Plato's *Euthydemus* and the Two Faces of Socrates

It is a major purpose of Plato's *Euthydemus* to distinguish the way in which Socrates used his skills in argument from the ways in which similar skills could be employed by less scrupulous persons. The story which Socrates relates in this work is divided into scenes where the sophists confuse or exasperate their baffled interlocutors and others in which Socrates educates his own interlocutor the young Cleinias. The contrast is given emphasis by the comments that Socrates makes upon their practices at 277d-278c and his invitation to the sophists to give Cleinias some real education at 278c-e and 282de.\(^1\) Important here is the reaction of laughter which the sophists' victories provoke (276b7, d1, 278c1, 298e9, 303b2),\(^2\) and the request of Socrates to Euthydemus, Dionysodorus, and followers, that they should listen without laughter while he questioned Cleinias (278e1).\(^3\) Related to this is the contrast between playful and serious pursuits (277d9, 278cd, 288bc). Ultimately the sophists differ from Socrates not just because they display the eristic trait of trying to win the battle of words at any cost (particularly that of the truth) but also because they are basically entertainers, earning their living as comedians rather than as serious advisors.

Plato faces a real problem: how is one to distinguish between the passionate promoter of unorthodox theses and the expert in argument who expounds similarly unorthodox theses because

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1. Cf. 288c.

2. This is also forthcoming when Ctesippus imitates them (300d6, e1).

3. This is the only case of the adverb ἄγελαστί in Plato.
success in doing so will excite the amusement or admiration of others? How, in particular, can you separate Socrates’ question-and-answer examination of respected moral views (which presumably had some serious concern for finding the truth), from the question-and-answer techniques of those who want only to demolish respected theses (without any concern for the truth whatever)? In short, what separates Socrates from the ‘eristics’?

That question was by now a critical one. Isocrates had been publicly associating the Socratics themselves, some or all of them, with the practice of eristic (Against the Sophists, 1-8). He accuses them of attempted deception, thereby bringing ‘philosophy’ into disrepute. He identifies them as those who spend time on disputes (erides). They pretend, he maintains, to seek the truth, while their claims are founded on a falsehood: the belief that human beings can know in advance what they should be doing to achieve happiness (1-3). When their weaknesses are made manifest by their lack of practical advice for the present, let alone for the future, this results in a reputation for adoleschia and micrologia (aimless rantings and quibbling) rather than for psyches epimeleia (tending the soul). There is no reason for us to think that Isocrates had Plato specially in mind here, for these Socratics take a fee (albeit a small one, 3-7), but there would have been no difficulty in painting Plato’s Socrates in some passages as an idle talker without a central concern for truth. The challenge issued by Isocrates would seem to be as follows:

1. Persuade us that your Socrates genuinely cares for truth, and does not simply adopt a position;

2. Persuade us that this teaching he offers can really impart the good qualities claimed;

3. Persuade us that it has some practical value.

Isocrates’ reservations about the activities of Socratics again surface in the Helen (1), and here he separates different groups by pointing to their most spectacular cases of deviance: group 1 (Antisthenes and any like him) claim that contradiction is impossible and that there can’t be two logoi about the same thing,
group 2 (Plato, as in *Protagoras*, and any like him) make all the virtues the same thing and claim that a single branch of knowledge covers them all, and group 3 (perhaps Euclides and any like him) occupy themselves with useless disputes (again erides) that make trouble for one. By now he has appreciated the differences between rival Socratic groups, but he continues to issue much the same challenges, particularly the first.

What does this mean for any Platonic work which tries to overcome these Isocratean criticisms? Clearly the major task is to persuade us that Plato’s Socrates is concerned to find as much of the truth as possible, even when appearing to espouse unlikely theses, while he must also be of real help in the education of the young. Socrates has to be respectable. He has to be respectable in a way in which he was not respectable in the *Protagoras*, for the theory that there are five virtue-names for the same thing (329cd), whether or not seriously espoused by Socrates, was clearly presented in a contentious manner, and the literary digression had shown even more clearly how Socrates could imitate the sophists in setting out to argue for his own counter-intuitive views at any cost and to impress the gathering thereby. It is no accident that Isocrates chooses to characterize Plato’s early philosophic activity with an oblique reference to this work, but a multitude of other dialogues which Vlastos would label early have similar image-problems: we see a ‘Socrates’ who will appear to some to be less than serious, sometimes adopting counter-intuitive theses, and certainly less than constructive, when he harasses the unfortunate interlocutor into conceding defeat. The other works most vulnerable to such an interpretation are:

1. The *Hippias Minor*, which revels in forcing Hippias to counter-intuitive conclusions (if it were possible to do wrong willingly, the willing wrongdoer would be better than the unwilling);

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4 It is particularly welcome to be able to refer here to the judicious discussion of the targets of the *Euthydemus* and the *Helen* in R. S. W. Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato’s Euthydemus* (Philadelphia 1981), 23-30.
2. The *Lysis*, where much of the argument concerning the nature of what a friend is seems fairly trivial, and where opposite theses are successively expounded;\(^5\)

3. The *Euthyphro*, where Socrates seems less charitable than one would like, and does much to add to the interlocutor's confusion. The alleged pressing reason for wanting to discover the true nature of piety (the imminence of Socrates' own impiety trial) seems something of a sham.

4. The *Charmides*, where the intricate argument about knowledge of knowledge is frequently taken as dependent on a fairly straightforward fallacy (166c ff.), and the discussion with Critias in general throws up difficulty after difficulty without seeming to make any progress towards satisfying the reader; and where Socrates had only struck up the original conversation with Charmides through trickery, and does not seem to have been as concerned for this youth's welfare as for that of a Cleinias or a Hippocrates.

5. One perhaps ought to include the *Apology*, since, where Socrates is able to indulge in a little of his usual cross-examination (24c-27d), the impression of unfairness and sophistry is never far away.

Of these works only the *Hippias Minor* is unrelentingly non-constructive and counter-intuitive, and elsewhere there are

\(^5\) The following propositions are argued during the contentious portion of the dialogue:
Nothing is dear to the lover unless it loves in return (212d); but what is loved is dear to the lover regardless of reciprocity (212e).
Many are dear to their enemies and inimical to their friends (213ab); but this proposition is declared impossible (213b).
What loves is dear to the beloved (213b).
Like is friend to like (214a); but many like pairs are not friends (214b).
Good is friend to good (214c); but good can't be friend to good, qua self-sufficient (215ab).
Unlike is friend of unlike, opposite of opposite (215de); but opposite can't be friends with opposite (216b).
mitigating factors. It is fairly easy to justify Socrates' handling of Euthyphro, because his religious views are such that he would have outraged the reader/listener; it is likewise easy to justify his handling of Critias, since the Athenian public were all too aware of the dire consequences of having a Critian master-art controlling all else within the city while failing to be of any benefit itself. In a word, it is the obnoxiousness of the interlocutors which justifies the determined resistance that Socrates offers and the attitudes and tactics which he employs. In the Lysis the seemingly antilogical nature of the investigation (cf. 216a) is easily explained as a preliminary, much as Socrates justifies the initial assaults of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as a preliminary rite at 277de; the dialogue does indeed move on to a new phase, in which Socrates is able to picture himself for a moment as a hunter (218c) and in which the investigation appears to take an important step closer to Plato's supposed Middle Period with the investigation of the ultimate object of desire (219c ff.). The Lysis is also low in irony, and gives the impression of a Socrates concerned for the welfare of those with whom he converses. But perhaps the greatest difference between the Protagoras and the Hippias Minor on the one hand and other dialogues so far discussed on the other is that none of these others portrays Socrates seemingly arguing for and only for a counter-intuitive thesis. It is often supposed that he does just that in the argument equating eutychia with knowledge at Euthydemus 279c-280a, but that is not the case as one may see from my Appendix below.

