city of sows (372d)?

Giving in to Glaucon's many desires, Socrates concedes that they are moving now from an account of how a healthy city comes into being, to one of how a luxurious or feverish city develops (372e). From couches and tables to courtesans and poets, the feverish city expands until it is "gorged with a bulky mass of things" (373a). With this expansion comes want and war. No longer able to stay within its means, the city will

cultural norms." See Scodel, *Excess*, 213. On this point see also Clor, *On Moderation*, 98-99.

²²⁵ Robert Meister notes that proponents of capitalism "openly [avow] that the relentless superannuation of products and desires is a strength, not a weakness," arguing that the austerity and "'satisfaction' promised by socialists and Greens alike is a form of living death." In a quotation taken from a "self-proclaimed 'survivor' of [Communism's] austerity" measures, Meister captures the grim outlook of a society in which, like Socrates' healthy city, the future merely perpetuates the past: "What Communism instilled in us was precisely this immobility, this absence of a future, the absence of a dream, of the possibility of imagining our lives differently. ... [W]e learned to think: This will go on forever..." See Robert Meister, "Is Moderation a Virtue? Gregory Vlastos and the Toxins of Eudaemonism," *Apeiron* 26 3/4 (1993): 113-114.

have to expand, taking its neighbors' land (373d). Thus, the city will have need of an army. Having established a need for what he calls the guardian class, Socrates goes on to discuss what nature its members must have and what education they must undergo. This education will amount to what Socrates later calls a purging of the gorged, luxurious city (399e).

Before looking in detail at this education and the moderation it achieves, it is important to note that however austere this new city becomes, Socrates never expects there to be a return to the healthy city. As he says when they move to the luxurious city, the healthy city simply will not satisfy everyone (372e-373a). It seems that once the existence of human longing is acknowledged, the healthy city is no longer possible. Or even if it could be possible, one sees that it is not fully desirable. The healthy city may be without poverty or war, but for all that it fails to be fully human. Crude as his expression of it might have been, Glaucon's rejection of the healthy city betrays a deeper dissatisfaction with a way of life in which the present merely perpetuates the past, leaving no room for the exceptional or the transcendent. The healthy city, while it sees to the needs of the body, neglects those of the soul.

Moderation as a human virtue, one that does not reduce us to easily satisfied animals, must be different from the moderation that could be said to exist within the healthy city. It cannot simply be a negation, removal, or, as we saw in the case of Cephalus, a withering away of that within us which strives and desires for more. That said, if all our longing amounts to is an augmentation of the desires and habits that we

share most with the animals, then it would be hard to see how its satisfaction makes us more human, as opposed to simply the worst of beasts. The task of moderation may then be to educate and elevate, as opposed to eliminate, human desire. In Socrates' treatment of the guardian class, we will see one possible model for such an education.

An Education in Moderation

The guardian education is comprised of gymnastics for the body and music (which includes speeches) for the soul. The musical education of the young is of primary importance, for, as Socrates explains, the beginning of every work, especially anything young and tender, is the most important part: "For at that stage it's most plastic, and each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give it" (377a-b).²²⁶ Impressionable youths must be given only the best of models and, above all, they must not be exposed to opinions that are opposite to those they must maintain in their adulthood (377a-b). There must then be strict supervision of the makers of children's tales.

To begin with, the gods of these tales, if they are truly good, can only be the cause of good. If it must be said that gods punish, then it must be maintained that the one who is punished profits on account of it (380b). Moreover since a god, and all that belongs to him, is in the best condition, it follows that he should never change, since to change would be to move from a good and perfect condition to one that is less so (381b-c). Poets

²²⁶ See also *Laws* 765e-766a.

should never write tales of gods changing shape and visiting the cities, and mothers should not be allowed to scare their children with stories of gods walking among men, disguised as strangers. Needless to say, the picture Socrates paints is a radical revision of the Homeric gods. The gods Socrates describes would seem to have little to do with human things.²²⁷ Especially if one follows through to its end the thought that what is perfect will never change or be moved by something external to it, one wonders whether it could still be maintained that the gods punish at all, even if in doing so they should not actually be seen as doing harm.

On the whole, one can safely say that the divinity Socrates describes is much less fear-inspiring than the gods of whom Cephalus heard tales in his youth. This revision is striking when viewed from the standpoint of cultivating moderation. Fear of the gods would seem a natural ally to the virtue. Had fear of the divine gripped Cephalus sooner, he may have been more concerned with moderation in his youth than he appears to have been. Indeed, fear seems so clearly a support of moderation that Aquinas deems it to be the gift that accompanies the virtue. As he puts it, “man stands in the greatest need of the fear of God in order to shun those things which are most seductive, and these are the matter of temperance.”²²⁸ But gods who are thought to punish are often also thought to reward. Fear-inspiring gods are also hope-inspiring gods, and both fear and hope can be

²²⁷ See Bloom, *Republic*, 352 and Rabieh, *Courage*, 114.

²²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II Q141 A1 ad.3. Translation from *Summa Theologica* Vol. 3 Part 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Cosimo, 2007).

great sources of immoderate, unreasonable action. As we saw, Cephalus' great hope is that, as Adeimantus puts it, the gods can be "perverted by sacrifices." Belief in gods who can be so easily swayed by human actions can inspire late-life repentance, but it does not lend itself to a sustained interest in and devotion to virtue throughout the whole of life. Rather than rely upon external threats and rewards, and the fears and hopes they engender, Socrates tries, through an elaborate education, to bring about a kind of moderation that stems from the inner inclinations of the individual.

If children are to grow to be moderate adults, then the gods and heroes they worship in their youth must be depicted as moderate themselves. In Socrates' description of the elements of poetry that must be banned and those that can remain, we find our first definition of the virtue, although it is a sketch that requires some filling in. He identifies "the most important elements of moderation according to the multitude (*hos plethe*)" as "being obedient to the rulers, and being themselves rulers of the pleasures of drink, sex and eating" (389e). In this way, moderation governs one's relation both toward others and toward oneself. Each facet of moderation appears to have something to do with an ability to recognize and remain within certain limits. But how are these limits determined and what is the source of obedience in each case? As we look to the poetic examples Socrates goes on to provide, we will see that this picture of moderation becomes more

complex, pointing the way from the mere elements identified here to a more holistic definition of moderation found in Book IV.²²⁹

First, regarding being obedient to rulers, Socrates states that it would be “fine to say the sort of thing Diomedes says in Homer, ‘Friend, keep quiet, and obey my word,’ and what’s connected with this, ‘Breathing might the Achaeans went, / In silence, afraid of their leaders’” (389e). Here fear seems to reemerge as an inducer of moderation. If not fear of the rulers of the cosmos, then perhaps fear of the rulers of this world is to be the source of obedience. But the scene to which Socrates refers in his opening quotation suggests another possibility, and is worth looking at more closely. At this point in the *Iliad*, the Achaeans are in the midst of battle with the Trojans. Agamemnon is rallying his men, goading them with insults to rile their spirits, prompting them to prove themselves in battle. He lets loose on Diomedes, accusing him of being shy behind the lines, not half the man his father was in war. In response, Homer tells us that Diomedes remained silent, respectful of the king. By contrast Sthenelus, Diomedes’ compatriot, rails against Agamemnon’s taunting, calling him a liar and claiming that he and Diomedes are far greater than their fathers ever were.

It is in response to this outburst that Diomedes reproaches his friend as Socrates quotes. After ordering him to be silent, Diomedes explains that he does not blame Agamemnon for goading the Argives on in this way, for the glory is Agamemnon’s to

²²⁹ For an alternate reading of the meaning of these passages see Seth Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing: On Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 67-69.

win if they prosper, and the grief is his to bear if they are massacred. With this, Diomedes rouses his troops as Agamemnon wishes. He does this not because he is taken in by his chiding, but because he understands the necessity that prompts it, appreciating Agamemnon's attempt to spur his army to battle. In this, Diomedes bests even Odysseus, who takes Agamemnon's bait and reacts to his insults with anger (perhaps more than even Agamemnon anticipated). But if Diomedes is a model of moderation in his obedience, it is important to note that the source of this obedience is different from that of the Achaeans to whom Socrates refers in the second part of his quotation. In Diomedes' case, obedience stems from an understanding of what is prudent and necessary in war along with a recognition and acceptance of the difference between Agamemnon's position and his own. As we see later in the *Iliad*, no fear prevents Diomedes from standing up to Agamemnon, but he does so only at the appropriate time and place, when they are gathered together in an assembly and not in the midst of battle (*Iliad* IX), where insubordination can prove deadly. Thus, while conventional obedience in the case of the many may stem from fear, in Diomedes' case we see the alternative of obedience guided by reason.

This brings us to the second of Socrates' examples that address moderation as obedience to rulers. While the example of Diomedes is fine or noble, the lines "'Heavy with wine, with eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer,' And what comes right after, and all the rest of the youthful insolence of private men to rulers," are not (389e-390a). Here again, the context is worth considering. The words are those of Achilles, and just the

beginning of a long list of insults he hurls at Agamemnon. His rage has been prompted by Agamemnon's decision to take for himself Achilles' war prize, Briseis. Achilles is deeply insulted and does not hold back from saying so. While Achilles' immoderation will be discussed further below, it is important first to see that this example points to a difficulty beyond Achilles' immoderation, raising a complication for the virtue of moderation that did not arise in Diomedes' case.

As was noted above, Diomedes remains obedient to Agamemnon because he sees the shared good toward which Agamemnon's actions aim, namely, victory in battle. In the Achilles example matters are much less clear. In taking Briseis from Achilles, Agamemnon acts solely for his own selfish good, doing harm to Achilles and by extension all of the Argives. His decision to take Briseis is so spiteful and petty that it is hard to blame Achilles when he says, "I have no mind to linger here disgraced, brimming your cup and piling up your plunder" (*Iliad* I.163-90).²³⁰ To the extent that Agamemnon is as shameless and greedy as Achilles describes, one wonders whether obedience to such a king is a virtue.²³¹ Is not the first half of moderation, obedience to rulers, only sensible if those rulers possess the other half of moderation, being rulers themselves over pleasure and their own desire to grasp for more? If they are incapable of ruling themselves, can they be capable or respectable rulers of others? As Achilles puts it, only "worthless husks

²³⁰ All translations of the *Iliad* are from *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

²³¹ For an extended discussion the concept of greed in this scene from the *Iliad* see Balot, *Greed and Injustice*, 62-67.

of men” would be obedient to a “King who devours his people” (*Iliad* I.221-52). This difficulty will be averted in the city in speech through the rule of philosopher kings, who are, unlike Agamemnon, both moderate and wise.²³² But what is the status of obedience in all actual cities, where leaders fall short of being philosopher kings?²³³

Leaving aside for now the question of whether or not obedience can in all cases be seen as a virtue, we turn to Socrates’ discussion of the second part of moderation, mastery over the pleasures of drinking, sex, and eating. This version of moderation as a form of temperance is one with which we are more familiar. In the clearest examples he provides, Socrates refers to the gods being overcome by sexual desire, Zeus so enthralled by Hera that he forgets all else, including his shame, as well as the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite. As Glaucon will soon concede, there is no pleasure greater, keener, or madder than sex (403a). Indeed, the education of the guardians will culminate in a radical attempt to control sexual desire. Suffice it to say for now that if even gods are depicted as driven to act with such abandon, it is hard to find reason to believe human beings could do much better.

