To the theoretical foundations of temperance in Plato’s *Charmides* (158e-160d)

Christos Terezis – Lydia Petridou
University of Patras, GR

The aim of the present article is to examine how the debate is constituted in the context of a Platonic dialogue, in order to approach a virtue—in this case, the virtue of temperance—ontologically and epistemologically and to specialize its general definition in terms of how it is presented to a particular person. Our reflections are structured in two subchapters, in which the analytical method meets the method of synthetic judgments. In terms of content, we would note that, focusing on passage 158e-160d, we attempt a systematic reading of the virtue of temperance and, at the same time, we examine the origins of Socrates’ interrogative method with a view to the speculative construction of its definition. It is worth noting that the passage we examine is crucial from a methodological point of view, as it reveals the terms on which the Socratic dialectic works.

*Keywords:* Plato – Charmides – Socrates – temperance – dialectics

**Introduction**

Plato’s *Charmides* is particularly interesting from a philosophical point of view, since it discusses manners in which moral questions meet epistemological ones. The main topic is how a virtue—specifically here temperance—can be both defined as a concept and constitute a basis and reason for the construction of human life in a qualitative way. This complex issue is elaborated by the founder of the Academy almost throughout the
dialogue and in the study which follows we will undertake to examine it based on the passage 158e-160d, which belongs to the introductory ones but is also considered as a decisive contribution to a more systematic elaboration of the topic. In fact, we could contend that the direction of the passage is a strict epistemological basis for what will follow. In the passage 156d-157c Plato attempts to approach temperance with his interlocutors in a way that is connected with the content and the aims of the human soul. However, he did not formulate a theory on temperance in the literal sense of the term, nor did he provide the full preconditions for constructing its definitions. In the next passage 157c-158c the approach to temperance is temporarily interrupted and there is an attempt to examine whether a young person, namely Charmides, is aware of whether he possesses temperance and whether he behaves in an analogous way to its content. That is, if he is aware of whether his inner world and his relations with the social environment are fed by virtuous factors. Charmides says that he cannot give an answer at the moment, so in the passage 158e-160d a systematic reading of temperance begins, while also the appropriate ways are sought for the formulation of its definition. So, we will follow a transition towards the solution of the following question: in order to examine whether a person possesses a virtue (personal moral determination), it is necessary to know its content in general. This detail, however, in the context here is not clear so that it would allow us to describe the objective content –that is, the realistic foundation– of “universals”. We are still in introductory approaches, so Plato seeks to “test” various ways to process this synthetic issue.

The goal of our paper is not only to include the content of this passage in rational forms but also to show the methodological way in which they are composed. Based on the reasoning of the dialogue, we would like to stress at the outset that this is a way that reflects the systematic and at the same time creative adventures of the Platonic dialectics as a coherent method and as embracing scientific structures. Our paper is divided into two subchapters. The first one is analytical-textual, while the second one focuses on synthetic post-textual judgments. In addition, we attempt to shed light on what is being prepared in the Charmides and is explicitly discussed in the Meno and Phaedo, which chronologically follow.
1The first attempt to define temperance. The transition from the body of virtue to its conceptual clarifications

In the following episode, the young Charmides makes a first attempt to approach the concept of temperance, while the teacher Socrates puts it under critical investigation according to a coherent and consistent as to its foundations and self-justifications syllogism. These justifications are actually defined with respect to what has been discussed to this point and their direct logical extensions. The entire discussion avoids the intuitive leaps which exclude syllogistic interventions, since an attempt like this as forced to its procedures could be ineffective. The main question that the two interlocutors dealt with was whether the young man owns temperance and the answer to this will constitute the basis of the Athenian philosopher’s attempt to define this virtue. It should be mentioned that the process could follow the opposite course as well, but obviously it would not be easily conceived by Charmides. Some elements of the maieutic method seem to appear, but for the time being any judgements are limited by a general conclusion on a question that originally follows a direction that is based in the degree of self-awareness. That is to say, the main requirement in order the discussion to develop in a steady way is the person who is educated to gain awareness not only of his selfhood but also of the pedagogical and social procedures that he has been formed. This is a quality which will stimulate Charmides’ reflexes in a creative way, so that to follow the discussion and to contribute to them as far as possible. So, Socrates, who is the subject-body, will turn his reasoning, through indirect extensions, into logical propositions. This extension goes together with the question of whether these extensions can be considered as objective, since they result from personal opinions, and can be generally applied and, therefore, can be described with analogous predicates. That is to say, he contends that if Charmides owns this virtue—which is called “temperance”—and knows that he possesses it, he must be able to define it or at least to

