Problematizing Socrates' *Ad Hominem* in Plato's Charmides

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Abstract

This paper argues that in his pursuit of the meaning of sôphrosynê (sound-mindedness) in *Charmides*, Socrates deployed two abusive *ad hominem* in 161c and in 162b against the person of Charmides. This paper undertakes a hermeneutical study of Socratic *ad hominem* in *Charmides* and demonstrates that Socrates' deployment of *ad hominem* raises the problem of motive and justification, and is counterproductive.

Keywords: Socrates; Charmides; sound-mindedness; ad-hominem; definitions

Introduction

The pursuit of the meaning of sôphrosynê (sound-mindedness) has a long history among learned men of ancient Greece.[1] In *Charmides,* one of Plato's early Dialogues, this claim is buttressedby two of Charmides'[2] three definitions of the term, namely definitions 1 and 3. Charmides demonstrates an existing discussion of the topic by drawing his first definition from Greek folk sayings and the third from the saying of a wise person, who Socrates suspects is none other than Critias.[3] The two evidence

1. Edith Hamilton cited in Schmidt, 1998, claims that **sôphrosynê** is the most important virtue among the ancient Greeks.
2. Charmides is one of the interlocutors of the Dialogue after whom the book is entitled.
3. It is Critias, a former student of Socrates, a cousin and guardian of Charmides who instigates the dialogue between Charmides and Socrates. He is also present during the dialogue and takes over from Charmides in the second part of the dialogue.

portray sôphrosynê as an old topic of philosophical interest. It is, therefore, expected that anyone among the Greeks of Socrates' era, reputed to be distinguished in philosophy, should have a conception of the meaning of the term and be able to defend that. This, at least, is the expectation of Socrates. This expectation is not met wholly by Charmides whose definitions and Socrates' response are the subject of this paper. Despite being well-recommended by Critias as a youth of difference; one distinguished in beauty, philosophy, and poetry, Charmides fails to sustain any defense of any of his three definitions of sôphrosynê. Besides his inability to defend his positions, Charmides' definitions fail on a number of other grounds. The first of these grounds is on his resort to folk sayings as substitute for philosophical reflection. The second ground is the failure of his definitions to pass the test of consistency and therefore of universal applicability, an important component of any good definition. The third ground is located in the third definition whichis outrightly outlandish as it is opposed to common sense and simple observations of cultural and social practices.

An important component of the dialogue is Socrates' response to Charmides' definitions of sound-mindedness. Essentially, this paper is concerned with Socrates' deployment of *ad hominem* in his response to Charmides. Traditional philosophical practice that stretches back to Aristotle[4] considers all forms of logical fallacies as irrational and therefore irrelevant to arguments. In this case, Socrates' deployment of *ad hominem* against Charmides can be pointed out as a clear case of moment of irrationality, of incorrect reasoning. The *ad hominem* moment raises serious contradiction

4. Aristotle, "De Sophisticis Elenchis." *The Works of Aristotle Vol 1.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).

as Socrates is shown exhibiting lack of sound-mindedness in a discussion intended to teach sound-mindedness. Recent philosophical efforts present a counter argument that supports *ad hominem* as legitimate logical tool. Christopher Johnson links this legitimacy to epistemological virtue. This consists in recognizing the limitations of human rationality and augmenting it with appeal to character of individual to arrive at a conclusion. Accordingly, Johnson argues that:'knowing how and when to judge that an appeal to the *ad hominem* is useful and justifiable is itself an intellectual virtue that must be developed to accommodate our limited capacities.'[5] In this paper, I will investigate Socratic *ad hominem* in *Charmides*. In the face of competing, indeed contradicting ideas about *adhominem*, I will consider certain questions. The first of these relates to the whys of Socratic *ad hominem* against Charmides. The second relates to possibility of justifying Socratic *ad hominem.* The third is about the general implication of *ad hominem* as demonstrated in the text.

