

Interpretation

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The Serious Play of Plato's *Euthydemus*

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Plato's *Euthydemus* is a strange dialogue.¹ In it two old, but not very experienced, sophists, the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, show off their "eristic" abilities. They bombard their audience with fallacy after fallacy, many of them quite absurd. (Example: that dog is a father; that dog is yours; therefore, that dog is your father [see 298e].) The dialogue is loaded with word play, and throughout Socrates is transparently ironic in his praise of his sophistic competitors. When they finish their show, he says, "no one of those present could praise highly enough the argument and the two men, and they nearly died laughing and clapping with joy" (303b).

As a result of its almost farcical quality, commentators often feel constrained to begin their work on the *Euthydemus* by asking whether it is even serious enough to merit analysis.² The task of the commentator is then to show that enough serious material can be extracted to justify the commentary. Typically the sophistic fallacies, which represent about half of the work, have been taken as the most significant portion of the dialogue. (Including the introduction and conclusion the dialogue has seven parts, three of which are filled with the sophists' eristic.). Even if they are occasionally absurd, it is obvious that arguments concerning the nature of learning (275d–77d) or the ambiguity of the verb "to be" (283b–e) or the issue of self-predication (300e–301c) should be seriously analyzed. Kuelen, for example, claims that there is an important relationship between the learning fallacies and the doctrines of the *Meno*; Peck argues similarly about the "to be" arguments and the *Sophist*; Sprague interprets a passage from the *Euthydemus* as an objection to the theory of Forms similar to one articulated in the *Parmenides* (see Keulen, Peck, Sprague [1967], and also Mohr).

The fallacies have also been examined from a historical perspective. Since they are closely related to many of the examples Aristotle uses in his *On Sophistical Refutation* (*SE*) the following sorts of questions have been asked: What is the relationship between Aristotle's treatment of the fallacies and Plato's? (Keulen asks this question, as does Praechter.) Was there an original source that supplied both the *Euthydemus* and the *SE* with its eristic arguments? Was there, for example, a historical figure named Euthydemus who actually compiled a handbook of fallacies (as is perhaps suggested at *SE* 177b12 and *Rhetoric* 1401a26)? (This is the main question in Praechter's essay.)

A similar historical question is this: What is the relationship between Plato's

dialogue and the “*Dissoi Logoi*” manual, possibly written at the end of the fifth century (see Sprague [1968], pp. 160–61)? Whatever the answer, it is clear that the *Euthydemus* provides valuable information about the state of Greek logic during this period, and it is likely that a great deal of serious work is both reflected in and was inspired by the sophistical arguments of the dialogue. The Kneales suggest an example: “It is probable then that the early Megarians took part in, and were stimulated to logical discovery by, such disputes as we find satirized in Plato’s *Euthydemus*” (p. 15).

There is thus no doubt that the fallacies deserve attention from both historians of logic and philosophers concerned with Plato’s development. In this essay, however, I propose a different approach to the serious side of the *Euthydemus*. Instead of focusing on its three eristic sections (275d–77d, 283b–88b, 293b–303b), I shall concentrate largely on Socrates’ “protreptic” speeches (278e–83a, 288d–93a). Commentators (e.g., Stewart, Friedländer, and Praechter) frequently dismiss, simply paraphrase, or ignore these arguments. M. A. Stewart describes the argument as “an extravagant induction” and “equivocal.” P. Friedländer says almost nothing about these arguments. Praechter describes the philosophical side of the dialogue as essentially negative and Socrates’ arguments as “unmittelbar ohne frucht” (p.9). By contrast, I hope to show that if analyzed carefully, these speeches employ some of Plato’s most crucial terms—*techné* and *arête* are the prime examples—and they raise philosophical questions of the highest order.

The two protreptic speeches together form a continuous argument which is indeed quite serious. However, precisely because it is protreptic, the argument is also intrinsically problematic. Protreptic, as explained by Socrates, is a form of argument designed to persuade its audience that “one ought to philosophize and care about arete” (275a6. For a comparison see Isocrates *To Nicocles* 57.1, *Evagoras* 77.1, *Antidosis* 60.4, 84.2, and 86.2, and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 1358b ff.) It invites its audience into the project of philosophy and promises, either implicitly or explicitly, that such a quest will be rewarding. But protreptic is incomplete: it only promises and does not itself deliver “what comes next.” This phrase, “what comes next” (*to meta touto*) comes from *Cleitophon* 408d7, a dialogue devoted to the question of protreptic. I have commented on this work at length in “The Riddle of Plato’s *Cleitophon*.” It urges its audience to love wisdom but does not itself provide, or clearly articulate the nature of, that wisdom. As a result, protreptic forces the reader to consider some of the most pressing questions raised by the dialogues: Do they contain a “positive” teaching? Can Socrates’ promise of wisdom be fulfilled? Is there a theoretical doctrine, an *epistémē* or *techné*, that actually does “come next” or is Socratic protreptic merely promissory? Does Socrates only refute and exhort his interlocutors, or does he actually teach them?

Answering such questions would ultimately require a comprehensive interpretation of the dialogues. This the essay to follow will hardly supply. Instead,

I shall argue only for the following thesis: The protreptic arguments offered by Socrates *fail* to demonstrate conclusively that one ought to philosophize. If this is correct, does it follow that Socratic protreptic undermines itself? After all, if arguments purporting to show that one ought to philosophize are themselves riddled with problems, then why ought one to philosophize?

While its conclusion is not universally or necessarily true, I shall argue that the protreptic does not undermine itself. As we shall see, Socrates' arguments are compelling only to those who are predisposed to agree with their conclusion. Such a diagnosis sounds entirely damning; it is not, however. A thorough examination of the protreptic will disclose that these peculiar arguments are uniquely instructive. While they are not powerful enough to persuade everybody to philosophize (i.e., to demonstrate that philosophy is an unconditional good), they can yet be effective in urging someone like Kleinias, the young man who (along with the reader) is the real target of Socrates' speeches, to pursue philosophy. Furthermore, they can teach him how to do so.

In sum, then, the protreptic, like the *Euthydemus* itself, is a strange blend of seriousness and play. On the one hand, the protreptic arguments for the pursuit of philosophy fail to attain their stated purpose; "we were entirely ridiculous," says Socrates as he nears their conclusion (291b). Nevertheless, the protreptic succeeds in performing a most serious task: outlining the questions that must be pursued if Socrates' exhortation to philosophize is to be heeded.

