

NIKOS G. CHARALABOPOULOS

THE CURIOUS CASE OF KNOWLEDGE  
AND HAPPINESS IN PLATO'S *CHARMIDES*

TABLE OF CONTENTS: 1. *Prolegomena*; 2. *The City of Clones*; 3. *Sophonopolis*; 4. *Darling, I'm a nightmare dressed like a daydream [...]*; 5. *Is Charmides happy?*

1. *Prolegomena*

The question of happiness (*eudaimonìa*) is not raised until relatively late in Plato's *Charmides*. While examining Critias' latest definition of *sophrosýne* as a second-order knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (167b-c) Socrates wonders whether such a knowledge is possible and/or beneficial to society. To this end he mentions his dream of a utopian society in which the rulers of the city are the true experts in their field (173a-d). Deliberations always result in correct decisions, leading to policies perfectly designed and impeccably implemented: error is, in the most tangible terms, simply not an option. Yet Socrates is not convinced that those citizens would live a truly happy life (173d3-5). In fact, in the ensuing discussion he dissociates knowledge from happiness – to Critias' amazement and disappointment (173e).<sup>1</sup>

The present paper examines the way Plato both problematizes and rehabilitates the causal relationship between *epistème* and *eudaimonìa* in the utopian narratives of the *Charmides*. A short comment will also be made on what is one to make of Socrates' concluding unequivocal causal association of *sophrosýne* with *eudaimonìa* (176a4-5).

---

<sup>1</sup> On Plato's *Charmides* see: Lampert 2010, 147-240; Tuozzo 2011; Tsouna 2017; Moore & Raymond 2019. The latter work is the source of all my translated passages from the *Charmides*.

## 2. *The City of Clones*

When Socrates expresses serious doubts as to whether absolute knowledge is sufficient for absolute happiness, he does so in reference to the inhabitants of a society in which epistemological failure is a practical impossibility in every aspect of private and public life. In fact, this is the third time in the dialogue that Socrates constructs a utopian city so that he may give his argument a graphic representation. The first utopia (161e-162a) pops up during the refutation of Charmides' third definition of *sophrosýne* as doing one's own things (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν, 161b6). In an ostensibly sophistic manner Socrates deliberately understands the phrase in the counter-intuitive sense of a pupil's learning to read and write only his own name or a doctor's curing no one else but himself (161d-e). He then asks Charmides to pass judgement on a *pòlis* in which every citizen is required by law to make every item of his own wardrobe, shoes included, as well as every other personal item of his:

Do you think a city would be well run under this law that orders each person to weave and wash his own *clothing*, fashion his own *sandals*, make his own *oil flask and strigil*, and do everything else according to the same principle: that no one avails himself of other things, but *each works on and does his own things*? (δοκεῖ ἄν σοι πόλις εὖ οἰκεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τούτου τοῦ νόμου τοῦ κελεύοντος τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἱμάτιον ἕκαστον ὑφαίνειν καὶ πλύνειν, καὶ ὑποδήματα σκυτοτομεῖν, καὶ λήκυθον καὶ στλεγγίδα καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, τῶν μὲν ἀλλοτρίων μὴ ἄπτεσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστον ἐργάζεσθαι τε καὶ πράττειν;) (*Chrm.* 161e10-162a2, my italics).

Charmides cannot but concede that the principle of doing one's own cannot be related to *sophrosýne* since the latter is considered indispensable for a well-governed city – and Socrates' utopia plainly does not fit the bill. The implementation of the law of do-it-yourself results in individuals who are perfectly capable of providing for themselves (and their families?) drawing exclusively on their own resources and practical skills. The concomitant prohibition against laying one's hands on someone else's possessions guarantees social peace. At the same time, household self-sufficiency means that people have no need for each other and

lack any motive for human contact. Isolated individuals (or families?) may lead lives of social insularity using rudimentary communication – if at all. Their life comes close to questioning the very notion of community any city is supposed to embody. As they practice identical crafts there is also no room for personal differentiation. Provocatively, they all look like replicas of the Platonic Hippias who once had appeared in Olympia while having made with his own hands everything he had on his body (*Hp. Mi.* 368b5-6). In a very real sense, then, their utopia may justifiably be called the *City of (Hippias') Clones*.

