

### Christopher Moore

*Socrates and Self-knowledge*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xvii + 275 pp. \$99.99. ISBN 9781107123304 (hbk).

Just how seriously did Socrates take the Delphic injunction ‘γνώθι σεαυτόν’? Some scholars have argued that it was of peripheral interest, serving perhaps as a first step in Socrates’ longer philosophical project regarding the knowledge of good and evil. With this book, Christopher Moore joins those interpreters who maintain that the Delphic injunction was actually of central importance to Socrates’ understanding of the goal of philosophical inquiry. But Moore does not simply fall in line with some other position that has been staked out in the literature. Instead, he defends a new and remarkably modern view of how Socrates understands the Delphic injunction and attempts to satisfy it. According to Moore, for Socrates self-knowledge is not a matter of knowing one’s limitations, or being modest, or even knowing into what ontological category the soul falls. Moore’s Socrates sees self-knowledge as an awareness of what is required to become a self, and what it is to be a self turns out to be a mature, responsible moral agent with unified desires and the right orientation toward moral understanding. If Moore is right, Socrates thought that the pursuit of self-knowledge is really something very akin to the modern notion of agency constitution.

To those who believe that such an understanding of self-knowledge is too far removed from the actual Delphic injunction to be what Socrates could have had in mind, Moore argues persuasively that there were in antiquity widely divergent interpretations of the god’s intent and so the Greeks themselves had not settled on what the Delphic injunction meant. We see Critias, for example, in Plato’s *Charmides*, insisting that ‘γνώθι σεαυτόν’ is not an injunction or admonition at all; it is really a greeting from the god and an encouragement to be temperate. Plato would not have even suggested that such an interpretation receive scrutiny were it plainly at odds with the settled, common understanding of the god’s words. Moreover, Moore points out that there is scant evidence of special interest in the injunction before Socrates, as there are only four authors (we know of) who even mention the γνώθι σεαυτόν before its appearance in the Socratic literature: Ion of Chios, Heraclitus, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. In fact, *Oedipus Tyrannos* may not even be referring the injunction. This is important for Moore’s story because we simply cannot say that some established understanding of the injunction makes the self-knowledge as self-constitution interpretation unlikely on its face. What we must do then to get at Socrates’ understanding of the god’s wish is to look at what the Socratic literature tells us.

This material, Moore argues, yields a remarkably coherent and philosophically sophisticated view of self-knowledge.

The ‘authors of Socratic literature’ from whom Moore draws together his account of Socratic self-knowledge are perhaps not surprising. First, there is Aristophanes, who, in what is likely the earliest reference to the philosopher’s interest in self-knowledge, unmistakably links his Socrates to the γνῶθι σεαυτὸν in the *Clouds*. Plato, of course, is the principal source. (Some readers will be surprised to see the *Alcibiades*, whose authorship is still disputed, playing such a prominent role in Moore’s story.) Also discussed, in the final chapter, are two works, rarely attributed to Plato himself but which may tell us something of what was discussed in Academic circles in Plato’s time and the decades following: The *Rival Lovers* and *Hipparchus*. The final source is Xenophon, whose interest in Socratic self-knowledge is front and center in *Memorabilia* 4.2.

Moore is keenly aware of the obstacles facing attempts to attribute much of anything to the historical Socrates. Nonetheless, he argues that

there are remarkable similarities in their ideas associated with self-knowledge about their respective Socrateses. This is despite differences among the texts’ descriptive, protreptic, analytical, or defensive goals. These similarities justify speaking of a relatively constant set of ‘Socratic’ ideas about self-knowledge, even against hermeneutic worries about identifying a single ‘character’ called Socrates across this range of works. (p. xii)

After all, Moore points out, precisely the same reasoning leads scholars commonly to refer to Socrates’ irony, Socrates’ method of questioning, Socrates’ interest in virtue as the supreme good, and so forth. The Socratic sources, or even the Platonic sources, however, do not build up to an account of self-knowledge that represents Socrates’ final thoughts on the matter. In no single source do we find the Socratic position on self-knowledge laid out for us. Indeed, no single work stands out as the richest source or even the most important source. Moore’s project, accordingly, is to tease out, interpret, develop, and stitch together these ‘remarkable similarities in their ideas associated with self-knowledge’. The picture that results is that of a Socrates keenly interested in self-knowledge as knowledge of a unified, responsible, morally informed self.

Moore starts with the *Charmides*. Critias’ inability to defend his understanding of self-knowledge leads to the thoroughly pessimistic conclusion that self-knowledge is either impossible to acquire or that it is useless. Because this conclusion conflicts with the obvious importance the god himself assigns to the γνῶθι σεαυτὸν, Moore argues that we should be deeply suspicious of the