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Complex Wisdom in the *Euthydemus*

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Abstract: In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is presented as an eager student of seemingly trivial arts, earning derision both for desiring to master the peculiar art of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus and for studying the harp in his old age. I explain Socrates' interest in these apparently trivial arts by way of a novel reading of the first protreptic argument, suggesting that the wisdom Socrates praises is complex in nature, securing the happiness of its possessor only insofar as it is composed of *both* ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge. This reading of the first protreptic makes sense of the otherwise perplexing second protreptic, explaining why Socrates is so keen to identify an art which makes what it uses. Wisdom acts as a reliable source of benefit only insofar as it is a complex composed of multiple different arts and types of knowledge. These arts, however, can only be acquired one at a time – if no single art is capable of combining the powers of both ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge in the way that wisdom as a whole does, then the pursuit of wisdom will fail to offer reliable benefit despite the reliably beneficial nature of its possession. Thus, it is appropriate for the *Euthydemus* to conclude with Socrates telling Crito to take courage and pursue philosophy despite the seemingly harmful effects that its pursuit has had on others. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus represent the danger facing the aspiring philosopher, the possibility of being ruined by independent possession of the particular kind of ordinary productive knowledge on which philosophical activity depends – verbal mastery, the grasp of subtle conceptual distinctions needed both to argumentatively reveal reality and to argumentatively obscure it, to reliably equivocate and to reliably avoid equivocation.

Keywords: Plato, *Euthydemus*, wisdom, happiness

At the start of the *Euthydemus*, we are presented with an uncommon twist on a common Socratic trope. Fulfilling his typical role, Socrates exhorts his fellows to boldly pursue knowledge even if the pursuit opens them up to public scorn. Surprisingly, however, the knowledge Socrates encourages his fellows to pursue at such cost is neither mastery of the philosophical art, nor understanding of the

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nature of virtue and happiness. Rather, Socrates encourages his fellow elders to face mockery in order to learn to produce music on the harp (275c–d).

In what follows, I would like to provide a reading of the two protreptic arguments which explains why the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* would take there to be so much at stake in the acquisition of this sort of ordinary productive knowledge. This reading will hinge on the claim that Socrates' endorsement of wisdom's power to ensure the happiness of its possessor neither relies on nor amounts to an endorsement of the claim that any single type of knowledge possesses this happiness-producing power independently. The wisdom which Socrates praises in the first protreptic is a complex, composed of two distinct types of knowledge, each of which offers a unique power to its possessor. These constituents of wisdom are: (1) ordinary productive knowledge, which allows its possessor to make or acquire ethically-neutral goods¹; and (2) ethically productive knowledge, which allows its possessor to make a good life for themselves through correct use of already acquired ethically-neutral goods. The conclusion of the first protreptic, then, is that if we want to ensure our happiness, we will need to acquire an expansive array of diverse types of knowledge, learning both how to acquire any ethically-neutral goods that might be worth using, and how to use those goods in an ethically productive manner once acquired.²

This complicates the sufficiency of knowledge thesis, suggesting that although knowledge is enough to guarantee the happiness of its possessor, we can never really be sure that acquiring any particular piece of knowledge will benefit us.³ Any ordinary productive knowledge we acquire might be useless or even harmful in the absence of the relevant ethically productive knowledge, and any ethically productive knowledge we acquire might be useless in the absence of the relevant ordinary productive knowledge. Thus, wisdom reliably provides

1 The phrase “ethically-neutral goods” is somewhat paradoxical. I will continue to use it throughout this essay, however, as the word “goods” seems to be the best way to capture the particular sorts of products that Socrates has in mind, ranging as they do from wealth and honor to handsomeness and courage (279a–c). Speaking more generically of things or (following Reshotko 2006) of “Neither-Good-Nor-Bads” would seem to blur over an important interpretive issue, as it is unclear whether Socrates' argument in the first protreptic denies those things that are ordinarily taken to be goods a unique ethical status, or merely suggests that their ethical status is different than we may have originally thought. This issue will receive more detailed discussion in section “Socrates, Student of the Harp” below.

2 See note 12 below for discussion of how this thesis relates to the *Republic's* seemingly opposed insistence on the importance of specialization.

3 It should be emphasized that not all complication is a bad thing – the sufficiency of knowledge thesis may look more plausible when it no longer seems to deny the importance of ordinary goods or make too-good-to-be-true promises of a safe path through life. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for calling attention to the risk of confusion on this point.

happiness to whoever obtains it, but not to whoever pursues it, and the road to wisdom appears fraught with danger.

The second protreptic argument brings out this dilemma and investigates the possibility of escaping it, asking if some single art might be discovered that combines the powers of ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge, immediately guaranteeing benefit to the one who masters it. Socrates is unable to identify any such art, although he holds out hope that it might exist. Until such an art is discovered, then, the best humans can do is acquire as much ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge as they can. Thus, it is quite understandable that the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* would encourage his fellows to risk public derision for the sake of a seemingly insignificant art like harp playing – even if harp playing does not have much value on its own, it is part of the vast array of ordinary productive knowledge that we need in order to approach the sort of wisdom that would ensure happiness.

With this reading of the protreptics in mind, I hope that Socrates' consistent eagerness to learn the brothers' seemingly ridiculous art will no longer look so strange. I will argue that the text encourages us to see the brothers' art as a form of ordinary productive knowledge whose product is an understanding of subtle verbal distinctions. Like any other product of ordinary productive knowledge, mastery of subtle verbal distinctions is an ethically-neutral good, and opens up previously closed options for bad action. When led by the right ethical knowledge, however, the distinctions produced by the brothers' art can be put to extremely beneficial use. Thus, the exact same verbal distinction that the brothers use to argumentatively obscure reality is vital to Socrates' own efforts to argumentatively reveal it. The brothers are aware of an ambiguity in the term learning – in one sense, one learns by acquiring knowledge, in another sense by using knowledge already acquired. Awareness of this ambiguity allows them to intentionally mislead Clinias about learning's nature. Likewise, Socrates is aware of a parallel ambiguity in the term wisdom – in one sense, wisdom is what allows you to acquire ethically-neutral goods, in another sense, it is what allows you to use those goods well. In sharp contrast to the brothers, however, awareness of this ambiguity allows Socrates to carefully and intentionally avoid misleading Clinias about wisdom's nature. The verbal mastery which the brothers possess is, in other words, an essential part of philosophical expertise – to succeed at constructing arguments that reveal reality rather than obscuring it, we need both the sort of verbal mastery that the brothers possess, and a separate art which shows us how to use that verbal mastery in a better way than the brothers have.

Once philosophical expertise is seen as a complex composed of these two arts, it is possible to make sense of one more perplexing moment in the dialogue, namely Socrates' concluding advice that the lives led by those who practice philosophy not be taken into consideration when deciding whether or not philosophy should be pursued. If the pursuit of philosophical expertise involves the separate acquisition of two distinct arts, one of which is capable of harming us when possessed without the other, then attempting to acquire philosophical expertise will be no less dangerous than attempting to acquire wisdom as a whole. It will, in fact, be the most dangerous part of the pursuit of wisdom, as it is the only part where acquiring the relevant ethically productive knowledge before acquiring the relevant ordinary productive knowledge is not an option – knowledge of how to use verbal mastery well can be produced only by way of arguments that depend on verbal mastery for their construction. Socrates, consequently, can rightly claim that it is no strike against the value of philosophy that those who have pursued it in the past have been ruined by the pursuit – seeking philosophical expertise is a risky business, but great rewards are worth great risk.

