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Charmides

We arrived yesterday evening from the army at Potidaea,[1] and I sought with delight, after an absence of some time, my wonted conversations. Accordingly I went into the wrestling-school of Taureas,[2] opposite the Queen's shrine,[3] and there I came upon quite a number of people, some of whom were unknown to me, but most of whom I knew. And as soon as they saw me appear thus unexpectedly, they hailed me from a distance on every side; but Chaerephon, like the mad creature that he is, jumped up from their midst and ran to me, and grasping me by the hand— Socrates, he said, how did you survive the battle? (Shortly before we came away there had been a battle at Potidaea, of which the people here had only just had news.) In the state in which you see me, I replied. It has been reported here, you know, said he, that the battle was very severe, and that many of our acquaintance have lost their lives in it. Then the report, I replied, is pretty near the truth. You were present, he asked, at the fighting? I was present. Then sit down here, he said, and give us a full account; for as yet we have had no clear report of it all. And with that he led me to a seat by Critias, son of Callaeschrus. So I sat down there and greeted Critias and the rest, and gave them all the news from the battlefield, in answer to their various questions; each had his inquiry to make. When we had had

[1] A Cortinthian colony in Chalcidice which was a tributary ally of Athens, and revolted from her in 433 B.C. In the next year an Athenian force met and fought a Peloponnesian force at Potidaea, and then laid siege to the city. Thus began the Peloponnesian War.

[2] A professional trainer.

[3] There was a shrine of Basile, or the Queen (of whom nothing is known), some way to the south of the Acropolis. Cf. Fraser, *Pausanias* ii. p. 203.

enough of such matters, I in my turn began to inquire about affairs at home, how philosophy was doing at present, and whether any of the rising young men had distinguished themselves for wisdom or beauty or both.

Then Critias, looking towards the door, for he saw some young fellows who were coming in with some railing at each other, and a crowd of people following on behind them, said—Concerning the beauties, Socrates, I expect you will get your knowledge at once: for these who are coming in are in fact forerunners and lovers of the person who is held, for the moment at least, to be the greatest beauty; and he himself, I imagine, must by now be nearly upon us.Who is he, I asked, and whose son? You must know, he replied, but he was not yet grown up when you went away,—Charmides, son of our uncle Glaucon, and my cousin. I do know, to be sure, I said; for he was not to be despised even then, when he was still a child, and now, I suppose, he will be quite a youth by this time. You will know this moment, he said, both how much and to what purpose he has grown. And just as he spoke these words, Charmides entered.Now I, my good friend, am no measurer: I am a mere "white line" [4] in measuring beautiful people, for almost everyone who has just grown up appears beautiful to me. Nay and this time, moreover, the young man appeared to me a marvel of stature and beauty; and all the rest, to my thinking, were in love with him, such was their astonishment and confusion when he came in, and a number of other lovers were following in his train. On the part of men like us it was not so surprising; but when I came to observe the boys I noticed that none of them, not even the smallest, had eyes for anything else, but that they all gazed at him as if he were a statue. Then Chaerephon called me and said—How does the youth strike you, Socrates? Has he not a fine face? Immensely so, I replied. Yet if he would consent to strip, he said, you would think he had no face, he has such perfect beauty of form. And these words of Chaerephon were repeated by the rest. Then,—By Heracles! I said, what an irresistible person you make him out to be, if he has but one more thing—a little thing—besides. What? said Critias. If in his soul, I replied, he is of good grain. And I should think, Critias, he ought to be, since he is of your house. Ah, he said, he is right fair and good in that way also. Why then, I said, let us strip that very part of him and view it first, instead of his form; for anyhow, at that age, I am sure he is quite ready to have a discussion.

[4] A white or chalked line was proverbially useless for marking off measurements on white stone or marble.

Very much so, said Critias; for, I may say, he is in fact a philosopher, and also—as others besides himself consider—quite a poet. That, my dear Critias, I said, is a gift which your family has had a long while back, through your kinship with Solon. But why not call the young man here and show him to me? For surely, even if he were younger still, there could be no discredit in our having a talk with him before you, who are at once his guardian and his cousin. You are quite right he said, and we will call him. Thereupon he said to his attendant,—Boy, call Charmides; tell him I want him to see a doctor about the ailment with which he told me he was troubled yesterday. Then, turning to me,—You know, he has spoken lately of having a headache, said Critias, on getting up in the morning: now why should you not represent to him that you know a cure for headache? Why not? I said: only he must come. Oh, he will be here, he said. And so it was; for he came, and caused much laughter, because each of us who were seated made room for him by pushing hard at his neighbor so as to have him sitting beside himself, until at either end of the seat one had to stand up, and we tumbled the other off sideways; and he came and sat down between me and Critias. But here, my friend, I began to feel perplexed, and my former confidence in looking forward to a quite easy time in talking with him had been knocked out of me. And when, on Critias telling him that it was I who knew the cure, he gave me such a look with his eyes as passes description, and was just about to plunge into a question, and when all the people in the wrestling-school surged round about us on every side—then, ah then, my noble friend, I saw inside his cloak and caught fire, and could possess myself no longer; and I thought none was so wise in love-matters as Cydias, [5] who in speaking of a beautiful boy recommends someone to "beware of coming as a fawn before the lion, and being seized as his portion of flesh"; for I too felt I had fallen a prey to some such creature. However, when he had asked me if I knew the cure for headache, I somehow contrived to answer that I knew. Then what is it? he asked. So I told him that the thing itself was a certain leaf, but there was a charm to go with the remedy; and if one uttered the charm at the moment of its application, the remedy made one perfectly well; but without the charm there was no efficacy in the leaf.