I

In the prologue the two sophists make a mighty boast for themselves: "Arete, Socrates, is what we think we can transmit more finely and quickly than anybody else" (273d8–9). The first question that Socrates poses in response is this:

Are you only able to make a man good who is already convinced that he should learn from you, or can you also teach that man who is not yet convinced either because he does not believe that in general arete is teachable or that you two are teachers of it? Come on, is it the work of the same *techne* to persuade such a man that arete is teachable and that you are the ones from whom someone could best learn, or is that the work of some other *techne*? (274d7–e5)

Dionysodorus answers that it is the same *techne* that does these two jobs. Socrates then reformulates: "Therefore, Dionysodorus, of all men you most finely encourage (or 'protrepticize,' *protrepsaite*, 275a1) others to pursue philosophy and to be concerned about arete?" (274a8–75a2). The sophist agrees.

Examination of this passage raises general questions about the possibility of teaching arete which, I suggest, can best be illuminated by comparing the teaching of arete with other, more typical, subjects (or *technai*). The passage

implies that instruction in the latter requires at least four separate phases. (1) Before beginning a specific study a student must first be persuaded that the subject can be taught. In a typical subject like geometry this is easily done. A prospective student can simply observe that those who took Geometry 101 in the fall, and knew nothing of the subject, can prove a host of theorems by the spring. (2) The student must be persuaded that the prospective teacher can actually teach the subject. Evidence of this is also easy to obtain. It can be determined that Dr. Jones received a degree in mathematics and taught the students who took Geometry 101 last year. (3) A third preparatory phase (one only suggested by the passage) is also required: The student must be persuaded that putting in the hours of study geometry demands is “worth it.” As a result, the teacher must persuade the student that geometry is valuable. A good teacher of a typical subject thus requires two separate capacities: fluency in the actual material to be taught, and the ability to arouse the students’ interest and commitment to the subject. It is obvious that the former need not imply the latter. (4) The final stage of instruction is communication of the actual course material.

This schema seems applicable to any ordinary *techne*. *Arete*, however, is an extraordinary subject whose teaching will disrupt the schema for the following reasons. First, it can be quite difficult to persuade a student that *arete* is an actual subject. As Socrates often points out, there is no obvious version of *Arete* 101 and its teachers are not easily identified (see, e.g., *Meno* 89e ff. and *Protagoras* 319e ff.). How, then, does one persuade a student that *arete* can be taught? The student must be “protrepticized,” exhorted to attempt an extraordinary subject. For most people, instruction in *arete* is left to the basic customs or institutions of the community: imitation of the elders, obedience to civil law, and religious traditions are examples. To persuade someone to study *arete* as a distinct subject therefore requires calling into question the authority of such familiar activities and opinions. To be a candidate for such instruction, the student thus has to be willing, at the outset, to question the nature of *arete*. But this is equivalent to commencing the study of *arete* itself. In other words, the initial protreptic phase, (1) and (2) from above, collapses into phase (4), the actual study of the subject.

A similar collapse occurs with phase (3). How does a teacher persuade a student that *arete*, assuming it can be taught, is worth studying? Only by arguing that knowledge of *arete* is valuable. This would require employing and then explaining some standard by which to measure the value of this knowledge. But *arete* itself is precisely the standard that measures the value of activities. Therefore, it itself would need to be invoked to prove the value of knowledge of itself. In other words, should a teacher try to persuade a student that *arete* is worth studying, she would have to explain the value of the subject. But this explanation would be an actual lesson in *arete*. Again, there is no division between the protreptic preliminaries and the actual study itself.

The dilemma of commencing the study of arete thus echoes Meno's famous paradox. A student cannot learn arete unless he can be convinced that it is both teachable and worth studying. But only the student already convinced of both is open to the possibility of being so persuaded. Put into somewhat exaggerated terms, since being convinced that arete is teachable and worth studying is itself a component of being good, only somebody already good can be made good. This issue, which admittedly is only suggested by the passage, will become more explicit as the dialogue progresses. As we shall see in Sections III and V, it will prove to be critical for understanding the intrinsic limitations of Socratic protreptic.

Dionysodorus states that it is one and the same *techne* that persuades a student that arete is teachable and that he and his brother can teach it (274e6). In a sense, this is the right answer: Because of the collapse of the various instructional phases just discussed, it has to be one and the same activity that both persuades the student to study and engages in the actual instruction. In another sense, however, it is clear that the sophist is unaware of a lurking problem. This concerns the very notion of a "techne," the word commonly used by Socrates to label ordinary forms of knowledge such as medicine, carpentry, geometry, etc. As has just been argued, the study of arete is extraordinary. The question should therefore be raised, Can there be a *techne* of arete? If so, who possesses it? Certainly not the two old sophists.³ If not, does this imply there is no knowledge of arete at all, or can arete be comprehended by some form of "nontechnical" knowledge (see Woodruff)? As we shall see in Section IV below, these are precisely the issues taken up in Socrates' second protreptic speech.

II

The fallacies of the first eristical scene commence when Euthydemus asks Kleinias, the highly promising youth who is the occasion for the entire dialogue (273a–c and 275a), "of the following two groups, who are the ones who learn, those who are wise (*sophoi*) or those who are ignorant (*amatheis*)?" (275d). When Kleinias answers "the wise" he is quickly refuted. He responds by answering "the ignorant," and is refuted once again. As Socrates later explains (277e–78a), the sophist here plays on the ambiguity of *manthanein*, which can mean either "to understand" (*sunienai*: 278a4) or "to learn something new." *Manthanein* can refer to expanding upon knowledge presently possessed (a student who already knows his letters will understand a grammar lesson) or to acquiring new knowledge (a student who does not know his letters can learn them). As such, the question can receive two different, and seemingly exclusive, answers. Given the first meaning of the verb, the answer is "the wise"; given the second, it is "the ignorant." Kleinias is befuddled.

This argument has occasioned much debate. It is not clear, for example, exactly where the force of the ambiguity falls. “Does the sophism depend upon an equivocation on *manthanein* . . . or on an equivocation on *sophoi* and *amatheis* (‘knowledgeable/ignorant’ and ‘clever/stupid’)?” (Hawtrey, pp. 58 ff.). It is also possible that rather than equivocation the fallacy is better described as, “the one known traditionally as *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*. . . . This fallacy consists in taking absolutely what should be taken only accidentally, e.g., to go from ‘knowing one’s letters’ to simply ‘knowing’” (Sprague [1962], p. 6).

Since the focus of this essay is on Socrates’, and not the sophists’, arguments, I shall simply assert that some form of equivocation is going on. What is clear is that, whatever the exact status of the argument, its consequences, if taken seriously, would call into question the very possibility of learning. If “the one who learns” cannot be identified, then the process of learning itself cannot be rationally explained, and it becomes legitimate to ask whether it is even possible. Clearly the sophistic arguments echo Meno’s famous learning paradox. (Again, Keulen makes this a major issue.)