The First Protreptic Argument

Let us turn, then, to the first protreptic argument. The conclusion of the first protreptic argument is that we should value wisdom above all else, as wisdom alone is capable of ensuring the happiness of the one who possesses it.⁴ In arriving at this conclusion, Socrates makes two distinct claims about wisdom's nature, first asserting that wisdom is equivalent to good fortune (279d), and then claiming that wisdom ensures the beneficial use of any goods we might possess (280d–281c). In what follows, I will argue that Socrates is able to make these two

⁴ I take Socrates to claim that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. This is somewhat controversial, as the argument of the first protreptic is sometimes read as merely asserting that wisdom is necessary for happiness. I will not deal extensively with this literature. In brief, however, I take the major difficulty faced by this reading to be its inability to account for Socrates' preoccupation with the distinction between making arts and using arts. As I will argue throughout this essay, the importance of the relationship between these two types of arts seems to be directly bound up with the fact that their combination is necessary in order to obtain reliable benefit from one's knowledge. Accounts which reject Socrates' interest in wisdom's ability to benefit reliably will have a hard time making sense of why the first protreptic argument has two phases (one in which wisdom is identified with good fortune, and one in which it is identified with good use), and why the second protreptic argument, with its preoccupation with identifying a type of knowledge that makes what it uses, even exists.

quite distinct claims about wisdom only insofar as he takes it to be a complex made out of two distinct kinds of knowledge. If Socrates' argument is not read in this way, then his defense of wisdom's value will appear to depend either on equivocation or circularity.

Wisdom and Good Fortune

At the start of the first protreptic, Socrates and Clinias agree to the (soon to be significantly modified) claim that happiness would belong to someone who "had plenty of good things" (279a).⁵ Socrates and Clinias then go about preparing a list of these good things, with elements ranging from health and wealth to wisdom and beauty. Socrates then adds good fortune to the list, declaring it to be "the greatest good of all" (279c). Socrates immediately rejects this addition as redundant, however. Good fortune, Socrates claims, had already been on the list, just under a different name, for good fortune is nothing more than wisdom (279d).⁶ In order to defend this claim, Socrates presents a series of examples, in which an expert is able to provide either themselves or someone relying on them with good fortune within their area of expertise:

Why, Clinias, consider for example doing well with pipe music, don't you think the pipers have the best fortune?

⁵ Quotations are drawn from the W.H.D. Rouse translation (published in Plato 1998) throughout.

⁶ Jones argues that Socrates should not be seen as identifying wisdom and good fortune. Rather, Jones claims that wisdom should merely be seen as something that generally produces good fortune, ensuring that it will be had whenever circumstances are favorable (Jones 2013: 4–12). On this reading, however, Socrates' refusal to add good fortune to the list of goods would seem a dishonest move. Socrates and Clinias were making a list of the things that "are good for us" (279a), and which we need in order to be happy. Insofar as good fortune is one of the good things which we need to be happy, it ought to be on the list. The fact that wisdom, which often produces good fortune, was already on the list, would be no reason to exclude good fortune, as it would still be a separate good that we need to do well in life. Jones grants that good fortune is one of the goods that we need to do well – this is, in fact, central to his argument against the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness, which he defends by claiming that wisdom is not sufficient to produce good fortune (Jones 2013: 17–18). Wisdom's association with good fortune cannot exclude it from the list unless their relationship is either one of identity or completely reliable entailment (such that saying that you need to have both wisdom and good fortune to do well in life would be redundant insofar as having wisdom always implies having good fortune). Insofar as Jones' argument against attributing the sufficiency thesis to Socrates depends on denying that Socrates attributes relations of identity or necessary entailment to wisdom and good fortune, however, I take this point to strike a serious blow against his account.

He said yes.

And in the writing and reading of letters, I said, the grammar men?

Certainly.

Consider the dangers of the sea. Surely you don't think that anyone has better fortune than wise pilots, as a general rule?

Of course not.

Well then, on a campaign, which would you like better to share danger and fortune with, a wise captain or an ignorant one?

A wise one.

And if you were ill, which would you prefer to run risks with, a wise physician or an ignorant one?

A wise one.

Don't you think, then, I said, that it would be better fortune to do anything along with a wise man, than with an ignorant one? (279e–280a)

In each case, it is the expert's wisdom that ensures good fortune to themselves or those who rely upon them for their success – thus, it appears that saying that someone is wise in a particular domain is already to say that they have good fortune within it.

This claim – that wisdom is equivalent to good fortune – is initially quite perplexing, not in the least part because it is not immediately clear what Socrates takes the phrase good fortune to mean. In Rusty Jones' "Wisdom and Happiness in *Euthydemus* 278–282" (2013), three plausible readings of the phrase good fortune are considered – good fortune as good luck, good fortune as internal-success, and good fortune as outcome-success (12). To interpret good fortune as good luck, is to equate it with the favorable disposition of events and circumstances that are outside of our control. Jones rightly dismisses the idea that Socrates could mean the phrase good fortune to refer to good luck in this way – to say that good fortune is the same as wisdom, is to say that it depends on us in a way that luck does not (12–13). To interpret good fortune as internal-success is to equate it with a capacity to act rightly, regardless of the results that come from this right action. On this reading, a doctor would have good fortune insofar as she successfully follows correct medical practice, regardless of whether such practice allows her to actually save her patient. Taking Socrates' use of the term good fortune to refer to this sort of internal-success seems dubious, however, as the equation of good fortune with acting well seems out of step with Socrates' suggestion that an individual can have good fortune even when she is not the one acting. Socrates' claim was not that good fortune belongs to wise doctors, but that it belongs to *patients* who rely on wise doctors.

The remaining of Jones' options – equating good fortune with outcome-success – is the one he himself ultimately adopts. This option is significantly more plausible than the other two options Jones considers, but it contains an ambiguity which makes it difficult to determine how well it fits Socrates' use of the

phrase good fortune. On one reading, someone could be said to have outcome-success insofar as they obtain an outcome which actually benefits them. In the context of the first part of the protreptic argument, in which doing well is equated with having good things, to say that good fortune means outcome-success would thus amount to saying that good fortune means obtaining the various good things on the list.⁷ If outcome-success is understood in this way, then equating good fortune with outcome-success would seem to pose two interpretive problems. First, Socrates claims that adding good fortune to the list of goods would be redundant because good fortune is identical to a particular one of the already listed goods, namely wisdom. If good fortune means outcome-success, however, and outcome-success just means attainment of some or all of the goods that constitute happiness, then adding good fortune to the list would be redundant not just because it is equivalent to wisdom, but because it is equivalent to all of the other goods on the list as well – to say that someone has good fortune would just be an indirect way of saying that they have some of the listed goods. That Socrates picks out wisdom as the one good on the list that good fortune duplicates would thus be perplexing at best and misleading at worst. Second, on this reading of outcome-success, it would be unclear how Socrates' appeal to the way that expertise produces craft-success could serve to demonstrate the sense in which wisdom produces good fortune. Suppose an expert "grammar man"'s wisdom allows her to write a sentence successfully – does this necessarily allow her to obtain an actually beneficial result for herself? Perhaps the beautiful sentence she had such good fortune in producing was an ill-considered clause in a business agreement that will ultimately lead her to ruin. Socrates' examples, then, seem to suggest the equation of good fortune not with the obtainment of a truly beneficial result, but with a much more local and ethically-neutral sort of success, namely with the achievement of one's immediate goals regardless of their actual value to oneself. This alternative understanding of outcome-success as corresponding not to the obtainment of something truly beneficial, but simply to the capacity to obtain whatever it is that one happens to be after is also sometimes suggested by Jones' account,⁸ and it seems to be a much more adequate gloss of Socrates' use of

