

СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

DIALECTICAL APPROACHES OF TEMPERANCE IN THE PLATONIC DIALOGUE *CHARMIDES* (157C-158E)

CHRISTOS TEREZIS

University of Patras, Greece

terezis@upatras.gr

LYDIA PETRIDOU

Hellenic Open University, Greece

petridoulydia@yahoo.gr

ABSTRACT. The purpose of this article is to investigate how the discussion in Plato's *Charmides* is formed with respect to a) the ontological and epistemological approaches of the virtue of temperance and b) how the transition from a general definition of a virtue to its presence to a person is accomplished. We rely on Plato's *Charmides*. After a concise presentation of those discussed in the passage 156d-157c, where we follow Plato's views on the soul to that time, we focus on how dialectics between Socrates and Charmides develops in the passage 157c-158e. Our article includes, apart from an introduction and an epilogue, two chapters. The first one is mostly analytical and the second is mainly formed by synthetic judgements. They are both crucial mostly for methodological reasons, since through them we can follow how temperance turns gradually into a question to be investigated and how the Athenian philosopher attempts to set the foundations of a discussion based on rational reason with the main reference focusing on the criteria which someone can use to prove that he possesses temperance.

KEYWORDS: Plato, *Charmides*, temperance, Ontology, Epistemology.

Introduction

In the *Charmides* Plato attempts to show, in addition to other moral and epistemological views of his, how a virtue –specifically here temperance– can be defined as a concept and constitute a human life style. He elaborates this composite question in almost the entire dialogue. In this article we will investigate this question as it

appears in the extensive passage 156d-158c. We will briefly present how it is approached in 156d-157c and we will systematically elaborate its dialectical development in 157c-158e. The goal of our investigation is not only to put into syllogistic schemata the topics which appear in this passage but also to reveal the methodology in which they are formed. Having as a basis the general development of the dialogue, we would first and foremost contend that this a way which reflects the sober as well as fertile course which dialectics as a coherent method follows.

The passage 156d-157c of the *Charmides* is crucial for the development of the investigation on moral questions, since it reveals the positions which Plato has formed during that period about the soul, as the greatest anthropological factor. The positions which he expresses are in brief the following: 1) all evils and goods of a human hypostasis come from the soul. So, considering the axiological moral question, the soul has a clearly priority, in an actually holistic way. This way is so precise that it is suggested that it can be included, through actually dialectical ascents, in consistently defined categories. 2. According to the former point, the principle which arises is that when we say that we need to take care of a man we first and foremost mean the soul, in order obviously to reveal the good qualities and to eliminate the evil ones. 3. Taking care of the soul is accomplished through a philosophical discussion. 4. Philosophical discussions cause temperance in soul. We need to pay attention here at the verbal form «ἐγγίγνεσθαι»¹, which does not refer to an a priori possession but to a status that comes as a result a posteriori, without this meaning that this is the final position of the founder of the Academy, since the dialogue is still at the beginning.

These four points are directly related one another, but we need to bear in mind that they rely on axioms. Specifically, the second proposition results from the first one, which, however, is based on a position not analytical but axiological. Furthermore, the third position is regulatory and defines the content of the fourth one, which communicates with the first, in the sense that good qualities come from the soul. It is obvious, through an indirect but easily identified logical extension, that temperance is a good quality, or becomes a requirement in order good qualities to come from the soul. The passage, however, neither forms a theory, literary speaking, nor does it provide the terms needed for its formation. This is because we need definitions for specific concepts, which, in this part of the dialogue, are introduced without the essential requirements or conceptual intermediations. Finally, in a

¹ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157a.5-6: «...ἐκ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λόγων ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς σωφροσύνην ἐγγίγνεσθαι...». “By the use of such words is temperance engendered in our souls” (the translation is from LOEB 1950, p. 21)

personal level, Socrates presents himself as capable of making the young Charmides to acquire this virtue, without using for the time being the maieutic method. However, none can exclude that it can appear in a later phase of the discussion, if not considering temperance, at least with respect to a thorough inquiry of these internal requirements which make a person acquiring it or retrieving it. For now, the discussion is about healing the soul², a conclusion which makes Socrates believing that Charmides presents some deficits with respect to how he understands anthropological questions, both *per se* and regarding their applications.

