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Platonic know-how and successful action

Tamer Nawar

Faculty of Philosophy, University of
Groningen, The Netherlands

Correspondence
Tamer Nawar, Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Groningen, The Netherlands
Email: t.nawar@rug.nl

Abstract

In Plato's *Euthydemus*, Socrates claims that the possession of
epistēmē (usually construed as knowledge or understanding) suffices
for practical success. Several recent treatments suggest that we may
make sense of this claim and render it plausible by drawing a distinc-
tion between so-called "outcome-success" and "internal-success"
and supposing that *epistēmē* only guarantees internal-success. In
this paper, I raise several objections to such treatments and suggest
that the relevant cognitive state should be construed along less than
purely intellectual lines: as a cognitive state constituted at least in
part by ability. I argue that we may better explain Socrates' claims
that *epistēmē* suffices for successful action by attending to the
nature of abilities, what it is that we attempt to do when acting,
and what successful action amounts to in the relevant contexts.
These considerations suggest that, contrary to several recent treat-
ments, the success in question is not always internal-success.

1 | INTRODUCTION

What is the relation between knowledge and successful action? And what do we aim at in action and what makes for a
successful action? This paper aims to make sense of the answers to these question put forward in Plato's *Euthydemus*
where Socrates seems to claim that a certain sort of cognitive state is sufficient for some sort of practical success. My
discussion is not, however, exclusively restricted to the *Euthydemus*, or indeed Plato (Aristotle and Ryle make prom-
inent appearances). Neither is it exclusively historical as it is concerned at least in part with the nature of knowl-
edge-how and abilities, the nature of practical success, and what precisely we attempt or aim at in action.

Early on in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates offers an exhortation to a life of virtue and philosophy. Assuming that all
people wish to do well (*eu prattein*, *Euthydemus* 278e3), Socrates wonders how we do well (279a1–2). In what follows,
he considers the relation between good fortune, successful action, and various crafts (or kinds of know-how) and
claims that flute players have good fortune (*eutuchia*) when it comes to success or doing well (*eupragia*) in flute music
(279e1–2), and that something similar applies to knowing how to write (279e2–4) and various other kinds of knowl-
edge. Socrates goes on to also claim that wisdom (*sophia*) does not require luck in order to succeed (280a6–b3) and
that "knowledge (*epistēmē*) seems to provide men not only with good fortune (*eutuchia*) but also with success or doing
well (*eupragia*) in every case of possession or action" (281b2–4).

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Socrates' discussion raises a number of puzzles—especially concerning the value of *epistēmē* or *sophia*, the nature of goodness and happiness, and the extent to which the latter depend upon the former. The view that a certain sort of cognitive state might be necessary and sufficient for being good and for being happy has—despite its various iterations (perhaps most notably among a number of the ancient Greek philosophers)—struck many as implausible. I shall here focus principally on attempting to explain a more limited claim upon which the aforementioned claims about goodness and happiness seem to depend: that *epistēmē* or *sophia* guarantees success or successful action. This is puzzling in its own right and raises a number of questions concerning the nature of *epistēmē* or *sophia* on the one hand, and the nature of action and practical success on the other.

It is widely agreed that the various epistemic terms (e.g. *epistēmē* and *sophia*) are being employed interchangeably to speak of one particular epistemic state and readers of Plato are accustomed to construing this epistemic state as explanatory understanding (the nature of which I shall discuss below). However, why such a cognitive state should be thought to guarantee success or successful action (let?alone happiness) is rather unclear. Several recent treatments have argued that one needs to draw a distinction between "outcome-successes" (e.g. the attaining of a certain result) and "internal-successes" (e.g. an action which meets certain success criteria purely in virtue of its internal features and not its results) and that the claim that *epistēmē* or *sophia* guarantees success is best understood to mean that *epistēmē* guarantees internal-success (and not outcome-success).

In what follows, I will argue that, as it stands, such an approach is inadequate and propose an alternative. First (Section 2), I give a brief critical account of the claims made by Plato's Socrates in the *Euthydemus* and go on to outline the distinction between internal-success and outcome-success drawn in the literature and argue that it does not succeed in explaining or rendering plausible Socrates' claim(s). I then (Section 3) suggest that *epistēmē* should be construed as know-how along somewhat less than purely intellectualist lines: as a cognitive state constituted at least *in part* by ability. Finally (Section 4), I turn to the nature of abilities and their manifestations and argue that it is certain views concerning abilities, which explain why *epistēmē* or *sophia* should be thought to guarantee success. I consider two different accounts of abilities, which offer differing sorts of guarantees of success, and distinguish between various different ways of characterising the manifestations of abilities and what success amounts to. I argue that the criteria for success are not uniform across all abilities or activities and that success cannot be construed purely as internal-success in all the relevant cases.

