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Socrates the Epicurean?

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1. A Conflict in the *Republic*

At the end of *Republic* I Socrates persuades Thrasymachus that the just and virtuous person will do well, live well and be happy (353e4–354a4). Socrates at once admits that the conclusion is premature, and that he ought to have examined the nature of justice before deciding whether or not the just person is happy (354b1–c3).

The rest of the *Republic* might seem to promise a fuller defense of Socrates' claim that justice secures happiness. For Glaucon and Adeimantus claim to "renew the argument of Thrasymachus" (358b7–c1), with a better statement of his objections to justice; and we expect them to ask Socrates for a better defense of the thesis maintained against Thrasymachus.

We do not get what we expect. Glaucon and Adeimantus do not ask Socrates to show that justice by itself makes the just person happy. They ask him to show that justice by itself makes the just person happier than the unjust (361c3–d3). And it is this comparative claim that Socrates defends in the main argument of the *Republic*, in Books II–IX.

The thesis of Book I and the thesis of II–IX are vitally different. For the second thesis leaves open a possibility that the first thesis excludes. It is possible for A to be happier than B even though neither A nor B is happy; and so when Plato argues that the just person is in all circumstances happier than the unjust, he does not imply that the just person is happy in all circumstances.¹ He allows

¹ I translate *εὐδαιμονία* by "happiness." This use of the comparative marks one difference between *εὐδαιμών* and the English "happy"; the comparative suggests that *εὐδαιμών* has the logic of "straight" and (significantly) of "complete."

that happiness may have components that are not infallibly secured by justice. Though the second thesis is hard to believe, it is easier than the first.

Plato probably sees the difference between the two theses. In Book X he claims that justice leads to happiness because it normally secures honors, rewards and other external benefits in this life, and invariably secures the favor of the gods (612a8–614a8). Here Plato assumes that justice by itself does not secure happiness, and rejects the strong thesis defended at the end of Book I (the “sufficiency thesis”).

Plato has a good reason for making Socrates in Book I defend the sufficiency thesis. On this point as on others, Book I presents a Socratic argument for comparison and contrast with the rest of the *Republic*. For the early dialogues clearly commit Socrates to the sufficiency thesis.² In rejecting it Plato rejects a central element of Socratic ethics.

In later antiquity the interpretation of Socrates' and Plato's views about virtue and happiness remained a controversial matter. Chrysippus criticizes Plato for doing away with justice and any other genuine virtue by recognizing such things as health as goods (Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiiis* 1040d). On the other hand, the later Stoic Antipater wrote a book arguing that Plato maintained the Stoic thesis that only the fine is good (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* iii, Antip. 56). Among later Platonists Plutarch seems to accept Chrysippus' interpretation of Plato, and so finds that Plato and Aristotle agree on this point against the Stoics. On the other side Atticus ascribes to Plato a view much closer to the Stoic position, and so contrasts him sharply with Aristotle: “He [sc. Aristotle] deviated from Plato first of all on the common and greatest and most decisive point, by failing to observe the measure of happiness and failing to agree that virtue is self-sufficient for this [sc. measure]” (ap. Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 794c6–d2).³ “While Plato shouted and proclaimed on each occasion that the most just person is the happiest, Aristotle refused to allow that happiness follows on virtue unless one is fortunate in family and physical beauty and other things” (794d10–13). Here Atticus assumes unwisely that Plato's acceptance of the comparative claim commits him to acceptance of the sufficiency thesis.

Albinus is equally unwary; he reasonably finds in the *Euthydemus*

² One way to explain the parallels between *Rep.* I and the Socratic dialogues is to regard it as a Socratic dialogue. I think this solution is unnecessary, and that some evidence of self-consciousness in *Rep.* I suggests that Plato wrote it deliberately as an introduction to the *Republic*. See part 11 below.

³ Edited by E. H. Gifford (Oxford 1903, 5 vols.). Atticus' views are discussed by J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977), p. 25.

a commitment to the Stoic thesis that only the fine is good, but claims that Plato has demonstrated this most of all in the whole of the *Republic*; "for he says that the man with the knowledge we have mentioned is the most fortunate and happiest," even in adverse circumstances (*Eisagōgē* 181. 7-9).⁴ "Most fortunate" is Albinus' addition to the *Republic* (perhaps under the influence of *Euthydemus* 282c9), and he assumes that the *Republic's* comparative claim is equivalent to the sufficiency thesis.

This conflict in the interpretation of Plato is implicitly associated with different views on the relation of Plato to Socrates. It is highly probable that the Stoics recognized, as Cicero did (*Parad.* 4), the Socratic origin of their views on virtue and happiness. The Stoics are partly inspired by the Cynics, and the Cynics by Socrates. But Chrysippus' debt to Socrates does not lead him to ascribe the Socratic view to Plato; nor does his dispute with Plato lead him to ascribe the Platonic view to Socrates. Chrysippus' care in distinguishing Socrates from Plato contrasts sharply with Cicero's argument for finding the Socratic position in Plato; Cicero appeals to the *Gorgias* and the *Menexenus*, raising no question about whether these present Plato's views (*Tusc.* V. 35-36).

I want to suggest that Chrysippus is right in his interpretation of Plato and right to distinguish Socrates from Plato. But to see why Plato disagrees with Socrates we must see why Socrates believes the sufficiency thesis. If we can find his reasons we will perhaps also see the claims that Plato could not accept.

2. Socrates' Claims

To show that the sufficiency thesis is Socratic we can appeal to earlier dialogues:

1. In the *Apology* Socrates affirms that a better person cannot be harmed by a worse (30c6-d5), and that no evil at all can happen to a good person, either in life or in death (41c8-d2).
2. In the *Crito* Socrates affirms an essential premise of his argument about disobedience and injustice, that living well, living finely and living justly are the same thing (48b8-9). Since living well is the same thing as living happily, Socrates assumes that anyone who lives virtuously (i.e. finely and justly) ensures his happiness.
3. In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues that the virtuous and just person acts finely and does well, and thereby is happy (507b8-c7).

⁴ Edited by K. F. Hermann in *Platonis Dialogi*, vol. 6 (Leipzig 1884). See Dillon, p. 299.

4. In the *Charmides* Socrates asks what sort of knowledge temperance is. If it is merely the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance, it will not produce happiness, since only the knowledge of good and evil will do that (173d3–5, 174b11–c3). It is assumed that the knowledge of good and evil ensures happiness; and if virtue is identical to that knowledge, virtue must ensure happiness.
5. The same assumption is made in the *Euthydemus*. Though we find it hard to describe the product of the kingly craft, we take it for granted that there is a craft securing happiness.⁵

This evidence commits Socrates fairly clearly to the sufficiency thesis. The first three passages are the clearest. The last two are less clear; for the crucial assumption appears in an argument that runs into difficulties, and we might say that Socrates wants to expose the assumption as a source of the difficulties. But the first three passages show that he cannot easily reject the assumption.

3. Questions about Happiness

To see why Socrates accepts the sufficiency thesis we must consider especially his conception of happiness. His views on virtue are comparatively clear, since inquiries into the nature of virtue are his main concern in the early dialogues. It is remarkable, however, that he never thinks it is worth asking what happiness is. A search for a definition would apparently be rather useful; but he never seems to feel the need of it. The *Republic* displays some of the same insouciance. At the end of Book I Socrates admits that his conclusion is premature; he cannot claim to know that justice ensures happiness until he has said what justice is. But he says nothing similar about happiness; and the *Republic* never offers any explicit account of the nature of happiness.