In the passage 157c-158e the discussion focuses on Charmides' personality and family origin, with an extension which leads to whether the young man possesses temperance and acts analogously. Charmides mentions that he cannot give an answer, so in the passage 157c-158e we see the beginning of a systematic approach of temperance and an attempt to be defined. Therefore, we will study how a question on whether a man possesses virtue develops, that is to say, we will deal with how his personal moral definition can be detected. In what follows we will not meet the content of this virtue in a general frame –for instance, as a “universal”–, for this is the topic of the next passage (158e-160d). Although the passage under investigation is not strictly theoretical, it is important, since we can see how a dialectical attempt in an initial phase can broadly lead to theoretical extensions.

1. *The terms of “temperance” as a personal property*

So, the basis of the episode which follows is an axiological prosopography.³ It begins with Critias, one of the first protagonists, who intends, once again and after an analogous attitude in a former episode, to praise his relative, namely Charmides.⁴ This possibly suspenseful and emotional attempt of the future tyrant of Athens to

² Cf. for instance, 156d.8-157b.1, where we read: «Ἀλλὰ Ζάλμοξις, ἔφη, λέγει ὁ ἡμέτερος βασιλεύς, θεὸς ὢν, ὅτι ὡσπερ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἄνευ κεφαλῆς οὐ δεῖ ἐπιχειρεῖν ἰᾶσθαι οὐδὲ κεφαλὴν ἄνευ σώματος, οὕτως οὐδὲ σῶμα ἄνευ ψυχῆς (...) Θεραπεύεσθαι δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἔφη, ᾧ μακάριε, ἐπωδαῖς τισιν, τὰς δ' ἐπωδὰς ταύτας τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλοὺς· ἐκ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λόγων ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς σωφροσύνην ἐγγίγνεσθαι, ἧς ἐγγενομένης καὶ παρούσης ῥάδιον ἦδη εἶναι τὴν ὑγίειαν καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ σώματι πορίζειν». “But Zalmoxis’, he said, ‘our king, who is a god, says that as you ought not to attempt to cure eyes without head, or head without body, so you should not treat body without soul’ (...) And the treatment of the soul, so he said, my wonderful friend, is by means of certain charms, and these charms are words of the right sort: by the use of such words is temperance engendered in our souls, and as soon as it is engendered and present we may easily secure health to the head, and to the rest of the body also” (LOEB, p. 21).

³ For an approach of this passage, cf. Tuozzo 2011, 128-131 and Lampert 2010, 168-170.

⁴ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157c7-d4.

protect a member of his family from potential –but not obvious according to the text– insults or at least underestimations is probably justified by the fact that he respects Socrates, that is to say, he is aware of the terms and conditions that he sets as well as his performance. More specifically, Critias, by recalling his past experiences, knows that he addresses a third person, Socrates, who, before any demand of some people to become his interlocutors and to discuss with him a topic, possesses valid criteria for giving answers and providing evaluations. Facing a person like this Critias thinks that he constantly needs to preserve his integrity at least for as long as he communicates with him, since he considers him as the greatest dialectician. This behavior is required not only for him but also the young Charmides, who was suggested by him to participate in the discussion. Critias is fully aware that, if Charmides will be educated by this well-known philosopher, he will enjoy only good benefits and this will have no negative –or even neutral– impact on him. Maybe due to this expectation he also presents him to Socrates not only as known for his external beauty but also as “capable” –in fact more than any other young man– of participating in a philosophical debate. Actually, at the beginning of this passage Critias, attempting to define the subject of this Platonic dialogue, wonders if this engages actually an investigation on “temperance”. This question is obviously technical for Plato, who intends to make readers understand that this text is one of those which elaborate virtue, that is to say, it is inspired from Socrates. Considering this virtue, Critias also expresses his belief that Charmides is incomparable to other young men, which means that he is capable of making a good debate with Socrates. This dialectics will also involve Theoretical Reason; and this is a nonnegotiable detail for the Platonic investigation, which constantly contributes to the development of Plato’s research.

