It is out of the question, Critias assures Socrates, that someone should act temperately, that is, act with self-control, and yet not know of himself that that’s what he is doing, not, in other words, be aware of himself as someone acting temperately or being temperate. Critias’ assurance comes as a response to a concern that Socrates has just expressed. Socrates is worried that the account given by Critias of σωφροσύνη as a moral virtue which consists in doing what is right – ἵτων ἀγαθῶν πρᾶξις – has this consequence, perhaps unintended, but nonetheless distressing. It allows for someone behaving temperately – doing what’s right – without being aware that that’s what he’s doing; someone might, Socrates says, act temperately and be temperate – “πράξει μὲν σωφρόνως καὶ σωφρονεῖ” – and yet be ignorant about himself that he’s temperate – ἀγνοεῖ δ’ ἐαυτὸν ὦτί σωφρονεῖ.”¹ “No way,” Critias responds. “If that were to follow from the account I’ve offered, I would give up the account.”

What makes Critias so certain that a proper account of σωφροσύνη rules out the possibility of acting temperately while not knowing that one is doing so? If we had only this piece of dialogue, we might imagine that self-awareness is a requirement of temperance being a virtue. It’s not sufficient for attributing a virtue to an agent that the agent perform the act and that it be of a certain sort; as Aristotle will make explicit in the
Nicomachean Ethics, (2.4 1105a) an agent who can be said to act virtuously must know what she’s doing and be doing it intentionally.

It’s reasonable to think that Plato would agree with such a view, and reasonable to suppose that he may wish to insinuate it as a subtext of Critias’ remark. But here an agent knowing what she’s doing is not so much a instance of what we think of as self-awareness; it’s rather an instance of acting in full awareness, of knowing what one is doing rather than being aware of oneself as doing it. In any case, as the dialogue continues, it becomes clear that this is not what Critias has in mind. For Critias’ attention, as we immediately discover, is focused not on virtue in general, but specifically on ἰσότρονος. “I would sooner say I was wrong,” he continues, “than at any time admit that someone ignorant of himself might be acting temperately: ἂν ἀγνώστα αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπων ἰσότρονος. That’s virtually, Critias goes on to say, the very thing temperance is, τὸ γιγνώσκειν ἑαυτὸν: self-knowledge. Think of what’s inscribed at Delphi: γνῶθι σαυτόν –know yourself – that’s ἰσότρονος.”

It’s on the basis of this specific and essential feature of this specific virtue that Socrates concludes that ἰσότρονος, on Critias’ understanding, involves knowing something. In a moment we’ll see what Socrates does with that fact; but first note the change in the understanding of self-knowledge that has occurred in this small span of argument. What Critias initially finds implausible at 164C is that someone should act temperately without self-knowledge in a very specific sense: she does not know of herself that she is acting temperately. But what he insists on by 164D is the impossibility of someone being temperate without self-knowledge in a less qualified sense: she lacks knowledge of herself tout court.
This change may be merely stylistic, or it may at most signal the difference between self-knowledge considered episodically and self-knowledge considered more generally. On the one hand, I may be said to know myself when I know that at this moment I’m acting out a fear of exposure, or am about to be overcome by a moment of painful self-consciousness; on the other, I may be said to know myself because I have a broad and general sense of my likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, erotic and culinary tastes, propensities for one type of behavior over another, and so on. This is not a negligible difference, but we can easily imagine how to translate from one form of self-knowledge to the other.

It is a difference, however, that Critias enforces by the end of the paragraph at 165B. Forget everything that’s gone before; I want to abandon all the previous argument and concentrate on a single simple assertion. Here’s what’s true: σωφροσύνη is someone knowing himself: τὸ γιγνώσκειν αὐτὸν ἑαυτόν.” And that enforcement might lead us to think that the difference is more than we had at first imagined. It’s one thing to know myself, I, who am sophron, and another to know myself to be sophron, just as it is one thing to know the man who was born in Jerusalem and another to know him as the man who was born in Jerusalem. In different lights one or the other of these instances of knowledge may seem to entail more than its fellow. But it’s clear that they are different.

Now regard the argument’s next move starting at 165C. If, Socrates says, σωφροσύνη is in fact an instance of knowing something, it must involve some kind of skill or understanding, some ἐπιστήμη, and it must be the skillful understanding of

What here emerges under the recondite description “the self” is a fairly robust object of knowledge, indeed the object of a dispositional understanding of the sort enjoyed by scientists, that is to say, the object of an ἐπιστήμη. As medicine is a science of health – ἐπιστήμη ὑγίεινοῦ – so σωφροσύνη is a science of the self – ἐπιστήμη ἐαυτοῦ.

