

Goodness and the Good Life: *The Euthydemus*

Plato makes it clear that thinking about the value that something—pleasure, or anything else—should have in your life begins naturally with reflection on what it makes sense for a person to want to get out of life in the first place. This is, at any rate, where Plato’s reflections on the nature of value begin, most notably in the *Euthydemus*. It is important to see that Plato’s reflections begin where they do because that, Plato holds, is where reflective people usually begin when they think about what really matters to them in life. Everyone, he notes, wants to be happy, or fare well (*εὖ πράττειν*), and no one disagrees about whether a good life is what he wants to live (278e3–279a1). But that is only where reflection about value *begins*, and it is quite another matter to determine just what a good life amounts to (279a1 ff.). Philosophical theorizing, then, is not supposed to replace ordinary reflection, but to extend it and give it a focus that we may fail to recognize without more rigorous thought. In fact, it may even turn out that many of our pre-theoretical notions must actually be given up.

For that reason, I shall begin our reflections on the nature of value with Plato in the *Euthydemus*. Doing so, I believe, will afford insight into the different sorts of roles that different goods play in our life, and thus with a crucial choice between ways of thinking about what happiness is, a choice we may not have realized we had: in particular, a choice between the idea that happiness depends on the things in our life in regard to which we act and choose (our health, our wealth, our projects, and so on) and the idea that happiness depends on the wisdom with which we act and choose in regard to those things. As we shall see in the first section of this chapter, Plato defends the latter idea in the *Euthydemus*, as he argues that happiness depends on how we give each part of our life the right sort of place in our life considered as a whole. The idea of giving things the right place in our life I shall call, in the second section, the ‘rational incorporation’ of them, and I shall explore what it could mean for pleasure, in particular, to be rationally incorporated into a person’s life on this model of practical rationality.

1.1 Some Distinctions in Goodness: The *Euthydemus*

What makes a life happy? Obviously, answers differ. As Aristotle observed, people tend to give different answers depending on what they prize in their own lives, and even depending on what is going on in their lives at the moment.¹ But beneath these different answers lies a more fundamental difference between *kinds* of answers. Some answers make happiness depend on the good *things* in a person's life, or on such good things at least in so far as they have been given direction in one's life as a whole.² After all, money, for instance, cannot make you happy if it sits idle, or if you become miserly or prodigal in your use of it, say, but perhaps on this sort of view money can make you happy (or happier) if you are also virtuous in your use of it. Other answers, however, make happiness depend on the *intelligent agency* with which a person leads her life. On this view, the *money* itself has no power to make you happy at all, even if you use it virtuously; rather, what makes a difference with respect to happiness is the practical intelligence, or wisdom, with which you formulate attitudes and priorities with respect to money—the wisdom, that is, with which you give it a place in your life. In other words, on this view to say that money is good in the hands of a virtuous person is really to say that a virtuous person is good where money is concerned, and it is the goodness of that person, and not really the money at all, that goes toward making her happy. The view that happiness depends on the 'ingredients' added into one's life I shall call the *additive* conception of happiness; and the view that happiness depends on the intelligent agency that gives one's life the direction it needs to be healthy and flourishing, I shall call the *directive* conception of happiness.³

At stake between these conceptions of happiness is whether happiness is determined⁴ by what is the source of all proper direction in one's whole life, or

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4, 1095a20–6, I.5, 1095b14–6.

² It seems clear that every account of happiness that takes seriously the idea of one's life as a whole requires that the ingredients of one's life be given direction; notice that even Callicles, despite the crudeness of his hedonist conception of happiness, is committed to the idea that the pleasures one should want are those characteristic of the kind of person Callicles thinks is best (*Gorgias* 497d–499b). Consequently, the view that goods can make us happy even when they are totally directionless is the first view that Plato attacks in the *Euthydemus*.

³ This distinction (although not the terminology) is also found in the Stoics' claim that while we choose and pursue certain goods, our success depends not on our achieving them, but on our choosing and pursuing them in a rational way; famously, the Stoics say that our goal is like that of an archer, who has a target that he means to hit, but whose goal is not that an arrow should be in the target, but that he should aim and shoot well with respect to the target. However, this sort of distinction is seldom brought to bear on Plato. For the archery analogy see Cicero, *de Finibus* III.22–5, V.20–1; see also Cicero's report (*de Finibus* V.16–22) of Carneades' division of six views on the ultimate good into two basic camps, which correspond to what we have called the additive and directive conceptions of happiness.

⁴ I shall speak throughout of what 'determines' happiness, rather than of what 'suffices for' happiness; whether or not virtue is sufficient for happiness is, of course, a controversial issue, which I do not wish to bias in advance. A further advantage of looking for what determines happiness is that it focuses, as Plato does, on what is causally responsible for making a good life a good life, without

whether it is determined by some or other of the things that must be given a direction they do not give themselves. Clearly, this difference will make all the difference for understanding what happiness comes to. The additive conception will be quite familiar from the idea that happiness consists in pleasure, say, or desire-satisfaction, or even engaging in certain projects (including doing 'good deeds'), since all of those goods require the right sort of direction to be good, but none the less are often said to determine happiness. But, despite the great familiarity of the additive conception, further thought about the nature of value shows more problems for it than we might see at first. Or so Plato tells us in the *Euthydemus*.

In a notorious passage of the *Euthydemus* (278e–282d) Plato considers these two conceptions of happiness and argues in favor of the directive conception.⁵ Plato has Socrates start by noting two truisms: that we all want to be happy and do well; and that happiness depends on the good in our lives (278e). The difficult task is to determine what happiness and goodness are, and at this point Socrates considers two fundamental alternatives. First is the view that happiness comes about from *good things*, like wealth, good looks, fame, and good fortune:

'[Since] we all wish to fare well (*εὖ πράττειν*), in what way would we fare well? Would we fare well if we had many good things?' . . .

[Cleinias] agreed.

'Well then, what sorts of things are there that happen to be good for us? It doesn't seem very difficult, and doesn't take a very grandiose man to produce a ready answer—everyone would tell us that being wealthy is a good thing, right?'

'Yes, quite,' he said.

'And so also being in good health and being beautiful, and being nicely outfitted with other bodily goods?'

He concurred.

'But surely an influential family, and power, and prestige in one's own circles are, clearly, good things.'

He said they were. (279a1–b3)⁶

Moreover, as Socrates notes we do not simply want to have these things, but to *do* things with them; so this list can be extended to include *projects* and *undertakings* as well:

'So would it do us any good if we should only *have* these things, but were not to *use* them? For instance, if we had plenty to eat but didn't eat it, or plenty to drink but didn't drink it, would that do us any good?'

'Certainly not,' he said. . . .

assuming either that that cause 'achieves' happiness as a distinct goal or that that cause is itself constitutive of happiness (although I shall argue for the latter). Of course, I do not pretend that the locution 'determines' is at this point pellucid, but the discussion that follows can be seen as an attempt to cash it out much more precisely.

⁵ On the radical nature of Plato's shift in notions of happiness, cf. Annas (1999: 39f.); see also Chance (1992: 69).

⁶ Translations of *Euthydemus* are my own.

‘So, Cleinias, this would be enough to make someone happy: both to possess good things and to put them to use?’

‘That’s how it seems to me.’ (280b8–c3, d7–e3)

The idea here is straightforward enough: things like these, the ways that they increase our opportunities for undertaking projects, the projects they make possible, and even the projects themselves have their own sort of power with respect to happiness. On this view, what makes me happy is the fact that I have *these* things, that I am *accomplishing* things of *this* sort, and so on. This, of course, is the view I earlier called the additive conception of happiness, and here Plato recognizes its immediate attractiveness.

But Socrates does not stop there. He notes that when we think about these ingredients, we see that their *direction* matters. Socrates had also listed wisdom as a good,⁷ and it now turns out to be a very special good. This is because even *using* good things might do us no more good than simply having them but leaving them alone does (280b7–8). Rather, it depends on what we make of them:

‘So, Cleinias, would this be enough to make someone happy: both to possess good things and to put them to use?’

‘That’s how it seems to me.’

‘In what way?’ I said. ‘If someone should put them to *good* use, or even if he didn’t?’

‘If he puts them to good use.’

‘Well said!’ I said. ‘I think it will be more the opposite [of happiness] if someone were to put something to bad use, than if he were to leave it alone; the former is bad, while the latter is neither good nor bad. Or isn’t this what we say?’

He agreed. (280d7–281a1)

However, Socrates notes that this thought tends to shift the responsibility for our happiness away from ingredients in one’s life, and onto the intelligent *agency* that gives them direction in one’s life—that is, onto what Socrates calls knowledge, a form of practical wisdom:⁸

‘So,’ I said, ‘when it comes to using the things we said earlier were the good things—wealth, health, beauty—the correct use of all these sorts of things is knowledge, which leads and directs our behavior; or is it something else?’

‘It’s knowledge,’ he said.

‘So knowledge, it seems, provides for people not only good fortune but also good action, in all their possessing and doing.’

He agreed.

‘My God!’ I said. ‘Then do *any* of our other possessions do us any good without intelligence and wisdom (*φρόνησις καὶ σοφία*)? . . . The upshot of all this, Cleinias,’ I said, ‘is presumably that *all* of the things we said at first were goods—well, the account of them is

⁷ See 279c1–280b6; we shall return to this passage below. It is also important to note that in what follows I shall take ‘wisdom’ and ‘virtue’ to be more or less interchangeable, as it is generally acknowledged among scholars that Plato intends no real distinction between them in this passage.

⁸ Annas (1993: 59) notes that Socrates’ gloss of ‘knowledge’ in this passage—so foundational in Socratic ethics—as practical wisdom poses a serious challenge to the traditional view that Socrates is an ‘intellectualist’, reducing moral virtue to a knowledge that consists in the ability to give definitions, etc.

not about how they themselves, in their own right, are good by their very nature (*αὐτὰ γε καθ' αὐτὰ πέφυκεν ἀγαθὰ*), but rather it seems to be this: if ignorance should lead them, they're greater evils than their opposites, to whatever degree they are able to encourage the bad person who is leading them; but when intelligence and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods—although neither of them *themselves*, considered in *their own right*, are of any value at all (*αὐτὰ δὲ καθ' αὐτὰ οὐδέτερα αὐτῶν οὐδενὸς ἄξια εἶναι*).⁹

'Apparently,' he said, 'and as seems plausible, it is just as you say.' (281a6–b6, d2–e2)

This is a most interesting development: things and projects that we initially take the good life to consist in turn out not to have any value of their own after all, because none of them brings the *direction* that makes for a happy life. The value of these things, then, depends entirely on the direction that a wise agent gives them. So Plato contrasts things besides wisdom that need direction, with the wisdom which *is* the source of direction that our lives need. That is why Socrates says wisdom is good without qualification, and is what determines happiness:

'So what follows from what we've said? Isn't it this, that of the other things none is either good or bad, and that of these two, wisdom is good, and ignorance bad?'

He agreed.

'Well, then let's have a look at what's left,' I said. 'Since all of us desire to be happy, and since we evidently become so on account of our *use*—that is, our *good use*—of other things, and since knowledge is what provides this goodness of use and also good fortune,⁹ every man must, as seems plausible, prepare himself by every means for this: to be as wise as possible. Right?'

'Yes,' he said. (281e2–282a7)

Here Plato makes it clear that the key to happiness is found not in the goods or even the projects that form the 'ingredients' of a person's life, but in the *agency* of the person herself that gives her whole life direction and focus, and which therefore determines her happiness.