At this point, the wise Athenian teacher conceives a brilliant plan, through which he essentially aims to elicit a positive answer from Charmides about his desire to have a discussion with him, according to the criterion of whether, despite his young age, he is temperate. In other words, this is not a debate to be performed in automatic terms; it will follow either already defined requirements or requirements that need to be defined. So, the principles to be followed are clear from the beginning. First and foremost, Socrates, attempting implicitly to direct Critias to express himself in sober terms, who praises in an excessive way –as usually since the beginning of the dialogue– one of his relatives, by using intense words regarding the style («σωφρονέστατος»⁵ –in superlative only for a personal opinion with no confirmation by others), turns directly to Charmides and praises the forefathers

⁵ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157d6.

who he originates from.⁶ These are families with special qualities, a great social and political tradition and also known for their beauty. Possibly here the son of Ariston and Perictione gets carried away by the aristocratic roots of his interlocutor and presents extensive biographic descriptions, probably to show the importance of a family tree regarding both the personality and the appearance of a descendant. It is not easy, however, here to assume whether he criticizes the social reproduction according to the behaviors which result from the family origin or he makes a suggestion on how families need to be formed taking into account the hereditary quality consequences. At least for now, Plato does not seem being interested in a strictly defined sociological discussion.

Charmides' position, however, will be confirmed if the Athenian philosopher will make in this way the young man to admit, at least indirectly, that due to his genetic origin is not only handsome but also temperate, namely, that he possesses two qualities together in a personal fine and rare synthesis. But, we need to clarify this: the basis is that since he is young, with no doubt he is in Aristotelian terms "potentially but not actively temperate", so that conclusions will not reach exaggerations with respect to heredity. He also assigns him a duty that a responsible and free citizen needs to serve, which has to do not only with his correspondence to what he is due to a noble origin but also what he should be. Socrates' expectation is the young man to accept the challenge so that to gradually improve himself. This acceptance is necessary for Socrates' syllogism, since the development of the debate will prevent the young man from denying –even for heredity reasons– that he owns potentially temperance. In general, we would contend that the discussion leads us in how freedom is gained but not a person's arbitrariness. Obviously, the Athenian dialectician believes that the former property is a great historical category while the latter is not, or the former one constitutes a productive principle while the latter receives meaning and value only from itself.

What is the advantage of this goal? Is there an attempt or not the interlocutor's syllogism to avoid the obstacles of hereditary automatism? These obstacles clearly prevent both personal achievements and initiatives. In addition, these obstacles do not allow a person to act in order to overturn the current social reality through specific actions, not even for approaching it in a theoretical or imagined critical way. Is there a reason to exclude the possibility of a behavior like this in a democratic and liberal society such as Athens? So, the topic has a number of aspects to be taken into account. Considering the accuracy or the strategy of the expressive means used by Plato, we need also to mention that the word "temperance" is not mentioned even once in the description of the qualities of the two families that

⁶ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157d9-158b2.

Charmides is descended from. This absence needs to be explained both historically, considering that the goal of the text is to be formed through true events, and systematically, considering that there are no relevant arguments to this point. For the time being, however, the greatest value models are taken into account: the father's generation is mentioned as consisting of and ordered by prominent Athenian poets for their "beauty", "virtue" and "eudaemonia", while the antecedents of the mother were known for their "beauty" and noble integrity. In fact, Socrates, intending to avoid causing emotional disorder to Charmides, somehow equates the qualities and value performance of the two families. In both cases he insists on a positive evaluation, without mentioning the issue of the virtue heredity as an automatic given but as being caused only according to what is natural for the evaluations that are to be expressed: «Ἐκ δὴ τοιούτων γεγονότα εἰκός σε εἰς πάντα πρόωτον εἶναι».⁷ So, he must have received the family qualities naturally, although the «εἰκός» does not indicate certainty or determinism. Yet, indirectly according to the context, temperance is not excluded; in fact, it could be revealed in the terms of a synthesis of the particular great qualities mentioned before. Besides, the reference to eudaemonia is also important, since it is a critical concept for the plenitude of the virtue performances and the quality of daily life. In fact, during the development of philosophy, in both Plato and Aristotle, eudaemonia receives a broader meaning than that of temperance, since it is defined as the quintessence for accomplishing a personal qualitative goal, as the highest point of an existential course, as the point where all virtues are gathered and as the actualization of good.⁸

Nevertheless, we need to focus on the former conclusion: a syllogism that is to be integral should follow specific principles while being formed. Thus, Plato, even when he presents his teacher in agreement with Critias' description-comments on that his relative is extremely temperate, does not mention in the first place the word "temperance", but the expression «διαφέρειν τῶν ἄλλων πᾶσι τοῖς τοιούτοις».⁹ In this way, he sets as the first goal of the discussion comparative evaluations. Clearly, the fact that there is no systematic investigation for identifying temperance in his and the young man's family makes Plato to avoid using this word at the beginning of his syllogism and raises, indirectly, the need for methodological and explorative accuracy. So, we could contend that what comes clearly to the fore is how necessary is method to correspond to the real conditions. The realistic criterion, with respect to conclusions that can be validated, can be identified here and determines in regulative terms the range and the intensity of the predicates. More

⁷ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 158a6-7.