Then I will take down the charm, said he, from you in writing. Do you

[5] A poet classed with Mimnermus and Archilochus by Plutarch; cf. Bergk, *Poet. Lyr.*2 p. 960.

prefer, I asked, to get my consent first, or to do without it? This made him laugh, and he said: To get your consent, Socrates.Very well, I said; and are you certain of my name? Unless I misjudge, he replied; for there is no little talk of you. among the set of our age, and I remember as a mere child the sight of you in company with Critias here. That is a good thing, I said: for I shall speak more freely to you about the charm, and its real nature; just now I was at a loss for the way to apprise you of its power. For it is of such a nature, Charmides, that it cannot cure the head alone; I daresay you have yourself sometimes heard good doctors say, you know, when a patient comes to them with a pain in his eyes, that it is not possible for them to attempt a cure of his eyes alone, but that it is necessary to treat his head too at the same time, if he is to have his eyes in good order; and so again, that to expect ever to treat the head by itself, apart from the body as a whole, is utter folly. And on this principle they apply their regimen to the whole body, and attempt to treat and heal the part along with the whole; or have you not observed that this is what they say, and is done in fact? Certainly I have, he said. And you consider it well said, and accept the principle? Most assuredly, he said. Then I, on hearing his approval, regained my courage; and little by little I began to muster up my confidence again, and my spirit began to rekindle. So I said,—Such, then, Charmides, is the nature of this charm. I learnt it on campaign over there, from one of the Thracian physicians of Zalmoxis, [6] who are said even to make one immortal. This Thracian said that the Greeks were right in advising as I told you just now:

"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 this was the reason why most maladies evaded the physicians of Greece—that they neglected the whole, on which they ought to spend their pains, for if this were out of order it was impossible for the part to be in order.

For all that was good and evil, he said, in the body and in man altogether was sprung from the soul, and flowed along from thence as it did from the head into the eyes. Wherefore that part was to be treated first and foremost, if all was to be well with the head and the rest of the body. 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

[6] A legendary hero of the Thracian race of the Getae; cf. *Hdt. 4.94-6.*

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. Now in teaching me the remedy and the charms he remarked,—

"Let nobody persuade you to treat his head with this remedy, unless he has first submitted his soul for you to treat with the charm. For at present," he said,

"the cure of mankind is beset with the error of certain doctors who attempt to practise the one method without the other." And he most particularly enjoined on me not to let anyone, however wealthy or noble or handsome, induce me to disobey him. So I, since I have given him my oath, and must obey him, will do as he bids; and if you agree to submit your soul first to the effect of the Thracian charms, according to the stranger's injunctions, I will apply the remedy to your head: otherwise we shall be at a loss what to do with you, my dear Charmides. Then Critias, when he heard me say this, remarked,—This affection of the head, Socrates, will turn out to be a stroke of luck for the young man, if he is to be compelled on account of his head to improve his understanding also. However, let me tell you, Charmides is considered to excel his comrades not only in appearance, but also in that very thing which you say is produced by your charm: temperance, you say it is, do you not? Certainly, I replied. 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. For your father's house, which comes from Critias, son of Dropides, has been celebrated by Anacreon and Solon and many other poets, so that it is famed by tradition among us as preeminent in beauty and virtue and all else that is accounted happiness; and then, your mother's house is famous in the same way, for of Pyrilampes, your uncle, it is said that no one in all the continent was considered to be his superior in beauty or stature, whenever he came as envoy to the great king or anyone else in Asia, and his house as a whole is no whit inferior to the other. Sprung from such people, it is to be supposed that you would be first in all things. And indeed, as regards your visible form, dear son of Glaucon, I consider that nowhere have you fallen behind any of your ancestors. But if your nature is really rich in temperance and those other things, as our friend here says, blessed is the son, dear

Charmides, I exclaimed, that your mother has borne in you! However, the case stands thus: if you already possess temperance, as Critias here declares, and you are sufficiently temperate, then you never had any need of the charms of Zalmoxis or of Abaris the Hyperborean, [7] and might well be given at once the remedy for the head; but if you prove to be still lacking that virtue, we must apply the charm before the remedy. So tell me yourself whether you agree with our friend, and can say that you are already sufficiently provided with temperance, or are deficient in it? At this Charmides blushed and, for one thing, looked more beautiful then ever, for his modesty became his years; and then, too, he answered most ingenuously, saying it was no easy matter at the moment either to admit or to deny the words of the question. For if, he went on, I say I am not temperate, not only is it a strange thing to say against oneself, but I shall at the same time be taxing with untruth both Critias and many others who consider me to be temperate, as he gives out; while if, on the other hand, I say I am, and praise myself, it will probably be found distasteful; so that I cannot see what answer I am to give you. Then I said: Your answer is a natural one, in my opinion, Charmides; and I think, I went on, that we must join in inquiring whether you possess the thing I am asking after, or not, in order that neither you may be forced to say what you do not wish, nor I on my part may recklessly try my hand at medicine. So if it is agreeable to you, I am ready to inquire with you; but, if it is not, to let it alone. Why, nothing, he said, could be more agreeable to me : so far as that goes, therefore, inquire in whatever way you think we had better proceed. Then this is the way, I said, in which I consider that our inquiry into this matter had best be conducted.