To see where Socrates and Plato fail we must turn to Aristotle's discussion of happiness in *Eth. Nic.* I. Aristotle notices that people all identify happiness with the highest good, but disagree about what happiness is (1095a17–22), and offer different candidates—virtue, honor, pleasure and so on. But he thinks these disputes are tractable because we can agree on something intermediate between the very general claim about the highest good and the disputed claims about candidates for happiness. His solution of the disputes proceeds through three stages:

⁵ Socrates assumes that *ἥτις ἡμᾶς ἀνήσει*, 288e1–2, is equivalent to *ἦν ἔδει κεκτημένους ἡμᾶς εὐδαιμόνας εἶναι*, 289c7–8; cf. d9–10, 290b1–2, 291b6, 292b8–c1, e5.

1. Formal criteria for the highest good—completeness and self-sufficiency (1097b20–21).
2. A conception of happiness meeting these criteria—activity of the soul according to virtue in a complete life (1098a16–18).
3. A candidate for the happy life—the life according to the specific actions and states of character described in the *Eth. Nic.*

These three stages make disputes more tractable. Even if we do not initially agree on the successful candidates we can agree on formal criteria, and use our agreement to form a conception of happiness that allows us to reduce our initial disagreement about candidates, by asking if they conform to a conception of happiness that meets the formal criteria. Aristotle practises this method on the lives of pleasure, honor and virtue to show that each of them is an unsuccessful candidate.⁶

Even this rough idea of Aristotle's method of argument suggests what is missing in Socrates and Plato.⁷ They offer us many third-stage remarks, about candidates for happiness. Sometimes they offer second-stage remarks; Aristotle's argument about the human function is partly anticipated in *Republic* I. But they offer no explicit first-stage remarks to show us the appropriate formal criteria for happiness.⁸ If, however, we are to understand Socrates' reasons for his third-stage claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness, we would like to find the implicit criteria and conception that might support it. We must ask him Aristotle's questions. Since Socrates does not ask them himself, we must rely on some inference and speculation to decide how he probably answers them. I will offer one account of his position, and try to explain why I think it is preferable to the most plausible alternative I can think of. But whether or not my account is right, I

⁶ On the role of the formal criteria in this chapter see *Nic. Ethics*, trans. T. H. Irwin (Indianapolis 1985), note on 1095b14 ff.

⁷ Some hints exploited by Aristotle appear in *Phil.* 20b8–22c4, in terms partly derived from *Rep.* 505b5–d1. Helpful remarks on formal criteria: N. P. White, "Goodness and human aims in Aristotle's ethics," in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Washington, D.C. 1981), pp. 225–46, at pp. 231, 234 f.

⁸ I believe that in the *Protagoras* Socrates is seriously committed to hedonism (some grounds for this belief are ably urged by J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* [Oxford 1982], pp. 58–68). It is important to explore the connections of the view of happiness that I attribute to Socrates with the discussions of hedonism in the *Protagoras* and *Gorg.* But I ignore the *Protagoras* here, because I would like my arguments to be independent of the dispute about hedonism, and because hedonism offers us only a conception of happiness that still leaves us to look for the criteria that justify it.

think it draws attention to a series of questions about Socratic ethics that need closer study.⁹

4. Criteria for Happiness

When Socrates argues with interlocutors holding common-sense views, he must begin from these views, and either appeal to them in his own argument or explain why he rejects them. In the earlier dialogues Socrates does not always show that he sees how controversial some of his claims are. The Socratic Paradox, e.g., is taken for granted in the *Laches*, but defended only in the *Protagoras* and *Meno*.¹⁰ Similarly, the sufficiency thesis is assumed in several dialogues; but only the *Gorgias* indicates that Socrates thinks it is paradoxical (470c–e), and only the *Euthydemus* defends it. We should not assume either that Socrates (or Plato) must have had a clear defense in mind when he first put forward the thesis or that the defense must have come later than the first statement of the thesis. If we attend to the *Gorgias* and *Euthydemus*, we can see that at least sometimes Socrates both sees that the thesis needs defense and defends it. He would be unwise to assume his view without argument; common beliefs about happiness and virtue do not make the sufficiency thesis seem obviously true. We should therefore see how Socrates might argue from common beliefs to show that his interlocutor must accept the sufficiency thesis.

The *Euthydemus* is our best source for such an argument, but it fails us at one essential point. Socrates does not begin with a statement of the criteria and conception he accepts in his claims about happiness. To see how the argument works, however, we must try to see his criteria and conception.

He begins with an assumption that he takes to be uncontroversial, that happiness is what we all want (278b3–6).¹¹ We achieve happiness by gaining many goods (279a1–4), and Socrates' list of goods is also meant to be largely uncontroversial (279a4–7). The reputed goods include bodily and social advantages, possessions and good fortune

⁹ My treatment of Socrates' views on happiness in *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford 1977) is open to criticism for not having faced these questions. It is justly criticized by Gregory Vlastos, "Happiness and Virtue in Socrates' Moral Theory," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* NS 30 (1984), 181–213, at p. 207 note 54, and by D. J. Zeyl, "Socratic Virtue and Happiness," *Archiv für Gesch. der Phil.* 14 (1982), pp. 225–38. In this paper I don't defend the claim that Socrates *does* take virtue to be merely instrumental to happiness and not an intrinsic good, but the weaker claim that the sufficiency thesis is compatible with the purely instrumentalist conception of virtue. (See Part 9, last paragraph.)

¹⁰ See Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, p. 72.

¹¹ Socrates identifies εὐπραγίαν with εὐδαιμονίαν, 280b6.

(279a4-c8); Socrates recognizes some room for dispute about the virtues and wisdom, but includes them too (279b4-c2).

To see the point of this list of goods we can usefully turn to Aristotle. In *Rhetoric* I. 5 he presents "by way of illustration . . . what happiness is, to speak in general terms, and from what things its parts [sc. come about]" (1360b7-9). He offers something closer to common-sense views than he offers in the *Ethics*, where his views on the right formal criteria and conception influence his presentation of common sense; and for our purposes the less sophisticated account in the *Rhetoric* is especially useful. To show what happiness is Aristotle offers four answers. It is "(1) doing well together with virtue, or (2) self-sufficiency of life, or (3) the pleasantest life together with safety, or (4) prosperity of possessions and bodies together with the power to protect them and act with them; for practically everyone agrees that happiness is one or more of these things" (1360b14-18). After presenting these conceptions of happiness Aristotle offers a list of its parts, rather similar to the list of reputed goods in the *Euthydemus*. He explains why they seem to be parts: "For in this way someone would be most self-sufficient, by having both the internal and external goods, since there are no other goods beside these. . . . Further, we think it proper for him to have power and fortune, since that will make his life most secure" (1360b24-29).

Aristotle suggests that the reputed goods are plausibly taken to be parts of happiness because they make someone self-sufficient; he has all the goods he could want, and needs none to be added. He is secure in so far as his good fortune protects him against sudden reversals and loss of happiness. Self-sufficiency and security are plausible formal criteria for happiness (1360b14-18), and they justify the common conception of happiness as consisting in the possession of all the goods there are.

In the *Euthydemus* Socrates' attitude to the popular candidates for happiness is far more critical than Aristotle's. He agrees with the popular view that it must include all the goods there are; but he claims that wisdom is the only good, and is therefore necessary and sufficient for happiness. To see if Socrates is right we should appeal to the formal criterion assumed by the popular candidates. If Socrates cannot show that his candidate for happiness achieves self-sufficiency and security, then he violates an apparently reasonable formal criterion for happiness. He must either challenge this criterion or show that his own candidate for happiness satisfies it.

5. Socrates' Argument

Socrates argues for the conclusion that wisdom is the only good and makes a person happy. We have every reason to suppose that he takes the conclusion seriously; for he identifies virtue with wisdom, and we have seen that he takes virtue to be sufficient for happiness. To justify his conviction about happiness he needs to show that there is no genuine part of happiness that is not secured by virtue, and that therefore the reputed goods that are independent of virtue are not elements of happiness at all. (Let us call these "external goods," remembering that in Socrates' final view they are really not goods at all.)