⁸ On this, cf. Gadamer 1994.

⁹ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157d9-e1.

specifically, this means that broader terms cannot be even expressed without the necessary dialectical preparation with intervening middle steps, which would certainly include a detailed elaboration of the empirical information, in fact through the persons themselves. Temperance will arise during the discussion as a product of a process that has revealed that the interlocutors, through investigations and theoretical constructions, agree on its contents and on the fact that it is found in specific persons. In addition, on that due to its meaning leads the interlocutors to investigate whether the persons-bodies of it hold also other great qualities.

As a parenthesis, we need to mention that nobody could exclude the following historical possibility: perhaps temperance is not yet a subject-matter for the Athenians, which means that there are no elemental potentials for it to be attributed as a predicate to a person or a family or general social concerns. However, whether Plato's conclusions are affected by the circumstances is not a strong possibility. He usually criticizes the status quo and makes suggestions for its reconstruction. This does not mean that he excludes the possibility that a person or a collection is a conscious body of great moral virtues. So, we would say that this possession is expected to be proved. But the debate will no more focus on the historical-family past; it will turn to the personal expected future, which Charmides represents. We could, however, contend that there is a theoretical and methodological strategy here. Socrates has already mentioned leading concepts such as virtue and eudaemonia, although he has not found them theoretically. Obviously since the main topic of the dialogue is temperance, he possible follows a systematic process in its elaboration, from the most unstructured to the most structured syllogistic schemata.

Considering how the arguments are presented, we could mention the following: the epistemological distinction «εὖ ἴσθι-οἶμαι»¹⁰ accurately shows the arguments of the two interlocutors, namely Critias and Socrates, as well as their characters. Critias, who insists on his views and is completely focused on his attempt to bring his relative close to the Athenian teacher, by stressing his qualities, uses the verb

¹⁰ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157d6-e4. «Εὖ τοίνυν ἴσθι, ἔφη, ὅτι πάνυ πολὺ δοκεῖ σωφρονέστατος εἶναι τῶν νυνί, καὶ τὰλλα πάντα, εἰς ὅσον ἡλικίας ἤκει, οὐδενὸς χείρων ὢν. Καὶ γάρ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ δίκαιον, ὦ Χαρμίδη, διαφέρειν σε τῶν ἄλλων πᾶσιν τοῖς τοιούτοις· οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι ἄλλον οὐδένα τῶν ἐνθάδε ῥαδίως ἂν ἔχειν ἐπιδειξάι ποῖα δύο οἰκίαι συνελθοῦσαι εἰς ταῦτόν τῶν Ἀθήνησιν ἐκ τῶν εἰκότων καλλίω ἂν καὶ ἀμείνω γεννήσειαν ἢ ἐξ ὧν σὺ γέγονας». "Then be assured, he said, that he is considered to be far and away the most temperate person now alive, while in every other respect, for a youth of his age, he is second to none, Why, yes, I said, and it is only right, Charmides, that you should excel the rest in all these respects; for I do not suppose there is anyone else here who could readily point to a case of any two Athenian houses uniting together which would be likely to produce handsomer or nobler offspring than those from which you are sprung" (LOEB, p. 23).

«οἶδα» when he expresses his opinion –which, although it is evaluative, it is also emotional– and wishes to persuade Socrates to adopt it. He is definite and, by extension, motivating to his opinion, leading himself, even indirectly, to dogmatism. This verb shows a certain strong knowledge but also requires a deep confrontation with the topic under discussion. We need to add here that the verb «λέγω», which comes before, is in indicative and shows what is explicitly strong. But, where do these requirements come from to this part of the debate? The only thing that we could contend is that Critias relies on his already established personal experiences.

