

Self-Knowledge and Self-Consciousness in Plato's *Charmides* and  
Contemporary Philosophy of Mind

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## **Abstract**

The thesis advanced here is that the argument of Plato's *Charmides* in its search for the adequate understanding of the nature of 'self-knowledge' (which is left unsolved in the dialogue itself), can be construed as a search for the proper understanding of what contemporary philosophy discusses under the name of 'self-consciousness' and that therefore the dialogue welcomes a solution which construes 'self-knowledge' as a special sort of knowledge directed at the formal principles that make ordinary 'objective' knowledge possible - a solution which invites a comparison with certain Kantian strands in modern philosophy of mind.

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*For “every hung up person in the whole wide universe”  
In my capacity as a “guardian and protector of the mind”*

## Introduction:

This essay has a twofold aim. The first consists in adequately articulating the problems posed by Plato's *Charmides*, and this aim is limited to the task of 'making sense' of the argument in a historically accurate manner. This aim will be achieved through textual analysis and a dialectic between some views advanced by Plato scholars in the last Century. The second aim however, will consist in attempting to shed light on the proposed interpretation by drawing systematic connections between the views of Plato and those of contemporary philosophy of mind. The division of labour between the historical and the systematic is meant to come together in the service of an overarching aim which consists in an understanding of 'what it means to be human' that transcends any temporal/historical limitations – a task which is the *raison d'être* of philosophy and a justification of her labours.

The **thesis** advanced here is that the argument of Plato's *Charmides* in its search for the adequate understanding of the nature of 'self-knowledge' (which is left unsolved in the dialogue itself), can be construed as a search for the proper understanding of what contemporary philosophy discusses under the name of 'self-consciousness' and that therefore the dialogue welcomes a solution which construes 'self-knowledge' as a special sort of knowledge directed at the formal principles that make ordinary 'objective' knowledge possible - a solution which invites a comparison with certain Kantian strands in modern philosophy of mind.

In speaking of 'consciousness' in relation to Plato we are naturally using modern parlance to elucidate the views of a philosopher to whom such terms were alien. The thesis thus rests on the possibility of bringing this concept to use in relation to the primary text, and this is achieved by showing that the locution of *episteme epistemes* ('knowledge of knowledge') that is investigated in the central part of the argument, is meant to stand for what modern philosophy would discuss under the name of 'self-consciousness'. Establishing this will be a major concern of ours throughout the first two Chapters of the essay. The general structure of the essay is as follows:

We will begin by sketching out the argumentation of the *Charmides* which is a dialectical search for an adequate understanding of the virtue of *sophrosune*, variously translated as 'temperance' or 'wisdom' – a virtue manifesting itself in moderation in the passions and a kind of 'self-mastery' characterised by virtuous conduct. In a search for the principle of this

virtue – rendered in Latin as “*mens sana in corpore sano*” (“a sound mind in a healthy body”) – the dialogue moves from outward manifestations of its presence in certain actions to the subjective conditions that characterise the *sophron* - a subject whom we call ‘temperate’ on account of the condition of his or her soul. The progression of the argument is a successive turning inward towards ‘self’ and ‘self-knowledge’ as the source of *sophrosune*, but the nature of ‘self’ and the sort of ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’ (*episteme*) that it is constitutive of ‘temperance’ is problematic and in the end remains unsolved in the *Charmides*. The dialogue ends, in a characteristically Platonic fashion, with a number of rejected positions and a demand for an adequate account. The dialogue identifies the profound difficulties involved in the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ – a concept meant to ground the virtue of ‘temperance’ but one that extends to the very possibility of self-knowledge which is and has been a central aspiration of philosophical thinking from Socrates to recently published work by, among others, P. Kitcher and S. Rödl.

The demand for an adequate explication of the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ is taken up by a number of contemporary scholars, and assessing the merit of their attempts at overcoming the obstacles is what will guide the second chapter of this essay. In particular we will focus on the views of Ayreh Kosman and Paul Natorp, both of whom propose interpretations that bring the issues as well as their possible solutions close to central questions in modern ‘philosophy of mind’. The concern which both of the scholars identify as central to the *Charmides* is that of ‘self-consciousness’, a topic that is thematised in various strands of modern and early-modern philosophy.

Kosman’s analysis gives a detailed survey of various kinds of reflexive (self-oriented) ‘cognitive states’ which appear throughout the dialogue as candidates for the sort of thing ‘self-knowledge’ might be. In the process we find that the understanding of the ‘reflexive’ states appropriate for ‘self-knowledge’ runs into the problem of their ‘intentionality’. On the one hand a relation to ‘self’ requires an appropriate ‘object’ for these ‘states’ to escape the threat of vacuity which would render them ineffective in so far as they are meant to ground the virtue of ‘temperance’. On the other hand lapsing into full blown ‘objectivity’ is problematic for the very possibility of ‘self-knowledge’ because given a proper object, ‘self-knowledge’ becomes limited to the grasp of some particular knowledge and cannot fulfil the comprehensive role that the concept was meant to stand for. Another issue in this connection is the ‘unity’ of self, which is made problematic if there is no relation of ‘self’ to ‘self’ that can be made sense of in terms of pure reflexivity as opposed to the kind of reflexivity that can be construed as a relation to a proper ‘object’ (for then our very ‘self-consciousness’ would always be episodic and partial, a mere sum of awareness). Kosman’s detailed analysis reveals the problems with a generous clarity but at the expense of giving a positive solution to this *a-*

*poria*. The clues we find in Kosman's reading require to be further developed, and the thesis of this essay rests on the interpretation that such a solution is forthcoming from a Kantian-inspired interpretation of Plato's philosophy as put forward by Paul Natorp in his monumental work "Plato's Theory of Ideas". Such a solution conceives 'self-knowledge' as a concept equivalent with that of 'self-consciousness', where 'consciousness' is understood as a 'formal principle' of any objectively directed cognitive state and identified with the 'true self' and the 'good'. This allows self-knowledge to remain a comprehensive 'power' not limited to a given object but at the same time to escape the threat of vacuity and inability to relate to standard 'object' directed forms of knowledge; further the solution allows us to hold on to 'mental unity' as the 'knowing subject' characterising all limited, 'object-directed' cognitive states.

This construal of the argument of the *Charmides* and one possible and attractive solution to its problems allows us to draw on the work of P. Kitcher and S. Rödl in contemporary philosophy of mind. Both philosophers are concerned with the nature of consciousness and their work touches on fundamental questions we encounter in interpreting and solving the argument of the *Charmides*. P. Kitcher's essay "*The Unity of Kant's Thinker*" focuses on the proper interpretation of Kant's views on 'a kind of consciousness that plays a crucial role in mental unity' and which is a necessary condition of 'rational empirical cognition'. The principle that fulfils that role is the synthetic a-priori 'unity of apperception' that acts as a principle for the synthesis of 'representations' in judgment and which is the only ground of an 'enduring subject'. This account sheds light on the 'self-consciousness' as a formal principle as discussed by Natorp. A further illumination of Natorp's solution to the dialogue is to be found in the work of S. Rödl, who speaks of philosophy as the "articulation of the form of our self-consciousness" - of the formal principles of thought that inform our encounter with the objective world. Rödl also allows us to bring the abstract reflections on the nature of 'self-consciousness', through the problematic 'unity of the subject' to the question of the practical use of reason and the question of 'temperance' and the 'good'.

## Chapter 1: Setting out the *a-poria*: *The Arrugment of the Charmides*

### I

#### *sophrosune* and ‘self-knowledge’

The *Charmides* begins with the question of ‘*sophrosune*’ – ‘temperance’ - the ‘honourable’ (160C) virtue which is supposed to ‘make men good’ (160E) and lead them to a healthy constitution of body and mind: “*mens sana in corpore sano*” as one translator suggests to render it (Jowett, Introduction). The Republic speaks of it as “a kind of order (*kosmos tis*), [...] and a mastery of certain pleasures and desires” (430E). It is essentially the virtue of *self-mastery* manifested in the freedom from the sway of the passions and in firm conduct. The young Charmides proposes various definitions, which are agreeable to even a modern reader’s associations with the putative virtue of ‘temperance’. The suggestions offered by the boy are consequently: ‘Quietness’, ‘Modesty’ and ‘Doing one’s own’. None of these amount to a satisfactory definition of what is essential to ‘temperance’. ‘Quietness’ is discarded because in many circumstances ‘temperate’ behaviour appears to demand its opposite, namely ‘quickness’ as for example in ‘wrestling’ or ‘learning’. ‘Modesty’ is rejected through a quotation from Homer’s *Odyssey*; ‘modesty’ it is said “*ill suits a man by want oppressed*”<sup>1</sup> which figures in the poem as an encouragement to (disguised) Odysseus not to shy away from begging for alms from the suitors who are feasting at Odysseus’ home during his prolonged absence. It is a beggars right to be immodest and as such it is recognized by both Socrates and Charmides. “Doing one’s own” finally is set aside for the reason that it is not always temperate to only do what immediately concerns oneself (163A): there is virtue in making things for others if we are craftsmen and a ‘temperate’ craftsman ought to, for instance, mend other’s shoes, much like Shakespeare’s Cobbler (‘*a mender of bad soles*’) speaks of his trade: “*Truly, sir, all I live by is with the awl. I meddle with no tradesman’s matters, nor women’s matters, but with all.*”<sup>2</sup>

The more commonplace definitions soon give way to what might be called an ‘intellectualist’ turn when Critias steps in to make good his pupil Charmides’ apparent mistakes. The attempt to give a more nuanced meaning to ‘doing one’s own’ finally fails when Socrates gets Critias

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<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey* XVII.347 (tr. Cowper)

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* Act 1, Scene 1



to admit that on his refined account of ‘temperance’ as the “doing of good things” (*ton agathon pratein*) it is possible for someone to do the temperate thing and yet be ignorant of so doing. The case is that of a doctor who cannot foresee the consequences of his action and so might or might not benefit someone unknowingly. The dialogue takes the crucial turn at the point where Critias passionately expresses his willingness to “give up any of the previous statements” rather than admit that one might be ‘temperate’ and yet be ignorant of himself as acting temperately (164D). Being conscious of what one is doing, or ‘knowing what one is doing’ is thus taken as the essential point to settle. Here the dialogue turn to an examination of what such self-knowledge must consist in and whether it is at all possible as well as the question of what use it can have.

Thus the discussion of a virtue which seems to be connected primarily with moderation in pleasure and desire – effecting a kind of ‘quietness’ or ‘modesty’ — takes on a strongly intellectual coloring. It is essential that the possession of the virtue be free of any admixture of ignorance, otherwise the virtue is inherently unstable and ‘temperance’ cannot be secured as something within one’s power, it is made dependent on contingent factors outside one’s understanding. What follows however is a perplexing and nuanced inquiry in to the very concept of self-knowledge and its problematic intentionality or other-directedness. It begins with Critias’ attempt at giving philosophical substance to the cryptic inscription at the oracle of Delphi: “Know Thyself!”. Critias proposes that the true meaning of the maxim is actually the same as ‘Be Temperate!’. Socrates opens the discussion which will lead the rest of the dialogue when after a concentrated effort at thinking Critias’ proposal through he comes with the question: ‘if temperance is knowing anything then it must be an *episteme*<sup>3</sup>, and if it is an *episteme* then ‘it must be an *episteme of something*’ (165B/C). Here we already notice the problem of ‘intentionality’, *episteme* seems to be always of something, it has something other than itself as an object about which it is an ‘*episteme*’. Critias’ reply is straightforward: ‘*estin, ... , eautou ge*’ – it is knowledge and specifically knowledge ‘of self’ (*eautou*) . Socrates carries the analogy with *epistemai* further. If that’s right, Socrates reasons, then ‘temperance’ as ‘knowledge of self’ should be alike to other *epistemai* in respect of being able to ‘produce something’ just as ‘medicine’ or the ‘art of building’ produce ‘health’ and ‘houses’. Is

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<sup>3</sup> I shall leave the Greek ‘*episteme*’ un-translated because no single English word is adequate to cover the variety of meanings to which the Greek term is open and which Plato might be exploiting here. The usual candidates are: ‘knowledge’, ‘science’ and ‘understanding’. The last of these seems to be most adequate because of its openness to a wider class of objects than the first two, but on the other hand it severs the close link between ‘episteme’ and an articulate, consistent body of explanatory propositions that constitutes a ‘science’ and so ‘knowledge’ and which certainly was important to Plato. We shall stick to ‘knowledge’ whenever *episteme* is translated because this is the term consistently used in secondary literature. For a thorough discussion on the problems surrounding the translation of ‘episteme’ in Plato see esp. ch.1. in [Moline, Jon. *Plato's Theory of Understanding*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998.]

‘temperance’ thus related to its object – the ‘self’? Critias objects to the likening of all *epistemai* to the productive sort, suggesting a comparison with the art of ‘reckoning’ (*logistike*) and ‘geometry’, which are not productive of anything outside themselves. Socrates concedes but again stresses the relation of these *epistemai* to an object other than themselves (though not productive of it). That they are *epistemai* they are is accounted for by the subject matter *about which* they are *epistemai*; but what then is the analogous object of ‘temperance’?

This is an interesting question, to which one seemingly obvious and tempting answer is not explored. We might expect Critias to voice a reply that takes knowledge of ‘self’ in the sense in which we might know our predilections and aversions, likes and dislikes, perhaps couching this comprehensive knowledge of oneself in the knowledge of the pleasant and painful just as arithmetic is the knowledge of the relations between the odd and the even numbers. But Critias’ response is different, his actual response to Socrates’ query what object other than itself temperance is as follows:

*Here Socrates you push your investigation right up to the real question at issue – in what temperance differs from all the other ‘epistemai’ – but then you proceed to seek some resemblance between it and them; whereas there is no such thing, for while all the rest of the ‘epistemai’ have something else as their subject, this one alone is an ‘episteme’ of the other ‘epistemai’ and of its own self.*

The strangeness of the proposal is striking, especially if we compare it with the possibility of construing self-knowledge along the lines of knowing oneself as an object, as is the case with the knowledge of what is pleasant and unpleasant to one. It is important that we understand why Plato might be inclined to pursue this path and neglect the other. The investigation of an ‘*episteme of episteme*’ which extends to all other ‘*epistemai*’ moves indeed away from the concern with ‘self’ in a way which we might expect will reveal to us what ‘temperance’ consists in. At the same time this strangeness can be compensated by observing that the discussion is coming close to the question of Socratic ‘self-knowledge’. We are engaged in an inquiry into one of the core concepts of Plato’s philosophy and one which, though not explicitly stated in the *Charmides*, is ultimately to lead through proper discernment of ‘our true self’ to virtue, whereby one in fact becomes not only ‘temperate’ but also ‘brave’, ‘pious’ and in the end consummately *good*. We might recall here the discussion of a later dialogue - the *Protagoras* - where the unity of virtue is argued for. The separate virtues must have a single source in ‘knowledge’. This line of interpretation is, as we shall see in Chapter 2, taken up by Paul Natorp: “the concept of a particular virtue – in this case ‘temperance’ is only seemingly the issue. In reality what is examined is once again merely another aspect of the

general concept of virtue, and in particular virtue as knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps Plato’s intention to hint at the direction which the dialogue seemingly concerned with the single virtue of ‘temperance’ needs to take through Socrates’ retort following the above quoted passage. Critias accuses Socrates for merely ‘trying to refute him’ without due consideration of what he has to say. Socrates replies:

*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 what I am doing I tell you. I am examining the argument mainly for my own sake, but perhaps also 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? (166D)*

I think the passage implicitly testifies to Socrates’ ‘temperance’ in that he has the ‘modest’ aim of merely ‘doing his own’ in coming to understand what he knows and does not know, and to discover the truth about ‘temperance’ so that he may not remain in ignorance. Perhaps his inquiry even being ‘for the common good of all’, which includes readers like ourselves. Socrates knows ‘what he is doing’, that is: conquering his ignorance through the supra-personal *logos*. This is a mere conjecture at this point in our inquiry but I do think the appearance of this interjection at the point where the dialogue begins a sustained inquiry into the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ is not incidental. We shall pursue this hint more extensively in Chapter 2.

