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Wisdom and Happiness in *Euthydemus* 278-282

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1. Introduction

There is perhaps no philosophical thesis that has more often been thought to be most central to or most distinctive of the philosophy of Socrates in Plato's dialogues¹ than the thesis that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. The sufficiency thesis amounts to the claim that no matter how things go in your life, if you are wise then you are happy, either because being wise somehow infallibly gives you the resources to become happy or because happiness just amounts to being wise. Hence its centrality for Socrates: The sufficiency thesis explains why Socrates is so interested in wisdom (which is the same as being interested in virtue, according to Socrates), and why he is always trying to acquire it and always trying to persuade others to acquire it, too. But the sufficiency thesis is a deeply counterintuitive one. Aristotle famously wrote that no one would maintain it unless defending a "philosopher's paradox".² Hence its distinctiveness for Socrates: Few others have been willing to go so far.

This common portrait of Socrates is appealing, but false. The *locus classicus* for attributing the sufficiency thesis to Socrates is *Euthydemus* 278-282.³ The interpretation I will

¹ And this is the philosophy I am interested in in this paper, the philosophy expressed by the character named Socrates who appears in Plato's dialogues, and particularly in the *Euthydemus*.

² *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b31-1096a2. I borrow 'philosopher's paradox' from Irwin's translation of 'θέσις'. Strictly speaking, what Aristotle says no one would maintain is that a virtuous person who is completely inactive throughout his life, or who suffers the worst misfortunes, is happy. This is not the sufficiency thesis itself, but something that the sufficiency thesis (at least on certain natural construals of the thesis) plausibly might be thought to entail. Similarly, at 1153b19-21, Aristotle denies what seems to be (or nearly to be) the sufficiency thesis: "Some maintain, on the contrary, that we are happy when we are broken on the wheel, or fall into terrible misfortunes, provided that we are good. Whether they mean to or not, these people are talking nonsense." (Irwin trans.)

³ The passage is largely unfamiliar to non-specialists, but specialists have often turned to it as crucial for understanding Plato's ethics. For example, Terence Irwin, in one of the most influential and provocative works on Platonic ethics in recent decades (*Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: 1995), esp. chapters 4-5) relies centrally on *Euthydemus* 278-282 to establish the following claims, each of which is both central to his interpretation and a point of controversy among scholars: Every action performed by some person is aimed

challenge is a long-standing one, stretching back at least to the Stoics, and common today.⁴ As I will show, the so-called *locus classicus* for the sufficiency thesis, *Euthydemus* 278-282, provides no evidence for, and even some evidence against, Socrates' commitment to the sufficiency thesis. It does, however, provide clear evidence for Socrates' commitment to the necessity of wisdom for happiness, and so explains the central importance of wisdom for Socrates. If correct, my argument forces those who would attribute the sufficiency thesis to Socrates to look elsewhere for

at promoting her own happiness (often called *psychological eudaimonism*); wisdom is purely instrumental for, rather than partially or wholly constitutive of, happiness; wisdom is necessary for happiness; wisdom is sufficient for happiness.

For others who rely on the passage to establish the sufficiency thesis, see, e.g., Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, (Cornell: 1999) ch. 2; Panos Dimas, "Happiness in the *Euthydemus*," *Phronesis* 47 (2002) 1-27; R. S. W. Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato's Euthydemus*, (American Philosophical Society: 1981); Richard Kraut, *Socrates and the State*, (Princeton: 1984) p. 211-212; Mark McPherran, "'What Even a Child Would Know': Socrates, Luck, and Providence at *Euthydemus* 277d-282e," *Ancient Philosophy* 25 (2005) 49-63; Daniel Russell, *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*, (Oxford: 2005) ch. 1; Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, (Cornell: 1991) p. 227-231. For the view that Socrates in the *Euthydemus* is not concerned with the logical relations of necessity and sufficiency, see Naomi Reshotko, *Socratic Virtue: Making the Best of the Neither-Good-Nor-Bad*, (Cambridge: 2006) ch. 7. For the view that in the so-called Socratic dialogues Socrates rejects both the sufficiency and the necessity of wisdom for happiness, see Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, (Oxford: 1994) ch. 4.

Among those who have taken the argument to aim at establishing the sufficiency thesis, some of these have thought the argument to fail *qua* argument. Most recently, Benjamin Rider ("Wisdom, Εὐτυχία, and Happiness in the *Euthydemus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2012) 1-14) has argued that Socrates' arguments are "insufficient to establish his strong conclusions." This is not to say that the passage is unimportant, for Rider argues that Socrates' arguments "nevertheless raise important questions for Clinias and for the reader about the relationship between happiness and wisdom and set the stage for later philosophical debates on the topic." Indeed, it seems that on Rider's view, Socrates recognizes the insufficiency of his arguments, but has protreptic reasons to offer them. To say that he has protreptic reasons is, in this context, to say that he uses the arguments in order to turn or urge (*protrepein*) Clinias toward philosophy. Though I will not engage such interpretations directly, my analysis, if persuasive, gives us reason to reject them. This is because I analyze Socrates' arguments in a way that shows them to meet a reasonable standard of plausibility. My approach crucially involves embracing the ideas that Socrates has a protreptic purpose and defends a "strong conclusion". However, the precise nature of this conclusion proves somewhat different from what other interpreters have supposed. Appreciating Socrates' argument for it will require us to attend to details of the passage that have largely gone underappreciated or misinterpreted by previous commentators.

⁴ Mark McPherran (2005, 49) reminds us just how far back the impressive pedigree of the view stretches:

[T]he *Euthydemus* began to be seen as the *locus classicus* for the sufficiency of virtue thesis beginning no later than with the Stoics, for in its key, initial protreptic section (277d-282e) they found a Socratic endorsement for their own central tenet that virtue is the only good-in-itself. Stoics were attracted, in particular, to the protreptic's condensed and, consequently, intriguingly problematic argument for the thesis that the possession of wisdom guarantees *eudaimonia* for its possessor no matter how much apparent bad luck that person might encounter (280a6-8).

On Stoic interpretation of the *Euthydemus*, see also Gisela Striker, "Plato's Socrates and the Stoics," in *The Socratic Movement*, ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt (Cornell: 1994) pp. 241-251.

their primary evidence. But even more radically, since the passage actually gives us some reasons to *reject* the sufficiency thesis, the interpretation I offer suggests that such a hunt for evidence is misguided. If that is correct, what we need is a thoroughgoing reevaluation of the nature of and relationships between the most important concepts in Socratic philosophy: *wisdom* and *happiness*. This paper is but the first step in such a reevaluation.

2. Alleged arguments for the sufficiency thesis in *Euthydemus* 278-282

On the standard reading, Socrates argues for the sufficiency thesis in *Euthydemus* 278-282. Irwin nicely illustrates this way of reading the passage:

Socrates takes it to be generally agreed that we achieve happiness by gaining many goods (279a1-4), but he argues that the only good we need is wisdom. He argues in three stages: (1) Happiness does not require good fortune added to wisdom (279c4-280a8). (2) Wisdom is necessary and sufficient for the correct and successful use of other goods (280b1-281b4). (3) Wisdom is the only good (281b4-e5). From this Socrates concludes that if we want to secure happiness, we need not acquire many goods; we need only acquire wisdom (282a1-d3).⁵

In support of this reading, Irwin identifies three arguments, one for each of the three stages. First, Socrates argues:

- (1) In each case the wise person has better fortune than the unwise (280a4-5).
- (2) Genuine wisdom can never go wrong, but must always succeed (280a7-8).
- (3) Therefore, wisdom always makes us fortunate (280a6).

Socrates is arguing, then, that “wisdom guarantees success whatever the circumstances.” But if wisdom alone is sufficient for success no matter what one’s situation, then wisdom must be sufficient for happiness no matter what one’s situation.

In the second stage, Irwin reconstructs Socrates’ argument as follows:

- (1) It is possible to use assets well or badly (280b7-c3, 280d7-281a1).
- (2) Correct use of them is necessary and sufficient for happiness (280d7-281e1).
- (3) Wisdom is necessary and sufficient for correct use (281a1-b2).
- (4) Therefore, wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness (281b2-4).

⁵ Irwin (1995) 55. The presentation of Irwin’s arguments that follows in this section, including all quotations, draws solely on Irwin (1995) 55-57.