1 For a general approach of this passage, cf. Tuozzo 2011, 157-161. Cf. also, Lampert 2010, 170-171. For a general discussion of the definition of temperance in this dialogue, cf. Vorwerk 2001, 29-47. Cf. also, Tuozzo 2001, 321-350, who stresses that, even though the virtue under investigation is presented as being in close related with epistemological questions, in this dialogue the social and political dimension of it appears as well. The will be shown mostly in the Respublica.
have an impression about it, either by intuition or by its effects. In such an atmosphere of self-awareness and especially in relation to a specific quality it is possible to develop argumentative possibilities.

We will generally mention that he believes that Ethics—which is clearly supported by empirical repetitions if not by actions applied to it—is extended to or founded on Epistemology. So, it does not remain to a simple conventional or according to inflexible attitude action, which is not based on analytical and conscious decisions. If you carry a moral property, you are able to describe it and you can include it in conceptual schemata, possibly in a detailed way. The only thing you have to do is to approach in a right way your own selfhood and to intervene in an abstractive and synthetic mode to your own experiences. So, the concepts which are formed will derive from a broad area of how we approach internal processes and conditions. Thus, the absolutization of the intellect will be also avoided, which would lead to exclusively idealistic forms without factual validations. But who will case these readings? This would be obviously the dialectician, who is also the guarantee for definition. This definition will then feed the criterion in which one can prove whether the young man is temperate or not. There will be a reversion to the subject itself with new data, which will provide broader understandings about personal assets. Thus, personal being is reinforced by the cognitive categories that are appropriate to it. However, this syllogism which is structured through developing thoughts has one weakness: if the young man is not proved temperate, the previous definition did not obviously have a consistent basis. Therefore, it should not be the only criterion for evaluating Charmides’ quality.

Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 158e6-a10, where we read: «Δῆλον γὰρ ὃτι εἶ σοι πάρεστιν σωφροσύνη, ἔχεις τι περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζειν» (158e.7-159a.1). “Now, it is clear that, if you have temperance with you, you can hold an opinion about it” (the translation is from ed. LOEB, 1950, 27).

Vlastos’ following comment defines in precision the thought process: “We can best see why if we recall that to speak of an attribute as being ‘in’ something is current usage for saying that it is instantiated there; this would be ordinary Greek for saying that the thing has the property associated with the Form. This is how Socrates speaks and thinks: he says ‘temperance is in you’ for ‘you are temperate’, ‘piety is in those actions’ for ‘those actions are pious’. S. takes it for granted that if temperance or piety or beauty exist they exist in something in the world of time” (cf. 1991, 74). So, even if we accepted that in this dialogue the theory of the archetypal Ideas as “separated” metaphysical realities is introduced, their
for another person, who would be able to define it, such as the age or to build a different beginning at the discussion.

But the topic discussed is not so superficial and simple for Plato, a thinker who raises complex perspectives of construction and reconstruction to any theoretical question that is analyzed. His thought as a creator of new detections has begun to conceive the theory on Ideas, in the context of which the definitions of a number of moral or of any other category of concepts per se hold the main position in the theoretical investigations. So, he does not remain only in the perspective of formal Logic or an abstract immanence. He now faces a new theoretical perspective that attempts to detect the possible ontological foundations of it, which he will show cleared in future dialogues: the eternal and unchangeable Ideas have some characteristics, through which one can contend that they are the supreme metaphysical conditions and, by extension, that they possess their identity, namely, they preserve their transcendent content, the a priori stability, which regulates the expression of a definition. We could add that all these are elaborated in the context of a realism that intensively and continuously raises its demands, if it has not already become “suffocating”. That is to say, definitions need to include only these characteristics of a concept which describe the formation of the similar entities which they represent and express. Or, else, they basically mean the identity with themselves and

