CHAPTER 2

The Prologue (153a1–159a10)

1 Setting the Stage (153a1–154b6)

> We had arrived the previous evening from the camp at Potidaea and, having arrived after a long absence, I gladly headed for my regular haunts. And so it was that I went into the gymnasium of Taureas opposite the temple of Basile and came upon a great many people there, some of whom were actually unknown to me but most of whom I knew. And as soon as they saw me unexpectedly entering the wrestling-school, they greeted me from a distance from wherever each of them was. Chaerephon, however, acting like the madman that he is, jumped up from the middle of the crowd, ran towards me, and, taking hold of my hand, asked, 'Socrates, how did you survive the battle?'. True, shortly before we came away, there had been a battle at Potidaea that the people here had only just got news of. (*Charm*. 153a1–b6)

The opening lines of the *Charmides* circumscribe the dialogue's frame, distinguish the level of the narration from that of the action, and specify the spatio-temporal parameters of the encounter that will be related. Speaking in the first person and the past tense and addressing his anonymous friend, Socrates as narrator immerses us directly in the episode's context and action. The dramatic date of the latter is one of the earliest in Plato. Socrates (as character in the narration) has just returned home, together with other survivors,[1] from the camp of Potidaea in Thrace, shortly after a very severe battle that took place either in 432 BC or, more likely, 429 BC.[2] The place is Athens and, more specifically, one of the city's

[1] The very first word of the dialogue, translated as 'we had arrived' (ἥκομεν: 153a), is not in the singular but the plural and probably indicates that several survivors of the battle of Potidaea, including of course Socrates, left the camp together and headed for their city. Socrates' use of the first-person plural is significant: contrary to Critias who has led a sheltered and privileged life in Athens during the months of the siege, Socrates views himself as one of many Athenian soldiers who participated in the Thracian Campaign of 432–429 BCE and faced its perils.

[2] Many commentators assume that there was only one battle at or near Potidaea, that it is the one mentioned both in *Charm*. 153b5–7 and *Symp*. 220d5–e7, and that it took place in the autumn of 432

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wrestling-schools, the palaestra of Taureas. We are told that this was one of Socrates' regular haunts and that he was pleased to enter it again[3] after a relatively long absence. We are thus led to think of the habitual interests and activities of Plato's Socrates and consider the associations suggested by the narrator's meticulous depiction of the dialogue's setting.[4]

Potidaea was one of the causes of the great conflict which ended with the defeat of Athens, the demolition of its walls, and the imposition of the rule of the Thirty. Socrates confirms that the battle that he fought there was especially violent and that many Athenians had lost their lives (153b9–c1). Potidaea, therefore, is a location associated with defeat and loss. Within the city of Athens, the shrine of Basile standing across from the gymnasium of Taureas carries similar associations, since it was probably dedicated to Persephone, queen of the underworld.[5] By leaving behind the military camp in northern Greece and heading towards the south and his native city, and then turning his back on the temple of Basile in order to enter the gymnasium, Socrates is shown to move away from the realm of the dead in order to eagerly join the world of the living.

The sequel of the narrative indicates that this is a deliberate choice on Socrates' part. Even though he accepts Chaerephon's exhortation to sit down and give a full account of the recent battle (153c5–6), he seems unwilling to talk much about it. When Chaerephon asks him how he managed to survive, he merely replies: 'exactly as you see me' (153b7–8). He is equally laconic in confirming the exceptionally fierce character of the conflict and its grim outcome (153c9–d1). As narrator, he mentions that he answered the questions that the people in the gymnasium asked him

BCE under the command of Callias (Thucydides, I.62–3). Consequently, they fix the dramatic date of the dialogue at 432 BCE: for example, see Dušanić 2000. However, a convincing case has been made by Planeaux 1999 that, in fact, in the *Symposium* Alcibiades implies that there was more than one battle, and that the battle to which the *Charmides* refers is not the battle of 432 BCE in which Alcibiades received an award, but the bloody battle in the spring of 429 BCE at Spartolus near Potidaea under the command of Xenophon, which was followed by the disbanding of the Athenian forces and the return of Athenian survivors to Athens (Thucydides, II.79). Planeaux's argument aims to show that Plato is interested in historical detail, and his concern for biographical realism is greater than is generally acknowledged.

[3] ἐπὶ τὰς συνήθεις διατριβάς: 153a3.

[4] Depending on the context, I use 'dialogue' either to refer to the *Charmides* as a whole consisting of both the frame of the narration and the episode that the narrator relates or, alternatively, to refer only to the related conversation between the three main characters.

[5] We know very little about this shrine. It is mentioned in a Greek inscription (*IG* 2d.ed., 94), but the identity of the Basile cannot be inferred with any certainty. Most probably, Basile is the bride of Hades, Persephone (Schamp 2000, 111–12). Other views include: that Basile was a personification of Athenian royalty (Sprague 1993, 57 n. 3), that it personified an aristocratic Athens (Shapiro 1986; Witte 1970, 40–2), and that the temple of Basile was related to the care of the soul, as opposed to the palaestra, which was related to the care of the body (Rotondaro 2000, 217).

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(153c9–d1), but does not dwell further on this matter. In the capacities of both narrator and character, Socrates appears disinclined to linger on the subjects of war, violence, and death. And while he is portrayed as quite unmoved by the mortal risk that he has run, he shows no penchant for heroics.

A first connection can be traced between the literary form and the philosophical subject of the dialogue. Unlike the 'manic' Chaerephon[6] who does not control his emotions and gestures, Socrates appears to be master of himself. If he has experienced fear at the sight of death or relief at its escape, sorrow about those that have been lost in battle or elation for being back in his city and amongst his friends, he does not betray such emotions but can control them so that they do not affect his behaviour. In other words, he is depicted as having *sôphrosynê*, temperance, in this ordinary sense of the term. Another feature of the opening lines of the dialogue bears on both the drama and the argument, namely an initial hint that Socrates and Critias are known to be friendly with each other. For, when Chaerephon asks Socrates to tell them more about the battle of Potidaea, he leads him to a seat next to Critias (153c6–7), presumably taking for granted that this vicinity would not displease Socrates.[7] Moreover, while he was taking his seat, he warmly greeted[8] Critias and everyone else sitting nearby (153c8–d1). The ambiance is one of easy familiarity – an impression that will be reinforced later in the dialogue's prologue. Socrates does comply with his countrymen's requests to provide information about the recent battle, but it is clear that his own interests lie elsewhere. The following passage reveals what they are.

> When we had enough of these things, I turned to questioning them about affairs at home, namely, about philosophy, how it was doing at present, and about the young men, whether any among them had become distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both.[9] And Critias, looking away towards the door and seeing some young men who were coming in railing at each other

[6] μανικός: 153b2.

[7] Plato's audiences know that Chaerephon and Critias eventually found themselves in opposite camps. Chaerephon was a democrat who fought with Thrasybulus to overturn the dictatorial regime headed by Critias and restore democracy. Surely it is not accidental that, in the prologue of the *Charmides*, Chaerephon and Critias are depicted as being on friendly terms. Their presence points unmistakably to the political subtext of the dialogue and refers its readers back to a time when political tensions festered beneath the surface of the Athenian democracy's precarious stability.

[8] ἠσπαζόμην: 153c8. LSJ refers to this passage, rendering the verb by 'salute from a distance' when it is preceded by πόρρωθεν. However, the latter adverb does not occur in our passage and, in the absence of that qualification, I take it that, here, the verb ἀσπάζομαι does not mean merely 'to greet' or 'to salute', but to do so with joy and frequently also with a hug or a kiss.

[9] ἢ σοφίᾳ ἢ κάλλει ἢ ἀμφοτέροις: 153d4–5.

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> followed by another crowd of people behind them, said 'As for the beautiful youths, Socrates, I expect that you will get to know at once; for these who are coming in happen to be the entourage and lovers of the youth who, at least for the moment, is believed to be the most beautiful; and I imagine that he himself is already on his way and somewhere close by'. (153d2–154a6)

Socrates identifies two objects of primary concern to him, namely the current state of philosophy and the excellence of youths in respect of *sophia*, wisdom, or *kallos*, beauty, or both. While he does not state how these themes are related to each other, the fact that he mentions them in close succession intimates that they are interconnected: Socrates wants to know whether there are any young men of exceptional promise who have an inclination to philosophy. Assuming that this is so, on the one hand, Socrates ostensibly observes conventional standards according to which youths are praised in encomiastic poetry and other kinds of literature,[10] but, on the other, he gestures towards the peculiarly Socratic idea that a youth's excellence in wisdom crucially bears on his aptitude and attitude towards philosophy. Already at this point, experienced readers of Plato are in a position to surmise that, in the eyes of Socrates, a young man's beauty has to do with his soul as well as his body, his philosophical nature as well as his physical form (cf. *Men*. 76b, *Tht*. 185e).

The man who answers Socrates' query is Critias, in his first direct intervention in the dialogue. It is worth noting that, initially, he does not say anything about wisdom. Concentrating on beauty alone, he assures Socrates that he will soon see the most beautiful youth of the day. Moreover, he informs Socrates that those accompanying the young man are his lovers (*erastai*: 154a5), highlighting the intuitive connection between *kallos*, beauty, and *erôs*, love. Thus Critias introduces an element of eroticism, even before mentioning the young man's name. It is only when Socrates prompts him (154a7) that he identifies the youth as follows: 'Charmides, son of our uncle Glaucon,[11] and my cousin' (154b1–2).[12] Reaching out of the dialogue to historical reality, Plato thus makes explicit the family ties between Critias and Charmides, and also between the two cousins and himself. And he also alludes to Socrates' familiarity with the

[10] See, for instance, Pindar, *Olymp*. X, 97–105, Isocrates, *Evag*. 22–4, and the discussion in Tulli 2000, 262–3.

[11] This Glaucon is probably the grandfather of the Glaucon of the *Republic*.

[12] Planeaux 1999 fixes the dramatic date of the *Charmides* at 429 BCE on the grounds that Socrates must have been absent from Athens long enough for Charmides to pass from boyhood to adolescence.

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members of his own family. For, according to our dialogue's narrator, Critias remarks that Socrates must have met Charmides in the past, but would not recognise him now, since he went on campaign away from Athens when Charmides was still a child (154a8–b1). Indeed, Socrates emphatically confirms that he knew Charmides and adds, ambiguously, that he was not ordinary (*ou phaulos*: 154b3) even in childhood (154b3–5).

Much has been achieved in these opening lines of the *Charmides*. The frame of the dialogue has been sketched and space has been created between the frame and what lies within it. The readers are now able to adopt different perspectives with regard to the dialogue's contents and to assess the action from different moments in time.[13] Socrates' double role, as narrator and as participant in the narrated episode, has become clear-cut,[14] what Plato has at stake has been indicated, and his authorial presence in the background has been felt. All the principal characters have been introduced, some information has been given regarding their relations to each other, and some features of their portraits have been sketched.

Both as narrator and as protagonist, Socrates is portrayed in a familiar way that brings to mind, notably, the *Apology*, the *Laches*, and Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*: friendly but not over-familiar, dispassionate and even-tempered, brave in the face of physical danger but making no display of his courage, entering an Athenian public space in search of company and conversation, passionate about philosophy and looking for youths of talent and beauty. For the moment, we can infer almost nothing about the

[13] While the dramatic date of the narrated episode is 432 BCE or, more likely, 429 BCE, the date at which Socrates' narration to his anonymous listener is supposed to take place remains vague. As for the date of the composition of the *Charmides* by Plato, opinions vary but the dialogue is generally located sometime in the 380s. According to Dušanić 2000, Plato wrote the *Charmides* in 382 BCE, probably after Lysias' speech *On the Scrutiny of Evandrus* (cf. XXVI.3, 5) and after Isocrates' *Helen* (cf. X.1, 5). On the other hand, Witte 1970, 44–5, points to close parallels between the *Charmides* and Lysias' speech and contends that the speech post-dates the dialogue by a few months and that its author deliberately imitates features of Plato's text. Witte and especially Dušanić argue in favour of the relevance of Critias' political heritage at the time of the composition of the *Charmides*. In fact, Dušanić contends that Plato's positive representation of Critias in the latter dialogue constitutes an implicit criticism of the support that Athenian democrats wanted to lend to Thebes in 382 BCE. According to Dušanić, by portraying Critias in a favourable light as a proponent of the aristocratic virtue of *sôphrosynê*, and by pointing to the similarities between the immediate aftermath of the battle of Potidaea and the political conditions of 382 BCE, Plato warns his fellow-citizens against demagogy, imperialism, and hostility towards Sparta (Dušanić 2000, 60–3).

[14] Rotondaro 2000, 214, maintains that, as narrator, Socrates uses a mixed form of speech consisting of both narration (διήγησις) and imitation (μίμησις), whereas, as participant in the narrated episode, he uses only imitation (μίμησις).

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nameless character who is listening to Socrates' narration.[15] In the course of the prologue, we shall gradually form the impression that he knows (or knows of) the places and the personages that Socrates mentions, is somehow associated with Socrates,[16] and is probably sufficiently intimate with him to receive from Socrates a confession of a personal nature.[17]

In addition to these characters, we get briefly acquainted with the 'manic' Chaerephon, clearly very attached to Socrates but overemotional and uncontrolled. He will play a small part in the prologue and then drop out of sight. Critias, however, is there to stay. As mentioned, he is portrayed as a relatively close acquaintance of Socrates or even a family friend. His behaviour appears unexceptional and his exchange with Socrates exhibits something of a rhetorical pace and structure. First he tells Socrates that there will soon be an answer to his query about beautiful youths, next he shows to him the admirers of 'the most beautiful youth of the day' but does not name him, then he reveals Charmides' name and that of his father and, in the end, he states his own family connection to the young man. We should remember that Critias initially identifies Charmides as the most beautiful boy of his age group, but does not say that he is also the wisest of his peers. As for Charmides himself, even though he has not yet made his entrance, we already know several things about him. He is the son of Glaucon, cousin of both Critias and Plato, known by Socrates since he was a child, now grown into adolescence, and an exquisitely handsome creature courted by many and admired by all.

2 A Most Poetic Youth (154b6–155a7)

> You will know immediately, he [sc. Critias] said, both how much and in what way he [sc. Charmides] has grown. And as he was speaking these words, Charmides came in.

[15] Van der Ben 1985, 4, suggests that the anonymous listener appears to be quite young.

[16] The vocative 'my friend' (ὦ ἑταῖρε: 154b) may point to a quite close relationship between Socrates and the listener (cf. *Phd.* 89e; also Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.8.1). Socrates' later address, 'my noble friend' (ὦ γεννάδα: 155d3), may indicate even a love relation of a certain kind. As McAvoy (1996, 77–8 n. 33) remarks, this is the unique occurrence of the vocative in Plato; the only other use of the word γεννάδας found in the Platonic dialogues occurs in *Phd.* 243c3 where Socrates, repenting of his first speech which compares lovers to wolves, implores someone 'of a noble and gentle nature' in love with a person of the same kind not to be offended and not to think Socrates entirely ignorant of genuine *erôs*, love.

[17] Arguably, only a noble lover would be an appropriate audience for the confession made by Socrates at 155d3–e2. Moreover, only someone well versed in Socratic dialectic would be able to follow Socrates' narrative beyond the prologue and through the argument. For these reasons, it has occasionally been suggested that the anonymous listener represents Plato in his youth.

