

**Wisdom as the Only Good:  
Socrates's Philosophical Protreptic at  
*Euthydemus* 278e-282a**

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I, Chandler Stahlman Clark, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the work.



# Abstract

Socrates in the *Euthydemus* between 278e-282a, attempts to demonstrate how he would like someone to be turned to the pursuit of philosophy. He does so by engaging in a discussion on the nature of wisdom and of happiness, with a young man named Cleinias. This discussion is incredibly controversial, with commentators widely disagreeing over how to interpret the nature of the claims made. While some have suggested that this section of the dialogue is the *locus classicus* for the bold Socratic claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness, other commentators have suggested that Socrates' goals and intentions are substantially more modest. This thesis argues for the claim, that Socrates does in fact engage in a defence of both the sufficiency and necessity of virtue for happiness. I argue that Socrates takes up some commonly held attitudes towards the goods, and their relationship to happiness, with the intention of radically revising them. In so doing, Socrates will argue that while many people believe that the possession of good things will make their lives happy, there is in fact only one good capable of playing this role – there is only one good that can make a life happy. Wisdom, because it is good in a unique and unconditional way, is the only good which can make someone's life happy. As such, Cleinias should take up the pursuit of philosophy, because it is only by taking up philosophy that he can obtain this good.



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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 The Protreptic: Why Do Philosophy?

Much effort is often put into defending the importance of philosophy and the benefits it provides to the lives of the people who take it up. This is done largely by university administrators, advertisers, and not least by professional philosophers themselves. However, attempts to defend the importance of philosophical practice, in light of encouraging students to take it up themselves, are undeniably as old as the practice of philosophy itself.

In the *Euthydemus* as part of his confrontation with two sophists, Socrates seeks to demonstrate why he believes someone should take up philosophy. Socrates does so by engaging in a discussion on the nature of wisdom and the goods with a young man named Cleinias. Socrates feels the need to do this largely out of dissatisfaction with what he saw as the failure of the sophists' attempts to do the same. The sophistic pair had tried to convince Cleinias to take up philosophy, in large part by preceding to humiliate him by demonstrating his ignorance of the usage of words. The thought behind why they would approach their protreptic this way is not too difficult to discern. It would seem that by demonstrating to Cleinias their capacity for verbal boxing and humiliation, they hope that this will motivate him to take up philosophy in order to gain this impressive capacity for quickness with words. This quickness with words would allow him too to draw the applause of the crowd, often at another person's expense.

### 1.1.1 Philosophy and Happiness

The thought that philosophy is valuable and subsequently that someone's reasons for taking it up should pertain entirely to the philosopher's impressiveness at academic debate, is no more strange to Socrates than to a modern reader. When Woody Allen envisages himself as a cowardly Socrates attempting to avoid the hemlock, he is confronted with Socrates arguments against fearing death. Allen finds no solace in the arguments attributed to him and says:

Agathon: But it was you who proved that death doesn't exist.

Allen: Hey, listen—I've proved a lot of things. That's how I pay my rent. Theories and little observations, a puckish remark now and then, occasional maxims. It beats picking olives, but let's not get carried away.

Agathon: But you have proved many times that the soul is immortal.

Allen: And it is! On paper. See, that's the thing about philosophy—it's not all that functional once you get out of class.<sup>1</sup>

Allen's pleas are humorous in large part because it is difficult not to sympathise with his situation. It is difficult to think that the products of philosophical argument could grant the sort of interpersonal well-being and security that the Socrates of the *Apology* seems to believe they do. As such, his perplexity helps us better understand the motivations behind the way the sophists approach their protreptic.

The sophists believe Cleinias should want to pursue philosophy because of the impressiveness of philosophical practice, and they know that this is definitely superior to 'picking olives.' However, someone would have rather crazy ideas about philosophy if they thought this sort of verbal boxing was the kind of thing that could give someone solace in the face of their imminent death. In contrast, Socrates does take solace from philosophy in the face of death, and this intimate connection between the practice of philosophy and the happiness of an individual are obvious in the way he proceeds in engaging in his protreptic. Socrates will attempt to

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<sup>1</sup>This conversation is drawn from Woody Allen's book *Side Effects*. See Allen (1975).

convince Cleinias of the importance of philosophy not for the political or social benefits which philosophy brings about, but because the practice of philosophy is both necessary and sufficient for happiness.

### 1.1.2 The Thesis Itself

If Socrates believes as he clearly does that one ought to pursue philosophy in order to be happy, then one is immediately faced with the question of what sort of 'happiness' Socrates has in mind. It is not obvious in his own case that Socrates' pursuit of philosophy has made his life happy. In fact, in many dialogues his interlocutors are puzzled by his seeming happiness in spite of dire circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Often when Socrates attempts to explain how and why he is happy, it can seem as if his conception of happiness is radically different than his interlocutor. In no dialogue is this question of more interest and controversial than in the *Euthydemus*.

In the *Euthydemus* Socrates begins his discussion with Cleinias on a simple assumption, that everyone wishes for their lives to go well. In turn, they quickly agree together on what it is that makes a life go well. What makes a life go well is the possession of many good things. With this agreement Socrates and Cleinias go on to identify many things as potential goods such as physical features, as well as intellectual qualities such as wisdom. However, they hit upon a point of puzzlement when Socrates suggests both that good fortune is the greatest good and that wisdom *is* good fortune.

Socrates' explains away Cleinias' puzzlement at this claim by drawing his attention to the comparable fortunes of wise and ignorant people. Cleinias comes to agree with Socrates that it seems that it is wisdom which makes people fortunate, and agrees that this is because wisdom causes the person in question to be successful in how they act. Socrates then goes on to point to Cleinias that while wisdom no doubt makes people successful, it is also required to benefit from the previously identified goods. Even if one were fortunate and successful in obtaining the goods which one desired, these goods would mean nothing without the knowledge and wisdom required to use them. As a result, Cleinias comes to agree that there is

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<sup>2</sup>This seems to occur in the *Apology* (29a-c), *Crito* (47c-d) and *Phaedo* (63b-c).

no benefit to the possession of the goods, because without wisdom they would not come to possess a positive role in someone's life.

Socrates then proceeds to draw some further conclusions about the nature of wisdom and the goods. Socrates suggests by the conclusion of his protreptic that the previously identified goods are not by nature good things. This argument like much of this section of the *Euthydemus* is controversial. However, this conclusion in particular raises important questions about understanding the philosophical motivations which Plato imputes to the literary figure of Socrates. The reason for this is that there exist two fundamentally different approaches to interpreting the conclusion of Socrates' protreptic, and subsequently the reasons why Socrates believes that virtue and practice of philosophy are valuable.

The first interpretation takes Socrates and Cleinias to have been correct in believing that a life goes well when someone has many goods, and that the goods they identified at the beginning of their discussion are capable of bringing happiness about. Thus, all that Socrates has attempted to demonstrate as part of his protreptic is to show that for any of these goods to contribute to the person's happiness, they must be accompanied by wisdom. In this sense, Socrates endorses these initial common-sense observations, but has seen fit to qualify them. As a result, Cleinias should want to pursue wisdom because he needs both wisdom and many good things.

The second sort of interpretation suggests that Socrates' initial agreement with Cleinias was merely an attempt to appeal to something Cleinias already believed, as a basis to proceed with his protreptic. It is Cleinias, not Socrates, who holds these common-sense assumptions regarding the goods and happiness. Thus, Socrates has set out in his protreptic to demonstrate that in fact there is only one good that fulfils this role of making someone's life happy. While there may be many good things in the life of the wise, the only good which can make a life happy is wisdom. As such, Cleinias ought to pursue philosophy because wisdom is the only good he needs to be happy. Because it is philosophers who pursue wisdom and wisdom is the only thing which contributes happiness to a life, Cleinias must take up the pursuit of

philosophy.

Which of these interpretations we agree with strongly influences how we understand the philosophical concerns of the literary Socrates, and the role the *Euthydemus* plays in ancient ethical thought. Terrance Irwin summarises this clearly. He writes that this section of the *Euthydemus*:

...offers two conceptions of happiness and two conceptions of the relation of virtue to happiness. If Socrates retains the common conception of happiness, he has a reasonable argument to show that virtue and wisdom are necessary for happiness, but no case to show that they are sufficient for it. If he maintains that they are sufficient for happiness, he needs to reject the common conception of happiness, and to maintain that only what we can control matters to our happiness.

The first of these two views anticipates the Platonic and Aristotelian view of virtue and happiness. The second anticipates the views of the Stoics and Epicureans, who modify common views of happiness in order to show that virtue is sufficient for happiness.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the following chapters, I will confront both of the issues Irwin identifies. I will ask both what the relationship of virtue to happiness is, as well as what conception of happiness seems to be advocated by Socrates. I deal with the first of these two questions particularly in chapter three and four, while chapters two and five deal more specifically with questions regarding Socrates' conception of happiness itself.

In the first chapter, I seek to identify what common-sense views on happiness Socrates attributes to the majority of people. In the process, I reflect upon what I take to be some of the philosophically interesting consequences of these common sense views. I argue that Socrates believes that most people, whether they realise it or not, rely on comparative judgements when it comes to happiness. They believe that happiness is a sort of comparative judgement between lives. Some lives are better than others, and what explains why some lives are better than others, is that

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<sup>3</sup>Irwin (2007:27)

some people possess more good things than other people. As a consequence, these people believe that happiness is also additive in nature, someone can always benefit from additional goods. And because happiness is essentially additive in nature, it is also essentially incomplete. Someone can always come to be better off than another person, and someone always has good reason to seek more good things, in order to be even happier.

In the second chapter, I argue that Socrates begins to examine this common sense view by looking at the role of good fortune in the life of the happy person. Socrates and Cleinias had agreed that good fortune was the greatest good, on what seemed to be the unstated assumption that good fortune was a sort of sheer luck, which could cause many good things to happen to a person. Socrates points out to Cleinias, that some agents are capable of producing their own good fortune, as the result of their wise actions. These wise actions resulted in comparably superior results, because it turns out that wisdom supplied an agent with correct action.

As part of this discussion, I question whether or not Socrates' method of arguing should encourage us to consider the relationship between happiness and virtue as productive in nature, or identical in nature. I conclude that Socrates' arguments make best sense when interpreted in light of the identity of wisdom and happiness. In so doing, I suggest that this appears to be an argument for the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness, but admit that the argument seems not to be entirely spelt out in the *Euthydemus*. I conclude that the most we can say given what Plato provides for us in the *Euthydemus*, is that the argument seems to indicate Socrates has a persistent concern with internal success. Internal success, understood as a quality of how someone acts, over and above what they achieve from acting.

Then in the third chapter, I engage with what I take to be Socrates' argument for the necessity of wisdom for happiness. Socrates suggests to Cleinias that the goods they had previously identified required knowledge and wisdom in order to be used correctly. In order to benefit from the goods on their list, they must necessarily also possess wisdom in order to benefit from the other goods. I raise what I take to be an important and largely ignored concern with the argument, pertaining to its



logical scope. In so doing, I argue that Socrates is best read as claiming that all and only wise actions allow someone to benefit from their possession of the goods. As such, Socrates is committed to the view that ignorant people never benefit from their possession of goods.

Finally, I confront Socrates' controversial conclusion regarding the nature of the goods themselves. I argue for two claims that are central to my thesis. Firstly, that Socrates endorses something like a notion of conditional and unconditional goodness. Secondly, that this is compatible with a so called 'extreme' interpretation of his argument about the nature of the goods. In fact, Socrates, given that he is working with an understanding of wisdom as an unconditional good, ought to argue that there is only one good. I make this claim, on the basis of the subsequent chapters, in which I suggest Socrates has in mind a common-sense conception of goodness. On this common conception, there are many good things the possession of which makes our lives happy. Socrates, in opposition, argues that in fact there is only one good that could play the role which this common-sense view assumes, and that this good is someone's wisdom. While the goods he and Cleinias identified can be part of a life lived virtuously, only wisdom can make a life good.

In this way, I conclude that Socrates' arguments are best interpreted as falling on the second side of Irwin's dichotomy. Socrates agrees with the common sense view that we all wish our lives to go well. But he radically disagrees with the idea that it is the possession of many goods which makes it do so. These supposed 'goods' themselves, turn out to possess no goodness by their own nature, and as such are not the kind of things which could make a life happy. It is only wisdom's unconditional goodness which can make a life happy, and as such while many people pursue good things in order to be happy, they are radically mistaken about the nature of happiness and will fail to find it. Thus, Socrates believes Cleinias should take up philosophy because philosophers pursue the only good which can make a life happy.



## Chapter 2

# Eudaimonia and Common-Sense

Socrates sets out between 279e-282a to demonstrate his protreptic model (παράδειγμα) to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (282d). This model has as its intended goal to turn the listener towards the pursuit of wisdom and philosophy. The motivations which drive Socrates' protreptic model are, unashamedly eudaimonist in nature. Socrates suggests to Cleinias that one ought to pursue wisdom because obtaining wisdom will make a life a happy one. The reason Cleinias ought to take up philosophy is because taking up philosophy is somehow integral to human happiness. As we shall see, this focus on the happiness of the individual as the locus for ethical reflection underlies the entirety of Socrates' protreptic with Cleinias.

The protreptic begins with Socrates asking Cleinias if it is the case that all people wish to do well in their lives. Cleinias quickly agrees to this, as well as to the further claim that what most people believe would make one do well would be the possession of many good things. In so doing, Socrates seeks to establish agreement on a general condition for human agents, that they want their lives to go well. Socrates then suggests that what most people believe would make a life go well, would be that the person in question had possession of many good things.

In this chapter, I want to argue that Socrates is committed to the claim that the majority of people hold this common-sense view I have just identified. Getting clear on the nature and implications of this common sense view, will allow us to better interpret the nature of Socrates claims between 278e-282a. By better understanding

the view of the goods and their relationship to happiness that Socrates takes his interlocutors to have, we can better understand some of the potentially puzzling claims made in this section of the *Euthydemus*. As I will suggest, much of what follows in this section of the *Euthydemus* stems from a claim that good fortune is the greatest good. I will argue that Socrates is not merely being ironic in suggesting this to be the case. Socrates in fact believes that the status of good fortune as the greatest of the goods, follows directly from the kind of picture of the good which is held by the majority of people.

## 2.1 A Common Sense View of the Good

Socrates seems to believe that many people hold what I will from now on refer to as *The Common-Sense View of the Good* (CSVG).

**CSVG:** A happy life is one with many goods, because the possession of many goods makes a life happy.

Here I will attempt to explore some of the philosophical consequences I believe follow from this simplistic understanding of the goods and the way they relate to happiness. Doing so will put us in a position to better make sense of certain claims Socrates will make later on in this section of the text. While Socrates does not devote substantial time to identifying the nature of CSVG, we can nonetheless discern from this section of the dialogue important consequences of such a view. As we shall see, CSVG commits the person holding it to the following:

1. It makes happiness the kind of thing which can always be improved upon. In so doing, it makes happiness incomplete. Someone can be happy, while still being in need of more goods.
2. It makes happiness out to be the kind of thing which can always be added to. The goods can always add additional happiness to the person who comes to possess them.
3. The generality of the view leaves deeply ambiguous the relationship between goods and why they make a life 'go well'. CSVG tells us that the possession

of many goods will make a life go well, but does not tell us why this is the case.

Understanding that Socrates believes most people, perhaps unwittingly, have beliefs of this sort on the nature of happiness and its relationship to the goods, is crucial to understanding what will follow in this section of the dialogue. While it is true that 'doing well' is something which people generally aim at, most people have failed to reflect upon why it is exactly that they believe the goods will make them happy. In what follows, throughout the Socratic interlude, Socrates will encourage Cleinias to question these common sense assumptions.

### 2.1.1 What Does it Mean to Do Well?

Socrates begins his protreptic by asking Cleinias two questions. These two questions he takes to be so obvious, that he feels the need to feign embarrassment at being forced to clarify Cleinias' agreement on the issue.

Do all men wish to do well? Or is this question one of the ridiculous ones I was afraid of just now? I suppose it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a man who would not wish to do well.

No, there is no such person, said Cleinias.

Well then, I said, the next question is, since we wish to do well, how are we to do so? Would it be through having many good things? Or is this question still more simple-minded than the other, since this must obviously be the case too?

He agreed. (278e4-279a6)<sup>1</sup>

Socrates notes that everyone agrees that all people wish to 'do well' and that most people believe that someone is 'doing well' if they are in the possession of many good things. The fact that the truth of CSVG is obvious to most people does not stop it from raising interesting questions. It is not clear what it means to 'do well',

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<sup>1</sup>All translations in this thesis are by Sprague and found in Cooper (1997) unless otherwise indicated in footnotes. Whereas the Greek text used will be from Burnet (1902).

nor is it clear why the possession of goods would make someone 'do well'. The immediate answer that comes to mind, is that what Socrates must mean by 'doing well' is that everyone wishes to 'do well' at living. In other words, what Socrates means is that people in general want their lives to 'go well'. This allows us to see the core of the common-sense eudaimonist view which:

**Common-sense Eudaimonism:** Everyone agrees that they want their lives to go well, but it is ambiguous as to whether people *know* how to make their life go well. This common-sense eudaimonism, causes even the average person to engage in ethical reflection. But Socrates also seems to believe, that the answer these people generally provide when caused to reflect in this way is that it is the possession of many good things which will make a life go well.

If this is the case it gives us an insight into the reasoning behind CSVG. The person holding CSVG believes that it is generally true of human beings that we all want our lives to go well. Moreover, they believe that what would make a life go well, would be possessing many good things.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, they aim at possessing many goods in order to make their life go well.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>I am in agreement with Irwin (1995) in thinking that Socrates is relying on common sense in making both these claims. However, I disagree with him in thinking about the level of sophistication at work in the dialogue. Irwin writes "*The remarks in the Euthydemus about happiness, taken by themselves, imply only that if we do not pursue our own happiness, we are not acting rationally; they do not imply that we actually pursue happiness in all our actions.*" Irwin (1995:52-54).. While I believe Irwin is right to suggest that Socrates has not suggested here that every action is taken with happiness in mind, he is wrong to insist that someone who did not want to 'do well' would be irrational. Socrates is silent on what it mean not to desire to 'do well.' The fact that he believes most people want to do well, seems to be a sort of social consensus. Such a consensus might be a restriction on practical rationality, but if it is we are not specifically told so here by Plato. I take it that Socrates and Cleinias agreement is about observable human behaviour and what people report themselves to desire, rather than what people think is or is not rational.

<sup>3</sup>This certainly seems to be how the person who holds CSVG uses the phrase 'doing well.' However, it is worth noting that there is another sense of the phrase εὖ πράττειν shared by both the Greek as well as the English translation 'doing' or 'faring' well. That is, someone is 'doing well' if their actions are the right kind of actions or done in correct fashion. We may say that someone is 'doing well' for themselves because they have recently come into a lot of money, but we might also say they are 'doing well' because they have recently been successful at a particular activity. It seems reasonably clear that those holding CSVG are not thinking of doing well in this manner, as it is not clear why possession of goods alone should guarantee that someone is 'doing well' in terms of their particular actions. Someone can certainly come to possess quite a lot of goods without doing anything at all, much less needing to do anything 'well'. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the distinction

If CSVG is correct in its assumptions and it is possession of good things which makes our lives happy, then we ought to pursue possession of the goods if we wish to be happy. With this in mind Socrates asks Cleinias what sort of things this common sense view of goodness counts as goods, and the two of them agree that discovering this should not be a difficult task (279a6-7). Cleinias quickly agrees that many external goods, such as good birth, wealth and a well trained body are goods for their possessor (279b3-5). As well as these external goods, Socrates suggest that they ought to include the virtues as well, even though this may be disputed by some, to which Cleinias also agrees (279b5-8). Cleinias seems satisfied with a list containing both bodily goods and virtues, when Socrates suddenly suggests they are at risk of making a serious mistake. They have forgotten that even very uneducated people know that good fortune is the greatest of the goods (279c5-7). In what follows, I want to ask why Socrates makes this sudden claim.