immanence is not raised, so we could easily speak of conceptual realism, in the sense that the whole discussion is about a term which is considered that it has an ontological basis and can be cognitively approached. The crucial thing is whether we can identify a process in which the body of temperance gains or regains it. If we could be certain about the theory of Ideas in this dialogue, the regaining case would be obvious, so we could contend that the theory of recollection would appear. However, the question is the following: why could we exclude the possibility that a human being is prudent and just instead of him just possessing these properties? Is immanence not a property of a personal way of existing which arises through gradual attempts and accomplishments? Could we consider it also as a posteriori in the sense of a particular activation of the inner capabilities? The questions here place the issue in an ontological foundation of all human factors. Another thing here which expands the question is the following: can the inner mental capabilities externalize and become action and practice? This is quite crucial question for the Ethics and, to some extent, Epistemology. As will be seen later –as in other dialogues– the solutions will emerge through the dialectic both through its maieutic and pedagogical use.
obviously their otherness to anything that is defined but belongs to another category. Otherness, however, does not mean that there is no communication. In this discussion as well, Plato’s attempt to define temperance is in an early step towards approaching the Idea of temperance, due to which any temperate condition – or those which are considered to be temperate – possesses this property, through which they also get their special functionality. The ontological aspect is now critical for the syllogism and, thus, by means of similar developmental variables which also include the epistemological-moral elaboration, will constitute an epistemological commitment. Thus, irrespective of the degree of mutual relevance between Ontology, Gnoseology and Ethics, it becomes obvious that the virtue issue is also a value issue that needs a holistic view.

Nevertheless, we should not ignore that the reference made at this point of the discussion does not concern many persons who own a common property but just one. The fact that Socrates begins his questions, relying on the hypothesis that, if temperance can be detected in his interlocutor, he must be able to express some judgments on its content, has a logical basis and justification; but its general application for its accuracy is constantly investigated. The existence in him of temperance obviously provides information for the ways in which it manifests, which will form first and foremost at least an unclear conception on its original content as a substance as well as considering its properties («ὁ, τί ἐστὶν καὶ ὁποῖον τι ή σωφροσύνη»). Moreover, Charmides, for reasons mainly of age, cannot have a thorough experience of the existence or not of temperance in his fellow citizens or in the persons with whom he communicates. This

4 Brès 1973, 35-36, after he has investigated the way in which this topic is discussed in the Laches, mentions the following about the Charmides: «Le Charmide va encore plus loin. Ici, bien que la question τι ἐστιν; Soit énoncée à propos de la σωφροσύνη, il est bien difficile de ne voir dans le dialogue rien d’autre que la recherche de la définition d’une vertu parmi tant d’autres. D’abord, très visiblement, il ne s’agit pas seulement de savoir mais aussi de produire un certain résultat...Ensuite, ce résultat, la σωφροσύνη, apparaît comme encore moins séparahle du “reste de la vertu” que ne l’était le courage dans le Lachès». So, the scholar clearly identifies in the Charmides a more mature thought regarding both the theory and methodology as a coherent dialectical science. So, the openness to the theory of Ideas has now more foundations, with the appropriate justifications to be under formation gradually.

5 Cf. Plato, Chrm., 159a3-4. “What temperance is, and what kind of thing it is” (LOEB, 27).
complex approach can be related with a conceptual and behavioral functionality. Accepting this general context of investigation, Charmides enters the process of defining («τί φής εἶναι σωφροσύνη») but not yet, according to the cognitive range that moderately sets Socrates’ question, in a pertaining to this state way («κατὰ τὴν σῆν δόξαν»). He still remains in his own personal area. That is say he speaks for a first judgement, which will function as the starting point for the following. Besides, defining generally cannot result in mechanism or automatism, since it requires identifying all those things which form the identity of a collection of similar beings and their difference from other collections, which is a complex argument which needs to come through all the epistemological levels until it reaches the highest. We should mention once again that we are not speaking here for similar things which would be defined on the basis of a common categorization or their abstract approach. The whole discussion is about an individualized personal case, without excluding that similar things are implied. We could suggest that for the time being there is an implicit peculiar nominalism and, therefore, Charmides has to overcome it in order to be gradually led to the “universal”. But it would be a highly hasty move if he does not pass through the specific. Socrates knows how to maintain the proper balance.