After explaining that the fallacy rests on an equivocation, Socrates seems to dismiss the sophists’ arguments as follows:

These are student games (*paidia*) and thus I tell you that these fellows are playing (*prospaizein*) with you—and I call this play (*paidian*) because even if someone should learn either many or all of such things as they teach, he would have no more knowledge of how things really are, but he would only be able to play with other men, tripping up and overturning them, by his use of the difference of names. They are like boys who take pleasure in pulling a chair away from people who are about to sit down and laugh when they see them sprawled upside down. You should think of what these fellows do as play (278b1–c2).

Socrates proposes that instead of such play, the sophists should fulfil their promise to engage in the serious work (*ta spoudaia*: 278c3) of protreptic. A series of dichotomies thus suggests itself: Sophistry is the mere playing with words; it is concerned only with appearances and refutation, and not with instruction in how things really are; it is superficial, manipulative, and bad. By contrast, philosophy uses words to understand things; it is serious, protreptic (or “dialectical”) and good. (“Dialectical” is Sprague’s word in *Plato’s Use of Fallacy*, p. 3, and her interpretation is a good example of what I’m talking about. The relationship between dialectic and protreptic would constitute an issue in itself, and I shall not broach it here. See also Szlezak, p. 81.)

While such comfortable dichotomies are attractive, I suggest that they are not as easily sustained as commentators wish to think. Despite their lack of perspicacity, the sophists have a position which is potentially quite serious. Whatever the exact status of the argument concerning learning, there is no doubt that overcoming Meno’s paradox is not easy. Let us assume for a mo-

ment that the process of learning cannot in fact be rationally articulated and that its possibility should therefore be called into question. If that were the case, then the verbal combat of sophistry, the manipulation of words whose goal is only to achieve victory in any given contest of speeches, should be taken very seriously. Since the use of language could promise no higher goal, i.e., knowledge, there would be no reason not to become a sophist.

This position that I here propose attributing to the sophists is roughly equivalent to that often ascribed to Gorgias. In his "On Nature" and Section II of the "Praise of Helen" he presents a form of scepticism. This in turn provides him with a warrant for his commitment to rhetoric, wherein truth is only an "adornment" (*kosmos*) of "logos." It is extremely difficult to translate "*kosmos*," the first word of the "Praise of Helen." See Diels, pp. 288 ff., for the Greek text.

The key point is this: The sophists who oppose Socrates are no doubt comic figures. This does not imply, however, that their position should be dismissed as a farcical "Gegenbild" (Szlezak's word, p. 81) to the serious work of Socratic philosophy. It is possible to abstract the sophistic view from its playful context and the result is troubling, and perhaps formidable.

The sense in which the sophistic view can seriously oppose Socrates' will be made clear as we examine the first protreptic argument. As we shall see, the conclusion Socrates purports to establish is, at the least, precarious. In other words, it will not be clear that good reasons are provided as to why Kleinias, the target of the protreptic, *should* accept the invitation to philosophize rather than join the sophistic camp. Indeed, we shall see in the following section that Socrates' argument requires prior agreement with, and does not itself certify, at least one of its premises; and it is precisely this premise that the sophistic scepticism concerning learning would call into question.

III

The following is an outline of the argument I extract from Socrates' questions and Kleinias' answers, and which Socrates describes as genuine protreptic:

1. All human beings wish to do well (*eu prattein*: 278e6), i.e., wish to be happy (*eudaimonein*: 280b6).
2. In order to do well, the possession of good things is required (279a3 ff.).
 - 2A. A sample list of good things: wealth, health, physical beauty, good family, power and honor in one's community, temperance, justice, courage, wisdom (279a7–c3).
 - 2B. Good fortune (*eutuchia*: 279c7) is a subsequent addition to the list. However, because "wisdom is good fortune" (279d6) the same item is actually listed twice.
3. To bring happiness, good things must benefit their possessor (280b7–8).

4. To benefit, good things must be used (280c1–d7).
5. To benefit, good things must be used correctly (280e3–4).
6. Knowledge (episteme: 281b2) leads to correct use.
7. All items on the sample list (2A) are actually neutral (281e3–4). Knowledge (or “good sense: [*phronesis*: 281b6] or “wisdom” [*sophia*: 281b6] or “intelligence” [*nous*: 281b7]) is the only intrinsic good and should be sought at any cost. (I omit that portion which argues that those with little sense should do less in order to err less [281b ff.])

This is a classical protreptic argument, traces of which probably appear in Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* (see Düring, p. 19). Its conclusion, “that it is necessary to love wisdom” (*philosophhein*: 282d1), if seriously accepted, would demand a total commitment on the part of anyone who agrees. Indeed, the conclusion is so serious and, with its use of the word “necessary” (*anagkaion*), so apparently unconditional in its admonition, that the premises deserve the closest scrutiny. Unfortunately, they are, as we shall see, quite vague. (This has led Stewart to describe this argument as an example of “Plato’s sophistry.”) A similar vagueness is found in the conclusion itself: Even if Kleinias were to agree that he ought to love wisdom, Socrates uses several words to describe the knowledge towards which the argument directs him. Two related questions, What exactly is this knowledge and How might Kleinias attain it? are thus left distressingly open. Finally, the principal examples used to illustrate knowledge or wisdom come from “the typical technai.” It is not clear, however, whether these can actually provide an adequate theoretical model for the type of knowledge the argument encourages Kleinias to seek.

The first premise contains a famous ambiguity in the phrase “eu pratein.” Does it mean “to do well,” in the sense of being virtuous, or “to succeed,” in the sense of achieving one’s goal, whatever that may be? Both Hawtrey and Gifford comment on the pointed ambiguity of “eu pratein.” The latter says, “In its usual acceptation it would rather mean “faring well” than “acting well”” (p.20). The reformulation the phrase receives, “eudaimonein,” typically but never quite adequately translated as “to be happy,” only recapitulates the problem. It does not seem to be the case that all people wish to be virtuous. We may all wish to succeed, that is, attain what we deem to be worth attaining. Eu pratein covers both situations. Its ambiguity, however, may not be entirely vicious; the first (as well as the second) premise expresses a basic, and typically Socratic, opinion about human behavior: All human beings desire what seems to them to be good. We make value judgments, pursue goals, attempt to move from here to there with an eye towards attaining what we want and deem, even if inarticulately, to be good (see, e.g., *Symposium* 206a). The argument assumes, and does not prove, that human beings are free agents whose rational choice of what is good determines their action. It is vague and undefended, but not without some basis in ordinary observation.

Premise (2) implies that human action is inspired by *epithumia*, the desire

for and consequent pursuit of objects. Again, although the premise is vague it reflects a broad and (to some) compelling perception of human behavior: People go after what they want, and what they want is what they think is good.