## 2.2 Good Fortune: the Greatest Good

It may be tempting for the reader to take Socrates' suggestion with more than a little irony. Socrates tells us that even the very uneducated or foolish know that good fortune is the greatest good, which might cause one to doubt whether we should take him at his word (279c7-9). Moreover, it is difficult to think that Socrates, who we know from elsewhere prizes virtue to the degree that he does, should say that good fortune is the greatest of the goods, rather than virtue.<sup>4</sup> However, we should be cautious not to ignore the particular context of this remark. As we have already seen, Socrates and Cleinias have agreed that their initial subject of investigation is this common sense view of goodness. As a consequence, it is reasonable to assume the goods they are listing are the ones they take the average person to believe would make a person happy. The driving force behind their inquiry so far is simply what

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between doing well at some particular action, in contrast to doing well in terms of a particular action, as Socrates will go to exploit the two senses of the term. By 280c4-7 Socrates will explicitly discuss 'doing well' as a result of the specific actions taken by a craftsman. It is worth noting this gradual shift in the use of the phrase as the dialogue progresses.

<sup>4</sup>Perhaps the best example for of this would be *Apology* 29d-30a where Socrates states that virtue is the thing of greatest importance. As well as this, good support from within the *Euthydemus* is found at 273d-e where Socrates seems to agree with the sophistic pair, that the teaching of virtue is superior to other sorts of abilities.

they take to be common agreement on what things provide benefit to someone's life.

If we keep this in mind, it is less puzzling why Socrates tells Cleinias that good fortune is the greatest of the goods. If the goods they are in the process of listing are things which most people believe would benefit someone's life, then we can see why good fortune is the greatest good. Good fortune would seem to have a unique role in benefiting someone's life. We can observe this unique role by noticing that the bodily goods such as physical appearance, good birth, and health are exactly the sort of goods one could possess as a result of good fortune. A person does not really 'do' anything to acquire good looks, they are the product of something else; good looks are the product of that person's good fortune. On this assumption, someone who has a life that is 'going well' is more likely than not to be born into a good family, along with the kind of physical characteristics which make a life a happy one. This is in part, what makes good fortune superior to the other goods: if one conceives of happiness in the manner someone holding CSVG does, then good fortune plays a unique role in securing them a happy life.

Consider someone who was born with excellent physical appearance, but goes on to live a rather unlucky life. They are physically ill, impoverished and die alone with without any social standing. Physical appearance considered on its own as a good is just not good enough to make a life go well. In contrast, the person who has good fortune throughout their life, would not only have been born physically attractive, but would not necessarily require the benefits of their physical appearance, in order for their life to go well. We can imagine that the merely handsome person still has to work to obtain the other goods. While the handsome person has an advantage over most people in the looks department, they nonetheless need to exploit this advantage to secure the other goods. Moreover, there is no guarantee that good looks alone are sufficient to secure the other goods. The situation is rather different with good fortune. Someone who possessed good fortune would not only be born with excellent physical appearance, but would not even need to use this natural advantage to acquire other goods. If they were the most fortunate of people they would have already acquired the other goods through fortune, rather than their



own activity.

It seems that at this stage of the dialogue, Socrates seems to be thinking of good fortune as what we might call 'sheer luck'. A result which is brought about through 'sheer luck' requires no effort on the part of the agent, and subsequently no effort on their part. If we think, as it seems reasonable to, that these results brought about by sheer luck may themselves include an individual coming to possess more goods, then it is not hard to figure out why good fortune is superior to the other goods. Good fortune is the kind of good which assists one in acquiring other goods. Moreover, it also secures the goods which an individual already possesses.<sup>5</sup> It allows one to avoid unlucky circumstances involving the loss of goods. As such, an individual should value good fortune as superior to the other goods, as once one has acquired good fortune, this will suffice to make them happy on CSVG's account. Good fortune is a good which guarantees not only benefit from itself, but also the possession and security of other goods.<sup>6</sup>

Here I have suggested that Socrates is right to think that those who hold CSVG agree that good fortune is the greatest good. In doing so, Socrates has introduced an unspoken assumption into their inquiry, one which he will go on to challenge. This unspoken assumption is that the goods are comparable in the degree of their goodness, some are more beneficial to the person who possesses them than others are. As we know from CSVG it is the possession of goods that make a life happy, and so it seems reasonable to assume that a life filled with greater goods, is superior to a life filled with lesser goods. Because Socrates believes that the many hold CSVG to be true, he also seems to infer that many people believe happiness itself is comparable. Happiness is the sort of thing to be judged by comparing one individual's life against another. Someone is only 'happy' insofar as they are happier *than someone else*. According to CSVG, the natural candidate for justifying our ability

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<sup>5</sup>There seems to be a similar thought here as at *Rep.III366c-d* where justice is described as one of the greatest goods, where its 'greatness' is derived from the way it benefits its possessor. However, a proper discussion of this and other such instances is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup>In this way, I am in disagreement with Jones (2013) and Reshotko (2006) both of whom suggest there is little evidence in this section of the *Euthydemus* to show that Socrates is concerned with the sufficiency thesis. In contrast, I believe the discussion of good fortune as the greatest good, in and of itself should begin to cause us to think about what sorts of things suffice for human happiness.

to use the comparative in this case, is that some people possess more goods than others. People with more goods, have comparably happier lives than people with less goods. In what follows, I want to examine the results of the fact that happiness is comparable in this fashion.

### **2.2.1 Addition and Incompleteness**

As we saw from the following section, Socrates seems to be claiming that the many believe good fortune is the greatest good, because of the central assumptions made by CSVG. An interesting consequence of thinking about the goods and their relationship to happiness in the terms stated by CSVG, is that it looks like both the goods and happiness are comparable. The better the goods, the better the life of the person who has them, at least compared to someone with less or lesser goods.

This suggestion, implied by the use of the comparative, that there might be 'happy' and 'happier' lives raises an interesting question. Is it really true that happiness can be incomplete? I will argue here that if one holds CSVG, then one ought to think that happiness is an incomplete state. It is not difficult to understand why. If someone is committed to the claim that 'happiness' as a concept is discovered through a sort of comparative judgement of lives, then the metric for this comparative judgement is going to be that person's possession of good things. This sort of view on how one discovers whether someone is happy or not may influence how they think about the nature of happiness itself, because on this view it could be that someone's happiness is always incomplete. Someone could always come to possess more goods than someone else, and thus there is always the potential to improve upon one's happiness. If this is the case, then happiness is essentially incomplete. Is this the conception of happiness which Socrates thinks many people have? There seems to be good reason even at this early stage of the discussion to think this is not the picture that the many have in mind.<sup>7</sup>

To see why we need to return to thinking about the goods Socrates and Cleinias

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<sup>7</sup>For thoughts about the incompleteness of happiness I am indebted to Russell (2005:45-46). However, I am not convinced that idea of Socrates defending an incomplete conception of happiness is impossible. Rather, Socrates seems to be aware of such conceptions, but it seems has chosen to reject them. In large part as we shall see, because he believes wisdom to provide someone with complete happiness.

have identified. For example, think about the person who has health and good looks. However, due to the bad fortune of being born poor they have to work to utilise these natural capacities in order to achieve their ends. Their life may 'go well' and they may succeed in achieving their ends. In so doing, they may attain the same money and social status as someone who had the good fortune to be born wealthy. At such a point it would seem right on CSVG, to claim that their life was going just as well as the person who had the good fortune. That is, their life is just as good as the person born with the same goods which they had to strive for. Notice an interesting result of believing this to be the case: because it is the goods that make a life 'go well' the poor person's life is only going as well as his fortunate and wealthy companions at the time as he acquires the same amount of good they do. He may have been happy before, being healthy and handsome - but now he is even happier.<sup>8</sup> If we accept that the person who holds CSVG rejects the idea that happiness is complete, then we can identify another simple but philosophically relevant consequence of holding CSVG. If happiness is a state that can exist incompletely, then it is not only reasonable, but necessary to think that happiness can be improved upon.

At this point we can begin to get some sense of how the person who holds CSVG believes the goods contribute to happiness. The holder of CSVG believes that the goods add to the happiness of the life of the person who has them. This sort of conception of happiness has been identified by Russell . Russell describes this view of happiness as an 'additive' conception. Russell identifies that this 'additive' view conceives of the goods as much like the ingredients in the life of the happy person. A good soup is composed of the right ingredients, and the ingredients themselves are making an independent contribution to the goodness of the soup.<sup>9</sup> That is, the goods have a power or capacity of their own in respect to happiness,

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<sup>8</sup>Russell (2005) points out a crucial consequence of holding the view that happiness is potentially incomplete. If happiness is potentially incomplete it cannot serve as the 'question stopper' which puts an end to our reflection on why we do what we do. If I can be happy, but still have other ends which I need to pursue, then I cannot reasonably claim that my final deliberative end is to be happy. As Russell puts it "happiness is the final thing we want, because there is nothing beyond it that we could want—that is what happiness stands for." Russell (2005:41). In the next chapter, I will suggest that conceptions of happiness which see virtue playing a productive role in bringing it about, risk falling victim to this flaw, and thus contradicting Socrates own claims.

<sup>9</sup>See Russell (2005:17-37)

and subsequently make an independent contribution to the life of the happy person. Just as vegetables, stock and salt are all the ingredients one needs for a good soup; health, wealth and good fortune are the ingredients for a happy life.<sup>10</sup>

It is also important to note how CSVG arrives at this additive conception of happiness. The person who holds CSVG has very uncomplicated beliefs about how the goods make us happy. All that Plato provides for us to go on as a reader is that the presence of the goods is what would make someone do well(278e4-279a6). The fact that CSVG is so sparse on detail has an interesting consequence. It results in the fact that the way in which an individual desires the goods and believes they will make them happy, comes itself to un-reflectively shape their very conception of happiness. CSVG tells us nothing about why the goods will make us happy. As a consequence, the manner in which we pursue the goods comes to form our conception of happiness: happiness really is tantamount to getting lots of good stuff.<sup>1112</sup>

In what follows, Socrates will begin to encourage Cleinias to challenge these common sense assumptions on goodness and happiness. Socrates will ask Cleinias to think, not just about how it is we value the goods, but what exactly it is about good things which makes our lives happy. In so doing, he will challenge Cleinias not just to list off the good things, but to think about what sort of thing a happy life is. Cleinias will need to question what role the goods would play in such a life.

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<sup>10</sup>It is interesting that Russell identifies the additive view as having been attributed to Socrates in this section of the *Euthydemus* by several commentators. Russell (2005) argues that commentators such as Vlastos (1991) and Irwin (1995) who see the goods as contributing as making an independent contribution to the happiness of the wise person have misinterpreted the nature of Socrates' commitments. This discussion will be returned to in chapter five.

<sup>11</sup>Aristotle has something interestingly relevant to say on this issue *EN*(1095a4-7). Aristotle explicitly uses the term 'doing well' as something which the majority of people believe, perhaps mistakenly, to be the same thing as being happy. They all have a general eudaimonist outlook and so aim at being happy. However, they lack reflection on what exactly it is that happiness consists in. Aristotle believes that the many wish their life to go well, and they have all sorts of beliefs about what would make it go well. But much like the person who holds CSVG, their conception of happiness itself is not subject to introspection or examination.

<sup>12</sup>On this point I am in agreement with Annas (1993) who points out that Socrates' intent here, is to revise our conception of happiness. I believe she is correct in thinking that Plato's Socrates shares with Aristotle the concern that most people do not reflect on what happiness is. It seems to be of real consequence to note that Socrates is challenging Cleinias to begin such reflections, as this will help make better sense of much of what is to follow Annas (1993: 35-36).

However, before moving on it is worth considering another issue raised by CSVG which will resurface later in this section of the dialogue, as well as this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Active and Passive Agents

As previously suggested, one reason for those holding CSVG to identify good fortune as the greatest of the goods was that good fortune appeared to play a unique role in helping someone secure happiness. If it is correct to think that the possession of good fortune would guarantee someone lots of good things, and ward off ills which are beyond the control of the agent, then good fortune both helps one acquire more good things and secures those already possessed. The handsome person who has good fortune, will not be scarred in an unlucky accident. In fact, we would be right to think that their good fortune will put them in lots of situations where being handsome is beneficial, so that they benefit all the more from their possession of good looks. A notable result about valuing this sort of sheer luck so highly is that it may tempt one to think that passivity, is if anything, preferable to activity. The man who acquires wealth and social status through the hard work of a long military career is less fortunate than the man who was lucky enough to be born with these things at birth. What does this tell us about our initial interest in 'doing well'? Is the man who passively acquires many goods through luck really 'doing well'?<sup>13</sup> If we are committed to CSVG the answer ought to be 'yes'. Certainly we might causally say to someone that 'Dave has been doing really well' when describing someone who has recently come into a lot of money. What I take it we indicate by saying this, is that Dave's life seems to be going in a fashion that is good for Dave.

It is not clear however, that Dave's life really is going well. Perhaps, despite the fact he has come into a lot of money Dave's relationship with his partner is falling apart; his work life is a mess; and he is consistently under-performing on the local football team. In fact, the only things which would tempt one to think that Dave's

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<sup>13</sup>Dimas suggests the use of *πράττειν* and its other cognates should encourage us to think that Socrates places human deliberative action as central to this discussion in the *Euthydemus*. While this is correct, I believe the language also raises a related issue issue Dimas (2002:18). The ambiguities Dimas acknowledges are present in the usage of *εἶ πράττειν* mirror more profound ambiguities regarding human happiness. When we speak about human agents and their happiness, it is not clear whether we should use *εἶ πράττειν* to qualify an agents passive states, or their active states, or both.

life is 'going well' are things which passively occur in his life, such as inheriting a lot of money. One way of cashing this out might be to say that while Dave is *fortunate*, he is not *successful*.<sup>14</sup> While he is 'doing well' in terms of the events which occur to him as a passive agent, he is unsuccessful as an agent. This reveals something really interesting about how we think about whether Dave is happy or not. Dave is both an actor and patient, he is someone who acts and someone who is acted upon. Whether or not we think Dave's life is 'going well' is going to depend on whether we prioritise one of these in our evaluation, or consider them both side by side. As the discussion in the *Euthydemus* progresses more and more importance will be placed on the need to answer this question.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.3 Conclusion

Does the person holding CSVG evaluate human happiness in a solely passive fashion? To evaluate happiness passively would be to refuse to, or to entirely discount the quality of an agent's actions. As a consequence, happiness would come to be solely about those things which happen to an agent, rather than are done by that agent. Perhaps those who hold CSVG genuinely believe that happiness has nothing to do with the messiness of human action? If this is the case, it would seem to support the further thought, that a happy life would in fact be one in which we could avoid activity if at all possible. More likely than not, I suspect Plato believes the people who hold CSVG simply have not thought about the issue at all. As a result of this lack of reflection, they are perhaps unknowingly committed to the thesis that happiness can be incomplete and that it can be added to. They seek to acquire the goods in hopes they will become happy, but they are actually unclear on what happiness itself is and on important facets of the agent, whose life is a happy one.

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<sup>14</sup>This distinction between being fortunate and being successful is crucial to what I will argue in the next chapter, in large part because Socrates' language is often ambiguous between both meanings.

<sup>15</sup>I am indebted here to Russell's discussion of virtuous activity in Aristotle's ethics. Russell correctly points out the fact that we can conceive of our selves as both agents and patients, ought to radically alter our conceptions of ourselves - and subsequently what we think a happy life looks like Russell (2012:67-69). It seems to me that Plato was aware of this sort of concern and has intentionally left 'doing well' at this stage of dialogue as something that one could be both *qua* patient and agent.

In this chapter I argued that Socrates attributes to most people a very particular view on the goods and the manner in which they contribute to our happiness. Those holding CSVG rightly believe that it is generally and obviously true of human beings, that we want our lives to go well, and Socrates agrees to the truth of this. However, the many believe that what would make a life go well would be the possession of good things, because it is the goods themselves which make a life happy. In so doing, they risk ignoring the important role which activity and human agency play in making a life go well. In what follows, I will argue that Socrates is well aware of these sorts of questions about how we evaluate an agent's happiness. Socrates between 279d1-280b7 will go on to discuss good fortune, not just in terms of 'sheer luck', but as a sort of 'success' something that comes about through the activity of the agent.





## Chapter 3

# Wisdom and Good Fortune

In the previous chapter I argued for a claim I believe to be crucial in interpreting this section of the *Euthydemus*. I argued that Socrates takes it to be true that most people hold to a common-sense view of the good (CSVG). As a consequence Socrates believes most people, perhaps unknowingly, to be committed to several philosophically interesting assumptions about both the nature of goodness and the nature of happiness. In this chapter we will begin to see one way in which Socrates asks Cleinias to examine these common-sense beliefs. Socrates will ask Cleinias about the role of good fortune in supplying an agent with successful outcomes. Socrates will point out that good fortune can be understood as something other than a kind of lucky event that occurs to an individual. Socrates will do this by examining the success of craftsmen, in order to demonstrate that individuals can be the cause of their own good fortune.

During the course of this discussion Socrates will suggest that in fact this sort of good fortune is caused by the agent's internal state, namely their possession of wisdom. Socrates will claim that wisdom is sufficient for its own success, and that this sort of success will be found not in the productive output of an action, but in the intellectual character of the agent who undertakes it. In this way, Socrates begins to revise Cleinias' attitudes towards good fortune and the role it plays in happiness. While in the previous section of the dialogue, it made sense to translate εὐτυχία and its cognates as words pertaining to chance, sheer luck, and good fortune. By contrast, in what follows Socrates will transform εὐτυχία into a sort of 'success'

which comes through wise action.

Socrates will use his identification of the role wisdom plays in this sort of internal success, to help shift the emphasis of their investigation. Whereas in the early stages of their discussion Cleinias and Socrates had asked what about sorts of things they required to be happy, the discussion will now shift, to focus on what sorts of activity benefits an agent. This new found interest in the intellectual character of action, leads them to consider things in a different light. As a result of this discussion, they will come to focus on the 'how' rather than on the 'what' concerning happiness. That is, Socrates and Cleinias will begin to ask questions about how the manner in which someone lives, comes to influence their happiness - over and above what goods they possess. This will pave the way for Socrates to more closely examine the relationship between an individual and how they engage with the goods which they possess, and what sorts of capacities they require in order to integrate these goods into how they live.

### **3.1 Socrates' Argument**

Socrates and Cleinias had only just agreed that good fortune was the greatest of the goods when Socrates suddenly suggests they are at risk of looking foolish (279c5-7), as a result of adding the same good to their list twice. When Cleinias asks what Socrates means, Socrates tells him that 'wisdom is good fortune' and that this is the sort of thing which even a child ought to recognise. Crucial to interpreting this section of the dialogue is making sense of Socrates' seeming confidence in this claim, and seeing whether not the results of his investigation in fact validate it.

And I reconsidered a second time and said, son of Axiochus, you and I have nearly made ourselves ridiculous in front of our visitors.

How so? he said.

Because in putting good fortune in our previous list we are now saying the same thing all over again.

What do you mean?

Surely it is ridiculous, when a thing has already been brought up, to bring it up again and say the same things twice.

What do you mean by that?

Wisdom is surely good fortune, I said — this is something even a child would know. (279d1-9)

On the face of it, Socrates clearly seems to be suggesting that wisdom is numerically identical with good fortune (ἡ σοφία δήπου...εὐτυχία ἐστίν). The reason Socrates believes they risk looking foolish, is that they have added two distinct entities to their list, which even a child would know are in fact one and the very same thing. However, Socrates' reasons for asserting the identity claim are difficult to discern at this point.