In terms of intra-textuality, except for the *Hippias Minor*, this utopia of self-sufficient individuals is mostly related to the *Republic*. The law of ‘doing one’s own’, bearing now the newly coined name of *oikeioprachia* (434c8), is a fundamental principle both in the *City of Pigs* and the *Kallipolis*. In a reversal of the situation in the *Charmides*, however, here this very same law results in the creation of a harmonious society and the solidification of communal spirit. For in the *Republic* the principle implemented means that each man performs a single task (370b6) and exchanges the surplus of his production for all the other goods he needs but cannot himself produce. At the very beginning of his construction of the just city, Socrates gives an explanation for the origin of societies along these lines: given that people are not self-sufficient on their own they decide to live together and enter into a ‘give-and-take’ relationship with each other so that their needs may be covered in the best possible way (369b-c). These two elements, namely the practical impossibility of the self-sufficient man and the necessity of sharing and exchanging goods, look like a corrective comment on the first utopia of the *Charmides* thereby giving the lie to what Socrates says in the *City of Clones*.

The latter may then be read as Socrates’ deliberate attempt at discrediting any simplistic acceptance or rejection of ‘doing one’s own’ as a definition of *sophrosyne* by pointing out that it is its opaque formulation that makes it liable to misinterpretation. To make his point, he takes an absurdly literal meaning of the definition and turns it into a city: an impracticable conglomerate of human atoms, displaying an unrealistic level of self-sufficient isolationism. Here Socrates takes a leaf out of a riddle contestant’s book: Charmides has confronted him with a riddle

(αἰνίγματι γάρ τινι ἔοικεν, 161c9; cf. 162a10), therefore Socrates counter-attacks with an *adýnaton*-puzzle of his own. No wonder Charmides finds such a *pòlis* dysfunctional, if not essentially dystopic.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Sophronòpolis

The *City of Clones* has no room for the question of the distribution of knowledge and happiness among its populace – with the possible exception of the productive knowledge practitioners of weaving, shoemaking, pottery, and smithery are expected to display. Contrariwise, Socrates' second utopia is all about the great benefits enjoyed by the citizens of a *pòlis* ruled by infallible leaders, possessors of *sophrosýne*, who would know what they know and what they don't know – with happiness as the greatest of benefits (171d1-6):

We would live our lives *free from error*, both we ourselves, the ones who had discipline, and anyone under our rule. We would never attempt to do anything that we didn't know how to do; we would instead find those who did know and hand the task over to them. And as for those under our rule, we wouldn't entrust to them any tasks but the ones they would do correctly – the tasks for which they possessed the relevant knowledge. In this way, thanks to discipline, a household would be admirably run, a city well governed, and so too *everything else* that was under the rule of discipline. *With error uprooted* and correctness in command, people in that situation would be bound *to succeed* in everything they did – and *those who succeed are happy* (ἀναμάρτητοι γὰρ ἂν τὸν βίον διεζῶμεν αὐτοί τε [καὶ] οἱ τὴν σωφροσύνην ἔχοντες καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες ὅσοι ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἦρχοντο. οὔτε γὰρ ἂν αὐτοὶ ἐπεχειροῦμεν πράττειν ἃ μὴ ἐπιστάμεθα, ἀλλ' ἐξευρίσκοντες τοὺς ἐπισταμένους ἐκείνοις ἂν παρεδίδομεν, οὔτε τοῖς ἄλλοις

---

<sup>2</sup> On ancient riddles see: Konstantakos 2004 and 2019. According to him the *adýnaton*-puzzle «may be an impossible sophism, a statement about an unnatural phenomenon, which the propounder calls the addressee to answer for or comment on» (Konstantakos 2004, 121). This could be a fitting description for Socrates' first utopia. The most recent discussion on the City of Pigs is to be found in: Usher 2020, 91-109. Cf. also Balasopoulos 2013; Rowe 2017.

ἐπετρέπομεν, ὧν ἤρχομεν, ἄλλο τι πράττειν ἢ ὅτι πράττοντες ὀρθῶς ἔμελλεν πράξειν – τοῦτο δ' ἦν ἄν, οὗ ἐπιστήμην εἶχον – καὶ οὕτω δὴ ὑπὸ σωφροσύνης οἰκία τε οἰκουμένη ἔμελλεν καλῶς οἰκεῖσθαι, πόλις τε πολιτευομένη, καὶ ἄλλο πᾶν οὗ σωφροσύνη ἄρχοι ἁμαρτίας γὰρ ἐξηρημένης, ὀρθότητος δὲ ἡγουμένης, ἐν πάσῃ πράξει καλῶς καὶ εὖ πράττειν ἀναγκαῖον τοὺς οὕτω διακειμένους, τοὺς δὲ εὖ πράττοντας εὐδαίμονας εἶναι (*Chrm.* 171d6-172a3, my italics).

