

The *Koinon Agathon* of Plato's *Charmides*

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Resumen: Dada la cantidad de referencias a *koinōnía* en los diálogos de Platón, llama la atención que la frase “bien común” sea usada solo una vez – en el *Cármides* 166d. Sócrates pregunta a su interlocutor Critias: “¿No crees que es por el bien común, para casi (*schedón*) todos los hombres, el que deba descubrirse cómo son todos los seres (*tōn ontōn*)?”. La pregunta surge después de que Critias ha afirmado que *sōphrosynē* es autoconocimiento, lo cual luego especifica como un “conocimiento de todos los demás conocimientos y de sí mismo”. En este artículo, sostengo que no es casualidad que Sócrates mencione el “bien común” precisamente en este momento en su discusión con Critias. La noción de *sōphrosynē* que Critias defiende es incoherente debido a lo que este afirma que es su característica distintiva – su reflexividad. Debido a su total reflexividad, no apunta a ningún fin más allá de sí mismo y, por lo tanto, es incapaz de revelar “los seres” ni de estar conectado a ningún bien fuera de sí mismo. El bien común que Sócrates menciona aquí está, por ende, esencialmente relacionado al reconocimiento de la ignorancia que motiva a asombrarse (*thaūma*) de un bien más allá del amor de nuestras propias cosas. Por lo tanto, sugiero una explicación para la curiosa adición de “casi” (*schedón*) en el comentario de Sócrates aquí: Critias mismo muestra que, a menos que él (o su joven primo Cármides) pueda admitir la ignorancia y experimentar tal asombro, entonces él no está constitucionalmente incluido en este bien común.

Palabras clave: *sōphrosynē*; Critias; Cármides; asombro; bien común

Abstract: Given the number of references to *koinōnía* in Plato's dialogues, it is striking that the phrase “common good” (*koinon agathon*) is used only once – at *Charmides* 166d. Socrates asks his interlocutor Critias a question, “Do you not think it is for the common good, almost (*schedon*), of all men, that how all the beings (*tōn ontōn*) are should be discovered?” The question emerges after Critias has claimed that *sōphrosynē* is self-knowledge, which he then specifies as a “knowledge of all other knowledges and of itself”. In this paper, I argue that it is no accident that Socrates mentions the “common good” at precisely this moment in his discussion with Critias. The notion of *sōphrosynē* that Critias defends is incoherent owing to what Critias claims to be its distinguishing feature – its reflexivity. Because of its total reflexivity, it points to no end beyond itself and thereby it is neither capable of disclosing “the beings” nor of being connected to any good outside of itself. The common good Socrates mentions here is therefore essentially related to an acknowledgment of ignorance that motivates one to

wonder (*thauma*) at a good beyond one's love of one's own things. I thus suggest an explanation for the curious addition of "almost" (*schedon*) in Socrates' remark here: Critias himself shows that unless he (or his young cousin Charmides) can admit ignorance and experience such wonder, then he is constitutionally not included in this common good.

Keywords: *sōphrosynē*; Critias; Charmides; wonder; common good

Given the number of references to *koinōnia* in Plato's dialogues, it is striking that the phrase "common good" (*koinon agathon*) is used with any specificity only once¹. At *Charmides* 166d, Socrates asks his interlocutor Critias a provocative question: "Do you not think it is for the common good, almost (*schedon*), of all men, that how all the beings (*tōn ontōn*) are should be discovered?" The question emerges after Critias has claimed that *sōphrosynē* is self-knowledge, which he then specifies as a "knowledge of all other knowledges and of itself" (166c)². Critias has grown exasperated with Socrates' questions about this notion. He claims that Socrates seeks only to refute him and does not inquire seriously into the unique reflexivity of this virtue.

In this paper, I will show that it is no accident that Socrates mentions the "common good" at precisely this moment in his discussion with Critias. Socrates' questions are not unfair. Rather, they reveal what Socrates thinks to be an essential feature of self-knowledge, its orientation to the good beyond it. In contrast, the notion of *sōphrosynē* that Critias defends is incoherent owing to what Critias claims to be its distinguishing feature – its reflexivity. Because of its total reflexivity, it points to no end beyond itself and thereby it is neither capable of disclosing "the beings" nor of being connected to any good outside of itself. As such, it becomes impossible to say how this virtue is either possible or beneficial to one who were to possess it.

