
This revised Leiden dissertation has the great merit of raising some major questions about Plato’s use of language and indeed about Greek semantics more generally. Struck, like many before him, by the fact that Plato sometimes gives a rather different meaning to a term or concept in different dialogues, Rademaker has reacted in what we may call the traditional way by attempting to demonstrate that in the important case of σωφροσύνη there is no inconsistency in the master’s work. This term and its cognates had many different meanings – σωφροσύνη was in fact a vague concept, with mental, prudential, social and moral aspects –, and Plato used now one meaning, now another, to make philosophical points; but all these meanings are linked by a unifying network.

In particular, *Charmides* and *Gorgias* seem to Rademaker to be inconsistent. The first of these dialogues sets out, ostensibly at least, to define the term, but does not discuss what Rademaker considers the obvious meaning, «self-control» or «control of desires», and at the end, even though it has been suggested that σωφροσύνη may be an «understanding (ἐπιστήμη) of understanding» (169d, etc.) or an understanding of good and evil (174b), we are left with aporia as to its meaning. In *Gorgias*, on the other hand, what σωφροσύνη means, according to Socrates, is self-control (491de), and in that sense σωφροσύνη is rejected by his interlocutor Callicles (later in the dialogue, says Rademaker, Socrates uses the term in a rather different sense). In the *Republic* σωφροσύνη is more fully defined – but this is a clearly a very prescriptive kind of definition – as the harmony of (a) different classes of citizens and (b) different parts of the ψυχὴ about which of them should be in charge (4.410c–412b).

In order to find out what Plato is up to in these texts, Rademaker decided that he needed to know what σωφροσύνη meant in «ordinary, non-philosophical» language (1); this will be the meaning of sophrosyne in Plato’s time (251). His strategy for locating this meaning, or these meanings, is to review most of the known uses of σωφροσύνη and its cognates from Homer to the fourth-century orators, with the aim of teasing out the nuances. Successive chapters examine the use of these terms in Homer (they do not appear in Hesiod), in the «archaic poets» (taken to include Pindar and Bacchylides), in the canonical tragedians, in Herodotus and Thucydides, and in «Aristophanes and the Orators». How Xenophon came to be left out, in spite of the evident importance of σωφροσύνη in his thinking and 128 uses listed in the *TLG*, is not explained – and this matters, as we shall see. For good measure, Rademaker discusses a number of other passages, from Homer onwards, in which Greeks advocate or praise self-restraint without actually using any words of the σωφροσύνη family.

His conclusion, in outline, is that «Plato’s technical conception of σωφροσύνη as given in *Republic* sticks as closely as possible to what is the most central (‘prototypical’) interpretation of σωφροσύνη for the most ‘central’ members of ancient Greek society, adult male citizens» (2). Plato’s description of σωφροσύνη as a

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1 I apologize to the author and all concerned for having taken so long to write this review.
harmony of the different parts of the state and of the soul is **not** a significant departure from ordinary language. It is in fact a more sophisticated version of what Socrates alleges (but he is already loading the dice) is the popular contemporary concept of Σωφροσύνη (Rep. 3.389de): obeying the rulers, and ruling oneself as far as the pleasures of drinking, sex and eating are concerned (Σωφροσύνης δὲ ἡς πλὴθει τὰ τοιαῦτα μέγιστα... ;).

Is this survey of the semantics of Σωφροσύνη an improvement in any significant respect over Helen North’s major contribution, Sophrosyne: Self-knowledge and Self-restraint in Greek literature (Ithaca, NY, 1966) (which is now alas unobtainable)? North’s book, a considerable tour-de-force, covers a much longer period. According to Rademaker (3), North failed to account for the similarities, differences and essential unity of the concept of Σωφροσύνη, which seems unduly harsh, though it is true that her study was by the standards of nowadays «under-theorized» (as to Rademaker’s theoretical claims, see below).

Some of Rademaker’s readings of particular passages may well be improvements, helped by forty extra years’ worth of exegesis. When they disagree, however, I generally find North’s reading more convincing. For example, she may possibly have made Homeric Σωφροσύνη into a slightly more prudential quality than it really is, but Rademaker’s attempt to give a ‘moral’ content to Odyssey 23.30 reads too much into the passage and seems forced. In my view, North was probably right, against Rademaker (10), to say that Σωφροσύνη was not in fact important in heroic times.¹ It is no use saying that Homer described the same concept in other terms: there is no genuine synonym in his work for Σωφροσύνη, σωφρονεῖν or σῶφρων, and he never applies the adjective σῶς to the noun φρένες.