²³² See Annas, *An Introduction*, 116.

²³³ For an alternate interpretation of this passage see David Bolotin, “The Critique of Homer and the Homeric Heroes in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul*, eds. M. Palmer and T. L. Pangle (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 89. On the whole, Bolotin takes Socrates to be tacitly encouraging blind obedience, as some degree of it will be needed even by the guardians, who will fail fully to understand and therefore be tempted to rebel against the philosopher kings. This seems right to me, but if blind obedience is salutary in the city ruled by philosopher kings, our attention is still drawn to its more questionable character in any other city.

While pleasure is clearly at issue in the above examples, the rest of the cases Socrates cites in this section prove more interesting, fitting less clearly within the definition of moderation as having to do with rule over pleasure. Reflecting upon them, we see the scope of moderation grow. To begin with, in addressing the matter of food and drink, Socrates starts by criticizing what appears to be Odysseus' excessive praise of a great feast with full cups and tables as the finest of all things (390a-b).²³⁴ He then quotes Eurylochus, one of Odysseus' men, asking his companions whether hunger isn't the most pitiful way to die (390b). The idea behind the two quotations seems to be that we should never think food and drink so important as to believe that having them is the best thing and being without them the worst. This point will be in keeping with the general movement of the education of the guardians insofar as it teaches them to privilege the soul over the body.

But further consideration of the second quotation brings out an aspect of moderation that had hitherto been overlooked. In context, Eurylochus is trying to persuade Odysseus' men to eat the forbidden cattle of Helios, despite Tireseus' warning against it. Marooned on an island, having exhausted the ship's stores, Odysseus' men are tired of scavenging for their food, suffering from hunger, and imagining the fate of starvation; in this state, they give in and slaughter the god's cattle. The situation of

²³⁴ As Bloom points out, here and elsewhere Socrates gives less credit to Homer's heroes than they deserve. Odysseus praises not so much the food as he does the harmony among men that results from gathering together and listening to music. See Bloom, *Republic*, 452. On the whole, Socrates' unfair denigration of Homer's heroes may be part of Plato's overall effort to make way for new ones.

Odysseus' men appears as less a matter of unrestrained or excessive desire for pleasure than it is a lack of endurance in the face of the pain (of hunger) and fear (of an eventual death by starvation).

This is not to say that pleasure is not at all involved. After all, the hungrier we are, the more vividly we anticipate the satisfaction of a meal, and the more intensely we enjoy it. In fact, the example helps to bring out how inseparable pleasure and pain tend to be, pleasures often being most tempting when they promise the relief of pain, and each becoming more intense by virtue of their contrast.²³⁵ But this means that the weaker we are when it comes to enduring pain, the more easily we will succumb to temptation. Moderation then must be as much a matter of endurance in the face of pain as it is restraint when pleasure is in reach.²³⁶ Indeed, in his one positive statement in this section on self-mastery, Socrates says that what must be seen and heard in poetry are “speeches and deeds of endurance by famous men in the face of *everything*” (390d, emphasis added). The example he goes on to provide of such endurance sheds further light upon the scope and nature of moderation.

Socrates quotes again from the *Odyssey*, this time the words of Odysseus himself: “Smiting his breast, he reproached his heart with word. ‘Endure, heart; you have endured worse before’” (390d). At this point in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus has finally returned home,

²³⁵ See *Republic* 583e ff. and *Phaedo* 60b-c.

²³⁶ It is especially insofar as they both share the element of endurance (*karteria*) that moderation and courage (especially the presentation of courage in the *Republic*) could be seen as sharing a significant amount of common ground.

only to find his house overrun by suitors, and he is so full of rage that he considers slaughtering the women who had been lying with them. Homer describes Odysseus' state of mind in the following way: "[A]s a bitch stands over her tender whelps growling, when she sees a man she does not know, and is eager to fight, so his heart growled within him in his wrath at their evil deeds" (XX 10-15).²³⁷ It is at this point that Odysseus reproaches his heart, commanding himself to endure as he has endured before. In keeping with Socrates' initial description of the proper guardian nature (375a ff.), moderation would seem to be that which curbs the spiritedness of the dog.

But there is more to the example than meets the eye. For while Odysseus succeeds in keeping his heart "bound within him to endure steadfastly," his rage is only stored away, later to be unleashed with great ferocity. His heart continues to seethe and his mind continues to race, "pondering how he might put forth his hand upon the shameless wooers," without getting himself killed, one man against many. Insofar as Odysseus is able to keep himself from acting impetuously, remaining level-headed enough to recognize his situation and think through his best plan of attack, he might seem to embody the sound-mindedness that is moderation. But to what end does one keep a level-head?²³⁸ While we might sympathize with Odysseus' anger, is there not something potentially problematic about keeping one's composure only as a means to better carry

²³⁷ Translations of *The Odyssey* are from *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

²³⁸ See Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing*, 68-69: "Odysseus' self-control is merely calculation: after he kills the suitors he lets Eumaeus and Telemachus hang the servants."

out what still amounts to an extreme, rage-driven act?²³⁹ Must not a more genuine moderation shape the very ends toward which one is driven?

Leaving aside this larger question for now, we can pause to see that the moderation we are speaking of is no longer the moderation of the desires for the pleasures of food, sex, or drink. What is in need of moderation is Odysseus' spiritedness. And, as Bloom points out, spiritedness is the common thread that runs through Socrates' critique of Achilles as well.²⁴⁰ The thread is buried, however, beneath Socrates' claim that Achilles, along with being brazenly disobedient to gods and men, is an excessive lover of money. Socrates insists that the city's guardians must not be allowed to believe that the hero Achilles "was so full of confusion as to contain within himself two diseases that are opposite to one another—illiberality accompanying love of money, on the one hand, and arrogant disdain for gods and human beings, on the other" (391c). Socrates suggests that Achilles allows himself to be a slave to his desire for money, and yet he refuses to be ruled by gods or men.

As described by Socrates, Achilles would embody the exact opposite of moderation, being neither a ruler himself over his desire nor willing to be obedient to any

²³⁹ Examples of this limited version of moderation, which seems especially to characterize a number of famous fictitious villains, abound. To take a clear case in which the capacity for self-possession is not equivalent to moderation in the fullest sense, one might consider the "moderation" of a man like Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, who claims, "Years of secret sufferings had taught me superhuman self-control." Here too we see an ability to maintain outward composure despite being "suffocated" inwardly by a "mounting fury." See Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (New York: First Vintage Books, 1991), 27.

²⁴⁰ See Bloom, *Republic*, 354 ff.

ruler. Love of money is doubtless a great source of immoderation for many. Money can buy pleasure, but unlike pleasure, money has no natural limit, making the pursuit of it subject to limitless desire. For these reasons, Plato may have considered it the greatest, at least in the sense of the most widespread, enemy of virtue. Generally speaking, Socrates' accusation of an honor-loving man as a lover of money prefigures his later analysis of the timocratic soul, which still harbors a love of money, even if it pays honor to it only "under the cover of darkness" (548a). But, as several commentators have noted, it seems obviously unfair to accuse Achilles of being petty in this way.²⁴¹ What may be the case for most hardly seems to be the case for Achilles, who appears first and foremost as a lover of honor.

In a sense, Achilles' love of honor truly brings out his confusion, for it reveals a desire for the recognition of his worth from the very men and gods he appears to disdain. Still, there are things that Achilles loves and covets even more than honor. As both Bloom and Bolotin note, in accusing Achilles of being a lover of money, Socrates directs us to the connection between Achilles' spiritedness and what could be called his covetousness.²⁴² As Bolotin makes especially clear, while Achilles may not be immoderately attached to money, he is immoderately attached to certain "things."²⁴³

²⁴¹ See, for example, Bloom, *Republic*, 356.

²⁴² Bloom, *Republic*, 355 and Bolotin, "Critique of Homer."

²⁴³ As Bolotin notes, the Greek word for "love of money" can also be translated as "love of things." See Bolotin, "Critique of Homer," 89.

Achilles' spiritedness is provoked when he perceives himself to be deprived of something or someone that he loves and that he believes belongs to *him*, first Briseis and then Patroclus. In the first case, he rages against Agamemnon, in the second, against Hector, and, it seems, the whole cosmos.

Bolotin takes Socrates' underlying critique of Achilles to be part of his attempt to make the guardians more self-sufficient, moving them away from the belief in punitive and ruling gods toward the more rational theology discussed above. As Bolotin explains, "our attachment to other people—or to property, or to life itself for that matter—leads to the belief in gods who enforce that right."²⁴⁴ As we saw before, Socrates' new theology greatly decreases both the fear and the hope that the gods would inspire. It is especially against the backdrop of his belief in a universe governed by caring gods that Achilles' loss of Patroclus comes as such an unbearable, unacceptable shock, one of cosmic proportions. While Socrates' theology requires a certain toughness insofar as one must accept a universe largely indifferent to human suffering and loss, it also spares those who believe in it the pain of shattered expectations and hopes, and the immoderate backlash of spiritedness that such pain evokes.

Through a closer examination of Socrates' examples we have come a long way from the conventional and partial definition of moderation with which we began: being obedient to rulers and being a ruler oneself over the pleasures of food, drink, and sex. We saw that although fear could be the source of obedience, Diomedes represents a more

²⁴⁴ See Bolotin, *Critique of Homer*, 88 and 90.

thoughtful form of obedience that stems from understanding. Reflection on Agamemnon gave us further cause to believe that obedience, if it is to be a virtue, cannot simply be blind. Moreover, we saw that moderation requires endurance, not only in the face of pleasure, but also in the face of pain. In the case of Achilles, we see endurance is needed in the face of the greatest pains, namely, the loss of a beloved, and that belief in Socrates' new theology would help one acquire the toughness necessary for this endurance. In general, we have seen that the reach of moderation is much wider than the conventional understanding captures, and that the spirited part of the soul is as much in need of moderation as the desiring part.²⁴⁵ This reflection upon Socrates' examples has paved the way to the broader and deeper definition of moderation that we will find in Book IV. There Socrates will propose in his own name a more comprehensive understanding of moderation, one that incorporates what is strikingly absent in the conventional understanding of the virtue: on one hand, the essential role played by reason in moderation; and, on the other hand, a vision of moderation as a virtue which involves the whole soul, both its appetitive and spirited elements. Before turning to Book IV's account of moderation, we will turn briefly to the key elements that remain to be discussed with regard to the musical education of the guardians' souls.

²⁴⁵ This is important to notice because it is what keeps one from viewing, as does Weiss, Book IV's expansive definition of moderation as a "distortion" of the virtue. See Weiss, *Philosophers in the Republic*, 180.

A Habituation in Harmony

The less than fully fleshed out account of moderation presented on the surface of Book III is in keeping with the early guardian education insofar as it is an education given largely through images and examples as opposed to clearly articulated, reasoned speeches. What is most important is that the gods and heroes *appear* moderate; the exact working out of what lies behind this appearance comes later. In this way, the structure of the *Republic* is in keeping with the structure of the guardian's education.