Let us note the complication which arises from Critias’ move from knowledge of ‘self’ to *episteme epistemes* - ‘knowledge of knowledge’. If Critias had replied again to Socrates’ question about the subject of self-knowledge with an account of the appropriate self that is the proper subject of this knowledge he could evade most of the problems into which the dialogue will lapse. A kind of self-knowledge which has an appropriate self as its object is ‘reflexive’ in a sense which is relatively unproblematic and which can be construed in terms of ‘otherness’. Such is the kind of reflexivity which characterises for instance the feeling of shame or what we nowadays call being ‘self-conscious’; it is a second order point of view which can easily be parsed in terms of an awareness, a knowing (a knower) that is directed at something other than itself, even though the two are numerically identical they are, as Aristotle would put it, different in being. What is interesting is that the dialogue runs into the problem of the kind of self-reflexivity which is essentially related to itself. It is the sustained

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<sup>4</sup> Natorp, Paul. *Plato's Theory of Ideas: An Introduction to Idealism*. Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 2004. 69

inquiry into a mode of reflexivity that resists the simple construal in terms of a 'power' and 'object' of that power. The fact that the Charmides runs into that problem is presumably because the question is a pressing one. And we may be reminded of the structural similarity that the problem of the self-predication of the ideas poses for Plato in, for instance the Parmenides. In any case we need to consider what this specific sort of reflexivity entails, and why Plato chooses to focus on it.

## II

### *episteme epistemes*

We shall here focus on the peculiar problem which attaches to the concept of self-knowledge in the course of Plato's dialogues. We need to look in close detail at the course of the argument and a way which makes sense of it in light of the questions that are driving the inquiry.

In order to clear up the problem I propose that we for a moment set aside the question of how the discussion is meant to throw light on the concept of 'temperance' focusing rather on the issue of 'self-knowledge' in its own right. If we do so we will be in a better position to appreciate the course of the discussion between Critias and Socrates and in turn see whether and how such an inquiry can indeed feed back into an account of 'temperance' as a virtue. With this in mind we may return to Critias' proposal to construe 'knowledge of self' as a 'knowledge that knows itself and the other kinds of knowledge'. Kosman notes that until this point in the dialogue the concern was "merely with the formal features of *sophrosune* and the psychic conditions offered by way of its analysis."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, we have found that one of the 'psychic conditions', a formal requirement for 'temperance' is that one be aware of 'what one is doing' as a temperate action. Kosman's nuanced analysis is revealing here. When Critias objects at 164D that he'd rather give up his previous assertions than to concede that the temperate man may be ignorant of himself as acting temperately he points to a merely 'episodic' kind of awareness that accompanies action, just in the sense in which I cannot be said to be doing arithmetic if I am not aware of so doing (in the minimal sense in which I am conscious of the logical connection between thoughts implied in making a sum). Critias points to a kind of 'self-consciousness' that characterises particular kinds of action. Yet when he asserts that the object of 'temperance' is 'self' (*eautou ge*) at 165C there is a shift from that merely 'episodic kind of awareness' to something more substantial. 'Temperance' now becomes an *episteme* of what Kosman terms a 'reified self', a robust object of knowledge quite different from the awareness that characterises particular actions.<sup>6</sup> The dialogue thus gropes for an adequate articulation of the kind of self-consciousness which is appropriate for the understanding of virtuous action. It is in the context of this question that we ought to look

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<sup>5</sup> Kosman, Louis Aryeh. "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides" in: *Virtues of Thought: Essays on Plato and Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014., pp.227-245; 231

<sup>6</sup> Kosman A. "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides", 229

at the further move towards ‘knowledge of knowledge’. And as noted earlier this move is puzzling.

The move is occasioned again by Socrates’ sustained insistence on Critias to say what the proper object of the knowledge in question is. The reply stated at 165C and repeated after a short digression at 166E is that:

*It alone of all the ‘epistemai’ is an ‘episteme’ both of itself and of the other ‘epistemai’.* (165C)

We are thus looking at a kind of *episteme* which is directed at itself and at all the other *epistemai*. This as Socrates is quick to point out makes it also an *episteme* of the lack of *episteme* (*anepistemouses*). This is in line with much of how Plato and Aristotle conceive of ‘knowledge’; in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* IX.2 the doctor is said to know how to produce health but also to know its contrary – disease - and to be capable of effecting both contraries through this knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Aristotle’s case is that of a productive science, the science we are looking would rather see the presence and absence of the knowledge of ‘medicine’ as such. The kind of *episteme* in question then is of itself but also of the presence and absence of all other *epistemai*. It is not too difficult to see where the dialogue is being directed, namely towards a knowledge that knows itself and can measure the scope of knowledge and ignorance. The point may be easier to appreciate if we pose the implicit question lurking in the background of the discussion: *if all knowledge is of a particular object i.e. a limited group of phenomena - in virtue of what can we know that we know and what we do and do not in fact know?* I take this to be the central issue behind the dialogue, though one that at first sight seems not to answer what the virtue of ‘temperance’ consists in. It is the question of the possibility of a single ‘knower’ who knows not only particular kinds of knowledge but has at his disposal a faculty for the discernment of the presence and absence of all particular knowledge in himself, in other people and perhaps in the scientific commonwealth alluded to with the ‘common good of all’ in the passage at 166D quoted above. He, as it were, needs to know knowledge (what it is) and be able to find it where it is present as a form ordering the relations between the elements of its proper subject and the lack of this form in *logoi*: ‘rational statements’ or explanatory ‘accounts’ of some group of phenomena. We find a succinct description of this capacity just after Critias affirms that the *episteme* he is looking for will also be capable of ‘knowing the lack of knowledge’:

*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*

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX.2 1046b20

*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. (167A)*

The connection between this sort of self-knowledge and ‘temperance’ needs to be spelled out in relation to other dialogues and this issue will be briefly pursued in Chapter 2. Yet, there is a way in which we might try shed some light on this connection by observing with what ease the dialogue moves from the ‘episodic’ awareness essentially characterising virtuous action, to the knowledge of self as a ‘robust’ object, to the ‘knowledge of knowledge’. The transition is guided by an inquiry into the nature of *episteme* but as it does so it also reveals something of the ‘subject’ of this ‘episteme’ namely ‘self’: this self progressively likened to ‘the knower’ as such. Plato seems to be working here towards the supposition that what is mostly ‘us’ is ‘understanding’. The ‘true self’ is in a sense ‘the knower’. Thus L.P. Gerson writes that “Unreflectively embodied persons identify themselves in an incoherent manner, sometimes with the subject of appetites and sometimes with the subject of cognition, sometimes with both. Platonism views philosophy as a process of gradual, or perhaps not so gradual identification with intellect”.<sup>8</sup> However that may be the dialogue itself does not venture such sweeping claims, on the contrary from this point onwards the focus is wholly on the question of whether such ‘knowledge’ is possible at all, and if indeed it is, how it can be of any use? (167B)

Socrates immediately points out to Critias that his is “a very strange statement” (167C). *Episteme* is in the genus of ‘powers’ or ‘faculties’ – *dunamai* – and as we have seen earlier every particular *episteme* is related to an object outside itself. The ‘strangeness’ lies in Critias proposing a ‘power’ which is related to itself. Socrates invites us to consider a number of cases which make such a relation appear impossible. In what follows from 167C-168 we are presented with a number of *dunamai* (‘powers’): ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘desire’, ‘wish’, ‘love’, ‘fear’ and ‘opinion’. In every case the supposition that such a ‘power’ that has itself as well as the presence and absence of the proper objects of this power within its scope appears impossible, Socrates asks Critias:

*ask yourself if you think there is a sort of vision which is not the vision of things that we see in an 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 colour, but only itself and the other sorts of vision. (167C)*

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<sup>8</sup> Gerson, Lloyd P. *Aristotle and Other Platonists*. Cornell University Press, 2005. 257

What we have here is an attempt to carry the proposed relation of ‘an *episteme* of itself and all the other *epistemai*, as well as their presence and absence’ to other ‘powers’ (*dunamai*). Socrates employs the inductive method to show that in all familiar cases this relation is (or at least appears to be) meaningless. ‘Vision’ in the ‘ordinary’ sense means vision of something colored just as an *episteme* is always an *episteme* of something. How can we make sense of a vision which is divorced from this intimate connection with its object so as to yield a ‘vision of itself and all other sorts of vision’ that sees no color? The same argument is applied to all the other cases. The general structure is the same: how can we make sense of a ‘power’ independently of its proper object? This problem is thematised in A. Joosse’s Phd dissertation, according to which central to the argument is the idea that a ‘power’ as such is ‘underdetermined’ attains to determination only in its ‘being towards something’ (*pros ti*).<sup>9</sup> In the case of vision this entails that “there is no mental state of seeing apart from an object seen”.<sup>10</sup> The overarching claim, as identified by Joosse is that Plato is working here within the framework of what a *dunamis* is. The sentence which lies “at the heart of the discussion” is stated at 168C-D:

*And similarly for all the rest: whatever has its own power related to itself will also have that being towards which its power is.*

According to Joosse, this passage testifies to a fundamental thesis about the nature of what it is to be a ‘power’ (*dunamis*) in that a ‘power’ is intimately connected to the ‘being’ (*ousia*) towards which it is oriented. The thesis is an ontological one: a ‘power’ is something that is in itself underdetermined and attains to determination only in the being ‘towards’ some *ousia*. This seems straightforward in the cases of ‘vision’, ‘desire’ etc. But is the problem analogous for the ‘understanding’?

*Qua power, a power is underdetermined. It finds determinate being only in being applied to a proper object. Critias’ proposal, however, would demand self-application. UU [episteme epistemes] attempts to be a superpower: a power that has its being towards a power (itself). But this will never yield determinate being. Understanding is not a determinate kind of thing in itself; so it cannot, by being about itself, come to be about a particular determinate being.<sup>11</sup>*

This is indeed the negative conclusion that emerges from the inductive consideration of cases similar to *episteme*. In addition to the above mentioned faculties we find a discussion of

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<sup>9</sup> Joosse, Albert. *Why a Philosopher Needs Others : Platonic and Stoic Models of Friendship and Self-understanding*. PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2011. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2011. 21

<sup>10</sup> Joosse, Albert, *Why a Philosopher Needs Others*, 2011, 23

<sup>11</sup> Joosse, Albert, *Why a Philosopher Needs Others*, 2011, 38



‘relative’ qualities such as ‘being greater than’, ‘double of’ etc. This move is made possible by the grammatical structures of Ancient Greek, where the ‘powers’ and ‘relatives’ both take their objects in the genitive case. This is a feature of language exploited by Plato but one which strikes us as, to say the least, strange. In any case, all these considerations point to the impossibility of having any a ‘power’ applied to itself. Thus at 169A we have the *a-poria* appear in full force when Socrates voices the demand for a ‘great man’ (*me-gas tis aner*):

*Who will determine to our satisfaction in every respect whether there is in nature anything so constituted as to have its own ‘dunamis’ applicable to itself, and not only some other object, or whether there are some things such and others not such; and whether, again, if there are such things that have a relation to themselves, they include the ‘episteme’ which we assert to be temperance.*

If that is so it still remains problematic how to account for our what is constitutive of our ‘selves’ under the aspect of *episteme* – understanding or knowledge. If one is to know what one is doing in the ‘episodic’ sense I need to be aware of what I am doing in special way. If there is to be ‘*episteme* of *episteme*’ and a single knower there needs to be way of ‘receding within’ from a point of view other than that of any particular science. It is this self-directed character of ‘consciousness’ which the dialogue has at its aim to investigate. Aristotle runs into the same problem in the *De Anima* III.2 in his account of a ‘percipient subject’ who needs not only to perceive the proper objects of the senses but also to see that he sees (be aware of seeing) and to distinguish his perceptions amongst themselves. In order to explicate these fundamental notions we need a notion of self-reflexivity which resists being construed as a relation of a *dunamis*: ‘faculty’, ‘power’, to something outside itself. This issue will occupy us in the next section of this chapter. For now let us note some of the additional problems which attach to the notion of ‘self-knowledge’ in the remainder of the dialogue.

### III

#### The benefit of 'self-knowledge'

The dialogue continues by Socrates' pressing Critias to tell him how his proposal to define self-knowledge as '*episteme epistemes*' is to made sense of in its own right – that is adequately articulating the very possibility of such self-knowledge - and further to tell him whether and how it 'would do us any good'. (169A) At this point Critias as by infectious 'yawns of the mind' begins to feel the difficulties his position is caught up in. Socrates' concedes to Critias' fear of being shown not to have an answer before students of his who hold him in high regard and therefore presses the question of the potential 'benefit' of such 'self-knowledge' on the assumption that it is very well possible:

*Come then, suppose that [episteme epistemes] is perfectly possible; how is one helped thereby to know what one knows and does not know? (169D)*

Critias' reply is again an enigmatic one, for in order to answer Socrates' question he invokes the parallel with qualities such as 'swiftness', 'beauty' and with the 'faculty' of *episteme* in its ordinary meaning claiming that he who possesses these will thereby be 'swift', 'beautiful' or 'have knowledge'; analogously he who possesses that which 'knows itself' will "be in the position of knowing himself". (169E) This goes unquestioned by Socrates, but he once again presses the issue of 'intentionality': "how is [he who possesses that which knows itself] thereby bound to know what he knows and does not know?" To this Critias gives no adequate answer and Socrates follows up making his previous question more precise:

*Will 'episteme epistemes' if such exists, be able to do more than determine that one of two things is an 'episteme' and the other is not? (170A)*

This question results in Critas forced retreat to a restricted notion of the power of his proposed '*episteme epistemes*': it is now only able to determine *that* but not *what* 'one knows or does not know'. Accordingly the notion becomes divorced from the capacity to tell us anything about whether anyone has an 'episteme' of: medicine or politics. (170B) The reason for that is that the object of *episteme epistemes* remains locked within the confines of its own self-oriented 'objectivity' such that it becomes possible for Socrates to say that the man who has *episteme epistemes* knows one thing and the doctor who knows 'medicine' another and there is hardly any common ground for them to talk to one another! (170E):

*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 talk to him about medicine, for as we were saying, the doctor understands nothing but health and disease. Is that not so?*

From here we witness the gradual destruction of the power of ‘self-knowledge’ as defined by Critias to be of any benefit. (170E-171D) It seems to be a totally vacuous postulation. In what follows the dialogue once again tries to assume the possibility of the undermined concept of self-knowledge but now in the more comprehensive sense of ‘knowing *what* one knows and does not know’ but even there the benefit of such knowledge seems questionable in so far as it is supposed to make a man or a *polis* consummately good. These questions are less important for our inquiry and will have to be passed by. We will touch upon a few of the issues in Chapter 2 but for the sake of brevity we now turn to the discussion of the scholarly material.