Some of our author’s readings are in short more persuasive than others. When he detects a pro-oligarchic or pro-aristocratic tone in the Σωφροσύνη recommended by fifth-century lyric poets, for instance in Theognis 39–42 West and in Bacchylides 13.182–189, we may suspect that he is over-influenced by a desire to bring them into line with the definition in the Republic (harmonious oligarchic government, in effect). On the other hand he is plainly right to think that the late-fifth-century Spartans made much of their own Σωφροσύνη and were regarded by certain Athenians as being fine exemplars of it (see especially 208–218).

In the fourth century, so says our author, Σωφροσύνη is «no longer... connected to the ideals of an elite with... pro-Spartan sympathies» (225) – but it depended who you were. We might suppose instead that the reason Plato noticeably steers clear of references to Sparta in the Republic is to dampen suspicions that he is a Λακωνίζων. It is true of course that when the orators talk about Σωφροσύνη they are very often concerned with sexuality or other ‘private’ behaviour and are not concerned with Sparta in any way, but if Rademaker had attended to Xenophon he would certainly have had to admit that Spartan sympathies and a fixation with Σωφροσύνη still to some extent went together. North has this matter right.

Rademaker’s theoretical framework derives from the «cognitive linguistics» of Ronald Langacker, where the crucial concept is a «network» of meanings. This is

¹ Of four occurrences of the word and its cognates, two (Od. 23.13 and 30) belong in any case to a passage that is probably later than the great poet himself.
one among many semantic theories of the last generation, and it cannot be said that Langacker, who does not seem to have applied himself much if at all to elucidating complex abstract dead-language concepts such as σωφροσύνη, contributes anything here. In fact his main effect on Rademaker may have been to encourage him to see the many meanings of σωφροσύνη as discrete, whereas a different metaphor (overlapping circles, for example) might have helped to legitimate the perfectly plausible alternative claim that, for all its vagueness, σωφροσύνη – a word whose components were utterly plain to any Greek – did in fact have a single set of meanings all related to a central concept.

Rademaker offers at the outset a criticism of North that shows why his central argument is a house of conjectures. I am not referring here to the faintly silly claim that his own is an «open, inclusive, and flexible approach» (whereas unnamed previous scholars, we are to suppose, were closed, narrow and inflexible?). What is revealing is that he rebukes North for her supposed «over-emphasis» on a «diachronic perspective» (11), seeking to undermine her approach, as I understand him, by referring to it as «Ideengeschichte». Now: forty years ago, it was a telling insult to accuse someone of writing the history of ideas, and few of us I think would want to return to the era in which ‘Ideengeschichte’ or ‘Begriffsgeschichte’ existed in the abstract without any social context. But what Rademaker offers us is a good deal further removed from social and linguistic reality than is the study by North.

What Rademaker wants to know is the vocabulary «available» to Plato (11–12, etc.), and elsewhere he refers to this vocabulary as «traditional» (35, 39). In short, he has not the faintest idea how Plato formed his vocabulary. There is not a word here about Plato’s intellectual formation in the extreme intellectual ferment of upper-class Athens in the 410s to 390s. Of course everyone had learned Homer and the other great poets, but half-an-hour with Euripides or Thucydides should be enough to convince any scholar that the language too was in ferment. We should suppose, setting Plato’s birth in 424/3 (with Debra Nails), that from about 427 till 399 Plato discussed ideas every single day with his compatriots, often using the vocabulary of philosophy in so far as such a vocabulary existed – and that he began to form his own highly individual ideas. It will not do to analyse the semantics of such a man in terms of the surviving plays of Aeschylus – for all their continuing influence – or the fragments of Theognis. It is true, admittedly, that Plato scholarship has never been very attentive, as far as I know, to the generation- and milieu-specific nuances of his vocabulary (chronology-studies aside). What we would need is a thorough semantic analysis, properly diachronic (because Plato notoriously does not always stay the same), both of Plato himself and of his contemporaries. Plato had read the great lyric and tragic poets, or heard them (or most of them: Rademaker does not even tell us what is known about the range of the philosopher’s literary knowledge). Also, presumably, the great philosophers (though he notoriously neglects some of those whom Aristotle thought important). He made a conscious decision to write in prose.\(^2\) But

\(^1\) For a useful overview see S. Lappin (ed.), The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory (Oxford, 1996).

the rules of what could and could not be written by a poetically-minded prose-writing philosopher with an intense sensitivity to language in Athens between the 390s and 346, and the ways in which such a person might break the rules and innovate, were determined by a largely unspoken dialogue between the individual’s taste and that of his desired readers.

It is a crucial part of Rademaker’s strategy to designate certain meanings of σοφροσύνη as «prototypical» (terminology borrowed from the linguistics of Eleanor Rosch). You might think that ‘soundness of mind’ would be a prototypical sense, since it corresponds to the word’s components and allows one to see without too much difficulty how all the other attested senses gradually emerged. But no: prototypical, for him, seems to be a synonym of ‘central’ (see the quotation above); «clusters of uses of a word centre around prototypical uses» (33). Much of what he has to say on this topic is perfectly sensible: «a use of a word may well be prototypical if it is easily activated, without a great deal of textual preparations…. A double-check of my findings would be that supposedly prototypical uses should be likely to reflect current and relevant norms of everyday life, rather than the constructs of high literature or philosophical discourse» (35).