Socrates final argument “is meant to secure Socrates’ previous claim that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness, for it claims to show that wisdom is the only good, and it has been agreed that happiness requires the presence of all the appropriate goods.” Irwin reconstructs the argument as follows:

- (1) Each recognized good [e.g., health, wealth] is a greater evil than its contrary, if it is used without wisdom, and each is a greater good than its contrary, if it is used by wisdom (281d6-8).
- (2) Therefore, each recognized good other than wisdom is in itself (*auto kath’ hauto*) neither good nor evil (281d3-5, d8-e1).⁶
- (3) Therefore, each of them is neither good nor evil (281e3-4).
- (4) Therefore, wisdom is the only good and folly the only evil.

There are, then, no fewer than three arguments that purport to demonstrate the necessity and sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. Contrary to Irwin’s interpretation, and others that may differ in detail but endorse the general point that Socrates argues for the sufficiency thesis,⁷ I will argue that Socrates in no way demonstrates or attempts to demonstrate the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness.⁸ I agree with Irwin that the passage divides naturally into three stages and I will treat each in turn, devoting the most space to the more problematic first stage.

3. Stage 1: “Wisdom is good fortune.” (*Euthydemus* 279c-280b)

At *Euthydemus* 279d6-7, Socrates makes a shocking claim: “Wisdom (σοφία) surely is good fortune (εὐτυχία); even a child would know that.” Two related interpretive issues immediately arise. First, are we to take this as a serious identity claim, that wisdom and good fortune just are the very same thing?⁹ This certainly does not seem like something even a child

⁶ Irwin’s argument cites 281e3-4 as evidence for premise (2). I think he must mean to refer to 281d3-5 or 281d8-e1 instead, but if the reader has doubts about this she can judge for herself by examining Irwin’s text, the relevant passages in the *Euthydemus*, and section 7 of this paper.

⁷ I have in mind those interpretations on which some part or all of *Euthydemus* 278-282 is meant to support the sufficiency thesis. See note 3.

⁸ I agree, as will become clear, that in this passage Socrates does endorse the necessity of wisdom for happiness.

⁹ Scholars who have given an affirmative answer to this question include McPherran (2005, 53) and Russell (2005, ch.1 throughout but most explicitly on pp. 30, 36-37).

would know, but it is a natural way to read Socrates' claim. And second, what exactly does 'good fortune' mean? I deal with the first issue in this section, and the second in the following section.

Certainly one natural way to read the claim that wisdom is good fortune is, at least in isolation, as an identity claim. And Socrates makes the claim in the context of giving a list of goods the possession of which will make us happy. He lists various goods of the body (health, wealth, good looks, and a sufficient supply of things the body needs), then goods had in relation to others (noble birth, power, and honor among one's countrymen), and finally goods of the soul (temperance, justice, courage, and wisdom). But, just when it looks like they have completed the list, Socrates exclaims that they have left off the most important item, "good fortune, which everyone, even the lowliest, says is the greatest of the goods" (270c7-8). Having put the last two goods, wisdom and good fortune, on the list with his young interlocutor Clinias' consent, Socrates reconsiders:

And reconsidering the matter I said, "You and I have nearly become ridiculous in front of the strangers, son of Axiochus."

"How so?" he asked.

"Because by putting good fortune in the previous list, we have said the same thing again."

"How is this?"

"It is most ridiculous to add again what was already mentioned, and to say the same things twice."

"What do you mean?"

"Wisdom surely is good fortune," I said. "Even a child would know that."

And he was surprised, for he is still so young and naïve. (279c9-d8)¹⁰

So, not only is it quite natural to read the claim that wisdom is good fortune as an identity claim, the immediate context of the claim also suggests that it is an identity claim. To add good fortune

¹⁰ Translations are my own throughout, unless otherwise attributed (though some will no doubt detect some influence from Sprague's translation). I follow Burnet's text.

to a list that already includes wisdom is to “say the same thing again” and to “add again what was already mentioned and to say the same things twice.”¹¹

But the argument that follows shows decisively that Socrates does not intend to put forward an identity claim. Here is the passage in full:

And recognizing that he was surprised, I said, “Clinias, don’t you know, then, that flautists have the best fortune (εὐτυχέστατοί εἰσιν) concerning playing flutes well?”

He agreed.

“And,” I said, “don’t grammarians have the best fortune concerning the writing and reading of letters?”

“Very much so.”

“Well then, with respect to the dangers of the sea, do you think that anyone has better fortune (εὐτυχεστέρους) than the wise pilots, for the most part?”

“Clearly not.”

“Well then, would you prefer when campaigning to share the danger and the luck with a wise general or with an ignorant one?”

“With the wise one.”

“Well then, with whom would you rather risk danger when sick, with the wise physician or the ignorant one?”

“The wise.”

“So then,” I said, “you think that it is more fortunate (εὐτυχεστέρον) to do things with a wise person than with an ignorant person?”

He agreed.

“Then wisdom makes people altogether fortunate (Ἡ σοφία ἄρα πανταχοῦ εὐτυχεῖν ποιεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους). For surely wisdom, at least, wouldn’t ever go astray, but necessarily does rightly and succeeds (ἀνάγκη ὀρθῶς πράττειν καὶ τυγχάνειν); for otherwise it would no longer be wisdom.”

In the end we agreed, though I don’t know how, that in sum things were like this: When wisdom is present, in whom it is present, there is no need of good fortune (εὐτυχίας) in addition. (279d8-280b3)

When Socrates sums up the results of his argument at 280b1-3, he puts it in a way that is not naturally read, at least in isolation, as an identity claim: “When wisdom is present, in whom it is present, there is no need of good fortune in addition.” A few lines earlier (280a6) he had drawn the conclusion that “wisdom makes people fortunate”. At 281b2-4 he recalls this conclusion and says that wisdom provides men with good fortune. Again at 282a4-5 he recalls

¹¹ Furthermore, *Eudemian Ethics* 1247b14-15 may be evidence that Aristotle took this to be an identity claim: “. . . or even all the knowledges – as Socrates said – would have been cases of good fortune (ἢ καὶ πᾶσαι αὖ αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι, ὥσπερ ἔφη Σωκράτης, εὐτυχίαι ἦσαν).”

this conclusion and says that wisdom is the source of good fortune.¹² At 282c8-9 Socrates again says that wisdom is the only existing thing that makes a person fortunate.

These summations of the conclusion of the argument for the claim that wisdom is good fortune are not naturally read as identity claims. Nevertheless, perhaps they are not flatly inconsistent with the claim that wisdom is identical to good fortune. Assuming the identity of wisdom and good fortune, the conclusion at 280b1-3 seems to follow: When wisdom [= good fortune] is present, in whom it is present, there is no need of good fortune [= wisdom] in addition. But, of course, as it is formulated in the text (without the bracketed bits), 280b1-3 does not entail the identity claim.

Likewise, perhaps the other three formulations, which seem to amount to variations of the claim that *wisdom makes people fortunate*, are consistent with, but weaker than, the identity claim. Given the identity claim, we should read the three later summations as claims that *wisdom makes people wise*, or alternatively that *fortune makes people fortunate*. This sounds like something we might find Socrates saying in some dialogues; think of the famous passage at *Phaedo* 100d where Socrates says that all beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful. But such a claim seems to miss the point in our passage. After all, at 281b2-4 and 282a4-5 Socrates says that wisdom is the source not only of good fortune but also of correct use, but there is no hint that correct use is identical to wisdom. Indeed, correct use and good fortune seem to have the same relation to wisdom in this passage and they seem to be distinct from one another. But if wisdom

¹² Strictly speaking, at 281b2-4 and 282a4-5 Socrates uses the term ‘knowledge’ (ἐπιστήμη) rather than ‘wisdom’ (σοφία). But it is plain that ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ are being used equivalently. Socrates is clearly summing up again the results of the argument at 279d-280b, which concerns wisdom and good fortune. Were ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ being used to refer to distinct things, this summation would misrepresent the earlier argument. But there is no hint in the text that any conflict arises. And at 282a1-6, Socrates easily slides between ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ in summing up the results of the entire passage:

“Then let us consider the consequence of this. Since we all want to be happy, and since we appear to become happy by using things and using them correctly, and since it is knowledge that provides the correctness and good fortune, it is necessary, it seems, for all men to prepare themselves in every way for this: how they will become as wise as possible.”

is identical to good fortune, we would expect it to be identical to correct use as well, and so good fortune and correct use would be identical.

Moreover, the relation between wisdom and good fortune is explicitly causal, and the causal passages (280a6, 281b2-4, 282a4-5, 282c8-9) militate strongly against the identity reading. A causal analysis implies that there are two different things involved: the cause (wisdom) and the effect (good fortune).¹³ But the identity reading implies that there is only one thing involved. If causation requires a cause that is not identical to its effect, then the identity reading is inconsistent with Socrates' explicit claims that the relation between wisdom and good fortune is causal.