## Chapter 2: Interpreting the Charmides: L.A Kosman & P. Natorp

In the last chapter we have identified in the progression of the argument a shift from the outwards manifestations of ‘temperance’ to the condition of the ‘temperate’ soul couched in the problematic concept of ‘self-knowledge’. In this section we shall try to shed light on this progression and its apparent failure to reach a conclusive end. The two views I wish to take into account are those offered by Paul Natorp and Ayreh Kosman. The choice of these particular scholars is guided by the common ground they share in their attempts to read the Charmides. Both see in the discussion of ‘temperance’ not merely the discussion of one particular virtue among others but the discussion of virtue in general, of the very source of a virtuous constitution of a soul in comprehensive ‘self-knowledge’.<sup>12</sup> This allows us to start from the assumption that what we are dealing with here are questions fundamental to an account of virtue that is grounded in the appropriate condition of the soul. This is an assumption which will be taken for granted in the present essay but which appears to be the only reasonable one if the context of other dialogues, most notably the *Protagoras* as well as the early *Apology* and *Crito*, is taken into account. Both scholars also share the view that such a condition cannot be a function of merely reflexive self-knowledge in the sense already suggested, namely as a knowledge of oneself as ‘object’ which would be the knowledge of one’s particular desires, aversions, tastes and so on. Both propose an interpretation for what the peculiar self-knowledge that is constitutive of virtue is supposed to consist in but they differ in their attempts to render this special kind of ‘self-knowledge’ intelligible. Kosman’s reading draws on the work of J.P Sartre and limits itself to the clarification of the special sense of ‘self-consciousness’ that the dialogue is trying to articulate without thereby attempting to provide an exhaustive solution. Paul Natorp’s reading on the other hand is more ambitious, he finds a continuity between Plato and Kant, a tendency which Kosman explicitly opposes.<sup>13</sup> Natorp’s reading brings ‘knowledge’ as the primary constituent of ‘self’.<sup>14</sup> The difference constitutes two varied and creditable attempts at understanding the Charmides and overcoming the difficulties (*a-poriai*) voiced throughout the dialogue. More importantly the work of both scholars brings the dialogue into the discussion of the problem of ‘self-consciousness’ that is and has been the centre stage of philosophical work in recent times. This opens the door to the systematic treatment of the questions involved which will concern us in the third Chapter of this essay.

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<sup>12</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Charmides”, 243  
Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 69

<sup>13</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Charmides”, 230

<sup>14</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 69

# I

L.A Kosman

Kosman's enterprise is primarily a work of clarification in drawing distinctions between various 'cognitive states' that surface throughout the central part of the dialogue and which insinuate various ways of construing 'self-knowledge'. These various 'cognitive states' all share the 'reflexive' feature as instances of a relation to 'self' and their analysis helps to articulate the problems that 'reflexivity' poses for any account of 'temperance' as 'self-knowledge'. In particular the questions center around the problematic and ambiguous 'intentionality' of self-oriented cognitive states. 'Reflexivity' is in tension with 'intentionality', that is, with a relation to a class of objects outside 'self' which seems indispensable for a kind of 'self-knowledge' which allows for a comprehensive virtue that is to guide one's conduct and make one 'temperate'. We shall consider this problem in the course of our argument. To begin let us turn to the main cognitive states which Kosman identifies as present in the central part of the dialogue:

*[W]e encounter an array of cognitive states in the course of Critias' argument at the centre of the Charmides. Beginning with the knowledge that an agent has of himself in the course of a specific activity or mode of activity, the conversation moves to a more general sense of reflexive self-knowledge, and from that to the knowledge we may be said to have of the self as a substantive object. Talk of the general sense of reflexive self-knowledge and of a knowledge that can be thought to have the self as an independent object leads to the consideration of a rather different state, an understanding that itself is of itself: a self-knowing that knows itself. The conversation finally moves back to the personal reflexive via the inference (whether licit or not) from one sense of self-understanding to another (169E).<sup>15</sup>*

We thus have a number of instances in which talk of a relation to 'self' seems appropriate. These can be listed in this order:

- 1) 'knowledge that an agent has of himself in the course of a specific activity' (164D)  
- (episodic) consciousness that characterises particular actions: *knowing what one is doing* – this condition is the one marking the turning point in Critias' argument where he objects to the claim that one can do a 'temperate' act and yet be unaware of so

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<sup>15</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides", 235

doing. This awareness is distinguished by Kosman from mere “awareness of one’s actions’ as ‘awareness of oneself as acting in some particular way’”.<sup>16</sup> It is, as it were, the kind of awareness which characterises actions done with a ‘sound mind’, in full awareness of the character of *what one is doing*: in the particular case of the dialogue ‘the awareness *that* one is acting in a temperate manner’, “that what one is up to involves moderation and self-control”.<sup>17</sup>

2) ‘general, reflexive self-knowledge’ (165C) – that is, a knowledge which does not merely characterise an action but the subject as a whole, in this case *knowledge that one is a temperate person*. – here the shift is to ‘knowledge of self’ as a robust object of knowledge at, this form of self-consciousness would presumably also apply to instances of knowing one’s own desires, predilections, tastes and so on.

3) *episteme epistemes* (166C ff.) – the puzzling locution towards which Critias moves in the course of the argument but which remains elusive, the attention turns from the subject as a whole to a specific power or capacity (*dunamis*), namely ‘understanding’ which its related to itself.

4) Return to a personal-reflexive (169E) – the subject who possesses the above *episteme epistemes* will know himself due to the fact that he possesses that which has ‘self-knowledge’ (the validity of which inference Kosman questions).

As we have seen in chapter 1 the argument of the *Charmides* moves between these ‘cognitive states’ with such swiftness and seeming ease that the relevant distinctions between them remain obscured. What we have here is indeed a survey of various forms of ‘self-consciousness’ that together (though perhaps not exhaustively) contribute to our cognitive life under its ‘reflexive’ aspect – our multiform, complex relation to our ‘selves’. Not all however are appropriate instances of the sort of ‘self-consciousness’ that would ground the virtue of ‘temperance’ if any such is indeed available to us. Interestingly enough, aside from the question of virtue, according to Kosman the dialogue identifies some key instances of ‘reflexivity’, especially the first of the two listed above, which are indispensable to a philosophical understanding of the concept of ‘self’. A substantial ‘self’, an enduring unified ‘subject’ of experience is arguably ‘constructed’ out of instances of first-order, episodic ‘self-consciousness’ that characterises perceptions (awareness of seeing, hearing etc.). From this first order-awareness a sense of ‘subjectivity’ which unites various experiences under the concept of a ‘self’ comes into view and it is on the basis of such first-order awareness that the second-order awareness of a ‘robust’ self is at all possible (we shall touch on this in Chapter 3 and Kitcher’s opposing claim). Thus Kosman writes:

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<sup>16</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 228

<sup>17</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 231

*We may feel a need to somehow warrant this move the argument has made from 'knowing what I am doing' to a more extensive knowing the self. [viz. between 1 and 2 in the list above] But that feeling may be eclipsed by the sense of a philosophical finding, the sense of having discovered the pathway to our concept of the self. (...) [P]erhaps Critias' move from an episodic self-consciousness 'secundum quid' to a robust awareness of the self simpliciter represents what is a respectable candidate for a theory of how we in fact acquire the concept of the self.<sup>18</sup>*

What we have here then is a number of glimpses that constitute material for an inquiry into the nature of 'self' and 'who we are' far beyond the question of virtue which the dialogue gropes for.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand we need not think that the large question is separate from the question of virtue, there are to reasons to think that for Plato the two questions were intimately connected, and while the *Charmides* may not provide a comprehensive account of 'selfhood' it may be seen as trying to identify that which is most essentially 'one's self' and which can lead the way to a virtuous disposition of the soul. Kosman's interpretation recommends just this path towards an understanding problematic locution of *episteme epistemēs*. Before we get there a few preliminaries.

The dialogue finds its way to the locution through a consideration of the first two 'cognitive states' listed above: the episodic 'self-consciousness' and the robust knowledge of 'self', the latter of which is further specified by Critias as *episteme epistemēs*. In chapter 1 we have already noted the surprising neglect of a possible path left unexplored by Plato, namely that of constructing the relevant *episteme* of 'self' on the analogy with other *epistemai* such as 'geometry' or 'arithmetic'. We might have expected Critias to answer to Socrates' question with an account of 'temperance' rooted in the *episteme* of one's particular tastes, desires, habits, likes and dislikes and so on. Such an *episteme* could conceivably have the genus of 'pleasure' with its concomitant of 'pain' as a proper object just as the object of 'arithmetic' is the 'relation between the odd and even numbers'. Understanding why the dialogue does not move in this direction is crucial and Kosman's interpretation does provide an interesting

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<sup>18</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's *Charmides*", 230

<sup>19</sup> An indication of this is the parallel that the discussion of the *Charmides* has with contexts in which Aristotle discusses related questions. In the *De Anima* III.2 the conditions of animal, pre-rational, subjectivity – the conditions for a unified 'perceiver' are analyzed in terms which, as various scholars testify, reveal Aristotle's engagement with the problems of the dialogue. On the other, (far) end of the *scala naturae* the articulation of the 'selfhood' of the Prime Mover of the Book XII of the *Metaphysics* likewise discusses questions of 'reflexivity' that are discussed in our dialogue, not to mention the similarity of the locutions both in the *De Anima* (seeing that we see) and the *Metaphysics* (thought thinking itself) that structurally mirror *episteme epistemēs*.

answer to this question.<sup>20</sup> The whole issue for him revolves around the ambiguity of the ‘reflexive’ character of the ‘cognitive states’ identified above. The putative *episteme* directed at ‘self’ in the way just suggested is ‘reflexive’ in the sense that it is an instance of having some kind of *episteme* about oneself. On the other hand it is not too difficult to see that that relation is ‘reflexive’ only accidentally. The object of the *episteme* as well as the subject who has it are numerically identical but the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ are different in being (*ousia*). In principle it is a case of one having a knowledge of something outside that knowledge itself and it only so happens that the object coincides with the subject in an embodied person. The point can perhaps be made clearer if we pause to ask whether there is anything special about that sort of knowledge of oneself as opposed to the knowledge of another. It seems that the answer must be no, for the object of the ‘episteme’ stands in the same relation to the ‘knower’ regardless of whether it is further qualified as one’s own ‘self’ or the ‘self’ of another.<sup>21</sup> In fact the attempt to construe ‘self-knowledge’ in this way seems rather to split the ‘self’ (in the sense of an embodied person) rather than to unify it, it is a case of one part of oneself knowing something ‘other’ outside itself. This brings us to the heart of the problem of ‘reflexivity’ that guides Kosman’s analysis according to which it is precisely this sort of pseudo-reflexivity which the dialogue tries to avoid. The splitting of ‘self’ which we have been trying to articulate is more apparent if we consider cognitive states such as ‘shame’ or ‘guilt’ and in general anything that falls under the commonplace phrase that characterises such states: ‘being self-conscious’. Such a relation to ‘self’ in fact involves seeing oneself from the outside, as it were from a second order perspective which in its negative guise involves a form of ‘self-alienation’. In light of these consideration we may want to view, as Kosman does, the move towards ‘*episteme epistemes*’ as Plato’s attempt to hold on to the intuition that if temperance is to be anything it must be a kind of ‘self-knowledge’ but at the same time to avoid its collapse into the sort of ‘self-consciousness’ that involves a splitting of the subject. Speaking in general about the problem that the *Charmides* is facing and invoking some of the parallel contexts in Aristotle (De Anima III.2 and Metaphysics XII.9), Kosman puts the central concern of the dialogue into the framework of the larger question of ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ which make up our cognitive life not just in relation to ‘action’ but to cognition in general: sensation and thought included:

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<sup>20</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 243-4

<sup>21</sup> One natural objection may be that one has a special sort of access to one’s own inner life: desires, sensations, etc. While there is a relevant sense in which our acquaintance with ourselves is always more thorough than anyone else’s could ever be, just because we have to live with ourselves for all of our waking life, the point is rather that there is nothing that *in principle* privileges such access. Any position which claims otherwise has to overcome the implications of Wittgenstein’s ‘private language argument’ which I take to be a case in point on this issue.



*On this Plato and Aristotle are in agreement: cognition is in its nature objective, that is, intentional; it reaches out toward a world other than itself, which it posits as its object. But at the same time it involves a mode of self-awareness that is, as it were, nonobjective, a consciousness of the subject as aware in which the subject as aware is present to itself but not before itself in the mode in which the posited object of consciousness is before consciousness. The attempt to explain and elucidate this nonobjective mode of self-awareness, to articulate the sense in which it is a condition of consciousness of the objective world while preventing it from collapsing into simple reflexive self-awareness, is in some ways a deeply modern concern.<sup>22</sup>*

The ‘nonobjective’ mode of self-awareness is one that resists explication in terms of simple ‘intentionality’ or ‘other-directedness’. And it is in this mode of reflexivity that Kosman locates for Plato’s attempt to account for what temperance might consist in.<sup>23</sup> It is explicitly not “the mode in which the posited object of consciousness is before consciousness”, which is what ‘temperance’ would be an instance of if it were explicated in the way suggested above. It remains puzzling what that other ‘mode’ is, and how it is to ground a virtuous constitution of the soul. One of the cues in the above passage is that this more problematic, properly ‘reflexive’, mode of self-awareness is a ‘condition of consciousness of the objective world’ – it is not itself an object of consciousness (a simple case of it being a consciousness *of* something) but a condition that makes such ‘object-directed’ consciousness possible. This is a claim made in relation to the general questions about the nature of cognition, within which Kosman discusses the specific issues addressed in our dialogue and we will need to see how this connection sheds light on our question. In order to see how Kosman relates the questions of cognition to the account of ‘temperance’ as a virtue we need to take a brief look at his short but interesting discussion of the difference between ‘temperance’ (*sophrosune*) and ‘self-control’ or mere ‘continence’ (*enkrateia*) that distinguishes these two apparently similar virtues of soul on the model of the two ‘modes’ of self-consciousness outlined above.