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> Now truly, my friend, I cannot measure anything. So far as beautiful youths are concerned I am merely a blank ruler. For, somehow, almost all youths who have just come of age appear to me beautiful. Indeed this is so, and especially on that occasion the youth appeared to me marvellous in stature and beauty. As for all the others, they were so astonished and confused when he entered that they seemed to me to be in love with him. Moreover, many more lovers were following in his train as well. Of course this was not so surprising on the part of men like ourselves. However, I was also observing the boys and noticed that not a single one of them, even the youngest, was looking elsewhere but all gazed at him as if he were a statue. (154b8–c8)

In an apostrophe to his anonymous auditor, Socrates reveals something about himself, namely that he is a 'white measuring-line' or a blank ruler[18] that cannot measure the beauty of one young man in comparison to that of another: all of them appear the same to him in that regard.[19] Why wouldn't Socrates be able to do what everyone else can do; that is, judge the beauty of one person in comparison to that of another? His metrical ineptitude could not derive from excessive proneness to sensuality, for this hypothesis is largely incompatible with Socrates' persona and with the self-restraint that he shows at a later stage of the opening scene. Nor, on the other hand, can his ineptness result from indifference, since he has already expressed interest in the beautiful youths of the day and has just told his anonymous friend that Charmides appeared to him marvellous in beauty and stature. Perhaps, then, Socrates has in mind something else – an idea developed by Diotima in her account of a lover's ascent to the scale of perfection in the *Symposium* and in the *Republic* (474 c ff.).

According to Diotima, as the candidate for initiation in the mysteries of love is going up the ladder, in his initial steps, first, he falls in love with the beauty of one individual body; next, he comes to realise that the beauty of one body is the same as the beauty of another and thus becomes a lover of every beautiful body; and then he grasps that the beauty of the soul is

[18] ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ λευκὴ στάθμη εἰμὶ πρὸς τοὺς καλούς: 154b8–9. Reece 1998, 66, renders the expression by 'blank ruler', Sprague 1993 by 'broken yardstick'. Reece remarks that the image of a white measuring-line is especially appropriate on this occasion, since Socrates is looking at a young man who is like an ἄγαλμα, a statue of white marble or stone. I am not sure about this suggestion, for, so far as I know, ancient statues were usually painted.

[19] Those familiar with Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* might be tempted to compare Socrates' metrical ineptness with regard to beauty with Don Giovanni's lack of discrimination with regard to womanhood: 'non si picca se sia ricca, / se sia brutta, se sia bella;/ purché porti la gonnella, voi sapete quel que fa!' (*Don Giovanni*, Act 1). Compare Nehamas 2007, 112–14, with notes, who explains the 'extraordinary convergence between Plato and Mozart' by tracing the connections between the philosophical lover in the *Symposium* and Leporello's area through Lucretius and Molière.

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incomparably superior to the beauty of the body and hence overwhelmingly attractive even in the sight of a plain or ugly physique (*Symp*. 210a–b). Considered in these terms, Socrates' confession that, when it comes to beautiful youths, he is a 'blank ruler' indicates that he has reached at least the second step of the heavenly ladder: he understands that the beauty of each and every body is the same and, accordingly, does not judge the beauty of one boy in comparison to that of another but is a lover of beauty in all beautiful boys alike (cf. 210a8–b6).[20] The parallel between the two dialogues need not go further and, therefore, need not introduce transcendent Forms. In the *Charmides*, Socrates has come to realise that all beautiful youths are alike in respect of beauty, and also that the beauty of the soul is incomparably superior to that of the body. But so far there is no indication that he has moved beyond that point.

Enter Charmides. The narrator vests him with the elaborate imagery of divinity. He is both preceded (154a4) and followed (154a5) by adherents, and he has a terribly powerful impact on everyone except Socrates. His admirers are astounded and overpowered, confused and bewildered,[21] much as people are when they fall under the spell of erotic passion or, in myths, when they encounter some god. Socrates himself marvels[22] at both the young man's physical beauty and people's uniform reaction to him.[23] For, regardless of their age, all of them gaze at Charmides[24] with a sort of fixation and seem incapable of turning their eyes away. Socrates says that he found especially astonishing the fact that not only mature men but also the youngest boys looked at Charmides in that manner (174c5–8). Presumably, the reason was this: while he could explain the behaviour of the former by surmising that they experienced intense physical desire, he could not find a ready explanation for the behaviour of the latter. He seems to think that, even if very young boys (*paides*: 154c6) feel sexual desire of some sort, this does not amount to fully fledged sexual passion, nor does it have such compelling force.

Socrates compares the way in which the people in the gymnasium gaze at Charmides with the way in which one stares at a statue.[25] The metaphor carries significant connotations that bear on the sequel of the prologue and

[20] Diotima's ladder can also be considered relevant to Socrates' expressed interest in Charmides' soul rather than his body (*Charm*. 154e). For this suggests that, in the terms of the divine ladder of the *Symposium*, he has effected the ascent to the third step as well, where the lover of beauty in every youth alike fixes himself on a youth's soul rather than his body and endeavours to conduct the sort of *logoi*, discourses, that will benefit the young men and improve their character (*Symp*. 210b6–c3).

[21] ἐκπεπληγμένοι τε καὶ τεθορυβημένοι: 154c3. [22] Cf. θαυμαστός: 154c1.

[23] θαυμαστὸν ἦν: 154c5–6. [24] ἐθεῶντο: 154c8. [25] ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα ἐθεῶντο αὐτόν: 154d1.

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foreshadow some of its themes. Statues frequently represent divine or quasi-divine beings, and the members of Charmides' retinue stare at him as if he were a god or a sculpture representing a god. Arguably, in the eyes of the spectators classical statues primarily represent ideals rather than elements of individuality. Likewise, as they gaze at Charmides, his admirers primarily perceive the beauty and harmony of his form rather than features of his personality or character. Indeed, Charmides is depicted through the prologue as a lad of such perfection that his beauty resembles that of an art object:[26] a sculpted human form.[27] Also, a statue is passively available to the eye of the beholder but cannot interact with him. In comparable manner, the narrator gives us to understand that, at first, Charmides was entirely passive.[28] Everybody stared at him but he did not stare at anyone in return. His admirers seem passionate about him but he appears completely detached. Everyone is in love with him but there is no indication that he is even aware of it. People are talking about him but he hasn't yet uttered a word. These features are even more prominent in the sequel of the narration, when Chaerephon's praise of the youth's beauty almost violates wrestling-school protocol and prompts a remarkable exchange between the other two older protagonists.

> Then Chaerephon called me and asked, Socrates, how does the youth seem to you? Does he not have a beautiful face? – Very much so, I replied. – And yet, he said, if he were willing to take his clothes off, it would seem to you that he has no face, so great is the beauty of his bodily form. All the other men too agreed with Chaerephon's claim. – By Hercules, I said, you make the man seem irresistible, if indeed he has in him one more advantage – a small one. – What? asked Critias. – If he happens to be beautiful with regard to his soul, I replied. But somehow he ought to be of such sort, Critias, since he belongs to your family. – Well, he (sc. Critias) said, he is very beautiful and good in this respect too. – Why then, I said, did we not strip that very part of him and view it first, before his bodily form? For, in any case, at his age, he surely will be willing to engage in dialogue. – Very much so, said Critias, since in fact he is a philosopher and also, as it seems to both himself and others, he is quite a poet.[29] – That fine gift, I said, my dear Critias, exists in your family from a long time back and derives from your kinship with Solon. (154c8–155a3)

Chaerephon's intervention is especially revealing about the manner in which he and his peers perceive Charmides and suggests a contrast between, on the one hand, Chaerephon and other mature men in the room and, on the other, Socrates and possibly Critias as well. In accordance with his 'manic'

[26] Charalabopoulos 2008, 513, and 2014. [27] Reece 1998, 66. [28] McAvoy 1996, 84.
[29] πάνυ ποιητικός: 155a1. On the meaning of ποιητικός see below, 68–9.

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temperament, Chaerephon presses Socrates to acknowledge emphatically[30] that Charmides is indeed *euprosôpos* (154d2), he has a beautiful face, and then goes on to remark that, should the youth agree to stand naked in front of them, his face would be totally eclipsed: Charmides would seem *aprosôpos*, faceless (154d4–5). Chaerephon's meaning is not entirely clear. Given his impulsive character and his evident susceptibility to passion, I think that his point is not that one cannot contemplate two kinds of beauty at the same time,[31] or that Socrates should look towards the universal, Form-like aspects of Charmides as opposed to his individual, face-like aspects.[32] Rather, Chaerephon says that, however beautiful the young man's face may seem, its beauty would be completely obliterated by the beauty of his naked body. And the likely reason why Chaerephon makes this claim is that he passionately desires the youth's body. The same probably holds for other mature men in the room who agree with Chaerephon (154d6).

Charmides, then, is both fragmented and reified by these older men. Unlike Socrates who has been away for several months, these men must have had many opportunities to see the youth exercising naked in the palaestra. And, unlike Socrates, they had probably experienced the overwhelming effect of that sight many times. Presently driven by desire, they disconnect the youth's face from his body and become oblivious to the former but focus their gaze exclusively on the latter. They see only a part of the young man, but cannot view him as a whole. And insofar as a person's face is linked to his/her individuality, Chaerephon's remark intimates that he and his companions are blind to Charmides' personality but view him only as an object of desire. Should the young man consent to remove his clothes, he would strip himself of his identity as well as his garments.[33] Note that, even though Chaerephon makes the stripping conditional upon the young man's consent,[34] Charmides' fragmentation in the eyes of the beholder and his transformation into a faceless figure would be something that he would merely suffer, much as a lifeless

[30] ὑπερφυῶς: 154d3. [31] So Bruell 1977, 144.

[32] Benardete 1986, 13, maintains that Chaerephon points out to Socrates the Form-like aspects of Charmides. In his view, Socrates is not interested in σωφροσύνη as knowledge of the self – that is, of a unique bundle of individual features – but in σωφροσύνη as class-knowledge.

[33] Compare the end of Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* (237a–241d), where the speaker points out that, in many cases, the fondness of the lover for the beloved is not motivated by goodwill towards the beloved but by erotic appetite: 'just as the wolf loves the lamb, so the lover is fond of the beloved' (241d). The wolf looks on the lamb as food, not as Wooly. Likewise, the lover sees the beloved as an object intended for the satisfaction of his own needs, not as an individual that has value in his own right (cf. 240c–d).

[34] εἰ ἐθέλοι: 154d. Although Chaerephon's appreciation of Charmides' body is indicative of his passionate nature and his susceptibility to sexual desire, it does not amount to an 'eroto-violent suggestion' to strip Charmides naked (*pace* McAvoy 1996, 83).

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object would. From this perspective too, the young man's passivity is comparable to that of a statue. Things are done to him, but he does not react in return.

So far as one can tell, Critias is in the same position as Chaerephon and the other men mentioned by the narrator. He too has probably often seen his ward naked in the palaestra, and we cannot know whether he agrees with Chaerephon for he says nothing to that effect. The only man in the room who has not been privy to the youth's physical charms is Socrates, since he left Athens to go to war when Charmides was still a child. Therefore, he is still unaffected by passion and able to perceive the young man, so to speak, from a distance as a whole person. Not only does he perceive the latter's exquisite face as well as his body, but also he wants to move beyond Charmides' physical appearance and gaze at his soul. In typical manner, he changes the course of the conversation at a single stroke: the youth would be really irresistible if, in addition to the beauty of his body, he also had 'one more small advantage'; that is, a beautiful soul (154d7–8). Thus, Socrates expresses the hope that the youth's outward perfection may correspond to something equivalent within, and indicates that, for his own part, he is far more interested in beauty of the soul than of the body.

Next, specifically addressing Critias, he tells him that, since Charmides belongs to the same house as Critias, he *ought* (*prepei*: 154e1) to have a fine soul. One cannot mistake his meaning: given Charmides' aristocratic origins and hereditary gifts, he is expected to live up to the loftiest expectations. Socrates will say more on this subject later, but for the moment we should note the earnest tone of his remark, which, I believe, is not ironical in the least. On the contrary, he underscores that young Charmides was perceived as representing a unique chance for his city, his family, and perhaps also philosophy itself; and everything depended on one 'small' condition, namely whether he had (or could acquire) a well-formed soul. Within the frame of the dialogue, there seems to be every reason for optimism. Indeed, Critias hastens to respond that, in respect of his soul too, his young ward is 'both beautiful and good' (155e4),[35] thus claiming, in effect, that the youth embodies the ideal of *kalokagathia*: physical beauty and moral perfection both occurring in the same person.

At first glance, Socrates' proposal that they strip the youth's soul before they look at his body (154e5–6) might appear continuous with Chaerephon's earlier remarks. In truth, it shifts attention away from Charmides' physical charms, diffuses the ambiance of eroticism lingering in the gymnasium, and suggests a startlingly novel way of thinking and

[35] πάνυ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός: 155e4. The word πάνυ very much governs both adjectives.

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talking about the soul. As the body can be stripped of its clothing, so the soul can be peeled of its trappings, and as the former can become the object of contemplation, so can the latter. There is nothing mysterious and inaccessible, generally, about the soul or, specifically, about Charmides' soul. It can be exposed and scrutinised, and both Socrates and Critias seem to think that this would be of great benefit to the young man.[36] We should register that Socrates and Critias are portrayed as having ostensibly similar attitudes in that regard. Unlike Chaerephon, whose interest in Charmides is tainted by sensuality, the other two older characters agree that the condition of Charmides' soul is much more important than that of his body and must be the first to be looked at. Moreover, they agree about the means by which that goal should be pursued: *dialegesthai* (154e7) – one-to-one dialectical cross-examination by question-and-answer.

Socrates assumes that Charmides is ready and willing[37] to engage in this sort of dialogue (154e5–7) and Critias emphatically assures him that this is so. But the reason he gives is very puzzling: not that the youth has reached an age at which he should be able to take part in a dialectical discussion (as Socrates suggests), but that he is *philosophos* (154e8–9), a lover of wisdom, and *pany poiêtikos* (155a1) – an expression that can mean a 'very good poet', but also 'greatly susceptible to poetry', 'very poetical', or 'much celebrated by poets'.[38] In what way might Charmides qualify as *philosophos* and how might this be related to his gift for poetry? Of course, Critias cannot mean that Charmides is a philosopher in any technical sense of the term, for no such sense of 'philosopher' or 'philosophy' is available in the dialogue. All that Critias can mean is that his ward loves to learn and, therefore, will be eager to engage together with Socrates in *dialegesthai*, i.e. participate in the dialectical investigation of some issue or other. It is more difficult to ascertain just how Charmides is 'very poetic'. If Critias is claiming that his ward is a really good poet,[39] and if he assumes that there is some connection between the young man's love of wisdom and his ability to

[36] See the excellent discussion of this passage in Charalabopoulos 2008, 518 and also the paper by Papamanoli (unpublished).

[37] ἐθέλει: 154e7.

[38] The entire phrase is this: ἐπεί τοι καὶ ἔστι φιλόσοφός τε καί, ὡς δοκεῖ ἄλλοις τε καὶ ἑαυτῷ, πάνυ ποιητικός (154e8–155a1). The word πάνυ governs only ποιητικός and does not apply to φιλόσοφος: cf. Tulli 2000, 260.

[39] Most translators render πάνυ ποιητικός (155a1) in that way: e.g. Lamb 1927; Sprague 1993. On the one hand, it seems unlikely that Critias would judge Charmides to be a good poet: the phrase ὡς δοκεῖ ἄλλοις τε καὶ ἑαυτῷ (155a1) seems politely worded to save Critias himself from agreeing in that judgement. On the other hand, Critias appears inclined to flatter Charmides and attribute to him exceptional gifts, and the capacity to write good poetry seems to be one of them.