Even if we could force these various expressions of the conclusion of the argument into the identity mold, there is another feature of the argument that counts strongly against taking the claim that wisdom is good fortune to be an identity claim. Socrates begins the argument by claiming that various experts – flautists, grammarians, and pilots – have the best fortune when it comes to matters in their field of expertise. He then generalizes from these examples to the claim that experts quite generally have the best fortune concerning matters in their field of expertise. Their expertise is clearly meant to count as a kind of wisdom, and so some connection between wisdom and good fortune is established.

But then Socrates adds to his list of examples that it is preferable to act with a wise general or physician rather than an ignorant one. He generalizes from the choice to act with the wise general and physician: “So then, you think that it is more fortunate to do things with a wise person than with an ignorant person?” The proposition is that it is more fortunate *for you* to do things with a wise person. It is more fortunate *for you* to be under the command of a wise general, or under the care of a wise physician. That is why *you* should choose it. But it is not you

¹³ Though it is a difficult passage, even in the *Phaedo* it does not seem that the beautiful in particulars can be identical to the beautiful itself. Rather, there must be two different things involved in the causal analysis: the beautiful in things and the beautiful itself. Of course, even those who might disagree with me on this point about the *Phaedo* are not in any way thereby committed to disagreeing with me about the *Euthydemus*.

who is acting wisely in the situation; it is the general or the physician. So your good fortune is a result of someone else's wisdom being operative. The important point here is that the wisdom is the physician's (but not yours) and the good fortune is yours (but not the physician's).¹⁴ But this means that wisdom and good fortune are not identical, for you can have one without the other. The point Socrates is making is that the wise physician causes your good fortune, whereas the ignorant physician will likely not bring you good fortune. But this very point entails that the identity claim cannot be true.

Not only that, but even in the expert, wisdom and good fortune sometimes come apart. Notice that Socrates qualifies his claims when talking about pilots.¹⁵ Expert pilots have better fortune at sea than non-experts, *for the most part* (ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν).¹⁶ To say that experts have

¹⁴ Of course, the physician might be said to have good fortune, too. Nevertheless, it is not identical to your good fortune, and even if it were, that you can possess good fortune without possessing wisdom is enough to make the point.

¹⁵ On 'for the most part': Russell (2005, 42) is unusual in calling attention to this qualification. But whereas he thinks the qualification highlights a significant *gap* in an argument for the very strong conclusion that success lies entirely in the exercise of wisdom – a gap, moreover, that cannot be filled in from within the standard sort of craft analogy that Socrates here employs – I argue that the qualification plays a plausible and comprehensible role in a relatively complete argument for a more modest conclusion. I take it that the comparatively greater plausibility, completeness, and fit with the argumentative framework (the craft analogy) of the argument I attribute to Socrates are advantages over Russell's interpretation. Russell does reasonably call in as evidence Socrates' curious narration of the conclusion he and Clinias reached: "In the end we agreed, *though I don't know how*, that . . ." Russell takes Socrates to be admitting a serious shortcoming in the argument itself, that Socrates does not know how they reached that conclusion from those premises. I take it to be admitting rather a narrative shortcoming. It is an admission that this is a more or less rough retelling of the conversation, rather than a strict recitation. Calling into question the accuracy of the report is not the same thing as calling into question the cogency of the argument. But calling into question the accuracy of the report alone is no reason to think that the retelling has provided an argument that is as deficient as the one Russell finds. Indeed, such a narrative shortcoming is of a piece with what we find elsewhere in the dialogue. For example, at 290-291, when Socrates attributes some rather sophisticated statements to Clinias, Crito breaks into the narrative to call him on it. Socrates admits that he may have gotten the speaker wrong, but insists that he got the content right. And then, oddly, through the rest of that argument, it is not reported as before, but Socrates and Crito actually engage in an argument that is supposed to track the argument of the previous day. Socrates' strange phrase at 280b, "though I don't know how", is on my interpretation perfectly consistent with the overall narrative practice of the dialogue. Alternatively, though less likely, perhaps Socrates is not hedging about the accuracy of the report, but is expressing uncertainty about why Clinias has agreed to the conclusion, given Clinias' own starting points.

¹⁶ The phrase ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν is uncommon. Alternative translations might include: "as a general rule", "on the whole", or "to speak generally". I have chosen a translation that especially highlights the basic function of any of these versions of the qualification: to serve notice that the principle admits of exceptions. For a similar use in Plato, see *Laws* XI 917a-5: "Now the 'superiors' of bad men are the

better fortune than non-experts *for the most part* is to imply that sometimes they do not. Success for a pilot consists in, roughly, getting one's ship safely to the desired port. Skilled pilots will generally have the most success at getting ships safely to their destinations. But in the case of pilots, the possibility that a non-pilot might have greater success than a pilot becomes more salient. In the case of flautists and grammarians, there are not many obvious external influences on their success.¹⁷ A good flautist plays her flute and beautiful music comes out. A good grammarian reads accurately and writes effectively. But for pilots, one external influence looms

good, and of the young their elders (usually) – which means that parents are the superiors of their offspring . . .” (Saunders trans.). The ‘usually’ translates ‘ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’. For similar uses in Aristotle see *Meteorology* 386b24, *On Length and Shortness of Life* 466b15, *History of Animals* 573a28, and *Generation of Animals* 732a20-1. In each of these Aristotle passages, it is clear that he uses the phrase to indicate that the general rule under consideration admits of exceptions. Less obviously, but probably with the same sense, see *Laws* II 667d5-7: “Generally speaking (‘ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’), I suppose, the ‘correctness’ in such cases would depend not so much on the pleasure given, as on the accurate representation of the size and qualities of the original?” (Saunders trans.) (The only other occurrence of either ‘ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’ or ‘ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’ I am aware of in classical Greek is in Proclus, and is simply a quotation of *Laws* 667d5-7.) These usages are consistent with the more common ‘ὥς ἐπὶ (τὸ) πᾶν’, often used to indicate a general rule that admits of exceptions. (See, e.g., Theophrastus’ *Historia plantarum* 3.2.1.7-8 and 8.1.6.2.)

I take the linguistic evidence to be very strong for this understanding of ‘ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’. But even if someone were to doubt that the phrase *need* be taken to indicate exceptions, this is clearly an available and even prevalent sense, and I submit that the plain sense of our passage in the *Euthydemus* indicates this reading. After all, it is simply obvious in the case of pilots that, for the most part but not always, wise pilots will achieve their aims better than ignorant pilots. On this reading, ‘ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν’ recognizably contributes to the argument. But it is difficult to discern its function if it is not indicating the possibility of exceptions.

A reader for this journal suggests, however, that the force of the qualification is “almost wholly”, and notes that it is only brought up with respect to pilots, a particularly difficult case for the sufficiency thesis. The point, then, may be that though the sufficiency thesis is not strictly speaking true, it applies for all practical purposes and in virtually every case, even the most difficult. This is possible, though I am skeptical of restricting the force of the qualification so much. In the ancient world, piloting (like medicine and generalship) was fraught with danger, even for the skilled. So if we read this as saying that even pilots are pretty much always successful, we should wonder why Socrates is permitted such an implausible premise. We face, again, a slightly weaker version of Russell’s gap (see n. 15, above), and my aim is to offer a plausible reading that closes the gap.

¹⁷ Though, of course, one can turn up such external influences with a bit of effort. Grammarians may have to deal with better or worse lighting, flautists with higher or lower quality flutes, etc. Indeed, Ben Rider makes an interesting case that the example of the flute-player is meant to be highly subject to external influences. He argues (i) that ‘flute’ is a poor translation of ‘αὐλός’, since the αὐλός was a double-reed instrument; (ii) double-reed instruments, even those produced with modern technologies and played in controlled environments, are “notoriously finicky”; and so, (iii) the skilled αὐλός-player, much like the skilled pilot or physician, would have been highly susceptible to negative influences outside of her control. (Rider 2012, 12-13) Whether this is correct or not hardly affects my main point here, which is that even experts can fail to achieve success. Nor does it challenge the idea that experts are more susceptible to failure in some domains than in others. What it challenges is the categorization of αὐλός-players as less susceptible to failure than most other experts.

particularly large: the weather. This is especially true in Plato's time, when seafaring would be a paradigmatic case of a highly uncertain endeavor. Imagine that I, though woefully unskilled, am to pilot a ship from Piraeus to Megara. At the same time, a skilled pilot is to pilot a ship from Piraeus to Aegina. It is easy to imagine a case where I have more success than the skilled pilot. Suppose that I set sail from Piraeus with my crew, with fair skies and friendly winds. This fair weather continues as I follow the coastline for some days and finally dock successfully at Megara. The skilled pilot leaves Piraeus at the same time, sailing toward Aegina with equally fair skies and friendly winds. However, midway to Aegina, he encounters an unpredictable and fierce storm. Despite the best efforts of this expert pilot and his crew, the ship is tossed around by the severe wind and waves and finally capsizes. I, unskilled though I am, have successfully guided my ship to the desired port, while the skilled pilot has failed to do so.