I describe the list of good things Socrates proposes as “sample” because the specific items on it are not in themselves that important. The point is only that such a list can in principle be drawn. The items on this list (which have been accused of fluctuating “between the causes and the constituents of success” [Stewart, p. 23]) cover a very broad spectrum, ranging from bodily beauty to justice. Nevertheless, in keeping with the kind of analysis made so far, the list is plausible: it signifies again something basic about ordinary behavior. Each of us has a set of goals that energize our desires, a sample list of good things we think are worth pursuing.

To summarize: The assumptions initiating Socrates' argument are vague and questionable. Nevertheless, they express a plausible conviction about human action, namely that it is caused by free and rational choices. More serious problems with the argument are yet to come.

After placing wisdom on the list of sample goods, Socrates digresses. He states that he and Kleinias have left out “the greatest of the good things . . . good fortune (eutuchia: 279c7).” He cannot, however, add eutuchia to the list for it would repeat an item already there, namely sophia. By means of a series of examples, Socrates argues that good fortune and wisdom are really the same. In the matter of flute playing skilled flautists have the best fortune; in reading and writing letters, it is the writing masters; in warfare it is the wise generals; in times of sickness one would always prefer to try one's luck with the wise doctor. (About eutuchia Gifford says it means both “an accidental concurrence of favourable circumstances, and success resulting from the agent's judicious choice of means” [p. 22]. Note that at 279e1 the word used is *eupragia*. Socrates generalizes: “Wisdom everywhere makes human beings have good fortune” [280a6]. This same point is made about eutuchia and *techne* in the Hippocratic writing, “*Peri Technes*,” section IV.)

Why does Socrates go off on this tangent, and is this identification of eutuchia and sophia really as “disastrous” as Stewart thinks (p. 23)? The purpose of this digression, I suggest, is to focus attention on the character of *techne*. As has often been stated, *techne* is the mode of knowledge that best overcomes, and enables its possessor to control, *tuche*, luck (see, e.g., Nussbaum, 95–100). The pilot, for example, fares well when facing the contingencies of the sea. In this passage Socrates relies exclusively on *techne* for his model of wisdom, soon to be defined as that knowledge of the correct use of neutral items which brings its possessor happiness. But is wisdom best modeled by *techne*? In Section I we noted the features of *arete* that would distinguish its being taught from instruction in the ordinary *technai*. For Socrates *arete* is equivalent to *sophia*; therefore, this digression should be read with an eye towards the possibility of irony. In other words, despite its superficial identification of

sophia with *techne*, the real purpose of this passage may well be to call that identification into question. Is *techne* in fact the best model for *sophia*? If not, what is the nature of that *sophia* which knows how to use correctly the neutral items on the sample list and thus bring happiness to its possessor? These questions will be returned to shortly.

Premise (3) states that the good things on the sample list must bring benefit to their possessor. This is true by definition and so adds little to the argument. Premise (4) does add something new: It states that benefit requires that the good things be used. I may possess an apple, but it brings no nutritional benefit unless I eat it. A woman may, for example, have a great deal of money, but she would neither be benefited nor made happy by it unless she used (spent) it (280d). “Use” becomes the crucial term because it refers to the process of bringing possessions into the human sphere, i.e., of applying them.

Premise (5) elaborates the concept of use. Benefit requires, not only that good things be used, but that they be used “correctly” (*orthōs*: 280e3). If the item is used incorrectly the result is “bad” (*kakon*: 280e6). This, I propose, is the pivotal premise of the argument. It assumes that the items of the sample list are in fact not good at all; they are neutral and can be used for good or ill. Most important, it assumes that the use of an item *can* be understood as correct or incorrect, good or bad.

This assumption, I suggest, is problematic in a way that is both similar to and different from the problems surrounding the first four. None of the premises is self-evidently true; they are neither defended nor is their meaning entirely clear. In order for the conclusion to be compelling, therefore, the target audience of the protreptic must already be predisposed to agree with them. Premises (1) and (2), for example, assume that human beings are free agents whose selection of what is good can determine their actions. This may not be true. Its truth, however, is not here the issue; the point is that in order for the audience to be protrepticized they must believe it is true.

Premise (5) poses a similar, but more serious and complicated, dilemma. Is it in fact the case that, (1) things like wealth and health are not good but neutral; (2) their use can be rationally evaluated as correct and for the good, or incorrect and for the bad; (3) what the correct/good use is can be learned? It is possible to accept the earlier premises but still deny Premise (5). Indeed, this is precisely what sophists such as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus would do. They surely would maintain that human beings are free agents whose actions are determined by some conception of what is good, e.g., attaining political power in the Assembly. Without this assumption, their sophistry would become meaningless: they would have no reason to seduce an audience. They would not, however, agree with Premise (5). Their scepticism as disclosed in the first eristic scene (275d ff.) prohibits them from doing so. As suggested in Section II above, the entire case for sophistry rests on the denial that objective knowledge is possible. Premise (5) of Socrates’ first protreptic argument assumes the

opposite, namely objective knowledge of the correct or good use of an object is attainable. In other words, Socrates assumes that the "practical" question, How should we live our lives and apply or use our possessions? can be answered. From this assumption he concludes that such answers should be sought.

To reformulate: If Socrates' premises are granted, then it follows that knowledge of how to use one's possessions would be the most desirable possession which is needed in order to be happy (which everybody wishes to be). Everyone, therefore, ought to seek knowledge of the correct use of neutral items. It is, in other words, "necessary to philosophize." But Premise (5), I propose, is question-begging.

According to Socrates, an item like health is neither good nor bad, for it can be used well or badly. A strong body can beat up innocent weak bodies or build hospitals. Socrates assumes that one of these applications of the body is and can be known as correct. This assumption begs the crucial question. If correct use is a property belonging to neutral items, and if neutral items span the broad range that the sample list indicates, then knowledge of correct use would be required for happiness. The conclusion is thus built into the premise: If there is such a thing as correct use, then knowledge of it should be sought.⁴ But on the basis of what should this assumption be granted? It is not self-evident: What if there is no such thing as correct use, if use is simply in the eyes of the beholder? What force would the protreptic argument then have? Can the living of a good life be directed by knowledge? Perhaps so. This, however, is precisely what the argument should show, and not assume.