We have noted the absence of the attempt to construe self-knowledge on the analogy with other *epistemai*, parallel to this absence is the lack of a fairly intuitive definition of ‘temperance’ which might conceivably have appeared early on in the dialogue, namely that of ‘self-control’ (*enkrateia*). Given that the virtue in question is manifested in a kind of ‘modesty’ or ‘quietness’ and in general a ‘moderation in the passions’ it is surprising that nowhere do we find the tempting attempt to define it precisely as ‘self-control’ – the capacity to withdraw oneself from the sway of the passions and restrain them. And yet according to

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<sup>22</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Charmides”, 244

<sup>23</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Charmides”, 243

Kosman that absence again serves to reassure us about Plato's interest in the 'nonobjective' mode of consciousness.<sup>24</sup> 'Self-control' presupposes a distancing of oneself from one's states of the soul whether they be desires, fears or other. If it is a virtue, it would be precisely the virtue that would involve a mode of consciousness that is 'objective', one that can successfully treat the states of one's soul as 'objects' and thereby restrain certain passions. It is a virtue that is rooted in a capacity for a kind of 'self-alienation', though not necessarily in a negative sense, a splitting of oneself into a part that 'rules' or 'controls' (*kratei*) and one which 'obeys' or is 'controlled'. Kosman contrasts this alleged virtue of *enkrateia* with *sophrosune*, which latter is conceived as a higher, consummate, virtue of 'self-possession' or 'self-mastery' in which the splitting of oneself is no longer present.<sup>25</sup> *Sophrosune* is precisely the virtue that culminates in a thoroughgoing "unity of self with self", a kind of 'self-knowledge' that makes one immune to the unruly elements in the soul (passions, fears and aberrations of all kinds) because of a proper constitution of the soul (and perhaps also the body). It is an ordering of the whole of one's being that leaves no room for the intrusion of anything that might disturb or lead astray. A person who has 'self-control' has to concede to the existence of such elements and fight against them to the best of their ability. The *sophron*, the 'temperate' man, on the other hand is really a *mens sana in corpore sano* a harmonious unity of the whole soul from top to bottom. This difference may be seen as hierarchical, 'self-control' being appropriate to those who have not yet mastered themselves and 'temperance' being reserved for those who have become consummately good through understanding or *episteme*. The helpful analogy invoked by Kosman is that of the difference between a skilled and an unskilled craftsman, the first of which finds difficulty in 'controlling' his 'intractable material' and needs to strain himself, follow rules and so on, while the latter can perform his tasks with an ease and freedom that seems effortless and can allow itself much more liberty while yet achieving its end flawlessly.<sup>26</sup> We may be reminded of Socrates of the Symposium who is said to be able to drink or not and yet remain wholly of a 'sound mind' – Alcibiades in the same dialogue is presumably in need of much more restraint and 'self-control' if he is not to make a fool of himself or lapse into his over-grown *thumos*. In any case we have the contrast between a yet 'unmastered' soul and one that has attained full mastery, between one that has to be on the lookout for itself, to keep itself in place and not be led astray just as an unskilled craftsman must devote a great deal of attention and deliberation to each movement and the one which has its true self in constant possession and can thereby indulge in things that might otherwise be perilous precisely because the 'self' is always 'present to itself' and 'known'. If Kosman is right in introducing this distinction to aid the interpretation of the

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<sup>24</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides", 243-4

<sup>25</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides", 244

<sup>26</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Charmides", 240

dialogue then it becomes clear why Plato might be so interested in issues of cognition in a dialogue which asks about the nature of ‘temperance’.

The array of cognitive ‘states’ summarised in the opening paragraphs of this section is then an inquiry into the modes of self-consciousness that characterise our cognitive life under the aspect of reflexivity and which might give us the relevant relation ensuring that an agent may ‘know himself’ in such a way that he never strays from the path of his or her soul under the sway of the passions. The proposition to consider ‘temperance’ as a virtue of ‘self-knowledge’ seems well founded in light of the above considerations. What we need now is to bring our findings together in order to elucidate the movement of the dialogue towards *episteme epistemes*. For Kosman this locution is introduced in order to highlight the ‘non-objective mode of awareness’ that is a feature of cognition in general and which is put to a dialectical test with respect to its feasibility as a ground for ‘temperance’. It is meant to introduce the ‘first-order awareness’: “my knowing what I am thinking, or saying, or doing”<sup>27</sup> as a candidate for that role. According to Kosman it is not meant to offer a way of solving the problem of ‘intentionality’ by providing an appropriate object but to mark the appropriate character of the reflexive relation. It is here that the ‘cognitive states’ listed above become relevant, their analysis reveals that there is a mode of awareness that is purely of itself and that it is an irreducible if philosophically problematic aspect of our cognitive life. In perception this is the simple awareness of ‘seeing’ or ‘hearing’ that Aristotle attempts to get a grip on in the *De Anima* III.2. In another context, namely the enigmatic chapter 9 in Book XII of the *Metaphysics* according to Kosman Aristotle means to identify the parallel ‘awareness’ that is internal to any ‘thought’ when he speaks of ‘thought thinking itself’ as the ‘most divine of phenomena’.<sup>28</sup> While Kosman’s take on these issues in Aristotle will be left unquestioned it does help to cite these cases as instances of the sort of ‘reflexivity’ which is meant to illuminate the central concern of our dialogue. The mode of ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ is not in itself a ‘thing’, it is rather the ‘transparent’ condition of consciousness for the very positing of an object within that consciousness and therefore cannot be an object in the standard sense. Any object of a cognitive state, whether that be perception, thought, desire or opinion is an object outside that state towards which (*pros ti*) that state is directed. The pure awareness of ‘self’ supervenes on such states as a necessary aspect of the cognitive (otherwise we should have the possibility of thinking or perceiving or cognition is general without that first-order awareness). To say that it is not a ‘thing’ in its own right is not to deny its

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<sup>27</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 244

<sup>28</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 243 see also Kosman’s contribution to the XIV Symposium Aristotelicum on that very chapter: “*Metaphysics A.9: Divine thought*” in [Frede, Michael. *Aristotle’s “Metaphysics” Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. 307-326]

autonomous status but it is only to claim that it does not itself come as an object of experience among other proper objects that satisfy the requirements of ‘intentionality’. Such awareness is what Albert Joosse identifies as a *dunamis* - a power, or capacity - which becomes determinate only in conjunction with an object of experience but has no being in its own right independently of that object. Perception is always of a sensible object: color, sound, smell etc., thought is always thought of something and there is no thought ‘that is a thought purely of the thinking of it’ as Meinong once discarded Aristotle’s idea advanced in the above mentioned chapter of the *Metaphysics*: a thinking that is thinking thinking (*noesis noesis noeseos*).<sup>29</sup> Thus *episteme epistemes* in the *Charmides* is to be viewed according to Kosman as a locution which functions just like ‘perceiving that we perceive’ or ‘thinking thinking’ in Aristotle, as an instance of the objectless awareness.

*These locutions are wrongly understood if we read them on the model of reflexive self-knowing; they are expressions designed to reveal the nonreflective self-presence that is an irreducible aspect of the cognitive, as indeed it is of awareness in general. The locutions of self-awareness here point not to the self as object but to the self as present to itself – we might say the self as its own companion. (p.245)*

This chimes in with the noted absence of ‘self-control’ or a kind of ‘self-knowledge’ that is construed on the analogy with standard *epistemai*. Does it help us to understand what *sophrosune* is, period? The dialogue does not rest content with this answer for the obvious question is how such a purely self oriented *episteme* which we can now construe on the analogy with pure awareness accompanying all cognition is to translate into a virtuous constitution of the soul. Kosman does not provide a satisfying answer to this question leaving only a couple of pointers to what such an answer might be. We shall try to fill in the blanks in the next section but before we do that let us concentrate on how Kosman tries to pave the way to a satisfactory answer with the idea of a ‘self-presence’ and the ‘self as its own companion’ and note some of the potential problems for his proposal.

Obviously the self-presence cannot be explicated in the manner of something that we can keep a mental eye on, for that would make it an object in the standard sense and perhaps assimilate the consummate virtue of ‘temperance’ to mere ‘self-control’. I would like to suggest that it is more appropriate to think of it somewhat in the manner of the Christian ideal of living with Christ in one’s heart, a presence that is not so much the presence of another but of one’s ‘true self’ which is capable of illuminating the whole of our ‘consciousness’ with a

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<sup>29</sup> As quoted by Kosman in “*Metaphysics A.9: Divine thought*” in [Frede, Michael. *Aristoteles "Metaphysics" Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. 323]

light from above, through a 'selfless love' rooted in 'faith'. The Platonic answer may be different in important respects but I think the parallel is one that serves the purpose of mutual illumination of the core of these two different traditions. Kosman's own suggestion is as follows:

*It is a virtue to know what I'm doing, to act consciously and with self-awareness. Gluttony, sloth, licentiousness, procrastination, like all their vicious cohort, sneak up on me when I lose sight of myself and forget what I am about, when I fail to take account of what it is that I am doing. So it's a healthy 'phronesis' that is conscious of its actions, and we can therefore understand why 'sophrosune' might be thought to be the virtue of self-consciousness.<sup>30</sup>*

'Temperance' as a virtue of 'self-consciousness' on this proposed reading becomes the (masterful) ability to keep up a mode of consciousness that is immune to the intrusion of elements that might disturb it. Though Kosman does not explicitly advance this thesis, it is tempting to think of *sophrosune* as an *episteme* which culminates in a consistent identification, or identity of oneself with the self-same subject throughout the various circumstances that swim into our 'conscious', 'self-aware' stream of (distinctively human) experience. To 'forget what one is about' is to fail to identify oneself as a single subject, it is to give voice to something that can 'cloud awareness' and play its own part without us 'knowing what we are doing'. If the suggestion is correct then it seems that the problematic locution of *episteme epistemes* is supposed to identify something that can fulfil just that role, being objectless or at least not having an object in the standard sense makes it possible to figure as something that can be present at all times regardless of the nature and character of the object 'posited' within that 'consciousness': it really is the virtue of 'self-consciousness', of awareness itself, one that can master its objects because it 'knows itself', that is it: 'knows the very nature of awareness itself'. To speculate further we might want to say that it consists not just in 'knowing', having an *episteme* of something or other, it is rather 'knowing the knower', being aware of the 'sound' character and form of any conscious activity whether that be 'thinking', 'perceiving', 'desiring', 'opining', 'acting' or what have you. In which case the 'consistent identification' would be with the 'knowing subject', one's true 'self'. But if this speculation is to recommend itself as making good sense of the argument of the *Charmides* it runs into the problems that the dialogue subjects to painstaking investigation. If *episteme epistemes* is really what 'temperance' must consist in, how is it's 'intentionality' to be restored? The question that makes for the sustained dialectic between Critias' proposal at 165B all the way until the end of the dialogue is whether such a 'self-knowledge' can indeed

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<sup>30</sup> Kosman, "Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato's *Charmides*", 245

bear any relation to anything outside itself. Hence, the supposition that ‘temperance’ as a virtue of ‘self-consciousness’ can in fact translate into a virtuous mode of mastery of the objects of consciousness seems to remain problematic on the grounds set out by Plato until the end of the *Charmides*. This, I think, points to a major weakness in Kosman’s account. In the end of his article we find a poetically inspired and spiritually captivating but perhaps philosophically insufficient characterisation of the virtue in question:

*[The virtue of sophrosune] is a figure of that self-erasure and self-accomplishment (...) to which Plato points in our dialogue, points and leads us through a discourse of quiet and order, modesty and skilled self-knowing. Like the empty mindlessness of the fully enlightened sage, ‘sophrosune’ is a virtue of self without self, a virtue of wisdom and self-mastery in which wisdom, self and mastery vanish, and there remains only the quiet orderly, and effortless grace of skilled living.<sup>31</sup>*

This passage ends the article with which we have engaged thought this section and it figures after Kosman’s short digression on the dangerous tendency of the letter ‘I’ to dominate and ‘cloud’ awareness. The solution to the puzzle of the dialogue thus becomes a kind of selfless self-consciousness which has a grip on itself but without the ‘self’ being present in the manner of an object that would interfere with its ‘transparent’ functioning. In the end of the article we do find the mention of a ‘healthy *phronesis*’ which is supposed to characterise this state but the place of such ‘sound thinking’ (as *phronesis* might be rendered in English) is left undiscussed.<sup>32</sup> On the whole Kosman’s suggestions towards a solution of the riddle of ‘temperance’ remain fairly un-intellectualistic and seem to be at odds with the Socratic insistence on the ceaseless striving towards *episteme* and especially *episteme* directed at the ‘ethical’ concepts that are supposed to order the soul towards the ‘good’. This objection requires recourse to other dialogues of Plato and will not be pressed here but within the context of the dialogue we may observe that Kosman’s proposal only minimally invokes the ‘knowledge of what one knows and what one does not know’ as constitutive of ‘temperance’. Such ‘self-knowledge’ is at the heart of Socratic thinking and is given so much attention in the dialogue that it would be strange if temperance were not essentially connected to it. Let us recall how Critias explicates this idea:

*[O]nly 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*

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<sup>31</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 245

<sup>32</sup> Kosman, “Self-Control and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s *Charmides*”, 245

*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. (167A)*

As it was suggested in Chapter 1 the short digression early on in the argument seems to suggest that Socrates is throughout the discussion an example of just this: being ‘temperate’ in trying to know what he knows and what he does not know. To quote that passage again, Socrates replies to Critias’ charge that he is merely trying to ‘refute’ him for the sake of ‘refutation’:

*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 what I am doing I tell you. I am examining the argument mainly for my own sake, but perhaps also 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? (166D)*

I stress Socrates’ ‘fear’ because it expresses the passionate commitment to ‘self-knowledge’ in the very sense of ‘being aware of what one is doing’ but extending further to a more comprehensive knowledge of ‘what one knows and doesn’t know’ in general. Here in particular it is Socrates’ engagement in a dialectical discussion in which case it is all the more urgent to investigate the *logos* – things said, statements made, by oneself or another – in search for understanding and logical consistency and in that context the actions undertaken by Socrates are ‘temperate’ with respect to the given situation. But the suggestion may be taken further, namely to a more substantial thesis to the effect that pursuing *logos* in this way is the high-road to ‘temperance’ and ‘wisdom’, that knowing what one knows and doesn’t know and never ‘carelessly supposing’ and mistaking ‘opinion’ for ‘knowledge’ is what makes one temperate across the board, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. I think Kosman’s suggestion of *sophrosune* as a ‘virtue of self-consciousness’ is not inconsistent with such a reading though he himself does not venture to develop his insights in the article. The virtue of Socratic ‘self-consciousness’ may be just this: to ‘know that one does not know’ (as the Oracle of Delphi itself testifies<sup>33</sup>) and to be thereby able to search for knowledge where it is wanting and in the process find out what one knows and what one doesn’t know and to act in

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<sup>33</sup> Though such a testimony would on Plato’s own terms be of little value if not followed by a philosophical understanding of the meaning of such a ‘divinely inspired utterance’ rooted in the *logos*. See especially *Timaeus* 72a but also *Charmides* 164E in reference to the inscription ‘Know Thyself’ “the god addresses those who are entering the temple in a mode that differs from that of men (...) but he does so in a rather riddling fashion as a prophet would.”

accordance with the *logos*. It would be a 'virtue of self-consciousness' because it is able to discern the formal character of the object posited within that consciousness i.e. able to reflectively assess what swims into the ken of 'awareness' as 'knowledge' or mere 'opinion' and never to base itself on something that merely has the semblance of certainty. If it seems puzzling how such an intellectualistic notion is to translate into 'temperate' behaviour then perhaps the crux of the matter lies in the difficulty we find in treating 'mind' and 'knowledge' as a principle of action, desire, emotion and other mental states which are nowadays conceded to be irredeemably 'irrational'. If 'consciousness' means 'rational consciousness' and if its 'ruling' function extends to even the lowest desires then we can see how a thorough 'self-knowledge' a masterful disposition of consciousness can in the end result in a thoroughgoing and healthy soul: a *mens sana in corpore sano*. In order to develop this line of thought let us turn to Paul Natorp.