On the other hand, Socrates, since he is not able at least for now to have a clear opinion and since he relies mostly on any experience he can invoke («οὐδένα τῶν ἐνθάδε ραδίως ἂν ἔχειν ἐπιδείξαι»),¹¹ uses the verb «οἶμαι». This is a language form which basically shows a subjective opinion or a doxa but not a consistent knowledge; this, however, does not preserve epistemological development and does not make him fall under an exhaustive skepticism or a pessimist agnosticism. The hierarchized levels of epistemological accuracy are revealed and clearly show the moderate and realistic way in which Plato approaches the topics and defines the principles in which they are gradually placed in conceptual-axiological models. In fact these models reflect the comparisons between the graduations. The same methodological or, in a broader sense, epistemological condition is here once again revealed: the predicates, which describe both the pure conditions and the comparisons, are formed only after the necessary syntheses of the basic empirical and dialectical-theoretical factors. In fact, these are definitions which require reevaluation and, therefore, the system which will form –and by extension the concepts which describe it– will not be sufficient.

At this point, Socrates, the inventor of the maieutic method, raises a question, which, although it consists of two parts, leads actually Charmides to give only one answer. He actually does not obviously require accepting middle states or a development from that which is imperfect to that which is perfect. Or, else, this is not an attempt to structure a theoretically consistent definition. So, Socrates asks Charmides if he considers himself to be temperate or not.¹² The fact that he does not discuss a middle state shows that in this case he probably does not take into account that for these human matters it works in a mediating way in the sense of the most realistic. And we could not ignore that the daily experience confirms that it is not easy to characterize a man as fully temperate or, on the contrary, completely lacking of this property. The factor or quality development, according to the current circumstances as well, is the only approach in this discussion, but it is

¹¹ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 157e1-2.

¹² Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 158b2-c4.

not yet chosen. The changeability of human states is presented as if it is not theoretically interesting. If the first possibility has been true since the introductory paragraphs, that is to say, the organic illness, it is enough for Charmides to use the appropriate herb to heal his body pain. But, if he accepts that he is temperate, the healing will be accomplished in two phases. He will first of all say the magic lines and, then, he will receive the herb.

The way in which Socrates presents the philosophical question is one-dimensional and maybe superficial, since it does not raise the need for criteria that will have to do with the means to be chosen or their succession during their use-application and –the most important– the predicates that will be attributed. In fact, it is a technical question-“trap”, which necessary leads to just one answer, although it consists of two parts but with respect to the same property. So, if Charmides admits that he is completely temperate, there is no interest for Socrates to deal with or to investigate his personality. His educational intervention has nothing to offer, except for suggestions to be further implemented. But maybe there is a different, elenctic and critical possibility in this: the interruption of the discussion is maybe due to the fact that the young man will be proved an arrogant, namely, the opposite of the property which he claims that he owns (temperance). A young man without the «γνώθι σαυτόν» (self-awareness) and with no intention, due to an arrogant attitude or his great ignorance, to cooperate and have a discussion with the teacher, reveals a selfhood with a wrong direction perhaps without an, at least direct, intention to accomplish an existential reconstruction or assertion of this sort of state. Therefore, the entire communication would end here as lacking of a future possibility, since consciousness would not be open to new perspectives. This openness, however, in the context of how one establishes or justifies his own decisions, cannot exclude any possibility, either good or bad, regarding the factors which hold a decisive role in the field of how a person forms or presents himself. This subject matter is defined in each person individually and has nothing to do with axiomatic conclusions. Socrates as an experienced and thorough social analyst is aware of all these and he obviously will lead the discussion analogously.

But if Charmides admits that he is not completely temperate, he will allow a communication with Socrates in order to explore with him this virtue. That is to say, they will investigate whether temperance exists as both a capability and goal in the young man in order to improve himself to all the fields in which he is personally involved. It is highly possible, however, a person who questions the truth of all these mentioned before to criticize the accuracy of Socrates' syllogism by stressing that Charmides is not able to provide a consistent argumentation about the fact that he has no suspicion of temperance. It is also possible that he owns temperance but without knowing it, for reasons that have to do, in both cases,

mostly with his young age. However, which are the criteria of Charmides' exercise on the conclusions? It should be mentioned that Socrates has already discussed this topic at the beginning of his syllogism by having claimed that Charmides is possibly "potentially temperate" due to his genetic origin, or somehow due to ontological specifications. So, the principle of heredity has already arisen, which adds to the process of how a person develops by following particular natural terms (not however in the sense of determinism).