(165D) And that knowledge and its object have emerged from the rather more innocuous phenomenon of an agent being aware that what she’s up to involves acting with moderation or self-control, that is, being aware of what she’s doing as an act of temperance. The thought that temperance involves an awareness of what it is that I’m about has segued into a definition of σωφροσύνη as a science or understanding of the self: an ἐπιστήμη ἐαυτοῦ.

Perhaps we should be nervous about this move in the argument, a move that we now see involves a genuine change. What could warrant the move from knowing what I’m doing to a more robust knowledge of the self tout court? Such a move would seem at least to result in a different understanding of the sense of σωφροσύνη in the one case from that in the other. Perhaps, however, we would feel less uneasy if we thought that the inference from a reflexive awareness of oneself as doing something to an awareness of the self as a substantive entity were a reasonable candidate for the genesis of our notion of self. Such a thought would provide at least an inferential link between the two seductively different senses of self-knowledge. And if it were true, it should recommend to us that we ought at least be charitable in our assessment of what Plato is about.
In fact, a rather similar theory of the origin of our concept of self is found in an early essay of Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, a theory elaborated in his *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre argues that it is out of moments of self-consciousness, moments when we become aware of our conscious states of subjectivity as objects, that we construct the ego as a transcendent object. This theory is not original with Sartre, but has roots at least as far back as Husserl and Brentano, and many philosophers have often found quite respectable this segue from episodic self-awareness to a robust theory of what Sartre calls a *transcendent ego*. By ‘transcendent’ Sartre means something different from what many of us in a different lexical tradition might understand. He means by it ‘something that is in the world as an object of our experience.’ What that means is that for Sartre the I is not figured as the *transcendental* ego, that is, not as a self that lies *behind experience*. Sartre attributes the notion of a self that lies behind experience to a false Husserlian reading of Kant. Instead, Sartre understands the self as *transcendent*, that is, an object of our experience, an analogue of virtual subjectivity. Such a self is revealed in and constructed out of moments of self-conscious reflection, moments like what David Velleman, speaking from a different discursive tradition, calls *presentations in reflexive guise*.³

So perhaps there is less cause to be nervous than we thought; perhaps Critias’ move from an episodic awareness of the self *secundum quid* to a robust consciousness of the self *simpliciter* constitutes what is at least a reasonable candidate for a theory of how we acquire the concept of the self, and therefore represents at least a thread of continuity in our understanding of the virtue of self-knowledge. But let’s put this question aside and follow the argument of the *Charmides* somewhat further.
Socrates proceeds to ask Critias a series of questions based on this definition of ςωφροσύνη as 'an understanding of the self' – ἐπιστήμη ἑαυτοῦ. The first of these questions is designed to ask this of Critias: if ςωφροσύνη is a kind of skilled understanding, an ἐπιστήμη, what is its ἐργον? That is, what is it that this skilled understanding is capable of producing, as medicine is capable of producing health, or as the skill of carpentry, say – knowing how to build something – can produce a house, which is therefore its ἐργον? That’s not a good question, says Critias; for it supposes that all skills are alike; it supposes, in other words, that all involve the capacity for production. But that’s not true; what, for example, does geometry produce? This is a strong response, which Socrates recognizes as such, but for which he has a reply. Even geometry is of or about something that is distinct from itself; so in this way, Socrates asks Critias, what is it that the knowledge or understanding that you say ςωφροσύνη is, is a knowledge or understanding of? what is it about?

This is, it seems to me, a critical moment in the dialogue. In asking Critias to specify what the knowledge that ςωφροσύνη has been determined to be is a knowledge of, Socrates directs our attention to a feature of the cognitive that been present in the dialogue until now, but unmarked. For until this point, the dialogue has attended to what we might term formal features of ςωφροσύνη and the psychic conditions offered by way of its analysis. What Socrates' question highlights is the ubiquitous but unmentioned fact of the intentionality of these states; it highlights the fact that a feature of ςωφροσύνη consistently alluded to concerns whether it constitutes, for example, a knowledge of the good. Particularly since the dialogue’s turn to a discussion of the cognitive dimension of
swfrosu/nh, this feature is a critical feature that has remained, so to speak, in the dialogue’s unconscious, masked by an attention to formal features of the virtue. Socrates’ question brings into the open this question of intentionality.