## II

P. Natorp

The analysis of the *Charmides* with which we shall be concerned here figures as a sub-chapter of the book that is the monumental achievement of Natorp's project of setting out a new interpretation of 'Plato's Theory of Ideas' that traces the development of that theory from scratch by a thorough analysis of Plato's writings in a chronological order.<sup>34</sup> Natorp's reading is controversial if only because it locates Plato's project as a first a major advance in the tradition of 'Idealism' a claim that perhaps stands on its own as a kind of 'outsider' in the development of Plato scholarship. Natorp draws on Kant in his interpretation though he sees Plato as an advocate of a more refined form of idealism than Kant's own.<sup>35</sup> We will not be able to give this interesting topic its due in the course of our inquiry but it is important to note that Natorp starts from certain fundamental of assumptions that may be surprising to readers of Plato who have been introduced to his philosophy through more conventional sources.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless his interpretation of the *Charmides*, as will be shown in what follows, has the force of filling in the blanks left by Kosman and answering the problems set out in the course of Kosman's article in a positive manner. Moreover it has the extra merit of bringing the discussion of the dialogue into the heart of the modern philosophy's preoccupation with 'consciousness' – a topic which we shall touch on in Chapter 3.

The *Charmides*, according to Natorp figures as an early dialogue, one which still bears the distinctively Socratic spirit manifested in the pursuit of a logical determination of 'ethical' concepts.<sup>37</sup> That 'ethical' concern of Socrates is based on a method of inquiry which will be developed by his disciple Plato into a comprehensive 'theory of knowledge' and into the establishment of a path towards a thorough logical/scientific consciousness that is to become the cornerstone of the western intellectual tradition. The Socratic approach begins with the realisation of one's own ignorance, and Socrates is presented as the first to have attained this insight in its full force and clarity. The nature of the insight into one's ignorance is not left

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<sup>34</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 48-9

<sup>35</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 48-9; cf. Politis' Introduction, 15-21

<sup>36</sup> These assumptions, or starting points are treated in the Introduction to Natorp's book written by Vasilis Politis. (see especially pp.21-3) The two main starting points as summarised by Politis are: 1) *The Metaphysical Claim*: That Plato's Ideas are not 'substances' (viz. as independently existing items) but laws, and real explanations. They signify 'methods' as the horizon towards which any rational discussion must order itself in seeking the 'unity of conceptual content' posited in any judgment. And 2) *The Transcendental Claim*: That "Plato's ideas are primarily elements in the nature of thought and knowledge, and only as a consequence elements in the nature of reality" (p.21) Natorp gives ultimate priority to 'thought and knowledge' in the determination of being. This is the claim that puts Plato in line with transcendental Idealism.

<sup>37</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 69

unqualified but further explicated as proceeding from the reflection on the ‘form’ of knowledge, that is, one that come into possession of the formal criteria of what *ought to* count as an *episteme*.<sup>38</sup> Importantly it is a reflection that is content-less, for it does not thereby give us the knowledge of what we do and do not know, it merely marks the reflection on and discovery of *the* ‘criterion’ that is to guide one’s intellectual pursuit. It establishes the demand which Socrates pursued in a merely ‘negative’ fashion through his ceaseless dialectical testing (the *elenchus*) of the putative knowledge of others and himself and which merely negative approach is according to Natorp given a positive turn in the subsequent development of Plato’s own thought. Because the *Charmides* situates itself in the early stage of Plato’s thought what follows is primarily concerned with the Socratic basis, which Plato is clarifying in these dialogues, nevertheless it is one that paves the way for the ‘mature’ ‘Theory of Ideas’.

The central concept of the dialogue *sophrosune* or ‘temperance’ is for Natorp “only seemingly the issue”.<sup>39</sup> This claim is based on the idea that what is being investigated is the more general claim to which Plato and Socrates were both committed, namely that “virtue is knowledge” a claim already advanced in the *Phaedo*.<sup>40</sup> Thus the whole of the inquiry is viewed as an examination “of another aspect of the general concept of virtue” that aspect being ‘self-knowledge’. We need not understand this claim as an invitation to read the dialogue as removing itself from a discussion of ‘temperance’ in its more ordinary guise but rather as the discussion of an aspect of virtue in general which being a ‘unity’ gives birth to ‘temperance’ as much as ‘courage’ or any other nameable virtue. The point is that we are looking for the single principle which makes a person or a soul virtuous through and through. The question of virtue becomes for Plato a question about *episteme*, and the *Charmides* takes the path of investigating one aspect of that question, namely ‘self-knowledge’, but as we have seen the concept of self-knowledge is not given any positive determination in the dialogue, the argument culminating rather it’s the seeming annihilation of the concept. According to Natorp this is because the theses advanced by Critias fall short of an adequate definition: the kind of self-knowledge put forth by Critias in its most developed form at 167A, one which postulates this knowledge to consist in a comprehensive grasp of ‘what one knows and does not know’ runs into the tension between ‘reflexivity’ and ‘intentionality’ that turns out untenable (an issue we have dealt with in detail in Chapter 2). Critias’ attempt to articulate the possibility of this form of self-knowledge in response to Socrates’ questions has to retreat to a restricted ‘knowledge’ the power of which is only to ‘know *that*’ one knows or does not know

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<sup>38</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 56

<sup>39</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 69

<sup>40</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 69

but thereby divorcing itself from ‘knowing *what*’ one knows or does not know. As Natorp points out such an *episteme*:

*(...) which is not supposed to grasp an object different from itself, but purely the knowing or the lack of knowing – for this is how self-knowledge is explained by the interlocutor Critias -, such a knowledge seems to be an absurdity.*

What is absurd or problematic about it is that it seems to be an attempt to construe self-knowledge on the analogy with other properly ‘intentional’ states like standard *epistemai* such as ‘geometry’ or ‘arithmetic’ but its ‘intentionality’ leaves nothing that could serve as a ground for virtue, it seems to be an empty concept. It is rather like a ‘vision’ which sees nothing at all but purely the ‘seeing’ but is not able to tell one ‘what one sees’, it is in that sense blind and ineffective. Critias’ attempt comes down to the postulation of merely ‘formal’ concepts of ‘powers’ or ‘faculties’ which lose their grip on the ‘matter’ that is correlative to such ‘powers’ in ordinary instances and thereby renders them empty and inadequate. This is made clear by the dialogue’s admission at 169E of the existence of such a putative self-knowledge – for even given its possibility it seems to be ineffective insofar as it would not be able to tell us *what* we know, for to know whether one knows ‘medicine’, ‘geometry’ or ‘arithmetic’ one must inquire into the very objects of these *epistemai* (170B-C). And yet Natorp argues that the path pursued by Critias is not wholly mistaken. The problem is that he fails to understand the peculiar nature of ‘self-consciousness’ and its specific difference from the ordinarily ‘intentional’ states.<sup>41</sup> The difference of *episteme epistemes* from ordinary forms of ‘cognition’ that are inextricably connection with the ‘matter’ correlative to them is a subtle one and Natorp, as we shall shortly see, provides a way of articulating that difference. The dialogue as interpreted by Natorp restricts itself to an exposition of the problems involved in the core concepts of Socratic philosophy: ‘self-knowledge’ and the related concept of ‘self-consciousness’. Referring to Socrates’ comprehensive demand for ‘a great man’ who’s task is to tell us “if there is anything in nature so constituted as to have its own power exercised on itself” and whether “among such objects ‘temperance’ has a place” (169B) Natorp writes:

*Socrates does not venture to decide such a large question. Only the wonder is perfectly expressed, i.e. how perfectly incomparable self-consciousness is. But certainly the concept itself, of self-knowledge is not thereby discarded.*<sup>42</sup>

So how does Natorp articulate the peculiar character of self-consciousness and circumvent the sustained criticism of the dialogue? The answer begins with a recourse to other dialogues and the larger framework within which the claim “virtue is knowledge” is to be understood. But

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<sup>41</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 70

<sup>42</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 70

there is a clue latent in the argument of the *Charmides* itself. We may recall that in the last part of the discussion between Critias and Socrates the latter is willing to grant the possibility of the kind of ‘self-knowledge’ that in fact extends to ‘*what* one knows and does not know’ so as to test its potential benefit for mankind (171D). But even that concession turns out to miss the mark of providing us with anything that amounts to a satisfactory ground for ‘temperance’. Even if the collective life of a *polis* were organized in accordance with such knowledge it would only ensure that everyone does ‘his own’ that is, ‘what he knows’ and leaves what he is ignorant of to the expertise of those who do possess the relevant ‘knowledge’; furthermore such a *polis* would excel in knowledge in general since whatever knowledge is to be had would be rendered perspicuous and easier of attainment and further mere opinion would never take its place without being known to have the status of mere opinion. Yet such a *polis* could not thereby be claimed unqualifiedly ‘virtuous’ or ‘temperate’ unless its organisation involved the single knowledge which is constitutive of ‘virtue’, namely the ‘knowledge of the good’.<sup>43</sup> This is the beginning of the answer to the puzzle of the dialogue on Natorp’s interpretation. The concept of ‘self-knowledge’ can only be salvaged if we notice that this important line of argument has not been left unexplored.

*A kind of self-knowledge that is not separate from the relevant object, namely the good, but which is identical with this knowledge, is not challenged, and the high-praise that self-knowledge is awarded provided that it does not suffer from the difficulties that were indicated is evidently supposed to be due to this properly defined self-knowledge, which is not in fact subject to these difficulties.*<sup>44</sup>

It may seem as if ‘knowledge of the good’ is a very far shot from anything that would help us in articulating ‘the peculiar character of self-consciousness’ but Natorp’s interpretation is one that rests on just this claim, namely that ‘the good’ is identical with ‘self-consciousness’. Thus the whole argument of the *Charmides* is to be seen as paving the way for an account which despite all the difficulties manages to articulate self-knowledge in this way, at least that is how Natorp argues. One of the most obvious issues for this interpretation is again the one we have met before: if we construe self-knowledge as the knowledge “that is not separate from the relevant object” whether that be the ‘good’ or anything else that can take the place of a standard object of an ‘intentional state’ we once again run into the problem of ‘intentionality’ that seemed to be undermined in the dialogue. But it is here that the ‘peculiar character of self-consciousness’ reveals itself in all its strange beauty and perfect ‘incomparability’ to anything ordinary and familiar. According to Natorp the ‘good’ is not a ‘standard’ object but the very condition of ‘objectivity’ and of ‘consciousness’. The ‘good’ is

<sup>43</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 71

<sup>44</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*, 71

the “peculiar lawfulness according to which consciousness knows”.<sup>45</sup> It is here, in the attempt to characterise the nature of the ‘good’ in relation to knowledge and consciousness that Natorp introduces the helpful distinction between the ‘form’ and ‘matter’ of knowledge, which we have already alluded to. All knowledge is directed at some ‘matter’, that is at its proper object which has an independent being from the ‘faculty’ or ‘power’ (*dunamis*) of ‘knowledge. Self-knowledge and self-consciousness are directed at the very ‘form’ which governs and structures any and all instances of ‘knowing’ that are objectively oriented. It is what Natorp calls ‘lawfulness’:

*As distinct from each particular object, conceived as the material of knowledge, knowledge is itself something independent, namely conceived as consciousness: it is the peculiar lawfulness according to which consciousness knows. The knowledge of this lawfulness, which makes up the ‘form’ of knowledge, was what Socratic self-knowledge was aiming at. Socratic thinking was essentially the discovery of the form of knowledge as something having its own status.*<sup>46</sup>

So it is reflection on the form of knowledge which is at the same time a discernment of ‘the knowledge of the good’. The ‘good’ is thereby not an object in the standard sense but a purely formal ‘lawfulness’ that characterises consciousness of any object, indeed makes that consciousness possible in the first place. But it is also self-consciousness or self-knowledge because it is a reflection directed at the ‘form’ of consciousness itself. This threefold identity between ‘the form of knowledge’, ‘consciousness’ and the ‘good’ is what Natorp sees as the foundation to the solution of the riddle of the *Charmides*. Just as we found Kosman speaking of the ‘nonobjective’ mode of consciousness which is not something that exists separately from the ‘objective’ states on which it supervenes so here the ‘form of knowledge’ is something “having its own status”. And yet similarly here Natorp writes that “[the form of knowledge] at first seemed as if it were separate when compared with the material conceived as the material of knowledge.” but this is not so for this knowledge has to be found *in* “the knowledge of particular objects”<sup>47</sup> – this is not to take it for granted that we have any such lawfully organized knowledge given, but it is the task of the philosopher to find it where present or to discern its lack, which is precisely what the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ was meant to stand for – more precisely the ‘form of knowledge’ “should indeed determine this knowledge; for only according to the formal law of knowledge is this knowledge [i.e. knowledge of particular things] knowledge at all.”<sup>48</sup> Thus the reflection on the ‘form’ remains

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<sup>45</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 72

<sup>46</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 72

<sup>47</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 72

<sup>48</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 72

something specific and retains its 'own status' but it has to at the same time be found within the material of knowledge and to determine it in organising it in accordance with its own law – the “*lawfulness according to which consciousness knows*”.<sup>49</sup> In that way ‘the peculiar character of self-consciousness’ retains its difference from other ‘faculties’:

*There is no seeing that sees itself but does not see something visible; there is no perception, and in general no function of consciousness which is directed only at itself and not also at an object different from itself. Nevertheless, it is the incomparable peculiarity of consciousness that it is at once consciousness of itself and of an object.*<sup>50</sup>

It is the possibility of receding within, towards the form of consciousness as such that makes ‘self-consciousness’ different from any other faculty which in order to do so would need to as it were carry the requisite ‘matter’ in itself. Consciousness does not have ‘matter’ strictly speaking but it is the only faculty which can reflect on its own ‘form’ because its ‘form’ is the ‘lawfulness’ that determines any ‘cognitive state’ in respect of its object-directedness. Lawfulness is the condition for the positing of an object within consciousness, we might say. And it is the peculiar nature of our cognitive apparatus that it affords us this possibility of self-reflection which further implies the possibility of having that reflection come to take the place of an organising principle according to which our conscious lives are to be determined. This interpretation gives substance to the already quoted passage from L.P Gerson where it is claimed that “Platonism is a process of (...) identification with the Intellect”.<sup>51</sup> It is the identification with the lawful character of consciousness and the submission to the demand for the determination of our ‘cognitive life’ according to its principles that makes Socratic self-knowledge the root of a consistent ‘theoretical consciousness’ directed at knowledge and of our ‘ethical striving’ directed at the good. ‘Knowledge’ and ‘the good’ are identical because they share the common ground in the unity of ‘consciousness’: ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ respectively. It is the unity of the conceptual contents posited within consciousness that in the end makes for any ‘knowledge’ of an object, for lack of unity simply means self-contradiction; and so with ‘practical consciousness’ it is the agreement with principles of consciousness (which is always available as a formal principle independent of the objects that are swim into its ken) that is able to determine the whole of our lives according to its ‘form’ and make us ‘virtuous’ through and through, one aspect of that consisting in making us ‘temperate’.