As if to signal distress, the conclusion is stated with a flurry of different terms: "episteme" (281b2), "phronesis" (281b6), "sophia" (281d6), and "nous" (281b7) are all used to label that which should be sought. This terminological flux helps to raise a decisive problem with the conclusion of Socrates' argument: Just what is this knowledge, assuming it exists, that Kleinias is being exhorted to seek? Throughout the discussion, most clearly in the eutuchia/sophia digression (279c–80b), typical *technai* such as flute playing, reading and writing, piloting a ship, being a general, and medicine are cited as examples of knowledge. Furthermore, it is carpentry that provides the example of correct use in Premise (5) (281a). Is it a typical *techne*, then, one whose subject matter is the good use of neutral items, that Kleinias should seek? The mere presence of so many "technical" examples would seem to suggest that it is. Such a conclusion, however, is difficult to maintain. Exactly why can be made clear by further examining Socrates' use of the example of the carpenter.

A typical *techne* has a determinate subject matter. The carpenter's subject is the production of furniture from wood (281a5). He knows, says Socrates, how to use tools and wood (280c8–9). Socrates makes an analogy between the carpenter and his tools and a man with money. The carpenter uses his tools and wood knowledgeably (or "technically") and is therefore benefited by them. Correspondingly, the man with money should use his wealth knowledgeably in

order to be benefited and be made happy by it (280d). “In the working and use concerned with wood, is there anything other than the episteme of carpentry that effects the right use?” (281a2–4). The answer is no. Analogously, says Socrates, it is episteme that should direct the possessor of the items on the sample list, such as wealth, towards the correct and therefore beneficial use of his possessions; towards, in other words, happiness.

There is a problem with this analogy which only becomes explicit in Socrates’ second protreptic speech. There are two senses of the word “use.” First, the carpenter knows how to use his tools and wood. With them he knows how to build furniture. *But he does not know how to use the furniture.* The carpenter knows how to build a chair; but to what end will the chair be put? Will it be used to seat someone comfortably at a symposium, or will it be used as an instrument for torturing a political prisoner? It is this second sense of “use” that would be required for “using” the neutral items on the sample list correctly and for the good. The first sense is technical and value neutral: the carpenter uses the tool correctly to produce the chair. The second sense is value laden: the chair is used correctly and for the good in order to achieve happiness. The carpenter, qua possessor of a *techne*, knows nothing of this.

This problem discloses the difficulty of identifying what type of knowledge it is that the target audience of the protreptic is being urged to seek. It cannot be an ordinary *techne*. But *technai* have been the sole supplier of examples of knowledge. Then what is it? The second part of the protreptic explicitly takes up this issue.

IV

Socrates begins this section by restating the conclusion of the first part of the protreptic: Human beings should seek wisdom, i.e., philosophize (288d6–7). But what knowledge should we seek (see 289d9–10)? To elicit an answer, he suggests as possibilities the ability to discover gold (or alchemy), in other words the ability to produce wealth (288e6–89a5); medicine; the ability to produce immortality (289b1). None of these *epistemai*, however, can really bring happiness, for they do not understand how to use their results. (“Episteme” is Plato’s word at 288d8, d9, 289a1, a4, b1 and b4. “Techne” returns at 289c4. As is often the case, the two are synonymous.) An immortal life, even one supplied with indefinite wealth, can still be wretched. The type of knowledge that is needed is one in which the knowledge of how to produce is combined with knowledge of how to use what is produced (289b4–7), in which the making is united with the using *techne* (289c2. See *Republic* 601c for more on the using *techne*.). Clearly, the sense of “use” here is not technical and value neutral, but value laden.

Ordinary *technai*, exemplified next by instrument making, fail this test. So-

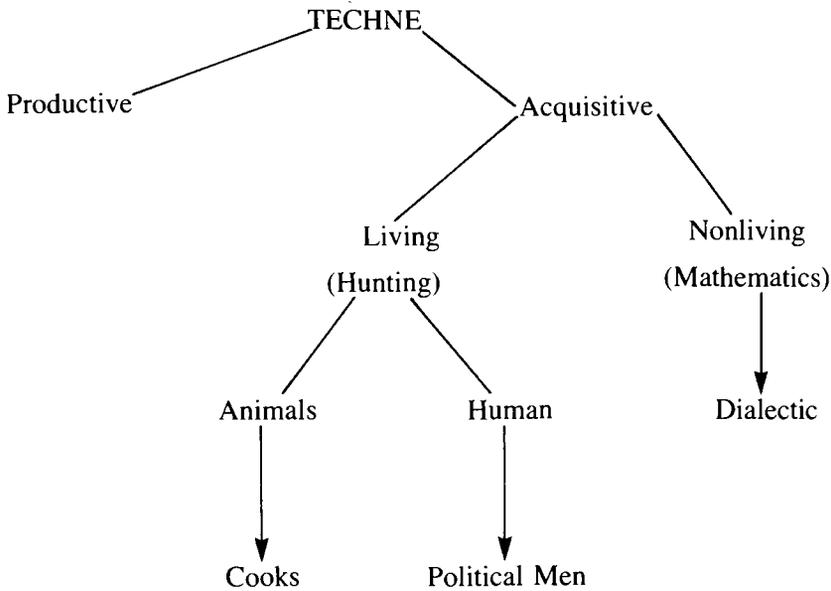
crates then rather enthusiastically asks, “By the gods, what if we should learn the *techne* of making speeches (*logopoiiken*)? Is this what is required to make us happy” (289c6–9)? Kleinias answers no, and he offers as evidence the fact that this *techne* can easily suffer the same split as any other: It is possible for speechmakers not to know how to use the speeches they make (289d).

Socrates indicates some disappointment at the failure of the speechmaking *techne*. On the one hand, he is surely being ironic, for “speech making” immediately connotes the work of men like the very sophists with whom he is arguing (see 304–6. I think, for example, of Lysias. See *Phaedrus* 257c. Also, the close of the *Euthydemus*, 304d–306b, returns to this issue.) On the other hand, his disappointment hints at something more positive: “*Logos*” is surely part of the right answer to the question, What knowledge should be sought? for what is required is a *logos* of how to use all objects of desire. What is required is *sophia*, understood not as an ordinary *techne*, but as a comprehensive account of what is good in the human sphere. (Slezak believes that what is being referred to here is the scientific rhetoric of the *Phaedrus* [p. 86].) However, as we shall now see, identifying the sort of knowledge that can provide such an account is intrinsically problematic.

Socrates offers the “general’s *techne*” (290b1; mentioned earlier at 279e) as his next proposal. He does so apparently because the general, who knows how to command other human beings, knows how to organize, and in this sense use, the various technicians under his sway. Kleinias, however, immediately counters with an objection: The general’s *techne*, he says, is a kind of hunting (290b5). Therefore, just as the hunter of game hands over his catch to a cook, so the general hunts and acquires cities and “then hands them over to the political men, for [the generals] themselves do not know how to use that which they hunt” (290d2–3). In fact, Kleinias gives a quite detailed description of this type of knowledge:

No part of hunting itself covers more than chasing and overcoming. And when the hunter overcomes what he is chasing he is not able to use it. Instead, hunters and fishermen hand over their catch to cooks. Analogously, geometers and astronomers and mathematicians—for these also are hunters since none of them make their diagrams, they discover what is—since they themselves do not know how to use these things, but only how to catch them, they hand them over to those men accomplished in dialectic so that they can use what these hunters have discovered—at least they can use however many of their discoveries that are not entirely senseless (290b7–c6).