Note that this question is a recognizable Socratic question. It is a question that, to be sure, exposes the complexity of our notions of understanding; but more importantly it is a question that invokes, as I’ve suggested, the objective intentionality that understanding shares with other concepts. By ‘objective intentionality’ I mean to designate this characteristic of things insofar they are directed toward an object that they are of or are about. ⁴

The objectively intentional in this sense is a frequent topos in Plato. Think of the conversations early in the Gorgias about rhetoric, conversations in which Socrates insists that Gorgias be able to specify what rhetorical discourse is about. Or recall the conversation in the Symposium (at 199E) between Socrates and Agathon about that feature of eros revealed in the fact that eros is always τίνος – of something. These conversations concern the objective intentionality of rhetoric and love; rhetoric and love are both – each in its way – directed toward an object, which object they are of or about. The intentionality that I mean to draw attention to is therefore not according to Plato (nor for that matter was it according to Brentano) confined to the cognitive alone; it’s a feature of many affective as well as cognitive states, and it’s a feature of practices and modes of discourse like rhetoric that are cognitively based.

So at this moment in the dialogue, Socrates asks Critias: given the objective intentionality of ἐπιστήμη, if you’re right that swfrosu/nh is an ἐπιστήμη, what is it an ἐπιστήμη of? What is it about? What is its object? Even if it’s correct that not every
instance of scientific understanding is productive, so that there may be no answer to the
questions what is it that σωφροσύνη produces, there should at least be an answer to the
question, what is σωφροσύνη an understanding of? Surely, given the argument that has
just preceded this question, Critias should have an answer ready to hand. For as we
have just learned, in so far as σωφροσύνη can be thought to be a kind of understanding,
it is an understanding of the self.

Indeed, why didn’t Critias offer this response in answer to Socrates’ earlier
inquiry into the ἔργον of σωφροσύνη? Why didn’t he reply that this is what σωφροσύνη
produces: a robust but appropriate self. Think analogously of Hume’s remarks at the
beginning of book 2 of the Treatise on the power of pride to cultivate that very self
whose fugitive nature was the source of such distress at the end of book 1. Critias
could have said something like that instead of invoking geometry and like arts.

In any case, when Socrates now asks, what is this understanding an
understanding of, Critias should repeat his description of but a moment ago. Socrates
had asked: you say that this is an ἐπιστήμη and τίνος – of something? That’s right,
Critias had replied: ἐκείνου γε – of the self. Critias could simply repeat this account of
what σωφροσύνη is about; it is about the self: ἐκείνου γε. But look at his actual response
at 166C. Once again, Critias says, you’re imagining that σωφροσύνη is like all the other
sciences. But it’s different from them; all the other sciences are of some other object
and not of themselves, whereas this science alone is both of other sciences and is itself
also of itself – καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκείνης.

It may take us a moment to realize what’s odd about Critias’ extended reply, but
an attentive Greek audience may have found it more obvious, because they could
perhaps more readily hear the shift from \( \text{\textepsilon\textpi\textsigma\texttau\texttau\textnu\textmetro\texttau\textomega\textupsilon} \) to \( \text{\textepsilon\textpi\textsigma\texttau\texttau\textnu\textmetro\texttau\texteta\textomicron\textomicron\textnu} \) – from Abromowitz’s understanding that is an understanding of \textit{himself} (like his love of himself or his criticism of himself) to his understanding that is an understanding of \textit{itself}, (like his love of love, or his fear of fear (which some of you are old enough to recall is the only fear he needs to have)). These modes of understanding are, as our text reveals, distinguished in Greek, whereas both are standardly represented by the English \textit{self-understanding}. But once we hear the distinction, we can hear what is dicey about Critias’ reasoning. Self-love does not love itself, nor need self-criticism criticize itself, nor self-abuse abuse itself; why then should we imagine that self-understanding must understand itself?

Perhaps the segue can be made more innocuous by seeing it merely as a version (or first cousin) of what is termed (perhaps somewhat oddly) \textit{Pauline predication}: just as ‘charity is patient’ means that those who are charitable are patient, so ‘self-love loves itself’ may mean merely that the self-lover loves himself. And just so, ‘self-knowing knows itself’ signifies merely that the self-knower knows himself.\textsuperscript{5} The reflexivity of the subject – “Abromowitz loves \textit{himself}” – is replaced by a reflexivity of the predicate’s nominalization – “Abromowitz’s love loves \textit{itself}” and the latter can therefore be parsed in terms of the former.

