

ABSTRACT

Plato's Socratic dialogues suggest that virtue is a form of expert knowledge or understanding analogous to expertise in first-order *technai* or *epistêmai*, arts or sciences: architecture, medicine, and mathematics, but also flute-playing, cobbling, weaving, and carpentry. The *Charmides* is commonly believed to reject that model and point towards the doctrines of the *Republic* and other Platonic works. The present article does not generally deny that the *Charmides* is forward-looking. However, it contends that this dialogue does not undermine but, if anything, vindicates an important aspect of the analogy between virtue and expertise. On the one hand, the *Charmides* shows that the intellectualist conception of temperance defended by Critias (Socrates' principal interlocutor) is deeply problematic: the very idea of 'a knowledge knowing solely itself' is probably incoherent and, even if it were not, a strictly reflexive knowledge would be irrelevant to happiness. On the other hand, the dialogue supports a philosophically defensible aspect of the Socratic model of virtue: if virtue is expert knowledge, the latter cannot be oriented mainly towards itself, but must govern its own distinct domain and essentially contribute to the good life.