⁷ Jones seems to have this sort of conception of outcome-success in mind when he says that "Good fortune might even itself entail the other goods like health and wealth, provided it is not simply internal-success... the highest sort of good fortune might be thought to be the achievement of success in one's life as a whole" (Jones 2013: 17). These statements are presented as part of an argument that Jones rejects. However, the argument is rejected not for its equation of good fortune with the acquisition of beneficial goods, but for its identification of good fortune with wisdom.

⁸ Thus, we see Jones glossing Socrates' description of fortune as "the greatest of goods" as follows: "Success at achieving one's aims is identified as the greatest of the goods, and one of

the phrase good fortune. Socrates' examples, in which experts are able to provide good fortune both to themselves and to those who rely on them, seem to fit nicely with this reading – an expert pilot knows how to get herself and those who rely on her services to port, regardless of whether anything good awaits them there; relying on a wise doctor allows a sick person to obtain the health she seeks, regardless of whether either the patient or the doctor will receive any benefit from the patient's convalescence (perhaps the patient hates anyone who has seen her in a vulnerable state, and will kill the doctor immediately upon being healed, at which point she will herself be painfully executed). Good fortune, then, seems to amount to a kind of ethically-neutral productive ability, a skill at producing intended results, whatever they are, and whether or not anyone will benefit from them.⁹

Given this understanding of good fortune, Socrates' claim that wisdom is equivalent to good fortune amounts to the claim that wisdom is what allows you to be effective at achieving your aims, whatever they might be. For this claim to be plausible, Socrates must be bringing an immensely diverse array of different arts under the heading wisdom – the wisdom in question needs to be able to produce or acquire anything you might be after, and thus must include (at the very least) all of the ordinary productive and acquisitive arts. This conclusion seems borne out by Socrates' examples, in which good fortune is produced by the mastery of several distinct commonplace arts: that of pipers, grammarians, pilots, captains, and physicians respectively. These ordinary productive and acquisitive arts are all forms of knowledge, and can thus reasonably be grouped together under the heading of wisdom, justifying Socrates' claim that wisdom constitutes a capacity to effectively attain one's ends.¹⁰

the main reasons Socrates gives Clinias for pursuing wisdom is that wisdom is conducive to achieving one's aims" (Jones 2013: 17).

9 In the language of the *Gorgias* (i. e. at 268e), good fortune is an ability to do what *seems* good to you, but not necessarily an ability to do what you actually want. Good fortune allows you to achieve your immediate ends, regardless of how those immediate ends relate to your ultimate object of desire (i. e. the happiness that all human beings fundamentally seek).

10 Socrates perhaps oversteps himself a little in suggesting that efficacy at attaining one's ends depends entirely upon such knowledge – various capacities that seem necessary in order to achieve ends one might have are not primarily or entirely knowledge based (i. e. if I want to carry out a successful heart transplant, I need a steady hand in addition to medical knowledge). Perhaps Socrates is assuming that such non-cognitive capacities can always be developed by an expert trainer, and thus ultimately be acquired by way of knowledge. Alternatively, Socrates' thought may be that experts are always capable of recognizing other experts – thus, even if an expert in a particular art were to lack a non-cognitive ability necessary to achieve success in that art, she could still achieve success in it indirectly by identifying and employing another expert

Having established that this sort of efficacy depends on wisdom, Socrates seems to be in a good position to validate his claims about wisdom's value. At this point in the argument, it is being assumed both that happiness amounts to having good things, and that identifying such good things "is an easy question" (729a). On these assumptions, to become happy would require little more than a capacity to produce or otherwise acquire the various already identified good things. Socrates has shown wisdom to be precisely such a capacity: wisdom, as the source of productive and acquisitive efficacy, is mastery of the art of coming to have whatever you wish to possess. Socrates is quite right, then, to say that this way of thinking about happiness makes good fortune – and hence wisdom – out to be "the greatest good of all" (279c). Wisdom of the productive and acquisitive sort that Socrates has been describing in this part of the protreptic is indispensable to us insofar as our happiness depends on coming to have good things.

Wisdom and Good Use

Socrates, then, has convinced Clinias that wisdom – seen as a mastery of ordinary productive and acquisitive arts – is essential to attaining happiness as Clinias himself conceives of happiness (i. e. as the having of good things). In so doing, Socrates appears to be in a position to triumphantly conclude the first protreptic argument – his goal, after all, was to convince Clinias of the value of pursuing wisdom, and he seems to have done just that. Instead, however, Socrates continues the argument, appealing to a new model of happiness in order to bring out another sense in which wisdom is indispensable to its production. Given that Socrates' goal in the protreptic argument was not to teach Clinias about the nature of happiness, but to attract him to the pursuit of wisdom (278d), this would all be beside the point unless the commitment to wisdom generated in the first part of the argument was somehow insufficient. I hope to show that the commitment to wisdom generated in the first part of the argument was insufficient insofar as it was incomplete, attracting Clinias not to wisdom as a whole but only to a particular part of wisdom. In demonstrating the equivalence of wisdom with good fortune, Socrates successfully led Clinias to value ordinary productive and acquisitive

who possessed the necessary non-cognitive ability (I owe this point to Agnes Callard's comments on an earlier version of this paper). For this to solve the problem, however, a separate acquisitive art aimed at actually finding (or perhaps even training) the relevant experts and convincing them to employ their expertise on one's behalf would also be necessary. See note 12 for further discussion of this issue.

knowledge. However, the wisdom Socrates wants Clinias to seek includes more than just this type of knowledge.

Socrates begins the second stage of the first protreptic by raising a problem for the equation of happiness with the mere having of good things. Good things, Socrates suggests, do not benefit us simply insofar as we possess them. Rather, they benefit us only insofar as we use them. To illustrate this point, Socrates directs Clinias to think about someone who has a lot of food and drink but neither eats nor drinks (280c), a carpenter who has the materials needed to make a product but does not do so (280c), and someone who has a great deal of wealth but never spends it (280d). In each case, it is not the mere possession of the good object which we value, but rather its use. From these examples, Socrates and Clinias conclude that there are two distinct things which the person who seeks happiness must do, stating that “the one who is to be happy must not only get possession of such good things, but also must use them” (280d). As Socrates points out, however, not just any use of good things will do for the one who wishes to be happy; rather, some uses of good things provide benefit while others are positively harmful. To return to Socrates’ earlier example, the person who has a lot of food will benefit if she uses it to eat a nutritious meal, but suffer harm if she uses it to overeat to the point of nausea, to attract a swarm of hungry ants to her home, to provide fuel for an arson, etc. Thus, the person who wishes to be happy needs not just to acquire and use good things, but to acquire good things and use them well.