Socrates addresses this narrative to Critias, Charmides' older cousin and guardian. Critias has entered the discussion after Charmides' epic failure to defend his thesis that *sophrosýne* is to do one's own things. Defending a definition he himself had authored (162c4-6), Critias argues successively that *sophrosýne* is the doing of good things (163e10-11) and the second-order knowledge that knows both itself and the other kinds of knowledge (166e5-6) – or, as later rephrased by Socrates, the knowledge of both knowledge and ignorance (169b6-7). The emergence of a city ruled by the experts forms part of the *elenchus* of this latest formulation – one that ultimately goes back to the original Critias' and Charmides' definition. In other words, the city of *sòphrones* responds to the same philosophical conundrum as the *City of Clones*, only it does so indirectly.

But this is where the similarities of these two narratives come to a halt. The *Sophonòpolis* is an actual *pòlis* featuring the standard polarity in ancient Greek politics depending on whether one exercises political power or not. By means of possessing the absolute knowledge of everything knowable and unknowable, the rulers see that the principle of 'doing one's own', properly understood, is implemented in every aspect of both private and public life. The *sophrosýne* administration guarantees the best possible state of affairs for each and every household, the city as a whole, even the human soul – possibly to be understood as one of the referents of the vague ἄλλο πᾶν (171e7).

Unlike the dystopian *City of Clones*, the *Sophonòpolis* is evidently a eutopia for at least three reasons: (a) *its citizens do not make mistakes* (ἀναμάρτητοι, 171d6): they always give the correct answers, make the right decisions, execute flawlessly each and every plan. Similarly, they display an impeccably moral conduct, since they always make Heracles' choice when being confronted with ethical dilemmas. Vice seems to

have been excised from their city alongside error (ἀμαρτίας ἐξηρημένης, 172a1); (b) *its leaders do not overstep their authority*. The *sophrosýne* imperative means that there may be only one expert for every conceivable object of knowledge and that no one else should interfere with him in his field of expertise. This applies to the *sòphrones* themselves, whose task is to rule the city by telling the experts what to do, not how to do it. Since the majority (or is it the totality?) of the population consists in experts of some kind, the political authority of the rulers is more a matter of distribution of expertise than a will to confirm the inferior status of the populace. In a city of experts, governed by the experts' experts as *primi inter pares*, social peace finds its natural habitat; (c) *everybody experiences the absolute happiness*. Due to their excellence in their specialty the citizens succeed in every activity they engage in, they are always «doing well» (εὖ πράττειν, 172a2). In ancient Greek this expression means 'I am happy' – mostly because I am successful. In the *Sophronòpolis* epistemocracy leads to *eudaimonìa*; and *eudaimonìa* is the hallmark of eutopia.

Socrates' second utopia raises for the first time in the *Charmides* the question about the relationship between knowledge and happiness and answers it in the affirmative. The second-order knowledge and ignorance wielded by the *sòphrones* is the reason why all citizens lead a successful and, therefore, a truly happy life: τοὺς δὲ εὖ πράττοντας εὐδαιμόνας εἶναι (172a3). And yet this city would remain forever a real (o)u-topia, a piece of wishful thinking that cannot be put into practice. This great eutopian narrative was from the beginning a what-if scenario: had Critias been right about the nature and attributes of *sophrosýne*, the *sòphrones* would have been extremely privileged (μεγαλωστὶ ἂν ἡμῖν, φαμέν, ὠφέλιμον ἦν σώφροσιν εἶναι, 171d5-6). But, to their disappointment, Socrates and Critias have failed in identifying that type of omniscient super-knowledge required for the birth of *Sophronòpolis* (ὀρᾶς ὅτι οὐδαμοῦ ἐπιστήμη οὐδεμία τοιαύτη οὔσα πέφανται, 172a7-8). Their argument has shown that the best a *sòphron* may hope for is that he will be a better student and teacher than others in any epistemological field. This is, indeed, a far cry from the benefit of political leadership in the best society ever.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The notion of utopia, both in thought and literature, and its definitional taxonomy is succinctly discussed by Vieira 2010. On ancient utopians in general see Dubois 2006;