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write in verse, it is not at all clear what this connection might be.[40] The same observation holds if we take '*pany poiêtikos*' to mean 'susceptible to the charm of poetry', 'inclined towards the composition of poems', or 'celebrated by poets'. None of these options is especially helpful in order to explain how being *poiêtikos* might bear on being a lover of wisdom or, specifically, on pursuing wisdom by means of *dialegesthai*. Perhaps the thought to retain is this: if Critias believes that poetry, philosophy, and dialectical practice ideally go together, his conception of the ultimate goals of *dialegesthai* is likely to differ from Socrates' own.

Anyway, Socrates proposes to Critias to summon the young man to where they are sitting and introduce him. As he points out, even if Charmides were younger than he is, Critias' presence in the room would totally guarantee the propriety of the encounter, since Critias is Charmides' guardian as well as his cousin (155a3–7). We cannot help comparing Socrates' meticulous concern for decorum with Chaerephon's indiscretion and vulgarity. Nor can we be sure, however, about the totality of Socrates' motives. He may be truly indifferent to Charmides' physical attractions and hence easily follow the etiquette of relations between older and much younger men. Or, conceivably, he may be assuming the position of a potential lover of the right sort: an older and dignified man, who implements a strict code of conduct[41] to the point of making it impossible to guess whether or not he intends to court the youth.[42] In either case, Socrates appears to be in complete control of his feelings and actions and anticipates his talk with Charmides with perfect confidence.

3 The Fawn and the Lion (155a8–e3)

To bring Charmides near Socrates, Critias uses a ruse that, he is sure (155b8), will work: he commands a servant to tell the youth that Critias wishes to introduce him to a doctor able to treat Charmides' morning

[40] Several commentators point out that, according to Plato, poetry is incompatible with the practice of philosophy: if Charmides is a good poet or, alternatively, someone very susceptible to poetry (Tulli 2000, 260), it would seem to follow that he can't be a philosopher as well. However, Socrates does not say anything against poetry in the *Charmides*. Also, it would be unlikely for Critias as a character to believe that poetry and philosophy are incompatible, since his historical counterpart was a poet who held philosophical views as well, and the same was true of his ancestor, Solon.

[41] Reece 1998, 67, makes the perceptive remark that 'by having Socrates bring up the issue of wrestling-school protocol, Plato makes the reader aware that this meeting does at least have the appearance of a seductive approach'.

[42] Compare the supposed non-lover in the *Phaedrus*: a crafty older man, who was as much in love with an exquisite youth as many others, but managed to convince the youth that he was not in love at all (*Phd.* 237b).

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headaches – an ailment that Charmides has been complaining about (155b1–3). Surprisingly, Socrates says that nothing prevents him from impersonating a physician (*prospoiêsasthai*: 155b5) and agrees to do so. Many elements of that part of the narrative are perplexing. Why does Critias prefer to use a ploy rather than invite his ward to come and sit with them? What prompts him to think of that particular ruse, namely the pretence that Socrates is a doctor? What are we to make of Charmides' malady, i.e. the morning headaches that Socrates is supposed to treat? And since Socrates is not a physician, why does he consent to be introduced as such? In fact, Critias' ruse fits well with both what precedes and what follows, and adds to the ambiguity of the characters and the complexity of their interactions.

Recall that Socrates has just expressed the wish to strip Charmides' soul, while Critias has claimed that his ward excels in his soul as well as his body and, moreover, is ready to submit to psychic stripping by means of dialectical cross-examination. The metaphor of taking someone's clothes off in order to ascertain what lies underneath brings associations of medical diagnosis, treatment, and healing. Given Socrates' known ability in *dialegesthai*, it is quite natural for Critias to come up with the idea of presenting Socrates as a healer who can strip Charmides' ailing parts in order to diagnose the malady and cure it.[43] This stratagem makes sense from Charmides' own perspective as well. A direct invitation issued by his guardian to come and meet Socrates – an older man and hence a potential lover – could be understood as an erotically charged message,[44] whereas the ruse invented by Critias seems innocent enough.

From the philosophical point of view, Critias' story is suggestive of the medical metaphor of the philosopher as a doctor of the soul, and of the idea that Socrates is indeed a therapist of that kind. We cannot tell whether Critias does think of Socrates as a physician of the soul, or merely presents him as a doctor in order to bring Charmides over. Likewise, we cannot yet be certain whether or to what extent Socrates endorses the medical metaphor and views himself as a healer of the soul. Further ambiguities surround Charmides' malady as well as Socrates' aptitude to treat it. On the one hand, the youth's morning headaches can be taken, specifically, as a sign of fast or even promiscuous living[45] and a bad omen for the youth's future. On the other, they can be read, more generally, as a symptom

[43] See McAvoy 1996, 83–4.

[44] See Reece 1998, 67. Bruell 1977, 145, suggests that perhaps Critias uses a ruse in order to put an obstacle in the way of Socrates' wish to converse with Charmides, but this proposal finds no support in Plato's text.

[45] So Hyland 1981, 32–6, 40–2.

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indicating that the young man is not altogether healthy: somewhere in him there is a sickness, a disorder, a deeper cause for his malaise[46] that Socrates may or may not be able to detect and heal. In the end, as Critias had predicted (155b8), the ruse proves successful and Charmides approaches the bench where the older men are sitting.

> This is exactly what happened. Indeed he did come, and he gave rise to much laughter. For each of us who were seated tried to make room for him by pushing hard at his neighbour so as to have him sitting next to oneself, with the result that the man sitting at one end of the bench was forced to get up, whereas the man sitting at the other end was tumbled off sideways. In the end, Charmides came and sat down between me and Critias. (155b9–c5)

This scene might have belonged to a comic play. The commotion provoked by the arrival of a handsome young man or one's attempt to make room for him somewhere close to oneself are familiar *topoi*, also occurring in Plato's *Symposium*. Compare the piece of vaudeville narrated in the above passage with the scene of Alcibiades' arrival at Agathon's house (*Symp*. 212c–e). In this latter too there is noise, music, and brawling, and Socrates makes room for Alcibiades to sit between Agathon and himself (213a). As in the *Charmides*, so in the *Symposium* there is burlesque behaviour, intense physicality,[47] congeniality, and laughter.[48] And as in the former case, so in the latter an atmosphere of eroticism and sexuality surrounds the protagonists, even though it manifests itself in different ways in the two dialogues.

As mentioned, it is reasonable to surmise that many of the older men on the bench have seen Charmides naked in the palaestra and many, if not all, have had the experience relayed by Chaerephon: they have gazed at the perfect beauty of his body in total oblivion of his face, i.e. his personality and individuality. Hence there can be little doubt about the reason why each of these men is battling[49] to push away his neighbour and have the youth sit right next to himself. Eventually, Charmides takes his place between Critias and Socrates, and this detail can but need not be vested with symbolic significance. Within the dialogue frame, Charmides makes

[46] So Benardete 1986, 18 and Solère-Quéval 1993, 11. [47] Charalabopoulos 2008, 521.

[48] The narrator's description of the laughter occurring among the older men sitting on the bench fulfils a meta-textual function: it invites the anonymous listener as well as the audience to step into the dramatic frame of the incident and join in the fun. Bernardete 1986, 15, contends that there was really no laughter in the palaestra, but the laughter belongs exclusively to the narrative level: it is not the characters but the auditors who are supposed to find the scene funny.

[49] Charalabopoulos 2008, 523, points out that the terminology of the episode has military connotations.

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the natural choice of sitting between his guardian, who has summoned him, and the man whom Critias presents as a doctor. In the light of historical events, however, the youth's choice acquires special meaning. He places himself between two very different men and could turn towards one of them and away from the other. In the sequel of the dialogue he will engage mainly with Socrates, but in real life he will attach himself to Critias and fall together with him. Now, the narrator's tone changes. Addressing his anonymous listener in a direct and intimate fashion,[50] he proceeds to give an account of his own state.

> By that time, my friend, I already began to feel perplexed,[51] and the confidence that I had possessed earlier, because I had anticipated that it would be very easy to talk with him, was quite gone. And when Critias said that I was the person who knew the remedy, and he looked me straight in the eyes[52] in an indescribable manner, and seemed ready to ask a question, and all the people in the gymnasium surged around us in a circle, then, my noble friend,[53] I both saw what was inside his cloak[54] and caught fire[55] and was quite beside myself.[56] And I thought that nobody was as wise in matters of love as Cydias, who, referring to a handsome boy and giving advice to someone else, said, 'The fawn should beware lest, by coming before the lion, he should be seized as a portion of meat'. For I felt that I myself had been seized by such a creature. (155c5–e2)

The first thing to notice in this passage is Socrates' unusual reference to an *aporia* or perplexity that does not directly bear on the puzzlement motivating a dialectical debate[57] or resulting from the inconclusive end of such.[58] Rather, Socrates uses a form of the verb *aporein*, feeling perplexed, to indicate an emotional reaction that does not pass through the intellect:[59] a sort of paralysis caused by Charmides' physical proximity, which renders Socrates at a loss for words. While up to this point he has been unmoved by Charmides' great beauty, now he experiences its full effect. According to the narration, three events occur almost simultaneously: Critias introduces the other two characters to each other by identifying Socrates as the doctor who can treat Charmides; Charmides

[50] ὦ φίλε: 155c5. [51] ἠπόρουν: 155c5.
[52] For this meaning of ἐμβλέπω, see *Alc.* 132e. A related meaning, 'to look deep into something', in this case into oneself, occurs at 160d6.
[53] ὦ γεννάδα: 155d3. [54] τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱματίου: 155d3. [55] ἐφλεγόμην: 155d4.
[56] Sprague's (1993) successful translation of οὐκέτ'ἐν ἐμαυτοῦ ἦν (155d4).
[57] Politis 2006 and 2008 convincingly argues that Socrates uses ἀπορία and its cognates not only in order to refer to the state of mind resulting from a dialectical argument's failure to reach satisfactory conclusions, but also in order to indicate the motivation or starting-point of a dialectical debate.
[58] See, e.g., Wolfsdorf 2004. [59] Cf. McAvoy 1996, 87 n. 54.

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turns his eyes on Socrates and is about to ask him something; and the other bystanders move closer, forming a circle around the protagonists. Each of these events requires brief comment.

First of all, by introducing Socrates as a physician, Critias keeps up the ruse by which he brought his cousin over to the bench. Note that Socrates does not react, nor does he tell Charmides that he is not a doctor, but plays along. Next, the moment that Charmides turns his eyes on Socrates and seems ready to ask a question is the first instance in which the young man is portrayed as coming alive: for the first time, he is active and not merely passive, he is looking at someone and is not merely being looked at, and he is about to talk. There is uncertainty about the significance of his gaze. Does Charmides simply turn his eyes on Socrates in order to address him, or does he look at him provocatively, straight in the eyes?[60] Does Socrates' characterisation of the youth's gaze as '*amêchanon*', indescribable or irresistible (155d1), refer to the overwhelming power of the youth's gaze or to Socrates' own feelings of helplessness?[61] One interpreter suggests that the young man's gaze is aggressive, narcissistic, seductive, and hypnotic, that it aims to conquer, and that it shows that Charmides knows well how to wear the mantle of innocence to get exactly what he wants.[62] Others, however, take Charmides' look to express incredulity: since Charmides knows who Socrates is, he must also know that he is not a doctor and therefore feels confused. While the narrator leaves room for such speculation, he only relays explicitly how the young man's gaze affected him at the time: he found it indescribable and absolutely overpowering.[63] At that crucial moment, the bystanders closed in on those sitting on the bench and, presumably, caused some shifting and shuffling. This explains how Socrates accidentally saw what was inside Charmides' cloak, was set afire, and was no longer able to contain himself (155d3–4).

Dramatically, the condition that Socrates found himself in constitutes the high point of a psychological escalation. When Charmides first entered the room, Socrates observed his beautiful face and stature in a detached manner and from a distance. He expressed a greater interest in the youth's soul than his physical beauty and appeared quite unmoved by the latter. Then, when Charmides sat beside him on the bench, he started feeling confused (155c5). Next, when the young man fixed his gaze on him, his perplexity increased to the point of making him feel unable to speak

[60] This depends on how one takes the dative ὀφθαλμοῖς in 155c8: Schwyzer 2002, 211, 237.
[61] See Charalabopoulos 2008, 524 n. 117. [62] Charalabopoulos 2008, 524, defends these claims.
[63] The term 'ἀμήχανον' has all these connotations and some others besides, notably the connotation of something allowing for no help or remedy.

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(155c6–7). In the end, when he glanced into the youth's garment, he was set ablaze and was no more 'within' himself (155d4). A primary factor through which Socrates' condition gradually changes is perception and, specifically, sight. Socrates will return to the topic of perception later on, at a pivotal point of his argument with Critias.

There can be little doubt, I believe, that the passage under discussion has a sexual meaning.[64] First, many syntactical, grammatical, and lexical elements of the narration point firmly in that direction. The neuter plural article rendered by 'what' was inside Charmides' cloak[65] points away from the feminine singular noun 'the soul',[66] which in any case occurs considerably earlier in the context. Typically, the expression 'I caught fire'[67] refers specifically to erotic excitement.[68] As for the phrase 'I was no longer within myself' and other similar phrases, they standardly render one's loss of self-control because of a strong emotion or passion. Besides, this reading of the incident makes excellent philosophical sense: it lends more depth to the persona of Socrates as moral paradigm, and flags an ordinary aspect of *sôphrosynê* that receives little attention in the sequel of the dialogue, i.e. self-control, but also illustrates one of the dialogue's central themes, namely the relation between *sôphrosynê* and self-knowledge. In brief, while earlier in the prologue Socrates appeared impervious to excessive emotions, he is now shown as vulnerable to passion as all men must be. Like his peers in the gymnasium, he too proves to be vulnerable to the power of sexual desire and feels its full impact. Unlike Chaerephon, and perhaps unlike Critias too, he experiences this susceptibility as a major danger to himself. And precisely because he realises his own weakness, he is able to make a concerted and successful effort to counteract the pull of sexual passion and retrieve his self-control. He appeals to an otherwise unattested

[64] This is the traditional interpretation of the passage, and most interpreters follow it. However, it has been radically challenged by McCabe 2007a. According to McCabe, the content of Socrates' seeing remains deliberately ambiguous: he does not state whether what he saw inside Charmides' cloak was the most exciting parts of the youth's anatomy or, alternatively, the youth's soul. If I understand McCabe correctly, she favours the latter option because she takes it to illustrate a philosophical approach to perception suggested by the 'Relations Argument' (or, as I call it, the Argument from Relatives). Namely, perception is 'civilised' in the sense that its objects need not always be physical. Hence the 'Relations Argument' does not go through either for perception or, analogically, for knowledge: contrary to what the argument purports to show, in fact reflexivity and higher-order functions are possible for *aisthêsis*, perception, and *epistêmê* (scientific) knowledge. While I disagree with McCabe on both counts for reasons stated both here and in the Argument from Relatives, her interpretation must be reckoned with because it has far-reaching implications both for our understanding of the drama and argument of the *Charmides* and for Plato's approach to perception.

[65] τά at the beginning of the phrase τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱματίου: 155d3.

[66] ἡ ψυχή: 154e1. Compare McCabe 2007a.

[67] ἐφλεγόμην: 155d4.

[68] See Eisenstadt 1981, 127.