2 | *EPISTĒMĒ*, *SOPHIA*, AND SUCCESS: THE ARGUMENT(S) OF THE *EUTHYDEMUS*

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates recounts a conversation with two sophists: the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Upon meeting them, Socrates notes that they are knowledgeable about war and how to fight and that they also teach people how to defend themselves in the law-courts (*Euthydemus* 273c4–9). However, the two sophists claim that they no longer merely teach people how to fight in word and deed, they now also claim to have a special skill or expertise (*technē*, 274e4; cf. 285b4): the teaching of virtue (*aretē*) (273d8–9). At this, Socrates is amazed, for the knowledge (*epistēmē*, 273e6) the brothers now claim to have goes far beyond the skilful or clever (*deinos*, 273e3) nature or expertise (*technē*, 272a5) he had attributed to them. Socrates asks for a demonstration to see whether they really can point someone towards virtue (274d4–275a7), but Euthydemus and Dionysodorus instead proceed to offer some sophistic puzzles about whether those who learn are already knowledgeable or not. Socrates quickly points out that their apparent puzzles turn upon easily detected lexical ambiguities—he dissolves the puzzles by showing there is a difference between coming to have (*echein*) knowledge and using (dative construction) it (277e5–278a5)—and asks that the two brothers refrain from playing further games and turn to serious affairs. He himself proceeds to offer an exhortation towards virtue as an example of what he has in mind (278d2–e2).[1]

In his exhortation, Socrates assumes that all people wish to do well (*eu prattein* 278e3) and wonders how it is that we do well (279a1–2). It is, he suggests, through being wealthy, healthy, well born, and so forth. Wisdom (*sophia*) is to be classed among these goods (279c1–2) and so is good fortune (*eutuchia* 279c7). In fact, Socrates (puzzlingly) claims

"wisdom is surely good fortune" (279d6–7). After all, he asks, isn't it the case "that flute players have the best luck when it comes to success (*eupragia*) in flute music?" (279e1–2). The same applies, he thinks, to grammarians when it comes to reading and writing (279e2–4) and as a general rule (279e6) the wise captain has the best fortune (279e4–6). In fact, in each case it is the wise (or those who depend upon them) who are luckier or more fortunate (280a4–5).[2]

As has often been noticed, much of the discussion about wisdom producing (or even *being*) good fortune seems to trade upon the fact that *eutuchia* ("good fortune") may be applied both to successes we attain through our own agency (such as what happens when a skilled tennis player hits a shot well due to their skill) and to positive outcomes attained due to things outside of our control (such as when a person wins a lottery). The claims make sense when applied to the former sort of positive outcome but not the latter[3]; Socrates goes on to propose:

> Wisdom (*sophia*) makes men have good fortune in every case, since I don't suppose she would ever make any sort of mistake but must necessarily act correctly (*orthōs prattein*) and succeed (*tugchanein*)[4]— otherwise she would no longer be wisdom.
> We finally agreed (I don't know quite how) that, in sum, the situation was this: if a man had wisdom, he had no need of good fortune in addition (Euthydemus 280a6–b3).

That is to say, the possession of wisdom suffices for acting correctly and acting successfully (280a8). Having settled this point, Socrates initially supposes that if a person has many goods,[5] then he or she would be happy (*eudaimonein*) and do well (*eu prattein*) (280b5–6). However, Socrates immediately goes on to argue that the goods must be advantageous to us (280b7–8) and that the mere presence or possession of goods is not enough do well, secure advantage, or be happy (280c1–d4).[6] In order to be happy or attain advantage, goods must be used correctly (280d4–7, e3–4). Socrates goes on to argue that in order to use things correctly, a certain kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*) is necessary.

For instance, when it comes to using things concerned with wood-making, one needs to have knowledge of carpentry (281a2–4) in order to use the relevant materials correctly. Something similar applies to other spheres (281a5–6). Furthermore:

> And also, I said, with regard to using the goods we mentioned first—wealth and health and beauty—was it knowledge (*epistēmē*) that ruled and directed our actions with regard to correctly using all such things as these, or some other thing? [...] Then knowledge seems to provide men not only with good fortune (*eutuchia*) but also with success (*eupragia*), in every case of possession (*ktēsis*) or action (*praxis*) (Euthydemus 281a6–b4).

Accordingly, a certain cognitive state (*epistēmē*) is thus necessary for correct use of things and success, but it also seems to be *sufficient* for correct use and for success or doing well (*eupragia*).

The relevant cognitive state thus possesses a distinctive sort of value when compared with the goods earlier mentioned. Those goods (health, wealth, and so forth) are not *per se* goods (281d4–5) and though they may be goods when used well, they are in fact *evils* when misused (cf. 281b4–c3, 281d6–e1). Wisdom (*sophia*), it turns out, is seemingly the only genuine or *per se* good (281e2–5)[7] and it seems better for a person who lacks the relevant cognitive state (*epistēmē*, *sophia*) to be poor than to be rich for, if rich, he will simply misuse his wealth and end up worse off than if he lacked it. (This seems like the blueprint for Stoic ethics, especially Stoic views concerning so-called "indifferents" and also seems important for understanding Hellenistic debates about whether a certain sort of cognitive state was the regulative norm of action or assent.)[8] Finally, Socrates claims:

> since we all wish to be happy, and since we appear to become so by using things and using them correctly, and since knowledge (*epistēmē*) was the source of correctness and good fortune (*eutuchia*), it seems to be necessary that every man should prepare himself by every means to become as wise as possible (Euthydemus 282a1–6).