In order to discover whether or not Socrates is seriously committed to the truth of the identity thesis, we need to look closely at the conclusion which he reaches and judge whether or it is compatible with, or directly entails wisdom's identity with good fortune. There is substantial debate on the issue itself, while some recent commentators have suggested that while it may initially seem as if Socrates is endorsing the identity thesis, the view he puts forward from this section of the dialogue is in fact incompatible with the identity thesis. While other commentators suggest the identity thesis is meant to be taken seriously, albeit with particular qualifications in place.<sup>1</sup>

For example, it would be difficult to believe that Socrates is suggesting that wisdom is identical with good fortune on some potential understandings of what εὐτυχία might mean. If we understand εὐτυχία to be a sort of agent independent 'sheer luck', the identity thesis seems obviously false. If we interpret it in this way, the identity thesis would indeed have some very unpalatable implications. For example, the truth of the identity of wisdom with sheer luck would entail that anyone who has wisdom was merely fortunate to possess their wisdom. Even worse, it would also seem to imply that there was nothing more to being wise, than there is

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<sup>1</sup>For commentators who believe Socrates endorses the identity thesis see Annas (1993), Irwin (1995), Dimas (2002), Russell (2005). For those who attempt to either qualify the identity claim, or deny it all together see Reshotko (2006) Vlastos (1991), Jones (2013), Parry (2003), Rider (2012).

to being lucky. In this sense, the actions and results of the wise person are really no different from the unintended 'mere happenings' which occur as the result of sheer luck. It is difficult to think that this could possibly be what Socrates is suggesting.<sup>2</sup>

Another option, may be to think that what Socrates has in mind is some sort of productive relationship. However, the identity thesis also seems incompatible with this thought as well. The identity thesis is incompatible with the idea that wisdom is a producer of good fortune, because it would be strange if the cause of someone's superior results (their wisdom) turned out to be identical with those results. The thing which brings about a result, the cause, is normally distinct from what is brought about. If Socrates is drawing Cleinias' attention to a relationship of cause and effect, the identity thesis would be an odd claim to make. Moreover, it would be strange if wisdom was valuable for its results, and yet also identical with them. If wisdom is valued for the sorts of results it brings about, it is difficult to imagine that it is one and the very same thing as those results.<sup>3</sup>

As such, those approaches which believe wisdom to be a cause of good fortune, have good reason to deny the identity thesis. And if it is true, that Socrates in fact argues for the idea that wisdom produces happiness, then it would look as if the identity thesis is false.

With these sorts of issues in mind, we can see that if it is true Socrates endorses the identity thesis, then what he must mean by εὐτυχία is going to have to be something quite different than 'sheer luck' or even 'a fortunate result.' Both the 'lucky' and 'productive' understandings of εὐτυχία are incompatible with the identity thesis. Instead, for the identity thesis to be something which it would make sense for Socrates to endorse, εὐτυχία is going to need to be understood as a sort of internal well-being. A state of internal well-being, which upon reflection, turns out to be nothing other than the activity of the wise person. This reading however, is not obvious from what initially follows. In fact, what initially follows seems most

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<sup>2</sup>For an excellent discussion of this issue see Reshotko (2006:144-146) who points out the difficulty of defending what she calls a *putative* identity thesis.

<sup>3</sup>For this reason almost all commentators who believe Socrates rejects the identity of wisdom with happiness, also believe he reject the identity thesis as compatible with Socrates argument. See Jones (2013) for an excellent defence of this view.

compatible with treating Socrates' interest in εὐτυχία, as an interest in good results.

### 3.1.1 The Superior Success of the Wise

This can be seen by looking at what follows. We can see that Socrates begins explaining away Cleinias' puzzlement at the hypothesised identity of wisdom with good fortune, by drawing comparisons between the fortunes of wise and unwise agents.

You know, don't you, Clinias, that flute players have the best luck when it comes to success in flute music?

He agreed.

And the writing masters at reading and writing?

Certainly.

What about the perils of the sea—surely you don't think that, as a general rule, any pilots have better luck than the wise ones?

Certainly not.

And again, if you were on a campaign, with which general would you prefer to share both the danger and the luck, a wise one or an ignorant one?

With a wise one.

And if you were sick, would you rather take a chance with a wise doctor or with an ignorant one?

With a wise one.

Then it is your opinion, I said, that it is luckier to do things in the company of wise men than ignorant ones?

He agreed.

(279e1-280a2)

Socrates suggests to Cleinias that craftsmen have the most favourable outcomes when it comes to their respective professions. Furthermore, amongst the

craftsmen the wise craftsmen have comparably favourable outcomes to the ignorant ones (279e1-6). Socrates raises several risky activities, where negative outcomes are possible even for the skilled members of the profession.<sup>4</sup> We can imagine that these skilled craftsmen are prone to misfortune through factors outside of the control of the agent. The crafts listed such as generalship, flute playing and medicine are all crafts where we expect the results to not be entirely under the control of the agent. Socrates realises this and qualifies his statements accordingly. Socrates asks Cleinias if it is true that these craftsman have comparably better fortune (εὐτυχέστερους) as a general rule (ὥς ἐπὶ πάν εἰπεῖν) than their peers, to which Cleinias agrees. These good outcomes are not good fortune understood as 'sheer luck'. Rather, they are outcomes which are fortunate *for someone* because they are the product of intentional agency. This intentional agency is what Cleinias seems to find valuable.

We can see this by noting that when Cleinias agrees that he would prefer risking the dangers of medical treatment with a wise doctor, Socrates asks whether or not this is due to his preferring wise people in general. Cleinias agrees that he prefers to be in the company of wise men, and that it is more fortunate for him to be around wise people. Wisdom brings about good results not just for the wise individual themselves, but for those people in their company as well. The thought would seem to be the following: A merchant sailing with a wise navigator will be more likely to avoid the perils of sailing, a soldier under Xenophon's command is more likely to return home than he would have been otherwise. The company of wise people is preferable, because those around them benefit from their wise results.

Now though, Socrates suddenly seems to believe these observations support drawing a very particular conclusion about the nature and character of wisdom. The fact that they observed that wise people had comparably superior results, turns out to be explained by the character of wisdom itself.

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<sup>4</sup>For a good discussion of Socrates choice of examples, and how they represent particularly risky professions see Rider (2012b:12). It also seems interesting to note that these examples are not particularly paradigmatic Platonic examples of craft, flute-playing in particular does not seem to satisfy the productive criteria Socrates sets out at *Gor.* 460a-d. The product of flute playing surely is nothing else but pleasing those listening. I believe this indicates that we should focus more on the way wise people overcome *bad luck* with wisdom, rather than on the power of craft itself.

So wisdom makes men fortunate in all these cases, since I don't suppose she would ever make any sort of mistake but must necessarily do right and succeed she would no longer be wisdom. (280a3-6)<sup>5</sup>

The reason Socrates claims that they observed these individual cases of people being fortunate, was because these individuals were being made fortunate by their wisdom. Socrates claims that this is due to the fact that wisdom necessarily guides an agent to act correctly. Conversely if an agent failed to act correctly and made a mistake, it would be clear that they could not possibly be being guided by wisdom.

It seems important to point out that Socrates does not seem to be suggesting that wise people *always* succeed, if success is understood as satisfying a particular external objective. Rather, Socrates is suggesting that someone who possessed wisdom would always have the capacity to act correctly. This must be the case, because as we have seen Socrates admits that wise agents are only more successful as a general rule (ὥς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν), so he would be contradicting himself to claim that they in fact can never fail to succeed. Socrates cannot use the comparative success of craftsmen to laymen, in order to argue for the absolute success of the wise - not at least if he intends such success to be understood as result oriented.

As a result there must be some sort of qualification at work, because in what follows Socrates does in fact seem to suggest that wise people cannot fail to succeed.

### 3.1.2 A Puzzling Conclusion

So far Socrates claims seem reasonably modest and had he stopped and summarised the results of their investigation at this point, interpreting the nature of his argument would be dramatically easier. However, Socrates goes on, and suggests that despite his failing memory he and Cleinias agreed that wise people did not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom.

We finally agreed (I don't know quite how) that, in sum, the situation was this: if a man had wisdom, he had no need of any good fortune in addition. When we had settled this point, I went back and asked him

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<sup>5</sup>My translation, but largely follows Cooper's.

how our former statements might be affected. We decided, I said, that if we had many good things, we should be happy and do well.<sup>6</sup>

If we formulate Socrates' claims straight from the dialogue itself it is not clear the argument is a good one, nor is it clear what its exact intent is.<sup>7</sup>

1. Wisdom makes men fortunate because she never makes a mistake, but necessarily acts correctly and succeeds (280a4-5).
2. Therefore, everywhere (i.e. in all the cases they have discussed) it is wisdom which makes men fortunate (280a3-4)<sup>8</sup>
3. Therefore, the wise do not need good fortune in addition (*προσδεῖσθαι*) to their wisdom (280b1-3).

It is not clear why Socrates believes he is entitled to this conclusion. We might allow that he can draw (2) from the truth of (1). The fact they observed the comparably better fortunes of wise agents, was because wisdom was the cause of their superior results (2). Nonetheless, it remains unclear why exactly wisdom has to be what did the 'fortune making' in every case. It is conceivable that lucky agents could be made fortunate by something other than wisdom - even if wisdom is superior to luck in terms of providing us with good results. Moreover, it is very unclear how (3) to be inferred from the truth of (1) and (2).

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<sup>6</sup>I would note that I share Chance's (1991:65-66) puzzlement on the use of the infinitive here (*εὐδαιμονεῖν*). So far, despite the topic of discussion being happiness, we have seen a total lack of forms or cognates of *εὐδαιμίων*. As previously noted, 'the many' assume that *εὖ πράττειν* was equivalent to it. However, here Socrates seems to question this assumption. He first raises the question of whether or not the broader term 'doing well' will cause us 'to be happy.' Whatever Socrates believes their discussion of craftsmen are shown, it should cause us to question the relationship between 'doing well' understood as possessing many goods, and the fact that 'doing well' would make someone happy.

<sup>7</sup>There is reasonably broad agreement on the idea that Socrates' argument here looks incomplete from the text itself. Irwin (1995:55) suggest that Socrates is clearly arguing for the 'extreme' claim that wisdom is guarantees success but provides no argument for this claim. Rider (2013a:222) agrees that the argument is fallacious or incomplete, but interprets Socrates' lack of argument to itself have protreptic value for Cleinias. Russell (2005:41) also agrees that Plato owes us more of argument than we get. Two notable exceptions to this are Jones (2013) and Reshotko(2006:121) who both deny that Socrates defends the sufficiency thesis, and subsequently believe that his arguments suffice to defend less ambitious claims.

<sup>8</sup>There is general agreement on the fact that Socrates begins this argument with part of his conclusion stated first. See Chance (1991:62-63).



One potential reading results in a flat out contradiction. For example, it cannot be that Socrates is suggesting both that the wise are made fortunate by their wisdom, and that they do not need good fortune. If Socrates is claiming this, then his argument is clearly contradictory. It is difficult to believe that Plato would put into Socrates' mouth something so obviously incorrect. Instead, the claim that Socrates makes is that whatever good fortune an agent has in virtue of their wisdom, requires no good fortune originating from some other source.

There are two broad approaches to making sense of what this might mean. The first sort of solution broadly suggests that what Socrates believes, is that 'good fortune' understood as a sort of 'sheer luck' over-determines the results of the wise people. Wise people get good results, and we do not need to resort to luck in order to explain their good results. A wise navigator can reach his destination through skill alone, and our appealing to events such as lucky currents in order to explain his success is unnecessary. The good results wise people get, do not seem to require 'sheer luck' in addition to the wisdom which brought them about. Thus, when Socrates says that wise people need no good fortune in addition to their wisdom, he means wise people do not need to be *lucky*.<sup>9</sup>

The second sort of answer goes further, and suggests that when Socrates says the wise do not need additional good fortune, he means both that they do not require luck but also that they do not require good results. Even though it is the case that good fortune can always help an agent to achieve superior results, Socrates does not encourage Cleinias to value wisdom for the results it produces. Socrates, by saying the wise do not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom, is denying that their happiness depends upon results. The person who is in possession of wisdom does not require any thing in addition to their wisdom in order to be happy. The reason they do not require any good fortune in addition, is they already have all of the good fortune they need, because wisdom is good fortune (279d1-9).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For this approach, see in particular Reshotko (2006) and Jones (2013)

<sup>10</sup>The two clearest articulations of this view are provided by Dimas (2002) Russell (2005). While Russell is critical of Dimas' view, the two of them share both a defence of the identity thesis, as well as a set of claims about wisdom and internal success. I take my own interpretation here to fit broadly into this camp.

In what follows, I want to consider the merits of the first of these two approaches, and raise what I see as a central difficulty for the productive approach. Having done this, I will then see whether or not the second of these two approaches provides us with a more palatable reading of Socrates' claims.

## 3.2 Two Productive Approaches

While both recent and ancient commentary have provided us with a variety of views on this section of the *Euthydemus*, most of these approaches fall broadly into two camps. The first camp takes seriously the identity thesis as a view defended by Socrates, and sees in this section of the dialogue the *locus classicus* for the thesis that wisdom is sufficient for happiness.<sup>11</sup> These approaches tend to take Socrates' discussion of the benefits of 'good fortune', as being a synonym for happiness - or as synonymous with a certain kind of internal well-being. Thus, when Socrates says that wisdom is good fortune, he is in effect, suggesting that wisdom is happiness.

As a result of taking Socrates to endorse the sufficiency thesis, these approaches tend to hold that Socrates does not believe that the possession of good things is required to be happy. While there is no doubt an important role for wisdom in determining how we use the goods we possess, the possession of goods themselves is not necessary for happiness. While wisdom is necessary to use the goods correctly, a wise person would remain happy absent the presence of external goods. In this way, wisdom is valuable because it is happiness. Virtue does not make a contribution to happiness, because something cannot contribute to itself. I will call this reading the 'Identity Thesis'.

In contrast, other commentators have argued for what I will call a 'Productive Approach' to understanding Socrates' claims. Those who hold this view, see clear evidence in this section of the *Euthydemus*, that Socrates believes that wisdom and happiness are two distinct entities. In this way, they read Socrates' hypothesis that 'wisdom is good fortune' as a claim which, upon reflection, turns out to be false. Having examined the role that wisdom plays in making a life happy, Socrates has

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<sup>11</sup>For a good discussion of this see Jones (2013:1-2).

identified two things rather than one thing. Whether these two things turn out to be related through cause and effect; means and ends or unconditional and conditional goodness; what these approaches all have in common, is a denial of the identity of wisdom with happiness. As a result, these approaches identify two elements as being involved in human happiness, and often suggest for wisdom a productive or instrumental role in bringing about happiness.

In what follows, I want to consider two significant and recent interpretations of this section of the dialogue, along this productive line of thought. I then want to suggest that these accounts fail to entirely put to rest some worries I have about the nature and content of Socrates' conclusion.

### 3.2.1 Irwin (1995): Virtue as an Instrument

Of all the readings of this section of the *Euthydemus* which take virtue to be independent from happiness, one of the most influential has been put forward by Irwin<sup>12</sup>. Irwin takes Socrates to be claiming that virtue has an entirely productive role in making a life happy. He takes Socrates to be arguing for the importance of virtue, in this case wisdom, because of its instrumental role in bringing about happiness. If wisdom played no role in our being happy, we would have no reason to value it, but once Cleinias realises that wisdom is both necessary and sufficient for happiness, he will value it as a means toward his own happiness.

Irwin formalises Socrates' argument as follows:

1. In each case the wise person has better fortune than the unwise (280a4-5).<sup>10</sup>
2. Genuine wisdom can never go wrong, but must always succeed (280a7-8).
3. Therefore, wisdom always makes us fortunate (280a6).<sup>13</sup>

Irwin suggests two ways of understanding this argument. The first *moderate* interpretation, takes what Socrates claims at (1) to amount to suggesting that the wise always do the best with their circumstances, especially in comparison to the

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<sup>12</sup>Irwin (1995:55-56)

<sup>13</sup>This is taken directly from *Plato's Ethics*. Irwin's line notes seem to be slightly off, see Irwin (1995:55-56)

unwise. The wise navigator in a storm, will definitely have a better chance of reaching port than an ignorant navigator. This being the case, Socrates is justified in holding that (1) is true. However, Irwin points out that if (1) is understood in this fashion, it is difficult to grant Socrates his conclusion at (3).

According to Irwin the fact that wise people would have comparably better results, would not support the fact that they do not need good fortune at all. His thought seems to be that, while a wise navigator might be more likely to make it through the storm than an ignorant navigator, this in no way indicates that the wise navigator receives no benefit from sheer luck, nor that he may not on occasion require it. Moreover, given that Irwin believes Socrates to hold that virtue is distinct from happiness, and that wisdom ought to be valued for the role it plays in bringing about happiness, it is difficult to believe that the *moderate* reading can possibly make sense of (3). If wisdom is valuable for what it produces, what it produces in terms of results is always somewhat subject to the influence of sheer luck. As such, the person who has wisdom and values it for its results, nonetheless remains in need of at least some 'good fortune.' Far from establishing (3), a moderate reading of (1) establishes that wise people need *both* wisdom and good fortune in order to be happy.

The only way the argument goes forward according to Irwin is if we take (1) to indicate that wise people always get good results. Thus, the truth of (2) follows from the observation that wise people are always fortunate, precisely because wisdom cannot allow an agent to fail to achieve their ends. Therefore, (3) follows as a result of their observations about the nature and power of wisdom, and how wisdom guarantees that a wise agent always achieves the sorts of results.

Irwin is right in thinking that understanding the premises in this fashion does get Socrates to his conclusion at 280b1-3. One reason to not need sheer luck to achieve a result, would be that the result was guaranteed by someone's possession of a skill, and this seems to be exactly how Irwin interprets Socrates' intent.<sup>14</sup> However, Irwin also notes correctly, that Plato has provided us with no argument to the

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<sup>14</sup>See Irwin (1995:68-70).

effect that wisdom guarantees a good result.

In fact, it seems worth pointing out that Socrates' own observations so far identified wise individuals as only being comparably successful to ignorant agents, not absolutely so. As such, it would be wrong for Socrates to argue for the absolute success of wise agents, from the observed comparable success of wise agents. His observations about wise agents, with which Cleinias has agreed, are simply insufficient to defend such a claim. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that Plato could be unaware of this rather obvious difficulty, and thus impute such an argument to Socrates.

One response to Irwin's reading of the argument would be to challenge his interpretation of what is said at 280a6-b3, and suggest that (3) does not cause the sorts of problems Irwin envisages. We might grant Irwin that virtue has a productive role to play in making us happy, but suggest that what Socrates has put forward as the conclusion of his argument is something which can be supported by a moderate understanding of (1): that wisdom causes an agent to act correctly regardless of their circumstances. As it is the case that wisdom is a producer of good fortune, it would be a mistake to equate fortunate results, with those brought about through sheer luck. In this way, the results of the wise would occur without the addition of sheer luck. Jones (2013) has put forward an interpretation of this section of the dialogue which seems to argue precisely this.

### **3.2.2 Jones (2013): Wisdom as a Producer of Good Fortune**

Jones has argued that this section of the *Euthydemus* is an argument for the thesis that wisdom produces good fortune. Jones suggests that Socrates' argument here neither puts forward the necessity or sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. Rather, what Socrates intends to argue for is that wisdom is desirable because it provides an agent with whatever good fortune is possible given the circumstances. Jones formalises the argument for the fact that Wisdom Produces Good Fortune (WPF) as follows:

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

- (WPF-2) The only difference between experts and nonexperts 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.<sup>15</sup>

Jones notes the way in which Socrates describes to Cleinias the superior results of wise people. With Socrates using the comparative 'more fortunate' (εὐτυχαστέρους) to qualify the superior results of wise crafts people. As such, he correctly takes the focus of this comparison to be the respective wisdom and ignorance of the agents in question, and so draws both WPF-1 and WPF-2 from these observations (279e-280a). As the the mode of comparison here is between wise and ignorant agents, and Cleinias agrees with Socrates' observation that the wise are more fortunate, they both conclude that wisdom is what accounts for the difference in the quality of their results (WPF-3).