This is an impressive little speech, for it succinctly presents an entire conception of *techne*. As if to signal its remarkable character, Plato places this speech in an extraordinary dramatic context: He has Krito interrupt the narration and ask whether young Kleinias was actually its author (290e1). This is a good question: How did a mere boy learn about dialectic? Socrates responds by



saying that he does not remember who the author was; perhaps it was the older Ktesipus. The situation is then made even more mysterious when he adds, “Good Krito, perhaps one of the higher beings was present and uttered these things” (291a3–4). Such mystery is, I believe, unparalleled in the dialogues.

What is the point of such dramatic tension? I suggest it is to highlight the fecundity of this succinct epistemological proposal, which the accompanying diagram schematizes.

Although somewhat awkward, this diagram schematizes an important epistemological conception which finds parallels in several other dialogues. (For parallels, see *Charmides* 165c–166b, *Gorgias* 450b–d, *Philebus* 55d–58a, *Sophist* 281e–219d, *Statesman* 258b–260b. The diagram is awkward because some branches give genus and species and others do not.) First, it represents the fact that there are two basic forms of *techne*, the productive and the acquisitive. The former are the most ordinary of all forms of knowledge, e.g., carpentry, pottery, medicine, etc.; the latter is itself divided into two parts, the second of which, I propose, is metaphorical; the acquisition of nonliving beings represents what Aristotle calls “theoretical knowledge.” (That this is so is made clear in the *Sophist*, 291c1–7. See Rosen, pp. 91–92.) This type of knowledge does not produce its object, which it only studies and does not alter or bring into being. Aristotle’s examples are mathematics, physics, and first philosophy; for Plato the single best example is mathematics (see Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1026a8–22).

A mathematical *techne*, such as geometry, “hands over” its “catch” to the dialectician. Dialectic in this passage refers to some form of meta-mathematical

reflection, e.g., the study of “number itself.” It is not possible, given the single mention of dialectic, to determine what Plato here had in mind. It can only be stated that the passage posits the existence of some theoretical discipline that is higher than ordinary mathematics. (Of course, *Republic* VII discusses dialectic in these terms and at length. For an interesting discussion of this issue see Klein, pp. 21–49.)

Analogous to the handing over of theoretical entities to the dialectician is the hunter of men, i.e., the general, who hands over his acquisitions to the possessor of the political *techne*, who presumably knows how to use them. As such, the political *techne* seems to be “the one we were seeking and the cause of correct acting in the city. And just (*atechnōs*) as Aeschylus says, it alone would sit at the helm of the city, steering everything and commanding everything and making everything useful” (291c10–d3). *Atechnos* again appears at 291d1. See n. 3. This knowledge, the putative goal towards which the protreptic urges, is then named “the kingly (*basilike*) *techne*” (291d7). On the “kingly art” see *Statesman* 305c ff. and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* IV.2.2 ff.).

The serious work of protreptic now seems over, for the knowledge that Socrates has been exhorting Kleinias to seek appears to have been identified. Unfortunately, this hopeful appearance is soon shattered. When he and his mysterious interlocutor reconsidered the *basilike techne*, Socrates tells Krito, “we were totally ridiculous, just like children running after birds” (291b1–2). Why? Because the attempt to identify the structure and specific object of this type of knowledge leads to an *aporia*.

First it is agreed that the *basilike* and the *politike techne* are the same and that to it “the general's *techne* and all the rest hand over their results of which they are the producers for it to rule on the grounds that it alone knows how to use them” (291c7–9). But a question then arises: What result (*ergon*) does the *basilike techne* itself produce (291e1)? The assumption here is that it has a determinate and therefore identifiable result, i.e., that it is analogous to an ordinary *techne*. But the assumption is faulty. A spokesman for medicine (291e5) or farming (291e8), for example, can identify that which results from his knowledge (health or food from the earth). If the *basilike techne* is truly analogous, then its spokesman should be able to do the same. But this Krito at least cannot do (292a6).

Because they agreed that the *basilike techne* is beneficial, Socrates next asks, “Isn't it necessary that it supply us with some good?” (292a11). Since the first protreptic argument established that “nothing else is good except knowledge” (292b1–2), all the results that one would typically point to when considering the *politike techne*, such as wealth for the citizens, freedom, and the absence of factionalism, are “neither good nor bad.” Only if it can make the citizens wise (or good or happy) can this *techne* be considered truly beneficial (292b4–c1). Once again, however, this description of the *basilike techne* fails to satisfy, for as Socrates next asks, In what specific sense will it make men

good? Will it make all men good in all things? Since knowledge is the sole good, will it provide all forms of knowledge, including shoemaking, carpentry, and the rest (292c6–9)?

The basic point is this: No determinate and identifiable ergon can be specified for the basilike techne. (Orwin discusses this issue in the context of the *Cleitophon* in quite helpful terms, and Blits has an interesting treatment of similar questions.) As shown by the first protreptic argument, it cannot issue in an ordinary result; if it did, it would end up being classified as a neutral item. The only knowledge, therefore, that it can provide is “of itself” (292d3–4). This obscure formulation is not explained further. I shall return to it shortly.

A final effort at describing the basilike techne is made: It makes other men good (292d5–6). But, asks Socrates, those men who are made good will be good with respect to what? The answer: they will be good only in making other men good. Of course, this just postpones the answer, for the question Good with respect to what? would surface again. The basic problem here is the same as that described above, namely that of determining the object of this techne. The search for such an object is “labyrinthine” (291b7); every time Socrates thinks he has found a way out (it makes the citizens wise, it makes them good) he discovers that the demand for specification (wise in what?, good at what?) amazes him again.

This extraordinary section closes with Socrates saying, “Corinthus, Son of Zeus, the situation is exactly (atechnōs) as I was describing it: we were still as far, if not further, from knowing what that knowledge is which would make us happy” (292e3–5).