Notice that Socrates says in one breath that things besides wisdom are greater goods if wisdom directs them (281d6–8), and in the next breath that nothing is good except wisdom (281e3–5). This raises two very serious questions. The first, of course, is why we should think that nothing is good except wisdom. Although we shall see that the argument in the *Euthydemus* for this claim is importantly incomplete, none the less some of Plato's reasons for holding this view will emerge as we proceed more carefully through the passage, as will the value theory it appears to embody. And so for now I wish to draw our attention to the second question, which is how something can be a greater good than something else if it is not a good in the first place.¹⁰ Clearly, Plato's point is to distinguish a strict or proper sense of 'good' from a qualified or secondary sense, and to say that only wisdom is good in the strict sense, since only wisdom is good 'by its very nature' (see 281d8–e1). Consequently, Plato takes wisdom to have a radically different kind of value than anything else has: wisdom has not only a superior

⁹ The claim that knowledge provides good fortune is controversial, as Plato seems to recognize. I shall return to this issue below.

¹⁰ For comment, see Irwin (1992: 202–4); see also (1995: 74 f., 117–20); and Annas (1999: 44).

value but also a unique value that is built into its very fabric—it alone is good itself, by its very nature, and considered in its own right. But what exactly does that mean, and what exactly is this difference in goodness?

1.1.1 *Some distinctions in goodness*

We can get a better grip on this question by distinguishing certain basic value-theoretical categories within which such a question must be answered.¹¹ We can see these categories if we begin by distinguishing three queries we can make about anything of value:

1. *For what purpose is it valuable—for its own sake, or for the sake of something else?*
2. *Is it valuable in its own right, or must value be brought about in it?*
3. *Does it bring about value in other things, or does something else bring about value in it?*

The first issue concerns our *reasons* for valuing something: if we value something as a means to something else, then we say it has *instrumental* value, whereas if we value it for its own sake as an end, then it has *final* value.¹² Being healthy, for instance, is a final good,¹³ since we want it for its own sake, while taking medicine is a means to health, and thus an instrumental good;¹⁴ likewise, enjoying oneself is valued as an end, whereas money-making is valued as a means.

The second issue concerns the *source* or *location*, so to speak, of a thing's value: some things are good by their very nature; whereas other things depend on something else for their goodness.¹⁵ Things that are good by their nature are *intrinsic* goods—their goodness is self-contained, as it were, and does not rely on another source; things in which goodness must be brought about, on the other hand, are *extrinsic* goods. To capture this contrast, we can say that extrinsic goods are *undifferentiated*: they are neither good nor bad, until goodness or badness is brought about in them by the agents involved with them. A career, for instance, can occupy either the right or wrong part of one's life, and so goodness

¹¹ For the definitions of and distinctions between these categories, I am greatly indebted to Christine Korsgaard's seminal paper, 'Two Distinctions in Goodness' (1983). This is an important paper which ancient scholars have not sufficiently appreciated; e.g., as far as I can see the only other critic to bring Korsgaard's paper to bear on the *Euthydemus* is Lesses (2000: 351).

¹² See Korsgaard (1983: 170).

¹³ It goes without saying that something can be a final good without being a final end, in the eudemonist's sense.

¹⁴ Cf. *Gorgias* 467c ff. for Platonic examples of what we are calling instrumental and final goods. Cp. also Plato's claim at *Republic* II, 357b–d that things like pleasure are pursued for their own sake, which makes them final rather than instrumental goods. Plato also distinguishes there a class of goods that are valued in both ways (see also Korsgaard 1983: 185); I shall take it as given that there are such goods, but shall not need to discuss them here.

It is sometimes thought that the classification of final and instrumental goods, which Socrates introduces in his discussion with Polus in the *Gorgias*, ought to be aligned with the classification of goods in the *Euthydemus* (e.g. Vlastos 1991: 228–30). However, as we shall see the *Euthydemus* passage concerns quite a different distinction between goods (cf. Annas 1993: 56 f.; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 110 f.).

¹⁵ See Korsgaard (1983: 170).

must be *brought about* in one's career, and therefore careers are extrinsic goods. Of course, to give *your* career the right place in *your* life is to differentiate it as a good, and in this sense we can say that such an extrinsic good has become differentiated;¹⁶ still, an extrinsic good is never differentiated in its own right, since something else must differentiate it. In this way extrinsic goods are unlike intrinsic goods, which are not merely differentiated, but *differentiated in their own right*, by their very nature.¹⁷

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods can be made even clearer if we distinguish them from final and instrumental goods, with which they are often conflated.¹⁸ In particular, *extrinsic goods can be final goods*.¹⁹ Many things that need something else to make them good can still be valued for their own sake once they have been made good. So while a career that has been given the right place in one's life is an extrinsic good, this is *not* to say that it can be only an instrumental good, rather than an end or final good, as careers sometimes are.²⁰ Something is extrinsically good because of *where its goodness comes from*, and it is an end because of *how we value it* as having the goodness that it does, wherever that goodness comes from. Clearly, very many extrinsic goods will be final goods; moreover, since some extrinsic goods are final goods, not all final goods are intrinsic goods. Therefore, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods, and that between final and instrumental goods, are importantly different distinctions.²¹

One reason why people are often apt to conflate these distinctions, I think, is the mistaken assumption that when something depends on something else for its goodness (is extrinsically good), the thing it depends on must *always* be some

¹⁶ As Korsgaard (1983: 179) says, conditional goods whose conditions are met must be understood as 'real particulars: this woman's knowledge, this man's happiness [i.e. in Kant's sense of 'happiness'], and so on'.

¹⁷ Notice that intrinsic goods will all be final goods. More precisely, we should say that intrinsic goods will be final rather than instrumental goods, *in the first instance*. There is nothing to prevent an intrinsic good, such as virtue itself, from being valuable both finally and instrumentally (cf. *Republic* II, 357c–358a); still, intrinsic goods are to be valued primarily as final goods, and never as instrumental goods only (this is also, of course, the force of Kant's claim that persons are to be regarded as ends, and not as means only, *Grounding* 428 ff.). However, as we shall see, although all intrinsic goods are final goods, not all final goods are intrinsic goods. This is an important point, since these distinctions are very often run together.

¹⁸ Of course, one *might* identify intrinsic with final goods and extrinsic with instrumental goods on the basis of some theory about their equivalence, but in most cases this is due to mere carelessness; see Korsgaard (1983: 169–73).

¹⁹ See Korsgaard (1983: 172 ff., 180); see also Lesses (2000: 351). This is an important point to recognize, as readers sometimes mistakenly assume that since Plato (*Republic* II, 357b–d) says that pleasure is a *final* good (that we do not pursue it for the sake of something else), he must therefore think that it is an *intrinsic* good (that it must be good by its very nature).

²⁰ The relations between these categories of goods are complex and interesting. For example, although choosing a career is an instrumental good—we need to make the choice not for its own sake, but for the sake of surviving, etc.—it does not follow that the career we choose must therefore be an instrumental good; see Schmidtz (1994).

²¹ What would be a case of an intrinsic good? Interestingly, fewer examples of intrinsic goods—properly understood—present themselves than in the case of extrinsic goods. In fact, this is perhaps the most interesting fact about intrinsic goods; as I shall argue below, there is really only one thing that is intrinsically good, or could be, and that is wisdom.

further end that makes it valuable as a means.²² But there is more than one way of construing the dependence of one thing on another for its goodness. A meal, for instance, may be said to depend for its goodness on the skillful chef who made it, or it may be said to depend for its goodness on my hunger which it will satisfy. If one thing's dependence on another for its goodness were *always* of the latter sort, then all extrinsic goods would be instrumental goods, since the dependence relation must be understood *solely* in terms of means and ends. But that cannot be quite right: surely the fact that it takes good people to make careers good, and good chefs to make meals good, does not mean that good careers, or good meals, must be only instrumental goods; by keeping these distinctions separate, we can avoid that awkward conclusion, and avoid the mistaken conclusion that good careers or meals must therefore be intrinsic goods, when what we mean is that they are (or can be) final goods. So there must also be forms of dependence other than those that concern means and ends, and finding some other form of dependence would shed more light on the precise nature of intrinsic goods and their difference from extrinsic goods. And our discussion of the third issue will reveal exactly that further form of dependence.²³

The third question asks about a thing's *active or passive role* in the production of value: some things have the power to bring about goodness in other things; while some things must have goodness brought about in them by something else. A career, to continue our example, must have goodness brought about in it, whereas the practical intelligence of the one pursuing it brings about its goodness, as she gives it the right place in her life. We can capture this difference by saying that practical intelligence is *differentiating*: it is what brings about the goodness in other things, like careers, which are not differentiating, since they do not direct themselves. Goods of the former type are *unconditional* goods: their goodness is not conditioned by something else's bringing goodness about in them, but they are responsible for bringing about goodness in other things. Goods of the latter type are *conditional* goods, which have goodness brought about in them by unconditional goods.²⁴ Conditional goods are good depending entirely on how one behaves in relation to them, and unconditional goods are those by which one behaves well in relation to other things.

This distinction is clearly connected to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods.²⁵ But before discussing that connection, notice that the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods is apparent in Plato's distinction between wisdom and all other goods, which he construes as the difference between what directs well and what must be directed. Accordingly, some scholars have cast the distinction between wisdom and all other goods in

²² See also Korsgaard (1983: 171 f.).

²³ *Ibid.*, (182 f.).

²⁴ This distinction is familiar from Kant's claim (*Grounding*, 393 f.) that only the 'good will' is unconditionally good, because its goodness is not conditioned on anything else, while the goodness of everything else is conditioned on it, as the good will is what brings about goodness in everything else. Here we find the idea that it is one's rational agency that is the source of goodness in all things, since it is what gives other things good or bad direction.

²⁵ In fact, they are coextensive; see Korsgaard (1983: 178 f.).

the *Euthydemus* as a distinction between conditional and unconditional goods.²⁶ However, those scholars have *not* construed that distinction as I have done here. In particular, we must note three points about the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods that are often overlooked.

One is that unconditional goods, as we have seen, are so in virtue of their active role with respect to goodness.²⁷ It is sometimes said that a good that is always good—good on all occasions—is therefore an unconditional good.²⁸ But although an unconditional good is good all the time, the point of this distinction is not the *frequency* with which a good thing is good. For instance, something that is always instrumentally valuable would be a most remarkable instrumental good, but it would not therefore be an unconditional good,²⁹ since it is not a good that makes other things good.³⁰ An unconditional good is what *conditions* the goodness of other things. Moreover, treating the distinction as a distinction in frequency of goodness threatens to collapse the distinction altogether. A conditional good, after all, has been made good by an unconditional good, and thus has become differentiated; but once a conditional good has become differentiated as a good, there is no reason it should not always be good, and thus no reason why it should not be an unconditional good, after all. But even when a conditional good has become differentiated, there remains the difference in *role* between what brings goodness about and what has goodness brought about in it. An unconditional

²⁶ See esp. Vlastos (1991: 230 f.); Annas (1993: 57); and Lesses (2000), who suggests (352) that the unconditional goodness of wisdom may be the point of Socrates' saying that wisdom is good in itself at 281e1. See also Reshotko (2001).