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fragment of the poet Cydias,[69] whose vivid imagery also expresses Socrates' own fear: of being captured and swallowed alive by sexual passion, as a fawn is seized and devoured by a lion (155d6–e1). According to the narration, Cydias used that metaphor as a warning to a man in love with a beautiful boy (155d5–6), and Socrates quite explicitly compared the position of that man with his own. When he was in the throes of passion, he thought of Cydias' verse and felt that he too had been seized by a wild beast (155e1–2).

Let us look more closely at this metaphor in connection to other elements of the prologue. In view of Charmides' earlier representation as a creature resembling a young god, the opening scene can be placed in the context of a rich mythological and religious tradition preserving firm boundaries between divinities and humans, and also determining relations within each realm. Divinities diminish or annihilate the consciousness of those who come near and, likewise, Charmides' physical proximity paralyses Socrates and weakens his spirit. Medusa turns those who stare at her into stone[70] and, in comparable manner, Charmides' gazing at Socrates causes confusion and speechlessness. In Homer, the breast-band of Aphrodite saps the resolve of gods and men,[71] and Charmides appears to have such a catalytic effect on everyone present. Men are often punished for violating the privacy of gods and goddesses or for transgressing in any way the limit between gods and humans. Some lose their perceptual powers, others are consumed by fire, and others suffer annihilation or transformation of their identity.[72]

Something like this happens (albeit temporarily) to Socrates: he sees a part of Charmides that was intended to be hidden and is set afire. In short, Socrates employs the imagery of myth in order to convey the formidable power of the youth's bodily beauty and of the desire that it gives rise to. Besides, Socrates appeals to Cydias' metaphor for erotic capture in a way that was familiar to Plato's audience. A predator seizing its quarry often represents a lover who acquires the object of his desire.[73] Typically, it is the older man who is the predator, whereas a youth is his prey.[74] In this instance, however, Socrates inverts the image, by identifying himself as the fawn and

[69] The *Charmides* is our only source of the fragment of Cydias, and that fragment is all we have from the poet.

[70] See the discussion of this mythological archetype in Charalabopoulos 2008, 527–8.

[71] Homer, *Il.* 14. 257–67.

[72] E.g. Teiresias was blinded because he saw Athena naked, Semeli asked Zeus to show himself to her in all his glory and burst into flames, and Marsyas was flayed alive by Apollo, who then transformed him into a stream.

[73] Theognis 1278c–d, cited by Reece 1998, 70. [74] See Plato, *Phd.* 241d.

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Charmides as the lion who might devour him.[75] By casting Charmides in the role of the lover, the pursuer, and himself in the role of the beloved, Socrates foreshadows a reversal that will occur in the dialogue's last scene (176c–d).[76] Finally, the description of this episode enjoys special authority, even though it need not be taken to be infallible. Since the narrator and the principal character are the same person represented at different points in time, and assuming that the narrator is sincere, he is in a unique position with regard to the event under discussion. He can tell us, truthfully if not incorrigibly, what he remembers having felt and thought on that occasion. And we should take him at his word when he says that he felt seized by a powerful beast threatening to devour him. Indeed, the wisdom of Cydias' verse seems to have helped Socrates to compose himself and regain his speech. Thus he managed, though barely so,[77] to answer the question that Charmides has intended to ask him for some time, i.e. whether he really knew the remedy for headaches. Socrates replied that he did (155e2–3).

4 A Leaf and a Charm (155e4–156a8)

According to the narrator, Charmides referred to the medical knowledge that Socrates was supposed to have by using a strong cognitive verb: *epistasthai*,[78] to know simpliciter or, specifically, to know in an expert or scientific manner.[79] The same holds for Socrates, who replied to the youth's question that he did know (*epistaimên*: 155e3) the cure for his malady. Given that he is playing the part of a doctor, he can naturally be taken to assert that he knows the drug in the way that an expert would. Even if this is so, there is no inconsistency, as many have feared, between Socrates' disclaimer of knowledge in other dialogues and the reply that he presently gives to the young man. For while the disclaimer of knowledge concerns expert knowledge of virtue, Socrates' *epistêmê* in treating headaches will amount, as we shall see, to an epistemically less demanding and

[75] McAvoy 1996, 90 and Reece 1998, 70–1 convincingly read the metaphor in that way. As Reece points out, several translators and interpreters stretch the text to make Socrates' use of the metaphor conform to its traditional usage: e.g. Jowett 1961, *ad loc*. and Nussbaum 1986, 92.

[76] Compare *Symp*. 222a–b. [77] μόγις πως: 155e3. [78] εἰ ἐπισταίμην: 155e2.

[79] Hulme Kozey 2018 convincingly argues that the verb 'ἐπίστασθαι' and its cognate noun 'ἐπιστήμη' have a relation to 'γιγνώσκειν' and 'γνῶσις' comparable to the relation between 'ἐπιστήμη' and 'τέχνη'. Namely, while 'ἐπίστασθαι' and 'γιγνώσκειν' are used interchangeably in certain contexts, they are not strict synonyms and cannot be inter-substituted in all contexts but have a relation of synecdoche. I hope to show that, in the *Charmides* and especially in the second part of the dialogue, 'γιγνώσκειν' will mostly point to Socratic self-knowledge, whereas 'ἐπίστασθαι' and 'ἐπιστήμη' will mainly refer to Critias' conception of temperance as a 'science of itself and the other sciences' and will carry the overtones of scientific knowledge or scientific expertise.

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less lofty kind of expertise, consistent with his profession of ignorance as well as with his mission in the service of Apollo.

Borrowing on a generic religious practice common to several Indo-European cultures,[80] Socrates identifies the remedy for headaches with a certain leaf[81] and says that a charm or incantation[82] must be administered in addition to[83] the leaf. He adds that the leaf and the charm ought to be applied '*hama*',[84] without specifying, however, the exact meaning of that term. The word '*hama*' could mean 'together' in a temporal sense, i.e. in the sense that taking both the leaf and the incantation *at the same time* would be sufficient for the cure. But this would be incompatible with something that Socrates says soon afterwards: the incantation must be chanted *before* the application of the medicine (157b2–4), unless one possesses sufficient[85] temperance in one's soul to take the drug straight away (158b5–c1).[86] A natural meaning of the expression '*a hama kai b*' is 'both a and b'. Socrates' point is, I suggest, that if one takes *both* the leaf and the charm, then one will be totally cured (155e7–8).[87]

Charmides seems convinced about the proposed treatment. And he promptly declares he will write down the charm at Socrates' dictation (156a1–2). Socrates asks him whether he intends to do so with or without persuading him to disclose the incantation (156a3),[88] and the youth laughs and replies that of course he would do so with the older man's consent (156a4), addressing Socrates by his name for the first time. Not only does he thus make clear that he knows who Socrates is, he also adds that he has childhood memories of Socrates as Critias' companion,[89] and has frequently talked about Socrates with his own peers (156a4–8). In any case, the young man's assertion that he shall take down the charm in writing raises questions. Since he knows who Socrates is, he also must know that Socrates is not a doctor. Why, then, does he appear eager to have the charm? Evidently, when he was first introduced to Socrates, he immediately understood his guardian's ruse and decided to play along with it: that is, to act as if he believed that Socrates was a physician. It is equally evident

[80] See Brisson 2000. [81] φύλλον τι: 155e. [82] ἐπῳδή τις: 155e. [83] ἐπὶ τῷ φαρμάκῳ: 155e6.
[84] ἅμα: 155e6.
[85] σώφρων ἱκανῶς: 158b6. On the idea that people have different degrees of temperance, see below, 97–8.
[86] See the analysis of Coolidge 1993, 25 and *passim*. [87] Cf. παντάπασιν ὑγιᾶ: 155e.
[88] ἐάν με πείθῃς: 156a3.
[89] The participle συνόντα (156a8) does not indicate the exact nature of the relationship between the two men. Socrates may have been one of Critias' acquaintances or friends, or he may have been Critias' lover. The historical Critias was famed for his beauty, just as Charmides is portrayed as being.

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that the two older men realise this. All three protagonists, then, are in the know. And all three undertake to play their respective parts in the play crafted by Critias, each for his own reasons.[90]

The scene hints at certain features of Charmides' character, but discloses nothing definite about him. His eagerness to record the remedy in writing may be an expression of youthful spontaneity or a preference for easy solutions and shortcuts. Socrates' question whether the dictation of the incantation will happen with or without his own consent may be a playful query, or, alternatively, an early diagnosis of a wilful and narcissistic streak in the youth's character. Indeed, Charmides does not ask whether Socrates is willing to dictate the incantation to him, but takes it for granted that the latter will do his bidding.[91] And the reason why he is so certain about this is, probably, that he is aware of the impression that he has made on the older man.[92] If we look forward to the final scene of the dialogue, however, we shall find that the theme of consent and compulsion emerges again: there will be apparently playful talk about forcing Socrates to become Charmides' mentor if he will not be persuaded to do so (175d5–176d5). On both these occasions, Charmides makes a demand on Socrates and anticipates his consent. And on both occasions, we have the opportunity to speculate on what would happen if Socrates refused, or reflect on what might have happened in reality when Socrates refused to comply with the orders of the Thirty (*Ap.* 32c–d). On the positive side, the fact that Charmides laughs when Socrates asks him whether he intends to write down the incantation with or without Socrates' consent may indicate embarrassment at his own presumption and a sense of shame. As for his reply, that of course he meant to obtain Socrates' consent (156a4), it shows that the youth has taken the point and perhaps has realised that he behaved wrongly.[93] He addresses Socrates by his name (156a4), mentions that he and his peers frequently talk about Socrates (156a6), and, generally, makes an effort to bridge the distance between himself and his interlocutor and establish some sort of familiarity between them.

[90] In a way, this is a story within a story. Within the framework set by the narrator and his auditor, a story is told about an encounter based on yet another story: of Socrates as a doctor in possession of a remedy that he is expected to administer to Charmides in order to cure him.

[91] Charmides seems certain about this: note his use of the future indicative ἀπογράψομαι (156a1).

[92] Some interpreters suggest that Charmides meant to show his nakedness to Socrates, but the text does not support this contention. According to McAvoy 1996, 84, Socrates convinces Charmides that it is better to use persuasion than to rely on the force of his presence.

[93] εἰ μὴ ἀδικῶ γε: 156a6. McAvoy 1996, 84–5, believes that this line contains an allusion to a possible injustice.

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Overall, this is a promising beginning. Charmides is no longer passive, but plays an active role. And he responds rather well to both Socrates' promise of a cure and what seems like an indirect reprimand. Socrates has partially recovered from his earlier experience and has been able to reply to the youth's query and begin a conversation. As for Critias, after setting up the ploy and distributing the parts to the other two characters, he temporarily recedes into the background.[94] Mutual recognition has occurred, Critias' ruse has come into the open, and everyone is in the know.[95] Now Socrates will give more details about the drug that he proposes to administer.

5 Speaking More Freely: The Holism of the 'Good Doctors' (156a9–c9)

> Well done, I said. For it means I shall speak to you more freely about the incantation and what its nature is, whereas just now I was perplexed as to how to indicate its power to you. For, Charmides, it is of such a nature that it cannot bring health only to the head, but, as perhaps you too have already heard the good doctors mention, when a patient comes to them with a pain in his eyes, they say something like this: that it is not possible for them to attempt to heal the eyes alone, but that it would be necessary that they treat the head along with them, if the condition of the eyes were going to be in good order too. Moreover, they say, it is utter folly to believe that one could ever cure the head on its own apart from the whole body. Following this principle, they apply regimens to the body in its entirety, trying to treat and heal the part together with the whole. Or have you not been aware of the fact that this is how they talk and how things are done? – Very much so, he said. – And do you believe that this principle is a good one and do you accept it? – More than anything, he said. (156a9–c9)

What does Charmides 'do well',[96] so that Socrates is relieved of his puzzlement[97] and capable of speaking more freely[98] about the nature of

[94] It is significant that the historical Critias *was* a playwright. McAvoy 1996, 85, compares Critias to a playwright who did not anticipate what Socrates might do with his own part of the play.

[95] This point could be pressed to suggest that all three protagonists have a sort of knowledge of knowledge, i.e. each of them knows what the other two know. If so, this seems a defensible notion of knowledge of knowledge to be contrasted with the notion of a 'knowledge of knowledge' or 'science of science' elaborated and then refuted in the second half of the dialogue.

[96] καλῶς ποιῶν: 156a9.

[97] Unlike other translators, Lamb accurately renders the γάρ at 156a9 and thus highlights the causal connection between what Charmides did well (καλῶς ποιῶν, 156a9) and the fact that, as a result, Socrates is now able to speak more candidly to the youth.

[98] μᾶλλον παρρησιάσομαι: 156a9–b1.

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the charm? It is natural, I think, to take the expression 'well done' (156a9) to refer to the immediately preceding context. Charmides has done two things right: he has correctly identified Socrates by name (156a4), and he has accurately remembered that Socrates was Critias' companion at the time when Charmides himself was a child (156a7–8). In that way, he conveys to Socrates that he knows something about him and his ways and, furthermore, that he is ready to trust Socrates as a family friend. Consequently, Socrates now feels at ease to talk to the young man in the manner that he deems best: with greater *parrhesia*, more openly, more outspokenly than he would have done if they were complete strangers to each other. He has reason to hope that the youth will listen to him attentively and won't think him insincere or foolish. Earlier on he experienced *aporia*, perplexity, because it suddenly seemed extremely difficult to him to talk to Charmides (155c5), and his nerve (*thrasytês*) failed him completely (155c6). Now, however, his *aporia* has been lifted and his self-confidence will fully return in due course (156d1). On both occasions, the *aporia* does not indicate the failure to conclude a search in a satisfactory manner, but refers ostensibly to a practical issue: in the former case, how to talk to the youth, and in the latter, how to explain to him the nature of the incantation. In the end, however, both occurrences of *aporia* have to do with Socrates' concern to appropriately engage Charmides in dialogue and hence constitute the starting-points of the dialectical examination to follow.

The passage just cited contains the first part of Socrates' explanation of the remedy for the headache and the manner in which it is supposed to work. He appeals to the practice of certain 'good doctors' who endorse a sort of bodily holism based on the principle that it is impossible to treat the part independently of the whole. Rather, they consider it necessary to cure, for example, the eyes together with the head, the head together with the body, and, generally, the part together with the whole.[99] In accordance with this principle, they prescribe therapies that act holistically, aiming primarily at whatever whole the ailing part is a part of. The bodily holism of these physicians, then, is not just a matter of theory but also a matter of established medical practice. The fact that Socrates refers to them as 'good doctors' suggests that there are doctors that don't follow that approach.

[99] Like 'ἅμα' at 156b8, the use of that word at 155e6 need not be chronological in a narrow sense. In the former instance the word conveys the idea that the leaf and the charm should be taken together, but not necessarily at exactly the same time. In the latter occurrence, Socrates need not mean that the part and the whole should be treated at exactly the same time, but only that the one should be treated in close connection to the other. A different view is defended by Coolidge 1993.

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Socrates suggests that those who do so have a correct understanding of the physical health of living organisms, in particular human organisms, and are rather successful in treating their patients.

This much is sufficiently clear. Nonetheless, there is disagreement as to whether these physicians are Greek,[100] and whether the bodily holism ascribed to them was a real medical theory or Plato's own invention. The former issue is easier to settle, for even though Socrates does not specify the ethnicity of the physicians in question at first, later in the prologue he says that, according to one of the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis, the teachings of the Greek [doctors][101] that he (sc. Socrates) 'was just talking about' were good so far as they went, but did not go nearly as far as the teachings of Zalmoxis himself (156d6–7). What Socrates 'was just talking about'[102] could only be the bodily holism of the 'good doctors'. Hence we can safely identify them with the Greek doctors that the Zalmoxian physician refers to.