However, crucial to Jones' reading is taking seriously Socrates' claim that the wise are only more fortunate than the ignorant as a general rule (ὥς ἐπὶ πάντων εἰπεῖν). Socrates is, at least at this stage of the discussion, allowing for the possibility that wise agents may fail to achieve their ends.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he allows for the idea that an ignorant agent may achieve a good result through sheer luck rather than skill (WPF-4). For this reason, Jones argues it would be wrong to view Socrates as committed to the idea that wise people always achieve good results, or that ignorant agents could never achieve good results. What Socrates is pointing out, is that

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<sup>15</sup>This is taken directly from Jones (2013:10-11)

<sup>16</sup>See Jones (2013:7)

wisdom by its very nature causes an agent to act correctly (WPF-6) and so produces whatever good outcome is possible given the circumstances (WPF-7).

The thought would seem to be this: wisdom is the cause of the favourable results of the wise, while sheer luck is the cause of the results of the ignorant. What explains why a wise navigator reaches his destination successfully, is that his wisdom caused him to act correctly, and so his actions conclude in a favourable result. Whereas, in the case of the ignorant navigator we should not seek to explain his successfully reaching port by appealing to his skill, skill is exactly what ignorant people do not have. As we cannot explain his good result as the product of his skill, we then must resort to events which came about independent of his agency. That is, events brought about by sheer luck, such as good currents or favourable winds. Thus, the sorts of results wise people get do not require good fortune to explain how they came about.

Jones then interprets what Socrates' concludes at 280b1-3 to be following: the person who has wisdom does not require any good fortune in addition to their wise action, because it is wisdom which caused their good results and not sheer luck<sup>17</sup>. As a consequence, Socrates is justified in claiming that the wise do not need sheer luck in addition to their wisdom. As such, Jones' argument relies heavily on the idea that wisdom is a cause, and good results are an effect. Wisdom explains the good results of wise people, and their good results would be over-determined if we attempted to suggest sheer luck as a possible explanation. The wise would have achieved their good results *without* the aid of sheer luck enabling their success. This solution however, is not without its difficulties, as Socrates 280b1-3 claim is not rendered entirely unproblematic.

### 3.2.2.1 The Difficulty of a Productive Approach

While it must be admitted to that Jones' interpretation is one way of making sense of Socrates' claim at 280b1-3, it remains unclear if, understood in this way, that Socrates is correct to argue as he does. We may admit that wisdom, by guiding an agent to act correctly, would produce the best results possible given the circum-

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<sup>17</sup>Jones (2013:10-11)

stances. Nonetheless, it is not clear that this correct action would leave an agent without the need for good fortune, especially given the specific eudaimonist and protreptic context of Socrates' argument.

It seems crucial to remember, that the motivations behind Socrates' protreptic are explicitly eudaimonist. Socrates clearly thinks that Cleinias should pursue wisdom because it will make his life better off. Even if Jones is right in pointing out that wisdom, because it always causes an agent to act correctly in their circumstances, means that very often a wise person's good results have nothing to do with sheer luck, it is not clear this suggestion is as effective in the context of human happiness.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear that just because wisdom can produce fortunate results, that a person who wants to be happy should think they do not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom. As Irwin has pointed out, even in the case of craftsmen, it is perfectly possible for luck to thwart the correct action of the wise person, spoiling their productive intent.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is conceivable that a very unlucky wise person will still lack the sorts of productive successes which Socrates, on this reading, is suggesting they will achieve. Even if wisdom always provides an agent with correct action in their circumstances, this may not be enough to remove the need for good fortune in order for them to be happy. If we value wisdom for the good results it provides for us *via* correct action, and it turns out correct action is insufficient to grant us good results, it is not clear why the wise do not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom. In fact, it looks as if in order to be happy we are going to need both correct action and sheer luck. If Jones' interpretation is correct, Socrates seems perplexingly unaware of the tension between his conclusion at 280b1-3 and the sort of examples he provides between 279e1-280a2.

The difficulty for the productive approaches lies in the way in which the good results we require in order to be happy seem to be influenced by, and come about in ways that are not independent of sheer luck. If it is good results which make us happy, then we ought to desire good results regardless of their origin, and if wisdom

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<sup>18</sup>This seems to be a worry which is central to Annas (1993). There are difficulties with taking the craft analogy too strictly, and as a consequence forgetting that these analogies are supposed to hold in the case of human happiness.

<sup>19</sup>Irwin (1995:64-66)



cannot always grant us good results, we then could always benefit from good results which did not specifically follow from our wisdom.<sup>20</sup> The productive approaches rely on the idea that virtue will supply us with what we need to be happy, but if it is results which contribute to our happiness, then the way in which we value wisdom is essentially productive in nature. A rational implication of this fact, is that if there are other candidates which could also grant us good results (i.e. results that contribute to our happiness), we might as well value them to the degree that they too could also make us happy.

Even more problematic for the productive approach is the essentially additive nature of productive success. If we hold the view that people become *happier* in their lives as a result of the good results they achieve, then the option which grants us more good results is always the most choice worthy option.<sup>21</sup> If we all want to be happy, and good results make us happy, our lives are always such that we require more good results. It is not clear, that this thought can be made easily compatible with Socrates' claim at 280b, that the wise do not need good fortune (μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας) in addition to their wisdom. A rational agent, who wants to be happy has reason to pursue wisdom in order to be happy for its good results, but they also have every reason to desire good results brought about by sheer luck. If this is the case, then the person with whom wisdom is present, could still easily stand in need of some additional good fortune in order to live a happy life.

Someone favouring a productive approach might respond that Socrates has the following in mind: In order to defend the productive approach, one might press the strength of the analogy between virtue and craft. One might claim that just as the crafts person achieves their results in a manner independent of the influence of sheer luck, so too does the action of the wise person achieves happiness without the aid of sheer luck. The wise person can live a happy life in a way which does not require sheer luck to explain how it came to be a happy life. A wise person, then, has a life which is happy because of their wisdom and its ability to positively effect

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<sup>20</sup>This issue will come back up again in the next chapter, when I consider issues surrounding the necessity of wisdom for happiness.

<sup>21</sup>I am indebted to Russell (2005) for beginning to think about happiness and the goods in these terms.

their circumstances. As a general rule, people who live these lives do not need to good fortune in addition to their wise actions. Even though there may nonetheless be some wise agents who are not happy, because their bad fortune thwarts their attempts to achieve the sorts of results required to make them happy.

It is not clear however, that this approach answers the fundamental difficulty facing the productive approach, especially in the particular eudaimonist and pro-treptic context in which it is placed. Socrates so far has argued that Cleinias ought to pursue wisdom in order to be happy. However, if the productive approach is right, it seems reasonable to think that the results of his argument seem to entail that we should desire *both* the good results of wise crafts people, as well the sorts of goods which we acquire through sheer luck, such as physical health, wealth and appearance.

This stands in contradiction to what Socrates concludes. Socrates is clear at 280b1-3, that whatever it is the wise have *qua* happiness, they do not require the addition of anything else in order to be happy. It is difficult to read the conclusion drawn at 280b1-3, and still claim that Socrates allows for the possibility that wise agents, in spite of their wisdom, could be made unhappy because of the influence of sheer luck. As such, it is difficult to think given the powerful influence sheer luck can have on the results of the crafts people he has so far discussed, that the benefit provided by wisdom to an agent's life can be understood in terms of results.

As a consequence, we should examine the possibility that Socrates does not understand the benefit which wisdom provides to an agent's life in terms of 'results.' I will argue that we should give up the idea wisdom is valuable for what it produces, and is instead valued because wisdom itself is identified with happiness.

### **3.3 The Identity Thesis: Wisdom and Happiness**

I want now to suggest a different interpretation of Socrates' remarks in this section. I will argue that the best way to make sense of Socrates claim at 280b that the wise do not need good fortune (*μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας*) in addition to their wisdom, is to suggest this is because he believes wisdom to be good fortune (279d)

(ἡ σοφία δήπου...εὐτυχία ἐστίν). The wise do not need good fortune because they are completely fortunate in virtue of their wisdom. By identifying wisdom with good fortune, Socrates seeks to radically alter Cleinias' conception of what good fortune is. By the conclusion of his argument here, Socrates in fact equates good fortune with happiness.

In order to see why Socrates believes εὐτυχία is equivalent to the happiness, we need to look closely at his use of the term throughout this section of the text.

### 3.3.1 **The Need to Disambiguate** εὐτυχία

Jones has correctly defined three possible options for what Socrates may mean by εὐτυχία.<sup>22</sup> According to him 'good fortune' may mean three things: (1) it could be a form of sheer luck, (2) it could be a form of outcome or productive success, (3) it could be a sort of intellectual or agent-centric success. I will suggest, that in fact all three 'senses' of good fortune are used by Socrates, albeit at different points in the discussion. In order to answer the question of what Socrates means by 'good fortune', we need to pay attention to the way in which Plato signals shifts in its usage to us.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that during the earlier sections of the dialogue (279a6-9) Socrates was considering εὐτυχία and the people who possessed it, to be 'sheer luck' and 'lucky people' respectively. The person who has εὐτυχία has lots of lucky things happen to them. These events are not the result of their own or anyone else's agency.<sup>23</sup> Following on, as we have observed Socrates then seems to shift the discussion of εὐτυχία and those who possess it, towards 'good outcomes' and people who reliably achieve these sorts of outcomes(279e1-280a2).

Socrates asks Cleinias whether or not it would be more fortunate for him to live a life in the company of wise people. These wise people seem to be fortunate and desirable to be around in large part, due to their capacity for favourable results. In this case, it appears as if Socrates is identifying εὐτυχία as a pertaining to the

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<sup>22</sup>Jones (2013:8-10)

<sup>23</sup>By this I mean at least the agency of mere mortals. It does seem compatible with this understanding of εὐτυχία that these could be things caused by the agency of Gods or spirits. TLG supports the idea that the word has these sorts of religious connotations.

quality of someone's results or outcomes. Wise people have better outcomes, that is they are *more fortunate* than other people (εὐτυχεστέρους), and the metric for this sort of comparison is the quality of the results they achieve. In which case, what Socrates means by εὐτυχία is what we find at (2). As should be clear (2) is exactly what the productive approaches take Socrates to mean by εὐτυχία; that it ought to be understood as essentially pertaining to the quality of people's results, and the way those results make a life a happier one to live.

However, Socrates seems to conclude at 280a4-5 that these observable results are caused by something distinct from the result itself. Socrates tells Cleinias that it is wisdom which guides an agent to act correctly and to be fortunate τυγχάνειν. There are at least two things Socrates could mean by using τυγχάνειν in this context. Socrates could be suggesting that wisdom causes fortunate results for the wise person, in a sense wisdom makes people lucky. On this reading, his use of τυγχάνειν further supports the idea that good fortune should be understood as a good result.

The second possibility is that what Socrates intends by τυγχάνειν in this context, is to put forward the claim that wise people are always *successful*. Wise people *always* hit the mark when it comes to their reasoning, even if they do not successfully achieve their results. While results may be under the influence of sheer luck, the process of reasoning which the wise person engages in always hits their intended mark.<sup>24</sup> The dialogue itself gives some reason for favouring 'success' as the most accurate translation. As Chance (1992) has pointed out, the manner in which τυγχάνειν is positioned next to correct action (ὀρθῶς πράττειν) ought to encourage us to translate it as 'success.' In part, because the stem (τυγχ) has been divested of any connotations of 'luck' by being linked with correctness (ὀρθῶς).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>On this point I am explicitly in agreement with what Dimas (2002) has argued, in that I believe Socrates argument encourages us to think the success at work is internal to the agent's rationality.

<sup>25</sup>Although I agree with Chance's suggestion regarding the translation, he nonetheless seems somewhat unclear on exactly what sort of good fortune at work here is Chance (1995:62). He seems to suggest both that Socrates thinks that wisdom causally produces good results, but also that the success which rests in 'hitting the mark' implied by the use of τυγχάνειν is a sort of internal success. This would mean that Socrates is happy to equivocate between (2) and (3) within the same section of the dialectic, without signalling his reader to the change. I would suggest, that Socrates has certainly identified good fortune as resulting from wisdom, in this case, at 280a4-5 he has clearly signalled that this 'hitting the mark' is a process internal to the agent. As such we would be right to think he has abandoned using (2) in favour of (3).

If Chance is correct this would seem to provide us with reason to think εὐτυχία may not be essentially results oriented, at least this seems to be implied by Socrates in the manner in which he concludes his argument. Rather, εὐτυχία seems to be a sort of internal success. As a consequence, what Socrates believes is demonstrated by the fortunate outcomes of wise men, is in fact something about the internal role wisdom plays in their lives. Wisdom allows them to 'hit the mark' or 'to succeed' in their reasoning, and this is the cause of their externally favourable results. The success granted by wisdom then is essentially internal in character. These external results are evidence of wisdom being at work, however they should not tempt us to characterise wisdom's essential nature as productive or outcome oriented.

This allows us to make sense of why Socrates believes that the wise do not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom (280b1-3). As it is the case that the success of the wise person is guaranteed by their acting wisely, the wise person is always fortunate (successful), as long as they remain wise. This good fortune is nothing other than their being engaged in wise activity. Thus, the product, their good fortune, ceases to be independent from their wisdom itself. In other words, their wisdom turns out to be nothing other than their good fortune (success) (279d).

### **3.3.2 Internal Success and Happiness**

If, as I have suggested, the best way to make sense of Socrates' conclusion, is to understand the success of the wise person as internal to wise activity itself, then we are now left trying to answer the question of how to understand the role which internal success plays in the life of the wise person. To do this, first of all, we need to clarify the nature of internal success itself. What exactly does it mean to say the success of the wise person is internal their activity? Daniel Russell (2005) has identified internal success as the following:

...success is determined not by the completion of some action, but by how one engages in all action with wisdom and intelligence. Success, then, is not so much a 'what' as it is a 'how'—it depends on how one does whatever one does, because success at acting wisely must always

be available to a wise person, who has no need of further good luck.<sup>26</sup>

Russell's understanding of 'internal success' is helpful, not just in pointing out how Socrates' interest in internal success, would seem to entail the independence of happiness from good results. It also allows us to see that his interest in internal success helps to mark an important shift in emphasis.

If Socrates' real interest lies in internal success rather than result oriented success, Socrates would seem to be shifting the focus of his inquiry from the question of *what* makes us happy, to the question *how* we are happy. This *how* was already implicitly there in the question of *how we do well?*<sup>27</sup> But Socrates' use of εὐτυχία as a sort of internal success, helps to place this *how* as central to what will follow. Internal success will help make sense of the sorts of questions Socrates will go on raise, pertaining to the goods and their use. Moreover, internal success is the most charitable reading of Socrates' argument, because it provides us an answer to the two most perplexing questions which arise from Socrates' claims about the nature and power of wisdom at 280b1-3.

- Why does Socrates believe that observing the comparable success of the craftsmen, indicates the fact that wise people do not need require good fortune to achieve their ends? (280b1-3)
- Why does Socrates float the idea that wisdom *is* good fortune? (279d)

Internal success helps provide us a clear answer to the first question, by allowing us to disregard the sorts of counter examples I provided earlier to Socrates argument. Given that wisdom's success is internal to its own activity, we can then see why Socrates takes himself to be justified in claiming that the wise do not need good fortune. As it turns out, the success had by the wise person does not depend on the results they achieve, and so the contribution wisdom makes to their happiness does depend on external circumstances. If it is how a wise person does what they do that matters in terms of how we evaluate how their life is going, then the fact that

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<sup>26</sup>Russell (2005:31)

<sup>27</sup>(279a2)

sheer luck may influence the quality of their results does not demonstrate that they need sheer luck in order for their life to go well.

The fundamental difficulty with the productive approaches to Socrates' argument is that they shared with CSVG a focus on the 'what' of happiness, rather than the 'how'. CSVG with its focus on the obtainment of goods, provided Socrates and Cleinias with a clear candidate for what would make them happy. The greatest of these goods was εὐτυχία because of the role it could play in giving an agent what they wanted, without the agent in question even needing to bother with the 'how' of obtaining these goods. By 279e1-280a2, it seems that Socrates began to investigate the fact that how agents engaged in various sorts of activities mattered when it came to their happiness. In fact, how they acted caused them to be producers of their own good results. These results, unlike ones generated by sheer luck, came about because of how someone acted.

However, this focus on productivity should not mislead us about Socrates' interest in the nature and power of wisdom. The reason wisdom would seem to be valuable is that unlike other sorts of productive activities, the person who has wisdom does not need good fortune in addition to their wisdom. While Socrates clearly acknowledged wise people were still subject to misfortune (279e1-280a2) in terms of their results, he does not seem to believe that wise people are subject to the need for sheer luck, if they are to be happy. This would seem to be because he believes the goods which result from productive success are not required for happiness. The reason for this is that we achieve happiness by how we engage with those things present to us in our lives, rather than what is present to us in our lives.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, internal success also gives us a solid answer to the second question. Internal success allows us to understand why Socrates would suggest that wisdom *is* good fortune. On the internal-success reading, wisdom is good fortune, because it plays the unique role which CSVG suggested belonged to sheer luck. CSVG held that good fortune was the greatest good, because it could secure an agent the goods

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<sup>28</sup>Socrates argument for this claim is still incomplete as of this point, but if we take him to expressed intent to make such an argument at this stage, the line of argument which follows makes good sense.

which they required to be happy, and to help them maintain their possession of them by warding off unlucky events. With this in mind, we can see the subtle humour at work in Socrates suggesting the identity thesis to Cleinias.

While CSVG would cause one to think that εὐτυχία secured happiness by granting us many goods, it in fact turns out that εὐτυχία ought to be understood as internal success (τυγχάνειν) rather than a perchance for events brought about by sheer luck. Socrates' wit seems to lie in the fact that he does genuinely believe that wisdom is good fortune, understood (much as is done by CSVG) as something that would secure us our happiness. But wisdom is good fortune, because good fortune is a matter of what one does with one's life, rather than what one has present in one's life. Because good fortune (i.e. being secure in one's happiness) is a matter of *how* one lives, it turns out that wisdom is nothing other than good fortune. A life lived wisely is guaranteed to be a fortunate life. As a result of the identity of wisdom and good fortune, we ought to then reject the idea that Socrates believes wisdom and happiness to be distinct in character. If it is good fortune which will secure us happiness, because good fortune is nothing other than wise activity, then happiness looks to be nothing other than wisdom's activity.

This leaves some interesting questions open about the role of goods other than wisdom in the life of the happy person, which will be dealt with more in subsequent chapters. But it does help settle the question of whether or not Socrates held wisdom to be distinct from happiness. And what sort of success is entailed by the kinds of analogies between virtue and craft which he has drawn here.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this way, Socrates by identifying that the success of the wise is internal to their activity, has shifted the focus of his *eudaimonist* inquiry from *what* makes a life go well (i.e. the possession of goods) to *how* things go with an agent. Understood in this way, we can see that while Socrates between 279e1-280a2 was interested in the fortunate (i.e. favourable) results of wise people, the conclusion he drew was not about the quality of their results, but about the quality of their agency. Wise people



had good results because of how they went about engaging in their activity, and it is how they engaged in their craft which was truly valuable, not the product that on occasion resulted from such activity.