But if innocuous, the segue remains nonetheless arresting. Perhaps we would do well to understand this zany modulation as something like a corrective response to the modulation we noted earlier, the shift that led from the self of reflexivity, as in \textit{himself}, to the reified self, as in \textit{his self}, that is, the self of Abromowitz. Now at just the moment when Critias might invoke this reified self as the object of the understanding that
governs a temperate life, we witness the return of the repressed reflexive, reflexivity in its pure form: like love loving itself, so does self-knowledge know itself. And when we look ahead, we soon see that this modulation is not casual. For after an extended discussion of how we are to understand reflexivity, a discussion to which we'll return in a moment, Critias reassures Socrates that this is indeed what they're looking for. He does this by invoking an ambiguity that is the converse of the one we've just discussed: someone, he says, possessing a knowledge that knows itself will himself \( (\alpha \upsilon \tau\omicron \delta \lambda) \) be like the knowledge he possesses.\(^6\) Just as someone who has speed is speedy, or someone who has beauty beautiful, or someone who has knowledge knowing, so someone who has self-knowledge will be self-knowing. This is a witty inference, though we can see that it requires that the self of self-knowledge be understood both attributively and referentially, both to whatever is the reflexive object of knowledge, and to that very self that one is said to know. But put aside the question of whether the inference is a valid one; allow that it might be one of the considerable body of illicit inferences that Plato uses so effectively in the course of his philosophical dramas. Here what I want to draw attention to is the way in which it is used to stage the re-emergence of the reflexive. That re-emergence, I suggest, is meant to generate in us once again the thought that talk of the self has its home in reflexive constructions. And if the inference is troublesome, it may be because of the tension between such reflexivity and the intentionality that Socrates has exposed.

So we've witnessed several shifts in the course of Critias' argument at the center of the *Charmides*. One shift takes us from the awareness that we have of ourselves in the course of a specific activity or mode of activity to a more general sense of reflexive
self-awareness, a second takes us from that more general sense to a concept of the self as a reified entity, and a third, as I’ve suggested, summons us, via the inference (whether licit or not) from one sense of self-understanding to another, back again to the reflexive. I’ve suggested that these latter two moves from the reflexive to self and back serve to enforce the connection between the self of reflexivity and the reified self as well as the priority of the former to the latter. At the same time, the course of these shifts has led us to a reminder of the intentionality of these modes of inference, a reminder that if self-understanding is a form of understanding, the question of its intentional object is always a live question.

Now I want to look more closely at the dialogues’ discussion about reflexivity, because I think it will illumine the moves we’ve followed, the move from self-knowledge secundum quid to self-knowledge in general, and from there to the “reified self,” the self itself as it were. To do this, we’ll need to look at the discussion between the two moves I’ve noted, and I’ll ask us to take another excursion, this time into thinking about a question whose striking absence from the Charmides might surprise us, the question of self-control.

3

Between the passages that I’ve suggested mark the force of the reflexive in Plato’s imagination, witnessed by its initial presence and subsequent re-emergence, Socrates raises a series of familiar paradoxes that attend the notion of reflexivity. Beginning at 167C, he suggests several reasons that might lead us to think that the very notion of a knowledge that is of itself and of other instances of knowledge is mightily strange (ἀτοπος). He begins by listing a series of activities objectively intentional (in the
sense I indicated earlier) where it seems obvious that the activity is directed ‘outward’
toward its appropriate and alien object, and not ‘inward’ toward itself or other activities
like it. These activities, in other words, are activities in which intentionality makes
awkward any thought of the activity being reflexive. Sight, hearing and perception in
general, desire, purpose, fear, love: these are all directed toward their appropriate
objects and not toward themselves. Indeed, if hearing were to hear itself, it would have
to have a sound, and seeing similarly would have to have a color. But how weird is
that? And what purpose, given our sense of what hearing and sight are good for, would
such hearing and sight serve?

What we need, Socrates then urges, is an adequate explanation of the
phenomenon of reflexivity in light of the requirements of intentionality; how is it possible
that faculties might apply to themselves, and which of them might, and what would the
good of them be? And for this, he says, we’re in need of μεγάλου τινος ἀνδρός, some
great man, someone who could explain how seeing could be of seeing without making
itself, as that which it sees, colored, or hearing of hearing without making itself a sound.

The need for a μεγάλου ἀνδρός who could thus reconcile for us intentionality and
reflexivity may not be as pressing as the need remarked on at Phaedo 78A for a
charmer who can exorcise the fear of death. But we may want to recall that in that
dialogue death is repeatedly figured as a disintegration and a consequent loss of the
very self that is attributed to Phaedo in the opening words of the dialogue: αὐτός, ὦ
Φαίδων, you yourself, Phaedo, were you there with Socrates that day? And if we recall
in another context altogether how close the issue of reflexivity is to the aptly named
question of self-predication – How could the large be large without being one of the large things? – we can see why the question is a pressing one.