This, Socrates thinks, suffices as an example of an exhortation towards virtue and a life of philosophy (282d4–7) and the conversation then turns to consider a range of other matters. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus primarily on attempting to explain why *epistēmē* or *sophia* should be thought to guarantee some sort of success or successful action (*eu prattein, eupragia*).[9]

Readers have noticed that this claim seems to receive little in the way of explicit argumentative support in the dialogue (e.g. Irwin, 1995: 56).[10] However, one way of attempting to explain (and render plausible) the claim that *epistēmē* or *sophia* guarantees success has been to attend to what Plato's Socrates might mean by "success." It was long ago noted that talk of success or doing well (*eu prattein*) can be used of a favourable outcome or a well performed action (Gifford, 1905: 20)—as noted above, something similar holds of talk of good fortune (*eutuchia*) and of terms like *eupragia*[11]—and in recent scholarship it is often suggested that in order to understand Socrates's claims in the *Euthydemus*, we must draw a distinction between different kinds of success and suppose that *epistēmē* or *sophia* might guarantee one kind of success, but not another. Two influential expositions of such a view have been put forward by Panos Dimas (2002) and Daniel Russell (2005). Here is Panos Dimas:

> [Socrates] surely knows, as does everyone else, that no action can ever guarantee the delivery of such a product, however knowledgeable the agent standing behind it. Circumstances external to the action and out of the agent's control can always interfere and cause it to fail even though it was performed impeccably. Since Socrates insists emphatically that the knowledge of the wise agent brings success in all her action, what he must be understanding as the measure of success is obviously internal to the action and therefore confined solely to the domain controlled by the agent who performs it. But the only thing internal to the action and most definitely within the control of the agent is the actual performance of it (Dimas, 2002: 20).

Here, in turn, is Daniel Russell:

> According to Plato, the success of wise activity is completely internal to the activity [...] Plato's claim that a wise captain succeeds at sailing cannot be that a wise captain would never let himself be exposed to peril or could always overcome it; wisdom is neither omniscience nor omnipotence. But the wise captain, even in perilous conditions, can still succeed at sailing well, as an intelligent, skilful, and prudent captain would sail. Moreover, Plato says that that sort of success is all the success one ever needs, since with such success there is 'no further need of good luck' (281b2–3). On Plato's view, success is determined not by the completion of some action, but by how one engages in all action with wisdom and intelligence [...] success at acting wisely must always be available to a wise person, who has no need of further good luck (Russell, 2005: 30–1).

The common core of these proposals seems to be that we may understand Socrates' claim that an agent with *epistēmē* or *sophia* is guaranteed to succeed by invoking a distinction between behaviour on the one hand and accomplishments on the other, that is, between what might be regarded (cf. Jones, 2013) as *internal-success* (performing a certain activity well) on the one hand and *outcome-success* (attaining a certain result),[12] and supposing that *epistēmē* or *sophia* guarantees only internal-success.

On this view, *epistēmē* guarantees success, but the relevant success is purely *internal* to the activity. Both Dimas and Russell use the same language, but do not elaborate its meaning in much detail. However, some examples should make fairly clear what is meant (I revisit the issue and discuss it in greater detail in Section 4). Thus, for instance, the sailor always sails well (though he may not reach his destination and may indeed drown), the archer always shoots well (though she may not hit her target), and the doctor always heals well (though the patient may not be cured and may indeed get worse). Dimas and Russell both suggest that what performing the relative activity well amounts to is, roughly speaking, performing the activity in an appropriately rational fashion (2005: 34; cf. 2002: 17–21, 25). They seem to think that this sort of construal rescues the claim from plausibility, but Russell in particular concedes that it leaves open several questions regarding the nature of successful activity (Russell, 2005: 42).[13]

However, such a proposal seems to face at least three objections. First, although the distinction between internal-success and outcome-success might initially seem helpful in rendering plausible the claim that *epistēmē* guarantees success, it ultimately seems to merely replace one obvious implausibility with another. Putting to one side whether the archer will hit her target or not, why should it be deemed plausible to suppose that she will always make a good shot?[14] Roger Federer does not attain outcome-success each time he plays tennis, but even Roger Federer does not attain internal-success each time he plays tennis. He not only sometimes makes some shots which (e.g.) land outside the playing area but he also—sometimes—makes unforced errors wherein he hits the ball poorly (I will elaborate this point in greater detail below). Secondly, it seems that divorcing the so-called "internal" and "external" features of action will lead—at least in some cases—to rather unnatural uses of success terms or actions which may only implausibly be regarded as successes. For instance, if an archer makes a brilliant shot (it is excellently aimed, has the right force so as to hit the target, takes into account the environmental conditions, etc.), and yet an unforeseeable gust of wind sent by some Homeric god blows the arrow off-course and the arrow instead hits the archer's allies, then it seems very difficult to regard the shot as a success (I will return to this below). Thirdly, even if such an approach were to grant some plausibility to the claim that *epistēmē* guarantees success, it does very little to explain how or why *epistēmē* should guarantee successful action. In what follows, I will suggest that we may explain the claim and better attend to its plausibility by taking *epistēmē* to be constituted at least in part by an ability and focusing on the nature of abilities and their manifestations.