The Euthydemus demonstrated Plato's concern to create an acceptable image for Socrates, a concern that seems not to have been felt when Protagoras was written. It is tempting also to conclude that it was not felt when Hippias Minor was written either. The impression of the contentious, heavily ironical, non-constructive verbal battler had to be avoided. This in my view

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6 I.e. a Critian version or per-version (παράκουσμα perhaps) of a Socratic master-art; for the relation to Socrates' own views of much of Critias' thought in the Charmides, see the paper by Andrew Barker, and more generally H. Tarrant and H. Tredennick, Plato: The Last Days of Socrates (Harmondsworth 1993), 4.
leads to a new tendency for Socrates to apologize at points of the argument where he feels the need to be contentious, and to introduce some of his more scathing objections, particularly where they depend on points of language rather than more concrete considerations, in the name of some third party. The *Theaetetus*, which linguistically seems less late than many would allow,⁷ is interesting in this regard. Socrates acknowledges, when speaking on Protagoras’ behalf, that he himself should not be unfair in argument, avoiding too competitive a spirit in discussion. Rather than tripping him, he should be helping him up once he has fallen (167e-168a). He should avoid arguments which depend upon the way we use words rather than upon how we see realities. The passage follows a stage of the argument in which Socrates had challenged Theaetetus in a contentious, antilogical manner characterized by the use of verbal problems (164c), crowing before he had won like an ignoble fighting-cock: an image specially relevant if the agon of *Clouds* I had been a tussle between fighting-cocks as has been suggested. Already Socrates had been introducing the more contentious questions as the anonymous objections of some third party (163d1, cf. 157e-158b), and this continues at 165c, where the deviousness and mercenary nature of the objector are highlighted. It continues further at 188d, 195c-e, and 200bc. The anonymous objectors argue in a style associated with dispute, refutation, counter-argument, and contention.⁸ Certainly Socrates had already in the *Protagoras* been used to asking questions in the name of others in order to distance himself from them and to soften their impact upon the interlocutor,⁹ but he is not there trying to avoid having the reader/listener associate

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7 On language grounds one might easily be tempted to place it at around the time of Book 5 of the *Republic*. This is where it falls, on balance, when one analyses its response-formulae, and this is also where it falls when one compares the frequency of ὅντως relative to τὸ ὅνη. (I am grateful to David Sedley for the latter observation.)

8 Dispute: 158b1, b5, c8, d1, 167d5 x 2, 198c9; refutation: 166b1, 200a12; counter-argument: 164c7, 197a1; contention: 164c9, 167e4, 168d2.

9 311d5, 312d1, d4, 330c2, d2.
those questions with him: they are still Socrates’ questions in a way in which they cease to be in the *Theaetetus*.

The technique used in the *Theaetetus* appears in a more prominent and remarkable form in the *Hippias Major*. As I hope to have shown in my article ‘The *Hippias Major* and Socratic Theories of Pleasure’,¹⁰ the so-called *alter ego* of this work, a second Socrates, a second son of Sophroniscus who shares Socrates’ house, is used to introduce questions which the surface-Socrates is apparently too shy to ask. The device is amusing, and of course a source of that Socratic irony which readers generally find a source of pleasure. But there may be more to it than that. The work may be an ironical comment, worked into this dialogue at a time of pre-publication revision,¹¹ on the tendency to phase everything that created a contentious image out of the character of Socrates, purging him of those quasi-Antisthenean excesses that the *alter ego* displays. Nothing published after the *Euthydemus* could have a Socrates more interested in winning than in honesty, nor more interested in puzzles of words than in the familiar truth. The middle period dialogues show Socrates taking the lead and declaring his hand, educating the interlocutor rather than harassing him. Even where Socrates begins to look like the old early Socrates again, i.e. in the *Theaetetus* where the young intellectual is again being encouraged to think to reveal his own ideas for scrutiny, Socrates offers many of his own thoughts as well as spending a considerable time in an entirely constructive conversation with Theodorus, who is subject not only not to *elenchus* but not even to midwifery. So the *Euthydemus* is a key dialogue in the evolution of the Platonic Socrates, but just where in this process of evolution did the *Euthydemus* come?

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¹¹ Such a revision is unprovable, but it is plausible in the light of the connexions with the 360s which Thesleff was able to show, ‘The Date of the Pseudo-Platonic *Hippias Major*’, *Arctos* 10 (1976), 105-17.
For Vlastos\textsuperscript{12} it is a transitional dialogue, and the Socratic elenchus is lost with the transitional dialogues: with \textit{Euthydemus}, \textit{Lysis}, \textit{Hippias Major}, and \textit{Meno}. A great many dialogues had already surfaced before it, \textit{Apology}, \textit{Protagoras}, \textit{Gorgias}, \textit{Ion}, \textit{Hippias Minor}, \textit{Laches}, \textit{Euthyphro}, \textit{Charmides}, \textit{Republic 1}, and \textit{Crito}. I believe that the bulk of the material for these dialogues was indeed already in existence, but that there is no evidence that any of the true dialogues\textsuperscript{13} had been ‘published’ in any meaningful sense of the word except the \textit{Protagoras} which is clearly a work of public self-advertisement, designed to outdo other teachers in every way possible, and was probably recognised by Isocrates as such. Thus he criticizes that work in particular in the \textit{Helen}.