The opposite is also possible: maybe the young man has realized his capacity, at least to a point, which comes from his personal experience with himself while he acts in his social environment in various ways. Either way, the entire syllogism to this point presents many weaknesses, which is natural, since the interlocutors are still at the beginning of the discussion and have not yet formed the appropriate conceptual and methodological code that would directly lead them to coherent syllogisms-arguments and true conclusions. In fact, if we considered temperance a divine virtue, we would conclude that Socrates remains within the frame of a common religiosity. At the same time, however, he has just begun revealing skillfully the terms for the transformation of the current views on its content according to rational reason. Nevertheless, the text does not allow this sort of discussion, which meets the terms of the enlightening spirit and that is why the ideas of common psychology are still allowed. Yet, Socrates' incomparable dialectics prepares us for what will follow.

For the time being, the young man cannot escape the complexity of the questions and, since he is not able to react analogously and effectively, he realizes the dead end that the wise teacher has led him to, which he actually mentions, by admitting the unclarity which he chooses. Besides, Charmides' explanation on that he is not able to answer Socrates' question is more naïve than it actually seems.¹³ If he suspected that the Athenian philosopher distracts him by mentioning his possible arrogance and Critias' extremely remarkable predicates, it would be extremely difficult for him to give an answer. He is concerned with the possibility that he might disprove Critias and all those who praise him. Besides, the person who would admit that he is temperate would seem as lacking argumentative capacity as well as irrational and unrealistic, since, anyone who combines arrogance with temperance falls by definition in a pragmatological contradiction. This is due to the fact that temperance involves moderation and humility, but if this person claims that he is temperate he is actually arrogant, or at least, unrealistic, as long as he has not yet presented the appropriate relevant proof. The concepts now have

¹³ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 158c5-d5.

got an orientation and, in this way, indirectly it becomes clear how necessary reflection is.

Charmides' argument, however, shows a person with structured thought, since he investigates all the possible explanations and possibilities which arise from the discussion, at least according to his own criteria. That is to say, he gives the answers for which he has the criteria so that to form them prudently. As expected, the young man eventually accepts Socrates' challenge to discuss, impressed by the former argumentation, which probably surprised him. So, we would contend that the intervention of the rhetorical uses of language can lead to new decisions and can overturn, more or less, any argument and conclusion which has been formed to that very moment. The only thing now is to see if Socrates will continue using exclusively rhetoric expressions or if an argumentative depth is hiding in them, which needs those expressive means by which he will cause the reflecting interest of his interlocutor.

At the end of this argument,¹⁴ the Athenian teacher asks his interlocutor to trust him his soul, since –as it has already been stressed– a philosophical process, such as dialectics, requires from both the interlocutors willingness and tolerance, that is to say, two things which need great internal supplies for unconditional ad extra projections for communication. Undoubtedly the leader of the discussion will be the most mature, so that, apart for everything else, to define the intensity that these projections should have. If the young Charmides insisted on referring to himself and Socrates' words did not have an impact on him, then the entire prospect of intervention of Socrates' thought would not be able to activate the process of changing the way in which his interlocutor thinks. In addition, he would not come to any pedagogical result, regardless of any strategic invention. However, in the passage under investigation it becomes clear that the moral regulatory principles and the resulting from them pedagogical goals are dominant, while at the same time dialectics has not yet become an autonomous process; it works only as a tool. The range of its functions is wide and, therefore, it does not own yet stable scientific qualities.

*2. Socrates' question on the terms that confirm
the possession of virtue by a person*

Attempting a more theoretical approach of all those which we elaborated, we have to mention that in this episode the coherent method of the Socratic thought dominates. The purpose is Charmides to participate in a rational discussion, which exceeds a simple dialogue between two persons, which do not rely on consistent

¹⁴ Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 158d7-e3.

terms. These are terms which lead to conclusions, which not only set boundaries to what has been already discussed but also are the source of what follows.¹⁵ That is to say, this is where we find middle syllogisms, which form the structural “chain” of the arguments.