Socrates and the Quest for Meaning of Sôphrosynê

The *Charmides* is a book of philosophical encounters set in the wrestling school of Taureas in Athens. It is one of the books which Wolfsdorf[6] refers to asPlato's 'definitional dialogues' alongside' *Laches, Lysis, Euthyphro, Hippias Major, Meno, and Republic I*.'[7]

5. Christopher M. Johnson, "Reconsidering the *Ad Hominem*." *Philosophy* 84, no. 328 (2009): 252
6. David Wolfsdorf, "Socrates' Pursuit of Definitions." *Phronesis* 48, no. 4 (2003): 273
7. Wolfsdorf holds that definitional dialogues'occupy about 26 of about 36.5 Stephanus pages in Charmides or about 72%of the whole text.

The central theme of *Charmides* is the definition of sôphrosynê.[8] Socrates' quest for the meaning of sôphrosynê (sound-mindedness), is indeed part of a larger pursuit described by Socrates as inquiry 'about philosophy, how things stood with it, and about the young, whether any among them had become distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both.' (154a).Lampert holds that Socrates' concern was specifically about Socrates' philosophy.

> Charmides is about the returned Socrates' discovery of the fate of his philosophy in his absence; Charmides is about Socrates' philosophy and its transmission to young associates. Did the philosophy Socrates shared with others before leaving for Potidaea survive his absence?[9]

Lampert's submission above erroneously considers Socratic philosophy as a body of knowledge that is transmitted by a teacher to his or her students. There is no direct support for this view in the text. Rather, Socrates' challenge to Charmides to reach inside himself to come up with a definition for sound-mindedness shows that Socrates does not consider philosophy as a body of knowledge transmitted by a teacher to their pupils. What is truer is that

8. The English translation of the Greek term is nuanced and has yielded many interpretations including **temperance** (Tsouna, 2022), **moderation** (Achtenberg, 2014), and **sound-mindedness** (West and West,1986). After listing other competing terms to include **self-control**, **discretion**, **and prudence**, West and West (p.6) undertook etymological interpretation of the term and held that *sôphrosynê* "is composed of the roots *sô* ("sound", "safe", "saving") and *phro* ("mind", "thought", "sense", "heart". Their conclusion is that no single English expression correctly renders the exact interpretation of the term. Their choice of sound-mindedness is therefore that of selecting the closest approximation.

9. Laurence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study of Plato's Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010):156.

Socrates feels that a philosophically developed mind should be able to form a conception of any term and defend it.

What can be agreed with Lampert, though, is that Socrates' inquiry about the standing of philosophy and the standing of Athenian youths in relation to philosophy is an act of catching-up with events after a long period of absence. Socrates returned to Athens in429 BCE, from Potidaea, the location of his war camp where he fought as a soldier in the Peloponnesian war for about two to three years. Athens suffered massive defeat in the hands of Spartans who razed homes, pillaged farms and rendered citizens destitute. The tragedy of the war was also exacerbated by the plague which ailed Athens for the second successive year and added to the death tolls and famine caused by the lost war.

Socrates is possibly concerned with recovery and general survival of Athenian citizens following the tragedies of the war and the plague, and therefore regards the cultivation of the right philosophy as an important aspect of this. It is from this concern that the inquiry about the standing of philosophy stems. What seems like a second inquiry: "about the young, whether any among them had become distinguished for wisdom…," is only a modification of the original question about the standing of philosophy. To be distinguished in wisdom is to be a lover of wisdom, therefore a philosopher.[10] Philosophy would be said to be in good standing if there were young men in love with wisdom. The survival and continuation of philosophical inquiry therefore depend on there being youths interested in the affairs of

10. Pythagoras of Samos is reputed to have invented the term philosophy, and its root words are rendered as love of wisdom and philosopher as lover of wisdom.

philosophy. The really second inquiry is "about the young, whether any among them had become distinguished for … beauty." Socrates' interest here is not about the Form, Beauty, treated in the Republic. For if it were so, it would mean one and the same with the inquiry about wisdom and therefore about philosophy. His interest is about the beautiful, the handsome. In the Republic, physical things in the physical world are said to be beautiful. The beautiful, the handsome, appeal to the eyes and excite the senses. The usefulness of beautiful things is that they inspire the contemplation of the Form of Beauty. For Plato, the ultimate goal of philosophy is this contemplation of the Forms. Thus, the question about youths distinguished in beauty is the question about beautiful, handsome youths. If we like, we can modify Socrates second interest as follows: "Do we have some handsome or beautiful young people in Athens?" There is a third concern, that of whether there exists in Athens youths who are both wise and beautiful. Essentially, the threefold interest is first about the wise, second about the beautiful and third about a combination of the wise and the beautiful.

