

*Critias' Final Definition**'Temperance Is the Science of Itself and the Other Sciences'  
or 'the Science of Science' (166e4–167a8) – the Third  
Offering to Zeus (167a9–c8)*

So tell me, I said, what you mean with regard to temperance. – I mean, he said, that it alone of all of the sciences is a science of both itself and the other sciences. – Then, I said, if indeed it is a science of science or knowledge of knowledge [*epistêmê epistêmês*], will it not be knowledge of non-science or ignorance as well? – Very much so, he said. – So, the temperate man alone will know himself and will be able to examine thoroughly what he really knows and what he does not know, and will be capable of judging others in the same way, namely as to what someone knows and thinks he knows in cases in which he does know and again what someone thinks he knows but in fact does not know, and no one else will be capable of that. And so this is what being temperate and temperance and knowing oneself are, namely to know what one knows and what one does not know. Is that what you are saying? – Indeed, he replied. (166e4–167a8)

This passage brings to the fore the interplay between the two conceptions of self-knowledge that, on my reading, are in evidence in the dialogue.

On the one hand, Critias reasserts the distinctive characteristic of the *epistêmê* that he claims to be equivalent or identical to temperance: it is the only *epistêmê* of both itself and the other sciences. While he earlier defined temperance as a science both of the other sciences and of itself (166c1–3), he now reverses that order, mentioning first that temperance is a science of itself and, then, that it is also of the other sciences (166e5–6). This shift is not accidental but is, I think, intended to highlight the focus of the elenchus to follow: not so much that Critianic temperance is a higher-order science governing the other sciences as that it is the only science whose sole object is science itself. The shorthand that Socrates uses, with Critias' consent, points in the same direction: '*epistêmê epistêmês*' (166e7–8), a 'science of science', underscores that the feature of primary interest to the interlocutors is the strictly reflexive character of the science in question

rather than the fact that it is also set over the other sciences.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Socrates obtains from Critias another preliminary admission that will play a fairly important role in the elenchus, namely that, since temperance is supposed to be a 'science of science' (166e7–8), it must also be a science of its contrary: *anepistēmosynē*, the privation of science (166e7). This inference does not mark a turn towards epistemology.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it derives from the application of the familiar Socratic principle that every capacity extends over both its positive object and the privation of the latter.<sup>3</sup> And, crucially, it bears on the idea that the temperate person is in a position to discriminate between knowledge and ignorance.

On the other hand, in elaborating Critianic temperance or self-knowledge, Socrates finds a way of reminding us of his own pursuit of self-knowledge through the cross-examination of himself and others about 'the most important things'. Namely, he uses language strikingly similar to the expressions he uses in his defence speech in the *Apology*, as well as in other dialogues including the *Charmides* itself (166c7–e2), in order to suggest on behalf of Critias that the 'science of science' entails substantive as well as discriminatory knowledge. The temperate person in possession of that science will 'know himself' (*heauton gnōsetai*: 167a1) both in the sense that he will be able to test (*exetasai*: 167a2) the *content* of knowledge claims, i.e. *what* he himself and others know (*eidôs*: 167a2) or do not know even though they think they know, and in the sense that he will thus be able to distinguish knowers from non-knowers. This articulation of Critias' view inevitably brings to mind Socrates' own path to self-knowledge. The sustained *exetasis*, testing (22e), of different groups of citizens revealed to him what he and others knew or did not know but may have thought they knew (*Ap.* 21b–23b), and thus enabled him to understand the true meaning of the oracle, i.e. how he was wiser than other people. On both these occasions, Socrates favours the use of the cognitive verbs '*gignōskein*' or

<sup>1</sup> Critias does not object to Socrates' use of this shorthand, and indeed there is nothing puzzling about it (compare, however, Tuozzo 2011, 203–4). For, as the sequel of the dialogue will show, when Critias defines temperance as a 'science of itself and the other sciences', what he means to claim is that temperance is a science of science simpliciter; this scientific knowledge is of itself as well as of all the other sciences *insofar as they are sciences* but, as we shall see, it is not knowledge of the proprietary objects of these latter. Also, the sequel of the debate strongly suggests that temperance governs the other sciences precisely because it is a science of science simpliciter. On my reading, therefore, the higher-order status enjoyed by the 'science of science' depends on what I call the strict reflexivity of the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Contra Taylor 1926 and others.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, see *Rep.* I 333e. However, towards the end of the *Charmides*, Socrates will problematise the idea that there can be a science of ἀπειροσθένεια on the grounds that it is impossible for one to know in any way things that one does not know at all (175c3–8).