But though the conclusion is important the argument raises grave doubts; its faults seem to be recurrent, gross and obvious.

Socrates rejects the external goods in two stages. First he argues that good fortune is not an element of happiness that is independent of wisdom, because wisdom by itself secures all the good fortune that is needed (279c9–280a8). Next he argues that none of the external goods is a good at all, because it is their right use that secures happiness, and only wisdom ensures their right use (280b1–281e5).¹²

First Socrates considers good fortune. He mentions two types of crafts:

- (a) flute-playing, writing and reading;
- (b) generalship, navigation and medicine (279d8–280a4).

Though he does not mention it, a difference between (a) and (b) is fairly clear; the Stoics, following Aristotle, formulate it as the difference between stochastic and non-stochastic crafts (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* III. 19). In (a) fortune seems to be needed to prevent antecedent ill fortune. An expert writer cannot produce good writing without the appropriate material; and we may think that the supply of it is sometimes a matter of fortune. But once he has it, the

¹² In examining reputed goods Socrates does not distinguish instrumental from intrinsic goods. Indeed he does not describe *εὐδαιμονία* or *εὖ πράττειν* as an *ἀγαθόν* at all in the *Euthyd.*; and it might be argued that here he confines *ἀγαθά* to instrumental goods. The same is true of *Gorgias* 467c–468e. Sometimes *ἀγαθά* may seem to include intrinsic goods, *Gorgias* 494e9–495b4, 499e5, *Protagoras* 355c3–8 (contrast *Gorgias* 496b5–6). But this is not certain; I can see no clear reason for denying that, e.g., the pleasures mentioned in these passages are considered as goods because they are instrumental to happiness. If this is so, then the claim in *Rep.* 357b5 that some goods are goods because they are chosen for their own sakes reflects a departure from the Socratic conception of goods. The claim that happiness is not a good is not unparalleled; Aristippus (*Diog. L. II. 87*) may be exploiting a Socratic distinction to draw an un-Socratic conclusion.

competent exercise of his craft ensures the right result. In the crafts listed in (b) fortune also seems to be needed to prevent subsequent ill fortune. A pilot might exercise his craft quite competently with the right material, but still a sudden and unpredictable storm might sink the ship.

Keeping in mind these two areas of ill fortune we can examine Socrates' argument. He wants to show that good fortune need not be added to our list of goods once we include wisdom, since wisdom ensures the sort of success for which we wrongly think good fortune is needed. He argues:

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

In this argument Socrates seems to move without warrant to steadily stronger claims. Since (3) is supposed to eliminate good fortune as a distinct good apart from wisdom, Socrates should show that wisdom provides all the success that is normally taken to require good fortune. But all he shows in (1) is that wisdom ensures more success, other things being equal, than we can expect if we lack it. The claim in (2) seems stronger. Socrates seems to ignore the problem of antecedent ill fortune with both types of crafts; and even if this point is waived, he seems to ignore subsequent ill fortune in crafts of the second type. We might agree with Socrates that bad writing with a good pen on good paper indicates lack of the writer's craft; but we need not see any lack of craft in a pilot's failure to save his ship from an unpredictable storm. It is just this sort of failure that we avoid only if we have good fortune. These objections seem to show that Socrates is not entitled to (2), if it is understood in a strong enough sense to imply (3). Apparently, then, Socrates tries to prove that good fortune, as an external good distinct from wisdom, is unnecessary for happiness, but in trying to prove this ignores those very cases that seem to show why we need good fortune.

Socrates now argues that the other external goods are not really goods; and he needs to show this, since these external goods seem to depend at least partly on good fortune, which Socrates has just argued is unnecessary for happiness. In Socrates' view, the only real good is wisdom, and so this turns out to be the only good that we need for happiness. He argues:

1. It is possible to use the external goods well or badly (280b7-c3, d7-281a1).

2. Correct use of them is necessary and sufficient for happiness (280d7-281e1).
3. Wisdom is necessary and sufficient for correct use (281a1-b2).
4. Therefore wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness (281b2-4).

This is the conclusion that Socrates needs. But he strengthens it by a further defense of (1) and (2):

5. Each external good used without wisdom is a greater evil than its opposite, and each used by wisdom is a greater good than its opposite (281d6-8).
6. Therefore each external good and evil is in fact neither good nor evil (281e3-4).
7. Therefore wisdom is the only good and folly the only evil (281e4-5).

At (3) and (4) two possibilities need to be considered:

- (a) Given a reasonable supply of external goods, wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness.
- (b) Whatever external goods we may have or lack, wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness.

In his examples Socrates considers only cases that allow (a); he remarks that a supply of money and other external resources is still liable to misuse. He might say that wisdom guarantees the right use, not the initial resources; then he would have to concede the role of antecedent fortune, and would simply be ignoring the role of subsequent fortune in the exercise of some crafts. But if he concedes the role of antecedent fortune, he cannot maintain his claim to have eliminated fortune as a distinct contributor to happiness. The elimination of fortune requires the strong claim in (b). And for this strong claim Socrates seems to have given no sufficient argument.

A further question arises in (5)-(7). When Socrates says in (5) that health, for example, is a greater good than sickness if it is guided by wisdom, we might suppose he means that health, in these circumstances, is a good and otherwise is not. In that case Socrates can deny, as he does in (6), that health taken by itself (*αὐτὸ δὲ καθ' αὐτό*) is a good, and allow that it is a good when it is guided by wisdom. But if that is what (6) means, the transition to (7) is blatantly unwarranted, since (7) says that health is not a good at all.

We have two ways out of this unwelcome result:

- (a) In (7) Socrates only means that health is not a good by itself, and needs wisdom added if it is to be a good.
- (b) In (5) he does not mean that health is a good.

While (a) might seem to be a more reasonable conclusion, it would not fulfill Socrates' main aim in the whole argument; for the reasons we have already seen, he must show that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness, and hence the only real good.

If we look again at (5), we can see that Socrates is not committed to regarding health as a good. If we adapt his remarks to show that health is a greater good, we will say: if wisdom leads health, health will be a greater good than sickness to the extent that it is more able to serve its leader when the leader is good (cf. 281d6-7). This account of how health is a greater good does not imply that health is good; "greater good" may simply mean "more of a good," that is, "closer to being a good." The explanation in "to the extent . . ." says that health is more able to serve wisdom. If a wise person wants to act he will often find it easier to act as he wants to if he is healthy than if he is sick.¹³ Socrates, then, can consistently claim that health is not a good. But he surely has not justified this claim, or the sufficiency thesis; for he has not shown that virtue can do without a level of health that is not within its control.

After finding such serious flaws in this argument in the *Euthydemus* we might remind ourselves that the dialogue as a whole is concerned with eristic, and suggest that even the protreptic passages are not free of the fallacious argument that is rife in the rest of the dialogue. But if we dismiss the argument we will have dismissed our best evidence of Socrates' defense of the sufficiency thesis. Before we dismiss it we ought to see if Socrates can reasonably appeal to assumptions about happiness that make some of his moves less clearly illegitimate.

At this point we need to examine Socrates' criteria and conception more closely. For our previous objections will collapse if Socrates can justify two claims:

1. When we plan for happiness, we can always count on having the right material, so that antecedent ill fortune can be ignored.
2. Happiness is the sort of end that is infallibly secured by the correct exercise of wisdom.