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<sup>49</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 72

<sup>50</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 70

<sup>51</sup> Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 257

To illustrate this general point it is perhaps relevant to bring up Natorp's short digression towards the end of the chapter where he looks forward to the *Meno* and shows how the above interpretation helps to elucidate the famous but enigmatic notion of 'recollection':

*The famous claim of the Meno that knowledge is "recollection" means in fact: the derivation of knowledge, and in particular the knowledge in which virtue consists, from its source in self-consciousness. The claim that knowledge is something one draws "out of oneself" would be meaningless if "self" did not also mean the lawfulness of consciousness, according to which consciousness shapes the object, i.e. the pure object corresponding to a concept. The form of knowledge as such is lawfulness; but it is this form that constitutes the content, the pure content of knowledge; for it is in general the law that creates the object in and for knowledge. This is the ultimate meaning of the 'idea'...*<sup>52</sup>

This passage is one that goes beyond the scope of our inquiry because it takes us into the heart of Natorp's interpretation of the nature of Plato's 'ideas' and we cannot hope to do justice to this topic, yet it does help to note how that wider context is introduced as an explication of the concept of 'self' that is identical to 'consciousness'. It is the power that makes objectivity possible by its own inherent potency that as it were 'makes' the object "'in and for knowledge' out of its own resources, or through the constitution of its power in relation to something other. We may see Socratic discussion as an attempt to trace the law of consciousness in whatever 'object' of discussion, forming the *material* for knowledge according to the lawfulness of consciousness which is structured according to principles such as 'unity' and 'non-contradiction': in the end it is the search for the *idea*, the unity of conceptual content that bears an exhaustive, explanatory relation to the object through deduction. Plato's ideas are thereby approached through 'hypothesis' postulated and examined according to their capacity to determine the 'object' "in and for knowledge" in a satisfactory manner. These are drawn from their 'source' in 'self-consciousness' because consciousness itself is constituted by a formal criterion that is able to guide and determine whatever is posited within its field.

How do these reflections help us to see in what way 'temperance' is, to use Kosman's apt phrasing in this context, a "'virtue of self-consciousness"'? The question is really one about the relation of 'practical consciousness' to 'theoretical consciousness' which are merely aspects of the self-same overarching principle of consciousness. The true human self is identified with consciousness conceived as the principle of lawfulness, knowledge and the

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<sup>52</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 73

good. Thus the 'good of the soul' becomes identified with the 'rule of consciousness' and its determination in accordance with its formal, lawful order:

*Socrates characterised the good as the proper constitution, the health and normal state of the soul; the good meant the rule of consciousness, it meant the reflection that one is master of oneself; and the demand was made: care about yourself more than about what belongs to you, and this was in turn identified with the care for reflection, truth or goodness of the soul.*<sup>53</sup>

The 'care of the soul' is thus nothing else than the striving to determine oneself through the principles inherent in the nature of consciousness itself. That is what a 'good life' means, the life that is lived in full awareness, in the constant consciousness of one's thought, action, desire as proceeding from the source rooted in the 'good'. Of course we are not angels or disembodied intelligences which could claim unrestricted access to this heavenly source. As 'embodied persons' we can be lead astray by 'losing sight of ourselves' and giving voice to elements of the soul that are in discord with the 'rule of consciousness': to fears and desires that blindly lead us to the gratification of their own ends and thereby forsaking or bypassing the reflection which would ensure that 'what we are doing' is in fact in accord with the formal principles of 'goodness'. Just as whatever 'knowledge' we may or may not possess is nothing until it comes to be determined through the 'form of knowledge' (for only then is it *known* to be knowledge) so whatever good we may do is not 'Good' (with a deserved capital) until we are aware of it being so according to the formal principle available to us through the law of consciousness itself:

*[T]o account for our actions and ask how far they are good is to account for oneself and to oneself it is practical self-consciousness. For the standard, the criterion of the good here is to be found in nothing but the unity of practical consciousness, in the agreement with the law of consciousness itself. The law of the good is the law of practical consciousness, hence self-knowledge is identical with the knowledge of the good.*

Thus as human beings we have a task to care for our 'selves' by a constant and unwavering identification with that part of us which has its anchor in 'knowledge' – the only thing that is immune from change. This turns out to be a merely formal principle of lawfulness but its form is susceptible to application across the board in the whole of consciousness. Ethics is the striving to acquire the proper discernment of the form of knowledge and the commitment to a

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<sup>53</sup> Natorp, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 71



project of ‘self-constitution’ (to borrow an apt term from C.Korsgaard<sup>54</sup>) where our ‘selves’ become as much as possible harmonized with and through the ‘rule of consciousness’. Though Natorp never explicitly makes this claim, perhaps owing to the brevity of his treatment of the Charmides and its lack of focus on the detail, this seems to be the path towards the understanding of the locution *episteme epistemes*. It is in a sense ‘knowing the knower’, understanding one self, one’s true self, the constant element in the stream of experience to be the ‘knowing subject’ and to resist the intrusion of anything that might ‘cloud awareness’ and make us lose sight of the *logos* lapsing into indeterminacy. The *Protagoras* speaks of the difference between ‘becoming’ a good man, which is ‘hard’ and *being* a man of worth, which is easy.<sup>55</sup> The path towards virtue is a long one and involves the submission to the *logos* without concessions to what we unreflectively and pre-philosophically admit to be good, it means the willingness to search for the best *logos* of ‘what is good’ we can find and the uncompromising undertaking to act in accordance with it. It may be that what we find accords with our pre-philosophical sentiments but it may be that we have to reform ourselves quite radically but until we have the relevant knowledge we do not know ‘what we are doing’ in the way in which Socratic self-knowledge demands. At the same time it seems that once the proper discernment of the ‘true self’ comes into view the process becomes much easier, the “identification with the intellect” which Gerson speaks of means at the same time a divorce from the identification with ‘desire’, ‘appetite’ or the ‘*thumos*’. Self-mastery may consist in just this but as we know the sway of the passions takes hold of us where we least expect it, so the virtue of self-control remains a force that can fight the unruly elements of the soul and restore us to the proper constitution of the soul by which it can find its rootedness in the ‘good’ and bear witness to it in thought and in action.

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<sup>54</sup> Korsgaard, Christine M. *Self-constitution: Agency, Identity and Integrity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> *Protagoras*, 338E ff.

### Chapter 3: Contemporary Philosophy of Mind: P. Kitcher & S. Rödl

In this Chapter we make a brief excursion into the work of two modern authors whose work in 'philosophy of mind' will, I think, shed light on the problems we have been concerned throughout the essay. The two positions that will be investigated are mutually supportive and will be assumed to be consistent but this claim remains outside the scope of our inquiry. The common ground between them rooted in the shared Kantian heritage is that 'self-consciousness' is an irreducible quality of our cognitive lives that owes its nature to the 'spontaneity' of thought. The thesis of P. Kitcher advanced in her essay "The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker" concerns the nature of mind, specifically the way in which our form of 'self-consciousness' under its aspect of a unified thinking subject proceeds from an a-priori synthetic principle: the *I think* which accompanies all representations. This thesis encounters the problems of 'intentionality' with which we have been concerned in the course of this essay and it proposes a solution that is worth comparing with the interpretation of the *Charmides* that we have given in considering the work of Paul Natorp. The thesis of S. Rödl found in his recent publication "Categories of the Temporal" and in his Review of the volume "Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism" (in which P.Kitcher's essay figures), comes in to elucidate the way in which the 'form' of our 'self-consciousness' has an inherent structure which 'shapes' the object world for our 'consciousness', this inherent power of thought is conceived much like Natorp's 'lawfulness' as a logical 'form' of thought.

## I

P. Kitcher

P. Kitcher's essay contains a lucid and intricate argument that is aimed, much like our essay, simply at the elucidation of the position of one major philosopher with regard to fundamental questions, which is both historically accurate and at the same time serves the purpose of contributing to the systematic treatment of questions in the philosophy of mind. We have taken Plato as our major figure, Kitcher's hero is Kant. The question with which she is concerned is the general question of the 'possibility of empirical cognition', that is, the possibility of our consciousness relating to 'objective' reality in the way that is presupposed by science.<sup>56</sup> The elucidation of Kant's position on this issue requires an account of the 'unity' of a thinker as well as the proper understanding of the nature of 'self-consciousness' that characterises 'cognitive states', both of which issues have been in the foreground of our essay. Kitcher's is the attempt to clarify Kant's statements on "*a kind of consciousness that plays a crucial role in mental unity*"<sup>57</sup> and which unity is constitutive of the employment of concepts in judgments. We shall not be able to do justice to the argument advanced by Kitcher but we can do justice to her philosophical ambition by drawing on her findings in the service of shedding a light on the systematic issues that are we share with her.

The relevant points for us are firstly, the specific difference of the distinctively human 'rational' form of 'cognitive awareness'; secondly the explanation of that specific difference in terms of principles of synthetic unity that inform our experience of the objective world and make possible a unified 'subjectivity'. As we shall see the principle responsible for this is the '*I think*' which, as Kant claimed, accompanies all representations and which is a condition of any 'conscious' activity.

Kitcher's essay begins with an outline of the role of 'transcendental deduction' in establishing conclusions about the nature of 'mind'. We shall not go into this topic but it is important to note that this method as employed in the search for principles of cognitive activity reveals, for Kant, that though all cognition "*commences with experience*" it does not thereby necessarily "*all originate from experience*".<sup>58</sup> The principles we are looking for are traced to the independent contribution of our cognitive faculties. While for Kant that contribution is located in the 'human' mind the claim that cognition does not '*all originate from experience*'

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<sup>56</sup> Kitcher P., "*The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker*" in Sullivan, Peter. *Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism*. Edited by Joel Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 55-7

<sup>57</sup> Kitcher, "*The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker*", 56

<sup>58</sup> Critique of Pure Reason, B1

is common to Plato. As we found that claim explicated in Natorp, the ‘form of knowledge’ has its own independent status as the form of ‘consciousness’, indeed the principle for the possibility of such ‘consciousness’ in the first place. While there is room for disagreement as to the nature and place of the *a-priori* factors in the accounts the ground shared in the very recognition of their necessity allows us to see how Kitcher’s conclusions about the ‘principle’ in question help us in getting our own question clear. With this in mind we turn to the core of her account of the nature and role of the ‘principle’ of ‘cognitive activity’ that makes ‘mental unity’ and ‘consciousness’ of the objective world possible.

We begin by noting the subject which requires explanation: the specifically human form of cognitive ability to form judgments which distinguishes us from animals. Judgment implies the use of concepts and concepts involve the *recognition* of the difference between objects of consciousness. An early quotation from Kant shows this point clearly while at the same time showing a way of distinguishing our ‘cognitive life’ from the non-rational form of ‘animal cognition’:

*The distinctness of a concept does not consist in the fact that that which is a characteristic mark of the thing is clearly represented, but rather in the fact that it is recognized as a characteristic of the thing. The door [of the ox’s stall] is something which does, it is true belong to the stall and can serve as the characteristic mark of it. But only the being who forms the judgment: ‘this door belongs to this stable’ has a distinct concept of the building and that is centrally beyond the power of animals.*

*I would go still further and say: it is one thing to ‘differentiate’ things from each other, and quite another to thing to ‘recognize’ the difference between them.<sup>59</sup>*

As human beings we encounter the world in and through judgments, we do not merely blindly “differentiate things from each other” but our experience involves a “recognition” of the characteristic features of things that make for their ‘difference’ and ‘concepts’ are the means by which that ‘recognition’ takes place. Now, the central concern of Kitcher’s is to explain the factors that make the use of concepts in relation to the world possible. This concern is addressed by focusing in on the ‘consciousness’ that for Kant necessarily accompanies the use of concepts in acts of ‘judgment’ but which at the same time is the constitutive factor of the ‘unity of the subject’ through its ‘synthetic’ power.

The case brought up and discussed by Kitcher is that of a simple addition of units. The application of the concept of number to distinct entities and the ‘mental act’ of ‘recognition’

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<sup>59</sup> Kitcher, “*The Unity of Kant’s Active Thinker*”, 61

of their amounting to a given sum is a simple and familiar phenomenon of our cognitive engagement with the world. Yet the possibility of this ‘judgment’ to be made requires that in such an act we are conscious of the application of certain general formal concepts to the sensible input conveyed by way of the ‘intuitions’. How that is to be accounted for is by no means obvious. The case of addition is illustrative here precisely because it shows so clearly how entities which might be ‘differentiated’ by animals are ‘recognized’ as ‘units’ in the cognitive act of the human mind and ‘synthesized’ in that single act of judgment (a pronouncement on the number of things in this case). The passage from the first Critique quoted by Kitcher shows the problem of the peculiar nature of our cognitive performance in such simple, everyday mental acts quite clearly:

*Without the consciousness that what we are thinking is the same as what we thought an instant before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be futile (...) If in counting I forget that the units that now float before my mind or senses were added together by me one after another, I should never know that a total is being produced through this successive addition of unit to unit, and so would remain ignorant of the number...<sup>60</sup>*

An animal may be able to differentiate units (though not apply the concept of a unit) but it cannot synthesize these in a consciousness that ‘makes one’<sup>61</sup> the multiplicity “floating” before the mind’s eye or the senses. Human beings can do so, that is a fact we have to account for, but notably we do not do so because we have a more developed memory which can hold the multiplicity together, it makes no difference how long our calculations are as long as we remain conscious of the application of a certain rule in the act of judgment and that capacity is not one explicable in terms of the natural faculties of sense or imagination. The claim identified by Kitcher as Kant’s own is that that power is that our consciousness involves the independent contribution of a formal principle is constitutive of the ‘synthesis’ that is essential to the cognitive act and constitutive of it. The nature of this principle is relevant to our discussion of the *Charmides* because it fulfils the requirements of a mode of non-objective consciousness that Kosman distinguished from the mere ‘consciousness’ of ‘self’ in the way of a standard ‘object’. This latter mode of consciousness would explicate ‘counting’

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<sup>60</sup> Critique of Pure Reason, A103 quoted in Kitcher, “*The Unity of Kant’s Active Thinker*” , 63

<sup>61</sup> I mean to use this phrase to suggest a connection with Aristotle’s *De Anima* where it is claimed that *nous*, ‘intellect’ or ‘understanding’, is what ‘makes one’ (το δε εν ποιουν, τουτο ο νους εκαστον) – the act of the supra-personal Divine Intellect operative in the world as a constitutive principle of being/substance (ousia) informs (or supervenes on) our perceptions and mental images to bestow the synthetic unity of a concept that goes beyond what is merely ‘represented’ in the otherwise fugitive and indeterminate sense input. (see: *De Anima* III.4 430b5 and *Metaphysics* XII. 7-10 as well as the publication of the supervisor of this thesis J.M van Ophuijsen “The two-fold Action of Mind in Aristotle’s Proto-book of Nature” )

on the model of an 'inner sense' which is explicitly rejected in Kitcher's essay. 'Inner sense' would presumably spectate the separate 'representations' of 'units' and in a conscious act 'make them one' in the form of a sum which would be another 'representation' floating before the mind's eye.<sup>62</sup> But the claim of Kitcher's essay is stronger, an account in terms of 'inner sense' could not ensure the possibility of 'rational cognition', for it would be the mere recording of operations that have no basis in the consciousness of the grounds for the application of the relevant concepts. It is the self-consciousness that characterizes such acts and which makes the whole cognitive performance of 'counting' a 'unified' act that makes each step in the process a part of the 'formal unity' that is contained, albeit in a purely formal manner, in the very concept of 'addition'. For Kitcher there is no place for thought in the sense of an act of judgment that applies concepts to what is represented outside the 'self-consciousness' of the grounds for their application. An advocate of 'inner sense' must leave room for judgment to as it were exist prior to the act of consciousness in which we become aware of judging. Kitcher's interpretation of Kant on the other hand says that the judgment is a result of the synthesis of certain representations that has as the two sides of the coin the unity of those representations under the form of a 'cognitive act' and the 'unity' of the subject which 'thinks' these representations in the given way. 'Self-consciousness' in this way is as much constitutive of the unity of a thinker as it is of the act of judgment which 'unifies' the representations and there is no room for 'unity' outside that 'non-objective' mode of consciousness.