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 : do you not think so ? I do, he replied. And since you understand the Greek tongue, I said, you can tell me, I suppose, your view of this particular thought of yours? I daresay, he said. Then in order that we may make a guess whether it is in you or not, tell me, I said, what you say of temperance according to your opinion. He at first hung back, and was not at all willing to answer: but presently he said that, to his mind, temperance was doing everything orderly and quietly—walking in the

[7] A fabulous hero of the far north, to whom oracles and charms were ascribed by the Greeks; cf. *Hdt. 4.36.*

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. Well, I said, are you right there? They do say, you know, Charmides, that quiet people are temperate : so let us see if there is anything in what they say. Tell me, is not temperance, however, among the honorable things? To be sure, he said. Well, which is most honorable at the writing master's, to write the same sort of letters quickly or quietly? Quickly.And in reading, to do it quickly or slowly?Quickly. And so, in the same way, to play the lyre quickly, or to wrestle nimbly, is far more honorable than to do it quietly and slowly? Yes. And what of boxing, alone or combined with wrestling? Is it not the same there too? To be sure. And in running and leaping and all activities of the body, are not nimble and quick movements accounted honorable, while sluggish and quiet ones are deemed disgraceful? Apparently. So we find, I said, that in the body, at least, it is not quietness, but the greatest quickness and nimbleness that is most honorable, do we not? Certainly.And temperance was an honorable thing?Yes. Then in the body, at least, it is not quietness but quickness that will be the more temperate thing, since temperance is honorable. So it seems, he said. Well now, I went on; in learning, is facility the more honorable, or difficulty?Facility. And facility in learning, I said, is learning quickly, and difficulty in learning is learning quietly and slowly? Yes. And is it not more honorable to teach another quickly and forcibly, rather than quietly and slowly? Yes. Well now, is it more honorable to be reminded and to remember quietly and slowly, or forcibly and quickly? Forcibly, he replied, and quickly.

And is not readiness of mind a sort of nimbleness of the soul, not a quietness? True. And to apprehend what is said, whether at the writing-master's or the lyre-master's or anywhere else, not as quietly as possible, but as quickly, is most honorable? Yes. Well, and in the searchings of the soul, and in deliberation, it is not the quietest person, I imagine, or he who deliberates and discovers with difficulty, that is held worthy of praise, but he who does this most easily and quickly. That is so, he said. Then in all, I said, Charmides, that concerns either our soul or our body, actions of quickness and nimbleness are found to be more honorable than those of slowness and quietness? It looks like it, he said. So temperance cannot be a sort of quietness, nor can the temperate life be quiet, by this argument at least; since, being temperate, it must be honorable. For we have these two alternatives:

either in no cases, or I should think in very few, can we find that the quiet actions in life are more honorable than the quick and vigorous ones; or at all events, my friend, if of the more honorable actions there are absolutely as many quiet ones as forcible and quick, not even so will temperance be acting quietly any more than acting forcibly and quickly, either in walking or in talking or in any other sphere; nor will the quiet life be more temperate than the unquiet; since in our argument we assumed that temperance is an honorable thing, and have found that quick things are just as honorable as quiet things. Your statement, he said, Socrates, seems to me to be correct. Once more then, I went on, Charmides, attend more closely and look into yourself; reflect on the quality that is given you by the presence of temperance, and what quality it must have to work this effect on you. Take stock of all this and tell me, like a good, brave fellow, what it appears to you to be. He paused a little, and after a quite manly effort of self-examination: Well, I think, he said, that temperance makes men ashamed or bashful, and that temperance is the same as modesty. Well now, I asked, did you not admit a moment ago that temperance is honorable?Certainly I did, he said. And temperate men are also good? Yes.Well, can that be good which does not produce good men? No, indeed. And we conclude that it is not only honorable, but good also.

I think so. Well then, I said, are you not convinced that Homer is right in saying—“ Modesty, no good mate for a needy man? ”*Hom. Od. 17.347* I am, he said. Then it would seem that modesty is not good, and good.Apparently. But temperance is good, if its presence makes men good, and not bad. It certainly seems to me to be as you say. So temperance cannot be modesty, if it is in fact good, while modesty is no more good than evil.Why, I think, he said, Socrates, that is correctly stated; but there is another view of temperance on which I would like to have your opinion. I remembered just now what I once heard someone say, that temperance might be doing one’s own business. I ask you, then, do you think he is right in saying this? You rascal, I said, you have heard it from Critias here, or some other of our wise men! Seemingly, said Critias, from some other; for indeed he did not from me.But what does it matter, Socrates, said Charmides, from whom I heard it? Not at all, I replied; for in any case we have not to consider who said it, but whether it is a true saying or no. Now you speak rightly, he said. Yes, on my word, I said: but I shall be surprised if we can find out how it stands; for it looks like a kind of riddle. Why

so? he asked. Because, I replied, presumably the speaker of the words "temperance is doing one's own business" did not mean them quite as he spoke them. Or do you consider that the scribe does nothing when he writes or reads? I rather consider that he does something, he replied. And does the scribe, in your opinion, write and read his own name only, and teach you boys to do the same with yours? Or did you write your enemies' names just as much as your own and your friends'? Just as much. Well, were you meddlesome or intemperate in doing this? Not at all.And you know you were not doing your own business, if writing and reading are doing something. Why, so they are. And indeed medical work, my good friend, and building and weaving and producing anything whatever that is the work of any art, I presume is doing something. Certainly.

Well then, I went on, do you think a state would be well conducted under a law which enjoined that everyone should weave and scour his own coat, and make his own shoes, and his own flask and scraper, [8] and everything else on the same principle of not touching the affairs of others but performing and doing his own for himself? I think not, he replied. But still, I said, a state whose conduct is temperate will be well conducted. Of course, he said. Then doing one's own business in that sense and in that way will not be temperance.Apparently not. So that person was riddling, it seems, just as I said a moment ago, when he said that doing one's own business is temperance. For I take it he was not such a fool as all that: or was it some idiot that you heard saying this, Charmides? Far from it, he replied, for indeed he seemed to be very wise. Then it is perfectly certain, in my opinion, that he propounded it as a riddle, in view of the difficulty of understanding what "doing one's own business" can mean. I daresay, he said. Well, what can it mean, this "doing one's own business"? Can you tell me? I do not know, upon my word, he replied: but I daresay it may be that not even he who said it knew in the least what he meant. And as he said this he gave a sly laugh and glanced at Critias. Now Critias for some time had been plainly burning with anxiety to distinguish himself in the eyes of Charmides and the company, and having with difficulty restrained himself heretofore, he now could do so no longer; for I believe that what I had supposed was perfectly true—that Charmides had heard this answer about temperance from Critias. And so Charmides, wishing him to make answer instead of himself, sought to stir him