'*eidenai*' over '*epistasthai*', even though everywhere else in the *Charmides* the interlocutors almost always employ the latter verb and its cognate noun '*epistēmē*' in order to talk about Critianic temperance. It appears, therefore, that Socrates' present choice of terms is significant,<sup>4</sup> especially because he is supposed to elaborate rather than loosely paraphrase Critias' meaning.<sup>5</sup> Why, then, does Socrates express Critias' conception of temperance in a way that could be misleading? And why does Critias not object?

Given Critias' familiarity with Socrates' views and methods, and also the intimation that he shares with Socrates some common philosophical ground (e.g. at 165b3–4), we are entitled to suppose that he registers the twist that Socrates' gives to the conception of the 'science of science' and approves of it. I think that he has sound philosophical grounds for doing so, which can be related to his presentation by Plato as a Socratic.<sup>6</sup> In the first place, he appears to endorse on his own account the view expressed elsewhere by Plato's Socrates – that every *epistēmē* is both of something and of its opposite (*Rep.* I 333e3–334a10; cf. *HMi* 367c2–4). If temperance is a 'science of science' (*epistēmes*: 166e8), it must also be of the privation of the latter, i.e. of non-science or the privation of science (*anepistēmosynēs*: 166e7). Also, Critias seems to find congenial the implication drawn by Socrates that the person who has an *epistēmē* of itself will thereby (*ara*: 167a1) know himself. In fact, he will assert this explicitly later in the argument (169d9–e5). Furthermore, he has every reason to welcome the assumption made explicit by Socrates that the 'science of science' entails *both* the temperate person's capacity to discern knowledge or ignorance *and* the capacity to know content, i.e. *what* oneself and others know or do not know. For, as we shall see, Critias is especially interested in the application of temperance to political rule, and each of these two kinds of knowledge is necessary for that purpose.

In sum, we should appreciate the subtle and effective character of Socrates' intervention. He highlights certain crucial elements of Critias' conception of self-knowledge as a 'science of science' and prepares the ground for problematising each of them in turn in the course of the refutation. But also, he brings his own conception of self-knowledge to the fore, underscores its relevance to the examination that will follow, and alerts us to the possibility that the criticisms that will be levelled against the

<sup>4</sup> Consider the following remarks by Tuozzo 2011, 205: 'while I do not think much can be made of different connotations of knowledge terms when those connotations are not explicitly thematized in the text, nonetheless the switch here does indicate how different the Socratic formulation is from the Critian one'.

<sup>5</sup> ἄρα ταῦτά ἐστιν ἃ λέγεις – Ἔγωγε. <sup>6</sup> See Tsouna 2015.

'science of science' may also affect the Socratic method and its principal goal. One may object that Socrates did not need to follow such an oblique approach. However, the rules of dialectical debate prevent him from doing anything else. The claim under examination is Critias' definition of temperance, not his own. All that Socrates is allowed to do is assist his interlocutor to state adequately his own meaning and then ask questions intended to test the coherence of Critias' view. Of course, in his role as questioner, he can influence the course of the argument considerably. But he may not change its primary target, nor may he propose another view for investigation, while the investigation of Critias' claim is about to begin.

Before turning to this latter, we may recapitulate in contemporary philosophical terms the characteristics that the interlocutors attribute to Critianic temperance.