²⁷ Kant makes a similar point in the opening lines of the *Grounding* (orig. 393): 'Intelligence, wit, judgment, and whatever talents of the mind one might want to name are doubtless in many respects good and desirable, as are such qualities of temperament as courage, resolution, perseverance. But they can also become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. The same holds with gifts of fortune; power, riches, honor, even health, and that complete well-being and contentment with one's condition which is called happiness make for pride and often hereby even arrogance, unless there is a good will to correct their influence on the mind and herewith also to rectify the whole principle of action and make it universally conformable to its end.' (*Grounding*, trans. Ellington 1993.) Although Kant's understanding of such things as 'courage' and 'happiness' in this passage raises familiar complications, especially in the context of ancient eudaimonism and virtue theory, we can easily note the root idea of a vast difference between the sorts of things that need to receive direction in order to be goods on the one hand and what gives those things their direction on the other.

²⁸ See Lesses (2000); Reshotko (2001).

²⁹ See Reshotko (2001), who claims that virtue is an instrumental good which is unique in *always* being instrumental with respect to our ultimate goal, and therefore an 'unconditional' good. On the surface, it may appear that Reshotko is claiming that some things can be both unconditionally good, *and* extrinsically and instrumentally good; but her usage of 'unconditional' is heterodox, and what she is in fact claiming is that there is never any circumstance in which virtue will fail to be instrumentally good. That instrumental goods should differ in this sort of way is, of course, most interesting, but we should note that it is *not* a point about unconditional goods, *strictly speaking*.

³⁰ See Korsgaard (1983: 193), who considers and rejects the view that conditional goods can become unconditional goods by being good in all contexts; the problem with this view, she says, is that it obscures the important differences in 'internal relations' between conditional and unconditional goods within the agent. Rather, a conditional good whose conditions are met is still a conditional good, because its goodness consists in 'its having been decently pursued'.

good is so not because of the ubiquity or frequency of its goodness, but because of its *active role* in the *production* of goodness in other things.³¹

This is why unconditional goods are differentiating. We may be able to speak of various ‘conditions’ under which all kinds of things may (fail to) be good, but when we speak of goodness full stop the fundamental distinction is that between what flows from the source of all goodness, on the one hand, and what is that source on the other.³² This is especially clear in the context of eudaimonism, where we must distinguish between the good things that one incorporates into one’s life in a rational way, and what it is that so incorporates them. At present we are speaking of conditional goods not in just any context, but in the special context of determining what makes something good as part of a person’s happy life. In this context, the conditions on something’s goodness are of a specific kind: since no thing or even project could ever make itself the right part of your life, just by itself, the condition on the goodness of things in your life is your

³¹ Lesses (2000: 356), for instance, says that ‘ideal friendship’—friendship between virtuous persons—is an unconditional good, since there is nothing to keep such a friendship from always being a good. However, even such friendship is still a conditional good, since it must become differentiated by the virtue of the friends, who make the friendship good. In fact, notice that such a friendship will also be an extrinsic good, since friendships require direction in order to be good; this does not, of course, keep such a friendship from being a final good, or end. This is an important mistake to avoid; indeed, on this line of reasoning Lesses argues that many goods besides wisdom are unconditional goods, and therefore that the ‘goods’ that Socrates concludes are not really good at all, must be only those goods he had specifically mentioned earlier in the passage, in order to leave room for other goods (such as ideal friendship) that are goods in the way that wisdom is (see Lesses 2000: 352). This reading lacks textual support, however, and flies in the face of Plato’s manifest intent in this passage to show that wisdom is a *unique* kind of good.

³² As Korsgaard (1983: 181) puts it, the unconditional good (for Kant, the ‘good will’) acts as ‘the source and condition of all goodness in the world; goodness, as it were, flows into the world from the good will, and there would be none without it’. This ‘flow’, she argues, transpires as the rationality with which one chooses with respect to a thing ‘confers’ value up on it, ‘as the object of a rational and fully justified choice. Value in this case does not travel from an end to a means but from a fully rational choice to its object. Value is, as I have put it, “conferred” by choice.’ (Korsgaard 1983: 182 f.) The unconditional good, then, is strictly speaking defined in terms of its role as an active, productive force in bringing goodness about in other things that have no goodness of their own (cf. Korsgaard 1983: 179 f., 183 f.).

Two caveats are in order. For one, it should be clear that appealing to this distinction between conditional and unconditional goods in the context of Platonic ethics does *not* commit one to the view that Platonic ‘wisdom’ is identical to Kantian ‘good will’. I shall claim only that they occupy broadly the same conceptual space in a specific context, namely that of the producer of goodness in other things through the rationality with which one acts. (For Kant, good will is, we might say, the flourishing of the rational self, whereas Platonic wisdom or virtue is the flourishing of the whole self, including what Kant calls the ‘empirical’ human nature. See also Sherman 1997: 15–20.) And, for another, although Korsgaard sometimes speaks of conditional goods (e.g. paintings) as things that are good only if certain conditions are met (e.g. only if the paintings can be viewed; see 186 f.), and unconditional goods as good in all circumstances (see, e.g., 178), this is not definitive of the basic distinction, but an application of it to extended sorts of test-cases (see 184). On the contrary, when she speaks of things as having value *as part of one’s life*, the condition that makes them good is their having been chosen, desired, and pursued in rational ways, the latter being unconditionally good. In such cases, the condition under which a conditional good is good, is in fact the unconditional good—choice and pursuit in accordance with right reason—that gives them their value in the first place (e.g. 180, 182 f., 190). This is a feature of the distinction that eudaimonists should certainly take advantage of.

giving them the right place in your life, that is, your desiring, choosing, and pursuing them in a rational way. In this context, then, the most fundamental distinction between unconditional and conditional goods is that between the wisdom of the agent who acts, and the things in regard to which the agent acts wisely—just as Plato says it is. This is because happiness is both a matter of what you *do* with your life, and a matter of what *you* do with your life.³³

Second, a proper understanding of conditional and unconditional goods further explains how extrinsic goods can be final goods. Some extrinsic goods will depend for their value on ends that they serve as means, but not all will. A wisely pursued career is an *extrinsic* good, since it depends on something else to make it good, but it can still be an end, since its goodness need not depend (or depend entirely) on some further end that it serves; it can depend instead on the wisdom with which it is pursued as an end. Conditional goods are extrinsic goods, and they can be ends, rather than means. In fact, the vast *majority* of ends in a person's life will be conditional, extrinsic goods; after all, *everything* in a person's life needs to be given direction by wisdom, and the dependence of these things on wisdom for their goodness does nothing to keep them from being valued for their own sake.³⁴

And third, 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. Understanding goodness as a function of something's role with respect to one's life and character, as opposed to a quality that something can simply *have*, just like that, shows that it is a mistake to think that conditional goods, however worth while they may be, somehow make one happy by virtue of what they are. Moreover, this fact also reveals the significance—and indeed the *necessity*—of making *virtue* the unconditional good: virtue is the intelligent agency that rationally incorporates all the dimensions of a life into a harmonious and integrated whole. Virtue is the unconditional good because it is the only thing that *could* be—it is *agency*, active and directive, and it directs in accordance with *right reason*; that is why virtue can play the appropriate *productive* role that unconditional goodness requires, and why it is on *virtue* that everything else depends for its goodness. It is not the case that virtue is part of a happy life only if it is made the right kind of part of one's life, since there is no way to make being the right kind of person the wrong part of your life.³⁵ A moment's thought shows why virtue—understood as the proper working of one's soul as

³³ Notice, then, that in the context of eudaimonism it is not enough to say merely that virtue is the condition on which other things can be good, but why virtue should be that condition—why, that is, virtue plays the special role that that condition plays. This point is very often overlooked, because, I suspect, the special nature of the conditional/unconditional distinction within the context of eudaimonism is insufficiently appreciated.

³⁴ It is therefore important to note that I do not share Vlastos's view that the only things valuable for their own sake are those that make a contribution of their own to happiness (Vlastos 1991: 207 f., 224 f.; cf., e.g. Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 103); I shall return to this below.

³⁵ As Aristotle puts the point, there is no need to bring a virtue into a mean, as it just is the mean (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.6, 1107a22–7). Notice, however, that we cannot say the same for 'virtuous projects', such as feeding the hungry; I shall return to this below.

a whole—must be this kind of good: virtue is not one thing among many to be incorporated into one's life, well or badly, but the thing that does the job of incorporating other things into one's life well.

These observations about conditional and unconditional goods have some important consequences. One is that conditional goods are coextensive with extrinsic goods. They are in fact two sides of one coin: extrinsic goods rely on something else to bring about goodness in them, and thus are conditional goods; and conditional goods are not differentiated in their own right, and thus are extrinsic goods, requiring differentiation from some other source. Another is that unconditional goods are coextensive with intrinsic goods. With respect to happiness, no thing, state of affairs, or project is good by its own nature, except for one's wise behavior in relation to all other things. Consequently, the only thing that could be good in its own right is the agency that directs our behavior according to right reason. Likewise, as we have seen such agency is the only thing that *could* be unconditionally good: agency is active and directive, and so is the only thing that could bring about the right kind of direction in all areas of a person's life, the only thing that could play the active, differentiating *role* of an unconditional good.³⁶

We can now understand the difference between the directive and the additive conceptions of happiness as follows. On the directive conception of happiness, the unconditionally good is what determines happiness: happiness depends on the wise agency with which one directs all the aspects of one's life, since it is on this agency that goodness in one's life ultimately depends. On the additive conception, however, conditional goods are what determine happiness: it may take wisdom in order for one's pleasures, desires, or projects to be good, but once they are good, they assume or reveal—somehow—their own power to make a person's life a happy one.³⁷ Moreover, we can also see how wisdom, on the directive conception, makes other things good: it does so by changing our attitudes, priorities, and actions so that we give other goods the right place in our life, in accordance with right reason.

³⁶ This, of course, is why Kant says that only the 'good will' is unconditionally good (*Grounding* 393 f.); and the details of Kant's thesis aside, we can surely appreciate the motivation behind the idea that the unconditionally good must be the *kind* of thing that the good will is, namely a form of wise agency.

³⁷ In a recent article, Dimas (2002) evidently tries to have it both ways: on the one hand, goods besides wisdom 'boost' happiness when directed by wisdom (the additive conception; see esp. 3 f.), and, on the other, success is internal to the very exercise of wisdom, which is constitutive of happiness rather than productive of some other benefit (the directive conception; 13 f.). Consequently, he is committed to the view that, somehow, both wisdom and other goods are involved in producing value, *and* that those other goods have no value themselves (10 f.); he reconciles this by claiming that, whilst wise behavior constitutes happiness, other goods do not merely provide opportunities, but opportunities that their recipients *certainly will* take—opportunities that those goods will 'induce' their recipients to take (16 ff.). This rather convoluted view is the result of trying both to make wisdom constitutive of happiness, and to give other goods some power of their own with respect to happiness. By contrast, Chance (1992: 69) notices and calls attention to the important shift in the *Euthydemus* from happiness as depending on *things*, to happiness as depending on the *wise use* of things. We cannot have it both ways.

