

## PLATO'S *CHARMIDES*

The *Charmides* is a difficult and enigmatic dialogue traditionally considered one of Plato's Socratic dialogues. This book provides a close text commentary on the dialogue which tracks particular motifs throughout. These notably include the characterisation of Critias, Charmides, and Socrates; the historical context and subtext; literary features such as irony and foreshadowing; the philosophical context, especially how the dialogue looks back to more traditional Socratic dialogues and forward to dialogues traditionally placed in Plato's middle and late period; and, most importantly, the philosophical and logical details of the arguments and their dialectical function. A new translation of the dialogue is included in an Appendix. This will be essential reading for all scholars and students of Plato and of ancient philosophy. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

VOULA TSOUNA is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her other books include *Philodemus: On Choices and Avoidances* (1995), a critical edition and commentary on one of the Herculaneum papyri on Epicurean ethics, which received the Theodor Mommsen Award; *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* (1998), recently translated into modern Greek (2019); *The Ethics of Philodemus* (2007); and a collection of essays on the Socratics and the Hellenistic schools (2012). She is currently preparing a monograph on the *Republic* Books 8 and 9 and another on *The Normativity of Nature in Hellenistic Philosophy*, to appear in the series Cambridge Elements in Ancient Philosophy, edited by James Warren.

PLATO'S *CHARMIDES*

*An Interpretative Commentary*

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## *Preface and Acknowledgements*

I have been intrigued by the *Charmides* ever since I first studied it as a graduate student at King's College, Cambridge. It seemed familiar in some ways but entirely unfamiliar in others, and although I worked through the argument as best I could, I eventually put the dialogue aside with a sense of unease and the determination to return to it at some future time. In fact, it proved impossible to switch focus altogether. I kept thinking about the *Charmides* even as I was working on other topics and acquired what might be described as an obsession with that work and the challenges that it poses.

The few articles that I published partly or wholly on the *Charmides* over a period of approximately two decades are indicative of the ways in which I gradually developed a distinctive approach to the work. It is appropriate therefore, first, to extend my thanks to the colleagues, students, editors, and referees whose comments led to substantial revisions and improvements of these papers before their publication. I wrote the first draft of 'Socrates' Attack on Intellectualism in the *Charmides*' (1998) during a lengthy stay in Cambridge and owe a debt of gratitude to Myles Burnyeat for extensive discussion of the paper and of the central argument of the dialogue. A later version of that paper was published in a special volume of *Apeiron* and benefited from the editors' comments. Two further articles, 'Interprétations socratiques de la connaissance de soi' (2000) and 'Interpretations of Socratic Self-Knowledge' (2004), were drafted in Cambridge and delivered in Paris, Athens, and Delphi. I am grateful for the input I received from these audiences, the referees of the relevant journals, the members of the B Caucus of the Cambridge Faculty of Classics, and, moreover, John Cooper, Michael Frede, and Michel Narcy. Later in time, well into the process of composing a full draft of the book and while holding a Senior Fellowship of the Onassis Foundation (2016), I wrote 'What Is the Subject of Plato's *Charmides*?' for the

Festschrift in honour of John Glucker. I thank the Onassis Foundation for its generous support and the editors of the Festschrift for their remarks.

A full draft of approximately two-thirds of the book was produced in the years 2015 and 2016. I had the privilege of holding a Beaufort Visiting Fellowship at St John's College, Cambridge in Lent term 2015. I wish to thank the College for its legendary hospitality and Malcolm Schofield for our almost daily conversations on the *Charmides* and much else. I returned to Cambridge in Lent term 2016 as Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Christ's College, Cambridge. I am grateful to Christ's College for providing ideal living conditions, to the college staff for their practical guidance, and to the Fellows and students for a uniquely stimulating intellectual environment. In particular, it is a pleasure to thank Gabor Betegh and David Sedley for many conversations about the *Charmides* and the different ways in which my own manuscript could take its final shape. I am also indebted to James Warren for his incisive remarks on the topic of the so-called craft analogy and to Matthew Duncombe for discussion of the logical behaviour of relatives. The basis for most of the chapters of this book lies in the lectures I gave on the *Charmides* at the University of Edinburgh in the capacity of the 2016 Centenary Fellow of the Scottish Philosophical Association. I thank the SPA for this honour, the University of Edinburgh for hosting the lectures, Ina Kupreeva for her kind hospitality, and the colleagues and students in the audience for their remarks. Sara Broadie's interventions were especially helpful and our correspondence in the aftermath of the lectures has influenced my interpretation of the opening scene of the *Charmides* and of 'the best method of enquiry' proposed by Socrates.