In the Republic (485a), Plato deploys the Greek adjective **euphuēs** to describe a person in whom wisdom and beauty converge. The medieval author, Roger Ascham conceptualizes **euphuēs** as one:

> that is apt by goodness of wit, and appliable by readiness of will, to learning, having all other qualities of the mind and parts of the body that must another day serve. learning . . . ; as a tongue not stammering, or over-hardly drawing forth words, but plain and ready to deliver the meaning of the mind; a voice not soft, weak-piping, womanish, but audible, strong, and manlike; a countenance not weerish and crabbed, but fair and comely ; a personage not

> wretched and deformed, but tall and goodly ; for . . . even as a fair stone requireth to be set in the finest gold, with the best workmanship, or else it looseth much of the grace and price ; even so excellence in learning joined with a comely personage is a marvelous jewel in the world.[11]

Critias presents Socrates with an example of an euphuēs man. Charmides who Critias presents has one more distinguishing quality as he is also poetic. Thus, according to Critias, Charmides is an example of a youth distinguished in beauty, philosophy and poetry (157d); as it were in health of the body, of the soul and of emotion respectively. This paints the picture of Charmides as a solid, balanced personality. Socrates has not included poetry among the things that concern him in *Charmides*. This may explain his silence on the third quality introduced by Critias. Another explanation may be found in his view about poets and poetry in the Republics (607d–608a) where the expulsion of poets and the banning of poetry is advocated for the Republic. Thus, he addresses only part of the response that answers his question about wisdom and beauty. First, on Charmides' beauty. He claims he may not be able to see it as he suffers from beauty-blindness and refers to himself as a 'a white line when it comes to those who are beautiful, because almost all who have just reached maturity appear beautiful to me'(154c).Socrates' reaction, following the appearance of Charmides, raises serious questions about his claim to beauty-blindness. Has Socrates lied about his being beauty-blind? Is Charmides exceedingly handsome that the force of his handsomeness so impressed itself on beauty-blind Socrates that he

11. Roger Ascham, *English Works: Toxophilus; Report of the Affaires and State of Germany; The Scholemaster.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904):194-5

experiences an aporia: 'Then indeed, my friend, I was in perplexity.'(155c). Besides the aporetic experience, Socrates also narrates his experience of sexual arousal which the sight of Charmides' inner body caused him when he peeped into his clothes: “O noble one, I saw inside his cloak, I was inflamed. I was no longer in control of myself…” (155d).

Socrates accounts for Charmides' handsomeness by stating that it was naturally guaranteed by his family tree, being a descendant of handsome people from both his parents' side. (157e -158a-b).Besides that, Charmides, on his own, has carefully taken care of his body. It is due to this care that Socrates was aroused just by seeing through his body. This effectively settles the question of Charmides' beauty or handsomeness. However, the question of his philosophical reputation, about his being distinguished in wisdom remains and cannot be settled on Critias' testimony alone. It is a question that Socrates must settle purely by a philosophical experiment driven by the famous Socratic method.

Chaerephon, the long-standing friend of Socrates calls Socrates to the need for this experiment.'“But if he should be willing to strip,' he said, 'he will seem to you to be faceless, so altogether beautiful is he in his looks.'” (154d). West and West (1986, p.16) holds that the word 'looks' in the immediate quote is their translation of the Greek word **eidos**. **Eidos** is what is translated as Form or Idea, in Plato. Essentially, Chaerephon called Socrates' attention to the need to transcend Charmides' appearance to investigate what does not appear, but is real about him, his Soul. Albert Joosse writes that Socrates believed in the “primacy of the soul over the body.”[12]

12. Albert Joosse, “*Sôphrosunê* and the Poets: *Rival Interpretations in Plato's* Charmides.” *Mnemosyne* 71, no. 4 (2018): 581.