Once the need for right use is on the table, Socrates has yet another reason to assert the value of wisdom. To use something well, Socrates suggests, one must know what the right use of it is. Thus, knowledge again comes to be productive of happiness. This time, however, the knowledge in question is of a specifically ethical kind. The knowledge which Socrates had equated with good fortune allowed its possessor to produce or acquire anything, making no distinction between beneficial and harmful products. The knowledge that Socrates ties to good use, however, is specifically bound up with benefit – it is knowledge not of how to use things in whatever way you want, but of how to use things well. Socrates’ claims about the importance of right use for happiness, then, have allowed him to highlight the value of a different type of knowledge than the kind he praised in his earlier discussion of good fortune. Someone who wishes to be happy needs to seek out not just ordinary productive and acquisitive knowledge, but also a special kind of ethical knowledge which will allow her to make beneficial use of whatever she has acquired or produced.

The Conclusion of the First Protreptic

Socrates, then, has praised wisdom by way of praising two quite distinct types of knowledge, ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge. On my reading, the argument has the following form:

- (1) To be happy, it is sufficient to (a) have certain ethically-neutral goods, and (b) use those goods well.
- (2) Ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge allows us to acquire ethically-neutral goods.
- (3) Ethically productive knowledge allows us to use any ethically-neutral goods we have well.
- (4) Thus, to be happy, it is sufficient to have ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge.
- (5) Ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge are both types of knowledge.
- (6) Thus, knowledge/wisdom is sufficient for happiness.

Given premise 1 – which I take to be clearly stated at 280d–e, and maintained for the rest of the first protreptic¹¹ – Socrates can only honestly conclude that wisdom suffices for happiness if he is taking it to be complex, composed of multiple different types of knowledge. Happiness has been shown to depend on two different things – having ethically-neutral goods, and using those goods well – and Socrates has provided distinct arguments to the effect that wisdom provides us with both. However, each of these arguments relies on the identification of wisdom with a different type of knowledge – wisdom is identified with ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge in order to show that wisdom provides good fortune, and with ethically productive knowledge in order to show that wisdom provides good use. If, then, Socrates were to conclude that either type of knowledge alone was sufficient to ensure the happiness of its possessor, he would be relying on an equivocation to do so, using their joint association

¹¹ “Is that enough now to make a man happy, both to possess the good things and to use them? I think so.

Is that if he uses them aright, or is it the same if he uses them wrongly? If he uses them right.” (280d–e)

The remainder of the protreptic focuses on identifying the thing that allows us to use our possessions rightly (ethical knowledge), and questioning the independent ethical status of possessions (should we really talk about possessing “good things” [my emphasis], when all possessions can be put to bad use?). None of this requires modification of the essential sufficiency claim Socrates and Clinias agree to here: to possess certain things and use those things well is “enough now to make a man happy”.

with the term wisdom to mask the attribution of one type of knowledge's power to a different type of knowledge that has never been shown to possess that power. Alternatively, Socrates could already be assuming the identification of wisdom with the special art that combines the powers of productive/acquisitive knowledge and ethical knowledge which he seeks out in the second protreptic. However, as he has provided no argument for the existence of such an art in the first protreptic, and indeed is unable to identify it even in the second, this procedure would make Socrates' conclusion about wisdom's value quite premature, and raise some suspicion of circularity – Socrates would have demonstrated wisdom's value by working out what powers something would need in order to be truly valuable to us, and then asserting that wisdom *must* have those powers, with that must seemingly backed up by little more than preexisting faith in wisdom's value.

For the conclusion of the first protreptic to be an honest one, then, the wisdom which Socrates praises must be seen as complex rather than singular, composed of two general types of knowledge, and many particular arts. Happiness has been shown to depend on success in two distinct domains – “getting and doing” (281b) – and a different type of knowledge has been shown to provide success in each. Further, within the domain of “getting”, knowledge has been shown to ensure success only insofar as such success would be ensured by a quite general mastery of the productive/acquisitive arts, or at least of any of those arts whose products must be used in order to lead a good life.¹² In praising wisdom in the first protreptic, then, Socrates is praising a state constituted by the possession of a diverse and expansive array of knowledge. As such, when Socrates concludes “that every man in every way shall try to become as wise as possible” (282a), this amounts to an exhortation to acquire as much of

¹² Note, however, that guaranteed access to masters of these arts would be just as good as mastering them yourself – the wise doctor's skill can be the patient's good fortune, etc. To some extent, the political system discussed in the *Republic* seems aimed at ensuring the general availability of all forms of craft expertise without requiring each individual to master all crafts – everyone is a master of something, and this means that each can rely on the skill of her neighbor to be her good fortune in domains where she cannot be her own (see the discussion of the city's origins in lack of self-sufficiency at *Republic* 369b–c – an individual with the kind of universal craft knowledge praised in the *Euthydemus* would not be insufficient in this sense). Of course, however, the *Republic* state is also not designed to ensure each citizen's happiness (420b–421c), so there is no reason to assume that citizens would always have access to each other's skills – the city may need those resources allocated elsewhere, leaving the happiness of any given individual up in the air. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for both pushing back against my initial handling of this issue, and encouraging me to think about the relation between the *Euthydemus*' praise of universal craft knowledge and the *Republic*'s insistence on the value of specialization.

the knowledge that constitutes wisdom as we possibly can. As the second protreptic will show, however, the fact that it is only the whole of wisdom which has been demonstrated to be truly valuable means that there is a serious question about how we should go about acquiring the parts that make it up.

The Second Protreptic

Having resolved in the first protreptic that seeking wisdom was the path to happiness, Socrates and Clinias next begin to think about what concrete steps to take in order to obtain it. Agreeing that “to love wisdom is to get knowledge” (288d), the two next turn to the question of what knowledge they should seek out. At this point, however, the complex nature of the wisdom praised in the first protreptic begins to complicate their endeavor. Socrates and Clinias value wisdom insofar as they take it to reliably benefit its possessor, ensuring her happiness. In seeking knowledge for the sake of wisdom, consequently, they are really seeking it for the sake of obtaining this sort of reliable benefit. Thus, they agree that the knowledge they should seek is “simply the knowledge that shall benefit us” (288d).