Socrates used observations about the comparable fortunes of wise and ignorant agents, to underwrite the importance for Cleinias that how one lives one's life influences both the results which an agent brings about, as well as the quality of their agency itself. In what follows, Socrates will now inquire about whether or not this internal success is required for someone to be happy. As yet, Socrates has pointed out that the wise have this sort of internal success, but it remains unclear whether this sort of internal success is necessary to be happy. While internal success, may suffice for a life to 'go well', perhaps the possession of many good things, or many fortunate events, would still suffice to *also* make someone happy.

While it must be admitted that Socrates does not make an explicit argument for internal success, this argumentation here makes most sense if such a notion is assumed to be at work. Moreover, such an assumption allows us to take Socrates' claim about the identity of wisdom with good fortune straight forwardly. Socrates believes wisdom *is* good fortune, because good fortune is what secures our happiness. Because wisdom just is good fortune, wisdom is happiness. Socrates has certainly provided a less than clear case for this claim, but in the subsequent discussion, I hope to bring out why Socrates might think himself justified in defending this line of thought.



## Chapter 4

# A Necessary Condition for Happiness

In the previous chapter, I argued that Socrates had provided for us an argument, albeit in an incomplete form, for the sufficiency of wisdom for success. Socrates and Cleinias identified that good fortune was the greatest good, because it played a unique role in making an individual's life happy. As their philosophical inquiry progressed Socrates suggested that wisdom was good fortune. In turn, Socrates and Cleinias discovered that there was more to 'good fortune' than just a sort of 'sheer luck' which occurred agent independently. In fact, some agents, produced their own good fortune through being wise in regards to the actions they undertook. The fact that some agents were capable of making their own good fortune, revealed something valuable about the nature of their internal intellectual character.

This revelation seems to have led Socrates to claim, that despite his failing memory, he and Cleinias agreed that the quality of someone's agency could also be a sort of good fortune. Because we saw in the first chapter that 'good fortune' is what would help us secure our happiness, it looks like Socrates is suggesting the following: Socrates is claiming that someone's life can be 'going well' in terms of the quality of their internal intellectual agency, in a way which does not require either lucky events or successful outcomes.

This realisation opened up the possibility that there were in fact two different ways in which someone's life can 'go well.' While wisdom, as a quality of someone's agency is sufficient to make someone's life go well, there are nonetheless other ways in which a life could go well as well. The philosopher may not need

anything besides his virtue, but perhaps there are other people who have lives that 'go well' even though they lack wisdom. Socrates may have successfully convinced Cleinias that wise people do not require goods in addition to their wisdom to succeed, but this leaves open whether or not people who possess many goods also have lives that are happy.

In this chapter, I will argue that Socrates having shown that wisdom is sufficient for success, will now turn his attention in this section to arguing for its necessity in the life of the happy person. In so doing, he will argue that wisdom is not just sufficient for happiness, but also necessary. Without wisdom to direct the goods which a person comes to possess, those goods cannot contribute to their happiness. For this reason, as well as his previous observations, wisdom is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. Moreover and very importantly, wisdom turns out to be necessary for happiness in a very particular fashion. Unlike other goods, which were previously discussed at 278e4-279a6 as merely 'being present' in the life of the person, wisdom has an essential and necessary role in the life of an agent. Wisdom could be present in one's life, by surrounding one's self with wise people, but in what follows Socrates argues wisdom is required for any and all agents who want to do well in their lives. This is because it must be someone's wisdom which directs their their life and their pursuits, if they are to benefit from the actions they undertake. As a result, an agent must seek to become wise if they also desire to become happy.

## **4.1 The Necessity of Activity**

Socrates begins his argument for the necessity of wisdom for happiness, by drawing Cleinias' attention to the question of how it is that we receive benefit from those things which we possess. It will not do, argues Socrates, to just possess good things because an agent must also actively engage with their possessions. Socrates will demonstrate that the reason that we envisage ourselves as benefiting from our possession of good things, is that we intend to use and engage with them. As a consequence, mere possession of the goods does not make someone happy, rather

activities which involve our engaging with the goods which make a life go well. The goods make us happier because we benefit from their use, but there is no benefit without activity. Thus, Socrates argues that it is the way in which an agent actively engages with the goods which makes them happy.

And would the possession of good things make us happy if they were of no advantage to us, or if they were of some?

If they were of some advantage, he said.

And would they be advantageous to us if we simply had them and did not use them? For instance, if we had a great deal of food but didn't eat any, or plenty to drink but didn't drink any, would we derive any advantage from these things? (280b7-c4)

This interest in activity marks a shift in emphasis. As we saw, in the previous two chapters, I suggested that there were two views on offer: The first view claimed that possession of the goods was sufficient for happiness, because having many goods causes someone to live a happy life. The other view put forward by Socrates, was that the possession of wisdom was sufficient for a sort of internal success, which perhaps could allow for a life to go well. Socrates claimed that this sort of success was possible, without the need for additional goods, such as those brought about by sheer luck, or wise action. An agent could do well as the result of additional goods, or they could do well in terms of the quality of their agency. At this point, Socrates has made no conclusive case to prefer one to the other.

Perhaps wisdom would be a really good pursuit for someone who is born poor and ugly as Socrates is, but still hold that for someone young, rich, and handsome such as Cleinias could simply rely on possession of the goods to be happy? Here we seem to find the beginnings of an argument against this being the case. Socrates points out that the good things someone possesses need to be used by them in order for the person to benefit from such possession.

It is not clear initially why Socrates feels the need to point this out, but reflecting upon the assumptions of CSVG may give us some clues. The person who

holds CSVG believes that the possession of the goods is what makes a life happy. However, Socrates has pointed out that the reason they believe the goods make will make them happy, is because they believe they will actively benefit from engaging with the goods. This points to the fact that person who holds these common-sense attitudes and beliefs, either has an incomplete view on the relationship between the goods and happiness, or has made an implicit assumption which Socrates believes is in need of investigation.

The person who holds this common sense view has either failed to reflect on the fact that we must actively engage with what we possess, or has mistakenly believed activity to be uninteresting and unproblematic. As a result, they have failed to note that there seems to be a place for activity in our conception of happiness, and its relationship to the goods. This could simply be an oversight, or perhaps they considered use of the goods a simple matter, at least when compared with the difficulty in acquiring them. Either way, it looks as if this common-sense view may not provide a complete picture of how the possession of goods causes a life to be a happy, by failing to give activity its proper place. It may be that the goods do in fact make our lives happy, but we are going to have to provide some answer as to how they are used or incorporated into the life of the person in question.

The issue with the common-sense view seems to be this: whether wittingly or not it gives priority to what happens to an agent, rather than what is done by an agent. This can be seen by the fact that CSVG gave us no explanation about how an agent was supposed to interact with the goods they came to possess, nor did it question what it was that would make these interactions beneficial to the person in question. As a result, CSVG attempts to give an account of what it is for a life to 'go well' in terms of what happens to agent, but it is silent on how their life goes well in terms of what is done by them. Socrates seems to recognise this, and so he once again invokes a sort of analogy between virtue and craft. Although, here the analogy is somewhat distinct from its previous incarnation at 279e1-280a2. The craft analogy which Socrates raises here is simpler in structure than the previous one, and his intentions behind it seem much more straightforward to discern.

### 4.1.1 A Subtle Difference in the Analogy

At 279e1-280a2 Socrates seemed interested in the comparative success of craftsmen. As such, he raised the issue of craft because of its ability to make craftsmen comparably better off than lay people. In contrast, here Socrates now seems interested in something quite different. Socrates goes on to point out that the craftsmen do not just possess the materials associated with their craft, but they actively engage with these materials. A craftsman is someone who has both possession of the right sort of materials, as well as the capacity to actively engage with this materials in a way which generates value from them.<sup>1</sup> Socrates will then use this example to point the necessity of an activity, by drawing an analogy between the use of the goods, and the craftsman's use of his materials.

Well then, if every workman had all the materials necessary for his particular job but never used them, would he do well by reason of possessing all the things a workman requires? For instance, if a carpenter were provided with all his tools and plenty of wood but never did any carpentry, could he be said to benefit from their possession?

Not at all, he said. (280c4-d1)

Craftsmen do not seek merely to acquire the materials associated with their craft, but they also actively engage with these materials. Thus, there are two components necessary for the productive success of craft. First, one must have possession of the materials, and secondly, one must have the capacity to act correctly in regards to them. Socrates uses this example to draw further conclusions about the nature of the goods.

Then are these two things, the possession of good things and the use of them, enough to make a man happy, Clinias?

They seem so to me, at any rate.

If, I said, he uses them rightly, or if he does not?

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<sup>1</sup>The idea that craftsmen bring about value in their materials through their agency is an interesting one. However questions of value will be left for the following chapter.

If he uses them rightly. (280d9-e5)

This reflects on Socrates concern at 280b5-7, that their previous statements may have been affected by their realisation that it is wisdom which supplies an agent with correct action (280a5-6). They had previously agreed that the possession of many goods, was how their lives would go well (2794-6). Now however, Socrates has identified two components relevant to the goods and how they feature in the life of the happy person. The goods require correct usage if we are to benefit from them, and we know from Socrates' previous discussion of the power of wisdom to supply an agent with correct use (280a4-5). So it appears as if wisdom is also something which the person who holds CSVG ought to be interested in.

As we saw, in the previous chapter, it would not be strange for someone who holds CSVG to value wisdom or wise people. However, notice that the way in which CSVG might tempt one to value wisdom is rather different than the view I take Socrates to be putting forward. As we saw wise people have better outcomes than unwise people, and so it would make sense for the person who prizes the acquisition of good things to associate with wise people. That is, if I desire the good of health, I am definitely better off choosing a wise doctor. I am, as it were, valuing wisdom for the sorts of goods it produces for me.

Note, that this is compatible with my being neutral on the issue of whether or not it is *my* wisdom which is contributing to my happiness or someone else's wisdom making me happy. On this view, I might admit that wisdom as a general rule is a valuable thing to have, without believing that I myself must become wise. If this turns out to be true, Socrates will have failed in his protreptic intent. However, Socrates seems to believe that by arguing that activity is necessary in regards to the goods, Socrates can demonstrate not just that wisdom is a valuable thing in general, but everyone who wants to be happy also has reason to pursue wisdom. Only wisdom can guide an agent in their actions, such that these actions bring about benefit from what they possess in their given circumstances.

I may come into quite a lot of money, and as a result it may be practically necessary for me to hire a wise accountant in order to keep track of my money. I



will, no doubt, end up having more money at the end of the day if I benefit from the wisdom of my accountant. However, no amount of wise accountants will ever help me to settle the question of what I ought to do with the money, and what role it ought to play in my life. I cannot outsource the need for wisdom to somebody else, because the wisdom I require is the very sort that directs and informs how I should want my life to go.<sup>2</sup>

For these sorts of reasons, Socrates points out to Cleinias that the goods are only rightly called 'goods', when they are incorporated into someone's life in the correct fashion.

Well spoken, I said. Now I suppose there is more harm done if someone uses a thing wrongly than if he lets it alone—in the first instance there is evil, but in the second neither evil nor good. Or isn't this what we maintain?

He agreed that it was. (280e6-281a2)

Socrates describes this incorporation, initially as a sort of 'correct use' and later as a sort of 'control' or 'leadership' of the things in question. As he and Cleinias already discovered, it was wisdom which supplies an agent with correct use (280a4-5). But now, it looks as if correct use does not just guarantee comparatively better results, but is required for any sort of good result. Importantly, it is not just the need for wisdom in general to feature in the life of the person (say perhaps by being around lots of wise people), but they themselves must become wise in order to direct their possession of the goods.

We are now in a position to see the shift in emphasis made by Socrates here. Whereas the former analogy between craft and happiness relied on a comparison of craftsman to laymen, the analogy here is relevantly different. Socrates has shifted the focus from explaining the observable success of craftsmen and identifying its

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<sup>2</sup>The thought would be that the goods do not just feature in our individual actions, but they also feature as part of our projects. Because they feature as part our projects, which are inherently forward looking in nature, we need to know how to engage with the good things we possess in a way which will satisfy future desires and attitudes. For thoughts on this issue I am indebted to Russell (2012), who is keen to point out the inherent future-orientatedness of happiness.

cause (their wisdom), to focusing on what exactly governs the an agent's actions. Now, Socrates seems to be concerned not with identifying the general cause of the craftsman's superior results, but with the specific relata involved in the process of successful action. Socrates and Cleinias had previously agreed that it was wisdom which necessarily supplied an agent with correct action, and that this explained the phenomena they observed regarding the success of craftsmen. The aggregate of the craftsman's actions were more desirable than those of the novice. Now, Socrates seems to have shifted emphasis to the particular item of knowledge required for a particular action to hit the mark and succeed.

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge is Necessary for the Right Sort of Activity**

It is this thought which I believe best explains Socrates' shift from discussing wisdom and its productive capacities, to his new-found focus on wise agents and their items of knowledge. This is because, as I will go on to argue, Socrates wants to point out the analogous relationship between the way a craft is directed by its object of knowledge, and the way in which a good life is directed by rational faculties of an agent.<sup>3</sup> Because we must necessarily engage in certain forms of activity with the good things we possess, we need to explore what it is that guides and unifies these diverse activities into a good life, just like a craftsmen who directed by his knowledge, is able to unify his disparate materials into a unified product.

The sort of questioning Socrates engages in seems to support this interpretation. Socrates immediately returns to the craft analogy with this different emphasis.

Then what comes next? In working and using wood there is surely nothing else that brings about right use except the knowledge of carpentry, is there?

Certainly not. (281a2-5)

The reason that they observed that wise agents were supplied by their wisdom with correct use, was because they were wise with respect the relevant epistemic

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<sup>3</sup>In spite of this, I will often use wisdom or virtue, to describe where the dialogue itself in fact has knowledge. This is because, as has been noted by Jones (2013) Socrates' seems to suppose them functionally equivalent for the purposes of his argument.

features of their craft. Wise craftsmen know what they are doing, and as a result act correctly in regards to their materials. However, Socrates immediately shifts the analogy back to that of virtue and the central Socratic question of how one ought to live.

And also, I said, with regard to using the goods we mentioned first—[b] wealth and health and beauty—was it knowledge that ruled and directed our conduct in relation to the right use of all such things as these, or some other thing?

It was knowledge, he said. (281a7-b1)

While Socrates believed that his conclusion reached at 280a3-6 meant they had to reconsider some of their previous statements, he now seems to have reached a point where he can explain why such reconsideration is required. The goods Socrates and Cleinias had initially identified turn out not to benefit someone unless they are used correctly, but they cannot be used correctly without the agent who possesses them having the knowledge required to direct them.

The implication then seems to be, that like the craftsmen who wants to produce the right sort of product, the person who wishes to have a happy life, is going to need to possess knowledge of the goods in order to live a happy life. While the company of other wise people might be preferable in granting someone more good outcomes, the goods which result from wise company will be useless to an individual unless they themselves possess the knowledge of how to incorporate these goods into their lives. As a result, Socrates now feels himself in the position to put forward a conclusion about the relationship of knowledge to both good fortune and a happy life.

Then knowledge seems to provide men not only with good fortune but also with success, in every case of possession or action.

He agreed. (281b2-5)

Socrates is consistent in his claim here. As we know from the previous discussion, wisdom is identical to good fortune. Thus, if someone is wise because they

have knowledge, and wisdom is good fortune, then the possession of knowledge would mean that someone is both wise and fortunate. Knowledge can successfully guide individual actions, and supply an agent with success. Furthermore, knowledge can also guide an individual's actions and assist them in incorporating the goods into their life in a way that makes their lives go well. Knowledge then has a dual role both in informing particular individual actions, but also in incorporating the results of these actions into the agent's life in a way which benefits them. As a result, Socrates argues that wisdom is not just sufficient for correct action, but it is also necessary to possess if someone wants to benefit from those things which are the results of right action.

The formal structure of Socrates' argument would seem to go as follows:

1. The goods contribute to someone's happiness if and only if they are both possessed and used by that person (280d5-7).
2. The goods do not play a role in someone's happiness, if they fail to benefit their possessor (280e8-281a1).
3. Only correct use supplies their possessor benefit from the goods (281a5-7).
4. Wisdom (knowledge) is necessary for correct use (281a9-b1).
5. Therefore, wisdom is necessary to benefit from the goods (281b2-4).
6. Therefore, wisdom is necessary for someone's possessions to play a role in their happiness (281b5-7).<sup>4</sup>

Socrates first established that possession on its own was not sufficient (1) for the goods to benefit someone. Socrates and Cleinias agreed that when we envisage the goods playing a role in our happiness, we do so because we expect to engage actively with them - we use the goods in our lives in various ways. Moreover, we

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<sup>4</sup>I use the language of 'playing a role' here for a particular reason. At this point I want to remain neutral on whether wisdom is necessary for the goods to actively contribute to someone's happiness, or whether it is just necessary for those goods to have the right sort of role or relationship within that person's life. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

can imagine situations in which someone possesses things which are recognised as goods, but does not benefit from them (2).

In being asked to reflect on the example of the craftsmen, Cleinias agrees that it is correct use of the things which one has, which allows someone to benefit from their possessions (3). However, Socrates and Cleinias know from their previous discussion of wisdom at 280a4-5, as well as their observations about the carpenter, that it is wisdom and knowledge which are necessary for correct use. Because one must actively engage with the goods (1) and wisdom is necessary the right sort of activity (3), then it follows that wisdom is necessary to benefit from the goods (4). As a result, it is benefit from the goods which makes a life happy, and mere possession of the goods is insufficient for them to play a role in our happiness (2).

Thus, as a result of (1), (2) and (3) it follows that (4) is true: wisdom is necessary for correct use. If we take the truth of (4) along with what has already been established, then (5) follows: wisdom is necessary to benefit from the goods. As it is benefit from the goods which allows them to play a positive role in someone's life, (6) follows as a result of (5). Thus, Socrates gets to his conclusion that becoming wise is necessary, if someone's possessions are to play a beneficial role in their life. He has secured his protreptic conclusion, that Cleinias should desire to become wise.

## **4.2 Necessity and Dependency**

The conclusion of Socrates argument in one respect is quite clear, Socrates is arguing that more than just mere possession of good things is required, and that an agent must use what they possess. He then goes on to identify wisdom as necessary (and perhaps sufficient) for the sort of use which would benefit an agent. However, there are at least two things this sort of necessity claim might mean. Socrates could mean that, for an agent who acts wisely, such action will necessarily be correct. As it is correct action which is what is required in order to benefit from the goods, and wisdom guarantees correct action, wisdom necessarily entails benefit from the goods. On the other hand, Socrates might intend to claim that wisdom is necessary,

because correct action depends upon an agent's wisdom. In which case, wisdom is necessary because it is only by being wise that someone can act correctly, and thus only through wisdom that someone can come to benefit from their possession of the goods. This can be seen by thinking about the logical scope of both these claims:

- The actions of a **wise agent** are by *necessity* **correct actions**.
- *Necessarily* **correct actions**, are those actions, which are done by a **wise agent**.

The first of these states that wisdom necessarily provides someone with a certain result, in this case correct action. If we know that someone has acted wisely, we know that necessarily correct action will result. The second of the two makes a different claim, the second one claims that correct actions are nothing other than those actions which are the results of wisdom's activity.

The difference in scope between these two readings has an important and often unattended to consequence. The first claim is compatible with Socrates believing that ignorant agents act correctly by chance. While correct action is necessary to benefit from the goods and we should value wisdom for its capacity to necessarily provide us with correct action, there are certainly correct acts which are not the results of wisdom being at work. In contrast, the second claim inter-defines wisdom and correct action. Where we will find wisdom at work we will find correct action, and absent wisdom being at work we will necessarily fail to find it. Both of these readings will give Socrates his desired conclusion, that wisdom is necessary for us to benefit from the goods. But they are radically different in both strength and scope.