In practice, however, this criterion allows Rademaker to make an arbitrary choice among the eighteen (!) meanings – or, as I think we should say, varieties of meaning – which he judges that his sources give to σοφροσύνη. And, lo and behold, the prototypical meaning of σοφροσύνη, for men at least, is «control of desires» (251) – even though we have just had it pointed out to us, inter alia, that the ideal citizen as he emerges from, for example, Lysias 21.218 is a good deal more complex; the word that is associated with σώφρων there is κόσμιος, which reminds us of Charmides 159b and the youth’s first (and not bad) attempt to say what σοφροσύνη is – «to do everything κοσμίως and quietly». But «control of desires», Rademaker insists, is «the prototypical use of σώφρων in relation to… male citizens» (259). This is unsubstantiated (the fourth-century orators do not support such a view), and it leads to a most unlikely conclusion.

To support these assertions, I will return, as Rademaker does, to Charmides, Gorgias and the Republic (many of Plato’s other works are also relevant). According to Rademaker, Charmides shows us Socrates attempting to reduce the polysemy of σοφροσύνη (2), which is obviously true in one sense but false in another. On any reasonable reading, the dialogue suggests that the meanings of σοφροσύνη offered by the intelligent innocent Charmides, order, quietness and αἰδώς, are, or are very close to, «prototypical» meanings, if we want to use that concept. (Like many others, Rademaker sees an allusion to «control of desires» in the passage in which Socrates «catches fire» as he looks inside the beautiful Charmides’ tunic (155d), but what Plato says here – it may all be irony of course – is that Socrates was losing not his self-control (Socrates? in the palaistra?), contra Rademaker (5), but his courage, which he shortly recovers (156d)).

Plato’s introduction of σοφροσύνη at Gorgias 491de is part of a complex rhetorical strategy: Callicles, being who he is, is «bound to reject» σοφροσύνη in the sense that Socrates proposes, as Rademaker points out (313), and after that inevitably gets into fatal trouble. We are not entitled to conclude from this dialogue that ‘control of desires’ was the prototypical meaning of σοφροσύνη in contem-
temporary Greek – only that it was one meaning that suited Plato well at a particular juncture.

What Plato does in *Republic* IV is to elaborate on one definition of *σωφροσύνη* (‘control of desires’) that any Athenian of his time would have recognized – so far Rademaker must be right. But what he also does is to impose an analogy with the state which is all his own invention, according to which *σωφροσύνη* involves the acceptance by the ‘ruled’ of control by Platonic ‘rulers’.¹ Far from sticking «as closely as possible» to the accepted «prototypical» meaning of *σωφροσύνη*, Plato has hijacked the term, deriving from it an obligation to obey one’s ‘betters’.² Would this have seemed reasonable to the typical citizen of democratic Athens? Not if his brains were in working order!

W. Harris: Rademaker, Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of self-restraint

¹ Such obedience was what tyrants had sometimes called *σωφροσύνη* when requiring it from their subjects (Rademaker’s sense 14).
² At one point Rademaker seems to sense this: in *Republic* IV ‘Plato… offers a new and highly original interpretation of the traditional notion of *σωφροσύνη* as *εὐνομία*’ (141) (though this ‘tradition’ did not perhaps go back further than the last years of the Peloponnesian War).

### References


Die vorliegende Studie, die die erste umfassende Untersuchung der beiden aus der Antike erhaltenen Kommentare zu Aristoteles’ *Physik* darstellt, hat eine vergleichende Analyse beider Kommentare zum Ziel.

Konzert liefert Golitsis zwei Teile und einen Appendix. Im ersten Teil, überbrungen «Réperer la tradition dans les commentaires», charakterisiert er in drei Kapiteln den Hintergrund, vor dem die Kommentare geschrieben wurden: Das erste Kapitel geht auf die Biographien der Autoren ein, das zweite auf die Einleitungen und Kommentierungstechnik der *Physik*-Kommentare und das dritte auf die von diesen verwendeten Quellen. Der zweite Teil beschäftigt sich mit den Exkursen von der eigentlichen Texterklärung, die interessanterweise ein Charakteristikum darstellen, das beide ansonsten recht unterschiedlichen *Physik*-Auslegungen verbindet und als relativ neuartig im Vergleich zu anderen Kommentaren gelten kann. Hier entwickelt Golitsis in einem Kapitel eine Typologie derartiger Exkurse und untersucht in einem weiteren jeden einzelnen Exkurs auf der Grundlage einer hierauf beruhenden Gliederung.