Thus, when Socrates accepts the challenge to investigate the content of Charmides' soul, he plots with Critias a possible way of initiating discussion with Charmides. Critias informs him that Charmides complained to him of experiencing some heaviness in his head. 'What prevents you from pretending to him that you have knowledge of some drug for the head? (155b). Indeed, the sickness in Charmides' head must have been of great concern to him and members of his family. According to Thucydides, the symptom of the plague that led to the death of many people in Athens that year and the year before it started in the head (Thucydides 2.49).

Charmides has known Socrates as a philosopher. To assume the role of a physician, he must state the training which now qualifies him as such. He therefore invents a story about doctors of Zalmoxis from whom he learnt the practice of medicine:'I learned it there in the army from one of the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis, who it is said, even immortalize people'(156d). Socrates' reference to immortality emphasizes the potency of his healing method, a combination of an unnamed leaf and incantation. If the doctors of Zalmoxis can guarantee immortality, healing ordinary heaviness of the head and extending long life to Charmides would be a simple matter. But there is a laid down procedure which entails treating the soul of a sick person before the body. Socrates identifies the soul as the source of all sicknesses that ail the body and informs Charmides that any treatment of the body according to Zalmoxis doctors must begin with the treatment of the soul by means of certain incantation which Socrates describes as beautiful speeches. It is from such beautiful speeches that sound-mindedness comes into a soul. Sound-mindedness, once received in the soul makes the healing of parts of the body easy. Thus, Socrates makes submission to healing of the soul, the possession

of sound-mindedness, a pre-condition for the healing of Charmides' head. When Critias interjects, he informs Socrates that Charmides already has sound-mindedness. Socrates replies that if indeed Charmides has sound-mindedness he would no longer be in need of the incantation as he would administer the healing drug straight away to him.

Charmides' Definition of Sôphrosynê

Socrates, again, does not take the testimony of Critias about Charmides possessing sound-mindedness without subjecting it to test. This test is in form of inquiring directly from Charmides whether he possesses sound-mindedness as testified by Critias. His charge to Charmides is pointed and direct. 'So tell me yourself whether…you already have a sufficient share of sound-mindedness, or that you are in need.' (158c). Charmides' response, in which he expresses the impropriety of answering yes or no to the question can be interpreted as a clear sign of possession of sound-mindedness. However, Socrates does not take the sign for the fact. Since sound-mindedness is an inner quality in man, Socrates insists that it is only through conversation with Charmides about sound-mindedness can it be shown whether Charmides is in possession of sound-mindedness. Thus, the conversation begins with demand for Charmides to define sound-mindedness, for he who is in possession of sound-mindedness would know the meaning of the term. Marina Berzins McCoy holds that Socrates at this point "connects three key elements to one another: the state of Charmides' soul, his perception of what sound-mindedness is, and lastly, an opinion that arises out of that perception."[13]

13. Marina Berzins Mccoy. "Philosophy, Elenchus, and Charmides' Definitions of ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ." *Arethusa* 38, no. 2 (2005): 138.