This is a difficult and perplexing claim, but on Kitcher's interpretation this is how we ought to understand Kant's account of mental unity and the possibility of 'empirical cognition' both of which proceed from the a-priori principle of 'the unity of apperception' – the *I think* which accompanies all representations. The consciousness of 'self' as an object in the way suggested by Critias early on in the *Charmides*, the self-consciousness that characterises shame, guilt and so on is a mode of consciousness which according to Kant has "no reference to the subject's identity." It is a merely 'empirical' form of consciousness that is as 'mutable' as the representations which swim into the ken of awareness by way of 'intuition'. It is not constitutive of the consciousness of an 'enduring subject' though insofar as it a form of self-awareness it owes its possibility to a formal, a-priori principle of identity conceived as the 'unity of apperception'. It is not by being aware of oneself as an object in particular instances that an enduring self is constructed (a view advanced by Kosman), but it is because our form of 'consciousness' is rational and is conscious of itself as a single 'thinker' that 'thinks' the representations in acts of synthesis. Let us turn to a quote from Kant on this point:

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<sup>62</sup> Kitcher, "*The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker*", 64

*Reference to the subject's identity (...) comes about not though my merely accompanying each representation with consciousness, but through my adding one representation to another and being conscious of their synthesis. Hence only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness, is it possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness itself in these representations.*<sup>63</sup>

This passage turns the question of unity of 'self' away from the 'empirical' towards the 'formal' in a way that surpasses any of the foregoing claims in our essay. The 'can' in the clause "only because I *can* combine a manifold of representations in one consciousness" rests entirely on the formal a-priori principle of the 'unity of apperception', in Kitcher's words: "the principle that different representations *must* belong to a common self or thinker"<sup>64</sup> (p.65) The notion of an enduring subject does not come *from* experience but though it does come *with* experience, it does so because we are rational cognizers who's self-consciousness necessarily involves acts of synthesis of the representations given in intuition, which acts involve the use of concepts and the exercise of our capacity to form judgments. It is because of our capacity to think all representations and to do so in accordance with general formal rules of concept application (as for instance in counting) that our experience can be attributed to a 'single' subject. But that subject is not the empirical 'self', it is the 'unified' thinker.

The '*I think*' which accompanies all representations is the principle of the synthetic unity of representations. It is because we can think (about) all things and from judgments about the object world that the world itself is a totality and we appear as unified subjects who have an experience of that totality. Kitcher's claim is that the '*I think*' as a formal principle has no existence outside its application in acts of cognition. This should remind us of the peculiar nature of self-consciousness' spoken of by Natorp as well as of the 'non-objective' mode of consciousness that Kosman tried to explicate. In all cases we have a principle of object-directed 'cognitive states' which is nothing in and of itself outside its application to objective reality. This is indeed how Kitcher speaks of the a-priori principle of 'the unity of apperception' – it is not an object of experience but a condition for experience in the first place. We find our unified 'subjectivity' in acts of cognitive performance and our cognitive performance is possible only because we our self-consciousness as 'unified thinkers' makes possible the synthesis of the multiform input of the intuitions, as Kitcher herself claims: "the

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<sup>63</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, B133 as quoted in Kitcher, "*The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker*", 65

<sup>64</sup> Kitcher, "*The Unity of Kant's Active Thinker*", 65

object cognition and the unity of apperception are necessary and sufficient conditions for each other.”<sup>65</sup>

I wish to propose to see the structure of Kitcher’s argument as groping for a principle of self-consciousness that bears striking similarity to the one we have identified as Plato’s concern. On the one hand is nothing in and of itself, being merely the condition for objective consciousness and there it is not an object of ‘consciousness’ in the standard sense, on the other hand it is something that only attains to determination within and through *experience* – and is not divorced from the need of such determination by active exercise of our cognitive capacities. This was the tension between ‘reflexivity’ and ‘intentionality’ that Kosman brought to the fore in his analysis of the dialogue and which Natorp sought to solve by introducing the ‘form of knowledge’ as the reflection of consciousness upon its own lawful character. For Natorp too, the form of knowledge is not knowledge, it has been found in the object-directed standard cases of *episteme*. For Kitcher the synthetic principle, the ‘*I think*’ too has to as it were find itself in the representations so as to make its unifying power manifest. Just as Natorp conceives of the ‘form of knowledge’ as something ‘having its own status’ but also as something that needs to determine the *material* of standard ‘knowledge’ so the ‘unified thinker’ is a mere ‘form’ that cannot be conscious of itself unless it (he/she?) finds his unity in the active employment of concepts in judgments that make him and the world a ‘unity’.

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<sup>65</sup> Kitcher, “*The Unity of Kant’s Active Thinker*” , 67



## II

S. Rödl

The main objective in introducing Rödl's position on the nature of thought and its relation to the objective world is that it helps to elucidate the solution to the riddle of the *Charmides* that we have attempted to provide in Chapter 2. We have been able to do so by considering Natorp's view of the 'knowledge of the form of knowledge' as the appropriate candidate for the object of self-consciousness which survives the criticism of the dialogue but at the same time allows us to salvage the concept of self-knowledge in the wide epistemological sense relevant to the problem of 'self-consciousness' in general. And which through its equation with the 'good' and the 'law of practical consciousness' allowed also to have that concept to act as a constitutive principle of 'virtue' and its particular manifestation in the putative virtue of 'temperance'. With Rödl we will mostly remain in the systematic discussion of the nature of self-consciousness which is the main subject of the material that is here investigated, nonetheless we will devote the last paragraphs to a similar move from the discussion proper to 'philosophy of mind' to 'ethics' (though perhaps not 'virtue' ethics in the sense in which Plato might think of it).

The central conception in Rödl's work which we want to get our grip on is that of the 'form of thought'. We find a succinct description of this concept in the review of the volume "Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism" which mentions Kant, Plato and connects the concept, importantly for us, with the notion of 'self-consciousness':

*I asked: what did Kant think he was doing when he described the form of thought and experience? Here is the answer for the form of thought. Thought is self-conscious; it apprehends what it does through itself, through its own concept. The concept of being, as Plato puts it, the concept of an object überhaupt, as Kant puts it, is nothing other than the self-consciousness of thought. Describing the form of thought is articulating this self-consciousness.<sup>66</sup>*

'Self-consciousness' is here taken to be a necessary condition of 'thought', a claim which we have already noted in connection with the work of P.Kitcher. Most minimally this is the claim that it is nonsensical to think a thought and not be conscious of so doing, yet the claim goes deeper to what we noted in the preceding section, namely that thought is conscious of

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<sup>66</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. "Review: Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism, by Joel Smith and Peter Sullivan." *European Journal of Philosophy*, September 28, 2014, 483-504. 487

the grounds for its application (in judgment). This is the meaning of the sentence ‘[thought] apprehends what it does through itself, through its own concept’. It is the nature of objectively oriented thought that it is, as it were, finds its own power in the object about which it *is*. That power is the pure relation of thought to ‘being’ (Plato) or to the general concept of an ‘object’ (Kant) which power is deployed in relation to whatever falls within the field of consciousness and constituted in relation to that object under the law of thought itself. We may recall that Natorp spoke of the ‘form of knowledge’ as something independent from any ‘given’ objects of consciousness, as something ‘having its own status’, likewise here we find that there is a peculiar and independent form of ‘self-consciousness’ directed at thought itself and we find Rödl speaking of the possibility of describing this ‘form of thought’ which is identified with the *articulation of the ‘self-consciousness’ of thought*.<sup>67</sup> This is an important claim for our purposes but before we can articulate this peculiar form of articulation we need to understand the nature of the ‘power’ of thought as conceived by Rödl.

Importantly for Rödl ‘thought’ is not just there as a ‘given reality’ of which we are conscious, or come to be conscious if and when we develop the characteristically human ability to have articulate cognitive lives.<sup>68</sup> The ‘form of thought’ is a ‘self-constituting’ power that has no basis outside that ‘self-constitution’ in the act of ‘self-consciousness’. It is the precondition of any judgment that it involves a consciousness of the grounds for its application and in order to secure that requirement the judging subject must have the prerequisite ‘self-consciousness’ that makes judgment possible. In order to render this difficult line of thought more digestible we may wish to connect it with the Socratic method of questioning, which rests not on any knowledge that Socrates possesses and others do not, but solely on the presupposition that whatever subject of discussion on which a judgment is made by someone or other is susceptible to the determination of the concept in accordance with laws of judgment that are presupposed in the very attempt to pronounce on the subject in question – making the fundamental judgment ‘x is ...’. Whether it is Critias, Socrates or Charmides who make a claim about ‘what temperance *is*’ they assert the being or the objectivity of their judgment in a way that situates that judgment in the ‘space of reasons’ open to investigation by a rational inquiry by ‘thinking’ subjects whether one or many. It is the participation of the human individual and humankind as a community in this ‘form’ of cognitive activity that makes it possible for us to engage in philosophy and science – the search for *knowledge* in the form of time-independent pronouncements on ‘how things are’ and ‘what is’. And for Rödl it is only because the form of our consciousness is informed by the irreducible power of thought independently of our rootedness in a specifically human form of sensibility that such a search

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<sup>67</sup> Rödl “Review”, 487

<sup>68</sup> Rödl “Review”, 492

for *knowledge* is possible. But our question is about what the ‘articulation of the form of thought’ consists in, and for Rödl ‘thought’ and ‘knowledge’ are distinct in a crucial sense, we read in the same review:

*[T]he self-consciousness of thought is not knowledge. It is the form of knowledge, not knowledge, not on its own. (We may put this by saying – Kant puts it by saying – that it is the mere form of knowledge.) Thought is incapable of relating to the object save by way of the object’s being given to thought in an act of sensory intuition.*<sup>69</sup>

The structure of this passage should remind us of what we have already discussed when considering Natorp’s solution to the *Charmides*. The ‘form of thought’ is the *mere* ‘form of knowledge’ but it is not knowledge proper. Knowledge involves knowledge of an object, it is *qua* power in need of objective determination (through its conjunction with the intuitions acquired by the contribution of sensibility), but the self-consciousness of thought provides us with no knowledge in that sense. This is what the *articulation of the ‘self-consciousness’ of thought* means, namely the articulation of the pre-objective, or ‘non-objective’ structure of self consciousness that is prior to the ‘act of sensory intuition’ in conjunction with which knowledge in the standard sense is possible. It remains for us to see what such an ‘articulation’ consists in for Rödl, and for this we turn to his *Categories of the Temporal*.

In the Introduction to the book we find a short treatment of the derogatory meaning that the name of logic has assumed in contemporary philosophy, namely as first and foremost a “science of formal calculi”.<sup>70</sup> This, indeed pervasive and commonly assumed view is contrasted with another, attributed to the heroes of logic: Frege and Wittgenstein<sup>71</sup> among others but also to Kant. Logic for Rödl is not so much about ‘formal calculi’ as about the ‘form of thought’ which ‘formal calculi’ try to capture in perspicuous and accessible notation capable of being used for the connection of thoughts “according to the rules of inference”.

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<sup>69</sup> Rödl “Review”, 487

<sup>70</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal: an Inquiry into the Forms of the Finite Intellect*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012., 3

<sup>71</sup> Most notably the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, though Rödl makes a (controversial) case for the inclusion of the notion of ‘grammar’ central to the *Philosophical Investigations* as in all essentials a descendant of the ‘logical’ tradition he means to salvage. Speaking of the *Investigations* Rödl writes: “*it soon becomes evident that grammatical remarks bear many of the traditional marks of logical knowledge. They are pure: they do not describe objects of sensory experience. They are valid a-priori: they can be neither empirically refuted nor empirically confirmed. And they are synthetic: they are not valid in virtue of arbitrary syntactic stipulations. Is “grammar”, then, only a new name for what Kant and Hegel call “logic”: thought reflecting upon itself?*” - Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 4

The true and fundamental meaning of logic for Rödl and the thinkers he claims his allies in the project is rather: “thought reflecting upon itself”. Thus the quotation from Kant:

*General logic (...) considers only the logical form in the relation of knowledge to knowledge; that is, it treats of the form of thought in general.*

This helps us to elucidate Natorp’s concept of the ‘form of knowledge’, for him it is the ‘thought’s reflection on itself that becomes constitutive of the object in general. It is thus logic, the general form of thought according to which knowledge knows that is the *articulation of the self-consciousness of thought*. It is a purely formal discipline which does not gain any knowledge of objects but renders any such knowledge possible. Self-knowledge as a knowledge of the lawfulness according to which consciousness knows, as we have heard Natorp speak of it, is the clarification of the formal, pure, principles of thought in its logical relationship to ‘being’ in Plato’s terms or the ‘object’ in Kant’s. Or rather, since ‘being’ (and this is the central thought of Idealism common to Natorp and Rödl) and ‘objectivity’ is itself constituted in thought and is not something ‘given’ outside thought itself, logic becomes simply the articulation of the structure of ‘being’ under its formal aspect – the very form which knowledge has to fill in by determining the content in a scientifically sound manner.

Rödl’s thought here is different in one important respect, namely in that it distinguishes the general logic as quoted in the passage above (and which treats the logical relationship of thought to thought) from transcendental logic which is not ‘abstracted’ from intuitions and culminates in the articulation of the ‘knowledge’ proper to for the knowledge of the world as given in the specifically human form of sensibility. The two are united in Natorp is a peculiar way which is alien to Rödl’s line of thought. But we are trespassing here into the larger question of the relation of thought to being which, as many of the topics we have touched upon has to be left aside for further investigation outside the context of this essay.