¹ In the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells a story of his former hope that he will learn the "common good for all" (98b) from the work of Anaxagoras. This hope is soon dashed when he sees the book is filled only with materialist reductionism.

² Translations from the dialogue are my own, though I have always started with the translations of West, T. G. & West G. S. (trans.), Plato. *Charmides*, Amsterdam: Hackett, 1986 and Moore, C. & Raymond, C. C. (trans.), Plato. *Charmides*, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 2019.

At the middle of the dialogue, Critias insists that *sōphrosynē* is best understood as self-knowledge (164d). After he presents an interpretation of the famous inscription at Delphi (*gnōthi seauton*) (164d-165a), Socrates asks a simple question: if *sōphrosynē* is indeed some knowledge (*epistēmē*), is it a knowledge “of something”? (165c). Socrates is asking for the object of this *epistēmē*, and Critias has a ready answer: “oneself (*heautou*)” (165c). This is the first direct reference to *reflexivity* in the argument of the dialogue, but it remains opaque what Critias means by his claim. In order to proceed, Socrates does not investigate the faculty or activity of knowing that takes “oneself” as one’s object, but instead asks Critias about the object of the knowing³. Socrates introduces the examples of medicine (not for this first time)⁴ and house-building, referring to each as an *epistēmē*, and shows that in these cases we can point to an object or product distinct from the *epistēmē* itself: medicine has health as its product (*ergon*) that Socrates links it with its benefit (165c). In what way, we might ask, is *this* knowledge –*self-knowledge*– oriented towards something beneficial or good beyond it?

We can see how one might answer this question in the examples that Socrates uses. For he goes on to say that the product (*ergon*) of house-building is the finished house, and one could say something similar for all the other *technai* (165d)⁵. Socrates then encourages Critias to point to the distinct object of the *epistēmē* that is *sōphrosynē*, to say what “beautiful work (*kalon ergon*)” it produces. At this point Critias claims that Socrates is inquiring incorrectly. But in my view Critias does not understand the significance of Socrates’ question (165e)⁶.

We should consider why Socrates is so insistent on getting at the “of what (*tinou*)?” regarding this *epistēmē*. His question implies that we define “knowledges” (*epistēmai*) not by investigating the subjective cognitive faculty we call knowing, but by considering the specific object known, which delimits

³ See Rosen, S., “ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ and *Selbstbewusstsein*”, in: *Review of Metaphysics*, v. XXVI, 4 (1973), p. 632; Hyland, D., *The Virtue of Philosophy*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981, p. 98; Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato's Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016, p. 182.

⁴ 165c-d. The re-introduction of “medicine” harks back to the Thracian physicians of the whole. The relation of their knowledge to the *epistēmē* being discussed is a background question here.

⁵ Socrates seems to be equating *technē* and *epistēmē* here.

⁶ Indeed, Socrates has hinted to us here that the “beautiful work” of self-knowledge could itself be “beautiful work”. That is, the activity of knowing oneself in Socratic terms may turn out to be inseparable from, if not identical to, a cognitive activity that is itself beautiful through beholding what is beautiful.

the knowledge under investigation⁷. Socrates is suggesting that knowledge is essentially *intentional*, for it is defined by an object other than itself⁸. Critias might be able to offer a suitable candidate in response to Socrates' question by claiming that the object of this self-knowledge, distinct from the knowing activity, is the human *soul*. In fact, this *seems* to be what he is suggesting when he first mentions "oneself" (165c). If he were to say this, the conversation might then take a quite different turn from the one it actually does take. For Socrates and Critias could at this point begin discussing more explicitly the nature of the soul, and could end up with a conversation like the one that occurs in *Alcibiades P.*

But Critias chooses to respond to Socrates' request for a "beautiful work" by claiming that *sōphrosynē* is not like the other *epistēmai*. In his view, *sōphrosynē* does not have a separable product like house-building and medicine. He claims that Socrates is wrong to compare it to these *epistēmai* or *technai*, and then asserts that even arithmetic and geometry are unlike house-building and medicine in this way. His response thus ends with a challenge: "...what is such a work of the art of arithmetic or of geometry, in the way a house is of house-building or a cloak is of weaving? ... Can you show me any works like these? But you will not be able to..." (165e-166a).