Charmides responds to Socrates' challenge by first defining sound-mindedness as' doing everything decorously and quietly.' (159b). He later modifies his definition and defines sound-mindedness as a certain kind of quietness. Socrates views Charmides' answer, especially his equation of quietness with sound-mindedness,as deriving from Greek folk sayings and not from a personal reflection which is the hallmark of philosophical investigation.'To be sure, they do say, Charmides, that the quiet are sound-minded.'(159c). Henceforth, Socrates moves to demonstrate the uncritical, unreasoned nature of folk sayings as opposed to philosophy. He points out to Charmides a number of activities where acting swiftly is a preferred course of action in comparison to acting slowly and quietly. Socrates' examples include writing, reading, playing the cithara, wrestling, learning, teaching, boxing and pankration. No doubt, Socrates does not lose sight of the fact that there are occasions where acting quietly is preferred to acting swiftly even if they are fewer. His first problem with Charmides' first definition restson its inconsistency and it not meeting the universality criterion of definition. Socrates successfully points out that a definition fails once a case is seen flouting consistency criterion. By this criterion a concept must be generalizable such that it covers all instances of the case. Thus, if quietness entails sound-mindedness, every quiet action must be shown to be good and every non-quiet one shown to be bad. The second problem with Charmides' first definition of sound-mindedness follows from the fact that Charmides derives the definition from folk saying. Philosophy is a personal reflection and is distinguished from folk wisdom by its criticality, individuality, and rationality. Folk wisdom lacks these characteristics. Thus, Charmides, to demonstrate his philosophical capacity must dive deep into himself to bring up the meaning of sound-mindedness that rests

within him. This way, his response can be philosophical.

From this point, it may seem that Critias is wrong in projecting Charmides as someone who is distinguished in philosophy as he lacks the basic element of philosophical engagement. In the light of the shortcomings of the first definition, Socrates challenges Charmides to undertake an introspection;“apply your mind more and look into yourself” (160d) in order to render a more philosophical definition. Charmides, therefore, abandons his earlier definition and responds to this challenge by defining sound-mindedness as that which 'makes a human being have a sense of shame and be ashamed, and sound-mindedness is just what respectfulness is.'(160e). Bearing in mind the general characteristics of sound-mindedness by which sound-mindedness must be shown to be beautiful, good, and desirable at all times, Socrates invokes Homer who wrote that 'respectfulness is not good for a needy man,' (161a) to show that respectfulness is not desirable at all times. There are instances where respectfulness is desired as good and other instances where it is not desirable and therefore viewed as bad. For Plato, therefore, respect is not an absolute good in the same way that sound-mindedness is conceived as an absolute good. At the metaphysical level, respect is rather an ethically neutral concept whose goodness or badness depends on the context of its use. Like the first definition this also fails to meet the consistency criterion of definition.

Charmides' confidence is hugely affected by Socrates' puncturing ofthe second definition. Recall that it is a definition which Charmides does as commanded him by Socrates to 'apply your mind more and look into yourself'(160d). Following Socrates' critique of the second definition as inadequate, Charmides

undertakes self-abandonment. He probably considers Socrates' critique and rejection of his definition, the one that is as a result of his introspection, as belittling of his person before the numerous witnesses of the dialogue. He therefore seeks to deflect attention from the content of his mind. Accordingly, he informs Socrates that his third definition is one he heard from someone. According to that person, sound-mindedness means doing one's own things. Thus, the third and the first definitions show that the pursuit of the meaning of sound-mindedness was a perennial issue among the Greeks. In the two instances, Charmides took recourse in the definitions of the term he heard elsewhere.

Following the third definition, Charmides cleverly exchanges role with Socrates'. He makes himself the questioner and puts the question to Socrates thus:'but investigate this statement about sound-mindedness, what is it in your opinion. For I just recollected what I once hear someone say, that doing one's own things would be sound-mindedness. So investigate whether in your opinion he who says this speaks correctly.' (161b).

Charmides' Character Flaws and Socrates' *Ad Hominem*

Socrates shows his sharp objection to Charmides' behavior with regard to the third definition. First, Charmides abandons introspection as philosophical method of inquiry taught him by Socrates and resorts to a definition of sound-mindedness given to him by someone else. Second, Charmides lacks courage and sufficient honesty by failing to disclose that he heard the third definition from Critias, his cousin, who is present during the dialogue. Socrates moves beyond his dishonesty and guesses that he heard the definition from Critias. Third, Charmides, a philosophical upstart, committed amajor blunder by attempting

tousurp Socrates' role as questioner, a leader of thought, while rendering the third definition. It is from the place of that usurpation that he asks Socrates to ' … investigate this statement about sound-mindedness, what is it in your opinion. For I just recollected what I once hear someone say, that doing one's own things would be sound-mindedness. So investigate whether in your opinion he who says this speaks correctly.' (161b).