To justify these two claims Socrates needs to show that he can defend them from a conception of happiness that satisfies reasonable formal criteria. If we return to Aristotle's general account of happiness Socrates seems to be wrong; for the completeness, self-sufficiency and

¹³ In *Meno* 88c6-d1 Socrates concedes that external goods are in some circumstances actually beneficial. His claim here is different from the one in the *Euthyd.*, though either claim is consistent with his main claims about virtue and happiness. See Part 10 below.

security of happiness seem to require just those goods that are exposed to antecedent and subsequent ill fortune. Socrates needs to show that he need not accept these inferences from the formal criteria.

6. Happiness and Desire

Aristotle takes happiness to be the self-sufficient and secure life. He assumes that self-sufficiency and completeness imply each other; for the list of reputed goods achieves self-sufficiency because it includes all the goods there are (1360b26).

But how is completeness to be achieved? Both Socrates and Aristotle assume, first, that happiness is what we all want, and, second, that whatever else we want we want for the sake of happiness (*Euthydemus* 278e3–279a4).¹⁴ If we are concerned with happiness because it is what we want, it will be complete in so far as it achieves all we want, and self-sufficient if it lacks nothing that we need to achieve all our desires. Aristotle sometimes explains the completeness of happiness in this way, saying that it is what we must attain to fulfill our desire (*Eth. Eud.* 1215b17–18).¹⁵

If we accept this account of completeness and self-sufficiency, the formal criterion of happiness seems to explain why we need the external goods, and why the loss of them will prevent happiness. If I lack the resources to satisfy my desires, or ill-fortune interferes with their execution, I lose happiness because I have my desires frustrated. The elements of my happiness, on this view, must include all that I need for the satisfaction of my desires; and hence they must include the external goods.

This conclusion, however, is open to challenge, for a reason that is briefly stated by Hume. Hume denies that the failure of metaphysical ambitions is a ground for unhappiness or discontent: "For nothing is more certain than that despair has almost the same effect upon us with enjoyment, and that we are no sooner acquainted with the impossibility of satisfying a desire, than the desire itself vanishes" (*Treatise*, *Introd.*). Hume draws our attention to a familiar fact, that we do not necessarily think ourselves unhappy simply because we

¹⁴ The second assumption is not explicit in the *Euthyd.*; but no other object of wish (*βουλόμεθα*, 278e3) and no other basis for choice than happiness is mentioned. Here, in apparent contrast to *Gorgias* 467c ff., *ἀγαθὰ* are not said to be objects of *βούλησις*.

¹⁵ This is not a complete or fair account of Aristotle's conditions for happiness. (This passage, e.g., raises a question about the relation between being *αἰρετόν* and filling desire.) But the fact that he speaks in these terms about happiness shows how someone might interpret the demand for completeness.

cannot fulfill clearly unfeasible desires that we might have had or once did have. When we see that a desire is unfeasible we give it up, and once we have given it up, we no longer suffer the unhappiness of frustrated desire.

If we attend to Hume's point we can reply to the claim that external goods must be elements of happiness. The loss of these goods seems to cause unhappiness because it makes some of our desires unfeasible, and it will cause unhappiness if we retain the unfeasible desires. But the rational person will react by giving up the desires that have become unfeasible; once he has given them up, he is no longer unhappy because they are unsatisfied. The loss of external goods seems to cause no loss of happiness, and the external goods are therefore not necessary for happiness.

In reply to Socrates we might urge that Hume is not right about every case; even if we realize a desire is unfeasible and that we would be better off if we gave it up, we may retain it, and so continue to suffer the unhappiness resulting from its frustration. While this might be a fair objection to Hume, Socrates can hardly accept it. Since he accepts the Socratic Paradox, he believes that everyone's desires are all concentrated on his own happiness and the means to it; as soon as we see that an action does not promote our happiness we will lose the desire to do it. Socrates' moral psychology offers him a strong defense of Hume's claim.

Just as the loss of external goods does not by itself cause unhappiness, their presence does not by itself secure happiness. We can still misuse them; and however many we have, we may have such extravagant and unfeasible desires that we are still unsatisfied. In favorable conditions as well as unfavorable we need feasible desires; and once we have them, we can secure happiness through the fulfillment of our desires.

We have seen, then, why external goods are neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness; and at the same time we have seen why the appropriate sort of wisdom will secure happiness. A wise person will see that he is better off with feasible desires; and if changing external conditions make some of his desires unfeasible, he will give them up. By adapting his desires to suit the external conditions, he will secure his happiness whatever the conditions may be.

A wise person is indifferent to external goods in so far as he does not regret their loss, and sees that they are neither necessary nor sufficient for his happiness. But he does not ignore them altogether. For they are means to the satisfaction of some desires he has. If the wise person wants a Rolls-Royce, and has the money to buy it, the money will help him to satisfy his desires, and for that it will be

useful to him. But if he loses the money, he will not suffer a loss of happiness, since he will adapt his desires to suit his reduced resources.

We have traced a conception of happiness that accepts the Aristotelian formal criteria, and interprets them in a particular way that leads to a non-Aristotelian conclusion, that external goods are not elements of happiness, and so are not genuine goods. Aristotle leaves himself exposed to this sort of argument as soon as he identifies completeness and self-sufficiency with the complete fulfillment of desires; for then it seems quite reasonable to adapt our desires in ways that secure their satisfaction.

On further consideration we may even think the formal criteria demand the adaptive strategy. For Aristotle recognizes security as a formal criterion of happiness; and security seems to him to require a reasonable supply of external goods, which in turn requires good fortune. We might challenge Aristotle's inference and claim that only an adaptive strategy properly fulfills his formal criterion. For the happiness of a wise and well-adapted person seems far more secure than the condition of someone who depends on the continuation of good fortune; dependence on external conditions makes our well-being insecure; and such an insecure condition can hardly count as happiness. From the formal criteria of happiness we have reached a conception of happiness as the complete fulfilment of desire, and an adaptive strategy for achieving that fulfilment. Let us call this an adaptive account of happiness; we have seen why it presents a plausible challenge to the common-sense view that regards external goods as elements of happiness.

7. Socrates' Account of Happiness

I have sketched an adaptive account of happiness to show how it can plausibly be derived from the common-sense criteria presented by Aristotle. I now suggest that this sort of account is presupposed in the *Euthydemus*. If Socrates relies on an adaptive account of happiness, he can answer our previous objections relying on external circumstances. He is free to ignore antecedent fortune; for the wise person needs no particular external goods, but only needs to find the desires that are feasible in the circumstances. If he suffers subsequent ill fortune, that will not threaten his happiness either; he will simply have discovered that some of his desires are unfeasible, and so will eliminate them. Socrates can justifiably claim that wisdom by itself secures all the good fortune that is needed for happiness, and that while favorable conditions (e.g. being healthy rather than sick) make

it easier to fulfill the desires I have, they are unnecessary for happiness and do not contribute to it in their own right.

If an adaptive account of happiness allows this defense of Socrates' argument, we have some reason to suppose he accepts or presupposes it. This is not a decisive reason; we may be able to find other accounts of happiness that explain this argument as well or better. To explain the argument we should both be able to refer to formal criteria for happiness that Socrates might be expected to assume, and be able to answer the objections that arise at different stages in Socrates' argument. I cannot think of any other account of happiness that will pass these tests as well as the adaptive account passes them; and therefore I am inclined to attribute the adaptive account to Socrates.

The implicit presence of an adaptive account in the *Euthydemus* is one reason for ascribing it to Socrates. But clearly we will have much better reasons if we can find other evidence to support us, and we will have to think again if we find conflicting evidence in other dialogues.

One argument in the *Lysis* assumes that the good person, as such, is sufficient for himself and to that extent needs nothing else (215a6–8). This assumption is not clearly challenged in the dialogue; and we can see why Socrates accepts it if he believes that happiness is complete satisfaction and accepts the sufficiency thesis.