Socrates recognizes that these scenarios become salient in the case of pilots,¹⁸ and he qualifies his question in their case: "Well then, with respect to the dangers of the sea, do you think that anyone has better fortune than the wise pilots, for the most part (ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν)?" Socrates is not asking whether in every case pilots have better fortune than non-pilots when it comes to sailing. Rather, he is asking whether, taking all the cases together, pilots have the best fortune at sailing. This allows that there could be infrequent cases of non-pilots having better fortune than pilots, so long as pilots have the most fortune most of the time. And this is a perfectly sensible position, to which Clinias finds it easy to add his consent.

The consequence of the pilot example for the claim that wisdom is good fortune is to add another reason it cannot be an identity claim, for wise pilots retain their wisdom, even in cases where they fail to have good fortune. Sometimes they possess wisdom but not good fortune, and so wisdom cannot be identical to good fortune. Add to this fact about pilots the fact that I can be fortunate though it is not I, but my physician, who is wise, and we see why Socrates repeatedly –

¹⁸ Aristotle recognizes this point for both pilots and generals (*Eudemian Ethics* 1247a5-7). It seems to me that in the present passage the qualification applies at least to generals and physicians, in addition to pilots.

at 280a6, 280b1-3, 281b2-4, 282a4-5, and 282c8-9 – expresses his conclusion in ways that do not at all look like identity claims. He is not arguing that wisdom is identical to good fortune, but rather that wisdom produces good fortune.

4. Good fortune and outcome-success

I now turn to the second interpretive issue concerning the claim that wisdom is good fortune: the meaning of the term ‘good fortune’. ‘Good fortune’ is ambiguous between at least two senses: good things that happen to us that are largely out of our control, and successes we achieve.¹⁹ The former could be described as having favorable circumstances in which to live one’s life. Being born into a wealthy family, living in a stable political climate, and winning the lottery all fall into this category. Call this sort of good fortune *good luck*, where luck is, not too unnaturally, here restricted to what is outside of the agent’s control.

Good luck cannot be the sort of good fortune at issue in this passage for two reasons.²⁰ First, good luck is not the sort of thing one pursues, for it is by definition outside of one’s control. It happens to one; it constitutes the circumstances in which one has to act; but it is not itself an object of pursuit. One does not try to be born into a wealthy family or a stable political climate, or try to make one’s lottery numbers come up. Insofar as one could make one’s family wealthy,

¹⁹ I do not mean to suggest that it is only the English ‘good fortune’ that is ambiguous in this way. On the contrary, the Greek ‘εὐτυχία’ is ambiguous in the same way. For the former sense (things that are largely out of our control), see: (in the Platonic corpus) *Symposium* 217a3, *Meno* 72a6, *Laws* 710c7 and 798b1, *Seventh Letter* 340a5; (in other philosophical texts) Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 1361b39-1362a2 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b23-24. For the latter sense (things we achieve), see: (in the Platonic corpus) *Laws* 754d4, *Epinomis* 986c7, *Demodocus* 382e4; (in other philosophical texts) Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* 1235b11-12, Epicurus’ *Letter to Menoeceus* 10.135.1-3 (from Diogenes Laertius). For a nicely ambiguous case – involving, as in piloting, a journey – see *Phaedo* 117c1-3, where, in one of his final utterances, Socrates offers a prayer to the gods that his journey into the afterlife will be fortunate (εὐτυχῆ). For a close parallel to our passage, which, given the context, fairly clearly has the former sense of ‘εὐτυχία’ in mind, see *Eudemian Ethics* 1214a24-25 (πολλοὶ γὰρ ταῦτό φασιν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ τὴν εὐτυχίαν).

²⁰ That is not to say that Clinias might not hear Socrates’ initial claim that wisdom is good fortune as the claim that wisdom is good luck. Perhaps that partially explains his surprise at the claim. If Aristotle is right that “many say that happiness and good fortune are the same” (*Eudemian Ethics* 1214a24-25, quoted in previous note), where Aristotle pretty clearly means something more akin to good luck, that might help explain why Clinias might understand the claim as one about good luck. But the argument that follows makes clear that Socrates does not have good luck in mind when he makes the claim.

one's city politically stable, and one's lottery ticket a winner, this would amount to the other kind of good fortune; it would be an achievement or success rather than something outside of one's control. But Socrates makes this claim in the context of a protreptic argument, or an argument aimed at persuasion to action. Socrates is attempting to persuade Clinias that he ought to pursue wisdom. A primary reason to pursue wisdom is that it enables its possessor reliably to have good fortune. But then good fortune is something largely within the control of the wise person.

A second reason to think that good luck is not the sort of good fortune at issue is Socrates' heavy reliance on the idea that experts have better fortune (for the most part) than non-experts. It would be strange to think that experts generally have better luck than non-experts. Wise and ignorant pilots sail the same seas in the same types of ships. Wise and ignorant physicians treat the same sorts of diseases with the same sorts of medicine at their disposal. What distinguishes them is not the circumstances in which they act, but their level of success when they act in those circumstances.²¹ If we are to make sense of Socrates' points about the fortune of the experts, we must take him to be talking about a kind of achievement or success.

But concluding that Socrates is talking about a kind of success does not yet settle the matter. Some scholars have argued that good fortune is a sort of success that amounts to acting well, rather than achieving a certain result.²² This sort of success is different from, say, breaking 80 in a round of golf or saving enough to retire; these are cases of achieving a certain successful result. Playing golf with a high degree of focus, an adequate understanding of the game, and a practiced swing, or being disciplined at saving money and investing with an adequate understanding of various investment vehicles are cases of achieving success at acting well: acting as the skilled golfer or investor would act. One may act well in these ways without achieving the desired result: the ball may take an unexpected bounce off an ill-placed sprinkler head, or the

²¹ Suppose, though, that wise pilots encounter fewer serious storms per trip than ignorant pilots encounter. Even this would not show that wise pilots have better luck than ignorant pilots, for the different rates of storms encountered can be attributed to the skill of the wise pilots.

²² See Russell (2005) ch. 1 for an especially clear articulation of the view, as well as Dimas (2002).

stock market may crash and the local bank fail. Call this sort of success – the success that is a matter of how one plays the game rather than what the final score is – *internal-success*. Call the sort of success that amounts to achieving certain results *outcome-success*.

The appeal of taking Socrates to be talking about internal-success rather than outcome-success results mainly from taking Socrates' claim that wisdom is good fortune to be an identity claim. Given that wisdom is neither omniscience nor omnipotence, the wise will not always achieve the results at which they aim. But, plausibly, they can always act well in the pursuit of these results.²³ And so Socrates is taken to be arguing that wisdom guarantees internal-success, and that internal-success is the important kind to achieve.

Insofar as this line of interpretation depends on taking Socrates' claim that wisdom is good fortune to be an identity claim, it is undermined by the argument of the previous section. Additionally, and relatedly, it fails to make sense of Socrates' qualification that the wise have better fortune than the ignorant *for the most part*. To say that experts have better fortune than non-experts *for the most part* is to imply that sometimes they do not. But internal-success is always available to the wise. They can always control the way they act when they act. It is the outcomes of their actions that they may not be able to control. And non-experts will never act well in this internal sense to the degree that the wise do, for they will never act out of understanding. They may try hard; they may choose correctly; they may achieve their aims. But they will not act well in the same internal sense as the wise. "For the most part" makes no sense if good fortune is internal-success.

²³ As David Bronstein has suggested to me, perhaps it is not really plausible that the wise can always achieve internal-success. To revive the golf analogy, even Tiger Woods may sometimes fail to play golf well in the internal sense, perhaps because he is distracted by other concerns or because he is simply having a bad day. Likewise, perhaps the wise pilot sometimes fails to achieve internal-success. Given Socrates' claim that wisdom never errs, though, either Socrates fails to admit this possibility (perhaps in keeping with the Aristotelian *phronimos* who does not act akratically or the Stoic sage who never fails to act in accordance with wisdom), or there is some implicit *qua*-operator at work: Insofar as the wise person fails to achieve internal-success with respect to his domain of wisdom, he is failing to act *qua* wise person – that is, failing to act out of his wisdom – and so counts as no exception to the rule that wisdom never errs.