Critias is right that while house-building and weaving focus on a tangible material product, there is properly no parallel tangible material product for geometry and arithmetic. Critias therefore categorically rejects productive *technai* as appropriate models for understanding *sōphrosynē*¹⁰. Socrates agrees with Critias (*alēthē legeis*) that these knowledges do not issue in a separable product in the same way (166a). But he now claims that they have similarly distinct objects, if we consider what they are *about*. In this sense, they are still *intentional*, because they are "of something": "But I can show you of what (*tinos*) each of these knowledges (*epistēmai*) is, which happens to be different from the

⁷ Cf. Republic 438a ff.

⁸ See Sprague, R. K., *Plato's Philosopher-King*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976, pp. 29-42; Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato's Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, 2016, pp. 182-183; Tuozzo, T., *Plato's Charmides*, 2011, pp. 198-199.

⁹ Annas (1985) claims that this does not happen in the *Charmides* because there is a confusion between self-knowledge and knowledge of knowledge. But the root of the confusion here is essentially connected to Critias' (dis)orientation to the beautiful and the good. See Annas, J., "Self-Knowledge in early Plato in D. O'Meara", in: *Platonic Investigations*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1985, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ This should not be taken to mean that Socrates necessarily disagrees with Critias here. Rather, Socrates is comparing self-knowledge to the crafts in order to reveal what, if anything, is distinctive about the knowledge Critias is describing. Cf. Tuozzo, T., *Plato's Charmides*, 2011, p. 194.

knowledge itself. Thus arithmetic is of the even and the odd, how many they are in themselves and with respect to other numbers... Now aren't the odd and the even different from arithmetic itself? And again, weighing is of the heavier and lighter weight. But the heavy and the light are different from weighing... Then tell me, what *sōphrosynē* is the knowledge of, which happens to be different from *sōphrosynē*" (166a-c)¹¹.

In response, Critias claims that Socrates is still attempting to seek sameness where there is only heterogeneity. *Sōphrosynē* is unlike the other *epistēmai* in just this way, "for while all other *epistēmai* are of something else, but not of themselves, this one alone is an *epistēmē* of all the others and of itself" (166c). We should note that it is Critias, not Socrates, who moves from his earlier claim about "knowledge of *oneself*" to the present formulation "knowledge of *itself*"¹². Socrates does not make anything of this move: for him it is not the strange and confusing transition that many readers have taken it to be. I believe the best way of seeing why this is so has been explained by Tom Schmid (1998, p. 47, 182, n. 16): "Critias would appear to assume that self-knowledge takes the form of knowing that one knows [an *epistēmē*], that is, self-knowledge is of oneself qua knower, qua cognitive self... Thus Socrates may well agree with the transition, even if he understands self-knowledge differently than Critias..."

Schmid's proposal makes sense of the movement of the text, which is a smooth transition, though one wouldn't think so based on the controversy it has generated. But what has been eclipsed by this controversy is the larger question of the meaning of this statement that Critias makes.

If we consider carefully what is implied in this definition, then we will see that it rests on Critias' *thymotic* attachment to his own things, at the expense of any good beyond this attachment. The *thymos* of Critias is present early in the conversation with Socrates, when his ward, Charmides, enters the Paleastra (154a ff). Critias' praise of his young cousin is a boast to Socrates about both his looks and his character. Critias wants Socrates to be awed by his finest, prized *possession*. His view of his relationship towards Charmides, and his *thymos* which is inextricably wrapped up in it, is most visible upon Critias' own entrance to the conversation about *sōphrosynē*. This entrance is provoked after Charmides asserts the definition of *sōphrosynē* to be "doing one's own

¹¹ It is not clear why Socrates does not mention geometry in responding to Critias.