Before arriving at Book IV's reasoned speech about moderation, there is one more crucial element to the guardian education to discuss: the precise role of music and harmony. As noted above, the proper portrayal of the gods and heroes is crucial because of the integral role imitation plays in education, specifically in the early formation of habits and character: what is young and tender "assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give it" (377a-b).²⁴⁶ To this one could add that what is young and tender assimilates itself to *every* stamp it is given, whether those stamps are given intentionally or not. Socrates' insistence that the young guardians be provided with only proper models to imitate would seem especially extreme and unnecessary if it were not for the fact that children cannot be trusted to copy only the good and not the bad. As anyone who has spent any time with children has noticed, they have no such filter, imitating indiscriminately. By the time they might be able to understand the difference between the good and the bad, it is likely to be too late. As Socrates puts it, "imitations, if

²⁴⁶ See also *Laws* 765e-766a.

they are practiced from youth onwards, become established as habits and nature in body and sounds and in thoughts” (395d).²⁴⁷

For these reasons, Socrates envisions an ideal education that completely controls the environment in which children are raised. Care must be taken even with regard to the smallest of things, lest “reared on images of vice as it were on bad grass, every day cropping and grazing on a great deal little by little from many places, they unawares put together some one big bad thing in their soul” (401b).²⁴⁸ Beauty and grace must surround the guardians in all things, from the products of the poets to those of the craftsmen, so that “dwelling as it were in a healthy place, [the young] will be benefited by everything; and...fine works will strike their vision or their hearing, like a breeze bringing health from good places” (401b-d).

²⁴⁷ Recent studies have allowed science to catch up with and even quantify this ancient wisdom, coining the term “overimitation” for children’s inability to avoid replicating the actions of adults, even when they recognize such actions as transparently unnecessary or at odds with their ultimate aim. See Lyons, Young, and Keil, “The Hidden Structure of Overimitation,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104, 50 (Dec. 11, 2007), pp. 19751-19756. This tendency can be amusing when it comes to unnecessary actions, but it is troubling when it comes to harmful ones.

²⁴⁸ Bourgault (“Prolegomena,” 137) notes that Plato “would be shocked by the nature and amount of advertisement children are inundated with. It is easy to see how, from Plato’s viewpoint, few things could contribute more to the molding of greedy or gluttonous souls than bombarding the young with suggestive accounts of the joys of material consumption or that of sweet foods.”

In this effort to infuse children with proper habits and what we might call a second nature in body and mind, nothing is more effective than music.²⁴⁹ For the inculcation of moderation, children must be exposed to a harmonic mode and rhythm that is akin to the virtue. Of this mode Socrates says the following:

“[L]eave...[a] mode for a man who performs a peaceful deed, one that is not violent but voluntary, either persuading someone of something and making a request—whether a god by prayer or a human being by instruction and exhortation—or, on the contrary, holding himself in check for someone else who makes a request or instructs him or persuades him to change, and as a result acting intelligently, not behaving arrogantly, but in all these things acting moderately and in measure and being content with the consequences.” (399b-c)

It is worth noting how well this description captures the actions of Diomedes described above. Also, although Socrates here makes a concession to conventional piety, prayer, if it must persist, can remain moderate insofar as it is accompanied by an overall ability to endure and accept the consequences, whatever they might be—an ability we saw Achilles, in his immoderation, lacked. But what role exactly does a musical mode, with its particular rhythm and harmony, play in bringing about or supporting this kind of action?

Music involves and captivates one’s whole being, body and soul.²⁵⁰ As Socrates explains, rhythm and harmony “most insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the

²⁴⁹ On the importance of musical education for producing moderation see Bourgault, “Prolegomena,” 135-137.

²⁵⁰ Aristides Quintilianus describes the unique character and capacity of music as follows: “[P]ainting and sculpture teach only through vision and the likeness both excites and amazes the soul; how then could music fail to captivate, since it makes its mimesis not through one sensory perception but through many? ...Only music teaches both by word

soul...bringing grace with them” (401d). But most importantly music helps in the development of aesthetic judgment that is rooted in and inseparable from sentiment. When the rhythm is off, one feels it before one even knows how to think it. Human beings respond instinctually to discord and dissonance, order and harmony, pained by the one and pleased by the other. As can be seen in the infant calmed by being rocked and sung to, from the earliest age we find comfort in rhythm and harmony.²⁵¹ An education in music nurtures the seed of this innate capacity so that it may grow to inform the whole of life. The natural attraction to harmony and aversion to discord can, if properly nurtured and developed, provide a basis for, as Socrates puts it, loving and hating in the right way in all things, taking pleasure in what is fine and being pained by what is not.²⁵²

These feelings of pleasure and pain can then translate into a form of judgment. As Socrates emphasizes, the proper education in rhythm and harmony gives one “the

and by the counterparts of actions, not through motionless bodies or those fixed in a single form, but through animate bodies, of which it alters both the figure and the motion to the kindred form in accord with each of the actions recited.” Quoted in Thomas J. Matheisen, “Harmonia and Ethos in Ancient Greek Music,” Vol. 3, No.3 (1984): 267-8. Matheisen describes Quintilianus’ treatise *De musica* as “unquestionably provid[ing] the most detailed and comprehensive ancient treatment of the subjects of harmonia and ethos.” See, Matheisen, “Harmonia,” 264-5.

²⁵¹ See *Laws* 653c ff. and 790c ff. As the Athenian stranger puts it, “Whereas all other creatures are devoid of any perception of the various kinds of order and disorder in movement (which we term rhythm and harmony), to men the very gods, who were given, as we said, to be our fellows in the dance, have granted the pleasurable perception of rhythm and harmony, whereby they cause us to move and lead our choirs, linking us one with another by means of songs and dances” (654a). All translations of the *Laws* are from *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²⁵² See also *Laws* 653 ff.

sharpest sense for what's been left out and what isn't a fine product of craft or what isn't a fine product of nature" (401e). The importance of this aesthetic instinct, expanded and finely tuned through an early and careful cultivation in music, can be seen once one recognizes that the guardians themselves are the masterworks of the education Socrates has crafted; they are to be models of refinement and grace, embodiments of harmony. With souls that have been treated with the same care and attention that any artist would bring to his or her craft, striving to have every detail align toward perfection, the guardians will love most of all the beauty they find in themselves and in each other. Their "musicality" culminates in an ability to recognize the forms of the virtues, and the fairest and most lovable sight of all will be the individual in whom these forms coincide (402c-d).

Love of a beautiful soul is something with which Glaucon is familiar, and this is part of why he so enthusiastically embraces Socrates' education of the guardians. He eagerly concedes that those with beautiful souls are "by far" the fairest of sights, and even adds that a soul's beauty can make up for a body's defect. Nevertheless, one who loves a beautiful person is likely to want to possess him or her, body and soul. But Glaucon admits that the pleasure of sex, a pleasure greater and keener than any other pleasure he knows, tends toward madness and licentiousness, ugliness not in keeping with a beautiful beloved. But the beauty of the love of beauty is the internal check this love can place upon the form desire takes insofar as it is a love that strives to be in keeping with and worthy of its beloved. Glaucon readily concedes that the pleasure of

sex, apparently immoderate in its very nature, must never approach the right kind of love. One must “love in a moderate and musical way what’s orderly and fine” (403a). And so, with Glaucon’s agreement, they set down a law in their city to this effect, and the musical education is complete (403c).

The musical education appeals to and elevates the longings of individuals like Glaucon, directing them toward a love of the beautiful that sets its own limits upon desire. As Bloom puts it, this path to virtue is “gentler, surer, and more humane” than one reached through either coercion or fear of divine punishment.²⁵³ Although surer, one could add that it is not entirely certain. If it were, it would not require a law for its support. But perhaps a law is necessary because the keystone to the guardian’s education is still missing. The musical education is an education in sentiment, forming souls that are in some sense moderate before they even know it, preparing the ground for the full flourishing of virtue. But this means we have yet to see what moderation *understood as moderation* actually is. As Socrates puts it, the musical education above all forms the soul in such a way that a person will “blame and hate the ugly in the right way while one’s still young, before one is able to grasp reasonable speech. And when reasonable speech comes, the one who is reared in this way would take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin” (401e-402a).²⁵⁴ We have been given a sense of how moderation appears, but have not yet looked in detail at the speech that explains it. We

²⁵³ Bloom, *Republic*, 360.

²⁵⁴ Notice, the guardian’s embrace of this reasonable speech depends on its being “akin.” In other words, the success of this education in virtue trades on a love of one’s own.

find this speech in Book IV, where Socrates provides the *Republic*'s definitive understanding of moderation: a harmony of soul orchestrated by reason.

CHAPTER 4: HARMONY OF CITY AND SOUL

Harmony or Mastery of the Soul?

The definition of moderation as a harmony of soul arises in Book IV as part of the process of elimination by which Socrates and Glaucon hope to find justice. With the completion of the education of the guardians, they have purged and concluded their city in speech. If they can locate within it the other virtues—wisdom, courage, and moderation—then justice, they trust, will appear as whatever is left over. Having located wisdom within the ruling part of the city (428e-429a), and courage within the defending part (429a), Socrates notes that there are two virtues left: moderation and justice. Instead of moving directly to moderation, he asks Glaucon, “How could we find justice so we won’t have to bother about moderation any further?” (430a). That Socrates would want to skip straight to justice is odd, especially since doing so would seem to ruin their entire method of inquiry. Why he wants to do this remains a puzzle—one we will return to at the end of the chapter—but at least this much is clear: if there is a way to find justice without finding moderation, Glaucon does not want to know it. Over the course of their conversation, Socrates has aroused in Glaucon such an interest in moderation that he says “I would not want [justice] to come to light before, if we aren’t going to consider moderation any further” (430d).²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Here I differ from Weiss (*Philosophers in the Republic*, 186) who reads Glaucon as having valued moderation from the start.