As it turns out, however, the complex nature of wisdom means that wisdom’s capacity to provide this sort of reliable benefit fails to translate into any single piece of knowledge’s capacity to provide reliable benefit. According to the argument of the first protreptic, an individual’s ability to obtain happiness depends on her possession of two distinct powers: the ability to make/acquire ethically-neutral goods, and the ability to use those goods well. In looking for the knowledge that will benefit them, consequently, Socrates and Clinias seek out “such a knowledge as combines both how to make something and how to use what is made” (289b).¹³ As we have seen, however, wisdom was only able to combine both of these powers insofar as it subsumed two distinct types of knowledge within itself, drawing its power to make/acquire things from ordinary productive knowledge and its power to use things from ethically productive

13 One advantage of my reading is that it makes it clear why Socrates is after knowledge that combines both of these things. This has often been mysterious to commentators who read the first protreptic as defending a unitary type of wisdom that benefits us by way of a single power. Thus, Julia Annas, taking the first protreptic to have praised wisdom solely for producing good use, can only see Socrates’ later interest in an art that combines making and using as evidence of confusion produced by over-reliance on the analogy between skill and virtue (Annas 1993: 60–61).

knowledge. Thus, when Socrates and Clinias ask themselves which single piece of knowledge they should acquire in order to obtain the happiness they seek, they find that the benefits of any particular art they examine are unreliable and obscure – some arts offer them the power to make/acquire things, and others offer them the power to use things well, but no single art seems to combine both powers.

This failure to identify a single art that can provide its possessor with both of the powers required to be happy¹⁴ significantly complicates the relationship between pursuing wisdom and obtaining happiness. At the end of first protreptic, it looked like a reliable path to obtaining happiness had been laid out before us – wisdom always produces happiness, so if you want to be happy, all you have to do is seek wisdom. As the second protreptic makes clear, however, the fact that *having* wisdom reliably produces happiness does not mean that *pursuing* wisdom reliably produces happiness. If we wish to be happy, we need to be wise, and if we wish to be wise, we need to acquire a vast array of different forms of knowledge. Until we have acquired all of these forms of knowledge, however (and it is unclear that we could ever really have all of them), any particular piece of knowledge which we have acquired might turn out to be useless to us, or even harmful. Thus, any productive/acquisitive knowledge which we acquire will provide no reliable benefit in the absence of knowledge of how to put the things it gets for us to good use, and may in fact harm us by providing us with the tools we need to act badly. Likewise, any ethically productive knowledge that we acquire will be of unreliable benefit in the absence of the knowledge that allows us to get the things which it shows us how to use.¹⁵ Pursuing wisdom, consequently, involves a great deal of risk – the

14 Insofar as the powers of philosophical art are left conspicuously unexamined in the second protreptic, it is reasonable to suspect that Plato means to direct us to reflect on whether it might be the art we seek. As I will argue below (section “Why Study the Brothers’ Art?”), however, the *Euthydemus* seems to encourage a negative response to this question, exploring the idea that philosophy too involves distinct making and using arts.

15 This will seem an overstatement if one thinks that certain pieces of ethical knowledge tell us how to use things that we always possess. It is not clear to me, however, that Plato takes us to have any inalienable useful possessions. The most obvious candidate – the soul – is identified in the *Alcibiades* as the one thing that can never be used. We *are* our souls, and Socrates claims that user and used must be distinct (129e–130c). The *Republic*’s division of the soul into parts seems to put the problem back on the table – even if the soul cannot use itself as a whole, one part of the soul could use another part. Accompanying this division of the soul into parts, however, is the thought that each part might be stunted in a way that renders it unavailable for use (see, i. e. 411a–d) – the division of the soul into parts, consequently, saves the idea that the soul might be used only by suggesting that the materials needed for any particular use of the soul will not always be available. Although I take these points to indicate that there are no automatically available useful things on

benefits of reaching the (perhaps infinitely) distant endpoint of the pursuit are clear enough, but each step along the way is fraught with danger. In taking great pains to acquire any particular piece of knowledge, the seeker of wisdom exposes herself to significant risk for the sake of uncertain benefits, never knowing if the knowledge she has acquired will really end up helping her.¹⁶ This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why Socrates sometimes treats the pursuit of wisdom as the domain where courage is most truly expressed.¹⁷

Socrates, Student of the Harp

With this reading of the two protreptics in hand, I take it that we are now in a good position to solve our initial problem, explaining exactly why Socrates would encourage the elderly of Athens to face public shame for the sake of a seemingly trivial art like harp playing.

Plato's account, there may yet be a particular kind of ethical knowledge that always has access to its object. Thus, knowledge about the right use of knowledge, though not automatically possessed by human beings, is nonetheless always capable of guiding use once acquired – the knowledge that contemplation is beneficial, for example, will be a source of reliable benefit insofar as it can always be used as an object of contemplation itself. Unless the benefit offered by the use of such self-reflexive knowledge is sufficient to render a person happy, however, this will not solve the larger problem of needing to acquire potentially harmful or useless knowledge when pursuing the wisdom one needs to live well. Further, as will be discussed in section “The Value of Philosophy” below, the acquisition of any ethical knowledge (including ethical knowledge about how to use knowledge) seems to depend on prior acquisition and use of potentially dangerous ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point.

16 It is worth emphasizing that the risks involved in acquiring ordinary productive knowledge and ethically productive knowledge seem to be of different kinds. Acquiring ordinary productive knowledge without ethically productive knowledge can actively harm us by allowing misuse. Acquiring ethically productive knowledge without ordinary productive knowledge can be a waste of time and effort, but cannot actively harm us. This seems to suggest that wisdom might be pursued at relatively low risk as long as we are careful to always acquire knowledge of how to use something before knowledge of how to produce it. I will discuss the limitations of this hedging approach in section “The Value of Philosophy” and note 21 below.

17 I owe this claim about Socratic courage to Agnes Callard. Evidence for it can be found in Socrates' discussion of true courage in the *Phaedo*, as well as his presentation of the search for the definition of courage as a place where courage might be expressed at *Laches* 194. In the *Euthydemus* itself, we see this claim explicitly at 307c (to be discussed in section “Philosophical Courage” below), as well as implicitly at 275d-e where Socrates encourages Clinias not to let fear prevent him from participating in the brothers' promised discussion of wisdom and virtue (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for directing my attention to this last passage).

At the end of first protreptic, having established the importance of dedicating ourselves to the pursuit of wisdom, Socrates draws the following conclusion: “For wisdom’s sake, Clinias, there is no disgrace, no reproach, in being a servant and slave to a lover and to anyone, for a man willing to give honorable service in the passion to become wise” (282b). The one pursuing wisdom, Socrates suggests, may need to expose herself to a great deal of shame in the public eye, pursuing knowledge in ways that are seen as demeaning. There will, Socrates suggests, be no true dishonor in taking on this public scorn as long as it is done for wisdom’s sake.

On my reading of the protreptic arguments, the wisdom that Socrates makes these claims about includes a great deal of ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge. We need not conclude that *all* productive/acquisitive knowledge is in play here. The first protreptic argument only explicitly claims that our happiness depends on having and using certain specific things – the items on the original list of things that make us happy – not all things. Thus, we first see Socrates saying that happiness requires us to have “good things” (279a), then that it requires us “both to possess the good things and to use them” (280d), and finally that it requires us to make use of “those things which we said at first were good” (281d); the same things are in play throughout the argument, although their ethical status shifts significantly. As such, it is not entirely clear whether we should think of happiness as dependent on the possession of truly universal productive/acquisitive knowledge, appealing to the thought that anything could be useful in some situation, or as merely dependent on the ability to produce a specific group of things, the use of which is in some direct way productive of happiness.¹⁸ In any case, anything which seems necessary in order to secure happiness on the more restrictive account will be necessary in order to secure happiness on the looser account as well.¹⁹ As such, the argument of the first

18 I am, consequently, uncertain about Reshotko’s suggestion in *Socratic Virtue* that Socrates’ claims in the *Euthydemus* and the *Meno* indicate that a paper clip has the same basic ethical status as health (Reshotko 2006: 101). Reshotko’s view makes sense if Socrates’ thought is just that using things produces happiness in a causal sense. If, however, the claim is that using certain things (those things which we are typically tempted to call “good”) is somehow constitutive of happiness, then Reshotko’s view would seem to miss the mark.