At this point any attempt is in the phase of preparation and testing. Specifically, the concept under investigation is heralded by the relative of the young man, who easily exaggerates, aiming to “prove” Charmides’ great “temperance”. Critias attempts to define the, actually not acceptable at first, compatibility between an age that is not characterized by the possession of a property and a person who, although he is of that age, has already revealed it. The personal accomplishment appears as a connection between those which are dialectically opposing, which are defined as such not due to a personal lack or inactivity but because of objective conditions. The sophist, however, uses dialogue only as a tool, which results from emotional discriminations and not a detailed code of arguments-syllogisms. He cannot correspond to an internal reconstruction, which would raise an authentic reason, which is not placed among the cases which the appetitive part of the soul forms. These sophistic proverbs, which are more appropriate to an uneducated public opinion, cause Socrates’ critical reactions. Considering actually all the Platonic texts one can confirm that the Athenian dialectician appears as someone who seeks as a constant foundation and perspective of his thought consistent criteria for an objective conclusion and application and starting points of a discussion that could be clearly confirmed by experience, but actually not by a superficial conception of it.¹⁶ This is an experience that, through the attentiveness of that who

¹⁵ On the topic of rationality and how the Socratic ideal is utilized in the *Charmides*, cf. Schmid 1998.

¹⁶ At this point, we could confirm the following antithesis: Socratic knowledge-sophistic idealization of the art of knowledge. The question however which here is raised is whether we can identify Plato’s view of Critias with reality. According to Tuozzo (2011, 66-71), Plato seems that he presents Critias as a representative of “what we might call technological sophistry. This sort of sophistry arises from an overestimation of the value of the power over various features of the world afforded by the various human crafts (τέχναι) and makes the claim that there is also a craft for settling questions of moral-political value, precisely the craft that they, the sophists, possess and can teach. On this view, it is this conception of moral knowledge as a craft that is the fateful sophistic error, one that inexorably leads either to something like value nihilism or to the identification of the true good with the exercise of power itself. On this view, Critias’ sophistry leads him to seek power for its own sake; on the other, more widespread view, his sophistry leads him to seek power to satisfy his desire for pleasure. In either case, the sophistry can be seen to be put into

investigates, is proved in its true dimension and with respect to its correspondence to truth and can be surely categorized as such. But, the internal control is necessary, since it attempts through difficult procedures to provide to the spirited part of the soul the purification which is required, so that to become the “sincere associate” of the logical part of the soul and to include the appetitive part into its true limits without eliminating it.

So, in the context of the former discussion, Socrates raises questions to make the young man answer whether he owns “temperance”. This technical question is a unique step of Socrates’ dialectical method, which is required for the development of the elenctic process. He actually asks Charmides «λόγον διδόναι περὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς» as a personal accomplishment, both regarding himself and those fellow citizens who think that he is temperate. This «λόγον διδόναι» will lead the Athenian young man to a self-reflection, a self-control that will be accomplished as he communicates with his selfhood. The quality of this communication will define the verifiability according to rationality, regarding both the general content and the internal coherence of what he contends. Despite the lack of Charmides, we need constantly to mention that not even Socrates has developed yet the appropriate criteria to found scientific dialectics. He takes the opportunity from the sophist’s announcement and without any question about the definition the first question that he raises is that which in terms of a coherent-logical succession should be the second one. However, maybe this change in the order takes place for strategic reasons, in a technic or rearrangement of dialectics in order to open wider and more flexible courses for the theoretical product. In fact, what will follow in the next passage of the dialogue will support this point of view.

So, the fact that in this case Charmides is proved not to have developed yet the appropriate cognitive tools, so that after he comes to an internal dialogue with himself to be able to establish in precise way what has to do with temperance in him, is a major problem-lack, but from any point of view justified. In addition, he has not yet made the appropriate synthetic judgments, which are the highest point of Theoretical Reason and obviously require constantly thoughtful elaborations. But how could he, since he has not received the necessary basis from the definition of temperance? So, he comes to a dead end, which does not provide what he actually needs to express at this point of the discussion a clear answer, which could open a course to the heart of the topics. It is highly possible that Socrates acts here as well in more strategic terms. He intends to show how public opinion understands the content of a virtue and analogously to criticize, leading his interlocutor

practice by Critias in his political activity” (p. 67). But, taking into account that Critias is not a professional sophist, we would better consider him as a “social theorist” (p. 70).

to a self-criticism with respect to the relevant meaning to which he has been lead. So, the criterion will be the mental-semantic schema with which Charmides should form his thought but he has not yet discovered.¹⁷ In this demanding case, the epistemological requirements will meet the reconstruction of the social mentality. For the time being, Socrates, who understands that his dialectical aporetic method begins to be effective, suggests to take his interlocutor out of the dead end and bring him into a philosophical dialectical discussion with him. This discussion will aim to mentor Charmides' way of thinking and reveal by using the criteria of rationality the validity of the views that he has and which his young interlocutor is asked to follow in a conscious and justified way. In addition, in a general perspective it is necessary to understand the ontological and moral questions as well as their logical elaboration and relations in specific conceptual schemata. But more middle syllogistic processes are still required, which will also contribute to the structure, an inviolable term for a scientific dialectics.