3 | PLATONIC *EPISTĒMĒ*: UNDERSTANDING AND KNOW-HOW

It is widely agreed that Plato often uses various epistemic terms (notably *epistēmē*, *sophia*, *technē*, and *phronēsis*) interchangeably to speak of one particular epistemic state (henceforth *epistēmē*),[15] and—in a great number of contexts—readers of Plato are accustomed to construing the relevant epistemic state not as knowledge (as it has typically been construed by modern epistemologists), but instead as an epistemic state which they typically take to be distinct from knowledge: *explanatory understanding*. As Myles Burnyeat, an influential proponent of this view, puts it:

> Much of what Plato says about knowledge [i.e. *epistēmē*] and its relation to true opinion falls into place if we read him, not as misdescribing the concept which philosophers now analyse in terms of justified true belief, but as elaborating a richer concept of knowledge tantamount to understanding (Burnyeat, 1980: 186).

Following Burnyeat, it is usually thought that the cognitive state Plato often discusses is not knowledge as it is usually described nowadays, but *understanding*. Though the relevant scholarship is often not entirely clear on the precise nature of this cognitive state, it is typically thought that understanding is necessarily synoptic or holistic (it is not piecemeal), requires some awareness of explanatory grounds or explanatory relations among the items understood, and cannot straightforwardly be transmitted through testimony. Accordingly, it is typically thought to be distinct from knowledge (and it is not to be construed as a kind of knowledge, e.g. causal knowledge).[16] As Burnyeat claims (see above), construing *epistēmē* as *understanding* is meant to make sense of many of Plato's remarks (and indeed those of several other ancient figures) about *epistēmē* which otherwise seem puzzling.[17] Thus, for instance, in the *Meno* (a dialogue in which Plato's Socrates seems to make claims rather similar to those he makes in the relevant part of the *Euthydemus*), Socrates considers whether *epistēmē* has a distinctive sort of value. The worry is that both *epistēmē* and true belief seem equally efficacious in guiding action (96e1–97c10), and so a question arises as to why *epistēmē* should have a distinctive sort of value which makes it superior to mere true belief. Socrates suggests that *epistēmē* should be distinguished from mere true belief in virtue of the fact that true belief has not been fastened down by "reasoning about the cause" (*aitias logismos*, *Meno* 98a3–4), whereas *epistēmē* has.[18]

Such remarks, the thought goes, are meant to make sense when we construe *epistēmē* as understanding but little sense when we construe *epistēmē* as knowledge. (There are parallels with some contemporary discussions of

understanding and epistemic value.[19]) Equally, somewhat earlier in the *Meno*, a slave comes to have justified true belief concerning the doubling of the square on the basis of another's testimony but does not yet, at this point, have *epistēmē* (*Meno* 84d3–85b7). What the slave requires in order to have *epistēmē* is not, seemingly, better evidence or some counterfactual safety condition; instead, they need to have worked out an explanation and *seen how things fit together*.[20] Again, such claims about *epistēmē* are meant to be highly puzzling if we construe *epistēmē* as knowledge (there are very few who want to claim that knowledge cannot be transmitted by testimony or that it requires an explanatory grasp of things), but make sense when we construe *epistēmē* as understanding.

Construing Platonic *epistēmē* as understanding does a good job of making sense of some of the claims Plato's Socrates makes about *epistēmē* (cf. Schwab, 2015). However, as far as I am aware, there have not been any attempts to explain the claims made about *epistēmē* in the *Euthydemus*—most notably why *epistēmē* should be thought to guarantee successful action—by appealing to the view that *epistēmē* should be construed as understanding. Those who construe *epistēmē* as understanding typically say little about how it might guarantee successful action and it is not clear how understanding—as it is construed in the relevant literature—can account for the guaranteed success or successful action which is ascribed to *epistēmē*. Equally, those who are interested in explaining the claims made about *epistēmē* guaranteeing successful action in the *Euthydemus* typically say little about construing *epistēmē* as understanding. Instead, they typically briefly remark that one should appreciate that there is an important practical dimension to the *epistēmē* Socrates speaks of (e.g. Annas, 1993: 58–9; Russell, 2005: 19, 34, 43). Such remarks are, I think, upon the right track, but—such brief remarks aside—the issue has not received much in the way of detailed discussion in the relevant recent literature.