[8] The flask contained oil for anointing the body before exercise, and the scraper was for scraping it afterwards, or at the bath.

up in particular, and pointed out that he himself had been refuted; but Critias rebelled against it, and seemed to me to have got angry with him, as a poet does with an actor who mishandles his verses on the stage: so he looked hard at him and said: Do you really suppose, Charmides, that if you do not know what can have been the meaning of the man who said that temperance was doing one's own business, he did not know either? Why, my excellent Critias, I said, no wonder if our friend, at his age, cannot understand; but you, I should think, may be expected to know, in view of your years and your studies. So if you concede that temperance is what he says, and you accept the statement, for my part I would greatly prefer to have you as partner in the inquiry as to whether this saying is true or not.Well, I quite concede it, he said, and accept it.That is good, then, I said. Now tell me, do you also concede what I was asking just now—that all craftsmen make something? I do. And do you consider that they make their own things only, or those of others also?

Those of others also. And are they temperate in not making their own things only?Yes: what reason is there against it? he said.None for me, I replied; but there may be for him who, after assuming that temperance is doing one's own business, proceeds to say there is no reason against those also who do others' business being temperate. And have I, pray, he said, admitted that those who do others' business are temperate? Or was my admission of those who make [9] things? Tell me, I said, do you not call making and doing the same? No indeed, he replied, nor working and making the same either: this I learnt from Hesiod, who said, " Work is no reproach. " *Hes. WD 309* Now, do you suppose that if he had given the names of working and doing to such works as you were mentioning just now, he would have said there was no reproach in shoe-making or pickle-selling or serving the stews? It is not to be thought, Socrates; he rather held, I conceive, that making was different from doing and working, and that while a thing made might be a reproach if it had no connection with the honorable, work could never be a reproach. For things honorably and usefully made he called works, and such makings he called workings and doings; and we must suppose that it was only such things as these that he called our proper concerns, but all that was harmful, the concerns of others. So that we must conclude that Hesiod, and anyone else of good sense, calls him temperate who does his own business. Ah, Critias, I said, you had

[9]The Greek word *ποιεῖν* (make) can also mean the same as *πράττειν* (do).

hardly begun, when I grasped the purport of your speech—that you called one's proper and one's own things good, and that the makings of the good you called doings; for in fact I have heard Prodicus drawing innumerable distinctions between names. [10] Well, I will allow you any application of a name that you please; only make clear to what thing it is that you attach such-and-such a name. So begin now over again, and define more plainly. Do you say that this doing or making, or whatever is the term you prefer, of good things, is temperance? I do, he replied. Then not he who does evil, but he who does good, is temperate? And do not you, my excellent friend, he said, think so? Leave that aside, I said; for we have not to consider yet what I think, but what you say now. Well, all the same, I say, he replied, that he who does evil instead of good is not temperate, whereas he who does good instead of evil is temperate : for I give you "the doing of good things is temperance" as my plain definition.

And there is no reason, I daresay, why your statement should not be right; but still I wonder, I went on, whether you judge that temperate men are ignorant of their temperance. No, I do not, he said. A little while ago, I said, were you not saying that there was no reason why craftsmen should not be temperate in making others' things as well? Yes, I was, he said, but what of it ? Nothing; only tell me whether you think that a doctor, in making someone healthy, makes a helpful result both for himself and for the person whom he cures. I do. And he who does this does his duty? Yes. Is not he who does his duty temperate? Indeed he is. Well, and must the doctor know when his medicine will be helpful, and when not? And must every craftsman know when he is likely to be benefited by the work he does, and when not?Probably not. Then sometimes, I went on, the doctor may have done what is helpful or harmful without knowing the effect of his own action; and yet, in doing what was helpful, by your statement, he has done temperately. Or did you not state that? I did. Then it would seem that in doing what is helpful he may sometimes do temperately and be temperate, but be ignorant of his own temperance? But that, he said, Socrates, could never be: if you think this in any way a necessary inference from my previous admissions, I would rather withdraw some of them, and not be ashamed to say my statements were wrong, than concede at any time that a man who is ignorant of himself is temperate. For I would almost say that this very thing, self-knowledge, is temperance,

[10] "Names" here includes any substantive words such as *πράξεις*.

and I am at one with him who put up the inscription of those words at Delphi. For the purpose of that inscription on the temple, as it seems to me, is to serve as the god's salutation to those who enter it, instead of

"Hail!"—this is a wrong form of greeting, and they should rather exhort one another with the words,

"Be temperate!" And thus the god addresses those who are entering his temple in a mode which differs from that of men; such was the intention of the dedicator of the inscription in putting it up, I believe; and that he says to each man who enters, in reality, "Be temperate !" But he says it in a rather riddling fashion, as a prophet would; for "Know thyself!" and "Be temperate!" are the same, as the inscription [11] and I declare, though one is likely enough to think them different—an error into which I consider the dedicators of the later inscriptions fell when they put up "Nothing overmuch" [12] and "A pledge, and thereupon perdition." [13] For they supposed that "Know thyself!" was a piece of advice, and not the god's salutation of those who were entering; and so, in order that their dedications too might equally give pieces of useful advice, they wrote these words and dedicated them. Now my object in saying all this, Socrates, is to abandon to you all the previous argument— for, though perhaps it was you who were more in the right, or perhaps it was I, yet nothing at all certain emerged from our statements—and to proceed instead to satisfy you of this truth, if you do not admit it, that temperance is knowing oneself. Why, Critias, I said, you treat me as though I professed to know the things on which I ask questions, and needed only the will to agree with you. But the fact of the matter is rather that I join you in the inquiry, each time that a proposition is made, because I myself do not know; I wish therefore to consider first, before I tell you whether I agree or not. Now, give me a moment to consider. Consider then, he said. Yes, and I am considering, I said. For if temperance is knowing anything, obviously it must be a kind of science, and a science of something, must it not? It is, he replied, and of itself. And medicine, I said, is a science of health? Certainly. Then if you should ask me, I said, wherein medicine, as a

[11] Throughout this passage there is allusion to the thought or wisdom implied in *σωφρονεῖν*, and here Critias seeks to identify *φρόνει* (think well, be wise) with *γνῶθι* (know, understand) in the inscription *γνῶθι σαυτόν* at Delphi.