Charmides realizes, as it was normally expected, how difficult is to give an answer to Socrates’ question. Regardless of this lack or inability of his, he attempts to accept the challenge and contends that temperance is a sort of decency and calmness to all the actions and dialectical encounters and he finally characterizes it in brief as quietness. This is a property that mostly shows the existing way, not however in the sense of inactivity. This answer is the beginning for Socrates’ question answer method, with the assistance

8 Cf. Plato, Chrm., 159b1-6. «... ἔπειτα μέντοι εἶπεν ὅτι οἶ δοκοὶ σωφροσύνη εἶναι τὸ κοσμίως πάντα πράττειν καὶ ἡσυχῇ, ἐν τε ταῖς ὀδοῖς βαδίζειν καὶ διαλέγεσθαι, καὶ τὰ ἀλλὰ πάντα ὡσαύτως ποιεῖν. Καὶ μοι δοκεῖ, ἔφη, συλλήβδην ἡσυχίτης τις εἶναι». “... but presently he said that, to his mind, temperance was doing everything orderly and quietly—walking in the streets, talking, and doing everything else of that kind ; and in a word, he said, I think the thing about which you ask may be called quietness” (LOEB, pp. 27-28). Cf. Goldschmidt 1971, 45.
of which the wise Athenian philosopher attempts to investigate the structure and the sources of his interlocutor’s position. His questions usually require specific answers, compatible with a system of thought that has been already formed or is to be formed and obviously needs to be verified. The first of his comments, which comes through an indirect conclusion, is that those who live in quietness are temperate. In this way he transfers the topic discussed from the conceptcondition to its bodies. Taking into account what will follow, this is not a final conclusion. It only reveals some extensions, which result from an opinion, actually not intensively suggested. The question on what is the epistemological projection or a somehow self-confirmation of an inherent presence of a virtue indirectly appears here well. The interesting part of the time being is however the method. So, he either presents two possibilities to his interlocutor –usually opposing («ταχέως ἢ βραδέως»), from which only one should be chosen –which is usually the logical one– or he raises his questions in a way that his interlocutor can only agree with his teacher following the common sense («τὸ κιθαρίζειν ταχέως καὶ τὸ παλαίειν ὀξέως πολὺ κάλλιον τοῦ ἣσυχη τε καὶ βραδέως»), where the syllogism is in order. This structural branching is necessary, taking into account that some middle solutions may be chosen, which it is highly possible that will be evaluated as more realistic, mostly regarding the data which form the case. In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to whether the examples used belong to the same or a different category, in order their investigation or inclusion to abstracting procedures of generalization and categorizations to be theoretically valid.

The question however should be examined in its whole process and it should necessary come through the information that come from the sensible experience, which can be validated, at least temporarily, through logical prepositions and definitions. And at some point of the discussion what will be confirmed is whether these prepositions can be set at the beginning as thought principles or can result from an abstraction later. Socrates’ syllogism begins from including temperance to a hypercollection, which completely consists of beautiful things, that is to say anything which can be considered as aesthetically remarkable and causes major interest.

9 Cf. Plato, Chrm., 159b7 ff.
10 Cf. Plato, Chrm., 159c6. “quickly or quietly” (LOEB, 29).
11 Cf. Plato, Chrm., 159c8-9. “to play the lyre quickly, or to wrestle nimbly, is far more honourable than to do it quietly and slowly” (LOEB, 29).
with their quality. The young man accepts that actually the virtue belongs to those who are “good” («τῶν καλῶν»)\(^{12}\), without thinking, however, that this inclusion will be the cause to change his former position. By this approval Charmides makes the mistake that the Athenian philosopher waited for, in order to proceed to his systematic, but not axiomatic or personally offensive, reconstructions of the expressed syllogisms, which, as in many dialogues is confirmed, constantly aim at a structural articulation of the internal procedures of cognition and theory precise correspondence to reality. So, by using examples from teaching, gymnastics, corporeal and spiritual activities through simple extensions the leader of the discussion makes the young man to accept that it is aesthetically better to perform all these not in a slow and calm way but quickly and intensively.\(^{13}\) Therefore, since temperance belongs to the category of the beautiful things, it would be logically absurd to be a sort of quietness, and by extension they all agree that the quite style of living does not form the conditions for it (sc. the style of living) to correspond to all those that we need to accept about this virtue.\(^{14}\) It is actually suggested that the condition related with the priority of quickness over quietness, which is approached in an axiological way, is in rare cases or even never excluded from the discussion on virtues. But, these are cases in which there is no certainty or stability, since the verb «τυγχάνουσι» and the categorical participle «οὖσαι» are used.\(^{15}\) Socrates avoids here as well making forced syllogistic leaps, which obviously do not lead to structurally great arguments.