Somewhat longer ago, Gould (1955) offered a more detailed suggestion along such practical lines. Gould argued against the view that Platonic *epistēmē* was a certain kind of understanding (moral understanding),[21] and claimed that the widespread tendency to construe Platonic *epistēmē* as a highly intellectualised form of cognition was mistaken (Gould, 1955: 4–5). Adverting to his contemporary Ryle (e.g. Gould, 1955: xii–xiii, 4–6), Gould proposed an alternative construal of *epistēmē* and suggested, *inter alia*, that Platonic *epistēmē* should be construed as Rylean knowledge-how and that one should resist "an almost universal tendency to assimilate cases of knowing *how* to cases of knowing *that*" (1955: 6). According to Gould, *epistēmē* should be construed as Rylean know-how and this in turn should not be construed as a propositional attitude, but instead as "a form of moral *ability*, comparable in some respects to the creative or artistic ability of potters, shoemakers and the like" (Gould, 1955: 7). In short, Gould thought "the ἐπιστήμη which Socrates envisaged was a form of knowing *how*" (Gould, 1955: 7).

Gould's views found relatively little favour and have largely been ignored in the relevant recent discussions.[22] I do not wish to subscribe to several claims Gould made concerning *epistēmē*,[23] but I do think that the core of Gould's proposal—that Platonic *epistēmē* might be construed as know-how as Ryle conceived it—is promising. More concretely, I think that, if suitably adapted, it may shed light on why *epistēmē* should be thought to guarantee successful action. However, in order to properly explain how such a proposal helps address the issue of how *epistēmē* guarantees successful action, I will first need to say something about knowledge-how.

In recent literature it is common to distinguish between so-called "intellectualist" and "anti-intellectualist" accounts of knowledge-how in more or less the following way. Anti-intellectualists often take knowledge-how to be distinct in kind from knowledge-that and typically suppose (or, perhaps, are typically taken to suppose) that knowledge-how is an ability or a relation to an ability which is not reducible to knowledge-that. In this, they are thought to follow Ryle (e.g. "According to Ryle, an ascription of the form "*x* knows how to *F*" merely ascribes to *x* the ability to *F*," Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 416). Thus, for instance, according to at least one anti-intellectualist view, knowing how to φ is having an ability to φ or standing in some relation to φ-ing which is not reducible to having certain propositional attitude(s) towards φ-ing.

In contrast, intellectualists typically deny that knowledge-how and knowledge-that are distinct in kind and they also deny that knowledge-how is or is constituted by (or otherwise requires) an ability. That is to say, according to intellectualists, knowing how to φ does not require that one have the ability to φ (and intellectualists often adduce cases wherein it seems that one knows how to φ and yet is not able to φ, e.g. a pianist who loses use of her hands

does nevertheless know how to play the piano—or so the thought goes).[24] Instead, intellectualists maintain that knowledge-how is or is reducible to knowledge-that about ways of acting. That is to say, on the intellectualist account, knowing how to φ is or is reducible to having certain propositional attitude(s) towards φ-ing. Thus, for instance, according to Stanley and Williamson (2001), one knows how to φ in context _c_ iff one knows that such-and-such is a way to φ in _c_ and entertains the relevant proposition(s) under a so-called "practical mode of presentation."[25]

Ryle himself claimed that agents are said to possess knowledge how in virtue of their ability,[26] and—more broadly —Ryle aimed to show that there are certain intelligent activities which are "neither themselves intellectual operations not yet effects of intellectual operations" (Ryle, 1949: 26). That is to say, Ryle thought that actions might be intelligent not in virtue of being accompanied or produced by some propositional attitudes or internal act(s) of considering propositions. However, while Ryle was especially concerned to argue that there is no separate act of considering a proposition prior to intelligent action (something which it is not clear that intellectualists would be committed to), it is worth noticing that in at least one respect the "anti-intellectualist" label attached to Ryle's own account (and no doubt encouraged in part by Ryle himself and his frequent invectives against the so-called "intellectualist legend") is potentially misleading. This is because while it is true that, for Ryle, know-how requires ability (1949: 41), it seems that mere ability to do something or other is not sufficient for knowledge-how:

> _Understanding is a part of knowing how [...] The intelligent performer operates critically [...] You exercise your knowledge how to tie a clove-hitch not only in acts of tying clove-hitches and in correcting your mistakes, but also in imagining tying them correctly, in instructing pupils, in criticising the incorrect or clumsy movements and applauding the correct movements that they make, in inferring from a faulty result to the error which produced it, in predicting the outcomes of observed lapses, and so on indefinitely (Ryle, 1949: 54–5)._

According to Ryle, it does not seem that knowledge-how should be construed simply as any old ability. This is because, in addition to the ability to do certain things (something which brutes, who lack knowledge-how, may possess), the possessor of knowledge-how acts intelligently and has understanding—something which brutes and fools do not possess (modern anti-intellectualist accounts often seem to neglect this). It is for this reason that the possessor of knowledge-how may readily explain things, is able to teach, to predict, to work things out, and so forth. For Ryle, these are hetereogenous manifestations of knowledge-how which is itself an ability which is attained by training (as opposed to drilling).[27]