[12] *μηδὲν ἄγαν* appears first in Theognis, 335.

[13] *Ἐγγύα πάρα δ' ἄτη*, an old saying on the rashness of giving a pledge, is quoted in a fragment of Cratinus, the elder rival of Aristophanes. Cf. Proverbs xi. 15—"He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it."

science of health, is useful to us, and what it produces, I should say it is of very great benefit, since it produces health; an excellent result, if you allow so much. I allow it.And so, if you should ask me what result I take to be produced by building, as the builder's science, I should say houses; and it would be the same with the other arts. Now it is for you, in your turn, to find an answer to a question regarding temperance—since you say it is a science of self, Critias—and to tell me what excellent result it produces for us, as science of self, and what it does that is worthy of its name. Come now, tell me. But, Socrates, he said, you are not inquiring rightly. For in its nature it is not like the other sciences, any more than any of them is like any other; whereas you are making your inquiry as though they were alike.

For tell me, he said, what result is there of the arts of reckoning and geometry, in the way that a house is of building, or a coat of weaving, or other products of the sort that one might point to in various arts? Well, can you, for your part, point to any such product in those two cases? You cannot. To this I replied: What you say is true; but I can point out to you what is the peculiar subject of each of these sciences, distinct in each case from the science itself. Thus reckoning, I suppose, is concerned with the even and the odd in their numerical relations to themselves and to one another, is it not?Certainly, he said. And you grant that the odd and the even are different from the actual art of reckoning? Of course. And once more, weighing is concerned with the heavier and the lighter weight; but the heavy and the light are different from the actual art of weighing: you agree? I do. Then tell me, what is that of which temperance is the science, differing from temperance itself? There you are, Socrates, he said: you push your investigation up to the real question at issue—in what temperance differs from all the other sciences—but you then proceed to seek some resemblance between it and them; whereas there is no such thing, for while all the rest of the sciences have something other than themselves as their subject, this one alone is a science of the other sciences and of its own self. And of this you are far from being unconscious, since in fact, as I believe, you are doing the very thing you denied you were doing just now: for you are attempting to refute me, without troubling to follow the subject of our discussion. How can you think, I said, if my main effort is to refute you, that I do it with any other motive than that which would impel me to investigate the meaning of my own words—from a fear of carelessly supposing, at any moment, that I knew something while I knew it not? And so it is now: that is what I am doing, I tell you. I am examining the argument mainly for my

own sake, but also, perhaps, for that of my other intimates. Or do you not think it is for the common good, almost, of all men, that the truth about everything there is should be discovered? Yes indeed, he replied, I do, Socrates. Then take heart, I said, my admirable friend, and answer the question put to you as you deem the case to be, without caring a jot whether it is Critias or Socrates who is being refuted: give the argument itself your attention, and observe what will become of it under the test of refutation. Well, he said, I will do so; for I think there is a good deal in what you say. Then tell me, I said, what you mean in regard to temperance. Why, I mean, he said, that it alone of all the sciences is the science both of itself and of the other sciences.So then, I said, it will be the science of the lack of science also, besides being the science of science? [14] Certainly, he replied.

Then only the temperate person will know himself, and be able to discern what he really knows and does not know, and have the power of judging what other people likewise know and think they know, in cases where they do know, and again, what they think they know, without knowing it; everyone else will be unable. And so this is being temperate, or temperance, and knowing oneself—that one should know what one knows and what one does not know. Is that what you mean? It is, he replied. Once more then, I said, as our third offering to the Saviour, [15] let us consider afresh, in the first place, whether such a thing as this is possible or not—to know that one knows, and does not know, what one knows and what one does not know; and secondly, if this is perfectly possible, what benefit we get by knowing it. We must indeed consider, he said. Come then, I said, Critias, consider if you can show yourself any more resourceful than I am; for I am at a loss. Shall I explain to you in what way? By all means, he replied. Well, I said, what all this comes to, if your last statement was correct, is merely that there is one science which is precisely a science of itself and of the other sciences, and moreover is a science of the lack of science at the same time. Certainly. Then mark what a strange statement it is that we are attempting to make, my friend: for if you will consider it as applied to other cases, you will surely see—so I believe—its impossibility. How so? In what cases? In the following: ask yourself if you think there

[14] Science or exact knowledge must be able to measure not only the field of knowledge, but also that of its negation, ignorance.

[15] It was the custom at banquets to dedicate a third and final wine-offering or toast to Zeus the Saviour. Cf. *Pind. I. 5* init.

is a sort of vision which is not the vision of things that we see in the ordinary way, but a vision of itself and of the other sorts of vision, and of the lack of vision likewise; which, while being vision, sees no color, but only itself and the other sorts of vision. Do you think there is any such? Upon my word, I do not. And what do you say to a sort of hearing which hears not a single sound, but hears itself and the other sorts of hearing and lack of hearing? I reject that also. Then take all the senses together as a whole, and consider if you think there is any sense of the senses and of itself, but insensible of any of the things of which the other senses are sensible. I do not. Now, do you think there is any desire which is the desire, not of any pleasure, but of itself and of the other desires ? No, indeed.Nor, again, is there a wish, I imagine, that wishes no good, but wishes itself and the other wishes. Quite so; there is not. And would you say there is any love of such a sort that it is actually a love of no beauty, but of itself and of the other loves? Not I, he replied.