¹² See the review of the scholarship in Tuckey, T. G., *Plato's Charmides*, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1968, pp. 33-37; Schmid, W. T., *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, New York: SUNY Press, 1998, p. 181, n. 14; Tuozzo, T., *Plato's Charmides*, 2011, pp. 198-199.

things”, a notion whose origin Socrates immediately and rightly suspects to be Critias himself (161c; 162c)¹³. Critias is unable to hold back from entering the conversation after Charmides fails to respond to the objections that Socrates makes to the definition, inciting Charmides to say about his elder guardian, “he was *reputed* to be quite wise” (162b)¹⁴. When Critias bursts in to interrupt, he reprimands young Charmides for implying that his elder guardian did not know what he was talking about, an implication that further suggests that Critias himself, in praising Charmides, *does not know his own things*. Socrates describes Critias as “angry with him, just as a poet is with an actor who recites his poems badly” (162d). The metaphor is illuminating. The author has been betrayed by the one whom he trusted to perform the work that is properly his. Charmides rouses Critias’ anger in a moment that not only embarrasses Critias, but also threatens him. His control of the youth has been weakened. Critias’ *thymos* here and throughout the dialogue displays both the desire for victory and for honor that defines the trait in *Republic* VIII (548c).

I believe that this *thymos* is at the root of Critias’ notion of “knowledge of itself and the other knowledges”. To possess a knowledge which has all others and itself as its object, is to have a knowledge that is both all-inclusive and reflexive. It has generality *and* self-reference. Critias offers it in an attempt to explain how his conception of self-knowledge can indeed benefit the one who possess it, even if it is not defined by an object that is distinct from it¹⁵. Therefore, he puts forward “knowledge of the other knowledges and of itself” in order to describe a knowledge that is *architectonic*, in its subordination of the other knowledges. So, for example, the knowledge of bridle-making appears subordinate to the knowledge of horse riding, for it is the person who rides the horse who puts the bridle to test, and thus supplies the standard to the bridle-maker. Such a conception is not unique in Plato’s dialogues¹⁶. If this knowledge

¹³ The definition is the same as that given as the definition of justice at *Republic* 441e. As I discuss further below, an attachment to “one’s own things” is an essential part of *thymos*, as illustrated by the doglike guardians of the city who are friendly to their own but hostile to the *other*. See *Republic* 376b.

¹⁴ My emphasis.

¹⁵ For this and the following, see Tuozzo, T., *Plato’s Charmides*, 2011, pp. 199-200, 305. Tuozzo’s explanation for why *sōphrosynē* knows itself and the other knowledge is that if we want to know if the other knowledges are beneficial, we need the one that is the standard for benefit. This may be right, but it does not explain why it is the Critian conception of a ruling science rather than the Socratic conception of knowledge of ignorance which addresses this problem. In my view, Socrates own account of *sōphrosynē* will offer a more successful alternative just because it is connected with the knowledge of limits, oriented to the beauty and good that transcends it.

¹⁶ See especially *Statesman* 259e-260c; *Euthydemus* 288e-291.

is possible, Critias seems to be claiming that the person who possessed this would seem to know the purpose of all such subordinated knowledges. The one with *sōphrosynē* would not be, in Critias' eyes, a lowly prostitute or fish-salt seller (cf. 163b), but the one with the knowledge that somehow stands above all these others, and because of its reflexivity, it needs nothing beyond itself. It is the *ruling science* that subordinates all others to serve its proper ends.

We readers should regard this notion with suspicion, and it is important that we not confuse it with a potential knowledge of *the good*. A knowledge of the good, if it exists, would point to an ultimate standard that transcends the activity of knowing, and that could even answer the question whether and why it might be good to have this very knowledge. But the self-knowledge Critias describes, in its attempt to be all-encompassing and reflexive, yields a conception of knowing that is not oriented to any standard outside of itself. Rather than see this notion as a philosophical account of the supremacy of the good, at this point we should be provoked to wonder if this is the very self-knowledge a tyrant would promote –totalizing and reflexive in its purview, it *seeks* no object beyond itself and what it rules. On Critias' account, self-knowledge is antecedent to knowledge of the good: it is the definition of one's own things that dictates what is good and not. The distinction between friend and enemy, between what is one's own and what is *other*, is primary. In this scenario, that which is threatening to my defined sense of self and other, is seen to be bad. That which is strange, alien, or unable to fit my conceptual framework, cannot be good. "Good" is reserved for that which confirms to one's already established view of oneself. This is why we should say that Critias' account of self-knowledge here is through and through *thymotic*, just as it fails to be properly *erotic*. In not being oriented to an *other* beyond itself, in refusing to admit as good or even as *being*, anything that falls outside of its self-determined standard, it effectively aims to spread itself throughout the whole and loses sight of the individual human soul that is the proper object of the person seeking self-knowledge. Critias' account fails to adequately describe the very situation that he himself is in with Socrates –a conversation in which the participants are seeking knowledge they lack about themselves¹⁷. Such a conversation must be possible, for Plato is able to dramatically depict it. But the account Critias proposes renders inexplicable the very conversation in which the notion has emerged. For Critias' account of