The combination of the foregoing factors it can be argued is responsible for Socrates deployment of *ad hominem.* He labels Charmides a 'Wretch.'(161c).It must be recalled that the third definition immediately follows the second definition in which Socratesavers that respect is not an absolute good as its goodness or badness is contextual. Socrates, in the context of the third definition, feels that Charmides is undeserving of respect. It is from this conclusion that he calls Charmides Wretch. Charmides thinks, mistakenly though, that Socrates calling him wretch is because he fails to mention the person from whom he heard the definition. Thus he asks: 'But what difference does it make, Socrates, … from whom I heard it?' (161c).When Socrates responds that it makes no difference, and that what matters is not who said it but to investigate whether what is said is true or false, Charmides replies thus: 'Now you are speaking correctly.' (161c).

Charmides, despite his shortcomings in philosophical matters, recognizes *ad hominem* as incorrect reasoning, bad logic. Right philosophical practice restricts attack to issues and not to person. Charmides indeed gets even with Socrates here. The same Socrates who has given him lecture on correct method of philosophical inquiry, is the same Socrates he is giving lecture on correct reasoning. To Socrates it is not a matter of being taught by

Charmides for Socrates himself recognizes that the essence of philosophical inquiry is truth of propositions. Again, Socrates feels the only way the third definition could make sense is if it is a riddle. His critique of riddles is that they do not express what their sayers have in mind (161d).He has no doubt that no thinking person will project the type of reality that is as consequence of the third definition. The awkwardness of sound-mindedness entailing doing one's own thing is found in the fact that each person will be responsible for doing his own thing alone. In such a world there is no division of labor, no cooperation and no specialization. Each person must be his or her own doctor, teacher, mason, artist, engineer, water carrier, shoe maker, baker, banker, publisher, writer, etc. No society managed this way would survive.

It is clear that Socrates' description of doing one's own thing is intentionally narrow as he offers Charmides the opportunity to continue the argument and defend his position. Indeed, one can still mind one's own even while producing for others. A tailor who sews for others can still mind his or her business in so far as he does not engage in the business of a pilot. Socrates expects such an objection from Charmides and when he fails to offer it, Socrates fires the second *ad hominem.*'Did you hear someone foolish say this, Charmides?' (162b).At first it would seem as if Charmides were not at the receiving end of the second *ad hominem.* This is an indirect, yet a more serious, attack on Charmides. For if Charmides heard the third definition from a foolish person it can only mean one thing and that is that Charmides is a bigger fool. Sensing the consequence of being viewed as a bigger fool to his reputation, Charmides informs Socrates that he heard the definition from a reputed wise person. Which otherwise person could Charmides possibly know if not Critias? His look towards Critias as he spoke

about the reputed wise person from whom he learnt the definition of sound-mindedness as doing one's own thing, seems to justify Socrates' earlier suspicion that he heard the definition from Critias. Even though Critias initially denies being the formulator of the definition, he angrily interjects and accuses Charmides of inability to defend a position he holds.

Can Socrates' *Ad Hominem be Justified*

Peter Thomas Geach[14] identifies some distinct challenge inherent in the logic of Socrates' model of definition. He critiques Socrates' demand for definition as "time-wasting dialectic," 'preposterous' 'unreasonable', and 'morally pernicious.'Geach's attack is based on his claim that Socrates' demand for definition is rested, first, on the wrong assumption that speakers are not intelligible to one another if they do not define the key terms of their discussion. Second, on the assumption that pointing to an example or specimen of a term is not enough proof of knowledge of a term. Geach's example here is that pointing out one elephant or oak tree should prove one's knowledge of oak tree or elephant whether one is able to define them or not as one without knowledge of an elephant may not be able to point out an example. Third, on Socrates' demand that a definition must also account for all marginal and doubtful cases related to the defined terms. Fourth, on the condition that moral judgement of issues must be suspended until a proper definition of terms is demonstrated. Geach, therefore, considers unreasonable and morally harmful, any request that one should suspend judgement about whether swindling is unjust until one has effectively defined swindling and unjust. These challenges which Geach associates with Socrates' demand for definition are