Taking good fortune to be outcome-success, however, allows us to make excellent sense of this qualification. Socrates recognizes that external factors may hinder success, preventing even the wise pilot from reaching port safely. The wise pilot is neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and must deal with the circumstances in which he finds himself. Sometimes these circumstances include unpredictable weather patterns or unexpected problems with crew or ship. Even while never failing to act wisely, the wise pilot may fail to achieve the result of getting to port safely. But in general wise pilots do get to port safely more often than ignorant pilots, for the wise are best able to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves.²⁴

To sum up the results so far, when Socrates uses the term ‘good fortune’, he has in mind outcome-success, rather than good luck or internal-success, but he does not mean to identify wisdom and good fortune. We are now in a position to see exactly what he is arguing. Wisdom produces good fortune. This claim is established by appeal to the examples of the experts, who produce better fortune than non-experts. But the wise do not infallibly produce good fortune, for external factors (luck, both good and bad) influence the degree of success agents have. Both wisdom and luck affect outcome-success. Even the wise pilot may encounter storms that cannot be weathered. But the wise pilot will handle each situation as well as it can be handled. The wise pilot will have the best outcomes possible given the conditions in which he has to act. And this is due entirely to his wisdom, the only thing that differentiates him from the ignorant pilot who will have worse outcomes on the whole given the same conditions. Socrates claims that “wisdom would never err” (280a7). In every circumstance, wisdom produces the greatest outcome-success possible given that circumstance. So, to put good fortune, understood as outcome-success, on the list below wisdom is to add something that is already there implicitly. Socrates sums up the argument by making just this point: “We agreed finally – I don’t know how – that in sum things

²⁴ Note, then, that while my argument is that Socrates must be talking about *εὐτυχία* as outcome-success, this does not entail that the notion of internal-success is unimportant. Indeed, it is because wisdom produces internal-success and internal-success leads to outcome-success that the wise have greater outcome-success.

were like this: When wisdom is present, in whom it is present, there is no need of good fortune in addition.” Wisdom is good fortune in the sense that it provides whatever good fortune is possible given the circumstances. But it is neither identical to good fortune, nor can it provide good fortune that goes beyond what is practically possible given the circumstances. Here is a reconstruction of the basic argument that wisdom produces good fortune (WPF):

(WPF-1) Experts usually have the best fortune when it comes to matters in their field of expertise.

(WPF-2) The only difference between experts and non-experts is the greater wisdom of the experts.

So, (WPF-3) It must be wisdom that produces the greater fortune.

(WPF-4) Nevertheless, experts can fail to have good fortune and non-experts can accidentally have good fortune.

So, (WPF-5) Wisdom is neither necessary nor sufficient for good fortune.

(WPF-6) Wisdom never errs.

So, (WPF-7) Wisdom produces whatever good fortune is possible in the circumstances.

Notice that this account requires that we read two lines in a way that may initially have seemed implausible. The easier case is Socrates’ summation: “When wisdom is present, in whom it is present, there is no need of good fortune in addition.” We might have been tempted to read this as the claim that wisdom entails good fortune, but the argument that leads to this summation does not warrant that reading. Instead, we must read this summation in its protreptic context. Socrates is trying to show Clinias what he should pursue, and what he has argued is that the only thing under Clinias’ control that will contribute reliably to good fortune is wisdom. Good fortune is not something separate to be pursued, some additional item to be put on the list behind wisdom, for good fortune is properly pursued *only* through the pursuit of wisdom. This is not to say that luck plays no role, but only that luck is not something to be pursued.

The more difficult line is the surprising statement that started the argument: “Wisdom surely is good fortune; even a child would know that.” This may look like an identity claim when read in isolation. But the argument that follows does not allow that reading, and so we must conclude that it is an attention-grabbing and as yet unqualified claim to the effect that good fortune duplicates something already on the list – wisdom – in the sense that pursuing wisdom

amounts to doing everything one can properly do to pursue good fortune. So, wisdom is not identical to good fortune, nor does wisdom entail good fortune *simpliciter*,²⁵ but the pursuit of wisdom exhausts the ways one can properly pursue good fortune.

5. Stage 1 and the sufficiency thesis

I emphasized above that it is common to read *Euthydemus* 279c-280b as an argument for the sufficiency thesis. I see two different lines such an argument might take. First, if good fortune is, as Socrates calls it, “the greatest of the goods,” then good fortune might be good enough to suffice for happiness all by itself. But then, if wisdom is identical to or entails good fortune, wisdom suffices for happiness. Good fortune might even itself entail the other goods like health and wealth, provided it is not simply internal-success. Second, the highest sort of good fortune might be thought to be the achievement of success in one’s life as a whole. But achieving success in one’s life as a whole just is happiness. So, if wisdom is identical to or entails good fortune, then wisdom suffices for happiness.

The problem with both of these lines of argument, if my interpretation of the passage is correct, is that Socrates is not committed to the crucial premise, in each version, that wisdom is identical to or entails good fortune. He is committed only to the much weaker claim that wisdom entails whatever good fortune is possible given the circumstances. So, we are left without an argument that wisdom suffices for happiness. Indeed, though Socrates does not give it and so I offer it tentatively, there are resources to construct an argument that wisdom does not suffice for happiness. For surely some success at achieving one’s aims is necessary for happiness. Success at achieving one’s aims is identified as the greatest of the goods, and one of the main reasons Socrates gives Clinias for pursuing wisdom is that wisdom is conducive to achieving one’s aims. But wisdom is not sufficient for success at achieving one’s aims. Even the wise may be frustrated

²⁵ Wisdom does entail whatever good fortune is possible in the circumstances. Sometimes, though, the circumstances may allow no good fortune at all.

in their endeavors. But if wisdom is not sufficient for a necessary condition of happiness, then it is not sufficient for happiness.

6. Stage 2: Wisdom and correct use (*Euthydemus* 280b-281d)

The first stage of the argument fails to demonstrate, or even to attempt to demonstrate, that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. Indeed, the first stage gives us reason to doubt the sufficiency thesis. But what of the second stage? Does it justify the standard view that the passage as a whole constitutes a ringing endorsement of the sufficiency thesis? I will argue that it does not, but rather provides an argument only for the necessity of wisdom for happiness.

Initially, Socrates and Clinias agreed on some basic assumptions: Everyone wants to be happy; happiness comes from having many good things; things like health, honor, courage, wisdom, and good fortune are good things. Having already reconsidered the last of these assumptions by arguing that good fortune need not be added to a list that already includes wisdom, Socrates now revisits the second of these assumptions, that happiness comes from having many good things. He argues that happiness requires not only the possession of good things, but that these goods be used as well.

“We agreed, I said, that if we possessed many good things, we would be happy and do well.”

He agreed.

“Then would we be happy through possessing good things if they didn’t benefit us, or if they did benefit us?”

“If they benefitted us,” he said.

“Then would they provide some benefit, if we only had them, but did not use them? For example, if we had much food, but didn’t eat any, or drink, but didn’t drink any, would we benefit from these things?”

“Clearly not,” he said.

“Well then, if every craftsman had all the requisite provisions for his own work, but never used them, would they do well through the possession, because they possessed everything which a craftsman needs to possess? For example, if a carpenter were provided with all the tools and enough wood, but never built anything, would he benefit from the possession?”

“In no way,” he said.

“Well then, if someone possessed wealth and all the good things we just said, but did not use them, would he be happy through the possession of these good things?”

“Clearly not, Socrates.”

“Then it seems,” I said, “that the one who is going to be happy must not only possess such goods, but also use them. Otherwise, there is no benefit from the possession.”

“That’s true.” (280b5-d7)

The passage licenses two principles. First, things contribute to our happiness just in case they provide some benefit to us. That this is a biconditional is a fairly clear implication of 280b7-8: If things benefit us they make us happy, and if they do not benefit us they do not make us happy. Second, things provide some benefit to us only if we not only possess them, but also use them. From these two principles we can infer a necessary condition for things that contribute to our happiness: Things contribute to our happiness only if we not only possess them, but also use them. But this condition is still too weak, and Socrates strengthens it.

“So then, Clinias, is this now sufficient to make someone happy, to possess good things and to use them?

“It seems so to me.”

“If,” I said, “he uses them correctly, or if not?”

“If he uses them correctly.”

“Well said. For I think it is a greater harm if someone uses something incorrectly than if he leaves it alone. For in the former case there is evil, but in the latter case there is neither evil nor good. Or don’t we say this?”

He agreed. (280d7-281a1)

Now our second principle has been modified: Things provide some benefit to us only if we not only possess them, but also use them correctly. That correctness is necessary is demonstrated by considering the consequences when correctness is lacking. When correctness is lacking, harm results rather than benefit. So, correctness is required for benefit. And the necessary condition for things that contribute to happiness has thereby been strengthened: Things contribute to our happiness only if we not only possess them, but also use them correctly.