However, if the former exclusion would be confirmed, the following would arise: The common attribution of a predicate, as the source of

\(^{12}\) Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159c10-d5.

\(^{13}\) Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 160b7-d3: «....καλὰ δὲ οὐχ ἦττον τὰ ταχὲα τῶν ἡσυχίων πέφανται». "....quick things are just as honourable as quiet things" (LOEB, 33). Goldschmidt 1971, 47.

\(^{14}\) Cf. Santas 1999, 127, who says that “a definition may fail to be true, or at least may be judged unacceptable, by being inconsistent with certain pre-analytically known general truths. For example, the definition of temperance as quietness in the *Charmides* is rejected on the ground that temperance is something of high praise whereas quietness is not”. Thus, it is not possible to assign mutual categorical determinations between the two situations, since a) their analysis does not place them in the same logical and factual context and, therefore, b) their meaning does not lead to valid synthetic judgments.

ambiguity and polysemy, would cause obvious difficulties to the axiological prioritizations, or at least to how the classification of those which give the impression that they belong to the same category would be accomplished. Either way, gradations are unavoidable in any genus of conditions, but the strict criteria that a priori establish them and a posteriori prove them should be necessarily introduced. It is not however possible to attribute a predicate in the exact same way, since it changes depending on the case, which can be confirmed and compared according to the question who defines the accuracy of the criteria for its particular attribution. For the time being, the text does not lead us in these points of view, which later expressed the representatives of the Academic skepticism (Arcesilaus-Carneades). What arises from the conclusions is strictly explicit and forms some somehow conclusive stereotypes. Even if the intense and quick actions are not superior as to their beauty from those which are performed in a measure and are quiet, according to Socrates we would not be able to contend that temperance means rather to act quietly than intensively, either during a walk or while studying or during any action that is at least related with them. It should be mentioned here that temperance is still not investigated per se and is presented as an idiom of several states of the human being. The Athenian philosopher insists and completes this syllogism with the following: we should suggest that a quiet and measured life is more temperate that an intense and quick one. What is more, we should not be carried away from the fact that in a particular point of the dialogue it was contended that temperance is one of the beautiful things; we also need to stay away from superficial evaluations regarding the supremacy as to the beauty between intense and quick and quiet and slow things. We should add that the mean mentioned here is not what has been already discussed, and mostly by Aristotle as a completely rational reading of the human conditions. This is not a rational choice but a somehow psychological one.

This part of the dialogue is full of verbs that show opinion or uncertain cognitive validity, which are mostly used by Charmides («ἔςωκεν», «φαίνεται»). The young man is constantly surprised. Socrates’ consecutive questions take away the necessary time to elaborate and connect to a syllogistic unity appropriately the information and the questions that he accepts and in this way he is lead to use verbs of skeptical agreement (such

16 Aristotle has dealt with this concept extensively. Cf. for instance, EN, 1103b.26-1109b.26.
as «κινδυνεύει». He answers with expressions that show strong certainty («πάνυ γε», «ναί») only to those questions that seem logical according to the common sense. It is obvious that this distinction reveals a degree of reasoning maturity and self-knowledge on the part of Charmides, a detail not insignificant for the evolution of the dialogue. But the expressive declarativeness which he sometimes chooses, taking into account the circumstances, is not for the time being epistemologically the safest, for reasons that have to do with him and the field of maturity which the discussion has reached.