1.1.2 The directive conception of happiness in the Euthydemus

Now that the distinction between the additive and directive conceptions of happiness is clearer, as are the fundamental value-theoretical categories underlying that distinction, we should focus on three features of Plato's discussion of happiness and goodness in the *Euthydemus* that make it clear he is arguing for the directive conception and rejecting the additive conception. First, although Plato lacks the technical terminology to distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic goods, he does grasp the distinction itself. Recall the following passage:

'... [A]ll of the things we said at first were goods—well, the account of them is not about how they *themselves*, in *their own right*, are good by their very nature (*αὐτὰ γε καθ' αὐτὰ πέφυκεν ἀγαθὰ*)... but when intelligence and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods—although neither of them *themselves*, considered in *their own right*, are of any value at all (*αὐτὰ δὲ καθ' αὐτὰ οὐδέτερα αὐτῶν οὐδενὸς ἄξια εἶναι*).'³⁸ (281d2–5, d8–e1)

Here Plato clearly distinguishes between different *sources* of value: things besides wisdom may be good, but they are never good in themselves, by their very nature. Since this is precisely the point of contrast for Plato between such goods and wisdom, which alone he says is good without adding any qualification (281e4–5), wisdom must be good by its very nature and in its own right—it must be *intrinsically* good—while all other goods are *extrinsically* good. By drawing our attention to this contrast, Plato is arguing that what determines happiness is the wisdom that has its own goodness and its own power to make other things good—that is, he is arguing for the directive conception of happiness.

Second, Plato focuses on wisdom as the key to happiness because of its *active, productive role* in bringing about goodness in all the areas of a person's life. This is why Plato tells us that wisdom plays a special role among goods, because all other goods depend on being 'used' properly in order to be good, while wisdom determines the goodness of all other things by 'using' them properly; only wisdom is *differentiating* of other things, and thus *unconditionally good*. Plato focuses on the directive conception of happiness, by drawing our attention away from the ingredients of one's life as the key to happiness, and onto the wise agency that gives one's life direction.³⁸

Here we also see how wisdom makes other things good. Although Plato compares wisdom to skills like carpentry, he also draws some important contrasts. For one thing, while other skills literally use things as tools or supplies, wisdom 'uses' things in quite a different sense. For while Plato speaks of how ordinary skills 'use' other goods, and use them well,³⁹ when he turns to knowledge and wisdom he glosses 'using' (*χρησθαί*) as 'leading' (*ἡγεῖσθαι*): 'the correct use of all these sorts of things', Socrates says, 'is knowledge, which leads

³⁸ This rules out, then, the view that wisdom makes other things good by using them as instrumental goods toward some purpose that is a final good, such as virtuous activity or even happiness itself. For the former view, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994), (2000a), (2000b); for the latter, see Reshotko (2001), and Irwin (1992), (1995), who identifies happiness with desire-satisfaction.

³⁹ See 280c1, 5, 280d3, 6, 280e2, 3, 5, 281a2, 3, 8.

and directs (*ἡγουμένη καὶ κατορθοῦσα*) our behavior' (281a8–b1), and Plato continues to speak of 'leading' when he describes the difference between wisdom and ignorance in handling the things in our life (281d6–e1). Plato gives this gloss on 'use' because wisdom 'leads and directs' not other goods themselves, but our *behavior* or *activity* (*τὴν πράξιν*) with respect to them (281b1). Unlike carpentry, which literally uses tools and materials, wisdom is a skill that directs *us* as we go about our lives; the 'materials' of this skill are not in the *first* instance money, health, or beauty, but *how we behave* with respect to money, health, and beauty.⁴⁰ Wisdom makes money good for its possessor, not by bringing about any change in the *money*, or even by pursuing or accomplishing some particular project with the money, but by bringing about a change in the *agent* where money is concerned. Wisdom is not one skill among many, but a skill of living, which puts every part of one's life together in a rational way.⁴¹

Wisdom makes other things good, then, by giving them the right place in one's life, a place that they cannot give themselves. For example, if Jack is especially good looking, his good looks may turn out good or bad for him; if he becomes vain, or manipulative, gets by with fewer talents, exploits sexual partners, and so on, he will be worse off than if he had been plain but sensible, honest, talented, and loving. So when Jack incorporates his looks into his vicious way of life, his looks are part of the wrong direction of his life. Now, we cannot say that Jack's good *looks* have made him worse off; rather, *Jack* has made *himself* worse off by giving his appearance the wrong place in his life.⁴² Consequently, the value of things like good looks, Plato says, is fluid (281b–d): value is not in the ingredients of one's life, but in how one puts together one's life as a whole; and so Plato says of such goods, 'if ignorance should lead them, they're greater evils than their opposites, to whatever degree they are able to encourage the bad person who is leading them' (281d6–7). Conversely, wisdom makes such things good by rationally incorporating them into one's life. My career, friends, and family do not determine or augment my happiness, if I am wise; *I* determine my happiness, by giving my career, my friends, and my family the right place in my life, so that my life becomes well lived where these things are concerned. That is why Plato says of such things 'when intelligence and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods' (281d8). Wisdom makes other things good, then, by making our behavior rational with respect to them. The right use of other goods, Plato says, is the rational control of ourselves.

⁴⁰ It is, of course, simpler (if less precise) to make this point by saying that wisdom directs a person's wealth, etc., as Plato does at 281d.

⁴¹ Cf. F. White (1990: 126). *Con.* Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 109), (2000a: 143), (2000b: 84–7), who argue that wisdom deals with other goods by using them as instrumental goods for the pursuit of virtuous projects (e.g. feeding the hungry), and by arranging one's circumstances so that such instrumental goods will be available. The wise person will surely make such uses of other goods, but this cannot be the whole story, as by itself it does not account for the fact that wisdom is in the first instance a skill that directs one's *self* with respect to other goods.

⁴² And notice that a person can make that sort of mistake with anything: possessions, a career, even friends and family, and *even* 'good deeds' like feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless—one can give *any* of these things the wrong place in her life.

Finally, notice that on this understanding of wisdom as a skill, the goodness of one's life consists in the *exercise* of that skill in one's life—one's living one's life in a rational way—rather than in what wisdom secures or accomplishes. Consequently, the directive conception motivates Plato's claim that success consists in the very exercise of wisdom. According to Plato, the success of wise activity is completely *internal* to the activity; or, as Socrates says:

'Wisdom,' I said, 'surely *is* good luck (*Ἡ σοφία δὴπουν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, εὐτυχία ἐστίν*)—even a child would know *that!*'

He was surprised; after all, he is still so young and naïve. Recognizing that he was surprised, I said, 'Don't you know, Cleinias, that *aulos*-players have the very best of luck when it comes to playing a song for the *aulos* well?'

He agreed.

'And so,' I said, 'for masters of letters, when it comes to reading and writing?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, do you think that anyone has better luck with the perils of sea than those who are wise about seamanship, on the whole?'

'Certainly not.'

... 'So,' I said, 'do you think that you'd have the very best luck by acting with a wise person, rather than an ignorant one?'

He agreed.

'Therefore, it is wisdom that makes people have good luck, in every case. I mean, surely wisdom wouldn't ever go astray in any way, but must always act correctly and have good luck—otherwise, it wouldn't be wisdom.'

We ended up agreeing (I don't know how) that, in summary, the matter is this: when there is wisdom, the one who has it has no further need of good luck. (279d6–e6, 280a4–b3)

According to Plato, if you have wisdom, you do not need to tack on any goods of fortune in order to be successful, because wisdom *is* good fortune (*σοφία . . . εὐτυχία ἐστίν*, 279d6).⁴³ Plato's claim that a wise captain succeeds at sailing⁴⁴ cannot be that a wise captain would never let himself be exposed to peril or could always overcome it; wisdom is neither omniscience nor omnipotence. But the wise captain, even in perilous conditions, can still succeed at *sailing well*, as an intelligent, skillful, and prudent captain would sail. Moreover, Plato says that that sort of success is all the success one ever needs, since with such success there is 'no further need of good luck' (281b2–3).⁴⁵ On Plato's

⁴³ Con. Irwin, (1992: 205 ff., 211 ff., 214 f.), (1995: 67 ff., 76 f., 117 ff.), cf. (1979: 141, 194, 223), who argues that on Plato's view wisdom is sufficient, but not necessary, as an instrument for success.

⁴⁴ Actually, Plato says that the wise captain succeeds 'on the whole' (*ὡς ἐπὶ πᾶν*, 279e6). With this premise so qualified, we would need a further premise to conclude that the wise captain sails successfully, just in virtue of sailing skillfully. This, I think, is the reason for Socrates' remark that he does not know how he and Cleinias arrived at that conclusion (280b1); thus, while Plato is *offering* this view of success here, I do not think he is fully *articulating* it here. I shall return to this below.

⁴⁵ Con. Brickhouse and Smith (2000b: 80), who claim that good luck in this passage is twofold, including both those good things that one cannot control, and those good things that one can; all that Socrates means, they say, is that there is no need to add the *latter* kind of good luck to wisdom. However, there is surely no textual support for this idea in the *Euthydemus*, and in fact Socrates seems to reject such a view, as he says that when wisdom is present, *no* added good luck is needed (*οὐτῶ τοῦτο ἔχειν, σοφίας παρουσίας, ᾧ ἂν παρή, μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας*, 280b2–3). If Plato's view in the

view, 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.

This view of success is possible only on the directive conception of happiness. If our success in life is always available, so long as we act wisely, then happiness must depend not on the things that we secure and accomplish, but on the wisdom with which we behave where they are concerned.⁴⁶ And it is for this reason that for Plato there is only *one* unconditional good: intelligent agency, or what Plato calls wisdom. Wisdom is the only thing differentiated as good just in its own right, and the only thing differentiating with respect to other things. Plato’s argument, then, is that wisdom is the only unconditionally good thing, because only wisdom could have the power of intelligently directing one’s life as a whole, so that wisdom alone has the power to determine happiness.

It seems clear, then, that in the *Euthydemus* Plato is defending the directive conception of happiness against the additive conception, since he makes happiness depend on what is good in its own right and productive of all other goodness, which he says is wisdom, or intelligent agency. The directive conception of happiness explains why Plato says in the *Euthydemus* that only wisdom is good by its nature, and not made good by something else. It explains why wisdom is a skill, since wisdom brings about goodness in other things. It explains why things besides wisdom are not good in their own right, since they are conditional goods relying on wisdom to bring goodness about in them. It explains why things besides wisdom, even when they have been made good, are none the less powerless with respect to happiness, since they are conditional goods that have no such power. It explains how wisdom directs, in the first instance, not the circumstances of our lives, but our behavior and our attitudes in response to those circumstances. And it explains why wisdom is successful in its very exercise, since happiness depends on the rationality with which one acts.⁴⁷

Euthydemus is that there is a form of good luck that wisdom itself lacks, he certainly is doing all that he can to conceal it, as he says merely that with wisdom there is no further need of good luck, *simpliciter*.

⁴⁶ Recently, however, Brickhouse and Smith (2000*b*: 85–7) have argued that success is always available to the wise, *and* that success consists in accomplishment rather than mere exercise, by arguing that wisdom judges what accomplishments are possible given the resources at hand. Fair enough, but the more we take this line seriously, the more we are pushed toward seeing the key to happiness as the rationality with which one acts, rather than in accomplishing specific types of action, such as exhorting one’s neighbors to righteousness, or giving to the needy (what they call, in general, ‘beneficent activity’, (1994: 109), cf. (2000*a*: 143), (2000*b*: 86). I discuss this view in the next section.