Two other advances are made at 280d7-281a1. Socrates introduces the idea that in cases where something is used incorrectly, it would have been better had it not been used at all. This claim will become a key point in the argument momentarily, and we can set it aside until then. More importantly, up until 280d7 we had no explicit indication that Socrates was looking for

necessary and sufficient conditions for something's contributing to our happiness. Indeed, to this point we had arrived only at severally necessary conditions. But here he makes it clear that he is after jointly sufficient (ικανόν) conditions as well. So, our strengthened necessary condition for things that contribute to our happiness can now be strengthened even further, this time by making it a biconditional: Things contribute to our happiness just in case we not only possess them, but also use them correctly.

Socrates goes on to consider what provides for correct use. Just as he argued that wisdom provides good fortune, he now argues that wisdom provides correct use.²⁶

“Well then, in working and using things concerning wood, surely there is nothing else that produces correct use than knowledge of carpentry?”

“Clearly not,” he said.

“And also in work concerning utensils the producer of the correctness is knowledge.”

He agreed.

“Then,” I said, “also concerning the use of the first of the goods we spoke of – wealth and health and beauty – was it knowledge which directed and made our action correct with respect to using all such things correctly, or something else?”

“Knowledge,” he said.

“It seems then that knowledge provides men not only with good fortune but also with well-doing, in all possession and action.”

He agreed. (281a1-b4)

Socrates again begins by considering craftsmen, and proceeds by induction to a general conclusion. When it comes to correctly using the materials of carpentry, it is the expertise of the carpenter that produces correct use. The carpenter's expertise allows him to make proper use of each tool and material. A non-expert, one who does not understand the carpenter's craft, will not be able to make correct use of each tool and material. Likewise, the same is true for the expert-maker of utensils. The point is parallel to the argument that wisdom provides good fortune, and so we should still have in mind that it is the expert pilot (or general, or physician) who makes correct use of ships (or troops, or medicine). In each of these domains, it is knowledge that provides both success and correct use.

²⁶ The shift from speaking of wisdom (σοφία) to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is unproblematic; see note 12.

Socrates then generalizes the claim for all the goods on the initial list. It is knowledge that provides for the correct use of goods such as wealth and health and beauty – and so, too, we should infer, with goods like power and honor and bravery. Knowledge provides people with correct use “in all possession and action.” It is difficult to determine strictly from the passage at 281a1-b4 whether this is meant to be a necessary condition, a sufficient condition, or both. But if we recall from 280a7-8 the principle that “wisdom would never err, but necessarily does rightly” we can see that it must at least be a sufficient condition. Knowledge, whenever present, guarantees correct use of whatever falls under its domain. The next part of the argument confirms that this is also meant to be a necessary condition:²⁷ Correct use is provided for just in case knowledge is present.²⁸

“Then, by Zeus,” I said, “is there any benefit from other possessions without intelligence and wisdom? Would a man benefit more from possessing many things and doing many things without sense, or from possessing and doing little with sense? Examine it this way. Doing less, wouldn’t he err less? And erring less, wouldn’t he do less badly? And doing less badly wouldn’t he be less miserable?”

“Certainly,” he said.

“Then would someone do less if he were poor, or wealthy?”

“Poor,” he said.

“And if weak or strong?”

“Weak.”

“And if honored or without honor?”

“Without honor.”

“And would he do less if courageous and temperate or cowardly?”

“Cowardly.”

“So then also if he were lazy rather than hard-working?”

He agreed.

²⁷ It is also possible to read the passage as supporting only a general rule: For the most part, correct use does not come about except by knowledge. In that case, the argument below (AWC) would require adjustment in two places as follows:

(AWC-4*) Correct use of possessions is provided for if knowledge is present, and as a general rule is not provided for if knowledge is not present.

(AWC-6*) Wisdom guarantees that one’s possessions contribute to one’s happiness, and ignorance as a general rule makes it the case that one’s possessions fail to contribute (and, if used, even detract from) one’s happiness.

Even so adjusted, the argument will support my general interpretation. Insofar as one who is ignorant does, against the odds, use one of her possessions correctly, this will be a matter of luck and so, again, not something that is an appropriate object of pursuit.

²⁸ Again, I emphasize that the words I am translating as ‘wisdom’ (σοφία), ‘knowledge’ (ἐπιστήμη), ‘intelligence’ (φρόνησις), and ‘sense’ (νοῦς) are being used interchangeably throughout. Otherwise, Socrates would be giving a bizarre argument. Outside of the translation, I shall use them interchangeably.

“And if slow rather than fast, and dull of sight and hearing rather than sharp?”
With all such things we agreed with one another. (281b4-d2)

For the person without knowledge, doing less means erring less. In other words, without knowledge, a person will not correctly use her possessions. The main point of this passage is that there is no benefit in possessions apart from knowledge. Knowledge, then, is both necessary and sufficient for correct use. Indeed, one who lacks wisdom would be better off the less he has, and the wise will always be better off than the ignorant. Having reached this conclusion, we are now in a position to sum up the argument of this second stage of 278-282 – the argument that wisdom provides correct use (AWC).

(AWC-1) Our possessions (broadly construed to include all such things as those on the initial list of goods) contribute to our happiness just in case they provide some benefit to us. (280b7-8)

(AWC-2) Our possessions provide some benefit to us just in case they are used correctly. (280b5-281a1)

So, (AWC-3) Our possessions contribute to our happiness just in case they are used correctly.

(AWC-4) Correct use of possessions is provided for just in case knowledge is present. (281a1-d2)

(AWC-5) If possessions are used incorrectly, positive harm (and not simply lack of benefit) results. (281b4-d2)

So, (AWC-6) Wisdom guarantees that one's possessions contribute to one's happiness, and ignorance guarantees that one's possessions fail to contribute to (and, if used, even detract from) one's happiness.

AWC-6 remains implicit at this stage, but it is entailed by the explicit claims that are defended. But notice that AWC-6 does not entail that wisdom suffices for happiness. Rather, it entails that any possessions (broadly construed to include all such things as those on the initial list of goods) a wise person has will contribute to his happiness. But this is just a conditional statement: For anything on our list of goods, if a wise person possesses it, then it will contribute to his happiness. There are two problems with thinking that this conditional expresses the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. First, there is little reason to think that, if something contributes to my happiness, it follows that I am happy. For example, I have a one-dollar bill on my desk. It seems true to say that this one-dollar bill contributes to my wealth. But it does not follow that I am wealthy. Its contribution hardly suffices to make me wealthy. Likewise, even if something contributes to my

happiness, it may leave me far short of being happy. So, even if wisdom did guarantee contributions to happiness, it would not follow that it guarantees happiness.

Second, there is no claim anywhere in the first protreptic that wisdom guarantees the satisfaction of the antecedent of this conditional. That is, nowhere is it suggested that wisdom guarantees the possession of the things on our list of goods.²⁹ Given that we possess them, wisdom guarantees their correct use. But there is no evidence that wisdom guarantees their possession. And if wisdom does not guarantee their possession, then for all this passage tells us, wisdom does not even guarantee contributions to happiness.

Whereas the first stage of Socrates' protreptic argument supported neither the necessity nor the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness, the second stage supports the necessity of wisdom for happiness. If wisdom is necessary for correct use, and correct use is necessary for benefit, and benefit is necessary for happiness, then wisdom is necessary for happiness.³⁰ However, as in the first stage, nowhere in the second stage do we find support for the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. To be sure, we do not find an explicit argument against the sufficiency thesis, but we do not find support for the sufficiency thesis either.

²⁹ One exception is discussed above in sections 3 and 4: Socrates claims that wisdom produces good fortune, and good fortune is on the list of goods. But even in the case of good fortune, wisdom does not guarantee good fortune *simpliciter*, but only whatever good fortune is possible given the circumstances.

A reader for this journal rightly notes that in the second protreptic section of the *Euthydemus*, at 288-292, Socrates considers whether the wisdom Clinias should seek has to do with *making* things (which includes acquisition), or *using* them. The puzzling answer he gives is that this wisdom must know how to use what it makes (289a4-7). This making and using requirement is puzzling for at least two reasons. One is that it seems to be unanticipated by anything that comes before it. In particular, the craft analogy, which is in play in 278-282, suggests that wisdom will both make and use, but typically not the same things. The housebuilder, for example, will use lumber, hammer, and nails (to oversimplify) – the products of lumberjacks and smiths – to make a house. He thus both makes and uses, but not the same thing (for even if he were to use the house, it would not be *qua* housebuilder). Another reason the answer is puzzling is that it leads directly to the apparently intractable *aporia* of the second protreptic. I cannot make a full case for this here, but it will suffice to note that in the case of every craft of the many mentioned in this passage, including the ruling craft, its failure to meet the making and using requirement is the explicit ground for rejecting it as a candidate for the wisdom we must seek. That is to say, in every case, the making of a product and the using of that product belong to two different crafts. Given the apparent disconnect of the making and using principle from the first protreptic, as well as its central role in producing the *aporia*, it is not readily apparent how this passage should affect our interpretation of the first protreptic.