And have you ever observed any fear which fears itself and the other fears, but has no fear of a single dreadful thing? No, I have not, he replied. Or an opinion which is an opinion of opinions and of itself, but without any opinion such as the other opinions have? By no means. But it is apparently a science of this kind that we are assuming—one that is a science of no branch of study, but a science of itself and of the other sciences. So we are. And it is a strange thing, if it really exists? For we should not affirm as yet that it does not exist, but should still consider whether it does exist. You are right. Well now, this science is a science of something, that is, it has a certain faculty whereby it can be a science of something, has it not? Certainly. For, you know, we say the greater has a certain faculty whereby it can be greater than something? [16] Quite so. That is, than something smaller, if it is to be greater. Necessarily. So if we could find a greater which is greater than other greater things, and than itself, but not greater than the things beside which the others are greater, I take it there can be no doubt that it would be in the situation of being, if greater than itself, at the same time smaller than itself, would it not? Most inevitably, Socrates, he said. Or again, if there is a double of other doubles and of itself, both it and the others must of course be halves, if it is to be their double; for, you know, a double cannot be "of" anything else

[16] At this point Socrates adduces the relation of greater to smaller (*τινὸς εἶναι μείζον*) to suggest a difficulty in conceiving a science to be a science of itself: in so doing he draws a false analogy between two quite different uses of the genitive in Greek, represented in English by the comparative "than" and the objective "of."

than its half. True. And what is more than itself will also be less, and the heavier will be lighter, and the older younger, and so on with everything else: whatever has its own faculty applied to itself will have also the natural quality to which its faculty was applicable, will it not? For instance, hearing is, as we say, just a hearing of sound, is it not?Yes. So if it is to hear itself, it will hear a sound of its own; for it would not hear otherwise. Most inevitably. And sight, I suppose, my excellent friend, if it is to see itself, must needs have a color; for sight can never see what is colorless. No more it can. Then do you perceive, Critias, in the various cases we have propounded, how some of them strike us as absolutely impossible, while others raise serious doubts as to the faculty of the thing being ever applicable to itself? For with magnitudes, numbers, and the like it is absolutely impossible, is it not? Certainly.

But again, with hearing and sight, or in the further bases of motion moving itself and heat burning itself, and all other actions of the sort, the fact must appear incredible to some, but perhaps not to others. So what we want, my friend, is some great man who will determine to our satisfaction in every respect whether there is nothing in nature so constituted as to have its own faculty applicable to itself, and not only some other object, or whether there are some such, and others not such; and whether, again, if there are things that have such relation to themselves, they include a science which we assert to be temperance. For my part, I distrust my own competence to determine these questions, and hence I am neither able to affirm whether it is possible that there should be a science of science, nor willing, let it be ever so true, to acknowledge this to be temperance until I have made out whether such a thing as this would benefit us or not. For, you see, I have a presentiment that temperance is something beneficial and good; and you, therefore, son of Callaeschrus—since you lay it down that temperance is this very science of science, and moreover of the lack of science—shall first indicate the possibility, as I put it just now, and then the benefit added to the possibility, of such a thing; and perhaps you will then satisfy me that your definition of temperance is correct. Now when Critias heard this and saw me in a difficulty, he seemed to me—just as the sight of someone yawning opposite causes people to be affected in the same way—to be compelled by the sense of my difficulty to be caught in a difficulty himself. And so, since he usually contrived to distinguish himself, he was too ashamed to bring himself to admit to me before the company that he was unable to determine the questions with which I challenged him, and he made a very indistinct reply in

order to conceal his difficulty. Then I, to forward the discussion, remarked: Well, if you prefer, Critias, let us concede for the moment that there may possibly be a science of science : some other time we shall consider whether such is the fact or not. Come then; suppose it is perfectly possible: how is one helped thereby to know what one knows and does not know? For this, you are aware, we said [17] was the meaning of self-knowledge and temperance, did we not? Certainly, he said; and it must surely follow, Socrates; for if a man has a science which knows itself, he will be similar himself to that which he has. For instance, he who has swiftness will be swift, he who has beauty will be beautiful, and he who has knowledge will know; and when he has knowledge that is of itself, he will then, surely, be in the position of knowing himself. I do not dispute, I said, that when a man has that which knows itself he will know himself; but having that, how is he bound to know what he knows and what he does not know?

Because, Socrates, the two things are the same. I daresay, I said; but I am afraid I am still my old self: I still do not see how knowing what one knows and does not know is the same as the other.How do you mean? he asked. In this way, I replied: will a science of science, if such exists, be able to do more than determine that one of two things is science, and the other is not science? No, only that. Now, is science or lack of science of health the same as science or lack of science of justice? By no means. For the one, I suppose, is medicine, and the other politics, while the thing in question is merely science. Yes, to be sure. And if a man has no added knowledge of health and justice, but knows only science, as having science of that alone, he will probably know that he has a certain piece of scientific knowledge about himself and about other people, will he not? Yes. But how will this science help him to know what he knows? For of course he knows health by means of medicine, not temperance, and harmony by means of music, not temperance, and building by means of the builder's art, not temperance; and so it will be in every case, will it not? Apparently. And how will temperance, supposing it is only a science of sciences, help him to know that he knows health, or that he knows building? By no means. Then he who is ignorant of all this will not know what he knows, but only that he knows. So it seems. Then being temperate, or temperance, will not be this knowledge of what one knows or does not know, but, it would seem, merely knowing that one knows or does not know. It looks like

[17] *Plat. Charm. 167a.*

it. Then such a person will also be unable to examine another man's claim to some knowledge, and make out whether he knows or does not know what he says he knows: he will merely know, it would seem, that he has a certain knowledge; but of what it is, temperance will not cause him to know.Apparently not. So he will be able to distinguish neither the man who pretends to be a doctor, but is none, from the man who really is one, nor any other man who has knowledge from him who has none. But let us consider it another way: if the temperate man or anybody else would discriminate between the true doctor and the false, he will go to work thus, will he not? He will surely not talk to him about medicine; for, as we were saying, the doctor understands nothing else but health and disease. Is not that so? Yes, it is. But about science he knows nothing, for that, you know, we assigned to temperance alone. Yes.