19 It should, however, be noted just how severe the asymmetry is in the other direction. Things which are necessary to secure happiness on the looser account may be positively harmful possessions on the more restrictive view. If some things simply cannot be used well, then possessing them will be all risk and no reward – they will open the possibility for bad action without offering any compensation in the form of possibility for good action. Socrates and Clinias never give up the assumption that identifying those things that can be used well is an “easy question” (279a) – the purposes of the protreptic do not require additional precision here. Nonetheless, it seems likely that Plato himself would ultimately reject this assumption. On the

protreptic can be read as suggesting that reliable access to happiness requires, at a minimum, a capacity to produce/acquire the sort of ethically-neutral goods that were included in Socrates and Clinias' original list of things needed for happiness.

Although it was not on Socrates and Clinias' list, it seems right to take musical ability as one such ethically-neutral good. Music, and the ability to produce it, are both ordinarily taken to be good things in the same sense that wealth, beauty, and honor might be. Thus, a non-philosopher is likely to accept without further explanation someone's claim that music has provided them with happiness, while an appeal to special circumstances would be needed to make something like Naomi Reshotko's happiness-producing paper clip credible.²⁰ It seems reasonable to think that Socrates would expect harp playing to be the sort of skill whose product could be put to beneficial use, regardless of whether or not we take Socrates' argument to suggest that all things can be put to such use.

Consequently, in encouraging the elderly of Athens to pursue a mastery of the harp even in the face of public scorn, Socrates seems to really be once again encouraging them to pursue wisdom in the face of public scorn. The ability to play the harp and the music such playing produces both seem to be the sort of things that one could use well, in a way that is productive or constitutive of happiness. As such, a mastery of harp playing is one of the many ordinary productive/acquisitive arts that go into constituting wisdom. The fact that such an art, taken on its own, may appear trivial and inconsequential, just reinforces the idea that pursuing wisdom is a quite risky enterprise, requiring courage and fortitude. The particular pieces of knowledge that one acquires are of very much uncertain benefit, yet for the sake of wisdom one faces up to sizable dangers in order to acquire them. Thus, Socrates and the elderly of Athens face public scorn for the sake of an art which *might* improve their lives, but might also just as easily fail to do so.²¹

more restrictive view, consequently, the acquisition of ordinary productive knowledge before ethical knowledge will be especially risky – not only will the knowledge acquired always be open to misuse, but it will sometimes be impossible to do anything other than misuse it.

20 In Reshotko's example, the paper clip allows you to deactivate a grenade (Reshotko 2006: 101), explaining its unexpected relevance to your happiness.

21 A question remains, however, about strategies that could be employed to minimize the risk of this pursuit. In the particular case at hand, one has to wonder why Socrates is pursuing this particular variety of knowledge at this particular moment in his life. Could he not wait to study the harp until after he acquired the relevant ethical knowledge, thus avoiding the risk of misusing his new skill? The *Euthydemus* does not provide us with an answer to this question. Plato is not directly interested in the harp and the specific value of its study here – Socrates' desire to study

Why Study the Brothers' Art?

Socrates' commitment to studying the seemingly trivial art of harp playing even in the face of public scorn mirrors a commitment that is much more central to the *Euthydemus*: namely, Socrates' resolution to study the seemingly ridiculous art taught by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. At the start of the text, we find Socrates telling Crito that younger harp students “look on and laugh at me” (272c) for pursuing mastery of the harp at such an old age. In parallel to this opening, at the end of the text we find the nameless speech writer telling Crito that, had Crito seen Socrates engaging with the brothers, “[he] would have been ashamed of [his] own familiar friend: he was such a fool as to want to put himself in the hands of men who just grapple with every phrase and don't care what they say” (305a). In each case, Socrates seems to be foolishly degrading himself in order to acquire an art that is not worth possessing.

In what follows, I will argue that Socrates' commitment to studying the brothers' art should be understood in the same terms that allowed us to explain his commitment to studying the harp. A key moment in the text encourages us to understand the brothers' art as a form of ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge, whose ethically-neutral product can be put to quite beneficial use when combined with the right ethical knowledge. The brothers' art, consequently, will turn out to be worth pursuing as a vital part of the wisdom that secures human happiness, despite seeming to be utterly worthless (if not positively harmful) when considered on its own.

The moment that suggests this understanding of the brothers' art is the transition between Clinias and the brothers' discussion of learning and the first protreptic. The brothers, having been asked to convince Clinias to love wisdom and practice virtue (275a), instead use a series of clever verbal tricks to confuse Clinias

the harp is presented as a way of getting the reader thinking about the nature of his interest in the brothers' art, not as an object of independent concern. Nonetheless, some progress on this question can be made by considering other texts where Plato takes a more direct interest in music in general and the harp in particular. Thus, in the *Republic*, Plato presents musical education as playing an important part in the training of future philosophers, citing the harp in particular as an instrument with a significant role in philosophical education (399d) (to avoid confusion, it should be emphasized that the word translated as harp here could be more precisely translated as kithara – other instruments that could also be described as harps are among those deemed harmful in the *Republic*). This would suggest that mastery of the harp might be a precondition of acquiring the ethical knowledge needed to reliably use that mastery well. If so, harp playing would be a particularly close parallel to the brothers' art, which stands in a similar relationship to ethical knowledge (see section “The Value of Philosophy” for a more detailed discussion). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point, as well as for suggesting that an answer might be found in the discussion of music's value at *Republic* 399d.

about who learners are (275d–276d) and what sort of things they learn (276d–277c). At this point, Socrates interrupts the discussion, and provides an analysis of what the brothers have been up to. Describing what has happened so far as a game of initiation, Socrates asks Clinias to view the brothers' activities as follows:

So consider now that you are hearing the beginnings of the sophistic ritual. For you must learn first of all, as Prodicus says, the right use of words; and this is just what the two visitors are showing to you, because you did not know that people use the word *learn* in two senses – first, when one has no knowledge at the beginning about something, and then afterwards gets that knowledge, and second, when one already having the knowledge uses this knowledge to examine this same thing done or spoken. ... Well, all this is just a little game of learning, and so I say they are playing with you; I call it a game, because if one learned many such things or even all of them, one would be no nearer knowing what the things really are, but would be able to play with people because of the different sense of the words, tripping them up and turning them upside down. (277e–278c)

Socrates, then, sees the brothers' art as one that provides its possessor with an understanding of subtle verbal distinctions. Thus, the brothers' art allows them to examine the use of the term learn, and uncover a distinction between two senses of learning, one that involves getting knowledge, and one that involves using it.²² At the start of his analysis, Socrates seems to suggest that acquiring this sort of knowledge is a necessary first step in the brothers' efforts to show Clinias the value of wisdom – he states that “you must learn first of all, as Prodicus says, the right use of words”. Socrates' comments at the end of his analysis, however, seem to reveal this statement to be a mere ironic flourish. Renouncing the value of mastering these distinctions, Socrates declares that having knowledge of them is not enough to bring us any benefit (it fails to bring us “nearer knowing what the things really are”), but is enough to enable us to act badly (it lets us “[trip] [people] up”).

