ABSTRACT
Plato’s Socratic dialogues suggest that virtue is a form of expert knowledge or understanding analogous to expertise in first-order technai or epistêmai, arts or sciences: architecture, medicine, and mathematics, but also flute-playing, cobblering, weaving, and carpentry. The Charmides is commonly believed to reject that model and point towards the doctrines of the Republic and other Platonic works. The present article does not generally deny that the Charmides is forward-looking. However, it contends that this dialogue does not undermine but, if anything, vindicates an important aspect of the analogy between virtue and expertise. On the one hand, the Charmides shows that the intellectualist conception of temperance defended by Critias (Socrates’ principal interlocutor) is deeply problematic: the very idea of ‘a knowledge knowing solely itself’ is probably incoherent and, even if it were not, a strictly reflexive knowledge would be irrelevant to happiness. On the other hand, the dialogue supports a philosophically defensible aspect of the Socratic model of virtue: if virtue is expert knowledge, the latter cannot be oriented mainly towards itself, but must govern its own distinct domain and essentially contribute to the good life.