Socrates agrees to gratify Glaucon and discuss moderation, “so as not to do an injustice” (430e). Having resolved to consider moderation, Socrates says that while wisdom and courage are found within particular parts of the city (428e-429a), moderation is, by contrast, “more like a kind of accord and harmony [of parts]” (430e). How this is the case is not immediately apparent to Glaucon (430e), so he and Socrates proceed to hunt down a definition of moderation.²⁵⁶ Socrates begins by describing how people speak about it:

Moderation is surely a certain kind of order and mastery of certain kinds of pleasures and desires, as men say when they use—I don’t know in what way—the phrase ‘stronger than himself’; and some other phrases of the sort are used that are, as it were, its tracks. (430e)

These tracks recall the half of moderation described in Book III as the mastery of pleasure. But while they might point us in the right direction, Socrates insists that there is also something ridiculous about the phrase “stronger than himself,” “if the same *himself* is referred to in all of them” (431a). The problem of contradiction that Socrates points to here is discussed at length when he turns to a closer investigation of the soul. It would seem that one cannot be both stronger and weaker at the same time, with respect to the same part, and in relation to the same thing. Making stricter sense of a common statement

²⁵⁶ Lorch views the definition of moderation as a harmony as representative of Glaucon’s view of the virtue, not Socrates’. He argues that “the definition of moderation as a harmonious condition of the soul is derived two separate times in Book IV,” and that “[o]n each occasion Glaucon is responsible for the definition.” But here I think we see that far from being responsible for introducing the notion of a harmony, Glaucon does not even understand what it might mean. See Lorch, “Choice of Lives,” 238.

like being “stronger than oneself,” Socrates explains such an expression “wants to say” the following:

[C]oncerning the soul, in the same human being there is something better and something worse. The phrase ‘stronger than himself’ is used [as praise] when that which is better by nature is master over that which is worse. And when, from bad training or some association, the smaller and better part is mastered by the inferior multitude, then this, as though it were a reproach, is blamed and the man in this condition is called weaker than himself and licentious. (431a-b)

Here Socrates refines the common saying by making a distinction between parts of the soul and then assigning to them a qualitative difference.²⁵⁷ We associate ourselves with what we consider to be the better part (or parts) of our nature, even when this aspect of ourselves might prove weaker by being overpowered by the worse. From the standpoint of moderation, when desire gets the best of us, it is a sign, we would like to think, of our weakness rather than strength, despite the fact that the overpowering desire is none other than our own.

But what exactly are the parts of the soul that Socrates refers to here, and in what sense are they harmonious? Thus far Socrates has spoken only of the mastery of one part of the soul over another.²⁵⁸ The aspect of harmony comes to the fore only when Socrates turns to moderation in the city, where the exact nature of moderation does seem clearer. The city, he claims, is rightly deemed “stronger than itself” insofar as the “desires and

²⁵⁷ One sees a similar movement in Plato’s *Laws*. Kleinias asserts that “there is a war going on in us, ourselves against ourselves” (626e). The Athenian Stranger refines Kleinias’ assertion, suggesting that this strife is one between the inferior and superior aspects of ourselves (627b).

²⁵⁸ For a discussion of this difference see Lorch, “Choice of Lives,” 237 ff.

prudence of the more equitable few” rule over the “motley desires” of the common many (431c-d). As it stands, it would seem that the city is moderate simply by virtue of the moderate individuals who comprise its ruling class. Socrates explains: “The simple and measured desires, pleasures and pains, those led by calculation accompanied by intelligence and right opinion, you will come upon in few, and those the ones born with the best natures and best educated” (431c). In the city Glaucon and Socrates have built, “the desires in the common many are mastered by the desires and the prudence in the more equitable few” (431c-d).

But this moderation as mere mastery is not yet the harmony of a whole that Socrates had initially emphasized. Reiterating the point that moderation should not be thought to reside in only one class of the city, as do the virtues of wisdom and courage, he stresses that the virtue “stretches throughout the whole,” insofar as all elements of the city “sing the same chant together” (432a).²⁵⁹ Both the rulers and the ruled are of the same opinion as to who should rule, and moderation is the accord that exists between them—the “unity of opinion among the rulers and ruled” (433c). Moderation on the level of the city consists in a manner of ruling and being ruled that, because it rests on this shared understanding or agreement, conduces to peace and friendship. Socrates does not here describe how this agreement is achieved, but we did see an indication of it earlier. Recall in Socrates’ description of the kind of harmonic mode and rhythm that best

²⁵⁹ Craiutu provides a helpful summary of the connection between political moderation and harmony in Cicero’s thought, but does not seem to recognize the origin of this idea in Plato. Compare page 24 of *A Virtue for Courageous Minds* with the paragraph devoted to Plato on page 20.

captures the virtue of moderation, he described what we can now recognize as a certain way of ruling and being ruled. This moderate mode was characterized by voluntary action, rather than violence, achieved through persuasion, instruction and exhortation (see 399b-c) on the part of those ruling, and an openness and absence of arrogance on the part of those ruled. In this way, the unity that characterizes the moderate city is one in which rule is maintained through peaceful rather than coercive means, allowing for friendship rather than faction.

We have then a basic understanding of the city's moderation, but the precise meaning of moderation within the soul remains unclear. Not only has Socrates failed to specify the exact nature of the parts within the soul, but he has also said little about how they are harmonious. In discussing the soul, he spoke primarily of the mastery of one part over another, using language that suggests a relationship falling short of friendship or harmony.²⁶⁰ To be sure, if we were to follow the procedure for the very construction of the city in speech, it would seem that we could simply transpose the definition of harmony given for the city onto the soul. But at this point in the dialogue, Socrates insists on testing the assumption upon which the analogy between the soul and city had been drawn in the first place. As noted when the analogy was first introduced (see 368d), a comparison between the two is useful only to the extent that they are actually similar.

²⁶⁰ This important difference between mastery and harmony, faction and concord, is noted by Bourgault in "Prolegomena," 127: "To be truly moderate, an individual's battle against the flesh (so vividly described by the likes of Augustine) must *not* remain a battle. Socrates repeatedly insists that *sophrosyne* does not call for a tyranny of reason over the appetites (as the likes of H. Arendt have suggested), but rather, for a voluntary *concord* between them (*Republic* 442d)."

Does the soul have within it “affections and habits” that correspond to the three “classes of natures” found in the city (435b)? To confirm whether or not our understanding of moderation in the soul can be modeled after our understanding of moderation in the city, we must look to Socrates’ proof of the tripartite nature of the soul.

The Tripartite Soul

Socrates has shown that the common understanding of moderation depends upon a conception of the soul as divided into parts in some sense, but the nature of these parts, and especially of how they must be ordered for a soul to be harmonious, has remained unclear. For this reason, Socrates’ account of the tripartite soul is crucial for our understanding of moderation within the individual. As we saw in the *Charmides*, self knowledge is an important component of moderation. In better understanding the structure of our souls, we can better understand what constitutes a moderate one.

In its essentials, Socrates’ argument for the tripartite soul can be broken down into, as it happens, three parts. First, he establishes the principle of non-contrariety: “the same thing won’t be willing at the same time to do or suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing” (436b). Second, he distinguishes between classes of opposing affections and actions of the soul: acceptance as opposed to refusal; longing as opposed to rejecting; embracing as opposed to thrusting away.²⁶¹ Third, he

²⁶¹ Interpreting Socrates’ initial principle as one of non-contradiction rather than one of non-contrariety has led some commentators to see the second step in Socrates’ argument as a logical mistake. See Rosen, *Republic*, 152-153. As Rosen points out, opposing

takes the particular example of thirst and argues that it is, strictly speaking, a desire for nothing other than drink (439a).

With these three elements of his argument in place, Socrates establishes that the soul has parts by drawing upon the experience of someone who is thirsty but refrains from drinking. Since the same thing cannot do or suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing, if one part of the soul is experiencing thirst, and thirst is nothing other than a desire for drink, then it must be some other part of the soul acting in opposition to the desire by refusing the drink. Socrates quickly concludes that this other part of the soul must be the rational, calculating part, which forbids and masters the loves, hungers, and thirsts of the irrational, desiring part of the soul. Using the same assumptions, Socrates establishes the spirited part of the soul as yet another distinct element by taking a second example of opposition to desire. In the case of Leontius, who struggles against his desire to look at corpses, and then curses his eyes when he is overpowered by their desire, Socrates argues that “anger sometimes makes war against the desires as one thing against something else” (440a). In this way, Socrates confirms that there are three parts in the soul akin to those in the city and is thereby able to maintain the integrity of his premise that the city is the soul writ large.

actions like embracing and thrusting away, which are contraries, allow for an intermediary (remaining indifferent) in a way that moving and standing still, which are contradictories, do not. But even if one sees Socrates as sliding from a point about contradiction to a point about contrariety, the fact that he does so would not seem to weaken his argument insofar as contraries are as unable to be simultaneously true as are contradictories.

A Longer and Further Road

Socrates' "proof" of the tripartite nature of the soul allows him to argue that moderation in both the city and the soul is the "friendship and accord of these parts—when the ruling part and the two ruled parts are of the single opinion that the calculating part ought to rule and don't raise faction against it" (442c-d). Although the tripartite account provides a clear description of what moderation in the soul entails, a closer look at this division reveals a soul that is in fact more characterized by faction than harmony, and within which reason shows little promise to rule.²⁶²

The parts of the soul as Socrates presents them in his tripartite account seem particularly unlikely to form what could be thought of as a harmony. On one hand, the

²⁶² There is nothing particularly novel about the critiques of the tripartite account to follow, versions of which have been made by many commentators, most notably Bernard Williams. That the tripartite account as it stands is inadequate for understanding the human soul is rarely a matter of debate. The more interesting question is why we are given this presentation and how best to understand the revisions that follow later in the *Republic*. In contrast to Williams, I agree with those commentators who believe we cannot ignore the huge grain of salt with which Socrates introduces his tripartite account, and that we must ultimately incorporate the significant revisions that follow. (For a concise gathering of these divisions in the scholarship see David Roochnik, *Beautiful City, The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic"* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003], 17-18.) Roochnik is right in pointing out that those who take this view should take seriously the question of why "it is legitimate to refer to later books of the *Republic* in order to bolster the psychology of book 4." Roochnik's general argument that the *Republic* develops dialectically, and that Socrates' account of the soul in particular begins (as Socrates often does) with how people speak about virtue is a persuasive one. I would add emphasis on the fact that the strict tripartite division of Book IV is also a feature of Socrates' need at this point in the dialogue to draw a clear correspondence between the city and the soul, and that one can find buried within Book IV's account indications of the major emendations (i.e. that each "part" of the soul has its own desires, pleasures, and forms of rule) to follow.

calculating part of the soul is given a rather limited role with respect to the appetitive, desiring part. As Socrates describes it, it is capable of no more than placing a check upon the desire which “leads and draws” the soul (439d). *How* it does this remains entirely unclear. In what way would the part of the soul that loves, desires, hungers, and thirsts, if it is wholly *alogos*—without reason or speech—be responsive to the speech of the reasoning part of the soul? To borrow a phrase from Cato, “it is a hard matter to argue with the belly...since it has no ears.”²⁶³ On the other hand, the strict division Socrates draws between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul creates what one might call a “motivational deficit” within the reasoning part. Without any desire of its own, it is difficult to see how this part of the soul could have the power or incentive to lead, let alone rule. Just as the philosophers will be compelled to rule within the city (519d ff.), it appears the reasoning part of the soul would have to be similarly compelled, having been divested of any desire of its own.

In light of these difficulties, spiritedness enters the picture as a potential solution, only to prove even more problematic. As Socrates describes it, the spirited part of one’s soul makes war against the soul’s desires when they threaten to overpower the calculating part of the soul. Spiritedness could be the means by which calculation’s otherwise ineffectual decrees are enforced. But even if spiritedness could be made reason’s ally, it is important to see that whatever order might be brought to the soul as a result, it would

²⁶³ Plutarch, *Marcus Cato* 8.1. Translation from *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914).

fall short of a harmony among the parts. Spiritedness is needed as an ally precisely insofar as there exists faction within the soul, the desiring part rebelling against reason's rule. The alliance between reason and spiritedness thus testifies to, rather than cures, faction within the soul.