We should, however, be wary of overemphasizing the bite of these concluding remarks. These are, after all, more or less the same terms that Socrates uses to describe all the products of ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge in the first

²² The nature of this second type of learning is somewhat complex. Seemingly, it involves using knowledge of *x* in order to understand *y*, where *y* is in some sense constituted by *x*. Thus, Socrates speaks of someone who has knowledge of something using that knowledge “to examine *this same thing* done or spoken” (my emphasis). The example from the brothers' tricks was someone using their knowledge of letters in order to learn words composed of those letters (277a). This example recurs at 198e–199a in the *Theaetetus*, where the difficulty of verbally tracking the distinction between this type of learning and the more familiar kind is once again emphasized. In any case, the exact details of this second kind of learning are not tremendously important for my argument. The essential point is just that it is primarily concerned with using knowledge already possessed.

protreptic. As has already been discussed, these products are themselves ethically-neutral, making no positive impact on our lives from their mere presence, but only from their good use. Further, in the absence of the knowledge needed to use them well, these products can be actively harmful, opening the path towards misuses that would otherwise be impossible. Thus, Socrates' concluding assessment of the brothers' verbal distinctions does not force us to put an ironical reading on his initial statement regarding their preliminary role. Socrates' claim that there is no value in merely having these verbal distinctions is perfectly compatible with there being great value in the right use of them. The suggestion that teaching Clinias these distinctions might be a necessary preliminary to teaching him the value of wisdom, then, would map on to the way that getting hold of an ordinary good is a necessary preliminary to using it well.²³

That Socrates' assessment of the verbal distinctions brought out by the brothers' art should be read in this way is suggested by the fact that, immediately after presenting this analysis, Socrates goes on to make good use of verbal distinctions that are nearly identical to the ones the brothers used to confuse Clinias. As we saw, Socrates attributed the brothers' ability to mislead Clinias to their mastery of an important distinction between two different ways that we use the term learn. On the one hand, we speak of a type of learning that has a role in getting knowledge. On the other hand, we speak of a type of learning that has a role in using knowledge we have already acquired. Picking up on this distinction, Socrates builds the protreptic

23 Even when all this is taken into consideration, there may still be reason to hear some irony in Socrates' speech. Socrates' remarks about tripping people up seem to indicate that he is very much aware that the brothers are not really *trying* to show Clinias the right use of words, but just exploiting his verbal ignorance in order to trick him. The brothers' attempts to trip others up do often have the effect of educating their interlocutors about the right use of words – thus, repeated refutation by the brothers eventually allows Ctesippus to pick up their art, culminating in his masterful use of a distinction between two senses of the term “everything” to tie the brothers themselves in verbal knots (300c–d). However, the brothers' spreading of their art in this way seems to be less a consequence of an intentional effort to educate than an accidental side effect of their games. Neither brother is pleased when Ctesippus starts to master their technique, and Socrates describes Ctesippus' acquisition of the brothers' art as a product of his copying (303e) them, suggesting that Ctesippus learned from the brothers' example rather than any lessons they intentionally imparted – the object of mimicry is a passive participant in the transfer of knowledge in a way that a teacher is not. As such, if Socrates' description of the brothers' tricks as teaching Clinias the right of use of words is heard as a claim about *why* the brothers have been employing those tricks, it will still seem to warrant a somewhat ironic reading. If, however, Socrates' description of the educational value of the brothers' tricks is heard simply as a claim about the effects of the brothers' actions rather than the intentions behind them, there will be no cause to hear Socrates' words at all ironically. In any case, that there might be some ironic bite to Socrates' statements about the brothers' intentions does not suggest that there must also be an ironic twist to his statements about the value of their art.

arguments around a distinction between two different senses of the term wisdom, a sense that has to do with getting things, and a sense that has to do with using things already acquired. Unlike the brothers, however, Socrates very carefully avoids using this distinction to trip up Clinias. On the contrary, Socrates' awareness of wisdom's two different senses seems to allow him to take steps to actively avoid the sort of equivocation that would have let him easily trick Clinias into accepting the value of one part of wisdom by proving the value of the other. On this point, it will be helpful to recall my argument from the start of section "Wisdom and Good Use". As I noted there, Socrates could easily have brought the first protreptic to a triumphant conclusion after the initial discussion of wisdom's identity with good fortune – Socrates set out to get Clinias to value wisdom, and this initial discussion was sufficient to get Clinias to acknowledge wisdom's worth. Socrates, however, chooses to continue the argument, with his motive seemingly being an awareness that the initial argument had only committed Clinias to the value of wisdom in one of the two senses of the word. Mastery of subtle verbal distinctions, then, seems to be what saves Socrates from accidental equivocation, allowing him to see the need to keep the argument going until he actually shows the value of wisdom as a whole, rather than being seduced by a linguistic anomaly into thinking that he had brought out the value of wisdom as such when he had only brought out the value of one part of it. The mastery of verbal distinctions acquired through the brothers' art, then, does turn out to have an important role in bringing us "nearer knowing what the things really are", pointing us towards genuine conceptual distinctions which would otherwise be blurred over in our arguments, necessarily occurring as they do by way of language. The relationship between mastering these verbal distinctions and coming to understand things as they really are, consequently, seems to depend wholly on whether or not we put them to good use. Just as in the *Hippias Minor* Socrates argues that the same knowledge which enables one to lie is needed if one wants to tell the truth, here it turns out that the same knowledge which allows one to verbally obscure reality is needed if one wants to verbally reveal it. If you do not know how to use words precisely enough to intentionally use them badly, then you are unlikely to know how to use them precisely enough to intentionally use them well.²⁴

²⁴ My position here is both significantly similar to and significantly different from that of Rosalyn Weiss in her "When Winning is Everything: Socratic Elenchus and Euthydemian Eristic" (2000). Like Weiss, I hold that Socrates and the brothers share certain important tools, with what separates them being largely the use that they make of those tools. Unlike Weiss, however, I do not think that logical fallacy is a member of the shared tool kit. The major source of the distinction between our views is, I take it, that on my reading what Socrates and the brothers share is a set of tools for use in the production of arguments, while on Weiss' reading what Socrates and the brothers share is a set of tools for use in the production of belief in conclusions. Thus, on Weiss' reading, Socrates makes better use of the tools he shares with the brothers insofar

There is, then, no reason to be surprised at Socrates' repeated declarations of the brothers' wisdom, nor at the way that these declarations tend to follow their most outrageous deceptions. The brothers' ability to consistently pull these tricks off is what reveals them to be true masters of an art that constitutes a very important part of wisdom. Namely, that part of wisdom which makes philosophical activity – identified here with the argumentative uncovering of reality – possible.