In what follows, I want to look closely at the logic of Socrates' argument, and see if the way he formulates the conclusion of his argument speaks more in favour of one of these two interpretations. To do this, I begin by looking at one of the more recent attempts to formalise this argument by Jones (2013).

#### 4.2.1 Jones (2013): On the Necessity of Wisdom

Jones summarises what I have as premise (6) as the following:

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.<sup>5</sup>

Jones rightly points out that this claim does not amount to the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. On the nature of what it does in fact claim, he writes:

..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. <sup>6</sup>

According to Jones the content of Socrates' conclusion is nothing more than a modest conditional statement, that would seem to entail that Socrates holds something close the first of our two scope distinctions. Wisdom guarantees us that which we need to benefit from the goods, and the thing which we need to benefit from the goods is to be able to use them correctly. Jones points out that this argument, as he interprets it, does not entail the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. All that Socrates seems to be claiming is that there is a conditional relationship between wisdom and benefit. If one acts wisely, then one will act correctly.

Is this what Socrates claims? A close look at the language is be helpful.

οὐ μόνον ἄρα εὐτυχίαν ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐπραγίαν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡ ἐπιστήμη παρέχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐν πάσῃ κτήσει τε καὶ πράξει.

Knowledge then, it would seem, provides not only success but also correct action to men, in all cases of possession and action.<sup>7</sup>

(281b1-2)

It would indeed seem as if this a conditional claim ( $A \square \rightarrow B$ ). If one is wise ( $A$ ), then one will benefit from the things which one possesses ( $B$ ). And it seems

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<sup>5</sup>This is taken directly from Jones (2013:14-15)

<sup>6</sup>Jones (2013:15)

<sup>7</sup>My translation.

likely, that this is where Jones draws the content of AWC-6, in tandem with what had come just before. If so, he is correct in saying that the content of AWC-6 represents a simple conditional claim. Moreover, he would be correct to think the operator takes *de re* scope. The necessity at work, is a necessity *between* wisdom supplying ( $\text{παρέχει}$ ) an agent with correct action ( $\text{εὐπραγίαν}$ ).

However *contra* Jones it seems to me that Socrates is not satisfied with this weaker claim. In fact, his conclusion seems to state something stronger, and more akin to the stronger second claim.

ἄρ' οὖν ὧ πρὸς Διός, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὄφελός τι τῶν ἄλλων κτημάτων ἄνευ  
φρονήσεως καὶ σοφίας·

And so then I said, by Zeus, is there any benefit in other possessions  
without knowledge and wisdom? (281b4-6)<sup>8</sup>

I take it that while Socrates proposes this using an interrogative, that nonetheless the mood of sentence should not stop from thinking it represents a summary of what he believe follows from his previous conditional claim. Socrates, having made his conditional claim that knowledge necessarily provides someone with correct action, seems to state that there is no benefit to us without knowledge. The only reason Socrates can believe this follows as a result, is if he believes that the only way to act correctly, is to act wisely. If he believed that the previous conditional claim, allowed for the idea that knowledge necessarily provided correct action, in contrast to other ways in which people could act which only contingently provided correct action, his conclusion would not follow. That is, there would still be some benefit to be had in possessing things, even absent knowledge and wisdom.

What Socrates seems to be saying, is that there is no benefit to be had in other possessions if one did not also possess knowledge and understanding. In which case, Socrates seems to be allowing the necessity at work to take wide scope ( $\Box A \rightarrow B$ ). That is, necessarily wisdom ( $A$ ) is what entails benefit from the goods( $B$ ). Moreover, nothing but  $A$  could have entailed  $B$ . There is very good reason for thinking that Socrates ought to intend this stronger claim. If we allow the

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<sup>8</sup>My translation.



necessity claim to only take narrow scope, Socrates argument will end up defending the idea that correct action, rather than wisdom is necessary to benefit from the goods.

Thus, it would turn out wisdom is desirable because it necessarily produces for us that on which benefit from the goods depends.<sup>9</sup> Benefit from the goods depends upon acting correctly in regards to them. Wisdom, because it possesses this capacity to necessarily provide such correct action, is relevant to happiness as the best candidate for correct use. Nonetheless, the most important necessary relationship at work in the argument, would be between correct action and benefit, not between wisdom and benefit. While wisdom would necessarily entail correct action ( $A \square \rightarrow B$ ), it would turn out that the entailment between correct action ( $B$ ) and benefit ( $C$ ) was stronger than that between wisdom and benefit ( $\square B \rightarrow C$ ).

What an agents needs to be happy, and thus their reasons for pursuing wisdom, would be that they would need to act correctly in order to live a good life. Correct action necessarily meant that someone would do the best with the goods they possessed, and thus their happiness is dependent upon their correct action. Wisdom and knowledge then might be valuable because they provide correct use necessarily, rather than contingently, but happiness itself does not logically depend on wisdom.

It is not obvious from the dialogue itself that Socrates wants to ground the dependency upon which the goods benefit us on correct action. Socrates seems to suggest something stronger, that benefit from the goods is dependent upon an agent's possession of wisdom. As such, their happiness depends upon their becoming wise. It is this dependency of our happiness upon our possession of wisdom that Socrates seems to believe worthy of his exclamation (281b4-6). If what Socrates' arguments show is that happiness depends upon correction action rather than wisdom, then his protreptic claims are somewhat weakened. Wisdom and knowledge

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<sup>9</sup>I am indebted to Christopher Bobonich's work in *Plato's Utopia Recast* where he raises this sort of difficulty with the Necessity Thesis in the *Euthydemus*. Bobonich (2002:142-143) says that "...the idea that the knowledgeable agent is better off than one who acts correctly on the basis of, e.g., a lucky guess because knowledge is a good "over and above' correct action is simply another way of losing the very notion of dependency. On this account, the value of other goods is not dependent on the possession of wisdom; rather, wisdom is a reliable guide to correct use and a good in addition to correct use.

might be useful in obtaining happiness, but the sorts of bold claims Socrates will make in his conclusion (282b-c) are highly suspect.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Here, I have argued that Socrates' claim is stronger than has been supposed by some recent commentary. Socrates is not simply claiming wisdom will guarantee the best result possible *via* correct action. Socrates rather, is pointing out the importance of correct action, because it is only through wisdom that correct action can come about. In this way, wisdom is not just a necessary way of achieving the sort of results required for our happiness. Rather, our happiness is in fact dependent upon our becoming wise, and to fail to do so, would seem to cause our happiness to suffer as a consequence.

In what follows, Socrates will go on to spell out exactly why happiness is dependent upon wisdom. Socrates will reflect back on the fact that he and Cleinias had initially agreed that happiness depended upon possession of the goods, and seek to revise this view. Socrates will now argue that, he and Cleinias were mistaken over the relationship between the goods and happiness. While it remains the case, that the possession of goods makes us happy, it turns out upon reflection that there is only one good - wisdom. As such, it turns out that wisdom is both necessary and sufficient for our being happy.

## Chapter 5

# Wisdom: the Only Good

In the previous chapter, I argued that Socrates believes wisdom to be necessary for happiness. Moreover, the sort of necessity at work was not just a sort of practical or productive necessity. That is, wisdom was not just necessary for producing certain kinds of results, or necessarily guaranteed certain kinds of results. Rather, happiness itself was revealed to be dependent upon the possession of wisdom, because only actions which flow from wisdom allow an agent to benefit from their possessions. Without such possession, we would entirely lack the capacity to utilise the goods in a way which would ultimately make us happy. Having established the necessity of wisdom for benefit from the goods, Socrates now reflects upon what this claim tells us about the nature of the good things themselves. It will turn out that our happiness is dependent upon our possession of wisdom, because the goods Socrates and Cleinias initially identified are not in fact goods. Socrates will then conclude that wisdom is the only thing of value considered on its own, and that the 'goods' they had identified were not goods by nature.

There is substantial controversy over exactly how to interpret the nature and strength of Socrates' claims. A common dichotomy which emerges in scholarship on the *Euthydemus* is that between so called *moderate* and *extreme* approaches. This distinction owes its origins to Irwin (1995), who distinguished between two possible interpretations of the following section of the *Euthydemus*. An extreme interpretation on which Socrates comes to conclude that in fact the goods he had initially identified with Cleinias 297b3-5 have turned out to not to be goods at all.

In opposition, he identifies a moderate interpretation on which Socrates is simply suggesting that the goods they previously identified require other conditions to be met in order to become good for their possessor. This distinction has recently been accepted by Jones (2013) who also attempts to broadly categories approaches to this section of the *Euthydemus* into these two camps.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I will argue for an 'extreme' interpretation of the section of the dialogue, in so far as I suggest Socrates believes the goods on their initial list are no longer goods. At least they are no longer goods as understood by common-sense view I identified at the beginning of this thesis. As a result, I will suggest that as many scholars have suggested, Socrates seems to be working with an understanding of wisdom's unconditional goodness in this section of the *Euthydemus*. As most interpretations which utilise a notion of unconditional goodness generally fall into the 'moderate' camp, I devote substantial time to the moderate approach and raise some difficulties for it. I argue that a proper understanding of the role of unconditional goodness in the context of the *Euthydemus*, reveals the extreme view to be our best interpretive option.

In so doing, I argue that once we reflect back on CSVG and the role it gave to the goods, we can see more clearly why it would makes sense for Socrates to argue as he does. On my interpretation Socrates demonstrates to Cleinias, as part of his protreptic, that there is only one good thing. While Socrates certainly believes there are good things which feature in the life of the wise, there is only one good which can satisfy the role envisaged by CSVG, and that good is wisdom.

## 5.1 Wisdom's Non-Relational Goodness

Socrates and Cleinias have now established two important claims about the nature and power of wisdom. They discovered that the wise had a sort of internal success which was result independent. They also discovered that wisdom was necessary for happiness. Socrates now goes on to try to explain why wisdom is able to provide this internal success to an agent, and what it is about the metaphysical status of

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<sup>1</sup>Jones (2013:17)

wisdom which causes it to be necessary for happiness. Socrates begins by restating the results of their previous discussion, and notes both that activity was required to benefit from the goods, and that wisdom was necessary for the right sort of activity.

### **5.1.1 Activity and the Goods**

Socrates begins his new line of argument at 281b5 by asking Cleinias to reflect upon the importance of their realising that wisdom was necessary for happiness, and how this might impact upon their reflections on the goods. Socrates asks Cleinias:

Would a man with no sense profit more if he possessed and did much or if he possessed and did little? Look at it this way: if he did less, would he not make fewer mistakes; and if he made fewer mistakes, would he not do less badly, and if he did less badly, would he not be less miserable?

Yes, indeed, he said.

And in which case would one do less, if one were poor or if one were rich?

Poor, he said.

And if one were weak or strong?

Weak.

If one were held in honor or in dishonor?

In dishonor.

And if one were brave and self-controlled would one do less, or if one were a coward?

A coward.

Then the same would be true if one were lazy rather than industrious?

He agreed.

And slow rather than quick, and dull of sight and hearing rather than keen?

We agreed with each other on all points of this sort. (281b5-d2)

While in the previous argument Socrates seemed interested in the results of individual actions, he now asks Cleinias about how these individual actions feature in a life. Socrates asks about various sorts of capacities for action, and he contrasts these capacities for greater or lesser levels of activity. Socrates by raising these sorts of capacities for activity and contrasting with one another, draws Cleinias' attention to the fact it is not action or activity itself which is valuable.

The reason for this seems to be that Socrates believes that the necessity of wisdom for happiness, should change the way we think about the role of activity. This is because it is not just 'doing more' that will make our lives happy, rather we must engage in the right sort of 'doings.' As a result, someone who possessed many goods without wisdom, would be in a worse position than someone who lacked wisdom as well as the goods. The goods provide someone with opportunities to act, and an agent who cannot act well Socrates claims is better off not acting at all.<sup>2</sup> The thought would seem to be, that if one lacks knowledge, their ignorant actions will harm them. Thus, having a lack of goods would succeed in removing the temptation to act, and the subsequent harm which would result.

It is worth noting that the goods are depicted somewhat differently here than at 297b3-5. While no doubt money and social status are mentioned as goods, the ways in which their goodness is described is relevantly different from the previous instance. The goods which Socrates cites here are described not as valuable possessions, but as ways of doing and living. That is, they are ways a person's life could be, ways which would encourage them to engage in further activities. This is interesting because it seems to indicate that Socrates is no longer just envisaging the goods as things that are valuable to possess, but also as the sorts of capacities which could further someone in living their life. One does not just possess bravery or quickness, one lives and acts bravely or quickly. These capacities further the

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<sup>2</sup>See Dimas (2002) for a defence of the view that the goods are 'good' precisely because they give us an increased capacity for action. While I agree with Dimas, that there is certainly a thought about the goods increasing our activity here, it also seems key to note the goods described here are not examples of the initially identified goods. These goods are specifically capacities for action, but not all goods may relate to activity in this way.

activity of the agent, and qualify the ways in which they engage in such activity. However, Socrates notes that due to the truth of the necessity of wisdom for happiness, these supposed 'goods' are in fact bad for their possessor. Because these goods increase the activity of the person in question, if the person in question lacks wisdom they will necessarily act incorrectly, and be harmed as a result.

One reason we might imagine Socrates expresses an interest in these capacities, is that he might be preempting a sort of common-sense objection to the necessity of wisdom for happiness. Someone might agree with Socrates that to benefit from what one possesses, one needs to use the thing in question correctly. However, they might also suggest that how one obtains correct action is merely through acting frequently, rather than acting wisely. The thought would be that if someone acts frequently enough they will eventually hit upon the correct result. If this is possible, then it would seem that it is not correct action which is valuable, but activity full stop. As I have argued, Socrates takes the common-sense view to be held by his interlocutors, then it would make sense to preempt the kinds of counter arguments they might provide. The common-sense view could easily accommodate the idea that there are goods which increase someone's activity, and that increased activity is itself a good thing to possess.

However, Socrates rightly points out that this sort of thought cannot right, and he would feel justified in doing so as the result of his previous argument. As we saw, wisdom was dependent upon happiness because correct actions could only be actions which came about through wise activity. This is evidenced by the way in which Socrates continues his inquiry. He points out to Cleinias that in fact these supposed goods, which would result in increase activity, will in fact harm an individual. The negative effects of incorrect action only increase across an aggregate of actions, and so acting more in regards to the goods is no alternative to wisdom. Socrates seems justified in thinking this follows, both from this conclusions about the nature of internal success, as well as the necessity of wisdom for happiness. However, having reinforced and strengthened his claim that wise activity is necessary to benefit from the goods, Socrates seems to believe himself warranted in

making a further conclusion about the nature of goods with which they began their discussion.

### 5.1.2 Non-Relational Goodness

Socrates now suggests that the fact that these goods seem dependent upon wisdom, in fact reveals something not just about the nature of wisdom, but about the status of the goods themselves. The goods they had identified at the beginning of their discussion are not by nature goods, or so Socrates claims.

So, to sum up, Clinias, I said, it seems likely that with respect to all the things we called good in the beginning, the correct account is not that in themselves they are good by nature, but rather as follows: if ignorance controls them, they are greater evils than their opposites, to the extent that they are more capable of complying with a bad master; but if good sense and wisdom are in control, they are greater goods. In themselves, however, neither sort is of any value.

It seems, he said, to be just as you say.

(281d3-e2)

The goods which Socrates and Cleinias had previously identified are not by their nature goods, but rather they are goods when led by wisdom, and evils when led by ignorance. As we saw earlier, it was correct use which determined whether someone's possession of a good benefited them, and now Socrates seems to be pointing out the reason why this is the case. The reason that wisdom is necessary to benefit from the goods, is that the goods themselves are indeterminate in nature. They can be determined as either goods or bads, in how they feature in and relate to the agency of the person in question.

If the goods themselves are essentially indeterminate in nature, then it is necessary for them to be determined to be good. And Socrates is clear that the only way that they are determined one way or the other, is through correct use. As I have argued previously, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that wisdom is necessary for correct use, without claiming that correct use has to be related to the agency of



the person in question, in the right sort of way. The reason the actions of the wise agent are correct is that they are brought about through wisdom. The quality of the agency of the wise person is that which determines what is and is not beneficial to them. As a result, the necessity thesis finds its metaphysical foundation in the relationship between agency and goodness: wise agency is what determines whether something is good for someone.<sup>3</sup>

### 5.1.2.1 Does Socrates Deny That the 'Goods' are Good?

However, Socrates does not conclude his argument here, and at least at first glance draws a further and substantially stronger conclusion regarding the nature of the goods. Socrates seems to suggest, that in fact the goods he and Cleinias identified, were not in fact goods after all.

Then what is the result of our conversation? Isn't it that, of the other things, no one of them is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad?

He agreed.

(281e3-282a)

There is substantial debate over what to make of Socrates' comments here. Some commentators believe that Socrates is merely clarifying the nature of his previous claim at 281d9-e10.<sup>4</sup> However, others suggest that this passage here represents two further inferences regarding the nature of the goods.<sup>5</sup> I will return to this issue in more detail shortly, but for now I will proceed as if Socrates is making two distinct further claims.

So understood, the argument looks to be this:

1. The goods previously discussed are greater evils to the ignorant than their opposites (i.e. if the ignorant person had no goods) (281d6-8). While

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<sup>3</sup>This thought seems to be advocated by both those on the extreme (Russell (2005)) and moderate (Parry (2003)) views. The thought is in many ways, in keeping with Socrates' previous analogies between virtue and craft. Just as it is a craftsman's wisdom at his craft which determines his product, so too wisdom is what determines what is good in the life of the virtuous person.

<sup>4</sup>For a defence of this claim see Jones (2013) and Vlastos (1991).

<sup>5</sup>For views along these lines see Russell (2005), Dimas (2002), Annas (1993)

the goods they had previously identified are greater goods if led by wisdom (281d9-e10).

2. However, considered on their own neither is of any value. That is, neither possesses any goodness or badness considered absent its relationship to someone's agency (that person's wisdom or ignorance). (281e1-2)
3. Therefore, of all the goods previously discussed, not one of them is either good or bad (281e4-5).
4. Therefore, there are only two things which are good or evil, wisdom is the only good and ignorance is the only evil (281e5-7).

This would seem to be the argument Socrates has made, provided we take 281e4-7 to state two independent premises. At first glance, premise (3) and (4) looks to be doing something quite different than premise (2). Premise (2) is established by (1), which demonstrate the indeterminacy of the goods. In contrast, (3) and (4) look like distinct and stronger claims. That is, (4) takes the indeterminacy of the goods to entail their indifference to goodness or badness, and subsequently their indifference to someone's happiness. It is one thing to say that the goods are only good when certain conditions are met, or when determined in a particular way, and another to say that - properly speaking - they are not really goods. Someone may grant that they are goods when conditioned by their relationship to something else, while maintaining that properly speaking there is only one good.<sup>6</sup>

While I take this to be a valid interpretation of the argument, nonetheless many commentators on the *Euthydemus* have suggested that what I have identified as premise (3) and (4) are in fact re-statements or clarifications of (2). That is, when Socrates says at 281e3-6 that wisdom is the only good and ignorance the only evil, Plato intends for his reader to carry over the 'considered on their' (αὐτὰ δὲ καθ'αὐτὰ) from the previous premise. Understood in this way, the conclusion of Socrates argument remains compatible with the idea that things other than wisdom

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<sup>6</sup>This seems to be the approach taken by Irwin, who believe Socrates has relegated the goods to mere 'assets.' (Irwin, 1995:57)

can be properly thought of as goods.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.2 Moderate and Extreme Approaches

Terrence Irwin in his seminal work *Plato's Ethics* divides up approaches to this section of the *Euthydemus* into two camps. The *moderate* camp claims that while Socrates believes that wisdom is a special good of some kind, the previously identified goods such as health, wealth and social status are nonetheless correctly thought of as goods. They are goods, but only goods when certain conditions and criteria are met. It is important to note however, that there is substantial diversity of debate on this subject, and those on the moderate view have various opinions on how to understand the relationship between wisdom and the goods. As a result of this diversity, in order to clarify matters, it is worth stating that when I use the term 'moderate' or 'moderate view' I have a particular feature in mind which they all share.