But Socrates, in response to Critias’ conceptual yawns, avoids the issue, in order that he might lead the conversation in another direction. And if Socrates can avoid the issue, so can we, at least for the moment. Instead I want to attend to a slightly different question, one that might have occurred to us earlier: why is this dialogue, ostensibly about ἔσωφροσύνη, concerned with the question of ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης at all? It’s a question that I want to follow out in a direction that will at first not seem obviously connected to what we have up until now been talking about.

4

At the beginning of this discussion I remarked upon Critias’ supposition that self-knowledge is a necessary component of ἔσωφροσύνη. Critias is not alone in that supposition; recall the facility with which ἔσωφροσύνη is identified (at 131B and then again at 133C) with self-knowledge in the Alcibiades. But we might still wonder why this should be so, and why our dialogue should be so centrally concerned with issues of cognition. Think how the discussion of ἐπιστήμη may mask the fact that ἔσωφροσύνη is elsewhere identified as a virtue of self-control or self-mastery, or as a virtue of moderation in the enjoyment of pleasure. The virtue of ἔσωφροσύνη, in other words, is not obviously, and perhaps only meditately, an issue of self-knowledge. It concerns, as we know from the conversation in the Republic, as well as from Aristotle’s extended discussion of the virtue, a person’s ability to act so as to be in control of herself or master of herself, particularly in her relation to pleasure. This fact is made explicit in Socrates’ description of ἔσωφροσύνη in the Republic as the control – ἐγκράτεια – of
certain pleasures and desires – and explicitly in the next line as the condition someone is in when in control of himself – κρείττω δὴ σὺντοῦ.⁷

That description is an interesting one for several reasons. One is that it in describing the virtue of σωφροσύνη as the condition of an agent being in control of himself, it reflects, despite the shift from the operative activity of knowledge to that of control, the central place in our dialogue’s argument of reflexivity. But the description will also be remarkable to anyone who has read Aristotle, for whom the distinction between ἐγκράτεια and σωφροσύνη is of considerable moment, and not merely as a distinction between two different if related virtues, but as a governing principle of distinct modalities of self-control, and indeed of virtue in general. Aristotle’s analysis of moral weakness becomes clear only when we recognize the complexity of his contrasts between, on the one hand, ἐγκράτεια and ἀκράτεια – or ἀκρασία as we more normally call it – and, on the other, between ἀκολασία and σωφροσύνη. The one is a contrast between having and losing control, the other a more radical contrast between licentiousness and the ease of infixed virtue, virtue that allows us serenely to pass by rather than to control or subdue temptation. Control and lack of control represent a different modality, a different dimension in the economy of moral life, from that of licentiousness and moral mastery. Recognizing the difference between these contrasts and the structure of thinking about moral sentiment and action that these differences represent for Aristotle should make clear to us the importance of properly understanding the notions of self-control or self-mastery. The point has been nicely put by Michael McGee, who writes as follows:
The vacillation we experience between control and lack of control, enkrateia and akrasia, reflects an instability in our emotional life, in our capacity to respond, so that, to quote T. S. Eliot, 'Between the emotion and the response/Falls the shadow'. Sophrosune, traditionally translated into English as ‘temperance’, reflects, by contrast, a flourishing sensibility the directions of whose attention dominate consciousness, so that there is no longer any inner conflict with the contrary inclinations that the enkratic individual defeats, and the akratic succumbs to.\(^8\)

There’s a considerable temptation to see this contrast, the contrast between ἐγκράτεια and σωφροσύνη, as specific to Aristotle. It is indeed tempting to see Plato and Aristotle as distinguished from one another precisely in respect to this contrast: Plato, we might think, particularly on the basis of the description of σωφροσύνη at Republic 430E and following, elides the distinction, identifying ἐγκράτεια and σωφροσύνη, whereas Aristotle is the first to introduce the distinction between them, a distinction that becomes of considerable import in his moral thought.

This temptation is understandable; it’s part of a view according to which Plato thinks of desires and passions as intrinsically in need of containment and control. Understandable I say, but in the final analysis incorrect. It may be this very feature of the description of σωφροσύνη in the Republic, a description which marks it as a form of ἐγκράτεια, that makes it γελοῖον – absurd, as Socrates goes on to call the account at the end of Republic 430E. And it may be this feature that explains his notable qualifications in the course of that discussion. Socrates, introducing the account at 430E, hedges his account with the words: “seen at least from here” – ὡς γε ἐντεῦθεν
and more notably some lines later at 432B, he qualifies the claim that they have discovered the virtue of σωφροσύνη as true “at least in relation to these views – ως γε ούτωσι δόξαι.