In the *Apology* Socrates suggests that death is a good thing even if it is like a permanent sleep (40a9–e4). There are few days or nights in our lives in which we have lived better or more pleasantly than in the nights of dreamless sleep (40d2–e2). Though Socrates first assumes that death involves non-existence (40c6), his praise of death does not rest on this assumption; and so he forgoes the Epicurean argument that nothing bad can happen to us when we do not exist and are unaware of anything.¹⁶ His argument is a different one—that death is actually good for us because it is so similar to a condition that is evidently better and pleasanter than most others. This claim is intelligible if an adaptive account of happiness is assumed; for in dreamless sleep we have no unsatisfied desires. The more seriously we take this account of happiness, the more seriously we will take Socrates' praise of death.

In the *Gorgias* Callicles claims that happiness requires large and demanding appetites and their satisfaction (491e5–492c8). Socrates asks him to consider the view that “those who need nothing are

¹⁶ 14. This passage is, quite reasonably, adapted to Epicurean use and strangely conflated with some of the dualism of the *Alc.* in *Ax.* 365d–366a. See D. J. Furley, “Nothing to us?” in *The Norms of Nature*, edd. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge 1986).

happy" (492e3-4).¹⁷ Callicles rejects this view because it would imply that rocks and corpses are happiest of all (492e5-6). Since Socrates has just suggested that a wise person will be temperate and self-controlled, the conception of happiness that Callicles rejects is plainly the Socratic conception.

Socrates says he wants to "persuade you to change your mind and to choose, instead of the unfilled and unrestrained life, the life that is orderly and adequately supplied and satisfied with the things that are present on each occasion. But do I persuade you at all actually to change your mind (and agree) that the orderly people are happier than the unrestrained?" (493c4-d2). In this last sentence we might take Socrates to be defending only a comparative claim (cf. 494a2-5), so that he is not committed to the stronger claim that the self-sufficient people are actually happy. The merely comparative claim, however, is not enough for the *Gorgias*. Socrates has already asserted the sufficiency thesis against Polus (470e9-10), and he reasserts this claim against Callicles (507b8-c4).¹⁸ If he maintains the adaptive account of happiness, his argument is clear. For he takes virtue to result from temperance, and therefore to result from wise planning that removes demanding and extravagant desires (503c4-6). An adaptive account of happiness strongly supports the sufficiency thesis; without such an account the thesis is left with very weak support.

Here as in the *Euthydemus* we ascribe the adaptive account to Socrates because he needs it; and such an argument is less than conclusive. We are better off in the *Gorgias*, however; for here Socrates mentions an adaptive account of happiness, and closely links it to his claims about virtue and happiness. It is striking that in the *Gorgias* he fails to distinguish the sufficiency thesis from the comparative thesis that is defended in the *Republic*; and the dialogue offers only the adaptive account to support the sufficiency thesis.

These remarks in dialogues apart from the *Euthydemus* encourage us to believe that an adaptive account of happiness is not confined to this one dialogue. Indeed they suggest that whenever Socrates

¹⁷ Here *δεῖσθαι* includes both wanting and needing. We might think it is important to distinguish the two, to insist that someone who does not want anything may still need some things, and to urge that only not needing anything is a reasonable condition for the self-sufficiency that is relevant to happiness. But for Socrates the distinction will be unimportant, since what we need for happiness is just what we need for the complete satisfaction of our desires; when we have no unsatisfied desires, then, in his view, we will need nothing.

¹⁸ I doubt if Socrates or Plato is (as often alleged) either confused by or deliberately exploiting any ambiguity in *εὖ πάρτεω*. See *Plato: Gorgias*, tr. Irwin (Oxford 1979), p. 223.

appeals to a conception of happiness to support his argument, he appeals to a conception that finds happiness in the complete satisfaction of desire. An adaptive account of happiness is an important, though largely implicit, element of Socratic doctrine.

I have suggested that the claims made in the *Euthydemus* about external goods are properly explained by the adaptive account of happiness accepted in the *Gorgias*. It is worth remarking, then, that this connection between the two dialogues may have occurred to the author of the pseudo-Platonic *Eryxias*. The argument here asks whether such external goods as wealth are really goods or really useful. The argument in the *Euthydemus* is used to show that these goods are not always beneficial (403a2–c5). Later Socrates claims that the happier and better person is the one who requires fewer external goods (405b8–c6). Just as the healthy person is better off and needs less than the sick person, so the person with fewer desires is better off than the person with many desires who needs large resources to satisfy them (405c6–406a3).

This argument fills the gap left in the *Euthydemus*, by explaining why the wise person, who knows how to use external goods and therefore will make the best use of those he has, will also be successful and happy, no matter how few of them he has. Part of his wisdom is his knowledge that he does not need any particular level of them to secure his happiness, and that he secures his happiness by satisfying the desires that fit the external goods available to him.

We do not know who wrote the *Eryxias* or when. But it is worth mentioning for our purposes, since the author echoes both the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias*, and sees how they might be combined. I think the connections he finds reflect an important Socratic assumption. It is easy to suppose that the *Eryxias* reflects the influence of Cynic and Stoic arguments. But we need not assume this; it is an intelligible, and to this extent not unintelligent, development of Socratic views.

8. Interpretations of Socratic Happiness

If Socrates accepts an adaptive account of happiness, we can perhaps understand better why he does not inquire curiously into the nature of happiness. He realizes that his views about virtue and knowledge and their relation to happiness are controversial; but he might well believe that a conception of happiness as completely satisfied desire is fairly uncontroversial, and that an adaptive strategy is a reasonable conclusion from it. We can support Socrates by noticing that these claims might not seem bizarre to all his contemporaries.

The *Menexenus* recognizes self-sufficiency as a source of happiness. A person's happiness is most secure if the things that promote it depend on himself rather than on the good or bad fortune of others; and such self-sufficiency is the mark of the temperate, brave and wise person (247e5–248a7). I mention this passage not because I imagine that this funeral speech is meant to express distinctively Socratic doctrine, but for just the opposite reason. Such a remark in a speech consisting mostly of moral platitudes suggests that an adaptive account of happiness would not be bizarre and unintelligible (even if it was not immediately obvious) to someone with ordinary views about happiness. This is not to say that Socratic ethics is free of paradox; it certainly outrages common sense at some points, but its aims are not alien to common sense.

Some of Democritus' remarks on happiness suggest that one of Socrates' contemporaries could accept an adaptive account. He says: "If you do not desire much, a little will seem much to you; for a small desire makes poverty equipollent with wealth" (B 284). For similar reasons he advises us to "keep our minds fixed on what is possible, and be satisfied with what is present" (B 191, DK p. 184. 9–10; cf. *Gorg.* 493c6–7). The claim about equipollence is just what Socrates needs to explain why recognized goods are not really goods, and why their loss is not really a harm; if I reduce my desires I will no longer miss the wealth I have lost, and my reduced resources will serve me just as well.¹⁹

Democritus' advice makes it easy to infer that an adaptive account of happiness will also be ascetic, advising us to reduce our desires to the minimum. Xenophon associates self-sufficiency and requiring nothing with Socratic asceticism (*Mem.* I. 2. 14, 6. 10). In fact, however, the connection between an adaptive account and asceticism is not simple. If asceticism requires the actual cultivation of limited and undemanding desires in all conditions, it does not follow from

¹⁹ This apparent evidence of a contemporary view may be challenged; see Z. Stewart, "Democritus and the Cynics," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958), 179–91. It is one of the fragments derived from Stobaeus, and sometimes taken to be contaminated by Cynicism. At the same time this claim fits well with Democritus' belief in the unimportance of fortune and the importance of wisdom and one's own efforts; cf. B 119 and the well-attested B 3. The occurrence of the term "equipollent," *ἰσοθενεία*, otherwise attested only in later Greek, may provoke doubts, but perhaps should not. It is a technical term of Skeptical argument (though this is not its only use); but this may be an example of a Skeptical term introduced by Democritus. For another example of such a term see P. De Lacey "ὄυ μᾶλλον and the antecedents of ancient Scepticism," *Phronesis* 3 (1958), 59–71. The appeal to equipollence may indeed be connected with the use of ὄυ μᾶλλον, since both can be connected with a doctrine of indifferents; see, e.g., Sextus, *Pyrr. Hyp.* III. 177 (cited by De Lacey, n. 19).

an adaptive account of happiness. If I can easily afford a steak and would prefer it over a bowl of porridge, an adaptive account of happiness does not require me to prefer the porridge; it simply requires me to give up the desire for steak if I cannot satisfy it. Still, we can see why in some conditions Socratic adaptiveness might require the actions that would be required by Cynic asceticism. We might, therefore, both deny that Socrates is a Cynic ascetic and suggest that his adaptive account of happiness made it easy to regard him as an ascetic.