It is true that Ryle emphasises that understanding should not be construed as something distinct from the relevant observable actions (which are manifestations of the relevant multi-track ability), and it is also true that Ryle would want to deny that understanding is or is constituted by a propositional attitude or otherwise requires the consideration of propositions (or, indeed, other similar representational devices in the mind) and would instead offer an anti-intellectualist account of what such understanding amounts to (such that it turns out not to be a propositional attitude).[28] However, for those who are attracted to some elements of the Rylean notion of know-how, it remains possible to follow Ryle and the anti-intellectualists in supposing that know-how is constituted at least in part by ability (as the anti-intellectualists suppose), and to follow Ryle himself in thinking that know-how is also constituted at least in part by understanding, and that intelligent action does not require prior consideration of some proposition (or an intellectual "shadow-life"), while not thinking that understanding itself needs to be construed in an anti-intellectualist fashion or in the manner that Ryle proposed.[29] That is to say one may suppose that knowledge-how is constituted at least in part by ability and at least in part by understanding. If one further supposes that understanding is or is constituted by some sort of propositional attitude, then one would have a sort of hybrid view of knowledge-how (according to which knowledge-how is constituted by an ability and a propositional attitude).[30]

Such a view of knowledge-how might seem like some bastard offspring of Rylean know-how (and no doubt it would be disowned by Ryle), but it seems to me to accurately describe Platonic _epistēmē_ in several important respects. While explanatory awareness is often taken to be the mark of _epistēmē_, it seems that _epistēmē_ in fact has a number of marks. For instance, in the _Meno_, it was also emphasised that _epistēmē_ was stable (_Meno_ 98a6) and distinctive in

enabling its possessor to *teach*—whereas mere true belief need not be teachable (*didakton*), *epistēmē* must be (*Meno* 98d10, 12, 99a7–8, b5–9).[31] So far, so Ryle, but also so Plato. In the *Euthydemus*, it is suggestive that the cognitive states discussed often seem much like knowledge-how in being oriented towards action or the making of things,[32] and elsewhere it is frequently emphasised that *epistēmē* is like a craft or skill (*technē*) in several important respects (e.g. *Apology* 21d4–22d4; *Laches* 194d10ff; cf. *Theatetus* 147b5–9). Most crucially for my purposes, in various dialogues *epistēmē* is often said to be or to be constituted by a capacity or power (*dunamis*)[33] and it seems to be assumed that the person who has knowledge-how is able to perform the relevant actions (e.g. *Euthydemus* 294b3–6). Accordingly, I am proposing that understanding is a part, but is not the whole of *epistēmē*. That is to say, *epistēmē* is constituted by ability and understanding. That this should be construed as knowledge-how, according to a hybrid-view of knowledge-how, is suggested by the fact that, for Plato's Socrates, understanding leads action (e.g. *Euthydemus* 281a8–b1, *Gorgias* 449e4–5) in precisely the manner which Ryle (and Gould) wished to resist while *epistēmē* is constituted at least in part by an ability in precisely the manner which intellectualist accounts wish to resist.[34] It is the fact that *epistēmē* is constituted at least in part by ability that is important for what follows and it is, I believe, required in order to explain why *epistēmē* should be thought to guarantee successful action.

4 | ABILITY AND SUCCESSFUL ACTION

To recap, I have proposed that one should construe *epistēmē* not merely as understanding, but as a cognitive state constituted at least in part by ability. I will now turn to elaborating upon how this might explain why *epistēmē* is thought to guarantee acting correctly (*orthōs prattein*), succeeding (*tugchanein*, 280a8), or success (*eupragia*, 281b3). My suggestion is simple and turns upon the thought that one has an ability to perform an action only when one can perform that action when one wishes. The semantics of "can" are notoriously tricky, but here it is worth noting two things. First, "can" is (at least sometimes) used to ascribe abilities (for recent discussion, see Maier, 2015). Secondly, ability (in the sense of "ability" at issue here) requires more than mere possibility. If x φs, then it follows that it is possible that x φs; however, it need not be the case that x has the ability to φ. This is because it seems that one's φ-ing need not manifest (and does not require) an ability to φ (one may, after all, φ through a simple fluke). In what follows, I will consider two accounts of abilities which may explain the relation between *epistēmē* (which is constituted at least in part by ability) and action, what sort of success *epistēmē* might be said to guarantee, and how it might be said to guarantee it.

The first way of seeing how *epistēmē* guarantees success or successful action turns upon supposing that the abilities constitutive of *epistēmē* may be characterised as follows:

> **(ABILITY)** *S has the ability to φ iff if S were to attempt to φ, then S would φ.*

Such a view of abilities has sometimes seemed intuitive (e.g. Moore, 1912; but cf. Ryle, 1949) and finds parallels in ancient discussions.[35] It is rather similar to a simple counterfactual conditional analysis of dispositions (e.g. x has a disposition to φ when confronted with stimulus s iff if x were confronted with stimulus s, then x would φ; cf. Martin, 1994). On the assumption that *epistēmē* is constituted at least in part by ability, (ABILITY) might be seen to lead to the view that *epistēmē* guarantees success because if a person has *epistēmē* (and *epistēmē* is constituted by an ability), then—according to (ABILITY)—if that person were to attempt to perform the relevant action then they would perform that action. Construing the cognitive state that Socrates speaks of as being constituted at least in part by ability and construing abilities in the way suggested by (ABILITY), or something like it, provides something in the way of an explanation as to why the relevant cognitive state should guarantee successful action.