Moreover, the alliance of reason and spiritedness seems to be an especially precarious one.²⁶⁴ Socrates' examples of how spiritedness often operates within the soul show it to be a double-edged sword, just as likely to cut against reason as to defend it. In the first place, his insistence that spiritedness never allies itself with desire is patently false. Insofar as *thumos* is a reaction to thwarted desire, its very existence is, so to speak, on desire's behalf. We saw in the case of Achilles how problematic this combination could become. Moreover, spiritedness can take on a life of its own, especially when it "form[s] an alliance for battle with what seems just" (440c-d), and becomes willing to suffer anything until it has "succeeded, or death intervenes, or before it becomes gentle, having been called in by speech like a dog by a herdsman" (440d).²⁶⁵ This last point would seem to suggest that the reasoning part of the soul has some power over the spirited, an ability to rein it in. But as an example Socrates cites Homer's description of Odysseus smiting his breast and reproaching his heart with word, claiming that this is a clear presentation of "that which has calculated about better and worse [rebuking] that

²⁶⁴ Compare Bloom, *Republic*, 375-379.

²⁶⁵ It is worth pointing out that by describing spiritedness as having to "form an alliance" with what "seems just," Socrates indicates that spiritedness is not *in itself* the moral concern that it often appears to be.

which is irrationally spirited as though it were a different part” (441b-c). While this helps to reinforce the distinction between the reasoning and spirited part of the soul, we saw that a closer look at this Homeric example only reveals calculation playing a disturbingly limited role in directing the soul. Odysseus’ calculations as to better or worse are made in the service of an end decided upon by the spirited part of his soul, revenge, over which reason has no influence.²⁶⁶ The calculating part is at this moment a mere tool used to execute more effectively spiritedness’ designs.

Reason’s weakness seems in large part due to its having been divested of any ruling or motivating desire of its own. Indeed, this is a part of the tripartite account that Socrates significantly revises later in the dialogue. In Book IX, he takes back entirely the suggestion that desire is limited to the appetitive part of the soul, stating that there are in fact desires, pleasures, and a form of rule peculiar to *each* part of the soul (580d ff.).²⁶⁷ In this sense, the tripartite account fails to capture the full *potential* of the reasoning part. But in divorcing reason from desire, the tripartite account does capture an *actuality*, namely what small a role reason plays in most souls. For the vast majority of human beings, Socrates seems to suggest, reason is more likely to be put in the service of loves and passions other than its own. As later books will confirm, reason’s full potential is

²⁶⁶ Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 69.

²⁶⁷ Indeed, the seeds of this emendation can even be found within the tripartite account. Leontius’ desire to look at the corpses may be an intellectual desire, a spirited desire, or a mixture of the two—in any case, it does not appear to be a desire of the appetites. For a note on other indications within Book IV of the tripartite model’s insufficiencies see Laurence Cooper, “Beyond the Tripartite Soul: The Dynamic Psychology of Plato’s ‘Republic’”, *The Review of Politics* 63, 2 (2001): 343, fn. 6.

realized only in the philosophic few, those rare individuals whose souls are characterized primarily by a love of learning. Socrates' tripartite account of the soul, the one by which he maintains the argument that moderation is attained when reason rules the soul, surprisingly points to just how difficult moderation is to achieve.

Desire and the Good

How, we are left wondering, could reason ever come to play a greater role in a soul where both the appetites and spiritedness have powerful desires and designs of their own? As Socrates says before making his argument for the tripartite soul, a true analysis of the soul would require traveling down a much longer road. In his attempt to establish strict divisions within the soul, Socrates takes a problematic shortcut with his argument that thirst is for nothing other than drink. This argument allows him to divide the soul into parts, but in doing so it ignores the complexity of our desires and obfuscates an essential connection between the parts of the soul, namely their shared desire for the good. This shared desire must be made clear if we are to see the essential role reason *ought* to play in the soul, and how it could begin to play this role, whatever the odds might be against it. To restore the connection between desire and the good, we must look more closely at Socrates' isolation of thirst as nothing other than a desire for drink.

Glaucon follows Socrates' argument on this matter up to a point, agreeing that "desire for this or that kind [of drink] depends on additions" (437e). But Socrates pushes the point even further:

Now let no one catch us unprepared...and cause a disturbance, alleging that no one desires drink, but good drink...for everyone, after all, desires good things; if, then, thirst is a desire, it would be for good drink whatever it is, and similarly with the other desires. (438a)

Glaucon finds such an objection fairly persuasive (438a). But Socrates is determined to argue against the idea that thirst is for good drink and does so by going through a long and largely linguistic argument on the character of relations (438a-439b): the greater is greater than the less; the much greater is greater than the much less; the once greater than the once less; the going to be greater than the going to be less; more to fewer; double to half; heavier to lighter; faster to slower—the list goes on (438b-438c). Socrates concludes from this that, “a particular sort of thirst is for a particular kind of drink, but thirst itself is neither for much nor little, good nor bad, nor, in a word, for any particular kind, but thirst itself is naturally only for drink” (439a).

This argument is convincing insofar as it seems impossible to argue that the concept of thirst itself relates to anything other than drink itself. But this argument based upon an abstract conception of thirst distracts from desire as we experience it.²⁶⁸ As Roslyn Weiss puts it, while “thirst pure and simple is, logically speaking, for drink pure and simple, there may very well not be an actual thirst that is not qualified in some

²⁶⁸ Compare Benardete: “Speech, because it admits of greater precision than fact, produces greater imprecision about facts.” See Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 96 ff.

way.”²⁶⁹ In other words, as embodied beings, we experience not “thirst itself” but *particular* thirsts, colored by whatever particular context we happen to be in—the very particular thirsts which Socrates admits here are for particular kinds of drink. A particular thirst is not thirst pure and simple—still less is it thirst in general, a concept derived precisely by abstracting from the character of our particular and diverse experiences of thirst.²⁷⁰

One *could* make an argument on the basis of certain experiences that thirst is just for drink. When experienced at the level of a pure, elementary impulse, thirst might seem to be simply for drink, a dryness in the throat that calls unqualifiedly for liquid. But what is important to notice is that Socrates does not make this kind of phenomenological argument. It seems he steers clear of descriptions of actual experiences of desire because the simple, unqualified form he isolates here is hardly the character of all our desires, much less the most problematic of them. To return to an example from earlier in the dialogue, the kinds of desires that are problematic from the point of view of moderation are not the desires of the healthy city, but those of the feverish city: desires that extend beyond our most basic bodily impulses. Socrates’ argument, while logically persuasive,

²⁶⁹ Roslyn Weiss, “Thirst as Desire for Good,” in *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*, ed. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée (Boston: Brill Press, 2007): 174 fn. 9. Weiss confines this point to a footnote, whereas I take it to be a crucial weakness of the argument.

²⁷⁰ Benardete provides a helpful analysis of this passage in *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 97-98.

distracts from the complex nature of the experience of desire, at the very least those desires most prone to immoderation.

If we admit that desires are more complex than simply the impulse of thirst for the object of drink, then we can see that most importantly thirst is not just for drink, but for good drink. Socrates' argument that the particular desire that is thirst corresponds to the particular object of desire that is drink distracts from the fact that mixed in with every particular desire is a general desire for the good. Thirst would seem fairly obviously to be a desire for drink precisely because drink appears as what is good for quenching thirst. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Socrates (or Plato for that matter) is abandoning the view that all desire is for the good, since within this same conversation, he declares that the good is "what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything" (505e).²⁷¹ Socrates' isolation of thirst as nothing but desire for drink seems more a spurious means by which he can establish the strict divisions of the tripartite soul, than an

²⁷¹ According to a conventional reading ascribing to an early, middle, and late Plato, the view that all human desire is for the good is the excessively intellectualist Socratic position which Plato abandoned in favor of a more complex psychology, the very turning point being this passage in the *Republic*. Not only is this view dubious for interpreters like myself, who are inclined to see the Platonic corpus as an integrated whole, but it is perhaps even more difficult for those who ascribe to an early, middle, and late Plato, to maintain, since elements of this supposedly Socratic intellectualism persist throughout the whole of Plato's works. See Bobonich & Destree, *Akrasia*, xvi-xix. As Rachel Barney notes, the thesis can be found not only in the *Republic* itself but also in purportedly "late" dialogues like the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*. I share Barney's suspicion that the thesis that all desire is for the good, while its exact meaning remains a question, "is a sustained and foundational principle of Platonic moral psychology." See Rachel Barney, "Plato on the Desire for the Good," in *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 34-35.

accurate or informative description of desire. The tripartite division allows Socrates to maintain his city-soul analogy, but in making this move he obscures the point of communication between the various “parts” of the soul, namely a shared desire for the soul’s good.²⁷²

If we reintroduce the notion that all desire is for the good, then we can see that faction within the soul is at the deepest level the result of competing claims to the soul’s greatest and truest good. Any part of the soul contending for rule over the whole must and will make a case in favor of its own ability to secure the soul’s greatest good. In other words, we desire what we desire, be it money, sex, honor, rule, or wisdom, in part because of the opinions or hopes we hold that this object, whatever it is, is good for us.²⁷³ That each part of the soul has its own opinions, i.e. a form of *logos*, has already been indicated—after all, Socrates defined moderation as a matter of all parts of the soul coming to share the same opinion as to which part ought to rule. Thus, not only does each part of the soul have desires, but each part of the soul has speech. Our appetitive and spirited desires are open to reason insofar as they are accompanied by the arguments we make in their favor. To reply to Cato, the stomach and the spirit have ears after all.

But at this point, we must recognize that to the extent that we continue to speak of “parts” of the soul, we are no longer distinguishing them along the lines of Socrates’ first

²⁷² Consider Annas, *An Introduction*, 131 ff.: “All three parts have enough cognitive capacity to recognize one another, conflict or agree, and push their own interests.”

²⁷³ On the connection between thought and desire (or opinion and passion), and desire and the good, see Pangle, *Virtue is Knowledge*, 92 and 198-202.

division. Recall the initial division depended upon isolating reason, spirit, and desire as mutually exclusive parts of the soul. Now we see the parts of ourselves are better understood as the distinct, and at times warring passions that exist within us.²⁷⁴ Socrates clarifies this more accurate basis for division in Book IX. There he reiterates the analogy between the city and the soul, but now explains the threefold division of the soul as one made on the basis of three kinds of “pleasures...desires and forms of rule” (580d). The “desiring part” of the soul is characterized by “the intensity of the desires of eating, drinking, and all their followers”—its love is of gain (580e-581a). The spirited part of the soul is that part which is “wholly set on mastery, victory and good reputation”—its love is victory and honor (581a-b). Finally, there is the part with which we learn, the one characterized most by its love of the truth—its love is learning and wisdom (581b). As Socrates puts it, there are three classes of men, distinguished by which love rules in their soul—the love of wisdom, victory, or gain (581c).