First, the 'science of science' is unique. It alone (*monê*: 166c2) is of itself and the other sciences, whereas every other science is not of itself but of an object different from itself (166c1–3). Second, it is, as I call it, strictly reflexive: it is *only* of science and the absence of science and of nothing else (166c2–3). Conversely, every other science is *only* of its own distinct object and of nothing else (166c1–2). The supposition that temperance is a science of the other sciences as well as of itself does not make it inclusive with regard to its object.<sup>7</sup> Since it governs the other sciences *only insofar* as they are branches of *science*, reflexivity is preserved throughout.<sup>8</sup> Third, the 'science of science' is non-transparent<sup>9</sup> or intransitive<sup>10</sup> with regard to the proprietary objects of the first-order sciences or arts. Since it is posited as an *epistêmê* only of *epistêmê*, it cannot be (also) of any other object. Importantly, the 'science of science' cannot be related either to tokens or to types or kinds. As will become clear later in the argument (notably at 170a6–171c10), Critianic temperance can know, for example, medicine *qua* science, but cannot know health and disease and cannot know any particular medical treatment.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, medicine knows health and disease and involves knowledge of particular treatments, but cannot know itself *qua* science. Fourth, the 'science of science' is supposed to be higher-order or second-order, formally as well as pragmatically. Formally, because by definition it is set over every other science, *qua* science as well as over itself. Pragmatically, because, according to the argument, it involves the capacity

<sup>7</sup> See also Chapter 1, 26, 37–9.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Thomas Tuozzo and David Sedley for their remarks on this point.

<sup>9</sup> So Duncombe 2012a and 2020 *passim*, who also explains why he prefers 'non-transparent' to 'intransitive' (see also the following note).

<sup>10</sup> So McCabe 2007a and 2007b. <sup>11</sup> See Chapter 11, 240 and note 11.

of delegating and overseeing the execution of tasks and of ruling the state. Fifth, Socrates and Critias agree that the 'science of science' entails both discriminatory and substantive knowledge: the capacity to discern *that* one knows or doesn't know (but may have believed to know), and also the capacity to judge *what* knowledge one has or doesn't have (but may have believed to have). To put it differently, the 'science of science' entails both the power to distinguish a knower from an ignoramus or a fraud and the power to judge what these persons' knowledge or ignorance is about. It is this highly peculiar and highly ambitious conception of temperance championed by Critias that will become, from this point onwards, the direct target of the elenchus. As for Socratic self-knowledge and the method by which it is achieved, we shall have ample opportunity to consider in parallel with the actual debate whether it can resist some of the criticisms directed at the 'science of science'.

Once more then, I said, as a third offering to the Saviour, let us investigate as if from the beginning, first, whether or not this thing is possible, namely to know of what one knows and does not know that one knows and does not know [it]; and second, however possible this may be, what would be the benefit to us of knowing it. (167a9–b4)

Here, Socrates articulates the twofold question motivating the search.<sup>12</sup> And he suggests that it has a quasi-sacred character by devoting it to Zeus the Saviour. The dedication of the investigation to the supreme deity flags its philosophical importance and is a plea to the god to assist the discussants in their task. For those familiar with the palinode of the *Phaedrus*, it may have dramatic significance as well. According to the myth of the palinode, the souls of people who practise philosophy on earth, when they are in their disembodied state in the heavens, belong to the retinue of Zeus. In their embodied state, these are the only people capable of apprehending Forms and discerning Beauty in the youths of their choice. Every pair consisting of a philosopher-lover and his beloved has Zeus-like characteristics and aims to live a Zeus-like, philosophical life. On the present occasion, Socrates' offering to Zeus of the argument that he will conduct with Critias could point back to the time when the two of them were frequently in each other's company (156a6–8) and Critias was still young and beautiful.<sup>13</sup> It could be a way of alluding to the nature of their past

<sup>12</sup> In this instance too, Socrates' ἀπορία does not mark an impasse resulting from the failure of an investigation, but motivates a dialectical search.

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned, Critias' beauty was famous and, therefore, can be considered part of the background information that dramatic aspects of the *Charmides* rely on.

relationship and to the emotional and intellectual bonds that, as Plato's audiences know, will eventually be severed.