2 The first factual question on “temperance” begins Socrates’ question answer method for theoretical structures

In a more systematic approach, we realize that the Athenian philosopher begins revealing the method in which he believes that the communication between the interlocutors should develop according to a scientific dialectic thought which proceeds both in depth and width. The first question on the possession of virtue from Charmides’ soul did not lead to precise conclusions and founded explanations. But, it caused the progress of communication in the sense that it gradually becomes acceptable that the Athenian philosopher is an expert who is capable of forming continuously coherent syllogisms, being affected by various fields. Moreover, the objective distribution of roles and the explicit acceptance of these roles are essential conditions for the success of a debate. So, in order Socrates, as the expert, to extend the meaning and the predicates, he opens the moral question on the possession of temperance towards its epistemological and ontological extensions. The first position expressed in the context of the goals that have been set is the following: if this virtue exists in Charmides, then it must have been arisen in the past compared to the present point. Or, we could contend this position: while virtue is formed in selfhood, he also understands its essence. But, the debate on the a priori must here accept some additions, which lead to the dialogues *Meno* and *Phaedo*, since the temporal distinctions between the former conditions are barely noticeable with respect to their succession. It is reasonable that the young man, unless he knows from a former personal and communicative experience what temperance is, will not be able to answer whether he possesses this virtue. However, even if he is not temperate, he has to have an opinion about it, as the expert teacher contends, since he lives in a society with everyday moral,
epistemological and generally philosophical questions, one of which is the question on virtue («φασί γε τοι, ὦ Χαρμίδη, τοὺς ἕσυχους σώφρονας εἶναι»)\(^{17}\). So, the usual empiricism is not excluded from the process of forming judgements, since it appears that it has a particular role with respect to the explanation of what is discussed. It can contribute to the epistemological process through its inclusion to abstracting procedures, provided that more than one case will be recollected for an as much as possible objective classification, which undoubtedly requires an accurate function of the terms that have to do with the similarity between the chosen experiences or to which this similarity leads.

Following a speculation, we believe that Socrates’ syllogism could be also supported by the prominent Platonic theory on recollection, according to which all human souls have known the Good and the resulting from it virtues, but they have forgotten the most part of this knowledge when they entered human body. This theory will be framed by the necessary epistemological principles in later dialogues, and mostly the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, with foundations both epistemological and ontological. In *Meno* they are mainly epistemological while in *Phaedo* they are mainly ontological. This succession is natural –if indeed *Phaedo* is later than *Meno*– since Plato’s gnoseological investigations precede chronologically the ontological ones. The above detail should guide us in how we should approach *Charmides*. But we cannot exclude that some images of the content of recollection can be found in the *Charmides*, which presents some of Plato’s later theories in an early stage.\(^{18}\) In an open approach of the texts, this sort of preparation is truly justified. In fact, this theory explains in a broader sense the right of human societies to think first and foremost on moral and then on ontological questions, using in each case at least their imperfect knowledge. At the same time, it empowers the dialectical process to achieve its goal, since it is considered that it feeds the philosophical syllogisms which help to recollect the hidden –that is to say, which already exists a priori– knowledge. Actually, this sort of possibility is identified in every human being. So, societies are able to move towards a field that is appropriate for “detections-excavations” due to the fact that its substrate is acceptable for cognitive approaches.

---

\(^{17}\) Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159b7-8. “They do say, you know, Charmides, that quiet people are temperate” (LOEB, 29).

\(^{18}\) For a proleptic approach of the *Charmides*, cf. Kahn 1988, 541-549.
To the theoretical foundations of temperance in Plato’s *Charmides* (158e-160d)

And returning to the strictly topical facts of the text under consideration, we would note that Socrates intentionally avoids expressing his own opinion for the essence of temperance, in order not to prevent the development of the elenchtic method, since this is what the Socratic irony requires, which here is more than obvious, as the starting point of self-critique and, subsequently, reflections and reconstructions. The intellectual atmosphere is formed regardless of the concerns on what should be defined which one can see here, in an optimistic way with respect to the cognitive performances that are to be caused, since dialectics becomes even more scientific and establishes, through the arising new conclusions, its self-justifications as a method. Once again we have to note that Plato’s teacher does not make theoretical leaps with the ease of an expert, but that he aims to bring out reasoning structures such that it is possible for a learner, as here Charmides, to actively participate in the discussion, in the formation of the arguments and the conclusions. In other words, he functions as an authentic teacher, perhaps even with obstetric process.