The Cynic and ascetic interpretation of Socrates' views on happiness provoked a reaction. As Augustine remarked, the unclarity of Socrates' views encouraged disagreement among professed Socratics.²⁰ Augustine was reasonably puzzled that the anti-hedonist Cynics and the hedonist Cyrenaics could both claim to be Socratics.²¹ But the dispute is intelligible if Socrates accepts an adaptive account. For while the Cynics interpret this ascetically, Aristippus points out that self-sufficiency and independence does not require abstention from pleasures when they are available. Like Socrates' temperate person who is satisfied with "the things present on each occasion" (*Gorg.* 493c6-7; cf. *Democ.* B 191), he "enjoyed the pleasure of things present, but did not labor in pursuing enjoyment of things not present" (*Diog. L.* II. 66).²² While Aristippus' version of hedonism would have surprised Socrates, he legitimately rejects the ascetic inferences drawn from Socrates' claims about happiness and self-sufficiency.

The philosopher who agrees most closely with Socrates on this issue is probably neither Antisthenes nor Aristippus, but Epicurus. I am not concerned here with Epicurus' hedonism, but with the account of happiness that forms his particular version of hedonism. Epicurus clearly accepts an adaptive account of happiness, and therefore cultivates independence of external conditions: "We count self-sufficiency as a great good, not so that in all circumstances we will use only a few things, but so that a few things will suffice us if we do not

²⁰ "Quod [sc. summum bonum] in Socraticis disputationibus, dum omnia movet, adserit, destruit, quoniam non evidenter apparuit, quod cuique placuit inde sumserunt et ubi cuique visum esse constituerunt finem boni" (*Civ. Dei* VIII. 3).

²¹ "Sic autem diversas inter se Socratici de isto fine sententias habuerunt ut (quod vix credibile est unius magistri potuisse facere sectatores) quidam summum bonum esse dicerent voluptatem, sicut Aristippus; quidam virtutem, sicut Antisthenes" (*loc. cit.*; cf. XVIII. 41).

²² Probably the force of *παρόντων* is partly temporal, reflecting Aristippus' views about prudence and the future. But it should also refer to Socrates' and Democritus' use of the term, for what is available and feasible.

have many, genuinely convinced that those who enjoy luxury most pleasantly are those who need it least" (Diog. L. X. 130).²³ Epicurus' advice sounds quite similar to Democritus'; but, unlike Democritus, he sharply rejects the ascetic inference supporting Cynicism. At the same time he clarifies Socrates' claim about self-sufficiency. Socrates left himself open to Cynic and Cyrenaic constructions, but committed himself to neither.²⁴ Epicurus best appreciates the role of an adaptive account in Socrates, and its consequences for the wise person's attitude to external circumstances. As we will see, the Epicurean position also captures some of Socrates' claims about the virtues, and reflects some of the difficulties in them.

9. The Sufficiency of Virtue

We turned to the *Euthydemus* to understand the account of happiness that is assumed in the sufficiency thesis. Having seen how Socrates conceives happiness we can now return to this thesis.

Socrates needs to connect wisdom with virtue. We have seen why knowledge of good and evil will be sufficient for happiness, if an adaptive account of happiness is accepted. For the wise person will be the one who knows that an adaptive strategy secures happiness; and this wisdom will secure his happiness. If we agree with Socrates in identifying virtue with the knowledge of good and evil, it follows that virtue is sufficient for happiness.

But we may still wonder how this conception of virtue is connected with the particular sorts of actions and states of character that both common sense and Socrates count as virtuous. Can Socrates explain why the wise person will characteristically be unafraid in battle, moderate in his appetites and demands, and unwilling to cheat or steal?

We can see the main line of argument if we consider why someone might be attracted to intemperate, cowardly or unjust action. If I am thinking about my happiness I might suppose that a particular vicious action will secure me some external good that I need to be happy, and that I will reduce my happiness if I deny myself that good. If I cheat, I can get the money I think I need to satisfy my desires; and if I do not cheat, and forgo the money, then apparently I lose something I need for happiness. An adaptive account implies that this argument is mistaken. If I forgo an external good, I simply

²³ I translate Cobet's attractive though unnecessary emendation ἀρκώμεθα (χρώμεθα, codd.), which makes the connection with the *Gorg.* and Democritus especially clear.

²⁴ The difference between the Socratic and the ascetic position is overlooked by E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1959), on 492e3.

need to adapt my desires to new circumstances, and I will not necessarily forgo any happiness.

Socrates insists strongly that a virtuous person will allow nothing to count against doing the virtuous action, no matter what the cost may be; the only question he need ask himself is what the virtuous action is, and his answer to that question should guide his action (*Ap.* 28b5–9).²⁵ His account of happiness makes this pattern of choice quite reasonable; since the virtuous person will not see any threat to his happiness if he pays the price of virtuous action in loss of external goods, he need not concern himself with this price in deciding what to do. If Socrates were to choose an external good over the virtuous course of action, he would be choosing an action that is bad for him, and he refuses to do this; that is why he refuses to propose an alternative to the death penalty (*Ap.* 37b5–e2).²⁶ For the same reason a good person cannot be harmed; no loss of external goods will threaten his happiness.

When Socrates makes these strong claims about virtue, he is not allowing himself a rhetorical exaggeration or an expression of unwarranted faith. He is drawing attention to a consequence of an adaptive account of happiness. A virtuous person can certainly suffer the loss of external goods; such losses require him to change his desires; but they do not threaten his happiness, since he adapts his desires to fit the circumstances.

If this is a defensible account of Socrates' claim about virtue, one consequence is worth noticing. It is easy to suppose that if Socrates thinks virtue all by itself is sufficient for happiness, then he must attribute some intrinsic value to virtue; it might be identical to happiness, or a part of happiness whose presence is causally sufficient for the presence of the other parts. If, however, Socrates holds an adaptive account of happiness, he can maintain the sufficiency of virtue without attributing any intrinsic value to it.

10. The Value of External Goods

We may hesitate to accept the sufficiency thesis because it seems to imply that no external good is worth pursuit at all; since these alleged goods do not promote happiness, they will not be genuine goods,

²⁵ This passage is appropriately stressed by Vlastos, "Happiness," p. 188, as evidence of Socrates' belief in the "sovereignty" of virtue over other goods.

²⁶ In saying that it would be bad for him to *choose* imprisonment as a penalty Socrates does not imply that there would be anything bad about imprisonment in itself. For a different view of this passage see Richard Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton 1984), p. 38 n.

and so apparently not worth pursuit. This objection was raised against the Cynics and Stoics who supported the sufficiency thesis. If we ascribe the thesis to Socrates we may well suppose he is open to the same objection; and if the objection seems cogent, we may hesitate to ascribe the thesis to him.