⁴⁷ At *Laws* I, 631b–d Plato again seems to suggest an account of goods similar to that in the *Euthydemus* when he distinguishes ‘human’ benefits like health, beauty, physical strength, and wealth from ‘divine’ benefits like good judgment, rational self-control, justice, and courage. For he claims that the former depend on and look toward the latter, and that the latter include and thus ensure the former. This suggests the view, as in the *Euthydemus*, that human ‘benefits’ are not good in themselves, but serve as ‘matter’ for proper use, where it is that use itself that is good. We see this again at *Laws* II, 661a–d, in the Athenian’s argument that conventional goods (health, beauty, wealth, etc.) are not good *simpliciter*,

1.1.3 The additive conception of happiness: some alternatives

The fact that the directive conception of happiness makes sense of Plato's claim that wisdom is success is especially telling. Alternative accounts of how wisdom makes other things good tend to suppose that it does so by using those things to bring about other things, which are the things that happiness really consists in. Notice first that such alternatives are versions of the additive conception, since they make happiness consist (in whole or in part) in conditional goods that wisdom has put to use and which then acquire their own power with respect to happiness. And second, none of them—*because* they are versions of the additive conception—can take Plato's thesis about wisdom entirely seriously, since on the additive conception success *cannot* be the exercise of practical wisdom alone, but must consist in something that wisdom secures or accomplishes. I shall consider here three alternative accounts of how wisdom is related to happiness in the *Euthydemus*: first, the view that happiness consists in noble pursuits that wisdom makes possible; second, the view that happiness consists in the satisfaction of desires that wisdom makes it possible to satisfy; and third, the view that wisdom determines happiness, but conditional goods none the less make further contributions of their own to happiness.

Some scholars explain how wisdom makes other things good by focusing on the notion of 'use' in skills that use materials and tools, arguing that wisdom uses things like wealth as instruments to achieve other goals. Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith offer one such view, on which goods besides virtue are instrumental for virtuous activity. On their view, money, for instance, is a good for the virtuous person, who uses it as a means to what they call 'beneficent activity', such as exhorting one's neighbors to righteousness, as in Socrates' case, or giving to the needy.⁴⁸ So as a hammer has value in so far as it facilitates a carpenter's activity, things besides virtue have value when they facilitate virtuous activity. Virtuous activity and everything else, on this view, differ as final and instrumental goods, respectively.⁴⁹

but are valuable to just and pious people, and a curse to unjust people. However, he also claims there that conventional evils *are evil* for just people, and conventional goods *are good* for just people. But we need not suppose this to mean that conventional goods and evil are good and evil in their own right (see also Annas 1999: 42), but only that things like health and strength are helpful for the just, but not for the unjust (and likewise, *mutatis mutandis*, for things like sickness and weakness). For things like sickness hold back the just in a way that they do not hold back the unjust, since being held back is a hindrance to be avoided only if one is held back from good action. Nor is this to maintain that things like health are necessary for happiness, since what is necessary for happiness are not such goods themselves, but the place one gives them (or their opposites) in one's life. *Con.* Bobonich (1995: 138), who suggests that health may be part of what contributes to the happiness of the wise and part of what contributes to the unhappiness of the unwise (say, by facilitating more unwise behavior).

⁴⁸ Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 109), (2000b: 86), cf. (2000a: 143). Irwin (1992: 205–13), (1995: 117 f.) also makes goods besides virtue (and even virtue itself) instrumental goods, but says that they are instrumentally valuable inasmuch as they are useful for desire-satisfaction, which on his view constitutes happiness. We shall turn to Irwin's view below.

⁴⁹ Actually, Brickhouse and Smith capture this value-theoretical distinction as a distinction between what they call 'dependent goods' and 'independent goods' (see esp. 1994: 103 *et passim*).

Note that this view would explain both why virtue has a different kind of value from other things, and what it means for virtue to ‘make’ other things good by ‘using’ them. And surely there is no denying that many goods besides wisdom will be good because of their instrumental value for virtuous purposes; money is a ready example. But why should we think that this is *the* difference—or even the main difference—between wisdom and other goods? After all, it is difficult to see how things like pleasure might be *instrumentally* valuable at all, and it is extremely difficult to see how things like health, friends, and family are to be *only* instrumental goods that one uses to further virtuous projects (would it be virtuous in the first place to treat them as such?).⁵⁰ Glossing the difference between virtue and other goods as the difference between final and instrumental goods cannot capture all the ways that a skill of living constructs a good life.

But, aside from this problem, this view also presses the notion of ‘use’ too far, effectively ignoring Plato’s gloss on ‘use’ in the case of wisdom as ‘leading and directing our behavior’ (*ἡγουμένη καὶ κατορθοῦσα τὴν πράξιν*, 281b1). Plato’s point is that whereas a carpenter’s tool is a hammer, say, the wise person’s ‘tool’—what he ‘uses’ or directs—is actually *himself*. In that case, the things that the wise person acts in regard to can be either instrumental *or* final goods. The central issue is not how he uses them to accomplish some other goal, but how he puts his life together with respect to them.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, notice that this view conflates the thesis that virtue consists in virtuous *activity* with the thesis that virtue consists in virtuous *projects*. As Brickhouse and Smith correctly note, Plato holds that one is to be called happy because of what he does, and not merely because of some inert but admirable state of his soul.⁵¹ In this sense, ‘virtuous activity’ is used synonymously with ‘virtue’, the addition of ‘activity’ serving only to clarify that by virtue we understand a specific psychic constitution which is essentially

However, it is not entirely clear exactly what the latter distinction is, since it often seems to straddle both the extrinsic/intrinsic distinction and the instrumental/final distinction. Consider their definition of an independent good as ‘a good in virtue of nothing other than itself’, and of a dependent good as ‘a good in virtue of its contribution to or employment by some good other than itself’ (1994: 103). Consider also such statements as ‘anything other than wisdom that is good has its goodness dependent on the agent’s wisdom’ (2000a: 138); this may be saying that such things are good for the sake of wisdom, or that they have their goodness instilled in them by wisdom (and their treatment of the dependence relation seems to go both ways). This ambiguity is especially unfortunate since extrinsic goods can be final goods; note also that ‘intrinsic’ is treated as the opposite of ‘instrumental’, at (1994: 104). Their distinction between ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ goods, then, is not adequately sensitive to the value-theoretical categories that we need to distinguish. However, their comment (2000b: 84 f.) that on their view things like good looks, when not required for virtuous action, have no value at all strongly suggests that their concern is the distinction between instrumental and final goods.

⁵⁰ See also *Republic* II, 357b–c, *Gorgias* 467c. See also Bobonich (1995: 112–16) for criticism of such a narrow conception of use.

⁵¹ Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 114), citing *Gorgias* 507b5–c5. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5, 1095b30–1096a4, who also rejects a ‘static’ conception of virtue as an account of happiness.

practical and active.⁵² However, from this observation about virtue they conclude that

Socrates drives home his point, not by arguing merely that the soul of the good person is more orderly than that of the intemperate person, but by showing that the good person always *does well*. What qualifies the good person as being ‘blessed and happy’ is the fact that he or she succeeds in his or her actions.⁵³

But from the fact that happiness is active rather than static, it does not follow that happiness must consist in specific types of projects—‘beneficent activity’—that must come off successfully in order for one to be happy.⁵⁴ So although the wisdom that Plato has in mind in the *Euthydemus* is clearly a form of *practical* wisdom—it is not a state which might act, but a *skill* with which we *do* act—none the less Plato nowhere suggests in the *Euthydemus* that that activity must be some special type of project to be completed, as opposed to the activity at a more general level of living one’s life in a rational way. Plato seems to think of ‘doing well’ not as completing some noble project but as behaving in a rational way, whatever one is doing, and however uncooperative external circumstances may turn out to be.

In fact, in order to take seriously Plato’s account in the *Euthydemus* of wisdom and success, we have to think of wisdom in terms of how one *behaves* in acting, rather than in terms of what one *accomplishes* in acting.⁵⁵ Recall Socrates’ claim that wisdom itself is not only a form of success (279d6), but is also all the success one could ever need: ‘when there is wisdom, the one who has it has *no further need of good luck*’ (μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας, 280b2–3, emphasis added). But of course the outcome of every project depends on external circumstances,⁵⁶

⁵² It is also important to note that it is in this sense that I shall intend the phrase ‘virtuous activity’ when it appears in this book. It is especially important to keep in mind that I do not intend by this phrase to speak of the activity characteristically associated with a virtue (e.g. as running into a burning building is often associated with courage), as if one could engage in ‘virtuous activity’ by doing what a virtuous person does, but not on the basis of the kind of internal states from which the virtuous person does it (see also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4). To engage in virtuous activity, then, is to act from a virtuous character. ⁵³ Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 114), emphasis in original.

⁵⁴ Again, Carneades’ distinction between views placing the greatest good in the right kind of *aiming*, and views placing the greatest good in the right kind of *outcome*, is instructive here; Cicero, *de Finibus* V.16–22.

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that these two ways of construing virtue as activity correspond to two readings of a notorious passage of the *Apology* (30a7–b4), as saying either that virtue makes good things like wealth, or that virtue makes things like wealth good. Brickhouse and Smith (2000b) defend the former reading, which is in line with their view that virtue needs to produce such goods in order to carry out its characteristic projects. Plato’s account of wisdom as identical to success in the *Euthydemus*, however, clearly seems to favor the view that virtue makes things good, since the account of wisdom and success requires that success be a matter of how one acts, rather than what one accomplishes with the cooperation of circumstances beyond one’s control. (On the latter reading of the *Apology* passage, see Annas (1999: 49 and n. 58).)

⁵⁶ Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 114–17) consider and reject the idea that virtue may be a skill of adapting to the circumstances at hand, on the grounds of *Republic* I, 335b2–e6, which says that virtue must always benefit and never harm others, and on the grounds of *Apology* 38a1–8, which depicts Socrates’ divine commission to improve his neighbors. However, the point of the *Republic* passage is not that the virtue consists in constant beneficent projects; the point is rather a modal one, that virtue

even in the case of a wise person who exercises what control he has in arranging for those circumstances that make his projects possible, and even if he undertakes only those projects that seem possible given his present circumstances.⁵⁷

It is important to remember at this point that *all projects—even beneficent projects—are conditional goods*, since all projects can take the wrong place in one's life. I do not do well to feed the hungry, or exhort my neighbors to righteousness, if in doing so I deprive my own children of the time, attention, and guidance they need from me as a parent, say, and which I am obliged as a parent to give them.⁵⁸ Projects require direction from a holistic skill of living that grasps all of one's priorities and values and puts them together in the right sort of way. Projects, then, are undifferentiated; and while they *become* differentiated as good when one engages in them in the right way, they are still conditional goods. Conditional goods never become unconditional goods, even when they have been differentiated, for to be a conditional good is to be dependent for goodness on an unconditional good. Wisdom, on the other hand, is unconditionally good, because it is a holistic skill that puts projects together *so that* they can be virtuous projects. And this is why it is so important to distinguish the projects we engage in wisely from the wisdom with which we engage in them: the directive conception of happiness makes happiness depend on the wisdom with which we engage in projects, while this version of the additive conception makes happiness depend on the projects themselves—and for that reason cannot take seriously what Plato says about wisdom and success.

Neither can the view that virtue is instrumentally valuable for, but distinct from, happiness. Terence Irwin defends one such view: since our common-sense⁵⁹ conception of happiness requires that one have no frustrated desires, but since one

is such as to benefit, and never such as to harm (cp. the analogous Stoic claim at Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* VII.103; Stobaeus, *Anthology* II.5d). Moreover, from the fact that Socrates (or anyone) has a special commission, and even ought to take great trouble to make sure that he can fulfill it, it does not follow that he cannot be happy if circumstances prevent him from carrying it out; nor do Brickhouse and Smith demonstrate that it does. This is to say that Socrates has something to aim at, not that his happiness requires a certain outcome from his aiming.