The Value of Philosophy

If the above is an adequate account of Socrates' interest in the brothers' art, then interesting light will have been shed on the question about the value of philosophy which concludes the dialogue and is implicitly raised throughout. I have claimed that coming to understand reality through argument requires the possession of two distinct arts: a form of ordinary productive/acquisitive knowledge which allows us to get an understanding of subtle verbal distinctions, and a form of ethical knowledge which allows us to put that understanding to use in the construction of arguments that reveal rather than obscure.²⁵ If this is the case, then philosophy cannot be the art sought in the second protreptic that combines making and using – argumentatively understanding reality too requires the combination of two arts, one that makes and one that uses the things made. A consequence of this is that the pursuit of philosophy will be no less dangerous than the pursuit of wisdom in general – it may, in fact, even be the most dangerous part of wisdom's pursuit. The aspiring philosopher must acquire two distinct arts, neither one of which will provide reliable benefit in the

as he uses them to defend better conclusions, while on my reading Socrates makes better use of the tools he shares with the brothers insofar as he uses them to make better arguments. As such, my reading is not really a form of what Mary McCabe refers to as the “good conscience view” of the *Euthydemus* (McCabe 1998: 141), despite being similar to it in some key respects.

²⁵ It is worth making it clear that I do not identify either of these arts with philosophical expertise. To be able to engage in successful philosophical activity (i.e. produce arguments that reveal reality rather than obscuring it) whenever one wants, one would need to possess both arts, so it would seem reasonable to treat possession of both as a precondition of true expertise in philosophy. Throughout the discussion, I will refer to those who seek to gain this expertise as pursuing philosophy, and those who successfully produce arguments that reveal reality as engaged in philosophical activity. As will come out below, one does not need to have mastered both arts to engage in philosophical activity, any more than one needs to have mastered cartography to direct someone on the road to Larisa – luck and true opinion can get you just as far here as it can in any other domain. It is thus possible for someone like Socrates who denies having knowledge of either art to sometimes engage in successful philosophical activity.

absence of the other. One of these arts, the ethically productive knowledge that lets one use verbal distinctions well, will often be useless when had on its own – a sincere understanding of the value of the truth will not get you very far if you lack the linguistic skills needed to argumentatively reveal it. The other art, the ordinary productive knowledge that allows one to grasp subtle verbal distinctions, will often be significantly worse than useless when had on its own – in the absence of knowledge of how to make beneficial use of the verbal mastery one possesses, one may very well use it in a way that is harmful, following in the brothers' footsteps and using one's verbal skills to obscure reality rather than reveal it. What makes the pursuit of philosophy so dangerous, is that there is no option to wait until after the ethical knowledge has been acquired to learn the productive knowledge – the aspiring philosopher must start by acquiring verbal mastery, and only then turn her attention to learning how to use that mastery well. Knowledge of how verbal mastery should be used can be gained only by way of philosophical activity, and such activity can only be engaged in by someone who has *already* acquired knowledge of subtle verbal distinctions – you can use something well by chance despite not knowing how it ought to be used, but no amount of luck will allow you to make good use of something you do not possess. Philosophy, then, differs in a significant sense from other activities, for philosophical activity alone is burdened with providing the very ethical knowledge necessary for its safe pursuit. The aspiring philosopher must, consequently, expose herself to a great deal of risk – she must take possession of a potentially dangerous skill before she knows how to use it safely, and she must then attempt to use it, for she has to hit the mark by pure luck at least once if she is to learn how to hit the mark consistently. The aspiring philosopher must use her words to uncover something important about reality before she truly knows that it is to her benefit to do so, for this is her only way of learning that it is to her benefit to do so.²⁶

I take it that this conclusion fits quite well with Socrates' response to Crito's worry about the apparently deficient quality of most philosophers. Socrates advises Crito to “not trouble about those who practice philosophy, whether they are good or bad; but examine the thing itself well and carefully” (307b). Were the pursuit of philosophy either guaranteed to benefit or guaranteed to harm, this advice would be off point – the value of philosophy would be directly expressed in the quality of its practitioners' lives, making paying attention to them just as instructive as paying attention to it. On my reading, however, Socrates' advice makes good sense – if the pursuit of philosophy is

²⁶ I owe this point about the special dangers of philosophy to Agnes Callard's comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

potentially very beneficial, but necessarily involves a dangerous phase where the aspiring philosopher must concern herself with the acquisition of potentially harmful knowledge, then looking at the lives of those who pursue philosophy would not be a reliable indicator of philosophy's worth. It is impossible to determine the value of a dangerous feat by looking at the lives of those who have attempted it – a dangerous activity is worth pursuing if the risk is outweighed by the reward, and looking at the lives of those who have previously attempted the activity will not reveal whether this is the case. If those who previously attempted the activity are in a bad state, then that tells us something about the risk, but nothing about the reward; if they are in a good state, then this tells us something about the reward, but nothing about the risk. Thus, when Crito notes that those who pursue philosophy seem to be ruined by it, Socrates is right to point out that this tells him very little about the value of its pursuit – that the pursuit of philosophy is capable of ruining someone does not mean that philosophy is not worth pursuing, for the rewards of its successful pursuit may be great enough to justify risking ruin.

Philosophical Courage

I have proposed a reading of the *Euthydemus* on which the pursuit of wisdom requires the mastery of a large number of distinct arts. Together, these arts constitute wisdom, and guarantee the happiness of their possessor. Independently, they are at best worthless, and in many cases positively harmful to the one who masters them. To pursue wisdom, consequently, requires a great deal of courage. A sort of social or political courage will be needed, as struggling to acquire a seemingly worthless art invites scorn from those who fail to place your efforts in the context of a larger project of pursuing wisdom. The sort of courage that allows one to face genuine risks for the sake of great reward will also be needed, as there is no guarantee that any particular art that you acquire will actually benefit you – wisdom always benefits as a whole, but until you have acquired all of the knowledge that constitutes it, it remains uncertain whether the particular portion of knowledge you have acquired will be helpful or harmful.

The pursuit of philosophy, more than that of any other art, seems to require such courage. To consistently engage in successful philosophical activity, one needs to be a master of two distinct arts, one which provides a grasp of subtle verbal distinctions, and one which allows the use of those distinctions to construct arguments that reveal reality rather than obscuring it. To pursue philosophical activity, consequently, one must first acquire two arts, each of which is

independently of no value, and one of which can easily become harmful. In pursuing each of these individual arts, one exposes oneself to public shame, making oneself look ridiculous by appearing to place great value on that which has no value. Further, one exposes oneself to serious risk – the potentially harmful art must be acquired first, and it threatens to deprive the one who misuses it of the very good which philosophy was meant to provide, obscuring the reality it was meant to reveal. It is appropriate, therefore, that the *Euthydemus* concludes with Socrates advising Crito that “if [philosophy] appears to you such as I think it to be, *take courage*, pursue it, and practice it” (307c, my emphasis). Just as pursuing wisdom requires great courage despite the fact that wisdom always provides happiness, so too does pursuing philosophy require great courage, despite the fact that successful philosophical activity always benefits.²⁷

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