I believe that it is possible to demonstrate that \textit{Protagoras} was the first of the narrative dialogues,\textsuperscript{14} and that the notion of publishing dialogues which remained in direct or dramatic form had not yet come to the author.\textsuperscript{15} For the most part I assume that Plato’s earliest writing had been designed for serious entertainment and to stimulate discussion among friends, that from there they developed into teaching texts when Plato founded his school; and that up to this point works were normally designed for the author to perform, with only selected works being marked for circulation and given a written narrative framework to assist other readers. Certainly it was expected that the author would read aloud where possible; in the works of Plato Zeno had done

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Socratic Studies} (Cambridge 1994), 29-33, 135.

\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Apology} is indeed likely to have gone into circulation, since it was presumably designed to play a role in reshaping the public image of Socrates.

\textsuperscript{14} See H. Tarrant, ‘Chronology and Narrative Apparatus in Plato’s Dialogues’, \textit{Electronic Antiquity} 1.8 (1994). If the \textit{Erastae} is genuine then it might possibly precede it.

\textsuperscript{15} I discuss this theory further in my paper ‘Orality and Plato’s Narrative Dialogues’ in a volume on Orality edited by Ian Worthington and containing papers from the conference \textit{Voice into Text}.
this in the *Parmenides* (127c), and Diogenes Laertius reports that Protagoras did likewise (D.L. 9.54). Anaxagoras is surely not there when his book is being read aloud in the *Phaedo* (97c, cf. 98b). When Plato writes that Zeno had not really intended his early work to be circulated (*Parm*. 128d), it is likely that he understood the experience. And again when he establishes a correct use of written compositions in the *Phaedrus* he is talking only of reminding those who know (the author and his circle, 275c) and of helping oneself and one's fellow travellers to remember things by coming afresh to one's earlier works in one's old age (276d). We are not supposed to envisage the general circulation of written works as being of any educational value. Plato is surely defending, in a limited way, the private educational value of the written word at the expense of any such public value. Even in the *Theaetetus*, where the author entrusts his book to a slave to read (143bc), the reading is essentially a private experience for the relaxation of the author and his friend. Thus we should not assume that Platonic dialogues were originally published for any educational reason, only to allow the author to engage his opponents in public debate and to promote his own gifts.

This being so, a typical early history for an early Platonic dialogue might be: (i) read in small circles of Plato's friends; (ii) read in the Academy in order to stimulate discussion; (iii) 'published' at a later date when ex-pupils and long-term friends wanted to be reminded of the discussions they had heard when young. At stages (i) and (ii) there was no special need for caution, since the work would not fall into the hands of those who would construe Socrates' role uncharitably, but at stage (iii) it became crucial that the work should present a respectable image and highly desirable that the public also be made aware of the limited claims being made for these works. The *Phaedrus* tackled the latter task, but even so it is likely that any early work released at this time would have undergone some vetting if not

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16 It is also significant that (i) Pythodorus had heard the work from Zeno before, and (ii) Socrates asks Zeno to read the first 'hypothesis' again (127d).
some rewriting. In some cases there may also have been progressive revision in the light of school discussions (stage ii), or early materials may have been absorbed into larger projects.\(^{17}\)