Charmides, since he does not have any other choice, at least for the time being, defines “temperance” as a form of peacefulness and somehow assigns to himself the role of someone who is regulated by right reason, a representative of which is the question answer method of the Athenian dialectician, who is an opponent of the sophists. This method is gradually formed by Socrates’ accurate questions, which elicit reasonable and clear answers from his interlocutor, given his apparent intellectual maturity. But these answers are not completely stable according the general context. They are appropriate to lead the investigative process to its end. The fact that the content of the questions is inspired by the direct experience of daily life contributes in that they do not require a time-consuming mental elaboration and in order to be more approachable by public opinion and this particular person who is here checked as one of its representatives. In any case, this prompt interchange of questions and answers makes difficult the understanding of the topic discussed from behalf of the young man. The growing number of these empirical examples, however, leads Charmides to identify the certainty of his interlocutor –firstly indirectly–, having started from a position of relativism, in the light of the considerations that were feasible for his reasoning up to that point in time. In fact, the first abstractive inductive methodologies are inevitably formed in his consciousness, which will lead to more clear categorizations. The
conclusion, therefore, of the question answer method which is clearly drawn is that the first definition of temperance is disproved. In this way the aporetic process is now revealed, but not in the sense of an extreme agnosticism that would postpone the interest for the development of the discussion.

Nevertheless, an important question arises, which does not allow the abstracting process to be as scientifically accurate as it could be. The examples are chosen without distinction from a number of fields of human activity and each one of them, due to its nature, is subject to a particular way to be accomplished and requires a special approach. It is not feasible and reasonable to be included in the same category for instance studying with walking, even though they could be both characterized as struggles. On the other hand, a single general condition is subject to a peculiar relativism, in the context of the circumstances in which it develops. For instance, a soul does not respond mechanistically in the same way. The stimuli that it accepts are in every case different, they are caused either by pleasure or sorrow or middle or neutral emotional-experiential conditions. So, the conclusion that through flexibility temperance is one of the aesthetically remarkable qualities –and, similarly, its body is also a temperate person– is strongly weak, in fact inherently. Definitely Socrates expresses a more moderate definition. But either way discussion has to follow a different direction, where temperance would not be defined as a property or accident of various conditions put in a pure sense. The difference is major, since it will include the factors of participation in its virtuous content and achievement from behalf of the person who will seek a rational morally action, while also the question of the existence of temperance will gradually, though not systematically at present, begin to take shape.

Conclusions

The transition from the passage 157c-158e to the passage 158e-160d of the Charmides is theoretically critical, since the discussion gradually gets epistemological and ontological research content and comes to reveal the new theoretical adventures into which Plato has entered. The following sentences of the passage 158e-160d are in our view the most important to show in a well-ordered way the first, but quite decisive, theoretical openness: I) «Δῆλον γάρ ὅτι εἴ σοι πάρεστιν σωφροσύνη, ἔχεις τι περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζειν. Ἀνάγκη γάρ που ἐνούσαν αὐτήν, εἶπερ ἔνεστιν, αἰσθησίν
To the theoretical foundations of temperance in Plato’s *Charmides* (158e-160d)

τινα παρέχειν, ἐξ ἦς δόξα ἃν τίς σοι περὶ αὐτῆς εἴη ὅτι ἐστίν καὶ ὑποῦν τι ἡ σωφροσύνη. 19 Πρὸς τὸ φῆς εἶναι σωφροσύνην κατὰ τὴν σήν δόξαν. 20 Οὐ τὸν καλὸν μὲντοι ἡ σωφροσύνη ἑστίν; – Πάνυ γε, ἔφη. 21 Η δὲ γε σωφροσύνη καλὸν τι ἐστὶν; – Ναι – ... ἐπειδή καλὸν ἡ σωφροσύνη. 22 Ἐπειδὴ καλὸν αὐτὸν δεῖ εἶναι σῶφρονα ὅταν. 23

The content of the first passage obviously prepares the theory on the archetypal Ideas although there is no explicit statement on the metaphysical foundations of the virtues and linguistic patterns remain in the anthropological field. Therefore and since the –not coordinated of course to the full extent– intention of Plato is this, we could form our syllogism as follows: if the Idea of temperance exists in man, then he could express some thoughts about what this virtue is and which its characteristics are. The content of the passage is formed by the combination of the ontological with the epistemological approach of the question. Specifically, if the ontological content of temperance is proved as inherent in human self, then its body is able to move epistemologically in relation to it. Its presence will first and foremost lead to a sense about it, which can develop into a doxa, which can also lead to the formulation of a definition. So, a epistemological improvement is clear. However, a question arises: since temperance is objective and exists in man, how does it cause epistemological products that relate with the sensible world? Why intellect is not used, which is closely related with the «ὅτι» and the «ὁποῖον», which are the objects of the integral knowledge? The answer will obviously arise through the actions which are subject to the experience, whether they are intact or unclear as to their foundation and purpose.