This confession of a serious theoretical aporia (292e6) is couched in playful terms. “The Scholiast on the passage relates that when Corinth had sent ambassadors to Megara to complain of their revolt, one argument advanced was that the mythical founder ‘Corinthus son of Zeus’ would be aggrieved if they failed to exact condign punishment. The proverb came to be used of boastful repetitions of the same story.” So says Gifford. Unfortunately, neither he nor Hawtrey takes notice of the use of atechnos at 292e3. The issue of techne is the key here; therefore, the pun seems unavoidable. Socrates professes to be drowning in the third wave of the argument (293a3) and he calls upon the two old sophists to save him. This is ludicrous, for of all men they surely can provide no relief.

v

Serious problems plague Socrates’ protreptic. In his first argument, the premises are questionable. Even if they are granted, his conclusion, that it is necessary to philosophize in order to be happy, is jeopardized by its obscurity. Just what is the wisdom we are told to love? This obscurity is amplified by

Socrates' second speech: there are intrinsic difficulties in the very notion of a basilike techne. How, then, can a target audience which is being exhorted to pursue wisdom even begin its quest? Are we forced to conclude that the protreptic undermines itself? If so, then the *Euthydemus* would have to be counted as truly bizarre: The Socratic protreptic would really be "apotreptic"; it would turn people away from the pursuit of wisdom. (I coin "apotreptic." See Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1358b for his use of *apotrope*.) On this reading, Socrates the serious protrepticizer who accuses the sophists of only playing with words, fails to give good reasons why we should pursue philosophy rather than sophistry.

I shall conclude this paper by showing why the protreptic does not undermine itself. It is true that Socrates' arguments end in an aporia from which he needs rescue. This is not, however, equivalent to failure because the arguments provide direction in how to perform the rescue operation. Kleinias, and more importantly we readers, are being called upon to respond to the aporia that Socrates has created for us. We are being called upon to philosophize.

The most serious question raised by Socrates in the *Euthydemus* is, Is there a techne of arete? This can be twice reformulated: First, can there be a "using techne," one whose subject matter is the correct and beneficial application of neutral items in the human domain? The second refers back to the diagram in Section IV. There the technai were divided into two kinds: the theoretical (acquisitive) and the productive. The diagram, I propose, invites the question, Is there a third kind, namely the "practical," which is possessed by the "political men" to whom the hunters of human animals hand over their catch?⁵ Given the basic assumption operative throughout the dialogue, namely that techne is the model for knowledge, and the problems sketched in the previous section, the answer would seem to be no.

The epistemological lesson that the *Euthydemus* teaches is this: Knowledge of arete cannot be completely analogous to an ordinary techne. This is because the latter has a determinate object or result (ergon). Medicine studies health, farming studies the production of crops. There is no analogous object of the putative basilike techne. Apparently this is because its subject matter, arete or the good use of neutral items, is indeterminate. Socrates presents no explicit argument here (292c–e) as to why this is the case. It can be inferred, however, that it is because the items on the sample list, namely the objects typically deemed good by human beings, are themselves indeterminate. It would follow, then, that the question of their correct use would not allow for a determinate answer and so would not constitute a stable epistemological entity. This is why Socrates and his mysterious interlocutor repeatedly fail to identify a specific object for the basilike techne.⁶ If techne is the only form of knowledge, then there can be no knowledge of arete and Socratic protreptic cannot be distinguished from sophistry.

There is, however, a thread to lead us out of this maze: a conception of a nontechnical mode of knowledge.⁷ I suggest two approaches to articulating

what it is. First, let us return to the obscure formulation that describes the basilike techne. It has, says Socrates, itself as an object. Second, let us consider somewhat further the very nature of protreptic.

The salient feature of Socrates' search for the object of the basilike techne is its circularity:

When we reached the basilike techne and were examining it, to see if this techne was the one that supplied and produced eudaimonia, it was just as if we had fallen into a labyrinth: when we thought we had reached the end, we twisted around again and appeared to be again at the very beginning of our search and just as much in need as we were when we began searching (291b4–c2).

Why is this search circular? Given the premises of the argument, the basilike techne must supply something good. But what good is this? Given the results of the first protreptic argument, the answer must be knowledge. But knowledge of what? Of that which is good. But the good is knowledge: hence, the circularity. The basilike techne, which we now know is no ordinary techne at all, is then described as follows:

It is necessary that it be a producer of no result, either good or bad; instead, it must transmit no knowledge other than that of itself (292d1–4).

Possessors of typical technai study and then teach about (or produce) an object that is distinct from the technai themselves: The doctor teaches about the workings of the human body, the carpenter about the production of furniture from wood (see *Charmides* 165c: episteme [or techne] is *episteme tinos*). Is there an analogous object of the basilike techne? One is tempted to answer, Yes, it is arete. But this is not quite right, for at least insofar as we pertain to the conclusion of Socrates' first protreptic, what this knowledge knows is only that knowledge of arete ought to be sought. When this knowledge—that knowledge of arete ought to be sought—is transmitted to students, they are equipped only to exhort others to seek it.

This is quite peculiar: Those who learn their Socratic lessons know nothing other than how to exhort others to love “wisdom.” Their wisdom is manifested only in their knowledge that wisdom is lovable. Protreptic teaches the student only how to protrepticize; like the labyrinthine aporia, it is circular. Or, in other words, *it has no object distinct from itself*.

Socrates exhorts his listeners to pursue arete, that is, to philosophize. As suggested in Section I, however, such an exhortation appeals only to those already persuaded that the traditional purveyors of arete are insufficient and that knowledge is therefore worth seeking. In this sense, Socrates does not teach his audience anything new; his protreptic “goes nowhere” for it is able to speak only to those already “protrepticized.” As explicated in Section III, the premises of his argument—that human beings are free and rational agents and that

the use of neutral items can be known as correct/good—are undefended. Acceptance of the conclusion, that it is necessary to philosophize, therefore requires that the audience be predisposed to accept the premises. In other words, the audience must already be predisposed to commence the search for objective knowledge, i.e., to philosophize. I propose that this is why the search for the determinate object of the basilike techne falters and why it is said to teach only itself.

To reiterate the basic question, Does the circularity of the protreptic render it vacuous? No. Socrates does accomplish something significant: He reinforces and explicates a desire that is present in his audience. To clarify, imagine presenting Socrates' first protreptic argument. Its conclusion takes the form of an imperative (which I paraphrase): Turn away from your typical concerns, care about arete and love wisdom. The audience can respond in at least three ways. (1) They can reject such exhortation by dogmatically asserting that they are, for example, Christians and don't need help. (2) They can object to it and demand reasons why they should follow such advice. (3) They can heed the argument's imperative.

Options (2) and (3) are similar: Those who ask for reasons are philosophizing. (This is reminiscent of the protreptical argument attributed to Aristotle: those who argue against philosophy are philosophizing. See the "*Testimonia*" collected by Düring, p. 44.) Furthermore, both groups, those represented by (2) and (3), are similarly predisposed to philosophize. As discussed in Section III, the argument itself fails to provide satisfying reasons to philosophize. In other words, it cannot be said to produce (rationally) a new disposition to philosophize in the target audience. In this sense protreptic is only effective with those who are already "protrepticized."