The faction that exists in our souls is a result of our competing loves. But once this is granted, it becomes clear that only the part of us with which we learn would be capable of articulating and evaluating competing claims for rule in the soul. Thus, insofar as “no one voluntarily wishes to lie about the most sovereign things to what is most sovereign in himself” (382a), one need not begin with a philosopher’s overwhelming love of learning to recognize a need, and thereby develop a desire, to cede rule to the reasoning part of one’s soul, if only to learn what one’s true good really is.

²⁷⁴ For a longer discussion see Cooper, “Beyond the Tripartite Soul,” 346.

This is the opportunity afforded to one by Socratic refutation—the chance to recognize one’s own ignorance, and, in the ideal case, embark upon a philosophic life. A complete vindication of the primacy of the philosophic life is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but one can see at least a picture of the harmony of the philosopher’s soul in a description Socrates provides in Book IX. There Socrates suggests that the philosopher is able, so far as is possible, to bring his or her person into the genuine harmony that characterizes moderation. This is accomplished not by denying or repressing the other parts of oneself, but by giving them their proper due and place—not by forcefully winning a war within oneself, but by coming to an understanding with oneself through persuasion.²⁷⁵ One sees a picture of this harmony in Socrates’ description of how the philosophic soul deals with the strong and unlawful desires that may remain within it:

“Those,” he says,

that wake up in sleep when the rest of the soul—all that belongs to the calculating, tame and ruling part of it—slumbers, while the beastly and wild part, gorged with food or drink, is skittish, and pushing sleep away, seeks to go and satisfy its dispositions...in such a state it dares to do everything as though it were released from, and rid of, all shame and prudence. (571c)

Socrates goes on to describe, in contrast to this picture, the achievement of moderation in a philosophic soul in terms that resemble how moderation is achieved in the imagined city:

[A person with] a moderate relationship to himself...first...awakens the calculating part and feasts it on fair arguments and considerations, coming to an understanding with himself; second, he feeds the desiring part in such a way that

²⁷⁵ As Reeve (*Philosopher-Kings*, 142) puts it, reason “is not an enlightened despot governing through *force majeure*.”

it is neither in want nor surfeited—in order that it will not disturb the best part by its joy or its pain, but rather leave that best part alone pure and by itself, to consider and to long for the perception of something it doesn't know, either something that has been, or is, or is going to be; and third, he soothes the spirited part in the same way and does not fall asleep with his spirit aroused because there are some he got angry at. When a man has silenced these two later forms and set the third—the one in which prudent thinking comes to be—in motion, and only then takes his rest, you know that in such a state he most lays hold of the truth and at this time the sights that are hostile to law show up least in his dreams. (571d-572b)

In this picture Socrates still employs the metaphor of parts. But what is important to see is that in the philosophic soul we find an image not of parts dueling with one another, but of multiple desires peacefully coexisting, their proper fulfillment being mediated and ordered by reason. Moderation, far from being a denial of desire, leaves the philosopher free to pursue his greatest desire and with it his greatest pleasure.²⁷⁶

Conclusion: Moderation and Justice

Our study of the *Republic* has aimed to show that enmeshed in the dialogue's famous treatment of justice is an equally important treatment of moderation. In conclusion, it is fitting to say something about the relationship between these two virtues. These virtues are so closely linked in this dialogue that it is difficult even to distinguish between the definitions Socrates ultimately provides for them. When Socrates and Glaucon are finally ready to hunt down their definition of justice, Socrates says “it's been

²⁷⁶ Compare what Socrates says to Antiphon in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*: “Do you think that anything is more responsible for my not being enslaved to stomach or sleep or lust than that I have other things more pleasant than these that delight not only in their use but also by providing hopes that they will benefit always?” (I.6.8).

rolling around at our feet from the beginning...As men holding something in their hand sometimes seek what they're holding, we too didn't look at it but turned our gaze somewhere far off, which is also perhaps just the reason it escaped our notice" (432d-e). Given how Socrates goes on to define justice, one wonders whether they did indeed already have it in their hands, namely, as moderation.

Socrates begins by claiming that justice is none other than the initial organizing principle of their city: doing one's own things. Here we finally receive an explanation of how best to understand this phrase, which we saw as a contending definition for moderation in Plato's *Charmides*. Socrates says that doing one's own things, "when it comes into being *in a certain way*, is *probably* justice" (433b emphasis mine). The "certain way" in which Socrates goes on to define the meaning of doing one's own things sounds a lot like the actions of someone who is moderate. We can see this near conflation of moderation and justice in Socrates' concluding remark about justice. There he expands upon the notion of "doing one's own things," saying the following about the just man:

He doesn't let each part in him mind other people's business or the three classes in the soul meddle with each other, but really sets his own house in good order and rules himself; he arranges himself, becomes his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts, exactly like three notes in a harmonic scale, lowest, highest, and middle. And if there are some other parts in between, he binds them together and becomes entirely one from many, moderate and harmonized. (443c-e)

These terms are nearly identical to those previously used to characterize moderation. To see the similarity, it is worth quoting in full the characterization of moderation that Socrates gives just before he defines justice:

Moderation...stretches throughout the whole, from top to bottom of the entire scale, making the weaker, the stronger, and those in the middle—whether you wish to view them as such in terms of prudence, or, if you wish, in terms of strength or multitude or money or anything else whatsoever, sing the same chant together. So we would quite rightly claim that this unanimity is moderation, an accord of worse and better, according to nature, as to which must rule in the city and in each one. (432a-432b)

Consider also 442b where Socrates says one is “moderate because of the friendship and accord of these parts—when the ruling part and the two ruled parts are of the single opinion that the calculating part ought to rule and don’t raise faction against it.”²⁷⁷

What is the meaning of the near equation of these two virtues? To arrive at the answer, I would like to begin by reviewing what we have learned about moderation by tracing its development through Book IV of the *Republic*. By bringing out more clearly Socrates’ defense of moderation in the *Republic*, I hope to show that this defense is a large part of Socrates’ response to the challenge to justice.

Our study of the *Republic* began with two critiques of moderation. The first critique of moderation came with our initial image of it in the *Republic*: Cephalus—an old man who appeared moderate, having been freed by time from the “mad masters” of

²⁷⁷ Here I am in agreement with Weiss, who draws attention to the two passages quoted above (*Philosophers in the Republic*, 174) and provides a detailed account of the way in which Socrates’ “characterization of justice as internal is not a distinct virtue but a replication of moderation” (181). Weiss notes (176 fn. 41) that many scholars agree that nothing is “left over” after the first three virtues are defined, but fewer focus on the fact that justice is then defined *as* moderation. Where I depart from Weiss is in her view that Socrates provides in Book IV “distorted definitions of *both* moderation and justice” (180, emphasis mine). I agree that the definition of justice is a distortion, but not the definition of moderation. As I show in Chapter 3, the way to Book IV’s definition of this virtue is paved in earlier books of the *Republic*, showing it to be neither a surprise nor a distortion, but a genuine understanding of Socratic moderation.

his youth. Although Cephalus was enthusiastic about his newfound freedom, we saw little reason to be enthusiastic about this unappealing and uninspiring version of the virtue. Cephalus captured well the enervated virtue that many think of when they think of moderation. This first impression led us to believe that if moderation is truly a virtue, it needs to be something other than the deadening of desire.

Cephalus' brand of moderation explains why this virtue would be of little interest to a passionate young man like Glaucon—Glaucon's initial interest was in justice. Recall that Glaucon had wanted to be convinced that it is in every way better to be just than unjust. Part of why he wants so much to be persuaded of this is that he does not know an argument against a vision of the good life that entails extreme injustice. It was in Glaucon's tale of the ring of Gyges that we found, bound up in a critique of justice, our second critique of moderation. A closer look at the tale of Gyges revealed that the life of injustice that the shepherd embarks upon is one largely driven by his immoderation. The force of the ring of Gyges story depends upon its presumption that the good life entails an unleashing of desires formerly kept in check by a fear of punishment for one's misdeeds. According to this account, once the fear of reprisal is absent, desire leads all individuals to do the same immoderate deeds.

Socrates was far from confident that he could defend justice against the attack voiced by Glaucon. In fact, he went so far as to say that he was incapable of it (368b). But he resolved to try, and did so by building a city in speech in which they might see what justice is. He began with the healthy city, where, as we noted, one might expect to

find the best understanding of moderation. But Glaucon's rejection of the healthy city, a city in which strong passions or longings simply seem to be absent, reaffirmed what we saw in our analysis of Cephalus. To reiterate the conclusions drawn from a study of the opening of the *Republic*, moderation must entail not the eradication or suppression of desire, but its education and elevation.²⁷⁸

Socrates moved from the healthy city to the feverish city, and then to the feverish city's purging—unleashing desire and then refining it through an elaborate education. In this education, Socrates resisted depending upon fear of divine punishment to instill or support moderation. In fact, Socrates' revision of poetry about the Greek gods aimed at decreasing their perceived influence on humanity altogether. Rather than rely on external incentives or threats for moderation, Socrates aimed at inculcating an inner desire for the virtue. He did this through an education that draws on and expands the natural human love of beauty and harmony. Socrates' education of the guardians ended with an emphasis upon the preliminary nature of this education, one which forms habits and desires, preparing the guardians to be able to recognize a reasoned account of the virtue they had already learned to love.

Generally speaking, we saw in Book III that Socrates expands upon the conventional understanding of moderation, building toward the definition we will find in Book IV. The movement is from a definition of moderation as two-pronged virtue

²⁷⁸ That Plato does not ultimately mean to repress desire, even sexual desire, is recognized by Bourgault in "Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life," 12 and 18: "Genuine *sophrosyne* (sexual or otherwise) is not about repressing completely one's passions or about avoiding pleasure, nor it is about achieving some kind of complete purity."

entailing self-rule over pleasure and obedience to the rule of others, to a harmony of the whole soul. But recall that before he arrives at this definition of moderation, Socrates wanted to avoid it entirely. Indeed, Socrates was hoping to move straight to justice and not have to bother with moderation any longer. Having now seen how he defines both moderation and justice, we can understand why. Had Socrates been allowed by Glaucon to move straight to a definition of justice, justice would have seemed to be accomplishing more in its own right.²⁷⁹ But Glaucon insists that Socrates cover moderation first. “If you want to gratify me,” Glaucon says, “consider this [moderation] before the other [justice]” (430d). “But I do want to,” Socrates responds, “so as not to do an injustice” (430e).

With this response, Plato has Socrates playfully gesture toward the strategy at work: once moderation is present, one is less likely to do an injustice. Our purpose here is not to provide anything close to a full account of justice in the *Republic*—a task beyond this dissertation’s focus on moderation—but simply to draw attention to the fact noted by those who do take as their primary aim a study of this virtue in the dialogue: justice, as Socrates defines it in the *Republic*, is largely a byproduct of what has already been accomplished by moderation.²⁸⁰ This is not to say that with moderation comes perfect

²⁷⁹ As Weiss puts it (*Philosophers in the Republic*, 178), “What reason could Socrates have for proposing that they bypass moderation and proceed directly to justice other than that he knows full well that once he defines moderation, precious little will be left for justice?”