Moving on to the other side of the Atlantic, I extend my warm thanks to UC Santa Barbara for the generosity and flexibility it has shown over the last several years in order to facilitate my research and professional activities in the USA and overseas. In addition to two years of sabbatical leave (2009–10 and 2015–16), both the university and my own department have supported the project of this monograph by enabling me to arrange my teaching obligations, administrative duties, and academic resources in ways that were effective and compatible with the necessities of conducting research. I am grateful to the colleagues who recommended philosophical literature relevant to the topics treated in the *Charmides*. In particular, I thank Matthew Hanser for his suggestions regarding the subjects of shame and modesty and Tony Anderson for a crash course on reflexive relations and the logical problems that they give rise to.



*Preface and Acknowledgements*

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My students, undergraduates as well as graduates, have been an inexhaustible source of learning and inspiration. My understanding of the *Charmides* gradually became richer and deeper by teaching Plato to the undergraduates and by running graduate seminars on Platonic dialogues traditionally classified as belonging to different periods of Plato's production. Especially important for my project have been two graduate seminars focused on the *Charmides* and taught several years apart from each other. I owe a debt to all the participants, and especially to Michael Augustin and Robert McIntyre, both of whom have subsequently earned their PhDs and joined the academic ranks.

I have had the opportunity to present material from the book in invited talks and express my gratitude to the institutions and colleagues that hosted these talks, as well as the audiences that attended them. Specifically, I thank the Philosophy and the Classics Departments of the University of Patras for inviting me and Panos Dimas (University of Oslo) to jointly give a three-day seminar on the *Charmides* in 2014. I am grateful to Mauro Bonazzi for the invitation to give a lengthy presentation of the Argument from Benefit at the University of Milan in the spring of 2017, and for his incisive and helpful comments. In that same year I was asked to give a talk on the use of the so-called craft analogy in the *Charmides* at the University of Leiden and received constructive and detailed comments from Frans de Haas and Jaap Mansfeld. These led me to revisit the debate between Socrates and Critias in respect of the craft analogy and rewrite the relevant chapter in the form of a talk that I gave at UC Berkeley in the winter of 2018. I am very grateful to the audience for the particularly enjoyable discussion, and to Tony Long and Sara Magrin for follow-up written comments. The penultimate version of that chapter was presented at UC San Diego at the invitation of Monte Johnson and the UCSD Philosophy Department. The discussion that followed gave me a new and illuminating perspective on certain aspects of Plato's argument.

Few people read the complete manuscript in the final stages of its preparation. Alexander Nehamas sent me extensive comments on Chapters 1 and 2 with the result that I made substantial changes to both. I thank him for his critical remarks, his kind words, and his unwavering support. Paul Kalligas has followed my thinking about this book since its inception, has debated with me virtually every bit of Plato's text, and has influenced my understanding of the drama as well as the argument of the *Charmides*. I would like to express my gratitude for everything that he has contributed to this project and for our ongoing dialogue on the philosophy of Plato for almost four decades.

I wish to extend my warmest thanks to the two referees chosen by CUP for the thoughtful, incisive, and detailed work that they did on the manuscript. All their comments have been taken into account and, I believe, led to improvements. My greatest debt of gratitude is to David Sedley. It is impossible to convey how much the book owes to him without getting into cumbersome detail. His comments touched on every aspect of the book and concerned form as well as content. They included substantive philosophical and literary issues, textual and philological points, matters of style, grammar, and punctuation, and a thorough overhaul of the translation in the Appendix. I am profoundly grateful to him for this massive undertaking and the time and effort that it must have cost him.

The book went into production in the early summer of 2021. Many thanks to Michael Sharp for his characteristic patience and courtesy and for his wise advice all along. Also, warm thanks to Sally Evans-Darby for her prompt copy-editing, to Judy Oliver for the Index, and to the Project Manager Akash Datchinamurthy as well as the staff of Cambridge University Press for an impeccable process of publication.

I wrote the book in two continents and three locations: UCSB, Cambridge, and Athens. All three are important to me in different ways and each of them is linked to a phase or aspect of my life, even though Athens is my birthplace and therefore has a special hold on my emotions and imagination. In all three places I have lived with my family for extended periods. I have tried to temper the hours of solitude devoted to intellectual work with time in the company of my husband, Richard McKirahan, our daughter, Eleni, and, for ten years, our dog, Spot. I am thankful for their affection and support and for the happiness that they have brought into my life. This book is for Richard, with all my love.

Athens, 29 August 2021