However, when it comes to considering the nature of the success or successful action guaranteed by *epistēmē*, much depends on precisely how we should construe the manifestations of the relevant ability. Just as scholars discussing the claims in the *Euthydemus* (or the ambiguity of expressions like *eu prattein*, see above) have distinguished between internal-success and outcome-success, so too when considering the analysis offered by (ABILITY) we might

want to consider what sort of thing "φ" is acting as a placeholder for. It seems, in particular, that we might wish to distinguish between the following possible ways of construing the manifestations of an ability:

i the *doing* of something (i.e. an action); or

ii the *doing* of something *well* (i.e. a *successful* action, an action which meets certain evaluative requirements); and

iii the *result* or *effect* brought about by one's doing or action.

Such a distinction is not always marked (and in recent debates one can find frequent slides from one way of construing the manifestation of an ability to another, for example, "Competences are dispositions of an agent to perform well [...] Your archery competence corresponds to: *if you were to shoot at a target you would likely hit it*," Sosa, 2010: 465–6). However, it is meant to be helpful. According to the distinction proposed, (i) and (ii) seem to pick out certain ways of construing direct manifestations of an ability, while (iii) seems to pick out a somewhat less direct manifestation of an ability. While (i) and (ii) are necessarily activities or actions, (iii) is not necessarily an activity or action (and in the cases considered here will generally not be). Furthermore, (ii) differs from both (i) and (iii) in explicitly including an evaluative dimension. Finally, (ii) seems to describe something very similar to so-called "internal-success" while (iii) describes something akin to what is meant by "outcome-success." To briefly illustrate the distinction by means of an example, consider the ability to engage in wood-working (*Euthydemus* 281a1–4). We might construe the relevant manifestation of this ability (per (i)) as something akin to carving wood; or (per (ii)) as something akin to carving wood well (whatever that involves, e.g. with skill, attention, precision, etc.); or (per (iii)) as a wooden statue (or a wooden statue coming into existence).

To illustrate the distinction in somewhat greater detail, consider another example (one much beloved of ancient and modern philosophers who like to discuss abilities, aims, and so forth): ability in archery. Thus suppose that, as per (i), we construe the manifestation of archery-ability as the shooting of arrows (something that involves the pulling of a bowstring and the loosing of an arrow). On this construal, in accordance with (ABILITY), a success of the following sort is guaranteed. If I were to attempt to shoot an arrow, then I would shoot an arrow (though there is no guarantee that if I were to attempt to shoot an arrow well or hit a target, then I would shoot an arrow well or hit a target). Accordingly, my shooting poorly or missing a target—or the fact that I could do so—would not reveal that I lacked the relevant ability. Instead, what would reveal that I lacked the relevant ability is if I could, in attempting to shoot an arrow (e.g.) pull on the bowstring so hard that I would break it (or the arrow would fall from my grasp before it is shot, etc) and no shooting of arrows were to occur.

Alternatively, suppose that, as per (ii), we construe the manifestation of an archery-ability as the shooting of arrows well. What precisely does this amount to? We might attempt to elaborate upon the suggestion offered by Dimas and Russell and consider features purely internal to the activity. Thus, for instance, shooting an arrow well would be constituted by shooting with good aim, holding the bow appropriately, understanding how environmental factors may affect the arrow's flight and compensating appropriately, employing the appropriate force, and so forth (I emphasise that, on this account, it is not constitutive of shooting well that one hits the target).

Finally, suppose that, as per (iii), we construe the manifestation of an archery-ability as the target being hit. On this construal, the manifestations of abilities should be seen as certain sorts of results and, in accordance with (ABILITY), *epistēmē* would thereby guarantee a success of the following sort. If I were to attempt to hit a target, then I would hit a target. To give further examples of (iii) we might suppose that, in the case of sculpting ability, the result or effect is either a statue or a statue coming into existence; and in the case of healing ability, the result or effect is either health or a patient coming to be healthy. The difficulties which arise from construing the manifestations of abilities along the lines proposed by (iii) should be apparent. For instance, to reuse an earlier example, suppose that I am a champion archer and that I make a perfect shot. My shot has the right force, it takes into account the wind, and so forth, and it is such that it would hit the target. However, some Homeric god or a sudden and unforeseeable gust of wind suddenly diverts the arrow from its course mid-flight. If (ABILITY) is correct, then the Homeric god's action has revealed that, despite all my archery trophies, I lack the relevant ability (at least at the time of my shot). Worse, the possibility that such a thing could happen when I took a shot would reveal that I lacked the relevant ability.