³⁰ But see note 27, above.

7. Stage 3: Wisdom as the sole good (*Euthydemus* 281d-e)

We have seen that the first and second stages of *Euthydemus* 278-282 do not constitute an argument for the sufficiency thesis, though the second stage is meant to secure the necessity thesis. But the third and final stage has sometimes been taken to be a nearly explicit endorsement of the sufficiency thesis. For happiness requires good things, and Socrates says at 281e3-5 that wisdom is the sole good and ignorance the sole bad. From this it appears to follow that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness. Here is this short but important passage in its entirety:

“In sum, Clinias,” I said, “it is likely that concerning all the things that we first called goods, the account of them is not that they are by nature goods just by themselves³¹ (αὐτὰ γὰρ καθ’ αὐτὰ πέφυκεν ἀγαθὰ), but rather it seems to be this: If ignorance leads them, they are greater evils than their opposites, insofar as they are better able to serve the evil master; but if intelligence and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods, though just by themselves neither sort is of any value.”

He said, “Apparently, it seems to be just as you say.”

“Then what follows from the things we’ve said? Is it anything other than that, whereas none of the other things is either good or evil, of these two, wisdom is good, and ignorance is evil?”

He agreed. (281d2-e5)

Irwin reconstructs the argument as follows:

- (1) Each recognized good [e.g., health, wealth] is a greater evil than its contrary, if it is used without wisdom, and each is a greater good than its contrary, if it is used by wisdom (281d6-8).
- (2) Therefore, each recognized good other than wisdom is just by itself (*auto kath’ hauto*) neither good nor evil (281d3-5, d8-e1).
- (3) Therefore, each of them is neither good nor evil (281e3-4).
- (4) Therefore, wisdom is the only good and folly the only evil (281e4-5).³²

Irwin distinguishes two views we might attribute to Socrates from this passage:

³¹ Following Vlastos (1991) 305-6. Irwin has ‘in itself’ in premise (2), below, and ‘in themselves’ in the opening clauses describing The Moderate View and The Extreme View. I have taken the liberty of changing these to ‘just by itself’ and ‘just by themselves’ to simplify the discussion to follow, as I do not think the difference affects Irwin’s point. (Note how in describing The Moderate View, Irwin writes, “only wisdom is good all by itself”. This language seems a better fit with ‘just by itself’ than with ‘in itself’.) The difference is important, however: ‘In itself’ may misleadingly suggest that the distinction is between intrinsic and extrinsic value, whereas the passage itself is inconclusive about this. The point is rather about whether the recognized goods are goods *by themselves*, that is, regardless of the presence of some further thing – wisdom.

³² Irwin (1995) 57.

The Moderate View: “When Socrates says that the recognized goods are not goods ‘just by themselves’, he means that they are not goods when they are divorced from wisdom. When he concludes that wisdom is the only good, he means simply that only wisdom is good all by itself, apart from any combination with other things.”

The Extreme View: “When Socrates says that the recognized goods are not goods ‘just by themselves’, he means that they are not goods; any goodness belongs to the wise use of them, not to the recognized goods themselves. When Socrates concludes that wisdom is the only good, he means that nothing else is good.”³³

Commentators have divided over these two readings. Recent commentators who accept The Moderate View include Brickhouse and Smith, Parry, Reshotko, and Vlastos. Recent commentators who accept The Extreme View include Annas, Dimas, McPherran, and Russell.³⁴ Irwin argues for The Extreme View on the grounds that The Moderate View cannot explain the inference to (3) and (4). After all, The Moderate View licenses calling the recognized goods ‘goods’ when they are conjoined with wisdom. But (3) and (4) rule out calling the recognized goods ‘goods’. So, Socrates must have in mind The Extreme View rather than The Moderate View.³⁵

The Extreme View, if correct, makes the argument an ugly thing. The problem is that if we suppose that in (3) and (4) Socrates is telling us that the recognized goods are in no way goods

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Brickhouse and Smith, “Making Things Good and Making Good Things in Socratic Philosophy,” in T. Robinson and L. Brisson, eds., *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides: Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum, Selected Papers*, (Academia Verlag: 2000) 76-87; R. Parry, “The Craft of Ruling in Plato’s *Euthydemus* and *Republic*,” *Phronesis* 48 (2003) 1-28; Reshotko (2006) 98-103; Vlastos (1991) 227-231; Annas (1999) ch. 2; Dimas (2002); McPherran (2005); and Russell (2005) ch. 1.

³⁵ The Stoics also interpreted Socrates as expressing The Extreme View, and so took this passage to be evidence for the Socratic origin of their view that wisdom is the only good. Even within the Stoic school, however, there was room for disagreement about what the passage implies. Orthodox Stoics would have found in the passage room for a doctrine of preferred indifferents, according to which the conventional goods (health, wealth, etc.) are *valuables* but not *goods*. Aristo, on the other hand, would have found support for the view that nothing but wisdom is good or valuable at all, and nothing but ignorance is bad or disvaluable at all. For a useful discussion, see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, (Duckworth: 1988) esp. 164ff.

Diogenes Laertius (2.31) clearly has this passage in mind when he attributes The Extreme View to Socrates: “There is, [Socrates] said, only one good, that is, knowledge, and only one evil, that is ignorance.” It is, of course, a point of debate whether this is the correct view to attribute to Socrates. But Diogenes Laertius plainly misinterprets Socrates when he immediately goes on to write, “Wealth and good birth bring their possessor no dignity, but on the contrary evil.” (Hicks trans.) (ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ ἐν μόνον ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, τὴν ἐπιστήμην, καὶ ἐν μόνον κακόν, τὴν ἀμαθίαν· πλοῦτον δὲ καὶ εὐγένειαν οὐδὲν σεμνὸν ἔχειν· πᾶν δὲ τοῦναντίον κακόν.)

at all, then he directly contradicts what he has just said in (1), that the recognized goods can be ‘greater goods’ than their opposites. But if Socrates is telling us in the same argument that the same things are both greater goods and not goods at all, then the argument appears to be incoherent.

The Moderate View is much more sensible and contextually sensitive. We can easily reinterpret the troubling phrases in (3) and (4) in a way that avoids Irwin’s charge that the inference is illicit, while allowing us to see the sense in which (3) and (4) are a description of what has been achieved in the conversation. The key is to recognize that in (3), Socrates is not drawing an inference but rather restating (2). ‘Neither good nor evil’ in (3) is then to be read, in light of (2), as a contraction of ‘just by itself neither good nor evil’.³⁶ (4), in turn, should be read as, ‘Wisdom is the only good just by itself and folly the only evil just by itself.’ Not only does this avoid the apparent contradiction that The Extreme View foists on the argument, but it prevents us from being confronted with a claim for which the argument to this point has not prepared us, that the recognized goods are neither good nor evil in any way. This claim, the extreme one, does not follow at all from what has come before. But if (3) is a restatement of (2), and (4) just takes the conclusion a step further, then we have a perfectly reasonable explication of the text on which Socrates holds The Moderate View. The argument, following Irwin but modifying (3) and (4) to make the moderate reading explicit, would go as follows:

- (1) Each recognized good [e.g., health, wealth] is a greater evil than its contrary, if it is used without wisdom, and each is a greater good than its contrary, if it is used by wisdom (281d6-8).
- (2) Therefore, each recognized good other than wisdom is just by itself (*auto kath’hauto*) neither good nor evil (281d3-5, d8-e1).
- (3*) Therefore, each of them is just by itself neither good nor evil (281e3-4).
- (4*) Therefore, wisdom is the only good just by itself and folly the only evil just by itself (281e4-5).

³⁶ See Vlastos (1991) 229-230 for a defense of reading ‘neither good nor evil’ as a contracted form of ‘just by itself neither good nor evil’.