¹⁷ Cf. Moore, C., *Socrates and Self-Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 6; Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato's Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, 2016, pp. 188-189.

self-knowledge, in restricting its purview to itself as knowledge, and to all other objects, insofar as they too are knowledges, cannot reveal knowledge of the *self* as one seeking such wisdom. In sum, Critias does have a reply to Socrates' question ("of what?") concerning the object of this self-knowledge: it is "of" everything. But Socrates will show that this answer is equivalent to saying that it is actually "of" nothing. In its attempt to be reflexive and comprehensive, such a knowledge is impossible, because Critias is unable to defend the existence of a self-relating power that has no object distinct from itself (167a-169c). And even if it were possible, Socrates shows that such a knowledge would be of no benefit to the knower, for it would ultimately have no content that it knows, such as the good itself, which would be known by some *other* knowledge (169c-171c). I do not have space and time here to elaborate on these arguments, which take up the remainder of the dialogue. Instead, let us consider Socrates' small but significant addition to the notion that Critias has proposed.

Critias' formulation is coupled with an attack on Socrates' method on the conversation so far. In addition to claiming that Socrates is not inquiring correctly, Critias asserts that Socrates knows very well the truth of the phrase he has just uttered, and is only seeking to refute Critias, regardless of what he says. Socrates once again takes this opportunity to profess his ignorance, but now sees that Critias is in danger of not continuing the conversation (166c-d). He is able to calm Critias down and re-engage with him by telling him not to worry whether it is Critias or Socrates who is refuted, but to focus solely on the argument itself (166e). Socrates then makes a small comment to Critias, in which his own "Socratic" *sōphrosynē* comes to light. "But Critias, I said, you come at (*prospherē*) me as though I claim (*phaskontos*) to know what I am asking about, and would agree with you, if only I were willing (*boulōmai*). But that is not how it is, for I am inquiring (*zētō*) along with you about whatever is proposed because I don't know (*eidenai*). Therefore, after I investigate (*skepsamenos*) I am willing to say whether I agree or not. But wait until I investigate" (165b-c).

Critias claims that Socrates already agrees with his claim that *sōphrosynē* is self-knowledge, and thus he implies that from where he sits, Socrates already knows what *sōphrosynē* is¹⁸. But Socrates claims that he does not know and cannot yet say whether he agrees or disagrees with Critias. This response reveals that Critias does not grasp Socrates' own view at all. Socrates is claiming that he must investigate *what Critias means by these words* in order to discover

¹⁸ See Bruell, C., "Socratic Politics and Self-Knowledge", in: *Interpretation*, v. VI, 3 (1977), p. 166.

whether they are true. While Critias supposes he has the answers and is ready to argue for them, Socrates claims he does not know and is ready to inquire. His ignorance motivates his search for knowledge, while Critias' claim to know conceals his own ignorance¹⁹.

Socrates has an outlook and character that is genuinely philosophical – he is aware that he is lacking wisdom and has a real desire (*erōs*) for it²⁰. But for Critias any such desire for wisdom is outweighed by his concern for his reputation. His desire for victory and his desire to be seen as wise get in the way of his ability to admit ignorance and seek. To put it briefly: his *thymos* trumps his *erōs*, if there is any. Whereas Socrates sees the need for investigation, and thus recognizes the limits of Critias' definition of *sōphrosynē*, Critias in no way seeks to investigate. After Socrates claims it is necessary to do so, Critias responds, “investigate then”. The command is in the second person, rather than the hortatory (“let us”) that would be heard from one who actually wished to discover the truth with Socrates. Critias is unable to do what Socrates himself shows. Socrates' inquiry, and any *inquiry* deserving of the name, is an act of a philosophical soul motivated by recognition of ignorance and a genuine desire to transcend this ignorance.