²⁸⁰ See, for example, Rosen, *Republic*, 160. Annas acknowledges that justice appears as redundant, as it “requires no new range of actions other than what is required by the other virtues, only a refraining from certain things. However,” Annas insists, “it would be wrong to think of justice too negatively in this way. For the other three virtues on their

justice. In Cicero's words, here we find only "one sort of justice...do[ing] no positive wrong to anyone."²⁸¹ Moderation does not go so far as to provide justice in the sense of a positive devotion to the common good. But of course this is precisely what is missing from justice as Socrates defines it here. This absence has led some commentators to wonder if what Socrates calls justice really captures the virtue—a virtue Socrates had earlier said he would be unable to defend.²⁸²

Perhaps it is because of the difficulty Socrates foresees in defending a more devotional form of justice that he uses another strategy. Rather than make a direct and complete defense of justice, Socrates makes a case for moderation, thereby uprooting a major cause of injustice: immoderation. In making a case for moderation, Socrates opens up the possibility for another outcome to Glaucon's ring of Gyges story. A person wearing the ring of Gyges need not be fully persuaded of the goodness of justice to avoid

own would not be virtues *of a whole*. Justice is a virtue of the city as a unity, for it requires of each citizen a recognition of his or her own role as contributing in some characteristic way to the common good." In the first place, Socrates had stressed moderation as a virtue that "stretches throughout the whole" city and soul, and the unity it creates within each. Second, Annas' stress on the common good seems imported into the text. See *An Introduction* 119.

²⁸¹ Cicero goes on to say that Plato's philosophers, those who do no positive wrong, "fall into the opposite injustice; for hampered by their pursuit of learning they leave to their fate those whom they ought to defend. And so, Plato thinks, they will not even assume their civic duties except under compulsion" (Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.9.28). All translations of Cicero are from M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

²⁸² See Stauffer, *Introduction to the Question of Justice*, 118-120 and Chapter 3, especially pages 122 and 129; Bloom, *Plato's Republic*, 374; Weiss, *Philosophers in the Republic*, 180-184.

a path of injustice if he or she is convinced of the goodness of moderation. This is precisely what Socrates accomplishes with Glaucon. As we have seen, by the time we are ready to find justice in Book IV, Glaucon is interested in finding moderation. In this way, Plato has the drama of the dialogue mirror its content. Socrates has achieved with Glaucon the exact process he describes achieving with the guardians of their city. Socrates draws out Glaucon's own love of beauty and harmony, such that he is eager to hear and accept as akin the account of moderation as a harmony of the soul. The very elaboration of the guardian education has the effect of educating Glaucon.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to study moderation as it is revealed in Plato's *Charmides* and *Republic*. Through the interplay between these two dialogues we see a comprehensive picture of the virtue emerge, suggesting that the *Charmides* is not merely an early dialogue to be left behind as we move to the *Republic*. By way of conclusion, I will return to several questions from our introduction—What is moderation? Is moderation attainable? Is it good?—and address how the study of these two dialogues has made progress in answering them.

The first task of this dissertation was to find in Plato a definition for moderation. We noted that scholars often turn to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean for a classical understanding of this virtue. But when it comes to the actual virtue of *sōphrosunē*, Aristotle provides a strikingly narrow definition, confining it solely to the regulation of pleasures of the body. *Sōphrosunē* in its classical contexts—not to mention moderation in its contemporary uses—ordinarily has a much broader scope. The hope was to find an understanding of *sōphrosunē* as not just a mean or a virtue related only to pleasures of the appetites. Our analysis aimed to recover the rich and unifying vision of the virtue found in Plato's thought.

The difficulties that attend understanding moderation are treated in detail in the *Charmides*, Plato's aporetic dialogue devoted to the virtue. We are not given an actual definition for moderation in the *Charmides*, but find Socrates stressing the importance of

knowing oneself. In the *Republic*, Socrates provides us with a model of the soul through which we may better know both ourselves and moderation. Moderation is the harmony that is achieved when all three “parts” of the soul, the spirited, appetitive, and reasoning, agree that the reasoning part should rule. Rather than confining the virtue either to curbing spiritedness on one hand, or regulating appetites on the other, we find a virtue that entails the proper ordering of one’s whole person. The tripartite model, while (or by) simplifying the soul, provides a way of understanding and ordering our desires. Even for those of us unlikely to take the longer road that ends in philosophic moderation, Socrates’ tripartite model provides a useful guide, encouraging us to strive for the harmony we may achieve through reason’s guidance.

But we had wondered in our introduction whether or not moderation as a harmony of the soul is actually attainable. Is it possible to have all one’s passions, desires, opinions and wishes align with what we reason to be good? Can our souls actually come to have the unity promised by moderation, or will we always be divided by warring factions within? And if this moderation is possible, how is it achieved? Socrates himself speaks to this important question by often switching between discussing moderation as a harmony of the soul and moderation as a mastery of the soul. The tension between the two is present in Socrates’ education of the guardians. As we saw, the city’s education of the guardian class draws attention the important role of proper habituation in the making of moderate souls. But it seems no amount of habituation can safely secure a perfectly reliable moderation. The guardian education inculcated a love of the beauty of harmony,

but failed to provide a reasoned account as to why the soul should be ordered this way. The suggestion of the *Republic* is that moderation as a harmony is truly achieved only in souls fully guided by reason, and not just by habit: the souls of the philosophers. But what exactly is the nature of a philosopher's moderation? Here it is especially by considering the *Charmides* in light of the *Republic* that we may come to answer this question.

Socrates' moderation—or lack thereof—is nowhere more vividly displayed than in the scene of the *Charmides* where Socrates is momentarily pulled “outside of himself” after looking into Charmides' eyes, and then seeing inside Charmides' cloak. With this scene, Plato, who is often faulted for abstracting from the body, provides a dramatic reminder of Socrates' body. Socrates finds himself vulnerable to physical desire for an object of beauty, as he is momentarily swept up in the hopes such beauty inspires. But, as we saw, Socrates recovers himself almost immediately. He recognizes that the desire threatening to overwhelm him may be fueled by false opinions or hopes that would not survive stricter scrutiny. His desire to possess Charmides fades as his desire to know Charmides grows, and he recovers himself as he turns to an investigation of Charmides' soul.

Reflecting on this scene of the *Charmides* in light of what we learn in the *Republic*, we can better understand the nature of Socrates' moderation and how it is achieved. We see that Socrates' moderation is not perfect, if by perfect one means uninterrupted. Even Socrates is vulnerable to conflicting impulses and desires. That said,

he is far from being at war with himself. Socrates is easily able to reestablish the harmony of his soul insofar as he has a clear picture of who he is and the desire with which he most identifies—his desire to know. Socrates' moderation is maintained not by any fear of external punishment or reprisal, but by his own fear of ignorance—of thinking he knows something he doesn't know. This fear is part and parcel of his philosophic moderation. Socrates is able to recognize that he may be wrong about the good, and that someone else may be wiser than himself.

In this way, the *Charmides* and *Republic* shed light on the questions of what individual moderation is and what it entails, especially insofar as they provide the model of ideal moderation in the form of the philosophic soul. These two dialogues also address the question of what political moderation entails, and what kind of moderation can be expected in a populace at large. In using Charmides and Critias, two future tyrants, as Socrates' interlocutors, the *Charmides* raises the issue of the connection between philosophic and political moderation. In Socrates' person we see a truly philosophic spirit, one animated by an awareness of ignorance and a corresponding *desire* to know, in particular a desire to know the good. In Critias, by contrast, we see the seeds of political immoderation in his philosophic immoderation—a dogmatic tendency toward what has been described by other scholars as an “epistemic absolutism.”²⁸³ Critias understands philosophy not as an activity in which one engages, but as a science to be possessed and applied toward political ends. Applying the tripartite model to Critias, we see a soul

²⁸³ See Schmid, *The Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 50.

dominated by a love of honor, with reason put in service of its ends. But behind this love of honor, Critias, as is characteristic of honor-loving men, harbors desires of the lower appetites—desires Socrates describes honor-loving men as pursuing “under the cover of darkness” (548a). When Critias comes to rule in Athens, these desires see the light of day, revealing the full immoderation of his person.

The *Charmides* also alludes to the danger of the kind of utopian rule that appeals to Critias, who is tempted by the idea of knowers ruling in a city. Lessons learned from the *Charmides* must be remembered when we turn to the *Republic*. There Plato explores an even more tempting form of utopianism—a city ruled not by mere technocrats, but actual philosophers. Socrates and Glaucon pursue in their city in speech the desire to make a city perfectly virtuous through reason’s rule. We ended our discussion of the *Republic* by emphasizing the progress Glaucon makes in coming to appreciate the beauty of the harmony that may be achieved through reason’s rule. But bearing in mind the problem raised by Critias’ immoderation and its source, there remains a more general lesson to be learned from the *Republic* regarding political moderation, particularly the moderation of those who rule in cities.

When Glaucon and Socrates are finished with their education of the guardians, and with it their purging of the city, Glaucon remarks that these efforts have been a sign of their own moderation as creators of the city. Socrates does not comment, but it is important for us as readers to recognize that Glaucon is wrong. Recall that the moderation of the city was characterized above all by the unity and friendship among the

classes, a social cohesion obtained through agreement and shared opinion, not coercion. But the purging of the city and education of the guardians is oppressive to say the least, and even this education is incapable of ensuring perfect moderation within the guardian class. As we saw, the education must be accompanied by laws. And as the dialogue continues, further measures must be taken to insure the cohesion of the city, measures entailing further compulsion of its citizens. From the communism of women and children to philosophers themselves being compelled to rule, reflecting on the city in speech, we see that a city may only be *forced* to be moderate through *immoderate* means. In identifying this problem, we see if not the impossibility, at least the undesirability of trying to establish perfect moderation (and, of course, perfect justice) within a city. The presentation of moderation we find in the idealized city points to moderation's political limits. Plato's *Republic*, properly understood, should temper such utopian ambitions, not inspire them.

* * * * *

The *Charmides* and the *Republic* taken together underscore just how difficult moderation is to achieve both in the city and in the soul. In moderating our hopes for a world in which reason reigns in the soul and in the city, we see the need for cultivating self and civic restraint in the absence of a perfectly harmonious whole. But if this is the case, to address one final point from the introduction, why retain the model of harmony at

all? If moderation is so difficult, and in some cases impossible to achieve, why not, as is the approach of modern thinkers discussed above, simply focus on how best to achieve desirable forms of self-restraint? We find in modern thought an ingenious approach to civic order that focuses on unleashing certain passions while redirecting and restraining others. Why not jettison the idea of moderation as a harmony in favor of a more practicable form of moderation: pragmatic restraint?

The difficulty is that self-restraint is unappealing as an end in itself. Self-restraint appears most immediately as a matter of taking *less* of what we want, which means that we are taking *less* of what we deem to be good. In itself, such restraint is nothing that anyone in his or her right mind would desire. In focusing solely on moderation understood as self-restraint or self-control, we are left without an attractive, compelling vision of a *virtue*—of something good. Plato’s insights into this problem suggest that our contemporary struggles with immoderation result in part from the loss of a virtue toward which we would actually *want* to aspire. Consider, for instance, the following observation made by Baumeister and Tierney in their recent book *Willpower*:

Ask people to name their greatest personal strengths, and they’ll often credit themselves with honesty, kindness, humor, creativity, bravery, and other virtues—even modesty. But not self-control. It came in dead last among the virtues being studied by researchers who have surveyed more than one million people around the world. Of the two dozen ‘character strengths’ listed in the researchers’ questionnaire, self-control was the one that people were least likely to recognize in themselves. Conversely, when people were asked about their failings, a lack of self-control was at the top of the list.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Baumeister & Tierney, *Willpower*, 2.