Epilogue

In our view what we investigated leads to the following conclusions regarding the passage 157c-158e of the *Charmides*, which has a sufficient degree of thematic autonomy so that it can be considered as a chapter with a special direction:

A) Although this passage does not literary constitute a philosophical question – that is to say, it does not systematically approach epistemological, moral, political, aesthetic and metaphysical topics– it is interesting since it refers to the spirit that must be formed in order to cause research stimuli. And given that for Socrates and Plato these stimuli are dialectically formed, this method is dominant so that to prepare the interlocutors to elaborate a major moral question, such as the virtue of temperance. So, we follow the preparation which will lead to the formation of requirements for the beginning of the relevant research, which needs to meet the terms of objectivity and systematicity in actually extended terms of participation in the topic under investigation.

B) The passage which we investigated is also interesting from a sociological point of view, since it presents the condition in which human personality is formed in an organized social and political whole. Although these conditions appear to be intra-familial with a clear projection of heredity, they refer to families which are distinguished by specific characteristics, which appertain to moral and social evaluations, in fact under comparative and indirectly regulatory terms. The question which, either explicitly or implicitly, is raised is the following: to what extent is a

¹⁷ For a general approach of this, cf. H. Marcuse (1955, 121-168).

young man's personality defined by his family background? In addition, to what extent does he need to strive for his autonomy from the determinations of his close environment and the possible tradition which is represented by it?

C) The dialectics which is formed in this passage does not aim only to detect, to pass erudite logical models and to form the principles which should define communication and discussion. It has also a clear pedagogical orientation, which refers to how an expert should stimulate the contemplative creative reflexes of someone who is not an expert, who however has been found that is able to overcome his lack. In the whole discussion with the young Charmides Socrates appears as an incomparable educator who respects his interlocutor and attempts to form the conditions to take him out of his ambiguity. Actually, the style of the dialogue reveals a spirit that can be generalized and shows what the behavior of an expert should generally be, no matter what the subject of the discussion is. We will find this regulatory basis and its results shortly after in the *Meno*, where Socrates will stimulate the scientific reflexes of a non-expert, in fact a slave, using the method of dialectics-maieutic.

D) The pedagogical orientation which is formed follows the principles of rationality, which places it in the spirit of the ancient Greek Enlightenment. There are no discriminations, shameful populism and unchangeable or inflexible axioms. This forms an open encounter that takes also into account the psychological feeling. The result is an emotional communication between the interlocutors. One can see a pervasive spirituality, which is empowered by the narrative strict scientific expressive tone, with figures of speech that reveal both internal and externalizing modes.

E) Although no special emphasis is given in the difference between philosophers and sophists, the way in which Socrates and Critias speak show it to some extent. Critias appears –in fact enthusiastically– being sure for Charmides' qualities, while Socrates, without questioning them, begins to investigate them and attempts to identify them, confirm them and examine if they exist consciously. So, regarding the last case, the following detail arises: even if Charmides possess the qualities that Critias recognizes, is he aware of this possession? This question proves that Socrates attempts to identify when philosophical topics begin, since he does not elaborate them exclusively in an abstract perspective but presents them through the dialectical encounter between responsible persons.

REFERENCES

- Gadamer, H.-G. (1994) *L'idée du Bien comme enjeu platonico-aristotélicien*, transl. by P. David and D. Saatchian. Paris.
- Lampert, L. (2010) *How Philosophy became Socratic: A study of Plato's Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic*. Chicago / London.
- Marcuse, H. (1955) *Reason and revolution. Hegel and the rise of social theory*. London.
- Schmid, W. Th. (1998) *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic ideal of rationality*. New York.
- Tuozzo, Th. M. (2011) *Plato's Charmides. Positive elenchus in a "Socratic" dialogue*. Cambridge / New York.