Socrates is fully aware of Critias' *thymos* and he thus tells Critias to “be courageous” (*tharrōn*) (166d)²¹ and to put aside whether it is Critias or Socrates who is being refuted. If Critias abandoned the inquiry at this point, he would thus be seen as a coward and he knows it. But Critias does not see that his agreement to put aside considerations about whether he or Socrates is being refuted actually undermines his own view of *sōphrosynē* itself. For in saying this, he agrees to detach his own view from the inquiry they are conducting. But his own conception of *sōphrosynē* placed the *sōphrōn* individual at the center as the supreme ruling *knower*, surrounded by *epistēmai* that work toward his benefit. Such an image is in sharp tension with a philosophic detachment from one's interests in favor of finding the truth, especially given the addition that Socrates will now make²².

¹⁹ Cf. *Apology*, 22e-23a.

²⁰ Cf. *Republic* 474c-475c, in which the erotic man is said to love the whole of the beloved object, and not just a part. The desire for only a “part” of the beloved is most manifest in a *thymotic erōs* which sees beauty only in what is akin to oneself. See below.

²¹ Courage has a strong link with *thymos*. For an excellent account of this, see Hobbs, A., *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

²² By using the phrase “philosophical detachment”, I am referring to nothing more than Socrates' exhortations to transcend our thymotic desire for glory and fear of looking inferior, in favor of

Socrates asks a small question of no small import: “Therefore... [is *sōphrosynē*] also a knowledge (*epistēmē*) of ignorance (*anepistēmosynēs*), if indeed it is of knowledge (*epistēmēs*)” (166e). Socrates’ question here sounds almost exactly like his description of his own famous claim to knowledge of ignorance in the *Apology* (21d)²³. After provoking wonder about the refutation of “Critias” and “Socrates”, Socrates now explicitly brings to the conversation a notion which seems to be the very depiction of his own vision of self-knowledge. By doing it in this manner, he prepares us for a discussion of two conceptions of *sōphrosynē*: the Critian and the Socratic²⁴.

That there are really two images here, Critias’ and Socrates’, is suggested by the way Socrates induced Critias to bring self-knowledge into the discussion. Socrates had asked about the *ignorance*, rather than knowledge, of an individual who does good things (164a). Critias leaves ignorance far behind, and it is not until this moment that it is re-kindled in the discussion. Critias’ omission of ignorance is not merely accidental: For Critias, it appears there are no limits to this wisdom he calls *sōphrosynē*, a fact he does not realize will cause trouble when he agrees to Socrates’ small addition.

Socrates’ addition implies that the *sōphrōn* individual is open to what is beyond his limits, in that there is a recognition of what is beyond his knowledge. This calls for a very different orientation to the good, for the knowledge of limits removes the individual from the center of his world. Rather than being elevated to the godlike center, human beings now properly stand in that in-between realm, the realm between beast and god²⁵. Consequently, the Socratic account of the good is not subordinated by “one’s own things”. For it is the neglect of the knowledge of ignorance, the elevation of ourselves to the gods, that seems to carry with it a confusion between one’s own and the god²⁶.

When Critias agrees to Socrates’ small addition, Socrates elaborates on an important activity that is essential to and unique to the individual who possesses *sōphrosynē* so described. This individual, and only this individual,

the philosophical pursuit of the true good itself. Socrates has explicitly said that Critias should not worry who among them is being refuted, but he has subtly forced the onlookers, including Charmides and the reader, to wonder about Critias’ false claims to know. Cf. Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato’s Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, 2015, p. 206.

²³ Consistent with Socrates’ other uses in the *Charmides*, the passage in the *Apology* does not mention *epistēmē* but *eidenai*. Accordingly, at 167a Socrates replaces *anepistēmosynē* with *ha mē oiden*.

²⁴ Cf. Tuozzo, T., *Plato’s Charmides*, 2011, p. 190.

²⁵ See *Symposium* 202d-203a.

