

from them, he invites the reader to debate them. This goes a long way toward making *Conflict, War and Revolution* a book you can argue with—in the best possible way.

If, then, you are like me, in that you have a class on war in the history of political thought to design, or an edited book on a related topic to curate, this is the book for you. A triumph on its own terms, *Conflict, War and Revolution* is a very smart and engaging book that takes a vast topic and somehow makes it accessible without any dumbing down involved.

—Cian O’Driscoll

*Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia*



Voula Tsouna: *Plato’s “Charmides”: An Interpretive Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 320.)

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There is much to commend in Voula Tsouna’s new book, *Plato’s “Charmides”*: *An Interpretive Commentary*. It is attentive to the dialogue’s historical context and dramatic situation; it is keenly aware of the interpretive controversies in the secondary literature; it illuminates useful connections between the *Charmides* and other Platonic dialogues; it provides in an appendix a complete translation of the *Charmides*. Such features make it a useful addition both for scholars who are working on the dialogue and for those who seek an introduction to scholarship on it.

It is surprising that Plato’s *Charmides* remains an underappreciated dialogue. It is the only dialogue to pursue the nature of a critically important virtue—*sōphrosunē* (translated variously as temperance, moderation, sound-mindedness, and discipline). More than any other dialogue, it explicitly raises the question: What is self-knowledge and why is it good to seek it? Socrates discusses this question with Critias and his young cousin Charmides, two members of the Thirty Tyrants whose violent deeds would be known to anyone in Plato’s audience. Why would Plato choose these figures to dramatize this investigation with Socrates? What attitude should we take towards the conversation between Socrates and these two figures? How do the political careers of Critias and Charmides inform the shape of the investigation and the conclusions readers should draw from it? Two opposing views can be found in the only full-length studies of the last twenty years: Tom Tuozzo’s *Plato’s “Charmides”* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and David Levine’s *Profound Ignorance* (Lexington Books, 2016).

While Tuozzo and Levine agree that the views of Socrates and Critias must be distinguished (a view with which Tsouna also rightly agrees), Tuozzo defends Critias against what he sees as trumped-up charges coming from a biased Xenophon, while Levine argues that the entire conversation and definitions of *sōphrosunē* are illustrative of Critias's failure to philosophize, a failure that is rooted in his tyrannical aspirations.

Tsouna's new book is organized around two important claims. First, "Plato's portraits of Critias and Charmides are far more nuanced than they have been taken to be" (10) not only by Tuozzo and Levine, but by prior commentators as well. She suggests that Plato depicts them neither as villains nor as flawless, but rather as "surrounded by ambiguity" (10). She claims that "[no] clear picture emerges regarding their emotional and ethical texture, their dedication to philosophy, or the extent to which they are really willing to submit to Socrates' scrutiny and conduct a philosophical investigation jointly with him" (10).

Tsouna thus seems to be staking out a middle position between rival interpretations (17–22) and suggests that both camps of interpretation can be grounded in this complex dialogue, but not in the text as a whole (she also includes her own interpretation in this critique). This leads to the second claim that organizes her book: the ambiguity surrounding Critias and Charmides also extends to the portrayal of Socrates and Socratic philosophy (14–15), and she claims that the "dialectical strategy of the *Charmides* crucially consists in cultivating alternative viewpoints and in inviting the reader to consider competing interpretive options" (23). Still, she claims that the "core" of her interpretation is a distinction between two different conceptions of *sōphrosunē* put forward by Critias and Socrates. The Socratic conception is akin to knowledge of the limits of human wisdom (see *Apology* 23d–e). The Critian conception—"epistēmē (science) of every other epistēmē and of itself" (23)—points to a "technocratic ideal of political governance" (27) and has "little to do with one's awareness of the limitations of human wisdom" (25). But consistent with her two organizing claims, Tsouna suggests that the elenchus of the dialogue demonstrates not only that Critian self-knowledge is deeply problematic (46), but also that Socratic method is shown to have limitations as well (35–36). In the *Charmides*, Plato distances himself from Socrates (51, 53).

The body of the book is a sustained, methodical, well-reasoned defense of these claims, excellently structured, and admirably rigorous in its analysis of arguments in the dialogue. There is much to discuss, but I must limit myself to Tsouna's criticisms of Critian self-knowledge. Her argument is rooted in the most technical part of the dialogue, the argument from relatives (165c–166e), an argument she calls "a breakthrough for Plato" (197). In this argument, Socrates questions Critias about his reflexive notion of "science of science." Because of its reflexivity, the notion of a "science of science" is shown to be empty of any meaningful content. Socrates suggests that if indeed *sōphrosunē* is a knowledge, then it is a knowledge of something, a view that is associated

with the *technē* model of virtue. Critias denies Socrates's suggestion, and this move has provoked "an almost universal consensus . . . that the criticisms exercised by Critias against Socrates' use of the *technē* model are successful and reveal Plato's readiness to shake off the spell of Socrates" (174). Against this almost unanimous view, Tsouna sides more closely with commentators who suggest that this Critian vision of self-knowledge is different from (even incompatible with) Socrates's view (186). She argues persuasively that Critian reflexivity is shown to be incoherent and that even Socratic self-knowledge must have content and not be reflexive in the Critian sense (225). The Critian notion of self-knowledge is thus deeply problematic.