4. *Darling, I'm a nightmare dressed like a daydream [...]*

In view of his confession that Critias' super-knowledge is no more than a chimerical vision, Plato's audience may reasonably think that Socrates has no reason to produce cities in words anymore. This is not the case though. A few moments later, against all expectations, he returns to *Sophonopolis* producing an enhanced version of the city of experts, addressing the same issue: if Critias' latest definition of *sophrosýne* is the right one, one is entitled to ask how this virtue benefits those who have it (172c7-d1). The new utopian narrative (173a7-d5) may be divided into five sections: (a) introductory remark; (b-d) main part; and (e) concluding remarks.

Arguably the most striking feature of a utopian narrative not lacking in surprises is its oneiric textual identity. This is the opening sentence of the section:

(a) «Then listen to my dream», I [Socrates] said, «whether it has come through horn or through ivory» (Ἄκουε δὴ, ἔφην, τὸ ἐμὸν ὄναρ, εἴτε διὰ κεράτων εἴτε δι' ἐλέφαντος ἐλήλυθεν, *Chrm.* 173a7-8).

This sentence is a majestic intertextual reference to *Odyssey*, XIX, vv. 560-567: Penelope has just recounted to Odysseus a dream she had had last night about a group of geese killed by an eagle. She would like to think that this is a good omen and Odysseus will finally return home and kill the suitors. But she has no way to tell whether her dream passed through the gate made of horn, the origin of truthful, prophetic dreams, or the one made of ivory, the origin of deceptive dreams.

Plato takes full advantage of the irony and polysemy of the Homeric passage so that a horizon of indeterminacy may hover over his own narrative. Taken at face value, the analogy implies that the soon-to-be-narrated utopia is the dream, Socrates is Penelope and Critias is Odysseus who is expected to fulfil it. Significantly, Plato's text suggests that Socrates experiences a lucid, that is a waking dream (ὄναρ), not a vision (ὕπαρ), as he sees in front of his eyes (καὶ ἄρτι ἀποβλέψας, 172e5) the construction of the new city.

---

while Vegetti 2013 comments on the utopian character of the Platonic *Kallipolis*.

The events following Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, though, may suggest an additional layer of interpretation. The ideal society of the experts must have been the historical Critias' dream and he possibly intended to put it into practice as soon as he joined the Thirty. In view of Critias' and Charmides' defeat and death at the Battle of Munichia in 403 B.C., the dream proved to be a nightmare. In this case, Socrates, essentially a Platonic avatar of Odysseus in more than one respects [Moore & Raymond 2019, 41], experiences with eyes wide open (not shut) the dream/nightmare of Critias/Penelope.<sup>4</sup>

The main part of the narrative runs as follows:

(b) For if discipline really were to rule over us, and it were as we've just defined it, wouldn't everything have to be done in accordance with knowledge, and no one who claimed to be a ship's captain but wasn't *would deceive us*, and no doctor or general or anyone else would get away *with pretending* to know something he didn't know? (εἰ γὰρ ὅτι μάλιστα ἡμῶν ἄρχοι ἢ σωφροσύνη, οὓσα οἷαν νῦν ὀρίζομεθα, ἄλλο τι κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας πάντ' ἂν πράττειτο, καὶ οὔτε τις κυβερνήτης φάσκων εἶναι, ὦν δὲ οὐ, ἐξαπατῶ ἂν ἡμᾶς, οὔτε ἰατρὸς οὔτε στρατηγὸς οὔτ' ἄλλος οὐδεὶς, προσποιούμενός τι εἰδέναι ὃ μὴ οἶδεν, λανθάνοι ἄν;) (*Chrm.* 173a8-b4, my italics).

(c) If that were the case, wouldn't the result have to be that we'd have healthier bodies than we do now, and when in danger at sea or battle, we'd be kept safe, and *our tools, all our clothing and footwear*, and all our belongings would be skillfully produced, as would so much else, seeing that we'd be employing genuine craftsmen? (ἐκ δὴ τούτων οὕτως ἐχόντων ἄλλο ἂν ἡμῖν τι συμβαίνοι ἢ ὑγίεσιν τε τὰ σώματα εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ νῦν, καὶ ἐν θαλάττῃ κινδυνεύοντας καὶ ἐν πολέμῳ σώζεσθαι, καὶ τὰ σκεύη καὶ τὴν ἀμπεχόνην καὶ ὑπόδεσιν πᾶσαν καὶ τὰ χρήματα πάντα τεχνικῶς ἡμῖν εἰργασμένα εἶναι καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ διὰ τὸ ἀληθινοῖς δημιουργοῖς χρῆσθαι;) (*Chrm.* 173b4-c2, my italics).