But are these Greek doctors historical figures? Did any group of Greek doctors actually hold the theory dubbed as bodily holism? A passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* (269e–270d) might seem to suggest an affirmative answer to these questions. There, in an attempt to account for Pericles' exceptional rhetorical skill, Socrates suggests that the Athenian statesman became familiar with Anaxagoras' meteorology (269e–270a), thus acquired the ability to grasp the nature of mind and mindlessness, and applied Anaxagoras' cosmological theory for rhetorical purposes (270a). As the argument goes, this shows that to understand the nature of the soul (*psychês physin*) and become an expert orator, one must understand the nature of the whole (*tên tou holou physin*). Phaedrus adds that, according to Hippocrates, one must understand the nature of the whole in order to understand the nature of the body (270b–c). For his part, Socrates asserts that he accepts that view and promptly undertakes to give a more detailed description of what he presents as Hippocrates' own method. On one account, since the latter posits that we should consider whether the object under investigation is simple or complex, to determine the nature of the object, we should first divide a concept corresponding to reality as a whole into body and soul.[103] Then, assuming that the powers to act and to be acted upon are common to all things including bodies and souls, we should try to establish what causal powers the object of our investigation has and how it generally behaves.[104] Because of the holistic assumptions that appear to govern the aforementioned method, one might infer that the theory of bodily holism

[100] See, e.g., Bruell 1977, 147. [101] ἰατροί secl. Cobet. [102] ἃ νυνδὴ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον: 156d7.
[103] On this point, see the different approaches of Gill 2003 and Mansfeld 1980.
[104] The exact nature of this method is hugely controversial and has to do with the so-called Hippocratic question, but this topic lies beyond the scope of the present study.

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that Socrates attributes to the 'good doctors' is closely similar to the approach assigned to Hippocrates in the *Phaedrus*.

In fact, however, these two views are not closely comparable, nor can they be identified with each other. While in the *Phaedrus* Socrates' mention of Anaxagoras' meteorology strongly suggests that 'the whole' is the whole of nature as the Ionian philosophers conceived it,[105] in the *Charmides* the whole that the 'good doctors' refer to is the whole body of which, for example, the eyes or the head are parts. And while Socrates' account of the method of Hippocrates arguably implies the use of the method of division, his summary reference to the bodily holism of the Greek doctors does not include any such element. Rather, it evokes in a general way the approach adopted by the physicians who belong, broadly speaking, to the Rationalist tradition with regard to the relation between physiological theory and medical practice, i.e. that the theory should determine the choice and application of the treatment. According to Socrates, the 'good doctors' hold a theory, bodily holism, which shapes their healing practices. They believe that no healing can take place unless the part is treated together with the whole (156b6–c1) and dismiss as utter nonsense any attempt to do otherwise (156c1–3). In short, they seem quite dogmatic about the theoretical basis of medical treatment, and appear adamant in their conviction that the former should determine the latter. The fact that Socrates characterises them as 'good doctors' indicates that he considers them competent physicians with proper scientific training, as opposed to healers who learn what to do by trial and error.[106]

Socrates does not specify what exactly, according to his own claim, the Greek physicians take to be the connection between the whole and its parts. It seems that, on the view that Socrates ascribes to them, the parts of the human body and the body as a whole are functionally interconnected, and the unimpeded function of each part is dependent upon the healthy condition of the whole. But this does not explain how, precisely, the treatment of one's body as a whole causes the cure of a diseased part of that body. One possibility is that, according to Socrates, the 'good doctors' commit the fallacy of composition by assuming that the properties of the parts are the same as those of the whole. Another, more attractive hypothesis that Socrates may be pointing to is that the 'good doctors' defend bodily holism by appealing to underlying causes that are operative in the same way on the entire human body as well as every part of it. On the latter scenario, they would proceed much as the so-called Rationalist physicians are known to have proceeded: by giving a theoretical causal account of

[105] See Mansfeld 1980, 353–4. [106] See Frede 1987a, 231–2.

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everything occurring in the human body, and in particular of the diseases affecting the entire body or some part of it. Moreover, like many Rationalists,[107] they would be inclined to postulate that reason alone enables the doctor to determine the nature of the malady of a bodily part, find its deeper cause concerning the whole of the body, and, accordingly, prescribe the appropriate treatment.

Once he has sketched out the approach of the Greek physicians, Socrates asks Charmides whether he knows of their theory and practice (156c5–6) and whether he accepts it (156c8), and the youth answers affirmatively on both counts (156c7, 156c9). Given his young age, how plausible is it that he would know the 'good doctors' and their therapeutic principle? And even assuming that he did, how plausible is it that he would have considered their approach and endorsed it? On the one hand, we may think, since Charmides belonged to the upper class of Athenian society, he might have been exposed to informed talk about the physicians of the day and their methods of treatment. On the other, his emphatic assertion that he endorses the principle of bodily holism (156c8) could not have had a solid basis. Charmides was simply not in a position to make such a commitment, let alone make an informed comparative judgement according to which he preferred bodily holism to rival medical approaches (156c8).

In this instance too, then, the character of Charmides is cast in an ambiguous light. He may have overstated his inclination towards the holistic principle merely in order to encourage Socrates to say more about the leaf and the charm. Or he may be entirely clueless about the 'good doctors' and their method. In any case, the youth's unreserved approval of the principle of holism restores Socrates' confidence (156d1–2) and revives him, so to speak, by rekindling in him a different sort of fire (156d2–3): presumably, the ardent desire to elaborate further the idea of holistic health and thus prompt Charmides to engage in dialogue.

6 The Doctors of Zalmoxis: Psychosomatic Holism (156d3–157c6)

> Such, then, Charmides, is the nature of this incantation [or charm]. I learnt it over there, on campaign, from one of the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis, who are said even to aim at immortality.[108] This Thracian said that the

[107] See Frede 1987a, 225–42, and especially 234–5.

[108] Compare ἀθανατίζειν in Herodotus, *Hist.* IV.93–4. Van den Ben 1985, 11–14, argues that, in *Charm.* 156d6, ἀπαθανατίζειν is intransitive, whereas Murphy 2000 and others take it to be transitive. See nn. 111 and 112 in this chapter.

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> Greeks spoke well when they stated the doctrine that I have just mentioned. However, he said, Zalmoxis our king, who is a god, declares that, just as one should not attempt to treat the eyes without treating the head nor to treat the head without treating the body, so one should not treat the body without treating the soul. In fact, he said this was even the reason why most diseases evaded treatment by the Greek doctors, namely that they neglected the whole that they should have attended to, since when this does not fare well it is impossible for the part to fare well. For all evils and goods for the body and for the entire human being, he said, spring from the soul and flow from it, just as they flow from the head to the eyes. Hence this [sc. the soul] is what one ought to treat first and foremost, if the condition of the head and that of the rest of the body are going to be good as well. And the soul, my good friend, he said, is treated by means of certain charms or incantations, and these incantations are beautiful [or fine] discourses. Temperance derives from such discourses and is engendered in the soul, and once it has been engendered and is present, one can easily supply health to the head and to the rest of the body as well. So, as he was teaching me both the remedy and the incantations, he said, 'Let nobody persuade you to treat his own head with this remedy who has not first submitted his soul to be treated by you with the incantation'. For at present, he said, this is the error besetting men, that certain doctors attempt to manage without each of the two – that is, without both temperance and bodily health. And he very strongly instructed me not to allow anyone to convince me that I should act in a different way, regardless of how wealthy, brave, or handsome that person might be. As for myself, therefore, I shall do as he bids, since I have sworn an oath to him and must obey him. And if you decide, in accordance with the stranger's instructions, to submit your soul to be charmed first by means of the Thracian's incantations, I shall apply the remedy to your head. Otherwise, my dear Charmides, we would be at a loss as to what to do to help you. (156d3–157c6)

The main known source of information for the story of Zalmoxis is Herodotus' *History* (4.94–5).[109] In the first part of his account (4.94), Herodotus says that there is a tribe in Thrace, the Getae, who worship Zalmoxis (or, as Herodotus calls him, Salmoxis) and who *athanatizousin*,[110] 'are immortal' or 'make one immortal'.[111] In particular, they believe that they will never die, but will pass out of life and join

[109] Tuozzo 2011, 115–18, offers a detailed discussion of the relevant passages from Herodotus and the relation between their content and the content of Socrates' story. Since I am largely in agreement with his analysis, my own comments will be brief.

[110] ἀθανατίζουσι. As Tuozzo 2011, 116, remarks, we do not know Herodotus' sources for this part of the story.

[111] Compare ἀπαθανατίζειν at 156d6. In neither case is it clear whether the verb is intransitive or transitive. See the discussion immediately below and note 108.

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themselves to the god Zalmoxis. In the second part of his account (4.95), Herodotus says that, according to the Greeks of the Hellespont, Zalmoxis was a slave of Pythagoras who, upon gaining his freedom and great wealth, returned to his own country and convinced his fellow tribesmen about immortality in the following manner: after feasting with them and teaching them that neither he nor his fellow-symposiasts nor their descendants would ever die but would transmigrate to a place where they would enjoy all good things and live forever, he hid for three years in an underground chamber, thus making his followers believe that he had died, and then he reappeared to them as if he were returning from the netherworld. While Herodotus remains sceptical about the truth of that story, and especially about the issue of whether Zalmoxis was a man or a Thracian god, he refers us to the Greek institution of symposia in connection to a closed society that supposedly consisted of Zalmoxis and his drinking companions and promised immortality to the symposiasts as well as their descendants. We encounter similar ideas in the teachings of the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, which point to initiation cults and to other practices aiming to secure post-mortem existence and eternal bliss after death.[112]

Socrates' tale evidently relies on Herodotus, but also deviates from Herodotus' account in important ways. On the one hand, following Herodotus, Plato's Socrates preserves some of the language and connotations of mystery rites, and attributes to the aforementioned Thracian doctor the claims that Zalmoxis is a god and that the Zalmoxian physicians aim at immortality.[113] On the other hand, several elements in Herodotus are entirely absent from Socrates' story. Unlike Herodotus, Socrates does not mention the tribe of the Getae, does not explicitly refer to Pythagoras, does not allude to any possible connection between Zalmoxis and Pythagoras,[114] does not explain how Zalmoxis convinced his followers of his own divinity and of human immortality, and does not express any scepticism about the truthfulness of what the Thracian says. He modifies Herodotus' rare term '*athanatizein*' into '*apothanatizein*' – also a rare and ambiguous verb that may mean that the Zalmoxian doctors are themselves immortal or that they are capable of making others immortal.[115] Most importantly, he attributes to Zalmoxis and his followers a theory that Herodotus does not mention, i.e. a kind of holism that comprises the

[112] See Tuozzo 2011, 117. [113] ἀπαθανατίζουσιν at 156d6.
[114] Herodotus' cautious report that the Greeks of the Hellespont connected Zalmoxis to Pythagoras could be historically accurate, since the Hellenic populations of the Hellespont may well have been familiar with both Thracian and Pythagorean lore.
[115] See notes 108 and 112 in this chapter.

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soul as well as the body and thus is far more radical and more comprehensive than the bodily holism attributed to the Greek doctors. Those readers of the *Charmides* who are familiar with Herodotus' version of the story of Zalmoxis cannot miss the differences between these two narratives or fail to register that Plato's Socrates decisively distances himself from Herodotus in order to relay the Thracian's tale. Moreover, it is immediately apparent to Plato's audiences that the latter is structured so as to highlight central Socratic themes: the priority of the soul over the body, the causal powers of the soul for good or bad, the cardinal importance of taking care of the soul and of engendering virtue, belief in the soul's immortality, and perhaps some sort of deification. A closer examination of the Thracian's story will give us further insight into these themes and will disclose aspects of Socrates' pedagogical agenda.

Socrates places the encounter that he will relate to Charmides at a remote time and place, when he was on campaign in the north of Greece. Significantly, the first thing he says about the physician that he met there is that the latter was one of the believers in immortality. Thus he brings to the foreground the idea that the soul is infinitely more important than the body – an idea central to the criticism that the Thracian physician levels against the 'good doctors' on the basis of a therapeutic principle stated by Zalmoxis, his own king and a god. At the outset, we should note that, from this point onwards, the narrative moves at several levels simultaneously: the frame set by the narrator, the story told by Socrates as character, the principle stated by Zalmoxis, and the critical application and elaboration of that principle by Zalmoxis' follower. According to the Thracian, then, Zalmoxis, who is a divinity, articulated a kind of holism that goes far beyond the holism of certain Greek doctors on the grounds of an analogy with assumptions endorsed by these latter: as the eyes should not be treated apart from the head and the head should not be treated apart from the rest of the body, so the body should not be treated apart from the soul (156d8–e2).[116] Thus, Zalmoxis proposes a holism that concerns not only the body and its parts but also the soul, which, as it turns out, constitutes the core of Zalmoxian therapy.

The Thracian doctor's criticism of the aforementioned Greek doctors derives precisely from his endorsement of the Zalmoxian principle of psychosomatic holism. According to Socrates' narration, while the

[116] I take it that this view is traced back to Zalmoxis himself, while the rest of the story, including the criticism of the Greek doctors, is attributed to his Thracian follower (see 156c6–7). Consequently, I emend Burnet's comma after ψυχῆς at 156e2 to a semi-colon.

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Thracian approves of what Socrates 'was just saying' (156d7), i.e. the holism defended by the Greek doctors, he finds fault with them insofar as they concern themselves with the part, i.e. the body, but neglect to attend to the whole.[117] They profess to treat the whole together with the part, but mistakenly identify the whole with the body and the part with parts of the body, leaving out the patient's soul. They view each patient as a mere physical entity, whereas in fact he/she is a complex psycho-physical entity whose condition is causally determined by the powers of the soul. On the other hand, the physicians of Zalmoxis fully acknowledge the causal effects of the soul on the body and the whole human being. They view the soul as the source from which derives every good or evil for the body and the whole person (156e6–157a1). And while the Thracian leaves it uncertain whether the health of the soul is a sufficient condition for bodily health, he explicitly states that the former is a necessary condition for the latter: one's body cannot be healthy if one's soul is not. Therefore, the physicians of Zalmoxis are able to treat successfully many maladies that the Greek doctors cannot (156e3–4). In sum, Socrates relays that the Thracian doctor elaborated the central idea of Zalmoxian therapy mainly in terms of psychic causation. Leaving aside the details, the chief contention is clear: it is the soul and not the body that ought to constitute the principal object of therapy. Furthermore, the physician of Zalmoxis discloses to Socrates that the proper treatment of the soul consists in *epôdai*, incantations or charms, that he describes as 'beautiful [or fine] discourses'[118] without specifying, however, just what these discourses may be. And he also claims that such discourses engender *sôphrosynê* in the soul, strongly suggesting that this virtuous condition is equivalent to psychic health: if one's soul is temperate and thereby healthy, one's head and the rest of one's body will be healthy too (157a5–b1).

So much is quite straightforward, but if we examine the Thracian's story more closely, we find that it suffers from imprecision and residual tensions. First, the part/whole relation is problematic, if the body is taken to be the part and the soul is taken to be the whole. For in what sense could the soul be the whole? And if the soul is not the whole, what is? Second, does the presence of temperance in the soul always suffice in order to heal the body, or can the body suffer from some physical ailment even if the soul is temperate and healthy? Is Zalmoxian holism compatible with our intuitions about this issue? Third, even if we can figure out what kind of

[117] τὸ ὅλον ἀγνοοῖεν mss τοῦ ὅλου Burnet; τοῦ ἄλλου ἀμελοῖεν Stobaeus.
[118] τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλούς: 157a4–5.