As a consequence of this argument, neither Critias nor Socrates is able to demonstrate that *sōphrosunē* benefits us. Because he is confined by his own reflexivity, the person with *sōphrosunē* will not be able to communicate his knowledge to anyone but another person with *sōphrosunē* (274–80). On Critias's conception of knowledge, dialogue between human beings becomes impossible and the society that is built upon this knowledge turns out to be an incoherent and illusory dystopia (260–62).

Tsouna's analysis here is persuasive and grasps rightly the critique aimed at Critian reflexivity. But I would suggest that she underestimates the importance of Socrates's suggestion of a lesser benefit of *sōphrosunē* (254), which is put forward to highlight the Socratic alternative to the Critian notion. The Socratic recognition of epistemic limitations is not the right aspiration from the point of view of the tyrannical Critias, which Tsouna correctly acknowledges. It is too small and does not befit the "great man" that Critias takes himself to be, a man with knowledge for ruling. Tsouna's case is strong here, and her case is strongest when she describes the dangerous flaws in her characters.

In my view, her argument is weakest when she attempts to defend Critias and Charmides. Tsouna remains committed to the ambiguous nature of Critias and agnostic about Charmides's motivations (291), an agnosticism that I feel is unwarranted by the ominous ending of the dialogue, in which Critias and Charmides conspire to use force against Socrates to keep him on as Charmides's teacher. Tsouna rightly claims (against Tuozzo) that the ending is not merely playful, as it calls to mind the future violence of Critias and Charmides. But on her account, given the ambiguity of the characters, this ending seems to come from nowhere, rather than serve as a fitting conclusion that finally exposes the two characters and what they cared about the whole time in the conversation. The challenge for the reader, when faced with the dialogue's ambiguities, is to see in the whole text *where this ending comes from*. Tsouna's critique of Critian reflexivity is a significant step in tracing the arc of the dialogue. But I would offer the next step as a crucial one: we are—as much as is possible—to see the connection between the critique of Critian reflexivity and the dialogue as a whole, a task that is perhaps misguided if Tsouna is right about the role that ambiguity plays in the dialogue.

I do not wish to downplay the existence of ambiguity in the dialogue, and I agree that an interpretation of the dialogue as a whole is quite elusive. Nonetheless, I would argue that the parts of the dialogue form a coherent unity around the tension between the aspirations of Critias/Charmides (for power and glory) and Socrates (for wisdom). In paying attention to these aspirations, the reader is provoked to draw the connection between Critias's commitment to reflexivity and his political career. The ending therefore prompts us to ask: What is the relationship between tyranny and self-knowledge as Critias understands it? What is the relationship between philosophy and self-knowledge as Socrates understands it? How might Socratic philosophy and self-knowledge answer to Critias's aspiration for reflexivity and power? Is there anything in the dialogue that can help us prevent the political tragedy that comes after the drama of the dialogue ends? In provoking these questions, I would suggest that Plato makes an unambiguous criticism of Critias and Charmides and displays for us and *defends* the Socratic alternative (both in Socrates's speech and deed), an alternative that still remains viable for those witnessing the conversation, and that perhaps can save us from tyranny—indeed, perhaps *this* is the benefit of Socratic self-knowledge.

—Alan Pichanick

*Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, USA*



Gary M. Kelly: *The Human Condition in Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages."* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2021. Pp. xviii, 242.)

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Robert Solomon, in *Continental Philosophy since 1750*, wrote that Jean-Jacques Rousseau discovered the self in its contemporary sense. But what is this self that Rousseau discovered? Is it the radical contract cosigner of the *Social Contract*, the corrupted civil man of the *Second Discourse*, or the adult Émile (let alone Julie or Sophie)? Is it some other self that roams contemporary Rousseau scholarship like Christopher Kelly's author in *Rousseau as Author*, Jason Neidleman's truth seeker in *Rousseau's Ethics of Truth*, or Frederick Neuhausser's *amour-propre* manager in *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love*? Is the self some combination of all of these possible selves, and if so, how? Into this milieu, Gary M. Kelly's *The Human Condition in Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages"* offers the audial self, a worthy addition to a motley crew.

The activity of speech defines the audial self: speaking, listening, hearing. This activity, Kelly argues, "connects sound to sense and soul," meaning, if