All of the moderate approaches to this section of the *Euthydemus* share the view that the previously identified goods have some sort of independent power or capacity for contributing to someone's happiness. These approaches despite their individual differences, all are unified in denying that the external goods are indifferent to happiness. As this is the case, they are committed to the claim that what people possess can make a contribution to their happiness over and above how they act in relation to their possessions. For this reason, I identify 'extreme' interpretations as those which either deny that the goods Socrates and Cleinias identified at the beginning of their discussion are in fact goods, or believe they are 'good' in some highly qualified sense, which does not imply they have an independent power, or capacity to contribute to the happiness of the person who possesses them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>As we shall see this approach is taken by both Vlastos (1991) and Jones (2013).

<sup>8</sup>In this I include Irwin, who places himself within the 'extreme camp.' While Irwin does insist that the items Cleinias and Socrates identified do make a contribution to the happiness of the individual, Irwin also denies that they are in fact goods. Those on the extreme view may hold an additive conception of happiness, while denying that the additive components are legitimately called goods. This would seem to be the view advocated by Irwin (1995).

### 5.2.1 Irwin (1995)

Irwin's provides his own reading of Socrates' argument, in which he suggests the only way the entailment between the premises makes good sense, is if Socrates is arguing for the extreme view. Irwin argues this by pointing out the relationship between the inference at (2) and (3). Irwin admits that the moderate view could make sense of why (1) entails (2), but would fail to explain why (2) allows Socrates to infer (3). Irwin supposes that the way in which Socrates understands (3), as entailed by (2), is a result of the fact that Socrates believes that something being good in itself is the only way a thing can be good. As a result, once Socrates and Cleinias realise the truth of (2), they ought to infer both (3) and (4).<sup>9</sup> The fact that the goods they had previously identified were not goods (3), revealed that there was only one good - and that one good is wisdom (4).

There are two important questions we then need to ask of Irwin's account. Firstly, does Socrates really endorse the view that being good 'in itself' is the only way something can be good? Secondly does the dialogue itself support reading (3) and (4) in the way that Irwin has suggested, as independent inferences, and distinct in content from (2). Both of these questions need an answer, but either answer is logically independent from the other. In what follows, I want to suggest that Irwin is correct in making the second claim, he rightly takes (3) and (4) to represent independent inferences, which in turn allows Socrates to deny that the previously identified 'goods' are good. However, we should qualify this by recognising that the first claim is false. Socrates' discussion so far in the *Euthydemus* does not seem to indicate that he believes being good in itself, or on its own, is the only way that something can be good. By recognising this we can make sense of the potential puzzlement that seems to result from Socrates both suggesting in (1) that good things are good for the wise person, while also suggesting in (3) that they are not good.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>My way of formalising the argument is relevantly similar enough to Irwin's so as to use the same premises for practical purposes. For Irwin's formal version see Irwin (1995:57)

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that what I argued in chapter 2 is now relevant here. Irwin writes: "*Although Socrates maintains the extreme view, he has not defended it. To defend it he needs to convince us that we benefit simply from the use we make of whatever assets we have*" Irwin (1995:58). This is

In order to begin to look at how we might challenge Irwin's interpretation, particularly as regards the first claim, we should take a look at the work of Gregory Vlastos.

### 5.2.2 Vlastos (1992)

Perhaps the most influential moderate approach to interpreting Socrates' views in this section of the dialogue, has been provided by Gregory Vlastos. Vlastos' interpretation of this section of the *Euthydemus* is difficult to fairly judge outside the general context of his work on Plato's philosophy. For this reason here, I simply want to consider his understanding of the claims Socrates makes regarding wisdom and the good at 281e3-6, because it was Vlastos who seems to have been the first person to introduce into debates on the *Euthydemus*, the idea that Plato might be working with a notion of conditional and unconditional goodness.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Vlastos also suggests a way of countering Irwin's assertion that a moderate reading of (2) cannot grant us the truth of (3). So, it is worth us considering both of Vlastos' proposed answers to the difficulties for the moderate approach Irwin raised. Vlastos' solution to the first problem is to suggest that Socrates has in mind a distinction between conditional and unconditional goods. This distinction Vlastos believes, allows Socrates to claim both that wisdom is the only good, in this special unconditional sense, but also maintain that the goods he and Cleinias had identified are also correctly called goods.

Vlastos' identification of conditional and unconditional goods, is interpreted as part of a more general distinction between *moral* and *non-moral* goods.<sup>12</sup> On

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precisely the sort of thought I argued for in chapter two. I argued that Socrates believes the benefit received from acting in regards to the goods, did not depend upon results. As this is the case, and given that I believe Socrates has argued for that claim, Socrates would be more justified in holding the extreme view than Irwin believes.

<sup>11</sup>While this is no doubt true, it seems also to be the case that Vlastos is working with a less complicated notion than later commentators would come to. While later commentators rely heavily upon Korsgaard's work on the nature of unconditional goodness, Vlastos seems mean something simpler. What Vlastos seems to suggest is that some goods are good without the need for further conditions to be met, while some goods are good only when other conditions are satisfied. The view put forward by Korsgaard (1996) is substantially richer than this. See both Vlastos (1991) and Korsgaard.

<sup>12</sup>I follow Dimas (2002) in thinking the distinction between moral and non-moral goods is suspect. However, while Dimas pins his objection on the general concerns about the nature of ethical inquiry in Greek philosophical thought my objection is much more modest. As I have argued so far, crucial

Vlastos' interpretation, the non-moral goods are themselves constituents of happiness. A happy life is one in which we possess goods, over and above the quality of our ethical agency. Moreover, these goods make an independent contribution to the happiness of the person in question. As a result, when Socrates tells us at 281e3-6, that only wisdom and ignorance are good and bad considered on their own (αὐτὰ δὲ καὶ ἀγνοία) he is speaking of them as moral goods. Only moral goods are good on their own, while non-moral goods require the moral goods to be good.

In order to advance this thought, Vlastos suggests reading premises (3) and (4) as a single inference, qualified by the content of (2). As such, if we follow Vlastos, it makes sense to modify my previous formulation of the argument as follows:

1. The goods previously discussed are greater evils to the ignorant than than their opposites (i.e. if the ignorant person had no goods) (281d6-8). While the goods they had previously identified are greater goods if led by wisdom (281d9-e10).
2. However, when they are considered on their own neither is of any value. (281e1-2)
3. Therefore, not one of these 'goods' is either good or bad (*considered on their own*) (281e4-5).
4. And so, there are only two things which are good or evil (*considered on their own*), wisdom and ignorance (281e5-7).<sup>13</sup>

According to this argument, the non-moral goods are only good or bad when paired with the morally relevant goods or evils. Money is a non-moral good, which becomes good or evil when pared with wisdom or ignorance respectively. An agent

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to interpreting this section of the *Euthydemus* is keeping in mind Socrates' question *how are we to do well?* Socrates' question is clearly about how we are to live our lives, and what we should do with the things and events that constitute them. His question is not how we are to become *morally good*, and he shows little if any interest in this question in the *Euthydemus*. As such, introducing a distinction between a morality which exists over and above questions about how one ought to live, seems alien to the dialogue - even if it is not to Plato's corpus at large.

<sup>13</sup>In this case (3) and (4) are in fact the same premise, but I've kept them independently numbered for connivance sake, in aligning them with the line notes of the dialogue. This is my reconstruction of the argument, but I believe it is accurate to what he is suggesting. See Vlastos (1991:229-230).

who was virtuous would be happy regardless of whether or not they possessed any money, because possession of the moral good of virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness. Nonetheless, Vlastos suggests that the non-moral goods are still capable of making a moral agent better off than they would be otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

This raises an immediate difficulty, because it is hard to square the idea that these external goods have the capacity to make such an independent contribution, when Socrates tells us quite clearly they are not by nature goods (αὐτὰ γε καθ' αὐτὰ πέφυκεν ἀγαθὰ εἶναι). As Socrates initially agreed with Cleinias that it was the possession of goods that would make us happy (279a-e), he now tells us their nature is not good. What this seems to entail is that they themselves cannot be thought of as goods, because whatever value they have over our happiness seems to come from something else.

On the contrary, according to the picture we have been given by Vlastos, it looks as if wealth is a good on its own - albeit in a qualified sense. That is, it has some potential or power to make an agent happy which belongs to in virtue of what it is. Money is good for buying things, and the capacity to buy things could make an agent happy. Thus, agents who want to be happy have a reason to want money, because buying things will make them happy. However, only agents who are wise will use the potential purchasing power of the money in a way which will enhance, rather than harm their happiness. We may no doubt agree that money is in need of being used correctly in order to benefit someone, while still holding on to idea that money is valuable in virtue of its purchasing power. In fact, this seems to be exactly what Vlastos has in mind.

This thought however, runs contrary to Socrates' observations, as he already told us that they possess no inherent value (αὐτὰ οὐδέτερα αὐτῶν οὐδενὸς ἄξια εἶναι.). Suggesting that certain goods require conditions to be met to obtain benefit from them (281b5-7), is a distinct claim from saying that they are not by nature goods (281e1-2). Socrates clearly recognises the distinction between these two

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<sup>14</sup>This also would align Socrates with the CSVG, in believing happiness to be incomplete. On this point I am in agreement with Russell in thinking it is unlike Socrates believes happiness to be incomplete. See my previous in section 2.2.1.

claims, and seems to think that the reason the first claim turned out to be true, was because of the truth of the second claim. It is because the goods they identified at 279a-e are not goods by nature that knowledge and wisdom must enter into the picture to determine whether or not they become goods. This is why Vlastos feels the need to resort to a distinction between moral and non-moral goodness. Moral goods can determine goodness, while non-moral goods cannot.

What this brings out, is that while Vlastos seems correct to think that Socrates is suggesting that some sort of condition needs to be met for the items identified at 279a-e to 'become good' for the person who possesses them, we need to be clearer on what exactly this conditional relationship is. We cannot simply claim that the previously identified goods are good 'on some conditions' without also explaining what it is that makes or transforms them into goods. Socrates has not simply suggested that the conditional goods are only good in some situations, but that they are not by nature goods, nor of any value on their own. As a consequence, if the goods are to be good for someone, they must take this goodness from some other source.

However, before moving onto a discussion of the role of unconditional and conditional goodness, it is first worth addressing in more detail Vlastos' formal suggestion. If Vlastos' formal suggestion is correct, then whatever we make of the role of conditional goodness, the moderate view is going to look attractive due to purely formal concerns.

### **5.2.3 Jones (2013)**

In recent commentary, Jones (2013) has defended a formal reading of the argument in question, which follows along similar lines as Vlastos. In particular, Jones confronts a difficulty with the reading which Vlastos does not raise, regarding the manner in which Socrates introduces premise (3) and (4) of the argument (281e4-7).

Jones admits that the way Socrates introduces the claim (*συμβάινει ἔκ τῶν εἰρημένων;*) would seem to indicate, that it may contain a further inference of sorts. Socrates seems to be asking Cleinias what it is that they ought to infer from there questions so far. As a result, there are two things he may intend. He might be stating



for Cleinias further propositions he believes are true as a result of their inquiry, or he may be clarifying something he already takes himself to have demonstrated.

τί οὖν ἡμῖν συμβαίνει ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων· ἄλλο τι ἢ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων οὐδὲν ὄν οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν, τούτοις δὲ δυοῖν ὄντοις ἢ μὲν σοφία ἀγαθόν, ἢ δὲ ἀμαθία κακόν; (281e3-6)

As we have already seen from my interpretation of the argument, I read (3) (ἄλλων οὐδὲν ὄν οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν) and (4) (τούτοις δὲ δυοῖν ὄντοις ἢ μὲν σοφία ἀγαθόν, ἢ δὲ ἀμαθία κακόν) as independent inferences, which Socrates draws from observing the truth of (2). It is because the goods are of no value considered on their own, that they are not goods or evils, and that wisdom and ignorance are the only good and evil things. Both (3) and (4) read in this way contradict the moderate view, by suggesting the goods at (1) are no longer genuine goods.

Jones suggests that the moderate view can respond to this challenge. He suggests that rather than two inferences, we in fact have a contrastive conjunction spelt out by the μὲν/δὲ construction. Socrates has established that the external goods are not good when considered on their own, and thus is contrasting the things which are not good considered on their own, with those things that are. This then, allows him to read the argument in fashion similar to Vlastos. It does so, by allowing the content of (2) to qualify (3-4).<sup>15</sup> I believe that Jones is correct in claiming that both of these are potentially valid readings of this passage. As such, it seems that disagreements over the textual material itself will fail to settle much of what we might want to say about this passage.<sup>16</sup>

In order to clarify what Socrates' intentions are here, we need to think more carefully about the eudaimonist context of his protreptic. We need to reflect in more detail on what it means to think wisdom will make our lives happy, and why Socrates would think this sort of claim is the one he should use as a centrepiece of his protreptic model. In order to do this, we should focus on figuring out what sort of

<sup>15</sup>Jones (2013:18-19)

<sup>16</sup>I mean by this, that the passage itself does not speak entirely in favour of one interpretation or the other, not that the content of Socrates' protreptic also fails to do so.

conception of goodness and happiness Socrates takes himself, and his interlocutor to have. In what follows, I want to look much closer at Vlastos' suggestion that Plato is working with a notion of unconditional goodness, and attempt to clarify what this might mean in the context of his argument here in the *Euthydemus*. I suggest, that once we do so, we can see that the extreme view is correct in the formal argument it attributes to Socrates, but that nonetheless this formal argument is compatible with the thought that Socrates is arguing for the claim that wisdom is an unconditional good.

### 5.3 Two Conceptions of Happiness

In order to approach the question of what sort of conception of happiness drives Socrates' philosophical protreptic, we should keep in mind the question which Socrates takes to be the focus of his inquiry with Cleinias. Socrates began their discussion by asking Cleinias '*how are we to do well?*' (πῶς ἂν εὖ πράττομεν;) and by doing so he explicitly invokes questions about how one is to live, and what would make that life happy. Cleinias should pursue philosophy, because something about philosophy is particularly suitable to making a life go well. This much is reasonably clear from the dialogue, but it also raises an important question in making sense of this section of the *Euthydemus* - *what is happiness?* Daniel Russell (2005) has attempted to provide two accounts of what sort of understanding of happiness Socrates could be working with; one which he dubs the *additive view* and another which he calls the *directive view*.<sup>17</sup>

The additive view conceives of happiness as essentially comparative and incomplete. It is essentially comparative in that it identifies the nature of happiness in terms of a sort of comparative judgement. We judge someone is happy by seeing that they are better off than other people. Such comparisons require a rational basis, or metric by which they are justified. As we have seen, Socrates has identified this metric at 278e4-279a6, as a question of how many goods an individual possessed and whether they were greater or lesser goods. Most people believe, that a life goes

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<sup>17</sup>Russell (2005:9)

well if the person living it has many goods. The more goods, the better that life is going in comparison to someone with less or lesser goods. It is also essentially incomplete, because someone can always be made happier by the addition of further goods. No one is ever completely happy, because they could always come to possess more goods than someone else, and thus have a comparably better life.

All the moderate approaches we have considered so far, seem to assume that Socrates is working with something akin to what Russell has identified as this additive view. These approaches want to suggest that the goods have some role to play in the life of the happy person, precisely because they believe that the goods in someone's life ought to make them better off. The person who has more goods than someone else, and the wisdom to use them, would be happier than someone who did not. Another way of putting this would be to say that the additive view believes, that what someone possesses makes a difference to their happiness, over and above how they live their lives.

In opposition to this additive view Russell identifies a 'directive' conception of happiness. On the directive conception of happiness, we abandon the idea that the role which the goods play in the life of the happy person is contributive in nature. On this view, the goods which Socrates and Cleinias identified are good, only when incorporated into the life of the wise person. Russell writes:

...on what I shall call the additive conception of happiness, happiness depends on (is determined by) the various good things in one's life—health and wealth, say, or pleasure, or desire satisfaction, or some recipe of such things—while on the directive conception of happiness, happiness depends on (is determined by) the intelligent direction that all the areas of one's life take together as a whole, as directed by practical reason and intelligent agency.<sup>18</sup>

While the additive conception believes that an individual's happiness is determined by what things they have present to them in their lives, the directive conception conceives of happiness in terms of how an agent lives. What determines

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<sup>18</sup>Russell (2005:10)

whether or not their life 'goes well' is not the sum-contribution made by their possessions, but the direction their life takes as a result of their rational agency. Agency is what determines the goodness of a life, not the independent contributions made by someone's possessions. I suggest, that what Russell's distinction allows us to see, is that the dichotomy posed by the moderate and extreme approaches could cause us to miss out on the crucial question Plato has put before us.

The question we ought to ask, is not whether the goods which Socrates and Cleinias previously identified ought to be referred to as 'goods.' As those on the moderate view have correctly insisted, it seems clear from premise (1) that the goods have some role to play in the life of the wise person. It would be strange indeed, if these goods which play a role in the life of the wise person, turn out not to be good at all. However, what Russell's distinction between additive and directive conceptions of happiness allows us to see, is that even if we admit the moderate view is right in suggesting that the goods play a *role* in the life of the wise person, this will not tell us whether or not the moderate view is correct to insist that these goods have an independent power to make that life *better* than it would have been otherwise.

The real controversy over whether or not (3) and (4) are independent premises consists in the fact that, if this is the case, then Socrates clearly rejects an additive conception of happiness. It is what these premises tell us about Socrates' views on happiness, that are so crucial. The reason then, that different commentators go one way or another on the the formal interpretation of the passage, I suspect, is that they believe Socrates to be working with different conceptions of happiness. If it is true, as I have argued so far, that Socrates has taken aim at many common-sense views on goodness, then it would also make sense to believe he is arguing against the additive conception of happiness. The additive conception is all too similar to the sorts of assumptions made by CSVG, and it risks imputing these assumptions to Socrates himself and as a result, missing out on Socrates' challenge to Cleinias that he revise his assumptions and take up philosophy.

If we accept this, we may allow that Socrates believes the goods play a role in the life of the wise person. However, this view does not entail that the external

goods such as wealth, physical appearance, or health are properly speaking goods. What the directive conception of happiness allows us to recognise, is that something can be a good for someone in their life, without needing to be thought of as a source of goodness itself. With this in mind, I want to argue that Socrates can in fact coherently maintain (a) the goods in the life of the wise person are 'greater goods' for them. While, at the same time, maintaining (b) that the goods he and Cleinias previously identified are not in fact goods.

In order to better explain why, it is worth further exploring the nature of unconditional goodness, in the context of Plato's *Euthydemus*.

### 5.3.1 What is Unconditional Goodness?

The way in which Vlastos described the distinction between conditional and unconditional goodness was relatively simple. Vlastos suggested, that while the conditional goods such as health and wealth were good only on the condition that the agent was wise, in contrast wisdom (virtue) was good without the need for further conditions to be met.<sup>19</sup> However, in recent commentary more work has been done to more closely examine the distinction in question. One reasonably recent account of the role of unconditional goodness in the *Euthydemus* has been provided by Naomi Reshotko (2006).<sup>20</sup>

Reshotko draws a further distinction between those goods which are good on the satisfaction of some condition, and those which are unconditionally good. And a further distinction between those goods which are other-generated in terms of their goodness, and those which are self-generating in terms of their goodness.<sup>21</sup> On her account, happiness is the final, unconditional, and self-generated good. Happiness is good due to its own intrinsic properties, and so is a self generating good. It is

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<sup>19</sup>Vlastos(1991:229-230)

<sup>20</sup>It should be noted that my interest in the unconditional/conditional goods distinction is limited entirely to the scope of the *Euthydemus* and its usefulness in making sense of this passage. I am not intending to attribute any particular view of unconditional goodness to Plato at large, nor do I intend to consider how faithful the Socratic picture is to view put forward by Korsgaard (1996). My interest in the distinction is limited to how it is raised as a matter of scholarship on the *Euthydemus* itself, and thus may not accurately reflect wider debates on the nature of, or validity of the distinction itself.