⁵⁷ See Brickhouse and Smith (2000b: 83 f.). Brickhouse and Smith claim, for instance, that 'even when it is an exotic disease that must be diagnosed and treated, virtue results in health' (2000b: 84); and also, 'if one is in a position to get the best use possible from the resources one has, one will also be in a good position to use one's resources in such a way as to produce other resources one needs' (2000b: 86 f.). But, of course, this raises many questions: What if there is no doctor available for the virtuous person to bring in for diagnosis and treatment? What if the disease is too rare to be diagnosed? What if no treatment exists? And so on. Accordingly, they qualify their thesis that virtue guarantees a high level of control over one's circumstances with the caveat that 'what action constitutes noble action is crucially dependent upon the circumstances the agent finds herself in, which are, in turn, dependent upon the agent's assessment of what can be put in the service of noble action' (2000b: 85 f.). They try to retain the success of wisdom, then, by arguing that if one makes the best use of available resources, then one will be able to use them to get the resources one needs for success (2000b: 86 f.). Even so, they surely cannot maintain that wisdom is a guarantee of success in their sense (see 2000b: 87), as man is yet to discover how to *make* circumstances cooperate with his endeavors, however modest those endeavors may be.

⁵⁸ Nor do I see how even a divine commission to do so would change this fact.

⁵⁹ For the special emphasis that Irwin places on such considerations, see Irwin (1992: 208 f., esp. 213); see also (1995: 68, 106).

cannot always control the circumstances necessary to satisfy the desires one may happen to have, Socrates must base his belief that wisdom suffices for success on the thesis that the wise person adapts her desires to the circumstances at hand, so that she is always guaranteed of having only those desires that she actually can satisfy.⁶⁰ On Irwin's view, wisdom is a special kind of good because only wisdom can *guarantee* satisfaction of desires; all other goods are good only in so far as they are generally useful, but not strictly necessary, for desire-satisfaction.⁶¹

On this view, wisdom is instrumentally valuable for desire-satisfaction,⁶² just as all other goods are, but is of greater instrumental value than any other good. Of course, the view that all goods besides happiness (or desire-satisfaction) are only instrumentally valuable will inherit all of the difficulties that plague the view that all goods besides wisdom are only instrumentally valuable, which we discussed above. It also faces a number of special problems. For one thing, on this view wisdom has the same *kind* of value—instrumental value—as all other goods, and this thesis is most pallid in comparison to the clearly *radical* difference that Plato says holds between wisdom and all other goods.

More important, this view also fails to take seriously Plato's point about wisdom and success. As Irwin concedes, while this view enables Socrates to defend the sufficiency of wisdom for success, a serious complication arises on this view for the claim that wisdom is *necessary* for success, since there could in principle be a vicious set of desires that it is feasible enough to satisfy. Accordingly, Irwin concludes that Socrates must have overlooked this fact about his thesis.⁶³ He must have overlooked it indeed, as in the *Euthydemus* he claims not only that wisdom is both sufficient and necessary for success but also that wisdom *is* success, and all the success one needs. In fact, on Irwin's view, Socrates' claim that wisdom is success must be not merely over-ambitious but patently false, since *desire-satisfaction* is success, while wisdom is distinct from and (at best) sufficient for desire-satisfaction.

Irwin's view illustrates how the additive conception places a gap between a person's wisdom and a person's success, which must be filled by some *further* good that wisdom secures, such as noble accomplishments or, as in this case, desire-satisfaction. But Plato perceives no such gap in the *Euthydemus*. Now Plato clearly realizes that he needs to say more about how wisdom could be the same thing as success—he does, after all, go out of his way to have Socrates concede that he does not know exactly how he arrived at that conclusion

⁶⁰ See Irwin (1992: 205 ff.), (1995: 117 ff.), cf. (1979: 194, 223). Cp. Tenkku (1956: 73), who attributes to Socrates the view that 'he who has least desires may be satisfied and consequently happy'.

⁶¹ Irwin (1992: 205–13), (1995: 117 f.).

⁶² See Irwin (1992: 211 f.), (1995: 67 ff.). Irwin (e.g. 1995: 67, cf. 1979: 141) often bases the instrumentality of virtue on the fact that Socrates believes both that we do all for the sake of happiness (*Euthydemus* 279a ff.), and that if we choose something for the sake of something else, then we do not choose it for its own sake (*Lysis* 220a–b). However, as Lesses (1985: 172) rightly notes, the latter claim in the *Lysis* covers only *distinct* objects of pursuit, and thus implies nothing about objects which are pursued for the sake of objects which they *constitute*. Nor, of course, does *Euthydemus* 279a ff. give any support to the idea that happiness is the only final good.

⁶³ Irwin (1992: 214 f.), (1995: 76 f.). See also Gosling and Taylor (1982: 74 f.).

(280b1)—but what is clear is that he *does* believe *that wisdom is success*, and we should be able to take that thesis seriously, even if we find that it stands in need of further articulation and defense. However, the additive conception of happiness is *formally incapable* of taking such a claim seriously, since it makes happiness depend on something besides wisdom itself that wisdom brings about. If Plato holds any version of the additive conception, then his silence about the gap between wisdom and success is not merely odd, but simply inexcusable and indeed disingenuous, since it is his declared aim in the *Euthydemus* to investigate what happiness really consists in.

But perhaps this is too hasty. Perhaps there is a way to take Plato's claim about success seriously while maintaining the additive conception after all. Gregory Vlastos argues that wisdom makes other things good because, if one is a wise (virtuous) person, then one will be happy, although goods besides wisdom can increase the wise person's happiness. On this view, virtue may be able to bring about happiness, but such happiness will still admit of further increases when other sorts of goods are added in. Virtue, then, unleashes the power of other goods to make you happier, if only in small ways, so that with them one might achieve not merely happiness, but *complete* happiness.⁶⁴

On Vlastos's view, conditional goods are like salt in one's soup: both have to be added in the right sort of way, but once they're added in properly one improves your soup and the other your life, entirely by its own power and nature (after all, *I* don't make my soup saltier, the *salt* does), and they fail to do so only if one makes some positive *mistake* about them. Thus wealth, or physical beauty, or prestige, we might say, has a life-improving power of its own, although its power is unleashed only when certain other conditions are met. On this view, a virtuous person's life becomes happier as wealth, or beauty, or prestige is added; they themselves improve one's life, even if some people bungle things so badly that these goods are no longer able to do for them what it is otherwise in their natural power to do.⁶⁵ In a word, on this view the meeting of the conditions on a conditional good do not

⁶⁴ It is therefore important to note that while Vlastos sometimes speaks of virtue as the 'condition' under which other goods are good, he does *not* mean that virtue is an unconditional good in the strict sense. Rather, he means that other goods have just the sort of life-improving value that conventional thought takes them to have, but only if one is a virtuous person. For a discussion of this aspect of Vlastos's view, see Annas (1999: 44), who argues persuasively that Plato's aim in the *Euthydemus* is to deny of such goods precisely this sort of conventional value: 'if conventional goods add to the happiness of the virtuous person in a conventional way—add to her happiness in their own right—then Plato would be switching around between radically different ways in which conventional goods and evils can play a role in virtuous and vicious lives.'

⁶⁵ It might be possible to read Aristotle as defending this account of conditional goods—which, in J. Solomon's translation (1984), he calls 'natural goods'—at *Eudemian Ethics* VII.15: 'A good man, then, is one for whom the natural goods are good. For the goods men fight for and think the greatest—honour, wealth, bodily excellences, good fortune, and power—are naturally good, but may be to some hurtful because of their dispositions.' This might suggest that natural goods are good in their own right, in a completely conventional sense, if only something (such as vice) does not obstruct them; in that case, they would not need to be given any special, positive direction in order for them to be goods, although certain kinds of direction may be able to thwart their goodness. I am not persuaded that this *is* in fact Aristotle's view, but I raise the possibility of such a reading only to clarify the sort of view in question. I thank Mark LeBar for bringing this passage to my attention.

make the agent good where that thing is concerned, but *unleash* the goodness that that thing naturally has, its natural power to add to one's happiness.

One advantage of this view, it seems, is that it makes the difference between wisdom and other things a radical one, since only wisdom can determine happiness. Happiness has many ingredients, and among them is wisdom, but wisdom still is not one ingredient among many. Another is that it explains how one might make choices among things, none of which can determine happiness: although health, for instance, cannot make one happy itself, it can make a wise person happier than if he were wise but ill, and thus is worth choosing. And this view also seems to have the great merit of positing no gap between wisdom and happiness, which preserves the spirit of Plato's claim about the identity of wisdom and success. On Vlastos's view, wisdom suffices for happiness, although other goods may be able to increase that happiness.

However, on closer inspection Vlastos's view turns out to have none of these advantages. For one thing, on Vlastos's view it turns out that all good things—not only wisdom—have some power of their own with respect to happiness. But in the *Euthydemus* Plato goes to great length to show that the value of things conventionally called 'good' is actually fluid—they can actually be *bad* things for a vicious person to have—and that they do not have the power with respect to happiness that conventional thought attributes to them. By contrast, on Vlastos's view, while conventional thought about value is mistaken in the case of vicious people, it must have been right all along when it comes to the virtuous; consequently, goods besides wisdom have no power with respect to happiness for vicious people, and yet have a straightforward power with respect to happiness for virtuous people—the power to increase their happiness.⁶⁶ This view seems convoluted in the extreme: somehow, things Plato says have no power with respect to happiness turn out to have some such power after all, since it is there for wisdom to unleash.

Interestingly, Vlastos does not say *how* wisdom unleashes that power. He does not see the difference between conditional and unconditional goods as a difference in how goodness is brought about. Rather, on his view, if the possession of wisdom is a materially necessary condition for the goodness of health, say, while there are no such necessary conditions on the goodness of wisdom, then health is a conditional good, and wisdom an unconditional one. The difference, then, is simply a difference in *when* wisdom and health are good, and not in *why* wisdom and health are good in different ways. But, in that case, it is not clear *why* wisdom should have a special role with respect to happiness, nor *why* it should be necessary for the goodness of other things. Those other things turn out to have conventional value, after all; why then should they not make some improvement to the unhappy lot of vicious, foolish people? And if we do not account for wisdom's power with respect to happiness in terms of its active role in producing goodness, why should *wisdom* be the determining condition for other goods, and why should *it* be unconditionally good itself? Yet as soon as we understand the

⁶⁶ See Annas (1999: 44).

distinction between conditional and unconditional goods as one of active role, and thus come to have the much-needed answers to these sorts of questions, it is no longer clear how a conditional good could have its own power with respect to happiness to be unleashed in the first place.⁶⁷ Vlastos's view, then, cannot make out the difference between wisdom and other goods after all. Here the directive conception does better: virtue is the unconditional good because it is the only thing that can play the reasonable, active role of the unconditionally good.⁶⁸

Moreover, Vlastos's view is neither plausible nor necessary as an account of how we choose among things that do not determine happiness. Vlastos argues that Plato must allow things besides wisdom to have some power with respect to happiness, in order to explain why, in Vlastos's colorful example, a wise person would have a reason to choose a clean bed over a filthy one.⁶⁹ But notice how odd it is to think that the reason one would choose to spend the night in a clean bed rather than a filthy one is that the cleanliness of one's bed will make a difference with respect to the happiness of *one's life as a whole*. Many things may hang on sleeping in one bed versus another, but presumably the tenor of one's very existence is not one of them. Of course, Vlastos recognizes that such low-level cases may strain our intuitions about happiness, and so he focuses on more monumental goods, such as freedom from a gulag. But this does not change the fact that Vlastos's claim applies across the board to all goods besides virtue, including less-than-monumental goods of the very sort that Socrates himself focuses on. And why shouldn't the reason for preferring a clean bed to a filthy one, and freedom to a gulag, be exactly what it seems to be—that filthy beds are nasty, and gulags are awful places? On the directive conception, this is just what we can say. The difference between wisdom and other goods is a difference in unconditional and conditional goods, and thus a difference in what does and what does not determine happiness. But of course even conditional goods, such as physical comfort, hygiene, and freedom, can be valued and even prized entirely for their own sake, since the distinction between conditional and unconditional goods is simply different from the distinction between instrumental and final goods. There is no puzzle about how we should choose between other things, even if wisdom is all that determines happiness.