²⁶ Cf. Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato’s Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, 2015, pp. 206-211; Schmid, W. T., *Plato’s Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, 1998, pp. 56-57.

has self-knowledge and knowledge of *others*: “Then only the one who is *sōphrōn* will himself both acknowledge (*gnōsetai*) himself and be able to examine both what he happens to know (*eidōs*) and what not, and in like manner will have the power to inspect others, what they know and think they know, if indeed they know, and also what they think they know but do not know. But nobody else will be able to do this. And this is what “being *sōphrōn*” and “*sōphrosynē*” and acknowledging oneself are: knowing what one knows and one does not know. Is that what you are saying?” (167a).

Critias agrees. But what has he agreed to? Does he himself know what he thinks he knows in agreeing with Socrates here? Or has he instead assumed that his all-encompassing architectonic knowledge, because it is all-encompassing, will also rule over Socrates’ small addition and be able to accomplish the task Socrates assigns to it? There are reasons to suppose that the latter is the case, for Socrates’ elaboration here adds elements to the Critian vision of *sōphrosynē* that have no proper place for them. In the Socratic account of the benefit of *sōphrosynē*, the virtue renders one to genuinely enter a *community* (*koinōnia*) with others –for the one with *sōphrosynē* is able to examine not only oneself, but also others in conversation. The Critian notion of “knowledge of itself and the other knowledges” fails to give birth to such an activity. Indeed, Socrates is presenting an alternative vision of *sōphrosynē* that is *incompatible* with the description put forth by Critias. While Critias describes an all-encompassing architectonic knowledge of knowledges that is closed to what is beyond its limits, because it dictates that there is nothing beyond its scope, Socrates’ account claims the opposite for *sōphrosynē*: it is an “open self-knowledge not limited to one’s own knowing situation”²⁷. Moreover, Socrates has insisted that it is *only* the person with such knowledge of limits who will be able examine himself and *others*. As I have suggested, the examination that is essential to the *sōphrōn* individual is remarkably parallel to Socrates’ description of his own philosophical search that is his own response to the Delphic Oracle in the *Apology*²⁸.

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We may now return to the passage in which Socrates asks Critias about the *koinon agathon*. Recall that Socrates asks Critias: “Do you not think it is for the common good, almost (*schedon*), of all men, that how all the beings (*tōn*

²⁷ Levine, D., *Profound Ignorance: Plato's Charmides and the Saving of Wisdom*, 2015, p. 215.

²⁸ See *Apology*, 20 d ff.

ontōn) are should be discovered?” (166d). While Critias agrees with Socrates that it would be for the common good (of “almost” all men) to disclose how all the beings are, his approach to the question ends up concealing the nature of *sōphrosynē*. He thus ends up revealing that while he claims *sōphrosynē* to be self-knowledge, he himself does not adequately possess self-knowledge, nor is he able to inquire in a way that would be for the “common good”. Critias’ error is deeply rooted in his *thymotic* nature and his unwillingness to admit ignorance, which is in sharp contrast to the *erotic* character of Socrates and his seeking of wisdom. For it is ultimately fatal for Critias’ position that he cannot overcome his *thymos*: he does not see past the distinction between what belongs to him and what is of another, a distinction that dictates what he believes to be good and bad. This leads him into incoherence, for his view of self-knowledge and his notion of the good are unbridgeable.

The common good Socrates mentions here is therefore fundamentally and essentially related to an acknowledgment of ignorance that motivates one to *wonder* (*thauma*) at a good beyond one’s love of one’s own things. I therefore want to suggest an explanation for the curious addition of “almost” (*schedon*) in Socrates’ remark here: Critias himself shows that unless he (or his young cousin Charmides) can admit ignorance and experience such wonder, then he is constitutionally not included in this common good: such is the fate of the tyrant. In his attempt to delimit the good to what belongs to himself, he is cut off from the *being* of the common good itself, and from a world beyond his own *thymos*. The self-knowledge of Critias, as knowledge of itself and all other knowledges, finally has nothing to do with a *koinōnia* of human beings. If I understand Critian self-knowledge correctly, he is putting forward the self-knowledge of the tyrant, a self-knowledge that mirrors the eventual political position of its adherent – seeing nothing beyond itself, disconnected from what is beyond it, it ends up rendering its own *being* as meaningless. Plato’s hope seems to be that Socratic *sōphrosynē*, if it is essentially tied to an admission of ignorance and search for wisdom, may reestablish the link to a *koinōnia* with human beings that Critias’ own vision renders void.

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