Above all it should be of interest to us that in our Charmides the concept of ἐγκράτεια plays no role at all. Here’s why: insofar as we understand σωφροσύνη as enkratic self control we figure it as a demotic and therefore lesser virtue; a virtue undoubtedly, but second place red ribbon rather than first place blue. The form of σωφροσύνη that interests Plato and Aristotle alike as an ideal virtue is the virtue that transcends this mode of strong-willed containment and is linked to the wisdom by which the sophron is freed from the need for restraint. This is the theme in many so-called wisdom traditions, but I think that we all know the distinction from very homely contexts. Think of the difference between the kind of ‘journeyman’ skill by which an artisan achieves control and mastery as the result of intense effort, and the ease with which the master craftsman works, or think of the difference between the equestrian skill of a novice who successfully controls the horse, but with effort and struggle, and the apparent effortlessness of the experienced rider. It doesn’t even look like control, but to hold the reins that lightly is a consummate achievement.

With this understanding of the virtue of σωφροσύνη in mind, it will be possible for us to understand the treatment of Simonides’ poem in the Protagoras (339B-C). The poem, you will recall, at one moment tells us that it is hard to become good and at the next moment denies that it is hard to be good: ἀνδρ’ ἀγαθὸν ... γενέσθαι χαλέπόν, we read at 339B1 and at 339C5 we read that Pittacus was “out of tune” when he said: χαλέπον ... ἔσθλον ἐμμεναι. The contrast that saves the coherence of Simonides’ poem
is not, as Socrates immediately makes clear, that between the ἀγαθὸν of the first line and the ἐθιλὸν of the second; it’s rather between the γενεσθαῖ of the first line and the ἐμμενεῖ, that is, the εἶναι, of the second. The poem is seen, in other words, as contrasting the struggle involved in the cultivation within oneself of virtue with the effortlessness that virtue allows in the activity of the sophron who has so cultivated it.

When such restraintless wisdom rules the city, it becomes the political virtue of σωφροσύνη, which, it is important to recall, stands in contrast to a tyranny’s forceful control of its citizenry. And when later in the Republic the virtuous person is described, it is as someone in harmony with himself, one rather than many, at peace with himself. In such a person what could be the need for the restrained and bonded self-control of ἐγκράτεια? Think of reading the Laches and asking the same question with regard to ἀνδρεία – courage; what need would a fully virtuous person have of the καρτερία – the endurance, first offered as an account of courage?

This distinction that I’ve here sketched between the σωφρον as a person of effortless and harmonious mastery and the ἐγκρατίς as a person of strong will but conflicted control is not always easy to keep in sight; the difficulty is reflected in the history of our term ‘temperance.’ Latin temperantia, from which French and English temperance derive, was used by Cicero to render σωφροσύνη, and it is used by most medieval philosophical writers, as well as in the Latin version of the Nicomachean Ethics. But temperantia is not found in Jerome’s Vulgate, so that when we find ‘temperance’ in Tindale and later English biblical translators, it renders the Latin equivalent of ἐγκράτεια, that is continentia. So in many late biblical texts we find
temperance, where the Vulgate has castitas or continentia. In these contexts, then, temperance sometimes represents σωφροσύνη and sometimes ἐγκράτεια.

But the distinction is never lost sight of. Maimonides, for example, dedicates chapter 6 of the 8 chapters in the short introduction to his 12th century commentary on the section of the Mishnah called Fathers to the distinction between a person of virtue and a person whom he describes as conquering his inclinations; he’s interested in the fact that the philosophers privilege the former whereas the rabbis appear to privilege the latter. The distinction that exercises him here is clearly that between our two modes of self-mastery, σωφροσύνη and ἐγκράτεια, we might say between temperance and continence.

In an earlier piece, I set out to suggest that this understanding of σωφροσύνη as tranquil self mastery explains Charmides’ first account of σωφροσύνη as ἡσυχία τίς: a kind of quietness – that is, a mode of tranquil and harmonious self-direction in which the agent is not in conflict with herself. It is nonetheless a mode of self-control, but it is not so much a mode of the agent controlling herself as it is of her being herself in control of her actions. It’s important, however, to keep clear about the fact that it is a mode of control; that is to say, the σοφον knows what he’s doing. Keeping that fact in mind may help us to recognize how for Plato the self-presence and self-knowing which is required for virtuous agency need not involve the self-alienation of ἐκρατεία.