This widespread lack of appreciation for self-control comes as no surprise when one recognizes that restraint in itself is not a virtue—it is what we need when we lack virtue.²⁸⁵ We want self-control because we are aware of the disasters that result in its absence, but this still leaves us far from wanting it for its own sake. Self-control is, in Glaucon’s schema of goods, the least desirable kind. It is a good chosen not for itself but for its consequences—a good like medicine. Left only with self-control, but without a compelling vision of moderation, not only is it hard to achieve self-control, it is difficult for us to *want* to achieve it.²⁸⁶

What we need is a virtue that is desired both in itself and for its consequences. If self-control is medicine for the soul, moderation, properly understood—as Plato understands it—is the soul’s health. Platonic moderation, far from being a restriction on our pursuit of the good, promises its genuine attainment. With a restored understanding of moderation, we find a virtue to which we may aspire. Moderation, as Socrates promises Charmides, is a virtue which may make one, to the extent that one possesses it, that much happier.

²⁸⁵ Baumeister & Tierney try to paper over the undesirability of self-control by titling their work “Willpower,” which does have more immediate appeal. But willpower is still nothing more than a means to an undefined end.

²⁸⁶ Scientific studies show that self-control is hard to achieve in the absence of what are called “high-level construals,” i.e. long-term, abstract goals—in Baumeister and Tierney’s words, “lofty thoughts” (*Willpower*, 164). Moderation can qualify as such a lofty thought, not self-control. See Kentaro Fujita and Yaacov Trope, “Construal Levels and Self-Control,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, 3 (2006): 351-367.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Joe Sachs. Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2002.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica* Vol. 3 Part 2. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Cosimo, 2007.
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Auden, W.H. *W.H. "Herman Melville," in Auden Collected Poems*. Edited by Edward Mendelson. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- Balot, Ryan K. *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Barney, Rachel. "Plato on the Desire for the Good." In *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good*, edited by Sergio Tenenbaum, 34-64. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Barry, John. *Rethinking Green Politics: Nature, Virtue and Progress*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.
- Bartlett, Robert C. "An Introduction to Hesiod's 'Works and Days.'" *The Review of Politics* Vol. 68, No. 2 (2006): 177-205.
- Baumeister, Roy F. and John Tierney. *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012.
- Benardete, Seth. *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- _____. "On Interpreting Plato's *Charmides*." In *The Argument of the Action*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Berkowitz, Peter. *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

- Beverlsuis, John. *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Bloom, Allan. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books, 1968.
- Bobonich, Christopher and Pierre Destrée eds. *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*. Boston: Brill Press, 2007.
- Bolotin, David. "The Critique of Homer and the Homeric Heroes in Plato's *Republic*." In *Political Philosophy and the Human Soul*, edited by M. Palmer and T. L. Pangle. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995.
- Bourgault, Sophie. "Eros, Viagra, and the Good Life: Reflections on Cephalus and Platonic Moderation." In *The Philosophy of Viagra: Bioethical Responses to the Viagrification of the Modern World*, edited by Thorsten Botz-Borstein, 9-24. Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2011.
- _____. "Prolegomena to a rehabilitation of Platonic moderation." *Dissensus* 5 (2013): 122-143.
- Bruell, Christopher. "Socratic Politics and Self-Knowledge: An Interpretation of Plato's *Charmides*." *Interpretation* 6 (1977): 141-203.
- Burnet, John. *Platonis Opera*. Vol. III. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903.
- _____. *Platonis Opera*. Vol. IV. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902.
- _____. *Platonis Opera*. Vol. V. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Chekhov, Anton. *The Beauties*, in *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories (A Norton Critical Edition)*. Edited by Cathy Popkin. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.
- Cicero, M. Tullius. *De Officiis*. Translated by Walter Miller. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913.
- Clor, Harry. *On Moderation: Defending an Ancient Virtue in a Modern World*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008.
- Cooper, Laurence. "Beyond the Tripartite Soul: The Dynamic Psychology of Plato's 'Republic.'" *The Review of Politics* 63, 2 (2001): 341-372.
- Craiu, Aurelian. *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political*

- Thought, 1748-1830. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873.
- Diels-Kranz, Hermann and Rosamond Kent Sprague eds. *The Older Sophists: A Complete Translation by Several Hands of the Fragments in Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.
- Dustin, Christopher and Denise Schaeffer. "Looks Matter: Beholding Justice in the Republic." *The Review of Politics* 68 (2006): 449-473.
- Dyson, M. "Some problems concerning Knowledge in Plato's 'Charmides.'" *Phronesis* Vol. 19 No. 2 (1974): 102-111.
- Eisenstadt, Michael. "Critias; Definitions of $\Sigma\Omega\Phi\rho\sigma\Upsilon\eta\eta$ in Plato's 'Charmides.'" *Hermes* 136 (2008): 492-495.
- Fagles, Robert trans. *The Iliad of Homer*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- _____. *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996.
- Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888.
- Fujita, Kentaro and Yaacov Trope. "Construal Levels and Self-Control." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, 3 (2006): 351-367.
- Galston, William. *Liberal Purposes: Goods, virtues, and diversity in the liberal state*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Gooch, Paul W. "Red Faces in Plato." *The Classical Journal* (1987-1988): 124-127.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. *The Greeks and Their Gods*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
- Hayes, Peter. "Hobbes' Bourgeois Moderation." *Polity* 31 (1998): 53-74.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994.

- Hubler, J. Noel. "The Perils of Self-Perception: Explanations of Apperception in the Greek Commentaries on Aristotle." *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 59, No. 2 (2005): 287-311.
- Hyland, Drew. *The Virtue of Philosophy*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981.
- Kahn, Charles. *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Klein, Jacob. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Klosko, George. *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Lampert, Laurence. *How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study of Plato's "Protagoras," "Charmides," and "Republic."* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Levin, Donald Norman. "Critias" in *The Older Sophists*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972.
- Lorch, Benjamin. "Moderation and Socratic Education in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*." *Polis* 26, 2 (2009): 185-203.
- . "The Choice of Lives and the Virtue of Moderation." *Interpretation* 39/3 (2012): 235-252.
- Lyons, Young, and Keil. "The Hidden Structure of Overimitation." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* Vol. 104, No. 50 (Dec. 11, 2007): 19751-19756.
- Lysias. *Lysias*. Translated by W.R.M. Lamb. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1930.
- Macedo, Stephen. "Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion: Defending the Moderate Hegemony of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 26 (1998): 56-80.
- Matheisen, Thomas J. "Harmonia and Ethos in Ancient Greek Music." *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 3, No.3 (1984): 264-279.

- McPherran, Mark L. "Socrates and Zalmoxis on Drugs, Charms and Purification," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 37 (2004): 11-33.
- Meister, Robert. "Is Moderation a Virtue? Gregory Vlastos and the Toxins of Eudaemonism." *Apeiron* 26 3/4 (1993): 111-135.
- Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Translated and edited by Cohler, Miller and Stone. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Moors, Kent. "The Argument Against a Dramatic Date for Plato's *Republic*." *Polis* 7, 1 (1988): 6-31
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. Edited by Alfred Appel, Jr. New York: First Vintage Books, 1991.
- Nails, Debra. *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.
- _____. "The Dramatic Date of Plato's *Republic*." *The Classical Journal* Vol. 93 No. 4 (1998) 383-396.
- Neer, Richard. *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2010.
- North, Helen. *Sophrosyne: Self Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 35. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- _____. "A Period of Opposition to Sophrosyne in Greek Thought." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947): 1-17.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. and Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- _____. *On the Genealogy of Morals* in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Owen, Judd. "The Tolerant Leviathan: Hobbes and the Paradox of Liberalism." *Polity* 37 (2005): 130-48.

- Pangle, Lorraine Smith. *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Pangle, Thomas. *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Plato. *Alcibiades I*. In *Socrates and Alcibiades*, edited by Albert Keith Whitaker and translated by David M. Johnson. Massachusetts: Focus Publishing, 2003.
- _____. *Apology*. In *Four Texts on Socrates*, edited and translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- _____. *Charmides*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.
- _____. *Gorgias*. Translated by James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- _____. *Laches and Charmides*. Translated by Rosamond Kent Sprague. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992.
- _____. *The Laws of Plato*. Translated by Thomas Pangle. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- _____. *Lesser Hippias*. In *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, edited by Thomas Pangle and translated by James Leake. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- _____. *Phaedrus*. Translated by James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- _____. *“Protagoras” and “Meno.”* Translated by Robert C. Bartlett. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- _____. *Plato’s Symposium*. Translated by Seth Benardete. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- _____. *Plato’s Theaetetus*. Translated by Seth Benardete. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

- Plutarch. *Plutarch's Lives*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914.
- Rabieh, Linda. *Plato and the Virtue of Courage*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Radasanu, Andrea. "Montesquieu on Moderation, Monarchy and Reform." *History of Political Thought* Vol. 3, 2 (2010): 283-307.
- Reeve, C. D. C. *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Roochnik, David. *Beautiful City, The Dialectical Character of Plato's "Republic."* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Rosen, Stanley. *Plato's Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Schmid, W. Thomas. *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.
- Scodel, Joshua. *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Stauffer, Devin. *Plato's Introduction to the Question of Justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- _____. *Xenophon's Socrates*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Stern, Paul. "Tyranny and Self-Knowledge: Critias and Socrates in Plato's Charmides." *The American Political Science Review* 93, 2 (1999): 399-412.
- Sutton, Dana. "Critias and Atheism." *The Classical Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 1 (1981): 33-38.
- Tarnopolsky, Christina. "Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame." *Political Theory* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2004): 468-494.
- Thucydides. *The Landmark Thucydides*. Edited by Robert B. Strassler. New York: Free Press, 2008.

- Tuckey, T. G. *Plato's Charmides*. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1968.
- Vlastos, Gregory. "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy" in *Socratic Studies*. Ed. Myles Burnyeat. Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1994.
- Vorwerk, Matthias. "Plato on Virtue: Definitions of ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ in Plato's Charmides and in Plotinus Enneads 1.2 (19)." *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 122, No. 1 (2001): 29-47.
- Weiss, Roslyn. "Thirst as Desire for Good." In *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*, ed. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destree, 87-100. Boston: Brill Press, 2007.
- _____. *Philosophers in the Republic: Plato's Two Paradigms*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012.
- Wilkins, Eliza Gregory. "*Know Thyself*" in *Greek and Latin Literature*. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1917. New York: Garland Publishing, 1979.
- Xenophon. *Hellenica* vol. 1, in Loeb Classic Library. Translated by C. L. Brownson. London: Heinemann, 1919.
- Xenophon. *Memorabilia*. Translated by Amy L. Bonnette. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Zuckert, Catherine. *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.