While I assume that many dialogues written early were published later, I hold that revision would have been economical in most cases: not sufficient to destroy the fundamentally 'Socratic' character of the work, not designed to convert it into an up-to-date exposition of Plato's thinking upon the issues. Plato would have sought above all to clean up the image of his Socrates without radically altering the nature of those early discussions which he and his friends wished to remember. Some of the works which were written early had surely been published much more promptly than others, and I assume that Charmides and Lysis were already revised and published before the completion of the Republic: the former for reasons related to politics and to the image of Socrates as a subversive teacher, the latter because material in it complemented the Symposium. Yet I do not believe that their publication should be dated too early: middle period revision is perhaps the best explanation of why the Lysis, which raises our suspicions by ending with seemingly more advanced philosophic theory, includes two examples of the middle response formula\(^{18}\) \(\alpha l l a \ \tau i \ \mu e n; \) (208b, c) and one of the plain \(\tau i \ \mu e n; \) (219e). In general Charmides and Lysis contain more suggestions of middle period influence at the 'polish' level than do Protagoras, Euthydemus, and even Symposium.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) The obvious possibilities are early parts of the Republic, Book 1, perhaps the earlier part of 2, and perhaps also some of the ideal state material; the virtue-definition part of the Meno which reads a little like a primitive aporetic dialogue tackling the definition of (a) virtue; and the earlier parts of Gorgias, which are confined to the examination of rhetoric and its dynamis.

\(^{18}\) Commonest in Republic (7 times, incl. Book 1 348c), twice in Symposium, once each in Tht., Parm., Philb., [Minos], and also twice in Hippias Major (285d, 292a) which is here assumed to have been revised quite extensively at a later date.

\(^{19}\) See my article referred to above (n. 14).
The change which I am postulating in the development of Plato’s Socrates might best be documented in any dialogue which developed slowly within the context of the school, so that its later pages grew out of quite early material. This is what I presume to have happened in the case of the Gorgias. The development of ‘Socrates’ within this work is well known.20 We experience an increasing confidence, an increasing willingness to expound teaching, a new interest in longer speeches and in the use of allegory and myth. We find an increasing seriousness, an increasing desire to relate Socratic philosophy directly to the practicalities of polis-life. In this work a new tactic is used to overcome any perceived naughtiness in the behaviour of Socrates: new characters complain that the tactics of Socrates have been, up to this point, hasty, unfair, demagogic, and impolite (something which ‘Socrates’ will do himself in the Theaetetus): Polus does so at 461bc, Callicles does so at 482c-e. Callicles also pours scorn on Socrates’ profession of truth-seeking. Thus to a degree Plato appears, if not to be apologizing for traits of his earlier Socrates, at least to be anticipating the objections which those like Isocrates would wish to raise concerning Socrates’ tactics. And Isocrates could hardly be ignored if a work like the Gorgias was ever to circulate before his eagle eye.

The Gorgias was a key work in the picture of the Socratic elenchus which Vlastos has built up over the years.21 The theory concerning the elenchus is founded almost solely on the arguments with Polus and with Callicles. If I am correct both of these parts already display the concern for Socrates’ image characteristic of the post-Euthydeman dialogues. The methods used in the refutation of Callicles have at least as much in common with the Socrates of the Republic as with those of the earlier elenchus, and the frequency with which verbal adjectives are found from 480e on

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should give one excellent reason for believing that the arguments with Callicles (in their final version at least) are not early.\textsuperscript{22} For Vlastos elenchus disappears after the \textit{Gorgias}. To a degree it suits me that this device which could so easily invite antagonism should be abandoned at least as soon as the \textit{Euthydemus} was written. Of course it would remain in earlier material if and when it was updated for publication, but it could remain only in a mitigated and somewhat more constructive form: which is precisely the form which Vlastos sees. In fact I believe that the original versions of works like \textit{Euthyphro}, \textit{Laches}, \textit{Charmides}, \textit{Lysis}, and \textit{Hippias Major} could have presented a Socrates somewhat more argumentative than the finished products, as my view of Socratic elenchus is nastier and less constructive than Vlastos'. Indeed, judging from the \textit{Hippias Minor} I suspect that Plato's early products may indeed have deserved to have their author classed among the Socratics attacked by Isocrates' \textit{Against the Sophists}. Socratic elenchus, however, ceases to be the building block of the Platonic dialogue after the \textit{Euthydemus}, precisely because it could too easily be portrayed negatively and Plato had become too image-conscious. The \textit{Euthydemus} was indeed a transitional dialogue, but early enough to have allowed Plato the chance to clean up the image of Socrates somewhat before the actual publication of most early works.