---

<sup>4</sup> On the Homeric passage and Critias' role in the *Charmides* see Catalin 2010; Kotwick 2020, and Danzig 2013 respectively. Capitani 2015 offers a useful overview of the dreams in the Platonic dialogues.



(d) And if you like, let's also accept that *divination* is the knowledge of the future, and that discipline, presiding over it, turns away charlatans and appoints genuine seers as our prophets of what's to come (εἰ δὲ βούλοιό γε, καὶ τὴν μαντικὴν εἶναι συγχωρήσωμεν ἐπιστήμην τοῦ μέλλοντος ἔσσεσθαι, καὶ τὴν σωφροσύνην αὐτῆς ἐπιστατοῦσαν, τοὺς μὲν ἀλαζόνας ἀποτρέπειν, τοὺς δὲ ὡς ἀληθῶς μάντις καθιστάναι ἡμῖν προφήτας τῶν μελλόντων (*Chrm.* 173c3-7, my italics).

Socrates' third utopia, *Sophonopolis Reloaded*, shares the same premise with its earlier counterpart: the *sōphrones* rule due to their possessing the superior knowledge of knowledge and ignorance – but it is more detailed in its description. The narrative displays more realistic features and is brought closer to the interlocutors' experience. To begin with, three types of experts are mentioned by name (the captain, the doctor, and the general), all of whom must have been familiar faces to Socrates from his three-year military service in Northern Greece. Particular emphasis is also placed on the detection of deception (ἐξαπατῶ, b2) performed by those who falsely pretend (προσποιοῦμενος, b3) to know navigation, medicine, or generalship. This emphasis points also to a thinly veiled sleight of hand on the author's part: Plato's audience may recall that Socrates resorted to the deception of role-playing when pretending (προσποιήσασθαι, 155b5) to know a cure for Charmides' headache.

Another new element is the comparison of the populace of the third utopia with men from the author's historical present: the former enjoy healthier bodies and far fewer (or, rather, zero?) casualties in both land and naval warfare. This is a version of the familiar poetic motif of the superiority of men from a bygone and/or golden age over those of today: one may be reminded of Nestor's boasting about the feats of his own generation far exceeding the ones performed by the warriors fighting at Troy or the Hesiodic myth of the races. Moreover, the selection of the products of the superior craftsmanship in the utopian city (tools, clothing, footwear) recalls the almost identical list of items made by each and every self-sufficient man in the *City of Clones* – items reflecting what Charmides was wearing (cloth, shoes) or carried with him (oil flask, strigil) in the wrestling-school.

The culmination of the enhanced level of the new *Sophronòpolis* is that the knowledge of its leaders knows no temporal limits. Since divination is merely another type of knowledge, that of the future, it is subordinate to *sophrosýne*. The *sòphrones* then acquire a privileged status normally assigned to gods and a selected group of gifted individuals who serve as their mouthpiece, such as religious experts and poets. The demand that the real seers and prophets should not be confused with the fake ones may not be irrelevant to Socrates' half-serious appropriation of that role (μαντεύομαι, 169b4).

Up to this point Socrates' narrative has created a powerful political utopia that both supersedes the pre-political *City of Clones* and gives a relatively more down-to-earth, therefore more persuasive version of the *Sophronòpolis*. By now both the internal and the external audience of the *Charmides* has been led to conclude that living in such a city is self-evidently beneficial for every lover of knowledge, truth, and social well-being – to say nothing about the exact prediction of future events. That is why Socrates' final remarks must have caught everybody, not only Critias, off guard:

(e) Now, if the human race were this equipped, I accept that we would live and act with knowledge – after all, discipline, serving as a guardian, would prevent ignorance from intruding into our work. But the further claim – that by acting with knowledge, we would succeed and be happy – that conclusion, my dear Critias, we aren't yet able to reach (κατεσκευασμένον δὴ οὕτω τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος ὅτι μὲν ἐπιστημόνως ἂν πράττοι καὶ ζῶη, ἔπομαι - ἢ γὰρ σωφροσύνη φυλάττουσα οὐκ ἂν ἐφῆ παρεμπίπτουσαν τὴν ἀνεπιστημοσύνην συνεργὸν ἡμῖν εἶναι - ὅτι δ' ἐπιστημόνως ἂν πράττοντες εὖ ἂν πράττοιμεν καὶ εὐδαιμονοῖμεν, τοῦτο δὲ οὐπω δυνάμεθα μαθεῖν, ᾧ φίλε Κριτία (*Chrm.* 173c7-d5).