We may hesitate still more when Socrates sometimes seems to admit that external goods are goods. Sometimes he lists them as goods without hesitation (*Gorg.* 467e4–6, *Meno* 78c5–d1, *Lys.* 218e5–219a1). He says he would wish neither to do nor to suffer injustice (*Gorg.* 469c1). He allows the reflective pilot to wonder if he has benefited or harmed people by saving them from drowning (*Gorg.* 511e6–512b2). He even claims that virtue is the source of wealth and any other goods there are (*Ap.* 30b2–4).²⁷

To admit that Socrates regards external goods as genuine goods introduces conflict with some of his other views:

- (a) He explicitly contradicts this view in the *Euthydemus* (281e3–5).
- (b) If the sufficiency thesis is true, and if nothing is good without contributing to happiness, then external goods cannot contribute to a virtuous person's happiness.
- (c) We avoid this conflict if we say that external goods make the virtuous person happier than he would be without them, and that this is what makes them goods, though even without them he would be happy. But if they are goods, then the loss of them should harm the virtuous person, and we are in conflict with the claim that the good person cannot be harmed.

We can remove any appearance of conflict if we deny either that (i) Socrates makes virtue the only good, or that (ii) he accepts the sufficiency thesis; or that (iii) he thinks the good person cannot be harmed. Alternatively, we can understand the claims about external goods so that they are consistent with (i)–(iii).

In the first three passages above (*Gorg.* 467e etc.) Socrates simply asks his interlocutor about commonly-recognized goods, and nothing in the argument depends on his agreeing with the interlocutor that these are genuine goods. The passages therefore provide very weak evidence for reinterpreting his explicit statement in (i). When he says

²⁷ Vlastos, "Happiness," p. 208 n. 66, follows J. Burnet, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito* (Oxford 1924), *ad loc.*, in translating "from virtue wealth and the other things become goods" (taking ἀγαθά as predicate). This provides a less exact balance with the previous clause ("virtue does not come to be from wealth"); and the other translation, if I have explained it correctly, does not commit Socrates to praise of money-making. If Burnet's translation is accepted, then this will be a passage where Socrates allows goods whose loss does not leave a person any less happy.

he would not wish to suffer injustice Socrates refrains from saying he would wish not to suffer it.²⁸ He has no reason to wish for it, since suffering injustice is in itself no benefit to him, and he can say this even if not suffering injustice is no benefit to him either.²⁹ These passages do not require us to reinterpret (i).

But there is a broader reason for wanting Socrates to modify (i); we do not want Socrates to be a Cynic, believing that he has no reason to choose external goods over their opposites. It is worth noticing, then, that Socrates can consistently maintain that health is preferable to sickness without rejecting (i)–(iii). As we have seen, he is entitled to say that if I have a feasible desire, I have reason to choose a means to its fulfillment, and such a means is useful to me. To this extent Socrates could say that the means are instrumental goods. However, it is easy to suppose that if they are instrumental goods, I will be worse off without them; and in Socrates' view this is false. If I lack instrumental means to satisfy a desire I will just give up the desire, and I will be in an equally good position to achieve my happiness.

If, then, Socrates holds an adaptive account of happiness, he has some reason for allowing that external goods are goods (they are sometimes instrumental means to the fulfillment of my desires) and some reason for denying this (their presence or absence makes no difference to my happiness). Sometimes he compromises between these two claims by speaking in comparative terms. Just as in the *Euthydemus* he says health is a greater good than sickness for a virtuous person, he says the person who is killed unjustly is less wretched and pitiable than the one who kills unjustly (*Gorg.* 469b3–6), and that doing injustice is a greater evil than suffering it (509c6–7). We might insist that these comparative terms do not imply that external goods and evils are genuine goods and evils, even if the presence of one

²⁸ Vlastos, p. 198, and Kraut, p. 38 n., explain the passage differently.

²⁹ Vlastos, p. 192 f., understands Socrates in *Ap.* 30c6–d5 to mean that death or imprisonment or dishonor would be some harm to him, but a much smaller harm than doing injustice, and when Socrates says that a better man cannot suffer harm from a worse (30c9–d1) Vlastos takes him to mean that he can suffer no major harm. We might be forced to suppose that Socrates does not mean exactly what he says if we had compelling reason to adopt Vlastos's view in other passages, but this passage taken by itself must be *prima facie* evidence against Vlastos's view, and I doubt if other passages require us to take Socrates to be speaking inexactly here. As I explain below, even if Socrates were to admit that these external goods are goods, he would not have to admit that their loss makes him any less happy, and therefore would not have to admit that their loss harms him (even if he also concedes, at first sight paradoxically, that their presence benefits him).

and absence of the other counts as a benefit (509d1).³⁰ But it may be better to allow that Socrates does count external goods as genuine goods, and then to insist that they do not make a virtuous person any happier than he would be without them. We need not, then, be surprised to find apparent evidence of Socrates' speaking both ways; and we need not infer that he must reject (ii) or (iii).

11. Conflicting Views on Happiness

I have tried to show that Socrates holds an adaptive account of happiness, and that it is consistent with his recognition of reasons for choosing external goods. But even so I doubt if he sticks consistently to an adaptive account. Some of his remarks seem to require a different view that seems irreconcilable with the sufficiency thesis.

In the *Crito* Socrates compares justice in the soul with health in the body; he wants to show that it is not worth living with an unjust soul, and to show that he appeals to Crito's agreement that it is not worth living (*βιωτόν*) with a diseased body (47d7–e5). The same claim about health is affirmed still more strongly in the *Gorgias*. There Socrates argues that it does not benefit a person to live with his body in bad condition, since he is bound to live badly (505a2–4).³¹

These claims raise difficulties for the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness. For apparently the virtuous person could be in bad health; if bad health deprives him of happiness, it cannot be true that no evil can happen to him, and his wisdom cannot make good fortune unnecessary for his happiness.

At the same time, these claims raise wider questions about the nature of happiness. Socrates might maintain a conception of happiness as the complete fulfillment of desire, and argue that bodily sickness inevitably frustrates desires that we cannot help having; in that case he must admit the failure of an adaptive strategy for securing happiness. Alternatively, he might allow that we could cease to desire the health we cannot have, and still insist that we are unhappy because of how we are, not because of how we feel about it. In this case Socrates must reject the conception of happiness as complete fulfillment of desire. He will have to interpret the formal criterion of completeness and self-sufficiency as requiring fulfillment of our nature and capacities, not just of our desires.

³⁰ Kraut, p. 38 n., may be over-confident in claiming that "469b3–6 suggests that someone who is unjustly killed is to be pitied" and that "at 509c6–7 he [sc. Socrates] calls suffering injustice an evil."

³¹ Zeyl, "Virtue," rightly cites these passages as evidence for Socrates' views on happiness; but he does not discuss their bearing on the sufficiency thesis.

It is worth asking whether this "Aristotelian" conception of happiness, referring to fulfillment of our nature and capacities, explains more of Socrates' claims than we have explained with the adaptive account. The main difficulty is its failure to explain the sufficiency thesis. Socrates appeals to the Aristotelian conception to suggest that virtue is necessary for happiness (*Cri.*, *Gorg.* locc. citt.), but it is not easy to see how it could also support the sufficiency thesis.