Be this as it may, in the above excerpt Socrates specifies the object of the search with remarkable precision. The enquiry will be centred on two problems, one having to do with the possibility (*dynamon*: 167b1) of the 'science of science', the other with the benefit (*ôphelia*: 167b4) that it might bring. Even though Socrates does not explicitly identify them as *aporiai*, puzzles, soon afterwards he employs twice a form of the verb *aporein* (167b7), to puzzle over something, in order to convey his own state of mind. So, first, he asks whether or not 'this thing' (*touto*: 167b1) is possible, namely to know *that* one knows or doesn't know *what*<sup>14</sup> one knows and doesn't know.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it is needless to stress that 'this thing' is Critias' definition of temperance or self-knowledge as a 'science of science'; it does not concern Socratic self-knowledge in any direct way. Of course, the same holds for the second question, for it depends upon the first: assuming that 'this thing' is entirely possible or that we can possess the aforementioned knowledge, what benefit would it bring to us (167b3–4)?<sup>16</sup> Socrates underscores that the question of benefit can be raised *only if* the argument establishes that a 'science of science' is possible,<sup>17</sup> in some sense of 'possible'.<sup>18</sup> Also, he clearly indicates that, while he is willing to entertain the idea that Critianic temperance may not be possible, he is not willing to assume that it might be possible but not beneficial in any way. On any plausible account, temperance is a cardinal virtue and hence a great good for man. If Critias wants to uphold his conception of what temperance is, and if the latter proves to be coherent, he still will need to explain just how it benefits us.

Next, Socrates openly avows his perplexity and identifies its main source: the strictly reflexive character of Critianic temperance, which appears to him odd or even incoherent.

Come then Critias, I said, see if you can show yourself more resourceful than I am about it. For I myself am perplexed.<sup>19</sup> Shall I tell you exactly how I am

<sup>14</sup> Again, this is ambiguous: 'what' can be an indirect question or it can mean 'that which'. The ambiguity will be clarified in the Argument from Benefit: see Chapter II, *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. τὸ ἄ οἶδεν καὶ ἄ μὴ οἶδεν εἰδέναι (ὅτι οἶδε καὶ) ὅτι οὐκ οἶδεν: 167b2–3. Compare the concluding statement of the elaboration of Critias' view by Socrates: καὶ ἔστι δὴ τοῦτο τὸ σωφρονεῖν τε καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὸ ἑαυτὸν αὐτὸν γινώσκειν, τὸ εἰδέναι ἅ τε οἶδε καὶ ἄ μὴ οἶδε (167a5–7).

<sup>16</sup> ἔπειτα εἰ ὡς μάλιστα δυνατόν, τίς ἂν εἴη ἡμῖν ὠφέλεια εἰδόσιν αὐτό: 167b3–4.

<sup>17</sup> εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα δυνατόν: 167b3.

<sup>18</sup> The elenchus will indicate that Socrates is interested primarily in the logical and conceptual possibility of the 'science of science'. Moreover, we shall discover that this issue has metaphysical and psychological aspects, as well as important political implications.

<sup>19</sup> ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ἀπορώ: 167b7.

perplexed? – By all means, do so. – Well, I said, assuming that what you said just now is the case, wouldn't the whole thing amount to this, namely that there is one science which is not of any other thing but only science of itself and the other sciences, and moreover that this same science is also a science of the absence of science as well? – Very much so. – Then look what a strange thing we are trying to say, my friend. For if you consider this very same thing in other cases, you will surely come to think, as I do, that it is impossible. (167b6–c6)

Socrates' *aporia* conveys both the sense that he finds himself at an impasse and the hope that Critias may help him out of it.<sup>20</sup> His puzzlement can be traced back to the debate between him and Critias concerning an aspect of the *technê* analogy, namely the assumption that every art or science is of something distinct and different from that art or science itself. While towards the end of that debate he conceded to Critias that, unlike all the other sciences, temperance is solely and exclusively orientated towards itself, now he avows that he finds that position out of place (*atopon*: 167c4), and the same holds for Critias' more recent admission that temperance is a science also of non-science (166e7).<sup>21</sup> Herein lies the specific source of Socrates' unease (*hêi aporô*: 167b6), which, as he suggests, becomes worse when he considers the above position in the light of other examples. For then it seems to him downright impossible (*adynaton*: 167c6).

