

Socrates' "protreptic" argument in Plato's *Euthydemus*

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In the *Euthydemus* Socrates presents two "protreptic" discourses which form a continuous argument. Protreptic, as explained by Socrates, is a form of argument designed to exhort one to philosophize and care about virtue (275A1). But the argument offered by Socrates leads to *aporia* and seems to have failed at the end of the second protreptic (292E), since it is apparently impossible to articulate the nature of the wisdom, the final and complete knowledge, which philosophy aims at. This paper analyzes Socrates' two discourses in order to see how the *aporia* arises and considers why Socrates thinks one ought to philosophize despite the problematic character of his argument for philosophy. In the first protreptic (278E-282E) Socrates takes it to be obvious that everyone wants to do well and to be happy, then argues that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness. He seems to endorse the extreme view that various recognized goods such as wealth, honour, health, bravery, industry, speed, and acute senses are not goods; any goodness belongs to the correct use of them, not to the recognized goods themselves. Wisdom is thus supposed to be the only good. Hence, Socrates concludes, we must pursue wisdom, that is, philosophize, to attain happiness. But what knowledge should we seek?

In the second protreptic (288D-293A) wisdom to be pursued is not to be understood as an ordinary expert knowledge, but as a kingly art (*basilike techne*) i.e. a comprehensive or superordinate knowledge of good in the whole human life. Yet since wisdom is the sole good, the only knowledge that the kingly art can provide is "of itself" (292D3-4). A regress like this seems to be untenable, but Socrates still asks what this knowledge is and how we use it. His suggestion is that this knowledge is that whereby we make others good, and these again others. Here he adds that in what respect they can possibly be good is nowhere evident to us, and that he had fallen into perplexity, *aporia* (292E1-293A1). The argument has failed. But his final question will bring back one's perspective from external various goods and others to the good of one's own soul. This suggests that one should begin philosophy as self-examination to extend and improve one's grasp of the good of the soul which Socrates thinks is the most important thing for human life. I conclude that his compelling reason to call upon us to philosophize comes down to his memorable axiom in the *Apology* that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being (38A).