Perhaps someone would object that (3)/(3*) and (4)/(4*) are introduced with an inference-term, ‘συμβαίνει’, and so must be inferences rather than restatements.³⁷ This is a fair observation, but it should be noted that what follows is, strictly speaking, not two inferences given separately, but a conjunction in which the conjuncts are being contrasted with one another by use of a μέν . . . δέ construction. If someone insists that we read (3*) and (4*) as inferences, defenders of The Moderate View can insist back that (3*) and (4*) must be read rather as *an* inference. That is, (3*) and (4*) are an inference from what precedes. On this understanding, the conclusion of the argument is a conjunction: “None of the other things is [just by itself] either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good [just by itself], and ignorance is bad [just by itself].” Granted, the first conjunct has already been made explicit in its uncontracted form, but it is restated in order to contrast it with the second conjunct, which is here made explicit for the first time.³⁸ The Moderate View makes sense of the entire passage, while The Extreme View cannot.

If The Moderate View provides the most plausible reading of the text, then we can see that it reinforces the necessity thesis. If the goodness of all other things requires wisdom, and if happiness requires goodness, then happiness requires wisdom. But the sufficiency thesis does not seem to be in view here.³⁹ Again, wisdom confers goodness on whatever so-called recognized

³⁷ Long (1988, 167 n. 62) objects on similar grounds: “In 281d3-5, Socrates has already asserted that ‘the things we first said were good are not good just by themselves.’ If this is all that he is asserting in the first part of his conclusion, ‘none of these other things is either good or bad’, his ostensible conclusion is reduced to a summary, which contributes nothing new.”

³⁸ Ravi Sharma has noted in correspondence to me that the grammatical structure of the sentence supports this point. The first conjunct is expressed by means of a dependent clause (governed by the participle ‘ὄν’), while the second is the main, and novel, thought (governed by the implicit indicative ‘ἔστι’).

³⁹ *Contra* Donald Zeyl, “Socratic Virtue and Happiness,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 54 (1982) p. 231, who takes Socrates to be expressing The Moderate View – “all of the candidate goods but wisdom are demoted from the status of being goods ‘in their own right’ to being neither good nor bad in themselves, but good, bad or indifferent only under the direction of knowledge, ignorance or the absence of any such direction” – yet concludes, “Wisdom alone survives as the only good whose mere possession guarantees its usefulness: it is thus the possession of wisdom which constitutes happiness.” But this is a *non sequitur* for at least two reasons. First, nothing in the passage decides the issue whether wisdom *constitutes* happiness or contributes to it in some other way. Second, by “it is thus the possession of wisdom which constitutes happiness”, Zeyl clearly means to express the sufficiency thesis. But, for the reasons expressed above, the sufficiency thesis does not follow from The Moderate View endorsed by Zeyl. Were Socrates expressing The Extreme View, the sufficiency thesis would seem to be in play, for

goods like health and honor we possess. But nowhere in this third stage is it suggested that wisdom guarantees the possession of the recognized goods. The focus is entirely on necessity rather than sufficiency.⁴⁰

We are now in a position to sum up the argument that wisdom is the only good (WOG):

(WOG-1) Each recognized good other than wisdom [e.g., health, wealth] is a greater evil than its contrary, if it is used without wisdom, and each is a greater good than its contrary, if it is used by wisdom.

So, (WOG-2) Each recognized good other than wisdom is just by itself neither good nor evil.

So, (WOG-3) Wisdom is the only good just by itself and folly the only evil just by itself.^{41 42}

happiness consists in having (or correctly using) good things, and wisdom would be the only good thing. Thus, to have wisdom would be to have everything required for happiness. We should, then, for the reasons I have given in the main text, go along with Zeyl in endorsing The Moderate View, though we should not follow him in drawing conclusions that can at best be drawn only from The Extreme View.

Like Zeyl, Parry starts out correctly but concludes too strongly. Parry rightly notes that Stage 2 does not make a clear case that the recognized goods are not needed for happiness (2003, p. 6), and rightly endorses The Moderate View of Stage 3, but goes too far in taking these passages to imply that if wisdom determines the goodness of the recognized goods, then it guarantees happiness:

From the context, it is clear that [Socrates] means that the things left alone are indeterminate with respect to the good. Wisdom, on the other hand, is the determining principle. As the determining principle, it is also determinate with respect to happiness. Being determinate with respect to happiness does not mean that wisdom by itself is happiness. Rather, it means that whenever wisdom is at work one is invariably happy. (2003, p. 12)

⁴⁰ A reader for this journal wonders whether “just by themselves neither sort [i.e., neither the recognized goods nor their opposites] is of any value” at 281d8-9 implies that the opposites of the recognized goods have some positive value when conjoined with wisdom. If they do, would that then imply that wisdom can make good use of even the recognized bads, and would that then establish the sufficiency thesis? First, it need not imply that the recognized bads have positive value when conjoined with wisdom. The point could simply be that there is no determinate answer to the question whether it is more valuable for someone to be rich rather than poor until it is determined whether she is wise or ignorant. But I think a more nuanced answer is available, too: poverty, weakness, slowness, and dullness of sight and hearing can be used by wisdom so long as they are not *complete* poverty, etc. (Cowardice and laziness present different problems with respect to how they could be conjoined with wisdom, and dishonor seems a difficult case to make out, so I leave those three aside.) Poverty (like the others) comes in degrees, and wisdom can use whatever money is available to it. Complete poverty, then, is not susceptible to use by wisdom; 281b6-8 suggests that this just is having nothing (monetary) available for use. But insofar as a wise person is poor but not penniless, what little money she has is of some little good to her. And the greater the money available to her, the better. This, of course, still fails to settle anything about the sufficiency thesis, since it is still an open question how many resources, and of what quality and variety, one needs to be able to achieve happiness. The text underdetermines the matter. (On the last point, see the discussion at the end of section 6.)

⁴¹ The position I am attributing to Socrates in the *Euthydemus* resembles the position Aristotle expresses at *Eudemian Ethics* 1248b26-34:

A good man, then, is one for whom the natural goods are good. For the goods men fight for and think the greatest – honour, wealth, bodily excellences, good fortune, and power – are naturally good, but may be to some hurtful because of their dispositions. For neither the foolish nor the unjust nor the intemperate would get any good from the employment of them, any more than an

8. Conclusion

Together, the arguments in the first stage that wisdom provides good fortune, in the second stage that wisdom provides correct use, and in the third stage that wisdom is the only good present a potent protreptic for wisdom. Clinias should pursue wisdom because with it he will have a good chance of being happy, while without it he will have no chance at all. Since Clinias shares with all of us the single dominant goal in life of attaining happiness, this conclusion is all Socrates requires to accomplish his protreptic aim.⁴³ Contrary to a long and dominant interpretive tradition, I have argued that this conclusion is all that Socrates aims to establish. Specifically, I have argued that Socrates is not making the case for the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. Wisdom is necessary for and conducive to happiness, but nowhere in this passage does Socrates claim or reveal that he is committed to the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. Indeed, what he says about wisdom and good fortune provides evidence against the sufficiency thesis. The summation of the passage reinforces this interpretation, as it appeals only to the necessity, but not the sufficiency, of wisdom for happiness:

Then let us consider the consequence of this. Since we all want to be happy, and since we appear to become happy by using things and using them correctly, and since it is knowledge that provides the correctness and good fortune, it is necessary, it seems, for all men to prepare themselves in every way for this: how they will become as wise as possible. (282a1-6)

So much for what I take myself to have established. It is equally important to be clear about what I do not take myself to have established. While *Euthydemus* 278-282 does not provide evidence that Socrates endorses the sufficiency thesis, I do not take myself to have

invalid from the food of a healthy man, or one weak and maimed from the equipment of one in health and sound in all limbs. (Solomon trans.)

⁴² There must be the further tacit premise that there are no goods other than the so-called recognized goods: those, that is, on the initial list of goods (or, more liberally, those on the list plus others of the same sort). This is true of the earlier reconstructions of the argument, as well.

⁴³ Or, at least, it is all the rational argument he requires. The question whether Clinias' acceptance of this conclusion is sufficient, in Socrates' view, to cause him to pursue wisdom goes beyond the scope of this essay.

demonstrated that what Socrates says in this passage is flatly inconsistent with the sufficiency thesis. Certainly, though, some of what he says here will be difficult to reconcile with the sufficiency thesis. Furthermore, I do not take myself to have shown that Socrates nowhere endorses the sufficiency thesis. Indeed, I have hardly considered any passages outside of our focal text. My claim, strictly, is only that a case for the sufficiency thesis will have to find its impetus in passages other than *Euthydemus* 278-282. Champions of the sufficiency thesis will need a new *locus classicus*, for the old one will no longer serve. But by showing that the supposed *locus classicus* for the sufficiency thesis not only fails to support the thesis but is in fact quite unfriendly to it, I hope to have sown in the reader a seed of doubt about whether the sufficiency thesis deserves its dominant status in interpretations of Plato's thought.⁴⁴

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