5. Andrew Franklin-Hall, 'Creation and Authority: The Natural Law Foundations of Locke's Account of Parental Authority,' Canadian Journal of

regarded as Socratic fallacy. John Beversluis'[15] strong defense of Socrates criticizes Geach on the ground that Socratic fallacy arises as a result of misconception about the methodology of Socrates. He therefore clears Socrates of the first and second charges above.

This paper identifiesa fallacy of a different kind in *Charmides.* Indeed, there are two instances in the *Charmides* where traditional fallacy of *ad hominem* is deployed by Socrates against Charmides as demonstrated earlier. Based on extant philosophical practice, *ad hominem,* as pointed out by Charmides and accented by Socrates is a bad logic. On what ground, therefore, did Socrates deploy *ad hominem* in the promotion of his argument. There are philosophical positions that object to the classification of *ad hominem* as irrational. A good example is Geach's which holds that"a logically sound *ad hominem* argument does a service, even if an unwelcome one, to its victim – it shows him that his present position is untenable and must be modified. Of course people do not like to be disturbed in their comfortable inconsistencies; that is why *ad hominem* arguments have a bad name."[16]

Socrates' *ad hominem* fails to produce Geach's effect on Charmides. Instead of leading Charmides to modify his position, it leads him, in the first instance, to abandon his position entirely. It aborts Charmides' experiment with the art of philosophizing asa personal reflection, taught to him by Socrates. There is an apparent loss of confidence in Charmides and this leads him to propose a third definition not as a result of personal reflection but one based on the definition of sôphrosynê he heard from someone else. Thus,

Philosophy 42, no. 3 (2012): 205–24.

6. David Foster, 'Taming the Father: John Locke's Critique of Patriarchal Fatherhood,' The Review of Politics 56, no. 4 (1994): 787–818.

the second instance of *ad hominem* is elicited by the new definition. Socrates disapproves the new definition, utters an *ad hominem* and causes Charmides to seek to abandon the dialogue entirely. In this case, the *ad hominem* clearly serves as an argument stopper.

This resort to *ad hominem* constitutes a major deviation from the topic of discussion. It entails a major display of an unsound mind in a dialogue about sound-mindedness. Thus, Socrates upends the dialogue by trying to support sound-mindedness with bad logic. This puts the entire dialogue at risk but for the redeeming intervention of Critias who takes it over from Charmides. Now we must address the question about Socrates' motives for resorting to *ad hominem* in the course of the dialogue. Thomas Schmid draws attention to the importance of the prologue of the *Charmides* to the understanding of the dialogic part of the text. He holds that one must pay attention to the "theme of war in relation to moderation"[17] in the prologue. Socrates' use of *ad hominem* falls into place when examined with Schmid's schemata. Thus, for Socrates the dialogue with Charmides is conceived as a sort of war between the beautiful and the wise represented by Charmides and Socrates respectively. It is a war which Socrates, the wise, wins easily. The *ad hominem,* therefore, can be likened to a verbal slaughter of the enemy, a final elimination of his person. Socrates, the Athenian soldier, who just returned from a war, was involved in the massacre of the enemies and escaping being massacred by them. He brings the ruthlessness of the battlefield into the dialogue and unleashes it as an attack against Charmides. When Charmides leaves the battlefield of the dialogue he does so as a loser but points out to his adversary that he

7. *Patriarcha,* or The Natural Power of Kings (London, 1680). Locke's direct response is in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government,* ed. Peter Laslett

has not won fairly. His introduction of *ad hominem* is clearly an underhand practice. The problem with this war-derived explanation is that it problematizes Socratic dialogues as adversarial, a contest of wit won only by the clever and cast Socrates as not different from the sophists whose philosophical orientations he criticized.