19 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 158e7-159a4. “Now, it is clear that, if you have temperance with you, you can hold an opinion about it. For being in you, I presume it must, in that case, afford some perception from which you can form some opinion of what temperance is, and what kind of thing it is” (LOEB, 27).

20 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159a10. “What you say of temperance according to your opinion” (LOEB, 27).

21 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159c1-2. “Tell me, is not temperance, however, among the honourable things ? – To be sure, he said” (LOEB, 29).

22 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159d8-159d11. “And temperance was an honourable thing ? – Yes. – ... since temperance is honourable” (LOEB, 30-31).

23 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 160b8-9. “Since, being temperate, it must be honourable” (LOEB, 33).
From a logical point of view, we need to mention that the first passage is analytical, since it refers—even hypothetically—to something that exists and not to its manifestations or applications. In fact, the cognitive process for its clarification-acquisition is explicitly self-referential. Similarly, the second passage, which moves to the formation of a definition, is also analytical, where the «δόξα» holds a key role. The third and fourth passages express synthetic-axiological-semantic judgments. The definition under formation or investigation includes a predicate, which, however, since it is attributed to a person or a collection of persons, does not refer to the pure temperance, for it is included in how men interpret it having as a criterion either its image or its effects, obviously in relation with its particular bodies and representatives. The fifth passage is an extension of the previous two—with “good” making the judgment synthetic—and shows, in terms of necessary extension, that anything related with temperance characterizes its bodies as well. So, the discussion personalizes behavior and in this way does not remain in abstract elaborations with only a conceptual orientation. However, the aporetic and detecting tone is maintained with the investigation having a dramatic content, so to speak.

Finally, considering the content of dialectics, in passage 158e-160d Plato’s purpose is to show how one will acquire this objective knowledge, with clear reference on its logical foundations. In fact, the expressive means in which the text is organized confirms, in our view, that he does not consider the capability of possessing temperance as a privilege of a minority. We believe that he follows a great, for its democratic orientation, position of Heraclitus: «ἀνθρώποις πάσι μέτεστι γιγνώσκειν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ σωφρονεῖν» (fr. 116). In fact, from a technical point of view, we can identify the process of reconstruction, since the definition expressed by Charmides is put under critical investigation together with broader syllogisms, is refuted and replaced by another. Nevertheless, Plato does not stress the fact that Charmides is characterized by ignorance, but that he is led to understand that a question, such as that which concerns virtues, needs constantly re-examinations and completions. Obviously, this course cannot be independent from the goal of catharsis of the mind from superficial or univocal approaches and foundations. Do note also that Charmides is firstly presented to be quite hesitating, maybe because he is involved in a discussion not socially common, which he meets in daily life: «Καὶ ὅς τὸ μὲν
πρῶτον ὁκνεῖ τε καὶ οὐ πάνυ ἣθελεν ἀποκρίνασθαι.24 So, from this chapter dialectics appears as an art for exceeding syllogistic failures or even ignorance as well as an unconventional tool against the social current and intertemporal status quo. Thus, it operates with an intense radical interventionism and attempts to articulate its presence in terms of Enlightenment versus pervasive social superficiality or in terms of stimulating the intellectual capacities of the new generation for its creative penetration into key anthropological issues.

Having also in mind the content of the dialogues Meno and Phaedo which will follow, we need to pay attention to the «ἀναμνήσθαι» and «μεμνῆσθαι» 25 as well as «ἐν γε ταῖς ζητήσεσιν τῆς ψυχῆς».26 Plato prepares the ground for what intensively will follow on the «ἀνάμνησις» ("recollection") and on the a priori ontological foundations of the human soul.

**Bibliography**


---

24 Cf. Plato, *Chrm.*, 159b1-2. “He at first hung back, and was not at all willing to answer” (LOEB, 23).


Prof. Christos Terezis, PhD.
University of Patras
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Philosophy
GR26500, Rion, Patras
Greece
terezis@upatras.gr

Lydia Petridou, PhD.
University of Patras
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Philosophy
GR26500, Rion, Patras
Greece
petridoulydia@yahoo.gr