⁶⁷ See also Annas (1999: 42): '[Conventional goods] can, presumably, encourage and sustain virtuous activity by facilitating virtuous action, but they do not add to the happiness of the life of the virtuous in their own right. . . . They can't produce or remove happiness in their own right; only virtue and vice can do that.'

⁶⁸ It is not enough, then, merely to point out that virtue has a unique role with respect to happiness; we must also show what it is about virtue that gives it this special role. This point is frequently overlooked: scholars recognize that virtue has a special role with respect to happiness, but very few offer an account of why it should be *virtue*, rather than something else, that should have this special role. Of course, it sounds very edifying to say that virtue has this role, but as Epicurus pointed out we are not entitled to edifying-sounding claims about, merely on the grounds that they sound edifying ('Those who place [the highest good] in virtue alone and do not understand what nature demands—transfixed as they are by the luster of the word ["virtue"]—will be set free from the greatest error if they should consent to listen to Epicurus,' Cicero, *de Finibus* I.42, my translation). We have to argue for such claims, and that means showing exactly *what* kind of power virtue has, and exactly what that power *does*.

⁶⁹ Vlastos (1991: 215 f.).

Vlastos's view that a thing's goodness must be explained in terms of its own contribution to happiness is motivated by his belief that eudaimonism entails that all goods are good in virtue of conducing to happiness.⁷⁰ Vlastos appeals first to *Symposium* 205a2–3: 'Of one who wants to be happy there is no longer any point in asking, "For what reason does he want to be happy?" This answer is already final.'⁷¹ Vlastos concludes that all things that are desirable for their own sake, that is all final goods, 'must be components of happiness, for this is the only way in which they could be desired both for their own sake (as they are said to be) and for the sake of happiness (as they must be, for [according to *Symposium* 205a2–3] happiness is "the question-stopper"—the final reason why anything is desired . . .)'. Of course, from the fact that there is nothing beyond happiness for the sake of which one could desire happiness, it does not follow that everything we desire for its own sake must be a component of happiness. The missing premise, according to Vlastos, comes at *Gorgias* 499e7–8: 'The good [= happiness] is the final end (*τέλος*) of all our actions; everything must be done for its sake.'⁷² And so Vlastos argues that if (1) happiness is the only end beyond which nothing can be desired—the only thing that is *all* that we want—and if (2) everything else we desire we desire for the sake of that end, then (3) everything besides happiness that we desire must make some contribution to our happiness. But Plato is not committed to premise (2); all that he says in *Gorgias* 499e7–8 is that our actions with respect to instrumental goods must in the end be explained in terms of *some* final good we intend to achieve by them, in other words, that the instrumental value of one thing entails the final value of some other thing.

Here again the directive conception of happiness does better: money, say, and physical comfort cannot do anything to make a person happy, under any conditions, but one's *attitude* toward money and physical comfort can make a tremendous difference in one's happiness. And, on this account, there is nothing to keep a person with the right sort of attitude toward money and physical comfort from preferring plenty to poverty, or a clean bed to a filthy one, for its own sake. Eudaimonism requires that our particular ends be unified by our final end of living a happy life. It does not prevent those particular ends from being ends in the first place.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Vlastos (1991: 207 f., 224 f.). See also, e.g. Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 103).

⁷¹ Trans. Vlastos (1991: 203).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 224 f. The insertion of '[= happiness]' is Vlastos's.

⁷³ Indeed, consider the view of Seneca: "Well, then," says the opposition, "if virtue is not impeded by good health and repose and freedom from pain, will you not seek these things?" Of course I shall, not, however, because they are goods but because they are in accordance with nature and because I shall avail myself of them judiciously. And what good will they involve? Simply this: proper choice. When I put on clothing that is appropriate, when I walk as I should, when I dine as becomes me, it is not the dinner or the walk or the clothing that are good but my own program of observing in every act a measure which conforms to reason. I must add that choice of becoming clothing is a desideratum, for man is by nature a tidy and well-groomed animal. Becoming clothing is therefore not a good per se, but the choice of becoming clothing is; the good lies not in the thing but in the quality of selection. Our modes of action, not the things we do, are honorable' (*Letter to Lucilius* 92.11–12, trans. Hadas 1958). On Seneca's view, it makes sense to prefer presentable clothing to shabby clothing (*ceteris paribus*) not because presentable clothing has any value of its own, but because it is better for beings like us

Perhaps the greatest problem for Vlastos's view, however, lies in his assumption that happiness can be incomplete, and can be improved and increased by degrees, if only small ones. But happiness is what we predicate of a life when it is a success, and when nothing is missing;⁷⁴ indeed, that is the point of Plato's making it a truism that happiness is always the final answer to questions about what we want: happiness is the final thing we want, because there is nothing beyond it that we *could* want—that is what happiness stands for. If beyond happiness there is something further—'complete' happiness, say—then happiness cannot be the 'question-stopper' that Plato says it is, after all. Consequently, by specifying that by 'happiness' he means that beyond which nothing more could be wanted, Plato has misled us, just as Socrates has misled Cleinias by holding out virtue as the key to our complete and final end of happiness.⁷⁵ As Cicero said, happiness is by its nature complete: 'What can be less commendable', he asks, 'than [the view] that someone should be *happy*, but not happy *enough*? Whatever is added to something that is enough, is too much; but no one is *too* happy, so no one is happier than happy.'⁷⁶

to choose things that suit our dignity; it makes sense, then, to prefer presentable clothes to shabby clothes, even though the clothes have no value of their own, because the *choice* of the presentable clothes is good, and is in accordance with right reason. See Russell (2004: 250 ff.); *con.* N. White (1990), who, in my opinion, is not sufficiently sensitive to this line of thought in Stoicism. We shall return to this line of thought in Ch. 5; for further discussion of the idea that happiness as the final end is consistent with pursuing other final goods that do not conduce to happiness, see Russell (2003).

⁷⁴ See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, 1097a24–b24.

⁷⁵ Likewise, Reshotko (2001: 333 and n. 19) claims that, for Socrates, virtue suffices not for happiness, but for the greatest degree of happiness possible given one's circumstances, or what she calls 'maxhap'. This view replaces talk of happiness as potentially incomplete with talk of happiness-like states that do not, in fact, qualify as happiness on account of their incompleteness. But this is no solution of the problem; again, Socrates claims that wisdom is *success*, and not something success-like, but not in fact success, which on this view turns out to require the cooperation of external circumstances after all—precisely the thesis Socrates is at such pains to reject in the *Euthydemus*. Reshotko's view, we should notice, seems to be motivated by the assumption that happiness is a goal to be reached by virtuous action in much the same way that a finish line is a goal to be reached by running; in both cases, the goal is something that one may be said to approach by degrees. But it is not at all clear to me how happiness could be an independent goal that one might achieve by means of a certain kind of living, as opposed to a goal that consists in a certain kind of living.

⁷⁶ My translation; see Cicero, *de Finibus* V.81–3. Cicero is responding to Antiochus' defense of the view that while virtue is sufficient for happiness, it is not sufficient for *complete* happiness, which requires other goods in addition. Likewise, Vlastos (1991: 216 n. 64) argues that since one unhappy person can be unhappier than another (citing *Gorgias* 479d, *Euthydemus* 281c2), it must follow that happiness can admit of degrees as well. But, while Vlastos is aware of the similarity of his view to the one Antiochus discusses (n. 63), he shows utterly no concern over Cicero's objection. Modern critics have been no more convinced than Cicero was; see Annas (1999: 43 f.); Bobonich (1995: 108–11); and Irwin (1979: 248 f.).

This fact explains, I think, why Brickhouse and Smith go to so much trouble to make all goods besides virtue instrumental goods. As we have seen, they hold the additive conception of happiness inasmuch as they make happiness dependent on wise activity rather than on the practical wisdom with which one acts, and on the additive conception goods are to be understood as good in virtue of their contribution to happiness; but since they also hold that happiness is complete, the only contributions to happiness that goods besides wisdom could make would have to be instrumental, and not constitutive.

Consequently, notice that on Vlastos's view the gap between wisdom and success resurfaces. At first sight, Vlastos appears to avoid that gap, since he allows wisdom to determine happiness. But the gap has merely been moved: instead of a gap between wisdom and happiness, we now have a gap between wisdom and *complete* happiness, to be filled by various 'mini-goods' and their curious power to make happiness complete. And so Vlastos's version of the additive conception inherits the same fatal problem as all the others: it requires a gap between wisdom and success that Plato insists is not there.

Thus our choice between an additive and a directive conception of happiness comes down to a choice between happiness as depending on what wise agency secures through activity—the ability to engage in certain kinds of activity, or the ability to satisfy desire, or the availability of goods besides virtue, or indeed pleasure—and happiness as depending on the wise agency with which we engage in activity. Plato's view that wisdom is success clearly declares for the latter, and only the directive conception of happiness can tell us exactly why that should be so: wisdom is success because happiness depends on the practical intelligence that puts one's life together.

1.1.4 Success in the Euthydemus

We should also notice, however, that Plato's presentation of the idea that wisdom is the same as success in the *Euthydemus* is seriously incomplete in some important ways. First, as we have seen, Plato makes a point of showing Socrates concede that he does not know exactly how he arrived at that conclusion about wisdom and success (280b1). And Plato has good reason to be reserved in his confidence in this conclusion, since it is one thing to say that the wise are lucky as a rule (*ὡς ἐπὶ πάντων*, 279e6), and luckier than the unwise, and quite another to say that with wisdom, there is no further good luck *at all* that one could need for success (*μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας*, 280b2–3). We need more of an argument to the effect that the very exercise of wisdom is its own success than Plato offers in the *Euthydemus*—and, I think, Plato knows it.⁷⁷

Furthermore, it is clear, to be sure, that Plato thinks that success lies in the very exercise of wisdom, and not in some other state of affairs that wisdom (generally) accomplishes. However, it also seems that his skill analogy works against him here, since skills like carpentry are valuable in virtue of what they produce; and so it is not clear how the idea that wisdom is constitutive of happiness could be made from within the analogy of wisdom to a productive skill. Plato is aware of this problem as well, as he draws attention to it in the second protreptic in the *Euthydemus* (288d–293a; see especially 291d–293a) without resolving it.⁷⁸

Finally, without further explication of the notion of 'wisdom' Plato may be in danger of collapsing the directive conception of happiness into the additive

⁷⁷ It is for a reason, after all, that Brickhouse and Smith (2000b: 80) distinguish luck that concerns what one *can* control, from luck that concerns what one *cannot* control.