One may seek to justify Socrates' use of *ad hominem* mayby contrasting Socrates' treatment of Critias with his treatment of Charmides. Socrates recognizes Critias as a wise person, a philosopher. He is sure that Charmides, if he heard the third definition from Critias, did not understand what he heard and therefore misrepresented Critias. Such is the respect between Socrates and Critias that they both address each other as best of men (162e& 163e). Thus, the explanation for Socrates' resort to *ad hominem* in his address of Charmides can be found in the reason behind his reference to Critias as best of men. This reason is to be found in the phrase 'the care you have taken.' (162e). Critias has taken the pursuit of learning and therefore the care of his soul very seriously as shown in his defense of his definitions. Herein lies the difference between Charmides and Critias. Charmides, from the testimony of Socrates, has taken care of his outward appearance. Besides the fact that he is naturally handsome, he has taken good care of his body and retains an attractiveness that made Socrates uncomfortable. However, as shown during the philosophical exchange with Socrates, it becomes clear that Charmides has not taken care of what matters to Socrates, his soul. In the view of Socrates, one who has not taken care of what matters does not deserve respect. In this case, Charmides has not earned respect and can be attacked with an *ad hominem.* If this reason stands, *ad hominem* will become the property of intellectual elites whose

claim to intellectualism and knowledge gives them the right to abuse others.

Also, Socrates complicates his *ad hominem* against Charmides by excusing Charmides' inability to defend his definitions on account of Charmides' age: 'It's no wonder that he at his age is ignorant.' (163e). On the other hand, he speaks to Critias thus: 'But you, no doubt, are likely to know because of your age…' (163e). Lampert places Charmides' age at seventeen and Critias' at thirty at the time of the dialogue.[18] It is difficult to explain why Socrates' deploys the *ad hominem* against a youth who on account of his age is still undergoing tutelage on many fronts. Perhaps, Socrates' angst against Charmides is feigned. The essence could be to induce some sense of shame in Charmides and drive him to further philosophical learning and practice in order to avoid future shame as he advances into adulthood. If this were the case, we may have to inquire into how much success Socrates made of this. In *The Seventh Letter,* Plato speaks about his relatives who collaborated with the Spartans following their conquest of Athens and overthrow of democracy. There is no doubt that the relatives were no other than Critias and Charmides. Ancient Greeks speak of the thirty tyrants that ruled Athens on behalf of the Spartans. Critias was one of the tyrants and he appointed Charmides to an important position of authority. In *The Seventh Letter,* Plato reports that Socrates, even at the risk of death, defied the order of his relatives — Critias and Charmides— to participate in the execution of an Athenian citizen. It becomes clear towards the end of the dialogue that Charmides, if he learnt anything from the dialogue with Socrates it is that respect is value neutral. He therefore casts

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 141–263.

Socrates as a hypocrite who abused him with *ad hominem* over a term whose meaning Socrates and Critias do not know (176b). It is clear that Socratic *ad hominem* backfired. It drove Charmides to disrespect Socrates who earlier taught him that respect is a circumstantial virtue. This effectively shows that *ad hominem* is also consequential for the utterer. It is not only the addressee's reputation that is diminished by it, the addresser's reputation may also be affected by an *ad hominem* as is the case of Socrates in the *Charmides.*

Conclusion

Socrates' use of *ad hominem* in the Charmides is problematic. His motives for deploying the two *ad hominem* against Charmides is unstated and at the same time unjustifiable. However, the biggest lesson of Socratic *ad hominem* in *Charmides* is that *ad hominem* is not consequential to its victims alone. Utterers of *adhominem* often deploy it as a form of abuse to discredit the other person. Victories won as a result of deploying an *ad hominem* can only be seen as pyrrhic in nature. It is temporary and only suffices in the heat of the argument. *Ad hominem* tends to lose its force on closer examination. In the eyes of others, the utterer of an *ad hominem* loses his or her respect. He becomes the lazy thinker who lacks the ability to confront and defeat an argument with superior argument.

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