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discourses are the 'beautiful discourses' constituting the charm, it is not clear to what extent the Thracian claims them to be effective. Are these discourses supposed to invariably instil temperance in the soul, or can they also fail to do so? Finally, why does Socrates mention that the doctors of Zalmoxis 'are immortal' or 'can make people immortal'? While the narrative suggests that there is some connection between Zalmoxian holism and the belief in immortality, neither Socrates nor the Thracian doctor state what that connection might be. These are controversial issues and I shall address them in turn.

Insofar as the holism of the Greek doctors is concerned, the part/whole relationship is relatively unproblematic. On the basis of Socrates' examples, we can infer that the part/whole relationship is primarily functional and holds, on the one hand, between different parts of the living body whose functions are directly related to each other and, on the other hand, between a part of the living body and the living body as an organic whole. To treat the eyes (part), the physician must also treat the head (whole), and to treat the head (part), he must also treat the patient's entire body (whole). Zalmoxian holism, however, introduces a new factor that complicates matters, namely the soul.[119] According to many interpreters, the principle articulated by Zalmoxis at 156b8–e2 implies that, as the eyes stand to the head and the head stands to the body, so the body stands to the soul. Therefore they infer that the soul is the whole of which the body is part, and the same holds for the Thracian doctor's contention that the Greek physicians frequently fail to cure their patients because they fail to realise that the part (the body or a bodily part) cannot be well unless the whole, i.e. the soul, is well.[120] The latter idea has seemed puzzling, reasonably so.[121] For it seems counterintuitive, if not plainly wrong, to view the soul as the whole of a human being. Moreover, the suggestion that the relation between the body and the soul is a part/whole relation is extremely problematic, not only because it is not clear in what sense the soul is a whole, but also because the body and the soul are widely believed to belong to different ontological categories. Therefore, it seems wrong to assume that they are related to each other as part to whole in the same way that, for example, the eyes and the head or the head and the body are

[119] On the sort of expertise that the doctors of Zalmoxis must be supposed to have, see Murphy 2000, 291–5 and Coolidge 1993, 26–7.

[120] The passages adduced in support of that claim include, notably, 156e2–6 and 157a3.

[121] See, notably, Anagnostopoulos 1972; Hazebroucq 1997; Hogan 1976; Levine 2016; McPherran 2004; Rowe 1998, 88; Steiner 1992; and Tuozzo 2011, 118–21. Tuozzo 2011, 118–21, offers a survey of the competing views. A different sort of survey is given by Korobili and Stefou in press.

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related to each other as part to whole. Further worries concern the compatibility of the idea that the soul is the whole while the body or the person is the part with the Thracian doctor's claim that the soul is the source of every good or evil for the body and the whole person. Various attempts to wriggle out of these problems, sometimes by proposing metaphorical readings of the passage, have proved futile.[122] The tensions remain, even when the Zalmoxian principle is rephrased in metaphorical terms.

One line of interpretation that might ease such tensions is this. According to the principle of Zalmoxian holism, the whole/part relationship is not metaphysical, but psychological and causal. Thus, perhaps the soul could be considered a whole just in the sense that the health of everything about one's body and generally one's person (156e7–8) depends on and is caused by the condition of the soul. If so, the Thracian's claim that the soul is a whole would not be very vulnerable to the objection that, in truth, the soul is only a part of ourselves as living beings, not the whole of ourselves. One's acceptance of the contention that the soul is a whole in the psychological/causal sense indicated above depends on one's endorsement of the view that the soul has causal priority over the body and the entire human being. If one accepts that the soul is the ultimate source of the goods and evils that affect every aspect of our being, including our physical health, one might also be inclined to accept that the soul represents the whole of us in just that sense. An alternative line of interpretation might have metaphysical dimensions. In the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, and *Alcibiades* I, Socrates suggests that the soul is identical with the self. If so, the soul could be considered a whole in the sense that it is essentially who one is, whereas the body or the human being (viewed compositionally as the sum of its constituents) would correspond to a part or aspect of oneself but not to one's whole self.[123] The aforementioned dialogues might be brought to

[122] As Korobili and Stefou in press remark, the interpretations of this passage can be divided, roughly, into three groups. Namely, some of them downplay or disregard the part/whole relationship but focus on the causal priority of the soul over the body. Others retain the part/whole relationship, identify the whole with the living human being as a soul/body composite, and take the Zalmoxian approach to entail that if a (body) part is to be well, both that part and the whole of us as a soul/body composite must be treated together. Yet other interpretations try, in different ways, to ascribe equal importance to the part/whole relation and the causal priority of the soul. Tuozzo 2011, 119–22, proposes an operative distinction between πᾶν and ὅλον, according to which the latter term refers to something beyond the mere sum of the parts, whereas the former term refers merely to the sum of the different parts constituting the whole. A similar approach but on the basis of different premises is defended by Korobili and Stefou in press.

[123] According to McPherran 2004, 18–21, we may think of the bodiless soul as an eyeless head: it can think but cannot see the world. However, it governs the body and acts as 'the ordering intelligence and animating principle of the whole person'.

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bear on our passage in order to *both* determine a sense in which the soul can be the whole *and* strengthen the connection between Zalmoxian holism and the belief in immortality. Whether the priests of Zalmoxis believe that they themselves are immortal and/or able to make others immortal, immortality entails the perennial survival of the self. Assuming that the self is identical with the soul, the principle of attending to the soul before attending to the body or anything else amounts to an exhortation to take care of one's self and thus gain eternal life.

Despite their merits, both these lines of interpretation face a major problem: they require a sense of 'whole' that is unattested and may even be impossible. So far as I can tell, the only way of circumventing that problem is to reject the claim that, according to Zalmoxian holism, the soul's causal primacy follows from its being a whole.[124] When the Thracian doctor accuses the Greek physicians of failing to cure their patients because they fail to realise that the well-being of the part depends on the well-being of the whole, and because they attend to the body but neglect the soul, he does not mean to equate the soul with the whole. Neglecting the soul is neglecting the whole not because the soul is the whole, but perhaps just because if you neglect a part (the soul), you can't be taking care of the whole (yourself as a human being). On such a reading, the soul is causally prior not because it is the whole, but because of other considerations that the Zalmoxian physician does not develop but that are familiar to Plato's readers, e.g. that the soul is the natural ruler of the body or that the soul is the self. If so, the series of analogical relations at 156e1–2 need not be mereological but could be, so to speak, contextualisations: you can't take care of any part of yourself unless you see it in a broader, holistic context; this crucially involves paying attention to the all-important aspect of you that is the soul.

Turning now to the incantation consisting of 'the beautiful discourses' (*hoi kaloi logoi*: 157a4–5), it seems to me virtually certain that these are philosophical arguments conducted by the dialectical method of question-and-answer and aiming to discover or approximate the truth.[125] Socrates declares that he will follow the instructions of the Thracian doctor and won't administer the medicine for the head unless the patient first submits his soul to Socrates to be charmed by means of the incantation (157b2–4).

[124] I am indebted to David Sedley for this suggestion and for written comments.

[125] On the quasi-magical power of Socratic discourses, see *Meno* 80a. Many authors assume that the καλοὶ λόγοι mentioned here are equivalent to Socratic dialectic (Reece 1998, 74). On the other hand, doubts about this identification have been expressed by McPherran 2004, 23–6 and Schmid 1998, 15.

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Charmides decides to do so (158e4–5), and what follows soon afterwards is, precisely, the treatment of Charmides' soul by means of the Socratic method of dialectical argumentation.[126] The intended result of this treatment is, specifically, to instil *sôphrosynê* in the patient's soul (157a5–6), for its presence in the soul 'already makes it easy to procure health for the head as well as the rest of the body' (157a6–b1).

Whether the 'beautiful discourses' are necessary or sufficient to engender *sôphrosynê* in the soul is debated. However, I suggest that a glance beyond the dialogue frame of the *Charmides* to the relevant historical facts confirms that 'the beautiful arguments' cannot guarantee the desired result. Even though Charmides probably enjoyed for a while the privilege of conversing with Socrates, he did not become virtuous. As for the vexed question of whether the healing of the soul by means of 'beautiful arguments' can also establish complete physical health, I think that it cannot be decisively settled. According to the Thracian physician, the treatment of the soul cures many diseases that the Greek doctors cannot cure (156e3–6); we may surmise, therefore, that, in these cases, the cure of the soul is necessary in order to cure the relevant physical ailments. However, it does not follow that every bodily ailment can be healed through the treatment of the soul. Nor does it follow that a person with a healthy soul can never be affected by a malady of the body. Socrates phrases the interim conclusion of his tale very carefully indeed. He says that the presence of *sôphrosynê* in the soul 'already makes it easy'[127] to bring about bodily heath. But he neither says nor implies that temperance necessarily brings about physical well-being. Rather, he seems to allow for the supposition that a psychologically healthy person could suffer from some bodily ailment that requires independent medical treatment.

Socrates' binding oath to follow the Thracian's instructions regarding the administration of the drug prevents him from giving the drug to Charmides straightaway. For while he knows the youth to be well born,

[126] According to the study of Laín Entralgo 1970, 108–38, this is one of the many instances in which Plato's Socrates deliberately rationalises for philosophical purposes the *epodai*, conjurations, commonly attributed to magicians and charlatans. Contrary to Boyancé 1937 or Dodds 1951, Laín Entralgo contends that this semantic shift is not a simple metaphor, i.e. an arbitrary verbal linking of two items completely different from each other, but presupposes a substantive similarity between the magic ἐπωδαί and the charm of οἱ καλοὶ λόγοι: the idea that there is power inherent in the word itself, which, under the appropriate set of circumstances, can bring about the desirable effect. On the basis of the story of Zalmoxis as well as other Platonic passages, Laín Entralgo concludes that Plato is the inventor of scientific (κατὰ τέχνην) verbal psychotherapy. It is worth noting that, on this latter approach, the tale of the Zalmoxian charm implies recognition, on Plato's part, that the soul has both rational and irrational aspects.

[127] ῥᾴδιον ἤδη: 157a7.

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wealthy, and beautiful (157b8), he does not know yet whether the latter has *sôphrosynê* and he therefore cannot give to Charmides the leaf curing the headache without first submitting his soul to the Zalmoxian incantations (157b7–c6). So, he invites Charmides to make a choice: submit himself to the charm of Zalmoxis, or receive no treatment at all. In this manner he highlights a crucial element of philosophical therapy: the decision to entrust oneself to the healer must be the patient's own. Critias' own reaction to what Socrates proposes is both revealing and important.

> Socrates, he said, if on account of his head Charmides will also be forced to improve his mind, then the malady of the head would turn out to have been for the young man a gift of Hermes [sc. an unexpected piece of good luck]. But let me tell you that Charmides is believed to surpass his peers not only in bodily looks, but also in the very thing that you claim to have the incantation for – you say it is temperance, do you not? – I do indeed, I said. – Well then, you must know that he is believed to be by far the most temperate youth of the day, while, considering his age, in every other respect too he is second to none. (157c7–d8)

On the one hand, Critias implicitly congratulates himself on the success of his own ruse: because Socrates enacted the role of a doctor able to treat the headache, Charmides is likely to receive a much greater benefit, namely to improve his mind (*dianoia*) by means of the beautiful arguments that he will be treated with (157c7–d1). On the other hand, however, Critias undercuts the idea that his ward stands in need of improvement. For he declares that the youth excels not only in beauty, but also in *sôphrosynê*, i.e. the very quality that the beautiful arguments are supposed to engender in the soul (157d1–8). In any event, unlike Socrates who gives Charmides the choice of accepting or declining the proposed treatment, Critias uses the language of passivity and compulsion. He remarks that, if the young man is compelled[128] to become better in respect of his *dianoia*, mind, this will be a stroke of luck for him (157c7–d1). This phrasing intimates that the young man's mind will be improved mainly by external factors, without the active participation of Charmides himself. It will be a lucky side-effect of the therapy that he will receive for his morning headaches, not a goal that he will independently value and pursue for its own sake. Furthermore, Critias does not specify exactly how he expects his ward's mind to be improved by the incantation. While the charm of Zalmoxis aims at the treatment of *psychê*, soul, Critias speaks about the betterment of his ward's '*dianoia*', mind. If Critias uses this word as a synonym for 'soul', there would be

[128] ἀναγκασθήσεται: 157c9.

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reason to believe that Critias' appreciation of 'beautiful arguments' coincides with Socrates' own: such *logoi* can instil virtue in the soul and bring about psychic health. If, however, Critias means that the fine arguments of the charm will serve to sharpen Charmides' wits and make him a more skilful debater, then his conception of the relevant *logoi* would be instrumental and pragmatic and, in all likelihood, different from Socrates' own. In the latter case, the youth's improvement would have little to do with moral advancement and self-understanding, whereas in the former case the opposite would hold true. In sum, already at this early stage of the dialogue, we may begin forming the suspicion that, despite their long-standing acquaintance and familiarity, Socrates and Critias may have very different views about the ultimate purpose of the practice of *dialegesthai* and the arguments developed in the course of a dialectical investigation. Relatedly, we may also suspect that these two characters have different conceptions of virtue, of psychic therapy, and of the importance of this latter for one's well-being. These suspicions will be confirmed as the action of the dialogue unfolds.

7 In Praise of Charmides (157d9–158c4)

> Of course, I said, it is only right, Charmides, that you should surpass the others in all such things. For I don't suppose that anyone else here could easily point to a case of two such Athenian families united together and likely to produce offspring more beautiful or nobler than those you have sprung from. For your father's family, the house of Critias son of Dropides, has been praised for us according to tradition by Anacreon, Solon, and many other poets for excelling in both beauty and virtue and everything else called happiness. Again, your mother's family is also praised in the same way. For it is said of your uncle Pyrilampes that no one in the entire continent[129] was believed to be superior in beauty or influence whenever he came as an ambassador to the Great King or anyone else in the continent, and this whole side of the family is viewed as not in the least inferior to the other side. Since you have sprung from such ancestors, it seems likely that you will be first in all things. And indeed, dear son of Glaucon, you seem to me not to have fallen behind any of your ancestors in any respect with regard to your looks. But if, in addition, you have sufficiently grown in respect of temperance and those other qualities as your guardian here says, then, I said, dear Charmides, your mother gave birth to a blessed son. (157d9–158b4)

[129] Ast (1819–32) followed by Croiset 1921 and Sprague 1973 remove the phrase τῷ ἐν τῇ ἠπείρῳ at 158a5, while I follow the manuscript reading, as does Lamb 1927.

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Socrates' short eulogy of Charmides' house is sincere[130] as well as effective. It points to some well-known facts about Charmides' noble origins, which are also Critias' origins and Plato's own. And it has a twin function. On the one hand, it gives reasons why Critias and many of his contemporaries probably took for granted that Charmides would be good as well as beautiful and perceived him as of great promise for the future of Athens. On the other hand, the eulogy is crafted so as to suggest that Socrates distances himself from these assumptions and is sceptical both regarding the true worth of Charmides' ancestors and their achievements, and regarding the expectations that the latter might raise about the young man himself. For the purposes of illustration, let us look, selectively, at certain features of the encomium.