I’ve introduced what we might have expected to be a more central concern of the Charmides as some form of self-control, a self-control such as we find explicitly expressed in the account of σωφροσύνη in the Republic, not in order to undermine the
centrality in our dialogue of understanding – ἐπιστήμη – nor in particular of self-understanding – ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης. I’ve done so rather hoping to encourage us to think of the different sorts of things to which the language of the reflexive may be used to refer. In English, these differences are commonly found in nouns with the prefix self-. Some instances of self-x-ing may involve a subject x-ing herself: so self-love, self-criticism, self-abuse. Others need not: consider self-realization, self-righteousness, self-confidence. Yet others appear to involve reflexive action, but present such difficulties when thought of this way as to lead scholars to question whether such an understanding is appropriate: notable here is the phenomenon of self-deception.¹⁰ In Greek, there is less ambiguity. Expressions involving reflexive pronouns like ἐαυτοῦ are more standardly reflexive; those involving intensives like αὐτός are intensive.

But what I think may be of interest to us are expressions like ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης, expressions which appear to play a reflexive role but may in fact not. To understand this, I ask that we return to our earlier discussion of self-knowing and the knowing that knows itself. My suggestion is simple: if we interpret self-understanding on an analogy with self-control, what we want our account to achieve is a mode of self-understanding that is an analogue of self-control understood in contrast to rather than as represented by ἐκρατεία. Indeed, we could say that what we want is self-understanding that is the cognitive analogue not of self-control at all, but of self-presence.

With that self-understanding as the model of ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης, the paradoxes of 167C and following vanish. For on such a model self-control and self-understanding alike do not figure a relationship between one part that controls or knows and another
that is controlled or known, where the second is the *object* of the first. How we are to understand the nature of that relationship is the real issue of how to understand σωφροσύνη.

It is also, I want to suggest, the real issue for Plato and Aristotle alike of how to understand consciousness. This latter point is properly a discussion for another occasion, but I mention it here in order to explain the déjà vu we experience when, after reading the *Charmides*, we find ourselves one day reading Aristotle’s discussion of self-awareness in *De Anima* 3.2. There the same issues and the same problems about reflexivity occur in relation to seeing that one sees and hearing that one hears. But the context – as I’ve argued at some length elsewhere – makes clear that this is a question of how to explain the nature of consciousness, not of reflective self-consciousness; it’s the question that’s left at the end of Book 2 of the *De Anima*: what’s the difference between smelling and merely being affected by odors? Aristotle’s answer is that smelling is a kind of οἴσθησις. In smelling we are aware – and here we’re tempted to say *of* it, but Aristotle warns us that there is confusion on that path. Go instead with: we’re aware by virtue of doing it. And to understand that concept, of awareness not as a matter of a reflexive perceiving that one perceives, but as some unified mode of self-presence enjoyed by animals but not by television cameras, is to understand consciousness.

So my thought is this: the apparent reflexivity of the form that governs the discussion of our dialogue: ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης – knowledge of knowledge – functions like a number of locutions that Aristotle employs: perceiving that we perceive at *De Anima* 3.2, or perceiving that we perceive and thinking that we think at *Nicomachean*

This latter text is of particular interest, for Aristotle there interrogates thought itself precisely in terms of its intentionality, arguing much as our dialogue does, though for somewhat different reasons, that intentionality both represents a necessary feature of the cognitive and poses a difficulty for its proper understanding.

These locutions are wrongly understood if we read them on the model of a reflexive self-knowing; they are expressions designed to reveal the non-reflective self-presence that is an irreducible aspect of the cognitive, as indeed it is of consciousness 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 to the self as its own companion. We can think of all these cases – the understanding of our dialogue which is an “understanding of understanding,” the perceiving of De anima 3.2, which is a “perception of perceiving”, the divine thinking of Metaphysics 12.9, which is a “thinking of thinking” – as instances of what we might call a faux reflexive. In each case what is expressed looks like a standard reflexive but is not. We are inclined to think of these as instances of self-consciousness because of the syntax of Plato’s and Aristotle’s expressions. But we need to understand that here self-consciousness is not reflexive self-awareness, but simply the self-presence of all conscious experience.

