

Foreword

When one is working with ancient texts and history and meets someone outside the academic guild who learns what your occupation is and politely asks what your current scholarly work is all about, it is sometimes difficult to briefly explain what your latest book is about in an understandable way. It may be even more difficult to explain why that topic is important and deserves sustained research. One cannot rely on there being any follow-up questions. However, when working with this book, this has not been a problem. Everyone seems to know the “know yourself” maxim and they immediately associate something of importance with it. Perhaps the maxim had a similar function in antiquity? Its simple, rememberable form invited different people to think about some of the most difficult, interesting and perplexing problems of intellectual history: what does it mean to know oneself? How can such self-knowledge be obtained? And why do we need it? One hardly needs to argue that these are important questions that have played a huge role in history, from Socrates until our own days. It has been all the more rewarding and surprising to discover that almost every chapter in the present volume breaks new ground in that it represents the first sustained attempt to explain what the maxim means in our selected sources.

This is not a collection of free-standing independent essays, but the fruit of many years of collaboration and scholarly exchange. The volume originated within a research group at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo, under the leadership of professor Ole Jakob Filtvedt. As we began inviting international colleagues to join the project we were delighted and honoured that so many esteemed scholars enthusiastically agreed to join us. Early in the process, we were lucky to have professor Jens Schröter join us the project as co-editor. We have had numerous digital seminars where chapters drafts have been presented and discussed among participants in the group. We would like to thank MF for hosting a physical seminar for all the participants.

We were honoured that De Gruyter accepted the volume in the BZBW series and we would like to thank their skilled team for all their help with preparing the manuscript for publication. We would also like to extend our thanks to Fridtjof Leemhuis, doctoral student at MF, who has assisted us with formatting the manuscripts. We are grateful to Olav Refvem who helped us compile the indexes.

Plutarch once wrote, concerning the Delphic maxims: “Behold how many questions these inscriptions [...] have set afoot amongst the philosophers, and what a multitude of discussions has sprung from each of them as from a seed.” (Plutarch: *E Delph.* 2). We hope that the present volume can contribute to raising new questions and provoking new discussions, as we continue to consider what the riddling words of the Delphic oracle may mean.

Ole Jakob Filtvedt and Jens Schröter