At the outset, we should note that many of the statements made in the speech represent the beliefs and perceptions commonly associated with the aristocratic segment of Athenian society rather than with Plato's Socrates. They are descriptive rather than prescriptive, and convey what the general run of Athenians may have considered likely, not what Socrates expects will happen. Thus, when Socrates says at the beginning of the speech that it is right (*dikaion*) that Charmides would be superior to the other lads of his age in temperance and all such things, he need not be understood as placing the youth under the ethical obligation of maintaining the reputation of his noble house.[131] Rather, he expresses a social norm that a young aristocrat like Charmides probably endorses. 'It is likely' (*ek tôn eikotôn*: 157e3), says Socrates, that the offspring of two such houses will be second to none (157e1–4). He does not say what *he* thinks; he merely repeats an aristocratic commonplace according to which virtue as well as beauty is treated as a hereditary property passing from one generation to the next within the same house. The reason is probably pedagogical: he hopes to motivate the young man to do as well as he can in the conversation to follow.

Socrates' remarks concerning the two sides of Charmides' family exhibit a similar pattern. He relays some of the praise heaped by tradition[132] on both sets of the youth's ancestors, but does not disclose his own opinion on the matter. Moreover, he focuses his remarks on the beauty (*kallos*) and excellence or virtue (*aretê*) attributed to Charmides' forerunners,[133] but he

[130] Bruell 1977, 150, claims that Socrates' words indicate 'how unlikely it was that a youth with so much to puff him up (not to mention Critias as a guardian) should be moderate in any sense'. Also, van der Ben 1985, 22–3, considers much of the praise ironical.

[131] *Contra* van der Ben 1985, 21–2.

[132] ἐγκεκωμιασμένη παραδέδοται ἡμῖν: 157e7.

[133] Recall that Critias has described Charmides as 'very beautiful and good' (πάνυ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός: 154e4).

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does not clarify whether these qualifications concern their character or their worldly achievements. Thus, he leaves room for one to wonder whether the beauty of these people or their admirable works need to go together with moral goodness. As Socrates remarks, on the side of Charmides' father, the line of Critias, son of Dropides,[134] is an extremely distinguished one. Not only has the family been praised by many poets, it also counts amongst its members one of the greatest poets of the archaic age: Solon the Athenian,[135] whose patriotic verses defend the reforms that he effected as a statesman and whose laws constitute the foundation of Athenian democracy. Thus, Solon is celebrated as both a statesman and a poet, and his reputation as one of the Seven Sages could intimate that he is a philosopher as well. As on an earlier occasion (154e1–155a1),[136] so at present Socrates points to the fact that the gifts of beauty and virtue are commonly viewed as Charmides' rightful inheritance. And, given the family connection with Solon and other eminent men, Charmides is probably expected to eventually participate in politics and distinguish himself in that domain as well.[137] However, Socrates does not reveal whether he himself admires the house of Critias for the reasons that Anacreon and other poets give. While these latter honour Charmides' paternal ancestors 'as excelling in beauty and virtue and everything else called happiness' (157e7–158a1), we cannot be sure that Socrates agrees that these men were virtuous or happy.

The part of the speech that concerns the maternal side of Charmides' lineage puts us on guard in a similar manner. While 'it is said' (158a3) of Pyrilampes[138] that, whenever he visited the Great King or some other eminent person on the Asian continent,[139] he was universally 'believed

[134] This Critias was Critias' grandfather. Both the father and the great-grandfather of Critias the elder (Dropides I and Dropides II, respectively) were archons of Athens. Solon was a near-contemporary of Dropides II (see also next note). Information gathered from a vast variety of sources is found in Nails 2002, 106–13.

[135] While later sources claim that Solon was a brother of Dropides (Critias' great-grandfather) and hence a direct ancestor of Critias and Plato, other sources indicate that, in fact, Solon was a distant relation and a family friend (cf. συγγενείας: *Charm*. 155a3; οἰκεῖος: *Tim*. 20e1).

[136] When Socrates proposed that they strip Charmides' soul in order to examine whether it is beautiful (154e1–7), Critias replied that in respect of his soul too his ward is both beautiful and good (154e4) and, moreover, that he is philosophical and most poetic (154e8–155a1). In reply, Socrates made the comment that, in truth, beauty (*to kalon*) has been present in their family for a long time because of their kinship with Solon (155a2–3).

[137] See Tulli 2000, 260–3.

[138] Pyrilampes was Plato's stepfather and an eminent member of Pericles' circle.

[139] Socrates refers to the Asian continent and in particular to the Persian empire: cf. van den Ben 1985, 22. As the latter remarks, the translations 'de la Grèce' and 'in the country', by Croiset 1921 and Sprague 1973, respectively, do not make sense in the present context.

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to' (158a3) excel in beauty and greatness, we are not told whether Socrates too considers Pyrilampes a truly great man. There is no indication that Socrates is speaking ironically in this instance.[140] He truthfully states that Pyrilampes was hugely respected as an envoy and greatly admired for his excellence, and this statement has an obvious psychological and pedagogical function. It simply would not be expedient for his purposes to disclose his own opinion about the value of a worldly reputation or about Pyrilampes' true deserts. Nonetheless, he does flag his reluctance to take anything entirely for granted regarding Charmides' prospects. For he says that, since the youth comes from such stock, 'it is likely' (*eikos*: 158a7) that he will be first in all things. But what is likely need not come to pass.[141]

Subsequently, however, Socrates does allude to his own attitude towards the praise traditionally bestowed upon Charmides' family and the expectations commonly entertained about the youth's future. By implicitly contrasting physical beauty, which Charmides has obviously inherited from his ancestors (158a7–b2), and moral virtue, which the youth may or may not sufficiently possess (158b2–4), Socrates underscores the hereditary character of the former as opposed to the latter. Even assuming that Charmides' forefathers were virtuous, as the tradition wants it, there is no guarantee that Charmides too is sufficiently endowed with virtue and, therefore, this question must be pressed further. Furthermore, consistently with the emphasis that Socrates earlier put on the beauty of the soul vis-à-vis the beauty of the body (154d3–e3) and his expressed desire to strip and examine Charmides' soul (154e5–7), he now discloses to the latter that he considers virtue or, specifically, temperance[142] of supreme importance for happiness (158b2–4) but says nothing about the role of physical beauty in that regard. Then, in the closing sentences of the speech, he presents Charmides with the following challenge:

> The situation is this: if temperance is already present in you, as Critias here asserts, and if you are sufficiently temperate, you would no longer have any need of the incantations of Zalmoxis or of Abaris the Hyperborean,[143] but

[140] *Contra* van den Ben 1985, 22–3, who claims that 'there is then strong irony in Socrates' words, in that the Persian king taken as a measure by which to judge a man is at the farthest remove from Platonic standards'.

[141] Compare *Lach.* 179b–d, *Prot.* 319e–320b, *Tht.* 142d.

[142] καὶ πρὸς σωφροσύνην καὶ πρὸς τἆλλα: 158b3.

[143] According to legend, Abaris was a physician, magician, and prophet of Apollo, who visited various parts of Greece sometime in the early eighth century BC carrying a golden arrow, Apollo's gift, curing the sick, foretelling the future, working miracles, and purifying individuals and towns from various kinds of pollution. The golden arrow also gave him the power to fly and to be invisible. Plato is the first known author to use the attribute 'Hyperborean', someone from the far North, the

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> should be given the headache remedy itself straightaway. But if, on the other hand, you appear to be still lacking in them [sc. temperance and the other such qualities], you must have the incantations sung to you before you are given the drug. So, tell me yourself whether you agree with our friend here and declare that you already participate sufficiently in temperance, or whether you are deficient in it. (158b5–c4)

Like many other passages in the dialogue, this excerpt, taken together with the preceding lines (158a7–b5), is susceptible to a metaphysically neutral or, alternatively, metaphysically laden reading. For it contains words and phrases that Plato's readers may but need not associate with the so-called theory of Forms. On the one hand, Socrates can be taken to say, simply, that Charmides is in no way inferior to his ancestors regarding 'what is visible of the form' (*ta horômena tês ideas*: 158a7–b1), i.e. the perceptible beauty of his bodily appearance as opposed to the imperceptible beauty of his soul. Indeed, nothing further is required in order to make sense of what Socrates tells Charmides in this instance. On the other hand, however, the phrase 'what is visible of the form' can be taken to refer, proleptically, to Charmides' physical beauty as an empirical instantiation of the Form of Beauty or Beauty itself. Defenders of this approach reasonably point out that Socrates does not merely ask the young man whether he is sufficiently temperate, but uses the verb *metechein*, participate – a verb frequently employed by Plato in a technical sense to convey the relation between empirical particulars and the corresponding Forms. This interpretation too is self-standing and receives some support from the text. On either reading, Socrates' challenge to Charmides amounts to this: would he be willing to confirm his guardian's assertion on his behalf, namely that he excels in temperance with regard to all his peers (157d1–4)? Is he in a position to assert that, at this early age,[144] he has a sufficient share in that virtue (158c3–4)?

These are extremely hard questions for Charmides to address: is temperance present in you[145] or not? Do you claim to have enough of it or not?

domain beyond, the realm of the North Wind. Abaris figures also in the Neoplatonist tradition, and a connection is drawn between him and Pythagoras insofar as it is said that he eventually gave Apollo's arrow to Pythagoras. According to the Suda, Abaris wrote on Scythian oracles. It is possible that, in the passage cited here, Plato appeals to some kind of mythical connection between Abaris and Zalmoxis, the North, Thrace, and conceivably Scythia as well, and even to a common religious and medical tradition in those areas. Or, one might interpret Socrates' summary reference to both Zalmoxis (whom he has discussed in some detail) and Abaris (whom he mentions here for the first and only time) as an indication that we should disregard the quasi-historical aspects of these legendary characters and focus on the philosophical message that Socrates wishes to convey.

[144] ἤδη: 158c3.

[145] πάρεστιν (158b5) – this is another verb that Plato sometimes uses in a technical sense to indicate the presence of a Form in some way.

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Are you really a good person or not? A person so young would be unlikely to have reflected on such matters, let alone have formed settled views about them. In addition, as Charmides will soon confess, he finds himself in a socially awkward situation and cannot see how to get out of it. Furthermore, the way in which Socrates phrases his query and, in particular, the vocabulary that he uses raise complications that Charmides is unable to discern or pursue, e.g. whether there can be different degrees of participation in temperance or what it could mean to have 'sufficient temperance' in oneself. Readers who are interested in such problems are directed towards the *Parmenides*, while Charmides is left to decide how to react to the challenge before him.

8 The Best Method of Enquiry (158c5–159a10)

> First, Charmides blushed at this and looked even more beautiful than before, for his modesty became his youth. Then, he replied in quite a dignified manner. He remarked that it would not be easy at present either to affirm or to deny what he was being asked. – For if, he went on, I deny being temperate, I shall both be doing something absurd in saying that about myself and be showing Critias here and, as he claims, many others who consider me temperate to be liars. If, on the other hand, I affirm that I am temperate and praise myself, perhaps this will appear offensive. So, I cannot decide what answer I should give you. – Charmides, I said, your answer seems to me reasonable. And I think, I continued, that we should examine in common whether or not you already have what I am enquiring about, to save you from being forced to say what you do not wish to say, and me, for my own part, from applying myself to medicine in a thoughtless manner. Thus, if it is agreeable to you, I am willing to pursue the question together with you, but otherwise let us leave it aside. – Nothing, he said, could be more agreeable. To this end, therefore, do proceed with the enquiry in whatever way you think is better. (158c5–e5)

The *aporia*, puzzle, expressed in this passage motivates the method that Socrates will introduce a little later as the 'best method' for the enquiry that is about to begin. The puzzle itself is articulated by Charmides in reaction to the question asked by Socrates, namely whether or not the youth believes himself to be sufficiently temperate. The exchange between these two characters yields further insights into their portrayals, and reveals something about Socrates as narrator as well.

Charmides expresses his perplexity in terms of a classic aporetic dilemma. He can see exactly two alternatives, neither of which appears acceptable. It seems that he should neither assert that he is temperate nor

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declare that he is not, for, as he believes, highly undesirable consequences are attached to each of these options.[146] What are these consequences? And what may they reveal about the young man's character and values? On the one hand, he considers it improper to say something pejorative about himself or undermine the credibility of his guardian, while, on the other, he wishes to avoid giving the appearance of singing his own praises. Charmides, then, has a keen sense of self-worth, of the behaviour that a youth of his rank is expected to have, and of what he owes to himself and others, including of course his own cousin and guardian. So, he is portrayed as temperate in this traditional sense: he knows who he is and what he owes to himself and others, and behaves accordingly in a decent and composed manner. For his own part, Socrates indicates that he considers the youth's answer appropriate if measured by social standards. In his role as character, he remarks that what Charmides says seems reasonable (*eikota*: 158d7), namely that he ought not to slander himself, expose his guardian, or appear boastful. Moreover, in his capacity as narrator, Socrates comments that, on that occasion, the youth spoke *ouk agennôs* (158c7), i.e. not without dignity or modesty. If either or both of these features capture what temperance really is,[147] it would seem that Charmides has the virtue.

In fact, Socrates confirms that Charmides has at least one of these characteristics, namely a disposition to be modest or feel shame (*to aischyntêlon*: 158c6), for when he asked Charmides if he was sufficiently temperate, the young man blushed.[148] Typically, blushing is taken to be a manifestation of feelings of shame or embarrassment caused by one's perception of oneself as violating some social value that one considers wrong to disregard or transgress.[149] This is precisely the circumstance that Charmides finds himself in.[150] He blushes because he feels ashamed either to call himself intemperate (men of his origins and upbringing would condemn such an act of self-humiliation) or to boast about himself

[146] Note that Charmides leaves out the sufficiency requirement, presumably because he is not aware of its possible implications. He does not put to himself the question of whether or not he is sufficiently temperate (or, equivalently, whether or not he sufficiently participates in temperance), but the question of whether or not he is temperate simpliciter.

[147] In due course, Charmides will define temperance, first, as a sort of quietness, i.e. doing everything (including *dialegesthai*: 159b4) in a calm and decorous manner (159b2–6), and then as modesty or a sense of shame (160e3–5). See Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

[148] ἀνερυθριάσας: 158c5.

[149] On the nature of shame and its relation to guilt, see the classic discussion by Williams 1986.

[150] E.g. Benardete 1986, 18, takes the blush on Charmides' cheeks as an outward manifestation of a modest disposition.

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(most members of his social milieu would consider this distasteful). At first glance, therefore, Charmides' measured and thoughtful reply to Socrates appears to vindicate Critias' earlier assertion that his ward is both beautiful and good (154e4). The great beauty of his body seems matched by a beautiful soul. Indeed, as Socrates suggests, what appeared like psychic beauty did enhance the beauty of the young man's physical form. The blush on his face made him appear even more beautiful than he did before 'for his modesty became his youth' (158c6).[151]

But is the sort of modesty made manifest on the youth's rosy cheeks the same thing as psychic beauty? Is it the same thing as temperance? Neither the characters of the dialogue nor its readers are presently in a position to give an answer. We need to wait and see and, in fact, we have some reasons to withhold judgement as to whether Charmides is temperate. For, according to the narration, he is not perplexed about the truth of the matter, i.e. whether he really has temperance, but about how to speak and what to say in order to avoid exposing himself and his guardian. He seems to hesitate not because he realises that it is terribly important and terribly difficult to discover the condition of his own soul, but because he wants to observe certain social norms but is not sure as to how to apply them.[152] It is possible, though by no means certain, that the message of the Thracian doctor has been lost on him. Nevertheless, Socrates encourages him to go on.