Just as in Metaphysics 12 Aristotle continues to speak of thought as an object of thought and in De Anima 3.2 of perception as an object of perception, so here Critias gets to talk about ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστήμης, knowledge as known. But in none of these cases are we to understand reflective self-awareness – my vivid thought that I am now, as I had so long imagined, viewing the buoyant streets and vibrant byways of Halifax –
but the self-awareness that characterizes simple first-order consciousness – my knowing what I am thinking, or what I am seeing, or saying, or doing. And that’s how the dialogue circles back to the awareness of the *sophron* that we began with. For even when at the end of the dialogue Socrates expresses his confusion about the nature of *σωφροσύνη*, he’s able to assert their agreement that the *sophron* knows what he’s doing, that is, that he is, as Socrates describes him, someone who understands about that which he knows it and about that which he doesn’t know that he doesn’t know it. ἐπιστήμων οὖν τε οἶδεν ὅτι οἶδεν, καὶ οὖν μὴ οἶδεν ὅτι οὐκ οἶδεν. (175C) He knows what he’s up to; but since this is not self-consciousness, but self-aware action, intentionality is not blocked: he knows what he knows. That’s why in the dream of a world governed by *σωφροσύνη* (173C), the hope is able to become this: that knowing what we’re doing, we’ll be able to do things well and have a good life: ἐπιστήμων ἂν πράττοντες εὖ ἂν πράττοιμεν καὶ εὖδαιμονοίμεν. Note how the objective intentionality of *σωφροσύνη*, problematic throughout the dialogue, is here restored.

On this Plato and Aristotle are in agreement: in its nature cognition is 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, non-objective, 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 non-objective 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. It’s common to thinkers as central as Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, thinkers who in different ways and with different degrees of manifestness, express the view (to put it in Kanto-Hegelian terms) that the spontaneity of self-consciousness is a condition for the possibility of the receptivity of consciousness. What I’m suggesting is that that modern concern is present, mutatis mutandis, in our ancient authors.

It’s a virtue to know what I’m doing, to act consciously and with self-awareness. Gluttony and its attendant vices, like all their cohort, sneak up on me when I lose sight of myself and forget what I’m about, when I fail to notice what it is that I’m doing. So it’s a healthy *phronesis* that is aware of its actions, and we can therefore understand why εἰδοσυνή might be thought to be the virtue of self-awareness.

But nothing clouds awareness like what Virginia Woolf calls “the dominance of the letter ‘I’ and the aridity, which like a giant beech tree, it casts within its shade.”

We can easily imagine a reading that connects Charmides’ second account of εἰδοσυνή as modesty – αἰδόσις – with Woolf’s concern about the power of the I to eclipse our vision. But we may also imagine other modes of cleansing consciousness of self-opacity than the incandescence that Woolf imagines, that hot intensity of self-illumination by which artistic consciousness is enabled to turn out to and, with its fictional intentionality, illumine the world; such self-immolating intensity may be the peculiar calling of the writer. But some mode of abnegation is a virtue for all of us, some mode of the self’s relinquishment of itself by which the self-consciousness necessary for thoughtful action is kept from becoming the opacity of egotism and self-absorption. A figure of that self-erasure and self-accomplishment is the virtue of
σωφροσύνη 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 mindful and enlightened sage, σωφροσύνη 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.
NOTES

1. *Charmides* 164C

2. *Charmides* 164D-165A


4. I use the term ‘objective intentionality’ rather than simply ‘intentionality’ precisely because I mean to direct attention away from the formal features of an intentional state to what is true of it by virtue simply of it having an object, and thus to bring out the dependence of intentional states upon their intended objects. Descartes is the modern philosopher who perhaps most famously uses this notion of the *objective*, which he inherits from its highly developed medieval usage. In the preface to the *Meditations* he points out to the reader that the term *idea* is equivocal, for, as he puts it, it can be understood *materialiter*, in a material sense, for any act of the intellect, or *objective*, in an objective sense, for the thing which that act represents, that is, the thing that the idea is an idea of, a thing that may or may not, as he immediately points out, exist outside the intellect. Ideas are by their nature objective, that is, they’re of something. In the Third Meditation, this fact is critical to Descartes’ exploration of our understanding of God, and therefore critical to his account of our subjective experience of the world. See also G.E.M. Anscombe, “The Intentionality of Sensation - A Grammatical Feature” in *Analytic Philosophy Second Series*, edited by R.J. Butler (Blackwell, Oxford: 1965)

5. The term ‘Pauline Predication’ is usually associated with Gregory Vlastos, but is in fact the invention of Sandra Peterson Wallace; see Vlastos “The Unity of the Virtues” in *Platonic Studies*, p. 257 fn. 88
Temperance is a kind of order, I said, and the mastery of certain pleasures and desires, as people indicate when they use the phrase ‘being in control of oneself’.


I've argued for this view at some length in the article mentioned just above, “Metaphysics Λ 9: Divine Thought.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, Oxford

Charmides 160E