What then does protreptic accomplish? It provides an occasion, as well as guidance in how, to philosophize. It addresses someone, like young Kleinias, who already is impelled to discover knowledge and encourages him to consummate that desire. Furthermore, the argument teaches him how to do so. In particular, it points him in the direction of nontechnical knowledge. Techne is the pivot around which the protreptic revolves. Understood in a comprehensive sense, it provides a conceptual framework, such as that diagrammed in Section IV, within which ordinary knowledge can be classified. This framework allows someone like Kleinias to understand what is required to consummate his desire for knowledge of how to use neutral items correctly, i.e., for knowledge of arete. It shows him that the ordinary technai are insufficient to accomplish his goal. What he really wants is a "higher" form of knowledge, one that is non-technical and somehow able to understand how to use the items on the sample list. Socrates does not identify this knowledge; as a result, and as Socrates himself admits, the *Euthydemus* is aporetic—even maddening.

The Socratic protreptic is not vacuous because in and of itself it represents a nontrivial form of knowledge. If its premises are granted, then it follows that

the typical things we normally desire (those on the sample list) are neutral and not good. It shows that if knowledge of the correct use of these neutral items is possible—which it may not be—then it is also desirable as the condition for happiness. It should be remembered, however, that the target audience of the protreptic *already* desires such knowledge. Therefore, at least implicitly, they assume it is possible. As a result, the protreptic directs the desires latent in the target audience; it urges them to turn away from more typical desires and pursue wisdom. It shows how a most untraditional and therefore potentially alienating desire, for wisdom, can be transformed into a coherent activity that can produce a happier life.

To reformulate: Socrates fails to prove that philosophy is an unconditional good. The necessity found in the conclusion of the protreptic—It is necessary to philosophize—does not bind everybody. In particular, the injunction is not binding for those who would join Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in rejecting Premises (5) and (6) (that correct use is an objective property of neutral things and can be learned). Philosophy, then, is only conditionally good, and the necessity expressed in the protreptic conclusion is hypothetical. *If* one is predisposed to philosophize and to question the traditional purveyors of arete, then one must philosophize in order to be happy. This is a crucial lesson for someone like Kleinias. Unlike other associates of Socrates such as Charmides, Critias, and Alcibiades, whose criminal behavior discloses their willingness to call into question the traditional sense of arete, Kleinias should pursue philosophy. He should seek the higher, the nontechnical form of knowledge, and he has been provided with a framework to begin doing so.

In sum, the Socratic protreptic teaches a kind of self-knowledge, knowledge of the nature and consequences of those desires that belong to the student open to the protreptic. It invites the student into the project of philosophy, an activity to which he is already predisposed, and thereby teaches him how to attain eudaimonia. Protreptic itself thus manifests a kind of nontechnical knowledge: It does not have a determinate object other than itself. Its object is itself; that is, it is the study of the desire that wishes to know about arete. Other technai make discernible progress: one can move from ignorance of carpentry to skill by studying with a master. This is why the ordinary technai are easily recognized and usually admired. There is no analogous progress in the study of arete. Only one who already knows can be taught. But knows what? That knowledge of arete is desirable.

NOTES

1. My text is Burnet's Oxford edition. Translations are my own. Support from the State of Iowa, the Joyce Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation allowed me the time to work on this project. Professor David Sedley and an anonymous reader made many valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper for which I am grateful.

2. An example comes from H. Keulen, who contrasts himself with Meridier, who wrote: "L'Euthydème est une comédie, avec son décor et ses acteurs," lautet eines der vielen Urteile, die den platonischen *Euthydem* als ein Ergebnis spielerischer Laune Platons betrachtet sehen wollen. Dass der dialog jedoch sehr ernst zu nehmen ist, weiss man allerdings ebenso lange" (pp. 4–5).

Or consider Leo Strauss, who describes the *Euthydemus* as "bantering, not to say frivolous and farcical" (p. 1) but then goes on to explain why he thinks the dialogue is extremely serious. In fact, because of the mention of Socrates' *daimonion* at 272e, Strauss says of the dialogue: "No other conversation presented by Plato has so high an origin" (p. 3).

3. That the sophists do not possess such a *techne* is playfully indicated with the phrase Socrates uses to describe them: they are, he says, "*passophoi atechnos*" (271c6). As I have argued elsewhere (1987, pp. 255–63), Plato consistently puns with *atechnos*; that is, he uses it to mean "without *techne*." R.S.W. Hawtrey comments extensively on *passophoi* in this passage but neglects to mention the pun with *atechnos*. The same is true in E.H. Gifford's edition.

4. This statement does not mention any of the problems normally associated with the naturalistic fallacy.

5. This discussion is informed by Aristotle's tripartite division of the *epistemai*. See *Metaphysics* 1026a8–22.

6. The key question this paper raises is, Is *arete*, is the human good, determinate? There is a little joke at *Statesman* 266b which indicates my own position: the nature of the human race is like the diagonal of the unit square, i.e., indeterminate. I would argue that this holds for *arete* but I understand that a lengthy discussion is required.

7. There are at least two other threads to lead us out of the labyrinth. As numerous commentators have proposed, there might be a *techne* of *arete*, if this can be understood in a "second-order" sense. R. Sprague (1976) most clearly expresses this position. She argues that the *basilike techne* represents a "second-order art" which "directs" or "knows how to use the things made" by other "arts" (p. 55). On her reading, even though the *Euthydemus* ends in an *aporia*, later dialogues actually express this higher or second-order knowledge.

I think Sprague's position is seriously flawed. Her solution sounds plausible, but it ignores what I suggest is the critical problem: In what sense can the "first-order" (or ordinary) *technai* function as an object of a "second-order" *techne*? What exact kind of object would it be and why wouldn't it simply recapitulate the same problems discussed here? Furthermore, if this is really the type of knowledge that Plato has in mind, then why did he only describe or allude to it in the early dialogues and never clearly explain or illustrate it in the later ones? Sprague is extremely vague about such questions. This is damaging for her argument because *techne* is precisely that mode of knowledge whose object is clear and determinate and should therefore be readily explained. As a result, her solution, while inviting, simply postulates a hope that the *aporia* can be resolved.

I mention Sprague in particular here because of all the many commentators who hold a similar thesis, she is the most systematic and clear. There is a mountain of literature on this subject. For representative views, all of which are similar to Sprague's, see Kato (1988), Kube (1967), and Irwin (1977).

Another thread leading out of the labyrinth here is that of K. Gaiser (1959). Simply put, his thesis is that the dialogues are exoteric exhortations towards wisdom, while the positive teaching was esoteric.

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