⁷⁸ For further discussion of this problem, see Annas (1993).

conception. Wisdom, we may worry, is too narrow—too ‘intellectualist’—to take us all the way to an account of happiness in a human life as a whole.⁷⁹ We are, of course, rational beings, but we are also affective beings, and our emotions, our desires, our passions, our pleasures, and our pains are parts of our lives as well. To leave them out of account is to give an account of happiness that may be too pallid to be recognizable *as* happiness. And it is also to account for happiness by appealing to one dimension of one’s life, as the additive conception does, rather than to the integration and harmony of the whole of it. The directive conception, by contrast, focuses on wisdom as the determinant of happiness because only wisdom is capable of integrating and harmonizing the whole of one’s life. But in the end the directive conception will be no more holistic than the additive, unless it can be shown that wisdom is not something local and narrow—merely one dimension of one’s life among many—but rather subsumes the whole of one’s self. And that is no easy matter.

I wish to explore these issues in the following chapters. I shall argue in the next chapter that Plato does manage to articulate and defend his identification of wisdom with success after all, in the *Gorgias*, although I do not believe that he will be able to capture this point from within the skill analogy. Moreover, in the next chapter and those that follow, I shall look more closely at the relationship between wisdom, or virtue, and pleasure, arguing that Plato does understand wisdom as holistic in the right way for happiness, subsuming pleasure and the other aspects of the agent’s humanity within itself.⁸⁰ In order to understand the holism of Plato’s conception of wisdom and virtue, we must look more closely at how virtue ‘incorporates’ parts of one’s life, and one’s pleasures in particular, into one’s life as an integrated, harmonious whole.

1.2 Virtue, Pleasure, and the Good Life: ‘Rational Incorporation’

As we have seen, practical intelligence makes one happy by making one whole: in every area of her life, the wise person has the outlook, attitudes, and priorities that it makes sense and is healthy for a fulfilled, reasonable human being to have. Practical intelligence, in other words, rationally incorporates all the dimensions of one’s life into a healthy and integrated whole. We have already seen quite a bit that is important about rational incorporation, and given a number examples of it in relation to things like wealth, careers, physical beauty, family relationships, and so on. But although we have spoken of certain ‘external’ goods (e.g. wealth) as well as ‘bodily’ goods (e.g. good looks), there is an important class of goods missing: what we can call ‘psychic’ goods, such as cleverness, wit, and good memory, as well as

⁷⁹ I thank Bill Artz for pressing this point in an earlier version of this chapter.

⁸⁰ However, in the final chapter I shall discuss Plato’s failure at developing a unified philosophical psychology to account for the holism of wisdom that his account of the good life requires.

such affective states as emotions, desires, pains, and pleasures. These are important, since they turn out to have a rather special relationship to virtue.

For our purposes, there is a most notable difference between psychic goods and other kinds of goods: whereas rational incorporation—what Plato calls ‘good use’, or ‘leading and directing’—of external and bodily goods is giving our behavior the direction it needs with respect to those goods, psychic goods will often be constituents of our behavior itself. Directing my behavior with respect to wealth, for instance, will be a matter of how I act and prioritize with respect to wealth, as well as how I formulate desires for wealth, how my emotions change with gains or losses in wealth, ways in which I enjoy gains in wealth and am pained at losses, and so on. Bodily and external goods, then, are the kinds of things that you can direct in this way or that, but your pleasures and your emotions are always parts of the *you* who does the directing.⁸¹

It is therefore important to understand *how* psychic goods such as pleasure are rationally incorporated into a good life—especially because such goods are conditional goods, and thus depend for their goodness on the direction they take in one’s life. Many philosophers have said that although we reject certain pleasures, we never reject them as the pleasures that they are, but only on account of the consequences that might follow them.⁸² But this cannot be quite right, because pleasures require a direction, and without the right kind of direction certain pleasures can become evils. Our estimation of a shoplifter or her actions, for example, surely does not improve if we learn that the shoplifter takes enormous pleasure in her shoplifting, is proud of it, finds other people’s losses amusing, or what have you; on the contrary, such pleasures only make the shoplifter worse. This is because, as we saw in the introduction to this book, a person’s pleasures tell us a great deal about what type of person she is—for better *or* worse. If pleasure were always good, and forgone only when it would prove a bad bargain, we should be *less* troubled by the pleased shoplifter than by an indifferent one, and much less than by a regretful one: if pleasure were intrinsically good, then the world should be a better place, if only by a little, for the pleasure that the shoplifter experiences in shoplifting, even if the world would be better off, all things considered, if she stopped shoplifting altogether. But of course just the opposite is true: the fact that she enjoys shoplifting as worth while makes her behavior only that much worse.⁸³ Here, pleasure understood as an affective capacity for finding value in things around us has

⁸¹ We would also need to distinguish from these goods the goods of having people that we love in our lives; for such people, it seems, also become ‘part’ of us in a way that wealth cannot—however much I come to love money, it can never become a ‘second self’ for me (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.4, 1166a31–2)—but then again they are not literally the sorts of ‘parts’ of us that the parts or dimensions of our psyche are. And there are yet more distinctions between conditional goods that a complete account would need to draw. But I am unable to pursue the point here.

⁸² A *locus classicus* of this view is Bentham’s discussion of the ‘four sanctions’ in the first chapter of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

⁸³ Cp. Aristotle’s remarks on the ‘self-indulgent’ person, who does what she sees is wrong, but does so by choice and without regret, and is therefore worse and less corrigible than the incontinent person (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.4, 1148a13–7, VII.7, 1150a16–32, VII.8).

been incorporated into a person's life in the wrong way, since this person is finding value in the wrong sorts of things, and that is a serious strike against the quality of her life considered as a whole. The oft-heard refrain that no pleasure is rejected for its own sake seems plausible only as long as we restrict our thinking to pleasures as sensations (does it always seem plausible, even then?), but of course that restricted way of thinking does not take us very far in thinking about pleasure in our life as a whole.⁸⁴ But if we think of pleasure as a kind of affective attitude that ascribes value to the object of the pleasure—an attitude that has real ethical significance—then it seems quite clear that we do reject certain pleasures *as* the pleasures that they are, and even praise some pains as the pains that they are.⁸⁵

Notice also that the direction that pleasures need is a direction that must be brought to them by something else. They do not direct themselves. For this reason, it is also particularly implausible to think of psychic conditional goods as having their own life-improving power, even if only in certain kinds of lives; for saying so suggests that there is some direction that they take on their own. But although our pleasures and our emotions always go in some direction or other, they do not take any particular direction under their *own* power. They do so only as part of the character of which they have become part. Since it is the direction within one's character that determines whether such goods actually do us any good or not, we cannot say that they do us either any bad *or* good under their own power. It takes vice to make them bad, *and* it takes virtue to make them good;⁸⁶ there is no such direction that they have by default. Such pleasures, then, will be good or evil depending on the direction the agent gives them in her life. Consequently, such pleasures are conditional goods, and require rational incorporation—and rational incorporation of a rather special type, since such pleasures are themselves kinds of attitudes and behaviors, rather than merely things in relation to which we behave and form attitudes.

How, then, does virtue give good direction to a psychic good? If rationally incorporating something like wealth means directing my behavior with respect to wealth, how do I rationally incorporate my pleasures, which are *part* of my behavior? Virtue directs a psychic good, I suggest, by making that good a part of virtue itself. While a person has a virtue with respect to wealth when wealth is

Of course, we might defend the view that pleasures can be 'bad' only in the sense of having painful consequences by claiming that our repulsion by the shoplifter's pleasure is due to the fact that such behaviors *tend* to lead to more painful consequences later on. And, as far as I am concerned, anyone who is satisfied with such a just-so story is welcome to it.

⁸⁴ We shall further explore the inadequacy of this conception of pleasure for eudaimonism in Ch. 2, as we examine Socrates' refutations of Callicles' hedonism in the *Gorgias*.

⁸⁵ e.g. consider Aristotle's claim that a feeling of shame or remorse is an admirable thing in a young person who has erred; *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.9.

⁸⁶ And I think that a good case can be made for reading Aristotle in this way too, even in the passage of the *Eudemian Ethics* I mentioned above: we identify things that are good by nature for human beings by determining what things are part of the life of a person whose nature has been fulfilled and actualized, for only in such a person do these goods take on the right sort of direction in a human life.

given the right sort of place in his or her life, wealth itself cannot become part of his or virtue itself—it is not part of the psyche at all, and thus not part of the good order of one’s psyche. But, as we have seen, other dimensions of our lives are not like that. When pity or fear is given the right sort of place in a person’s life, not only does that person have a virtue *with respect to* pity or fear, but she also has a virtue *of* pity, or a virtue *of* fear. In other words, to give your emotion of pity the right place in your life is not to develop the right attitude toward something distinct from the ‘you’ that deliberates about such things, but rather to develop a sense of pity that is itself virtuous, pitying the right people, for the right reasons. This is, moreover, why we say that wisdom is neither static, nor a matter of accomplishing noble projects. Wisdom is active, but its function in the first instance is to unite all the dimensions of one’s life by rationally incorporating them; this is why the ‘good use’ of these things is wisdom ‘leading and directing our behavior’. Some dimensions of our life wisdom incorporates by transforming our attitudes with respect to them, and others it incorporates, I argue, in so far as they are the very attitudes that it transforms.

This is, I think, an especially plausible model for understanding how wisdom rationally incorporates pleasure into a good life. Pleasure is a good within the self, and when transformed by reason, it becomes not merely directed by virtue, but a part of one’s virtue. My capacity for finding enjoyment and fulfillment in the things that I do needs to be given direction by right reason if I am to live well, and reason directs this dimension of myself when I take pleasure in the sorts of things that it is good that I take pleasure in. In that case, my pleasure becomes one of the ways in which I find value in things, people, and activities around me, taking joy in the value and importance that it is reasonable for me to place in them. So understood, we can see that pleasure is always a part of a person’s character, for better or worse; and this seems plausible, since, as we have seen, few things tell us more about people’s characters and who they are than the sorts of things that they find rewarding and enjoyable. In a virtuous person, pleasure is part of good character. Good character is one that is directed by reason, but here the ‘directing’ is a matter of reason’s suffusing all the practical dimensions of the self—emotions, desires, pleasures, pains, attitudes, priorities, and so on—with intelligence and harmony, so that they are not so much ‘controlled’ by reason, as they are harmonized, transformed, and indeed ‘informed’ by reason.

The details of this account of pleasure and the good life are still far from clear, but it is this account that I shall develop and articulate in the following chapters, as we find it unfolding in a number of Plato’s dialogues. For that reason, I turn now to the *Gorgias*, where Plato develops the directive conception of happiness in just those respects in which the *Euthydemus* is incomplete. In the *Gorgias* Plato shows, for one thing, how virtue can be both productive and valued for its own sake, by showing how virtue can be its own product, and, for another, how virtue, so understood, can be the same as success, or happiness. This is an especially important result, as it seems to settle recent debates over whether Plato

in the *Gorgias* allows for happiness to consist in the pleasure that virtue brings. For to affirm that he does is to assume a gap between virtue and happiness to be filled by pleasure, and, as we shall see, this is precisely the sort of gap that Plato in the *Gorgias* argues is not there. After the *Gorgias* I shall turn to Plato's *Phaedo*, where I argue that the idea of a conditional good does real work. In particular, it is only by understanding pleasure as a conditional good that we can make complete sense of all that Plato says about pleasure in the *Phaedo*. And in the chapters that follow (Chapters 4–7), we shall look more closely at the rational incorporation of pleasure, the relation of pleasure and virtue to each other and to happiness, and the shape of the psychological model that Plato needs in order to sustain his account of pleasure and its place in the good life.