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Appendix: \textit{Eutychia} in the \textit{Euthydemus}

Plato equates \textit{eutychia} with knowledge at \textit{Euthydemus} 279c-280a. The seemingly obvious translation of \textit{eutychia} as 'good

\textsuperscript{22} 40 times, well spread out; never in the arguments with Gorgias, and only here in the argument with Polus where the transition to the Calliclean section begins. Verbal adjectives are rare in earlier Attic prose (Thuc., Lys., Antiph. and Andoc., plus early Isocrates), and in Plato prior to the \textit{Republic}, except for \textit{Crito}. My reasons for this last exception should be clear from the present paper: it is a late revision, containing earlier material but extensively reworked.
luck makes this thesis counter-intuitive, not least because of the tendency among the Greeks to contrast the products of luck or chance (τύχη) with those of deliberate human agency (above all of techne). An excellent example of this occurs in the Meno, which was presumably close in date to the Euthydemus. To equate good luck with knowledge is really to deny the existence of luck at all. Aristotle's discussions in Rhetoric 1.17 and Eudemian Ethics 8.2 tend to confirm that eutychia is very closely related to luck, but the complexity of the latter text and its readiness at least to consider two senses of eutychia give us cause for hesitation. Plato in fact uses the terminology of eutychia and its opposites (dystychia, atychia) sparingly, and it is clear from other passages that a translation in terms of luck will often not be satisfactory. The basic notion is one of success or the lack of it, by hitting or failing to hit the mark. This is clear from the Cratylus on why aboulia often appears to be atychia. The following passages are also helpful: Phdr. 227d4, 231a, 233b2, b3, Gorg. 461e3, and Meno 72a6. Success and prosperity or their absence are much more basic to these notions than chance. If anybody is actually to be credited with possessing eutychia, as opposed to merely experiencing one or more instances of it, then they must have some quality which ensures them a good record of hitting the mark: a clear tendency to be successful. It is just such cases of

23 E.g. Robin Waterfield in T. J. Saunders (ed.) Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues (Harmondsworth 1987), 328-9. Waterfield realises that his understanding of the term makes the argument transparently weak, but thinks that Plato is to be congratulated for thoroughness (306).

24 99a3-4: τὰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς τυχῆς τινὸς ὀρθῶς γιγνόμενα οὐκ ἀνθρωπίνη ἡγεμονία γίγνεται.

25 Outside the Euthydemus I find 59 matches to the patterns eutuc, atuc, and dustuc (I exclude Ἀλ. II, Epinomis, Epistles, Spuria) on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae text of Plato, to which I am indebted. Only a small proportion (13) of these matches involve the nouns.

26 420c ὡσπερ αὖ καὶ τοῦναντίον ἡ "ἀβουλία" ἀτυχία δοκεῖ εἶναι, ὡς οὖ τοῦ θυγόντος οὐδὲ τυχόντος οὐ τ' ἔβαλλε καὶ ὁ ἐβουλεύετο καὶ περὶ οὐ ἐβουλεύετο καὶ οὐ ἐφίετο.
habitually ‘fortunate’ persons which most worry Aristotle in EE 8.2, and Plato too at the end of the *Meno* (99a-e) where he speaks of successful prophets and politicians, attributing their success to correct opinion. It is precisely the case of this quality which promotes success and of these habitual achievers that the *Euthydemus* concerns itself with. It helps the argument greatly that such achievers are those who regularly hit the mark (τυγχάνειν), for it is not difficult to demonstrate that in most walks of life those who hit the mark regularly are those with some kind of knowledge, whether technical or otherwise. The ancient reader has no difficulty in seeing that Plato equates success, not luck, with knowledge.

Aristotle (EE 1248a16ff.) worries over those who seem by virtue of their good character to be fortunate, since, without deliberation, they have a knack of desiring the right thing at the right time. He comes to the conclusion that this is not the work of fortune but of some divine quality within them, an inspiration (enthusiasmos). This is indebted to Plato’s view at the end of the *Meno* (99e) except that this divine quality is in Plato closely linked with correct opinion: it may fall short of consciously reasoned knowledge, but it is something akin to knowledge nevertheless. So that in a work like the *Euthydemus*, which still deals with a simple non-technical knowledge/ignorance dichotomy, to argue that habitual good fortune is in fact a kind of knowledge is entirely in accordance with Plato’s current serious beliefs. There is nothing contentious, unreasonable, or non-serious about *Euthydemus* 279c-280a.