So the medical man knows nothing about medicine either, since medicine is, of course, a science. True. Then the temperate man will know, indeed, that the doctor has a certain science; but when he has to put its nature to the proof, must he not consider what its subjects are? Is not each science marked out, not merely as a science, but as a particular one, by the particular subjects it has? It is, to be sure. And medicine is marked out as different from the other sciences by being a science of health and disease. Yes. And so anyone who wishes to inquire into medicine must make those things, whatever they may be, with which it is concerned, the matter of his inquiry; not those foreign things, I presume, with which it is not? No, indeed. Then he who conducts his inquiry aright will consider the doctor, as a medical man, in connection with cases of health and disease. So it seems. And will inquire whether, in what is said or done in such cases, his words are truly spoken, and his acts rightly done? He must. Well now, could anyone follow up either of these points without the medical art? No, indeed. Nobody at all, it would seem, but a doctor; and so not the temperate man either: for he would have to be a doctor, in addition to his temperance.That is so. Then inevitably, if temperance is only a science of science and of lack of science, it will be equally unable to distinguish a doctor who knows the business of his art from one who does not know but pretends or thinks he does, and any other person who has knowledge of anything at all: one will only distinguish one's fellow-artist, as craftsmen usually can. Apparently, he said. Then what benefit, I asked, Critias, can we still look for from temperance, if it is like that? For if, as we began by assuming, the temperate man knew what he knew and what he did not know, and that he knows

the one and does not know the other, and if he were able to observe this same condition in bother man, it would be vastly to our benefit, we agree, to be temperate; since we should pass all our lives, both we who had temperance and all the rest who were governed by us, without error. For neither should we ourselves attempt to do what we did not know, instead of finding out those who knew and placing the matter in their hands, nor should we permit others under our governance to do anything but what they were likely to do aright; and they would do that when they had knowledge of it; and so it would be that a house which was ordered, or a state which was administered, as temperance bade, and everything else that was ruled by temperance, could not but be well ordered;
for with error abolished, and rightness leading, in their every action men would be bound to do honorably and well under such conditions, and those who did well would be happy. Did we not so speak of temperance, I said, Critias, when we remarked how great a boon it was to know what one knows and what one does not know? To be sure we did, he replied. Whereas now, I went on, you see that nowhere can any such science be found. I see, he said. Then may we say, I asked, that there is this good point in the knowledge of knowledge and of lack of knowledge, which we now find to be what temperance is, that he who has it will not only learn more easily whatever he learns, but will perceive everything more plainly, since besides the particular things that he learns he will behold the science; and hence he will probe more surely the state of other men respecting the things which he has learnt himself, while those who probe without such knowledge will do it more feebly and poorly? Are these, my friend, the kind of advantages that we shall gain from temperance? But are we really looking at something greater, and requiring it to be something greater than it really is? Probably, he replied, that is so. I daresay, I said; and I daresay also our inquiry has been worthless. And this I conclude, because I observe certain strange facts about temperance, if it is anything like that. For suppose, if you please, we concede that there may possibly be a science of science, and let us grant, and not withdraw, our original proposition that temperance is the knowledge of what one knows and does not know; granting all this, let us still more thoroughly inquire whether on these terms it will be of any profit to us. For our suggestion just now, that temperance of that sort, as our guide in ordering house or state, must be a great boon, was not, to my thinking, Critias, a proper admission.How so? he asked. Because, I replied, we too tightly admitted that it would be a great boon to mankind if each of us should

do what he knows, but should place what he did not know in the hands of others who had the knowledge. Well, was that, he asked, not a proper admission?Not to my mind, I answered. In very truth, your words are strange! he said, Socrates. Yes, by the Dog, I said, and they strike me too in the same way; and it was in view of this, just now, that I spoke of strange results that I noticed, and said I feared we were not inquiring rightly.

For in truth, let temperance be ever so much what we say it is, I see nothing to show what good effect it has on us. How so? he asked: tell us, in order that we on our side may know what you mean.I expect, I said, I am talking nonsense: but still one is bound to consider what occurs to one, and not idly ignore it, if one has even a little concern for oneself. And you are quite right, he said. Hear then, I said, my dream, whether it has come through horn or through ivory. [18] Suppose that temperance were such as we now define her, and that she had entire control of us: must it not be that every act would be done according to the sciences, and no one professing to be a pilot when he was not would deceive us, nor would a doctor, nor a general, nor anyone else pretending to know something he did not know, go undetected; and would not these conditions result in our having greater bodily health than we have now, safety in perils of the sea and war, and skilful workmanship in all our utensils, our clothes, our shoes, nay, everything about us, and various things besides, because we should be employing genuine craftsmen? And if you liked, we might concede that prophecy, as the knowledge of what is to be, and temperance directing her, will deter the charlatans, and establish the true prophets as our prognosticators. Thus equipped, the human race would indeed act and live according to knowledge, I grant you (for temperance, on the watch, would not suffer ignorance to foist herself in and take a hand in our labors), but that by acting according to knowledge we should do well and be happy—this is a point which as yet we are unable to make out, my dear Critias. But still, he replied, you will have some difficulty in finding any other fulfillment of welfare if you reject the rule of knowledge. Then inform me further, I said, on one more little matter. Of what is this knowledge? Do you mean of shoe-making? Good heavens, not I! Well, of working in brass? By no means. Well, in wool, or in wood, or in something else of that sort? No, indeed.Then we no longer hold, I said, to the statement that he who lives according