In *Republic* I Plato highlights this difficulty by relying on the Aristotelian conception. Socrates asks, "Will the soul achieve its function well if it is deprived of its proper virtue, or is this impossible?" (353e1-2). Thrasymachus agrees, as Crito did, that it is impossible, so conceding the necessity of virtue for doing well. But Socrates infers, "It is necessary, then, for a bad soul to rule and attend badly, and for a good one to do all these things well" (353e4-5).³² This abrupt and illegitimate inference from necessity to sufficiency has no parallel in earlier dialogues; and though the *Republic* refers again to the Aristotelian conception (445a5-b4), Plato does not repeat the fallacious inference. Its presence in Book I may be a further sign of his self-consciousness in that book. Believing (as the rest of the *Republic* shows) that Socrates is right in appealing to the Aristotelian conception, Plato sees that this will not justify the sufficiency thesis; and so he abandons the sufficiency thesis in the rest of the *Republic*.

The Aristotelian conception, then, will not by itself explain Socrates' major claims about virtue and happiness. To explain these claims it is reasonable to ascribe the adaptive account to him as well. We have no reason to believe that Socrates sees the conflict between these two views.

12. Objections to Socrates

I have argued that an adaptive account of happiness explains the sufficiency thesis. But this result does not imply a satisfactory defense of virtue. Some unwelcome results of Socrates' views show what might be wrong both with his account of happiness and with his claims about virtue.

The problem about virtue is a special case of a general problem in the adaptive account of happiness. This account tells us what to do with desires that we have; satisfy the feasible ones and get rid of the unfeasible. It does not tell us how to choose between two equally

³² On εὖ πράττειν in this argument see above, note 18. The inference (indicated by ἄρα, 353e4) from necessity to sufficiency is still invalid whatever we decide about the use of εὖ πράττειν.

feasible sets of desires. Indeed it must tell us that from the point of view of happiness there is nothing to choose between them. If I have the resources and capacities to be a musician, a politician or an athlete, and I want to be one, the adaptive account of happiness does not forbid me to try. But it does not explain why I should not want to do nothing but lie in the sun or torture insects. The choice between these two lives will have to depend on other grounds than happiness.

This conclusion might not surprise us. For it is not obviously false that an admirable and a deplorable life can make different people equally happy. But Socrates seems to think that happiness should be our sole and sufficient guide in deciding between different ways of life; and if happiness leaves so many questions open, it seems to be an inadequate guide for him.

If we apply this point to Socrates' claims about virtue, we can see where he faces questions. An adaptive account of happiness explains the sufficiency thesis. In Socrates' view, a virtuous person has seen that his happiness requires him to have flexible or feasible desires; he therefore cultivates these desires and eliminates others, and so ensures the satisfaction of his desires. He therefore ensures his happiness, and loss of external goods is no threat to it. To this extent Socrates can defend his claim that the virtuous person cannot be harmed and will be happy. He will not lose any happiness by being brave, temperate and just.

The same sort of argument shows why an opponent such as Crito or Callicles or Thrasymachus is wrong to suppose that happiness requires vicious action or vicious character. I will believe that happiness requires me to be unjust or intemperate or cowardly if I want the external goods secured by these vices, and I believe that these goods are necessary for my happiness. But if I believe this, I must accept a mistaken, non-adaptive account of happiness.

Socrates can argue, then, that virtue is sufficient for happiness and vice is unnecessary for happiness. But this argument seems to give him no reason to be virtuous rather than non-virtuous. He may convince me that my happiness does not require me to profit at my neighbor's expense. But I can still be happy if I am indifferent to my neighbor's interests or unconcerned about the other people fighting in the battle beside me. If my desires are flexible and feasible, I can secure happiness for myself even if I refuse to do any of the actions of the just and brave person. And if I feel greedy or malevolent or cruel or extravagant, an adaptive account of happiness does not prohibit the satisfaction of these inclinations.

This philosophical weakness in Socrates' position helps to explain the historical puzzle we mentioned earlier—the sharp conflict between the views of professed Socratics about the right account of

happiness. Socrates' adaptive account endorses neither the Cynic nor the Cyrenaic view; but it is hard to see how Socrates can deny that both views satisfy his account, or how he could justify preference for one view over the other. The sharp conflict between the Socratic schools reflects their common acceptance of a Socratic assumption, and, as Plato (in the *Philebus*) and Aristotle see, we can resolve this conflict only by rejecting the shared Socratic assumption.

Socrates, then, offers a weak defense of virtue. Though the sufficiency thesis may seem to recommend virtue rather strongly, it does not; for being virtuous is at best one of many possible results of an adaptive strategy.

Even if we agree with Socrates that the happy person has no need to violate the accepted rules of virtuous action, we need not agree that such a person is really virtuous. Mere absence of temptation to vicious action is not the same as a positive desire to do virtuous action; and we might argue that the positive desire is necessary for virtue. Further, we might argue that only the right sort of positive desire is sufficient for virtue; perhaps the virtuous person must value virtue and virtuous action for themselves, not simply as instrumental means.

We might even doubt that virtuous lives will normally be a subset of happy lives. Will a just person not desire to promote other people's good, and will his desire, in unfavorable conditions, not be frustrated? It looks as though a virtuous person will be less happy, according to Socrates' conception of happiness, than someone who is wrongly indifferent to the results of virtuous action.

For these reasons we might doubt if Socrates has an adequate defense of virtue. If he has no answer to our objections, it does not follow that he is wrong. It may be our estimate of virtue that is wrong. But the objections should at least encourage us to reconsider Socrates' case. Especially they should encourage us to reconsider the adaptive account of happiness.

At this point we might argue that if the adaptive account of happiness leaves Socrates open to such objections, we have good reason for doubting that he accepts it. And indeed this would be a good reason, if we also had good reason to believe that Socrates both sees these objections and sees their bearing on his account of happiness. But we have no good reason to believe either of these things.

13. Plato's Reply to Socrates

We may now return to the beginning of the argument, and the conflict between *Republic* I and the rest of the *Republic*. I have argued for these conclusions:

1. Socrates believes the sufficiency thesis maintained in *Republic* I.
2. He believes it because he accepts an adaptive account of happiness.
3. Such a conception makes just lives at best a proper subset of happy lives.

I now suggest a further conclusion:

4. Plato rejects the sufficiency thesis because he rejects the adaptive account of happiness.

Plato sees that it is reasonable to maintain an apparently weaker claim about virtue to avoid the price that must be paid for Socrates' stronger claim. The most plausible defense of the sufficiency thesis rests on an adaptive account of happiness. Once an adaptive account is rejected, the sufficiency thesis must be rejected; and Plato defends instead the comparative claim about virtue and vice.³³

To show that Plato rejects an adaptive account of happiness, we need to understand the implicit criteria and conception assumed in the *Republic*. In particular we need to understand Plato's reasons for claiming that the people with unjust and disordered souls must all be unhappy. If we examine these reasons, we will see that Plato's claims about unjust people rest on an account of happiness that is not purely adaptive.

I will not defend this suggestion here. I have simply suggested why Plato might have good reasons for rejecting Socrates' sufficiency thesis. The thesis should be rejected not simply because it is counter-intuitive, but also because it rests on an account of happiness that is more deeply in error. When we see that Socrates' account of happiness leads him into error, we learn an important Socratic lesson that Socrates apparently has not learned himself; we need a clearer account of what happiness is supposed to be, and what would be a plausible candidate for happiness. This is the lesson that Plato and Aristotle learn, to different degrees. Once they examine happiness more carefully, they abandon Socrates' sufficiency thesis.³⁴

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³³ Plato's rejection of the Socratic Paradox gives him a further reason for rejecting Socrates' account of happiness (see note 10), though it would not by itself justify him in rejecting the conception of happiness as fulfillment of desires.

³⁴ An earlier version of this paper was read to the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy in December 1984, and benefited from questions raised on that occasion. Questions from audiences at Colgate University and at William and Mary College, especially from Daniel Little, helped me to improve a still earlier version. I have also benefited from criticisms by Gail Fine, and from a very helpful correspondence with Gregory Vlastos. I am especially indebted to the papers by Vlastos and Zeyl cited above.