We should note that Socrates shows himself aware of the difficulties surrounding the 'science of science' *before* the argument begins. As he indicates, he already foresees 'other cases' of strictly reflexive constructions comparable to *epistêmê* and finds them too strange or incoherent (167c4–5). Rarely does Plato's Socrates anticipate the outcome of the elenchus in that manner, and even more rarely does he intimate that he has gone in advance through the relevant dialectical moves. Perhaps this is Plato's way of flagging his own work on relatives and relations and alerting us to the importance of the Argument from Relatives.

In any case, the passage cited immediately above makes entirely clear that Socrates is not concerned with every kind of reflexivity, but with strict reflexivity alone. What perplexes him is not merely that the *epistêmê* posited by Critias has a self-referential function, but that the object of that *epistêmê* is supposed to be *epistêmê* and nothing else (*ouk allou tinos*: 167b11).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See again Politis 2008, which presents a case study of a general interpretation defended in Politis 2006.

<sup>21</sup> On this point, see Wolfsdorf 2004.

<sup>22</sup> So, the elenchus will not concern, for example, the hypothesis that there may be an *epistêmê* of both itself and the other *epistêmai* and *also* of the objects of these latter, or generally the idea of a higher-

Consequently, he will bring the elenchus to bear on just this conception: temperance as a science exclusively and exhaustively directed towards itself. There is no evidence whatsoever that Socrates intends to argue on two sides, i.e. against the 'science of science' insofar as it is directed only towards itself, but *for* it insofar as it is directed towards other things as well.<sup>23</sup> Rather, he appears poised to play his dialectical role as questioner to the end of the debate with only one goal in sight.

As we stand at the threshold of the Argument from Relatives, we should take a moment to appreciate how high the stakes are for both participants. The tensions between them extend beyond the adversarial context of a dialectical argument to their competing conceptions of self-knowledge and, ultimately, to their respective values, characters, and ways of life. On the one hand, Critias has banked his all on the definition of temperance as a 'science of itself and the other sciences': a higher-order form of expertise both reflexive<sup>24</sup> and directive that, he supposes, enables the temperate person to identify the knowers and distinguish them from ignorant people or charlatans, oversee the first-order arts and their experts, and (as we shall see) scientifically govern the state. He obviously finds this intellectualist ideal attractive, and he also loves to win. Therefore, it matters to him enormously to be able to defend his thesis and prevail. On the other hand, Socrates is about to launch an attack on a position that, in the first place, he finds strange and, in the second place, he must view as both competing and incompatible with some of his own intuitions. At the same time, his elaboration of Critias' notion of a 'science of science' (167a1–7) indicates that he is aware of certain features that this latter shares in common with his own notion of knowing himself in the sense of discerning what he himself and others know or don't know but think they know. So, Socrates too is in a tight spot. He intends to scrutinise Critias' position and hopes thus to come closer to the truth regarding the nature of temperance (166c7–d6). He is compelled by the rules of dialectical argumentation to

order *epistēmē* governing the first-order sciences or arts. I shall return to this point in the following two chapters.

<sup>23</sup> Contra Politis 2008. Politis contends that Socrates argues both against and for the 'science of science' without contradiction: he argues *against* it on the assumption that it is both reflexive and restrictive, whereas he argues *for* it in order to suggest that temperance may be both reflexive and non-restrictive. However, I find no textual support for this interpretation. Moreover, while Politis appears to assume that every aporetic formulation of an issue requires argumentation on both sides, a survey of the occurrences of '*aporia*' and its cognates in Plato reveals that this is not the case. Besides, Politis' reading does not do justice to the cumulative force of the Argument from Relatives, nor can it account for the logical and dialectical ties between the Argument from Relatives and the Argument from Benefit.

<sup>24</sup> By 'reflexive' I mean 'strictly reflexive' unless I indicate otherwise.



do his utmost in order to refute his opponent. However, he probably suspects that, if his argument against Critias is successful, it may amount also to criticism of his own conception of self-knowledge and the method by which he tries to attain it. Given the dialectical skill of both interlocutors, neither of them can be confident about the outcome of the argument. Many possibilities are open, suspense is at its peak, and we should get ready to follow Socrates and Critias as they address in turn the two horns of the puzzle.