[18] Cf. *Hom. Od. 19.562*ff. Dreams are there described as issuing: dreams that come true are from the gate of horn; deceitful dreams are from the gate of ivory.

to knowledge is happy; for these workers, though they live according to knowledge, are not acknowledged by you to be happy: you rather delimit the happy man, it seems to me, as one who lives according to knowledge about certain things.
And I daresay you are referring to my instance of a moment ago, the man who knows all that is to come, the prophet. Do you refer to him or to someone else? Yes, I refer to him, he said, and someone else too. Whom? I asked. Is it the sort of person who might know, besides what is to be, both everything that has been and now is, and might be ignorant of nothing? Let us suppose such a man exists: you are not going to tell me, I am sure, of anyone alive who is yet more knowing than he. No, indeed. Then there is still one more thing I would fain know: which of the sciences is it that makes him happy? Or does he owe it to all of them alike? By no means to all alike, he replied. But to which sort most? One that gives him knowledge of what thing, present, past or future? Is it that by which he knows draught-playing? Draught-playing indeed! he replied.Well, reckoning? By no means. Well, health? More likely, he said. And that science to which I refer as the most likely, I went on, gives him knowledge of what? Of good, he replied, and of evil. Vile creature! I said, you have all this time been dragging me round and round, while concealing the fact that the life according to knowledge does not make us do well and be happy, not even if it be knowledge of all the other knowledges together, but only if it is of this single one concerning good and evil. For, Critias, if you choose to take away this science from the whole number of them, will medicine any the less give us health, or shoemaking give us shoes, or weaving provide clothes, or will the pilot's art any the less prevent the loss of life at sea, or the general's in war? None the less, he replied. But, my dear Critias, to have any of these things well and beneficially done will be out of our reach if that science is lacking. That is true. And that science, it seems, is not temperance, but one whose business is to benefit us; for it is not a science of sciences and lack of sciences, but of good and evil: so that if this is beneficial, temperance must be something else to us. But why, he asked, should not it be beneficial? For if temperance is above all a science of the sciences, and presides too over the other sciences, surely she will govern this science of the good, and so benefit us. And give us health also? I asked: will she, and not medicine, do this? And will the several works of the other arts be hers, and not the particular works of each art? Have we not constantly protested that she is only knowledge of knowledge and of lack of knowledge, and of nothing else? Is not that so? Apparently it

is. Then she will not be a producer of health? No, indeed.

For health, we said, belongs to another art, did we not? We did. Nor of benefit, my good friend; for this work, again, we assigned to another art just now, did we not? Certainly. Then how will temperance be beneficial, if it produces no benefit? By no means, Socrates, as it seems. So do you see, Critias, how all the time I had good reason for my fear, and fair ground for the reproach I made against myself, that my inquiry regarding temperance was worthless? [19] For I cannot think that what is admitted to be the noblest thing in the world would have appeared to us useless if I had been of any use for making a good search. But now, you see, we are worsted every way, and cannot discover what thing it can possibly be to which the lawgiver gave this name, temperance. And yet we have conceded many points which were not deducible from our argument. For you know we conceded that there was a science of science, when the argument was against it and would not agree; and we further conceded that this science could know the works also of the other sciences, when the argument was against this too, in order to make out that the temperate man had a knowledge of what he knew and did not know, so as to know that he knew the one and did not know the other. And we made this concession in a really magnificent manner, without considering the impossibility of a man knowing, in some sort of way, things that he does not know at all; for our admission says that he knows that he does not know them; and yet, in my opinion, there can be nothing more irrational than this. Nevertheless, although it has found us so simple-minded and tractable, the inquiry remains quite incapable of discovering the truth, but has utterly flouted it by most impudently showing us the inutility of that which we had been ever so long assuming, by our joint admissions and fictions, to be the meaning of temperance. Now, so far as I am concerned, I am not particularly distressed: but for your sake, I said, Charmides, I am seriously distressed to think that you, with your goodly form and most temperate soul besides, are to have no profit or advantage from the presence of that temperance in all your life. And I am still more distressed about the charm which I learnt from the Thracian, [20] that I should have spent so much pains on a lesson which has had such a worthless effect. Now I really do not think that this can be the case, but rather that I am a poor hand at inquiring; for

[19] Cf. *Plat. Charm. 172c.*
[20] Cf. *Plat. Charm. 156d.*

temperance I hold to be a great good, and you to be highly blessed, if you actually have it.
See now whether you have it, and are in no need of the charm; for if it is yours, I should rather advise you to regard me as a babbler who is unable to argue out any subject of inquiry whatsoever, and yourself as advancing in happiness as you advance in temperance. Then Charmides said: Why, upon my word, Socrates, I do not know at all whether I have it or have it not. For how can I know, when even you two are unable to discover what this thing is?—so you say, but of this you do not at all convince me—and I quite believe, Socrates, that I do need the charm, and for my part I have no objection to being charmed by you every day of my life, until you say I have had enough of the treatment. Very well, said Critias: now, Charmides, if you do this, it will be a proof to me of your temperance—if you submit to be charmed by Socrates and do not forsake him through thick and thin. Count on me to follow, he said, and not forsake him; for it would ill become me to disobey you, my guardian, and refuse to do your bidding. Well now, he said, I bid you. Then I will do as you say, he replied, and will start this very day. There, there, I said, what are you two plotting to do? Nothing, replied Charmides; we have made our plot. So you will use force, I said, before even allowing me to make my affidavit? You must expect me to use force, he replied, since he gives me the command: take counsel, therefore, on your side, as to what you will do But that leaves no room, I said, for counsel; for if once you set about doing anything and use force, no man alive will be able to withstand you. Then do not you, he said, withstand me. Then I will not withstand you, I replied.

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