Socrates' first words look a lot like a truism – though one universally applicable: every society governed by the *sòphrones* lives by the standards of real knowledge. What is more, by means of a military imagery, as befits a brave soldier of the Athenian army, he assures that the enemy (*ἀνεπιστημοσύνην*, d3) will never manage to intrude into the

*pòlis* (παρεμπίπτουσαν, d2; a Platonic *hàrax* and, possibly, the earliest extant occurrence of the verb), because the city's defender (σωφροσύνη, d2), a combination of both Athena Promachos and Platonic Guardian, will constantly hold the would-be intruder at arm's length. One is also tempted to see in this duel between the two female combatants a replay of the antithetical pair error-correctness (ἀμαρτίας - ὀρθότητος) of the old *Sophronòpolis*.

And then comes the final, shocking blow. Even those societies equipped with and run by supreme knowledge are not *necessarily* successful and, therefore, happy. In an anti-climactic fashion, this conclusion plays a rather pessimistic tune as it demolishes the basic premise of both narratives on *Sophronòpolis*. Socrates' second utopia embodies by (onto)logical necessity absolute happiness *provided* that the superhuman knowledge envisioned by Critias is a real option. The problem lies in whether such a knowledge exists, not whether such a knowledge leads to absolute happiness. Socrates' third utopia may or may not embody true happiness *even if* the superhuman knowledge envisioned by Critias is a real option. The problem is that such a knowledge *is not enough* for true happiness. In other words, in his last words Socrates claims that *sophrosýne* is not intrinsically associated with happiness.

In the discussion following the utopian narratives Socrates moves a step further and argues that knowledge *as such* has nothing to do with *eudaimonìa* and there is no causality between them (173e). In due course it is revealed that it is a specific branch of knowledge that makes a man happy. When Socrates presses his point on Critias expressing his great desire (προσποθῶ, 174a10; another Platonic *hàrax*) to learn which is the type of knowledge that begets happiness, *it is Critias himself who provides the correct answer* as confirmed immediately by Socrates: *it is the knowledge of good and evil* (174b10-c3).

In sum, Socrates answers the question of the relationship between knowledge and happiness in the affirmative, with the proviso that it pertains only to a certain kind of knowledge, that of good and evil. Yet the dialogue ends in *aporia* because it is not clear whether this knowledge is an offspring of mother *sophrosýne*, another, evolved version of *sophrosýne* (*sophrosýne* reloaded, as it were), or a completely unrelated virtue.

### 5. *Is Charmides happy?*

Any interpretation of the notion of happiness in Plato's *Charmides* would be incomplete without a brief comment on those passages in which Socrates associates Critias' young cousin with *eudaimonìa*. Incidentally, these appear at the prologue and the exodos of the dialogue, flanking, as it were, the relevant passages in the utopian narratives and their aftermath.

Socrates' very first use of the term occurs in his praise of the family of Charmides' father: «For being outstanding in beauty and virtue and *the rest of what is called happiness* (ὡς διαφέρουσα κάλλει τε καὶ ἀρετῇ καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ λεγομένη εὐδαιμονία)» (*Chrm.* 157e7-158a1, my italics).

This looks like a standard appraisal of an *élite* Athenian family that lives up to the ideal of *kalokagathìa* in the context of what is considered socially desirable. Due to its qualification as λεγομένη, one is tempted to read it as a type of a popular notion of happiness that may be used as a foil for a more «genuine», philosophical notion of happiness associated with (a kind of) knowledge. In view of what follows, however, instead of resorting to any ready-made polarisation, it may be wiser to notice that from early on Plato wished to present the association of Charmides' family history on his father's side with a record of virtues leading to happiness as Charmides' own legacy.