<sup>21</sup>Reshotko (2006:124-126)

also always valuable, and as such is an unconditional good. Because it is both a self-generating and unconditional good, it is what we pursue as our ultimate end - although she admits we may pursue other things as ends as well.

In contrast, virtue on her account is an unconditional and other-generated good. Virtue is unconditionally good, because it is always valuable as a means to become happy. Nonetheless, virtue takes on its 'goodness' from the role it plays in making our lives happy. Virtue is instrumental for our happiness, but it is always instrumentally valuable for our happiness, unlike the other conditional goods which only contribute to our happiness if we are virtuous. As Reshotko puts it:

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates maintains that happiness is the only thing that is a *self-generated* good. Virtue, on the other hand, is unique among those things that are other-generated goods because it is an unconditional, other-generated, good. All other "goods" are conditional, *other-generated*, goods. <sup>22</sup>

Reshotko's use of the term 'unconditional goodness' is somewhat controversial, and for interesting reasons. As Russell has argued, there are problems with thinking of unconditional goodness in terms of *frequency* of something's goodness. Russell argues that doing so, in fact risks collapsing the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods itself.<sup>23</sup> Russell points out, that unconditional goods generate value in other things, but once those things are transformed into goods, there is no reason to think those things cannot remain goods permanently.

Russell seems to have in mind the following sort of thought: It may be that it is my practical rationality that makes a romantic relationship a good thing. However, once the relationship is transformed such that it is good, there is no reason to think it will not remain a good thing. Once grasped by my practical rationality, and given its correct role in a life, there is no reason to think a relationship will not be a persistent benefit to someone's life.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Reshotko (2006:124)

<sup>23</sup>Russell (2005:24-25)

<sup>24</sup>*Contra* Brickhouse (2000) who also suggest that the notion of 'conditional' here is one of frequency of goodness. They suggest that virtue is *always* good, while other goods are only *sometimes*

If a romantic relationship was transformed such that it was permanently a good in the life of the happy person, then by Reshotko's account we ought to say the romantic relationship was an unconditional but other-generated good. This cannot be right. The whole point in employing the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods, was to make sense of relationship between (1) and (3-4). This is why Socrates believes the goods he and Cleinias have a role to play in the life of the wise, while insisting that they are not goods. The usefulness of the distinction is less helpful on Reshotko's account. If we identify unconditional goodness with the frequency of something's goodness, there is no reason to think that there cannot be many unconditional goods, far more than the two she identifies. Many things could turn out to be always good for us, but this would not show that they meet the criterion of being good considered on their own, the criterion that Socrates places on wisdom's unconditional goodness.

What Socrates was suggesting in (3) and (4) was the goods themselves had nothing to offer us in respect to happiness, if we considered them independently from wisdom. The explanatory role that we want unconditional goodness to play then, is not that of realising 'the goodness' in these external goods. Socrates has been clear that they themselves are not by nature goods. What we want out of wisdom's unconditional goodness is to understand why it is wisdom which is the source of value to the other conditional goods. Wisdom does not realise the goodness in other things, rather wisdom transforms other things into goods because they themselves are not by nature goods (2).

This demonstrates I believe something quite important. To claim that Plato is working with a notion of conditional and unconditional goodness, is to suggest that Socrates does in fact embrace the idea that the external goods are not merely indeterminate in nature, but indifferent with respect to goodness.<sup>25</sup> Russell again

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good. They believe Socrates to be committed to the sufficiency and necessity theses, precisely because he believes that wisdom is always good. This is somewhat confusing in my opinion, because necessity and sufficiency are logical notions, not notions of frequency. If one holds the necessity and sufficiency theses to be true, one ought to do so because of the metaphysical status of wisdom, rather than the frequency with which it is good. As I have said here, the reason those two theses look defensible from Socrates point of view, is due to wisdom's status as an unconditional good, and this is a distinct claim from the idea that wisdom is *always* good.

<sup>25</sup> *Contra* the view put forward by Parry (2003) who suggests that any reading which claims the

helps bring out this idea by saying:

...conditional goods have no power with respect to happiness. This is in fact the point of making such things conditional goods, properly understood: they do not have any power with respect to happiness to be unleashed, by virtue or by anything else.<sup>26</sup>

What this makes clear is that the role envisaged for the goods by proponents of the moderate view, is undone if one takes a notion of conditional and unconditional goodness to be at work. If the good things have no power with respect to happiness, and are only good in terms of how they participate in the actions of the wise person, then there is no room for them to make an independent contribution to happiness. If it is true then that Socrates is advancing the claim at (3) and (4) that wisdom is unconditionally good, then he cannot also be working with an additive conception of happiness. By claiming that wisdom is the only unconditional good, he is also claiming that wisdom is the only thing capable of making any sort of contribution to our happiness.

The distinction between conditional and unconditional goods allows us to clarify and to better answer the question of whether or not Socrates' argument should be read as denying the goodness of the previously identified goods. If we apply the conditional/unconditional distinction, to understanding the manner in which CSVG valued the goods, we will be better positioned to understand the intent behind the controversial ambiguities in Socrates' argument.

### 5.3.2 The Common-Sense View Revised

At this point, it is worth looking back at how Socrates began his discussion with Cleinias. They agreed that everyone wanted to do well, and that it was the contribution made by someone's possession of many goods that made their life go well. As has already been pointed out this view left ambiguous both how an individual's actions brought them goods through successful results, as well how an agent's activity

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goods are indifferent in nature would conflict with premise (1). I suggest, it is perfectly possible to think the goods at (1) are indifferent *by nature* to happiness, while still claiming that once transformed, they make a difference to the life of the wise person.

<sup>26</sup>Russell (2005:26)



featured as part of their benefiting from their possession. As a result, the central claim upon which this common-sense view rested, was the idea that goods make a life happy. Perhaps those who held it believed that the other questions regarding activity and benefit were simply unimportant once possession was achieved. More likely than not, I suspect, Plato believes that they never thought about the question in the first place.

This is important because it helps us narrow down the scope of the question we should be asking from this section of the *Euthydemus*. As Russell (2005) has correctly pointed out, we are dealing with a notion of unconditional goodness in a very particular context - the pursuit of eudaimonia. Unconditional goodness in this context, is what determines what is good for someone as part of the life they lead, as well as something which differentiates the world into goods and bads: it is by living life that things in the world are carved up as either goods or bads. A world in which no one pursued happiness, would also be a world absent of goods or bads, because things are only good or bad insofar as they relate to virtue.<sup>27</sup>

When we notice this we can see how radically Socrates parts ways with the common-sense eudaimonism of CSVG. While CSVG is eudaimonist in that it takes the pursuit of human happiness as the core evaluative criteria for ethical reflection, it is quite different in character than the view Socrates has proposed. The mistake which Socrates has identified in CSVG, and which he seems to state in (2), is that the goods identified at 297b3-5 are conditional in nature. And it is this claim about conditional goodness when properly understood, which is in fact antithetical to CSVG.

Those holding this common-sense view may very well agree that Socrates has been correct to point out that activity and knowledge are important when it comes to how we benefit from the goods. However, they cannot possibly maintain their view if turns out the goods they believe make a life happy, are merely conditionally good. As we have seen, conditional goods cannot make an independent contribution to someone's happiness. If this were true, then the criteria upon which CSVG

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<sup>27</sup>Russell (2005:23-24)

grounded its assessment of what made a life go well are inaccurate. It is true that the goods are good for someone as part of a life lived virtuously. However, it is false that the possession of many good things is what makes a life go well. Conditional goods do not have the power to make a life go well, because as conditional goods they have no contribution to make over and above how their life was already being lived.

This is why Socrates is correct to claim at (4) that there is only one good and only one evil respectively, because he is speaking to this common-sense view. The common-sense view claimed that goods are things which contribute to, or make a life happy. Socrates seems to believe, that if this is the conception of goodness someone has in mind, then upon reflection there is only one good which will satisfy their desired criterion. This is compatible with Socrates believing that the goods he identified are present in, and even very important to the virtuous person. While nonetheless, allowing him to believe that if we follow the common-sense view on goodness through to its conclusion, there will turn out to be only one good.

In this way, because so much debate on the nature of goodness in the *Euthydemus* fails to take into account who and what Socrates is aiming his arguments at, they fail to make good sense of why he seems to claim both that there is only one good, and that there are many good things. While thinking in terms of unconditional and conditional goods, helps us make sense of this claim, it will not settle the issue unless we realise how such a distinction helps Socrates in his protreptic.

Socrates began with two claims Cleinias already agreed to. Cleinias already agreed that everyone wanted a life that went well, and that it was possession of the goods which would bring this about. However, by drawing Cleinias' attention to all the issues that have been raised throughout this section of the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is at last in a position to revise Cleinias' attitudes. Socrates has suggested to Cleinias that there is only one good which will satisfy the initial criterion with which they began their investigation. In this way, Cleinias ought to revise his views on happiness, and as a result of such revision he should take up the pursuit of philosophy.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for an 'extreme' interpretation of Socrates' argument within this section of the *Euthydemus*. I suggested that Socrates takes himself to have demonstrated that the goods with which he and Cleinias began their discussion are not in fact goods. While the goods may play a role in the life of the wise person, they are not by nature goods. As we saw, the common-sense view of the goods was that they were by nature good, and conferred their goodness upon someone's life. Socrates has countered this common sense view, by suggesting that it is wisdom which is the only good capable of fulfilling this special role.

As a result, he would be right to take himself to have succeeded in his protreptic. Cleinias agreed to their initial observations, that everyone wished to do well and that doing well consisted in the possession of goods. As part of his protreptic Socrates has taken these things which Cleinias believes, and revised them such that he has reason to pursue wisdom above all else. Because Cleinias wants his life to go well, and has been shown that wisdom is the only good which can make a life go well, he has reason to pursue wisdom over and above the previously identified goods.

I suggested this view made sense, in part because of the role played by unconditional goodness in the context of eudaimonist ethics. Because a concern with eudaimonia places questions about the pursuit of happiness as central to ethical reflection, questions about unconditional goodness become questions about what really provides or brings happiness to someone's life. The view which Socrates advocates allows him to both believe that there are many good things which play a role in the life of the wise, without believing that these things are independently good.



## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

In this concluding section, I want to reflect back on the dichotomy provided by Irwin (2007) which I discussed in the introduction. Irwin rightly suggested that Socrates' arguments in the *Euthydemus* potentially offer us two conceptions of happiness, and two conceptions of the relationship between virtue and happiness. In this concluding section I want to address both of these questions. In so doing, I argue that the interpretation I have offered up so far should cause us to think that Socrates' views in this section of the dialogue belong on the 'revisionary' side of Irwin's dichotomy. That is, the views put forward here by Socrates are more similar in kind to the Stoics or Epicureans who sought to revise our conception of happiness, rather than Plato and Aristotle who sought to fulfil or obtain our generally agreed conception of happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Before looking closer at this claim, it is first worth reflecting what Socrates takes the results of his own argument to be, because I take it this itself provides good reason for agreeing with my conclusion.

### 6.1 Socrates' Protreptic Concludes

In the previous chapter, I argued that we should believe there to be a contradiction at work in Socrates both insisting that the goods Cleinias and he had previously identified were not goods, while also believing them to play a role in the life of the happy

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<sup>1</sup>I do not mean to suggest that Socrates' arguments are either *proto-Stotic* or *proto-Epicurean*. All I intend is to draw the same sort of contrast which Irwin imagines, between views which modify our conception of happiness and those which do not.

person. I suggested, that once we thought more clearly on the nature of unconditional goodness, we could see how Socrates was correct in thinking that something can be a greater good for someone in how they go about living their life, without believing that the thing in question was itself is a good. This allows us to make better sense of why Socrates, when attempting to turn Cleinias to the pursuit of philosophy, finds it so natural to engage in a discussion on the nature of happiness and the goods. Socrates believes it is true that everyone, including Cleinias, wishes for their life to go well. Nonetheless, Socrates believes that most people are radically mistaken about what happiness consists in. The only good which will make their lives happy is the possession of wisdom, and the only way they may achieve wisdom is through engaging in philosophy. This makes the best sense of Socrates' own conclusion:

Then let us consider what follows: since we all wish to be happy, and since we appear to become so by using things and using them rightly, and since knowledge was the source of rightness and good fortune, it seems to be necessary that every man should prepare himself by every means to become as wise as possible—or isn't this the case?

Yes, it is, he said. (282a2-7)

Socrates summarises his claims involving the necessity of wisdom for happiness, by clarifying that Cleinias recognises that it was knowledge which in fact supplied people with correct action and good fortune. As it is knowledge and wisdom which allow someone to act correctly and be successful, knowledge was necessary to engage with those things present in one's life. In essence, Socrates is restating his claim from before and clarifying that Cleinias believes wisdom is now necessary for his happiness. However, Socrates then states a further summary of the result of their argument, which seems to suggest he believes wisdom is also sufficient for happiness.

And for a man who thinks he ought to get this from his father much more than money, and not only from his father but also from his

guardians [b] and friends (especially those of his city and elsewhere who claim to be his lovers), and who begs and beseeches them to give him some wisdom, there is nothing shameful, Clinias, nor disgraceful if, for the sake of this, he should become the servant or the slave of a lover or of any man, being willing to perform any honorable service in his desire to become wise. Or don't you think so? I said.

You seem to me to be absolutely right, said he. (282b1-c1)

As has been pointed out by Irwin (1995), it is clear that Socrates believes wisdom plays a role in happiness which would justify Cleinias forsaking the other goods in pursuit of wisdom. What Socrates seems to be suggesting here, is that instead of pursuing the goods on their initial list which they believed would make a life happy, Cleinias should instead sacrifice everything to pursue the one and only good that can make a life happy.<sup>2</sup> If Plato intended for Socrates to only be putting forward the necessity of wisdom for happiness, it would be strange if he imputed to Socrates the claim that one ought to abandon their initial goods to pursue it. If wisdom is necessary to benefit from what we possess, but not sufficient for it, then it is reasonable to desire both possession of the goods and wisdom. However, Socrates seems to think that his argument shows both that those who possess goods without wisdom receive no benefit, as well as that those who have wisdom, are always better off than those who do not. This conclusion, seems to evidence that he believes himself to have revised Cleinias' views on the nature of virtue and its relationship to happiness.

## 6.2 Socrates' Revision of the Common-Sense View

In the first chapter, I suggested that Socrates believed the average person to be, perhaps unknowingly, committed to several interesting theses on the nature of happiness, and the relationship between virtue, the good and happiness. The view on offer was that all people had a broadly eudaimonist outlook on life, everyone behaves as if happiness is the ultimate locus for ethical reflection. As such, when

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<sup>2</sup>Irwin (1995:57-58)

people act, they act in ways they believe will cause their life to go well, because as general rule such people take their actions to aim at happiness.

Socrates seems to find no fault with this attitude, and it provides the underlying motivational support to his protreptic. This common-sense eudaimonism is something Cleinias agrees to, and so it can provide the basis for beginning their discussion. However, Socrates clearly takes aim at what most people believe will satisfy these common-sense eudaimonist attitudes. Most people believe that, because we all want to be happy, we should pursue many good things. They believe this is so, because the possession of many good things is what either what happiness consists in, or that somehow happiness comes about through such possession.

Socrates pointed out something that someone holding this view ought to naturally assume, they ought to think that good fortune, understood as the quality of being lucky, was the greatest good a person could have. Being lucky, after all, means that one will gain many good things, and fail to lose the good things one already possessed. Socrates immediately challenged this idea, by pointing out that 'good fortune' could also be understood as a 'good result.' Thus, he seemed to suggest to Cleinias that the most fortunate people were not so much 'lucky' as 'successful' in the actions they undertook and the way they lived their lives. I suggested this argument was somewhat incomplete, but that good sense could be made of Socrates' conclusion, by realising that he believed this outward 'results oriented' success, was evidence of a more important internal success. This success too, could cause someone to 'do well' as an agent, in the actions they undertook.

In this way, Socrates offered up an alternative to 'doing well' by the possession of many goods. Someone could do well as an agent, they could act well and correct action was valuable independent of its results. Thus, having established this Socrates went on to argue that not only did wisdom suffice for this sort of internal success, it also was necessary if someone was to benefit from the possession of many goods. Socrates pointed out, that we envisage our selves as actively engaged with the good things we possess, and it is out of this engagement that we believe ourselves to benefit from said possession. However, the benefit from this possession



only arose in instances of correct action.

For this reason Socrates drew an analogy between knowledge in the case of crafts, and knowledge in the case of virtue. Just as a craftsman needs to act correctly to benefit from his possession of the materials he has before him, so too we need act correctly with the goods and situations which life presents to us, in order to benefit from them. I suggested however, that it would be a mistake to place an over emphasis on correct action as the source of benefit. Socrates' arguments did not claim that wisdom and knowledge were valuable because they were the best way to obtain correct action. Rather, correct actions were just those actions which followed from an agent's knowledge and wisdom. As a result, Socrates was committed to the very strong claim that no one benefits from their possessions if they are ignorant. I suggested this was a puzzling thing to suggest, without further explanation.

Socrates went on to do just this, by drawing a contrast between different sorts of capacities for activity. These capacities were things that someone might be tempted to think of as goods, such as bravery or quickness. However, Socrates pointed out that these goods which increase activity would only further harm the agent who possessed them if the agent lacked the knowledge and wisdom necessary to act correctly. As I argued, Socrates previous critiques of the common-sense view of the good was that it gave insufficient attention to the role of activity. Here Socrates considers how the CSVG may approach the issue: they might just suggest activity is itself a good. Socrates has countered, that this is not the case, the activity itself is only good when guided by wisdom.

Socrates then goes on to draw a drastic conclusion about the nature of the goods, and their relationship to happiness. The fact that these goods they had identified, whether passive things like wealth or good-looks or active things like quickness and bravery, could fail to benefit the person who possesses them, was because they were in fact indeterminate in nature. It was a matter of whether wisdom or ignorance controlled or led these goods, which determined whether or not they benefited the person who possessed them. As such, what determines goodness was a matter of the person's agency, rather than the nature of what they possessed.

From this Socrates draws his conclusion, that wisdom is the only good required to make a life go well. Because wisdom suffices for its own success, and is necessary to benefit from the capacities and goods one possesses, we can see that in fact the role envisaged by CSVG for the goods is impossible. The reason wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness, is that by being an unconditional good it is the source of happiness in someone's life, and thus those things which the average person believed made a life 'go well' were in fact only good because they were part of a life lived wisely. It is as part of a life lived wisely, that the other goods are transformed into goods.

As a consequence, while Socrates takes no issue with the common sense idea that everyone pursues happiness in their actions and in their lives, he strongly rejects the conception of happiness most people bring to bear in answering this commonly held eudaimonist outlook. As Socrates reports to accusers in the *Apology*, that his advice to everyone in Athens consisted in claiming that:

...virtue does not come from wealth, but virtue makes wealth and everything else good for men, both privately and publicly. (*Apol.* 30b)<sup>3</sup>

Wisdom because it is the only good, makes everything else good for someone in how they live. That is, it makes other things good for them, in both their public and private lives. It is for advocating this view to the youth, that Socrates believes he has been unjustly brought to trial. And it would seem, that this view has featured as centrally as part of his protreptic argument with the young Cleinias. In this way, this section of *Euthydemus* is a solid insight into Socrates' philosophical practice.

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<sup>3</sup>My translation.

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