We should pause for a moment to consider Socrates' double role in that scene. First, there is continuity between Socrates as character and Socrates as narrator insofar as, in both these capacities, he notes the causal effect that a feature of Charmides' soul has on the beauty of his body and thus lends support to the central intuition of Zalmoxian holism. Also, we have had the opportunity to observe Socrates' subtlety as a pedagogue. Even though he must have registered the mundane nature of Charmides' puzzlement, he finds something positive to say, i.e. that the youth's concerns seemed quite reasonable (158d7), and he turns Charmides' perplexity to pedagogical advantage. His message is this: the situation as you describe it, Charmides, is delicate and it is perfectly natural for you to feel at a loss; but perhaps I can help you, so let us make a joint effort to find out whether

[151] On this point, see the subtle analysis by Woolf 2019.

[152] Some interpreters claim that Charmides is concealing something, but disagree as to what the concealed element is. McAvoy 1996, 74, suggests that Charmides' blush is an involuntary expression of something kept hidden, namely a kind of bashfulness indicating a tendency towards philosophy. Others, however, contend that the youth shows no inclination to philosophy, but believes himself to be temperate and puzzles over how to say this in a decent manner.

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you have temperance. This move is calculated to put the young man at ease: he will probably feel less pressure if he knows that he won't be alone in his search for an answer. Furthermore, Socrates stresses that the success or failure of the investigation crucially depends on the youth's attitude. Only if the youth finds the prospect of a joint endeavour congenial (*philon*: 158e3) will Socrates wish to pursue it (158e3).[153] Recall that Zalmoxian therapy can have an effect only on condition that the patient freely chooses to engage with the doctor. In the opposite case, the doctor's remedies are bound to be ineffective (158e1–2).

For his own part, Charmides reacts in a positive and promising manner. He declares that nothing could be more congenial to him and urges Socrates to use whatever method of enquiry he deems better (158e4–5). Even so, we cannot be sure about his motivation for speaking in that way. On the one hand, his enthusiasm could be sincere and due to a genuine inclination towards philosophy. After all, according to Critias, he regards himself as a philosopher as well as a poet (154e8–155a1). On the other, Charmides is well aware of his guardian's wish to bring him close to Socrates and have him converse with the latter. By showing himself eager to do so, he knows that he is fulfilling Critias' expectations and winning his approval. We cannot exclude either of these options, nor can we rule out the possibility that a combination of these motives is prompting the young man to appear eager to contribute to the investigation. In any event, since he gives Socrates a free hand to proceed as he deems better (*beltion*: 158e5), his interlocutor outlines the following method:

> The best method of enquiry into this matter, I said, seems to me to be the following. It is quite evident that if temperance is present in you, you can express some belief about it. For if it really resides in you, wherever it resides, it must provide a sensation [or an awareness] from which you can hold a belief about it, namely what temperance is and what kind of thing it is. Do you not think so? – Yes, I do, he replied. – And since you know how to speak Greek, I said, you could also, I suppose, express it, saying what it appears to you to be. – Perhaps, he said. – So, in order that we may guess whether it is in you or not, tell me, I said, what you declare temperance to be according to your own belief. (158e6–159a10)[154]

This passage effects the transition from the prologue to the first part of the dialectical investigation constituting the main body of the dialogue, i.e. the

[153] εἰ οὖν σοι φίλον, ἐθέλω σκοπεῖν μετὰ σοῦ· εἰ δὲ μή, ἐᾶν: 158e3.

[154] Van der Ben 1985, 23, takes τοῦτό γε ὅ οἴει to be the grammatical object of ἄν εἴποις and maintains that the expression αὐτὸ ὅτι σοι φαίνεται is epexegetic of τοῦτό γε οἴει. See his criticism of Lamb's translation *ad loc*.

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round between Socrates and Charmides. For Socrates now suggests that the optimal method for discovering whether the youth has temperance is for them to examine together what Charmides believes to be the answer to the so-called 'what is X?' question: what temperance is and what kind of thing it is. To put it differently, they need to jointly examine what Charmides will propose as the definition of temperance. Nonetheless, the 'best method' (as I shall call it from now onwards) requires clarification regarding its scope and purpose, the argument that it entails, and the psychological and cognitive concepts that it involves. I think that these are the issues that we primarily need to address: is the method supposed to be 'best' without qualification or optimal just for the particular task at hand? What relations obtain between the presence of temperance in oneself, one's *aisthesis* (awareness, sensation, or feeling) of that virtue, and one's *doxa* (belief) about its nature? Why does Socrates mention *hellenizein*, speaking Greek, in this context? In the end, is Socrates' choice of method defensible? Is it really optimal? And if it is, in what way?

Regarding the method's scope and intent, there is no reason to suppose that Socrates proposes it as the 'best method' in every context and circumstance. Rather, he favours it on this particular occasion for a number of different reasons. Psychologically and pedagogically, the path that Socrates proposes answers Charmides' concern to avoid saying something disgraceful or immodest about himself. For the question that Charmides is now asked to address is not whether he is temperate, but rather what he takes temperance to be.[155] He does not feel forced any more to make an evaluative judgement that could expose him or his guardian to derision or ridicule. Instead, he has been offered an alternative and unexceptional way of submitting himself to dialectical scrutiny.[156] Philosophically, despite claims to the contrary, the method under discussion is neither indefensible nor arbitrary.[157] In fact, Socrates' outline of the method implies an argument explaining how the latter is supposed to work. We shall look at this argument immediately below, but it should be mentioned at the outset that Socrates does not justify, severally or jointly, its premises

[155] Compare Bruell 1977, 152: 'Charmides apparently would never be required to reveal his belief as to whether he possessed moderation; they would examine only the fact of possession or non-possession'.

[156] Solère-Queval 1993, 12, stresses the pedagogical dimension of Socrates' method as well as its modest epistemological requirements. In her view, Socrates asks Charmides to spell out his δόξα (belief) and not his ἐπιστήμη (expert or scientific knowledge) about the nature of temperance because he assumes that whatever Charmides says will be grounded on αἴσθησις (sensation) and, hence, will not qualify as a knowledge claim.

[157] On the relation between the dramatic and the philosophical elements related to the 'best method', see the brief comments by Bruell 1977, 152–3, Solère-Queval 1993, 12–13, and Taylor 1926, 49–50.

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and assumptions. Therefore, the attempt to reconstruct and discuss it must involve a certain degree of speculation.

The argument, I submit, goes as follows. (P1) If one has *sôphrosynê*, one must[158] also have an *aisthêsis*, i.e. some sort of awareness, sensation, or feeling[159] about it: a feeling about what temperance is and what kind of thing it is, i.e. what it is like to have it (159a3). (P2) And if one has such a feeling, one already has formed, or should be able to form, also a belief (*doxa*) about it (159a2).[160] (C) Evidently, then,[161] if temperance is present in Charmides, he should have, or should be expected to have,[162] an opinion about the nature of the virtue and what it is like.[163] It is clear that Socrates does not consider this opinion an autobiographical report: it will not merely relay a feeling that Charmides has about himself, but will purport to capture something objective about the nature of *sôphrosynê* (159a3). In point of fact, the 'best method' requires Charmides to attempt to define the virtue.

Again, in addition to making perfect sense in the immediate context, the 'best method' also directs us outside the frame of this dialogue to Plato's theory of Recollection or to his theory of Forms. Beginning with the object of the 'best method', for the purposes of the investigation underway it presently suffices to assume that temperance is a certain sort of disposition or attitude that Charmides may or may not possess. Or the choice of words in the phrase 'if temperance is present in you,[164] you should be able to hold a belief about it' (158e7–159a1) could be taken to be proleptic. One might

[158] ἀνάγκη: 159a1.

[159] So, e.g., Bruell 1977, 152. Solère-Queval 1993, 12, renders 'αἴσθησις' by intuition.

[160] It is not clear to me what the correct modality is here. On the one hand, δῆλον at 158e7 appears to point to some sort of necessity: if temperance is present in you, evidently you will have something to say about it (158e7–159a1). On the other, ἀνάγκη at 159a1 governs the claim that, if one has temperance, one must also have a feeling about it, but, I think, does not govern the further claim that, if one has a feeling about the temperance in oneself, one will be able to form a judgement. The verb in the optative (ἄν . . . εἴη) at 159a3 indicates that this latter claim is rather tentative.

[161] δῆλον γάρ: 158e7. [162] See note 158 in this chapter.

[163] Stepping back from the framework of the *Charmides*, one might object that (P1) is dubious, since I might have a virtue but not have any sense of it, e.g. I could be brave but have no sense that I am brave or, still less, know that I am brave. However, later in the dialogue, Critias explicitly denies that people could act temperately and be temperate without knowing themselves to be temperate (164c7–d3) and Socrates does not disagree (see Chapter 6, 153–8). This intuition is defensible and perhaps applies to all the virtues and not only to *sôphrosynê*. However, one might object to (P2) as well: supposing that I have some inner perception of bravery, does it follow that I also have a belief about the nature of bravery? Couldn't there be self-perceptions that do not automatically give me corresponding beliefs? I don't think that Socrates is blind to this sort of objection. Rather, he postulates (P2) for protreptic purposes, i.e. to give Charmides enough confidence to say what he thinks about the nature of temperance.

[164] εἴ σοι πάρεστιν: 158e7.

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think of the theory of Recollection in this connection, insofar as Recollection is a basic way to gain access to concepts that are 'in us' and begin an enquiry on the basis of them. Moreover, as mentioned, the ordinary expression 'to be present in' (*parestin*)[165] also belongs to the technical vocabulary that Platonic interlocutors sometimes use in order to refer to Forms and their causal relation to particulars. Thus, one might contend that Socrates is not merely saying that if Charmides has temperance, we should expect him to hold some belief about it; he is suggesting that if Temperance somehow inheres in Charmides, it will cause him to have a grasp of its own nature.

Similar observations apply to Socrates' use of the verbs *doxazein*, to believe, and *phainesthai*, to appear, as well as the nouns *doxa* and *aisthêsis*. They are mostly taken to bear, straightforwardly, on Socrates' exhortation[166] that Charmides attend to his awareness of whatever he registers as temperance in his own soul and, on that basis, try to articulate his own belief about that virtue.[167] Alfred Edward Taylor, for instance, interprets *aisthêsis* in such a broad and non-technical sense. 'If a man has this [sc. temperance) or any other character of soul, it must, of course, make its presence felt, and its possessor will therefore have an opinion of some kind about its nature. (It is not meant, of course, that the possessor of the character need have a "clear and distinct idea" of it, but only that he must have some acquaintance with it)'.[168] However, as has been noted in the literature, the perceptual and doxastic vocabulary that Socrates uses in order to outline the 'best method' could be taken to point, proleptically, to the middle books of the *Republic*. Socrates could be suggesting a contrast between *doxa*, belief, and *epistêmê* (scientific) knowledge; between the objects of belief, which are cognisable through *aisthêsis*, and the objects of knowledge, which are apprehended by the mind. Obviously, the former reading is self-standing and

[165] πάρεστιν at 158e7 is the third-person singular present indicative of the verb παρεῖναι. Similar uses of the verb occur at 160d7 (ὁποῖόν τινά σε ποιεῖ ἡ σωφροσύνη παροῦσα) and 161a8–9 (σωφροσύνη δέ γε ἀγαθόν, εἴπερ ἀγαθούς ποιεῖ οἷς ἂν παρῇ, κακοὺς δὲ μή).

[166] Solère-Queval 1993, 12, draws attention to the repeated use of doxastic terms in connection with the 'best method', and she comments on their epistemic implications and pedagogical utility.

[167] Socrates neither says nor implies that the 'best method' intends to provide a grounding relation. Such a claim would be absurd. All that the method implies is that, if one possesses temperance (to an undetermined degree), then one has a sort of dim awareness expressed in a belief. But there is no suggestion that beliefs of that sort can have proper epistemic grounding.

[168] Taylor 1926, 49–50. Compare McCabe 2000, 30: 'the thought here is that self-control in the soul is transparent to the person who has it; so Charmides' accurate reporting of what he sees in himself will be what the inquiry needs (or that would be so, if in fact Charmides turned out to be self-controlled in the right way)'.

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does not imply the latter in any way.[169] But it seems part of Plato's strategy to lay the text open to theoretically laden interpretations where he deems it appropriate.

As to the remark that, since Charmides knows how to speak Greek (*hellenizein*), he should be able to say what temperance appears to him to be (159a7),[170] it probably amounts to little more than a platitude which, however, serves a pedagogical purpose. Socrates points out that all that Charmides needs in order to speak his mind is knowledge of Greek, which of course Charmides has. Like the modest epistemic requirements of the 'best method', this comment too seems intended to put the young man at ease, encourage him to say what he believes, and prompt him to engage in the dialectical search. Socrates makes a comparable move in the *Meno* with regard to the slave boy that he is about to question in order to demonstrate that all learning is recollection. 'Is he (sc. the slave boy) a Greek and does he speak Greek (*hellênizei*)? – Very much so, in fact he is born in the house' (82b4–5). In this case too, the boy's mastery of the Greek language is, according to Socrates, all that is required for the interrogation that will follow. On the other hand, several commentators attribute the comment concerning Charmides' ability to speak Greek with theoretical dimensions. For instance, according to one view, '[Plato here] does represent Socrates linking together virtue with knowledge and knowledge with express-ability'.[171] According to another, assuming that Charmides has some acquaintance with temperance, 'language about it [sc. the corresponding belief] will have some meaning for [the young man], exactly as language about sight or hearing will mean something to anyone who can see or hear, though it would be meaningless to beings born blind or deaf'.[172] In my view, the non-theoretical reading of the passage makes excellent dramatic and psychological sense. Nonetheless, it is worth registering that Socrates' remark about *hellênizein*, Charmides' mastery of the Greek language, admits of theoretically informed interpretations as well.

[169] Bruell 1977, 152, rightly stresses that Socrates' outline of the 'best method' avoids raising epistemological issues. Notably, Socrates does not explain on what grounds the person experiencing an *aisthêsis* will be able to identify temperance as the cause of this latter. According to Bruell, Charmides accepts the assumption that temperance will always make itself known to its possessor, precisely because he is not alerted to the epistemological problems connected with that assumption.

[170] οὐκοῦν τοῦτό γε, ἔφην, ὅ οἴει, ἐπειδήπερ ἑλληνίζειν ἐπίστασαι, κἂν εἴποις δήπου αὐτὸ ὅ τί σοι φαίνεται: 159a6–7.

[171] Jenks 2008, 30. In fact, however, Socrates does not link together temperance with knowledge but with belief. And ἑλληνίζειν, speaking Greek, is not as broad as 'express-ability'.

[172] Taylor 1926, 50. In fact, Socrates does not say anything explicit about the meaningfulness of sentences concerning temperance.

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Socrates' concluding words underscore the relatively low epistemic expectations of the 'best method' and highlight its protreptic and pedagogical function.

> So, in order that we may guess [*topasômen*] whether it is in you or not, tell me, I said, what you declare temperance to be according to your belief. (159a9–10)

Literally, the verb *topazein* means to locate, but its habitual use is metaphorical and carries the connotations of guessing or forming a conjecture. Socrates, then, sets the bar rather low regarding the epistemic status of the 'best method' and its prospective achievements. Assuming that Charmides will be induced to state his belief about what temperance is, all that the interlocutors can reasonably aspire to is to make an informed guess as to whether temperance is present in Charmides or whether the opposite is the case. In addition to the fact that the 'best method' is relatively easy to follow, it is also directed towards a goal that appears not very difficult to attain. Indeed, by indicating that the search will not be too demanding and that the expectations will not be too high,[173] Socrates succeeds in prompting Charmides into action.

[173] See Solère-Queval 1993, 12, and also the remarks by Taylor 1926, 50 and Grote 1865, 483.

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