Such a reading might find some support from Socrates' last advice to Charmides. After blaming himself for having failed to nail down the meaning of *sophrosýne*, Socrates says to the promising young man: «But as for you, consider yourself *as happy as you are disciplined* (σεαυτὸν δέ, ὅσῳ περ σωφρονέστερος εἶ, τοσοῦτῳ εἶναι καὶ εὐδαιμονέστερον)» (*Chrm.* 176a4-5, my italics).

Curiously enough, this is the first and only time that a causal connection is established between happiness and *sophrosýne*. One might wonder how this claim tallies with the conclusion that the road to absolute happiness is the knowledge of good and evil. Or how one is to render the *sophronèsteros* given that all the suggested definitions have miserably failed. Perhaps it might be better to pay attention to the comparative degree of the adjectives and take these words at face value: the more Charmides progresses on the road to *sophrosýne* – no matter what this virtue means – the more he would live in a state of true happiness, proving himself a worthy descendant of his forefathers.

## Bibliographic references

### Primary sources

Homer, *The Odyssey*, ed. R. Fagles, London, Viking, 1996.

Plato, *Charmides*, eds. C. Moore, C.C. Raymond, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2019.

### Secondary sources

Balasopoulos, A. [2013], Pigs in heaven? Utopia, animality and Plato's *Hūopolis*, in: J. Bastos da Silva (ed.), *The Epistemology of Utopia: Rhetoric, Theory, and Imagination*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 8-27.

Capitani, I. [2015], Il sogno in Platone, in: *Studi Classici e Orientali* 61, 399-416.

Catalin, A. [2010], The Homeric gates of horn and ivory, in: *Museum Helveticum* 67, 65-72.

Danzig, G. [2013], Plato's *Charmides* as a political act: apologetics and the promotion of ideology, in: *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 53, 486-519.

Dubois, P. [2006], The history of the impossible: ancient utopia, in: *Classical Philology* 101, 1-14.

Konstantakos, I.M. [2004], Trial by riddle: the testing of the counselor and the contest of kings in the legends of Amasis and Bias, in: *Classica et Medievalia* 55, 85-137.

Konstantakos, I.M. [2019], The most ancient "puzzle magazines": miscellanies of intellectual games from *Ahiqar* to Aristophanes, in: *Enthymema* 23, 303-347.

Kotwick, M.E. [2020], Allegorical interpretation in Homer: Penelope's dream and early Greek allegoresis, in: *American Journal of Philology* 141, 1-26.

- Lampert, C. [2010], *How Philosophy Became Socratic: a Study of Plato's Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic*, Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press.
- Rowe, C.J. [2017], The City of Pigs: a key passage in Plato's *Republic*, in: *Philosophie Antique* 17, 55-71.
- Tsouna, V. [2017], What is the subject of Plato's *Charmides*, in: Y.Z. Liebersohn, I. Ludlam, A. Edelheit (eds.), *For a Skeptical Peripatetic*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 34-63.
- Tuozzo, T.M. [2011], *Plato's Charmides: Positive Elenchus in a "Socratic" Dialogue*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Usher, M.D. [2020], *Plato's Pigs and Other Ruminations: Ancient Guides to Living with Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Vegetti, M. [2013], *Beltista eiper dynata*. The status of utopia in the *Republic*, in: M. Vegetti, F. Ferrari, T. Lynch (eds.), *The Painter of Constitutions: Selected Essays on Plato's Republic*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 105-122.
- Vieira, F. [2010], The concept of utopia, in: G. Clayes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 3-27.

## Keywords

epistemocracy; *eudaimonìa*; dream; Critias

## Abstract

The present paper deals with the rather convoluted relationship between happiness and knowledge in the *Charmides*. The main argument rests on an analysis of the three utopian narratives of the dialogue and the respective societies constructed by them: *a*) the entropic City of self-sufficient Clones (161e-162a); *b*) the *Sophonòpolis* that boasts epistemocracy, or the rule of the experts, as its only governing principle (171d); and *c*) the *Sophonòpolis Reloaded*, a dreamland in which it is impossible for one to make any mistake whatsoever (173a-d). The net result of these narratives is

## THE CURIOUS CASE OF KNOWLEDGE AND HAPPINESS

that, in the textual universe of the *Charmides*, there is no guarantee that a life free from error is actually the royal road to happiness. In other words, the question «Are the ἐπιστημόνως ζῶντες εὐδαίμονες (173e)?» cannot be unequivocally answered in the affirmative.

Nikos G. Charalabopoulos  
Philology Faculty, University of Patras (GREECE)  
ncharalabopoulos@upatras.gr