What is important for our purposes is that the distinction between of the ‘general’ and ‘transcendental’ logic allows Rödl to give an interesting account of the practical subject which is relevant to the ‘unity of practical consciousness’ we have met with in Natorp. Transcendental logic allows us to determine the temporal categories within which we think the world as given in the forms of our intuition. One of those categories is the category of substance of which a ‘practical subject’ is an instance. It is Rödl’s claim that an adequate understanding of such a subject, an ‘agent’, has to be achieved through an analysis of the “logical form according to the which the topic is given”.<sup>72</sup> Now, the *Introduction* to the *Categories of the Temporal* gives an outline of the ‘form’ of the ‘practical subject’ that is

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<sup>72</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 13

rooted in the formal concept of ‘unity’ that characterises such a ‘subject’. This way of understanding is notably anti-empirical in the sense that it resists any intrusion of discourse about how agents actually act and the formal character their actions display, it is a claim that is derived from logic as applied to the categories of the temporal.

Rödl distinguishes two ‘forms of action explanation’ one of which involves the instrumental use of reason the other which is constituted by a conformity to a general law. The distinction comes as a means of articulating the disunity that threatens to assail the ‘practical subject’ if his or her actions are only susceptible to explication in the first form of explanation. The crucial point is that the instrumental use of reason is always in the service of desire:

*I can say “ I am doing A because it is a means to doing B. Now, that doing A is a means to doing B is a reason to do A only if I want to do B. While the fact that doing A is a means to doing B may be said to be the reason on which I act, my wanting to do B is the principle of my action.”<sup>73</sup>*

The use of reason that establishes the means (A) here is subservient to the ‘want’ or ‘desire’ that establishes the end (B). But such a ‘desire’ based ‘form’ of action is “temporally limited” in a sense that the ‘form of action’ as a unity persists only so long as the desire is present in determining the ends, but it is not difficult to see the inherent instability of a ‘practical subject’ who is instantiating this ‘form of action’ - the moment the ‘desire’ or ‘want’ “exhausts itself” so does the ‘practical subject’ as determined by that ‘form’ – his unity is as temporal as his desire:

*The notion that actions spring from desire not only ignores formal distinctions among action explanations; it also fails to attend to the category of the acting subject. If a practical subject, a subject who thinks about what she should do and why, is a sum of wants and desires, with no time-general principles of action holding these together, then one practical subject perishes and another emerges as desires change, as one want exhausts itself and another emerges. (The body may remain, but whoever entertains the notion in question cannot identify the subject with this body.) A practical subject, then, is as manifold and diverse as its wants and desires. And this is absurd.<sup>74</sup> (p.14-5)*

The threat of disunity and the absurdity of the conception which conceives a ‘practical subject’ solely on the desire-based ‘form of action explanation’ comes through vividly in the above passage. It does so in full force in a footnote quotation from Kant, which though

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<sup>73</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 13-4

<sup>74</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 14-5

addressing the unity of theoretical cognition brings the point of ‘disunity’ across: “for then I would have as many-colored and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious”.<sup>75</sup> It seems rather that in such a case the very notion of a unified ‘subject’ becomes difficult to hold on to and vanishes from our grasp. We may not care for unity but if we do there is only one way in which we might attain it. It is through the exercise of reason not as an instrument or means of the gratification of certain desires but as an autonomous power for the discernment or postulation of “time-general principles” that can inform the ‘form of action’ independently of whatever desires we may have. Rödl here gives the simple example of promise keeping:

*“I am doing it because I promised him to do it.” may explain why I am doing A by revealing doing A to be a means to an end I am pursuing, which in the given case may be keeping the promise that I gave. (...) Alternatively “I am doing it because I promised him to do it” may explain why I am doing A by revealing doing it as acting in conformity with a general law. In the given case the law is “One does what one has promised”. Then the principle of my action is not desire but a law according to which I act.<sup>76</sup>*

Here the two ‘forms of action explanation’ reveal themselves as candidates for the characterisation of an act which is ‘materially’ the same, namely ‘the keeping of a promise’. But in the first case the action is still guided by a mere ‘desire’ to keep the promise, in the latter it is rooted in a principle of action that transcends mere ‘wanting’. As Rödl goes on to claim it is a-temporal in a sense in which desire cannot be. And further it is constitutive of the formal unity of a ‘practical subject’ because even if “I now do one thing because I promised it and later another, because I promised it, then the same *principle* underlies my doing the one and my doing the other”.<sup>77</sup> We may here want to carry Rödl’s thought further to say that the two actions done under two ‘forms of explanation’ characterise two modes of ‘practical self-consciousness’ one determined by desire and another which conforms to a ‘general law’. It is only in the latter case that the unity of a ‘practical subject’ comes into view and can be established independently of the ‘multi-coloredness of representations’:

*The ultimate ground of the unity of a subject is its law. A practical subject as such falls under practical laws of a subject form.<sup>78</sup>*

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<sup>75</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, B134

<sup>76</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 15

<sup>77</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 14

<sup>78</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 15

In the former case a 'subject' is conscious of a 'desire' but not of its ultimate connection with any 'general', or 'a-temporal' formal principles of action and is thereby more of a 'locus' for the emergence and re-emergence of a plurality of 'subjects' determined by mere 'want'. On the other hand a subject who acts with the 'consciousness' of a connection between the action and the general, formal principles guiding it is acting in full awareness of the source of his action. This should remind us of the concern of the *Charmides* to establish the mode of self-consciousness which allows one to 'know what one is doing' not just in the sense of being aware of one's actions but of being aware of the their (formal) character. In Plato's case, and certainly so under Natorp's interpretation the project is more ambitious in that it aims to find a mode of self-consciousness that can guide us to a virtuous, harmonious, disposition of the soul which constantly bears witness to the 'principles of consciousness' that make one's self congruent with the supra-personal 'good' capable of informing all aspects of our life. Rödl's project limits itself to the analysis of 'the form of action' which does not venture to claim if and whether such a thoroughly 'temperate' soul is to be had.

## Conclusion

The *Charmides* begins with the question of a specific virtue – ‘temperance’ – the dialogue, we should not forget, has as its first and modest aim the understanding of what it is that makes man capable of a virtuous way of life that manifests itself in the moderation of the passions. As the proposed definitions of such a virtue are shown to be inadequate the dialogue moves towards the concept of ‘self-knowledge’ as the only possible source of such a virtue but it fails to provide a satisfying answer, instead leaving us with a number of rejected attempts at articulating this form of ‘self-knowledge’. We have been concerned with a proper understanding of the central part of the dialogue and Kosman’s analysis revealed that behind the various definitions of ‘self-knowledge’ is a survey of ‘cognitive states’ that characterise our lives under the aspect of our relation to ourselves – our ‘self-consciousness’. The virtue in question then was shown to proceed from a sort of self-knowledge that is not so much a standard form of ‘knowledge’ comparable with others but as a special form directed at ‘consciousness’ itself. The major problem of the dialogue that led the dialectic between Critias and Socrates in their attempts to define the nature of ‘self-knowledge’ was the tension between the demand for a properly ‘reflexive’ relation to ‘self’ and the demand for that relation to be able to extend outside its own domain. The dialogue ends with the tension in place and a demand for someone (a great man) to resolve it in a philosophically sound manner. Kosman’s own attempts here, minimal as they were, tried to answer the problem by noting that the ‘reflexivity’ characterising the locution *episteme epistemēs* is meant to stand for the relation that is in the foreground of modern attempts at understanding the ‘nonobjective mode of self-consciousness’ that is a condition for the ‘intentionality’ of cognitive states. This we found to make sense in the context of the dialogue but as a solution to the *a-poria* of the *Charmides* a purely ‘non-objective’ ‘self-presence’ seemed to be at odds with the Socratic concern with knowledge in the standard sense, especially the knowledge directed at ethical concepts. Nonetheless Kosman’s analysis did have the merit of showing that the *Charmides* is also a search for the discernment of ‘what we are about’ – of not losing sight of ourselves – in a way that suggested that in the *Charmides* we are in fact looking for the ‘true human self’.

In order to develop Kosman’s insight we turned to the work of Paul Natorp, who confidently provides an answer to the *a-poria* of the *Charmides* by identifying the ‘true human self’ with ‘consciousness’ conceived as the lawful ‘form of knowledge’ and the ‘good’. Natorp’s analysis of the dialogue and his answer to its problem allowed us to overcome the tension by construing ‘self-knowledge’ as the reflection on the ‘form’ of ‘consciousness’ itself – a



reflection on the very principles of the lawful determinations of the object for ‘consciousness’. This answer resolves the tension by providing a non-standard ‘object’ for self-knowledge which secures the proper ‘reflexivity’ of ‘self-consciousness’ but which allows that reflection to extend to all objects of cognitive activity. We may recall that the independent ‘status’ of ‘the form of knowledge’ was to be complemented by the determination of the *material* of knowledge according to the lawfulness of that form. This interpretation has the merit of allowing us to understand the movement of the dialogue from temperance to the seemingly abstract and removed concept of ‘self-knowledge’ and to bring it back to the concern with ‘temperance’ by way of the ‘unity of practical consciousness’ that promises to retain the meaning of that virtue as “*mens sana in corpore sano*”. In this way we have tried to achieve the *historical* aim of our essay.

The *systematic* aim of bringing our findings into dialogue with views advanced by philosopher’s working in contemporary philosophy of mind for the purpose of mutual illumination was carried out by noting connections between our solution to the *a-poria* of the *Charmides* and Kant’s account for the principle of ‘mental unity’ as explicated by P. Kitcher and S. Rödl’s work on the ‘form of our self-consciousness’. A recent publication in Aristotle scholarship by Jonathan Lear speaks of the tendency of the historians of philosophy to “stress the discontinuities” between the views of philosophers, but, Lear writes, there is another way:

*One can view philosophy as concerned throughout its history with the question of how mind relates to reality or (perhaps equivalently) of how and where to draw the boundary between subjects and objects. These are certainly fundamental issues for both Plato and Aristotle, and they are arguably central problems of Kant’s first Critique.<sup>79</sup>*

We have focused on the continuities that address the fundamental question of the principles of our consciousness and which we found to be addressed by Plato in the *Charmides*. Though notably, the issues mentioned by Lear also showed themselves relevant to our question. In connecting our inquiry with P. Kitcher we found that the ‘unity of apperception’ as a formal principle for the ‘unity of the subject’ and his cognitive engagement with the world bears structural similarities to our solution to the *Charmides* in that it satisfies the tension between the ‘intentional’ and ‘reflexive’. It also, like Natorp’s solution locates the unity of ‘self’ in the ‘thinking’ or ‘knowing’ subject as a ‘formal’ principle of ‘consciousness’ in opposition to any account which attempts to root that unity in empirical terms. It would seem that knowing the unity of our ‘selves’ comes through acts of judging and thinking comes with a demand to

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<sup>79</sup> Lear, Jonathan. *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 308

construct and constitute ourselves as progressively ‘unities’ in the making, working towards that unity by seeking the consistency of judgments we entertain and the ways in which we act so that our self-consciousness becomes a ‘unified’ agent and ‘thinker’ that bears witness to the laws of reason. This issue is not addressed in Kitcher’s essay though it is hard not to make that implication from her conclusions. It is S. Rödl’s work that brings the formal principles of ‘consciousness’ into a connection with the task of the theoretical and practical use of reason. The knowledge of the ‘form of knowledge’ which for Natorp was the ultimate meaning of Socratic ignorance re-emerges in the work of Rödl as “thought’s reflection on itself” – a reflection which is capable of providing criteria for the logical connections of thoughts to one another (general logic), founding the scientific enterprise (transcendental logic) and in providing us with laws of ‘practical reason’ that make for the unity of a ‘practical subject’ that escapes his diffusion in the ‘multi-colored’ palette of his wants and desires.

Naturally stressing the continuities comes at the expense of getting the differences clear. There are important differences between Natorp’s Plato, Kitcher and Rödl which we have not been able to address. One of those is the place of the ‘human being’ in the relation of the ‘form of knowledge’ to the object – as we know very well ‘knowledge’ for Plato was, if had, identical with the really real and transcendent, and as we know this was not so for Kant for whom the distinctive nature of the human form of sensibility, in Rödl’s phrasing renders our intellect ‘finite’ and ‘temporal’ – confined to thinking the temporal and in that sense different from a divine intellect which thinks “nowhere and nowhen” without the mediation of the senses.<sup>80</sup> This is a difference that broaches the larger questions of the relation of thought to being which we have tried to avoid, sticking to the epistemological considerations only.

One further difference and perhaps a more interesting one is that with the contemporary work we note the absence of an ambition that seems so present in Plato, namely that ‘knowledge’ and ‘self-knowledge’ is a force capable of as it were ‘tuning’ the soul to a harmonious ordering of the parts. Thought may provide us with practical laws but the claim that ‘self-knowledge’ of our rootedness in the unity of thought with itself will lead to a virtuous condition of the soul, perhaps through our ‘consistent identification’ with the ‘rule of consciousness’, in a form of ‘self-mastery’ that transcends mere ‘self-control’ is nowhere to be found. This is an issue that on the whole seems, for unknown reasons, not to be thematised in scholarly debates. Though one publication from some half a century ago does venture the claim that philosophy has become ‘easy’ in a sense that was alien to thinkers like Plato or the medieval theologians. Professor Needleman in his essay “Why is Philosophy Easy?” claims that

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<sup>80</sup> Rödl, Sebastian. *Categories of the Temporal*, 7

*The modern philosopher, in his philosophising, no longer loves i.e. searches for a new state of being.<sup>81</sup>*

This lack of the lover's zest is identified with the concession made to the experience of the world as it is, one that contrasts with Plato's search for a 'new state of being' that is in part characterised as a state of having "genuine experience" – a kind of experience that is to be had only after the process of purification that is to be achieved through the process of philosophical 'self-knowledge'. It is through the philosophical pursuit that man can deliver himself from the intrusion of the unruly elements and establish the rule of *nous*, 'mind' or intellect – the 'rule of consciousness' as Natorp would put it.

*Now, the state in which this element can function uninfluenced by the others is called 'wisdom'. Thus, to realize one's own inability to experience already requires the active functioning of that which 'can' experience. And thus, on strictly psychodynamic and structural terms, the Delphic Oracle is vindicated: Socrates 'is' wise in knowing his ignorance. This is, wisdom is a state of being, a condition of psychic organization, and has little, if anything, to do with the lodgment in thought of "correct" propositions about the universe, man, or even oneself.<sup>82</sup>*

But perhaps our findings can make Needleman's strict claims seem overstated. Self-knowledge as we have articulated it is not, it is true, a matter of a body of propositions but it is about an articulate understanding of 'who we are' and the "genuine experience" that Plato was looking for may be nothing more than a 'coherent' experience constirtued by a thinker and an agent who has done what he can to overcome the fractures of self-contradiction in him or her self.

As we said the overarching aim of this essay was to bring the academic work whether in its historical or systematic guise to the service of helping us attain 'self-knowledge' of what it means to be human that survives a stroll outside university grounds. We have I think identified between Plato, Natorp, Kitcher and Rödl a clear common ground as to the nature of our 'selves' that is as 'thinkers' and 'knowers' who's unity is constituted by the 'agreement of thought with itself'. While the nature of the lawfulness that characterises our 'form of consciousness' and the spelling out of the issues involved remains to be worked out we have at least the direction and the demand that any man can follow.

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<sup>81</sup> Needleman, Jacob. "Why Philosophy Is Easy." *The Review of Metaphysics* 22, no. 1 (September 1968), 3

<sup>82</sup> Needleman, Jacob. "Why Philosophy Is Easy." 7

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