It is worth emphasising that these difficulties do not apply exclusively (as several seem to suppose) to (iii). That is to say, there are also considerable difficulties when one construes the manifestations of abilities along the lines proposed by (ii). For instance, with respect to (ii), in attempting to shoot an arrow well, my hand might (e.g.) slip and release the arrow before the bowstring was fully drawn back (or otherwise fail to shoot well). If such a possibility is salient, then—according to (ABILITY)—I lack the relevant ability. What then about lowering the bar and construing the manifestations of an ability along the lines proposed by (i)? Well, on the iteration of (i) offered here, even construing the manifestations of an ability as (i) proposes does not help all that much. With respect to (i), the possibility that the bowstring might snap (or something else might occur such that I fail to take a shot) would again mean that I lack the relevant ability.

In short, while assuming (ABILITY) might explain why one thinks that *epistēmē* guarantees success, there does not seem to be a way of rendering plausible the sort of infallibility granted by *epistēmē*. Perhaps the most promising way of attempting to secure infallibility would to insist that the manifestations of an ability be construed as the sort of action spoken of in (i) but to insist that the manifestations of abilities should be construed as basic actions. If we were to modify (i) in line with this suggestion, then shooting an arrow (the sort of example offered above) would not in fact be an example of the manifestation of an ability, though raising one's arms might be (how to characterise basic actions is contentious, but here it suffices to suppose that a basic action is an action which is in some sense simple and is not performed by performing any other action). However, even if we granted that such a proposal might secure infallibility (I do not see any strong reasons to do so; there seem to be basic actions, such as keeping one's hands steady which I can recall failing to perform upon attempting to do so), then it is clearly not the sort of thing which Socrates has in mind in the *Euthydemus* (none of the relevant actions or activities Socrates speaks of, such as sailing, playing the flute, working wood, and so forth, would qualify as basic in the relevant sense) and the relevant kind of basic actions do not seem to be easily or straightforwardly evaluated as successful in the robust sense required. After all, what shall it profit a man if he guarantees success only at the price of intolerably cheapening success?[36]

In sum, most readers of the *Euthydemus* (though they do not, I emphasise, speak of abilities) seem to think that infallibility or guaranteed success might be gained by taking *epistēmē* to guarantee actions of the sort described in (ii)—actions considered successful purely in virtue of their internal features and not their results—this holds true not only of figures like Dimas (2002) or Russell (2005) but also of critics such as Jones (2013). However, that does not seem right. Even though the sorts of manifestations picked out in (iii) are generally more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of fortune and factors outside of one's control, it is not clear that appealing to (ii) plausibly ensures infallibility or guaranteed success. Furthermore, pretty much regardless of how we construe the relevant manifestations or the relevant successes, what seems to explain why the relevant successes are guaranteed seems to be (ABILITY) (or some view like it). Of course, while (ABILITY) might explain why one would think that success (of the relevant sort, whatever that is) is guaranteed, it is implausible and an inadequate characterisation of abilities.

There is, however, another way of understanding how *epistēmē* guarantees success or successful action. This turns upon supposing that the abilities constitutive of *epistēmē* may be characterised in a somewhat different manner. More concretely, in the *Hippias Minor*, where abilities and capacities are explicitly discussed, Plato has Socrates put forward a view of abilities which seems to avoid at least some of the problems posed by (ABILITY). Thus, in discussing what it is to be capable (*dunatos*) of doing something, Socrates claims:

> But each person who can do what he wishes when he wishes is able (*dunatos*). I mean someone who is not prevented by disease or other such things, just as I might say you are able to write my name whenever you wish. Or don't you say that the person in such a condition is able? (*Hippias Minor* 366b7–c4).

Here, Socrates suggests that the person with an ability or power (*dunamis*) is one who can do what they wish unless they are prevented. For instance, someone is able to calculate (and has the relevant *epistēmē*) *iff* were they to wish to work out an answer to an arithmetical problem and not be prevented from doing so, then they would work

out an answer (*Hippias Minor* 366c5–d1). Accordingly, it seems that something like the following view of abilities is being assumed:

> **(ABILITY*)** *S has the ability to φ iff if S were to attempt to φ and S were not prevented from φ-ing, then S would φ.*

According to (ABILITY*), the archer who would fail to shoot their arrow or hit their target due to the intervention of a god (or indeed, a sudden onset of sickness), need not lack ability. They do not succeed, but what ability guarantees is not success under any condition whatsoever, but rather success provided the agent is not prevented. Such a view has the advantage that it yields a more plausible view of abilities while respecting the intuitions that an ability, constitutive of *epistēmē*, is something which offers some sort of guarantee of success and is something which may be difficult to gain, but is equally not something that is easily lost.[37]

On this view of abilities, we are left with a kind of qualified infallibility. That Plato's Socrates might have a view of this sort in mind (or at least a sort of qualified guaranteed success) in the *Euthydemus* is perhaps suggested by a passing remark (Socrates at one point asks "What about the perils of the sea—surely you don't think that, as a general rule,[38] any pilots have better luck than the wise ones?" *Euthydemus* 279e4–6, trans. Sprague). This is because according to (ABILITY*), *epistēmē* does not guarantee success under all conditions or simpliciter (as, for instance, supposed by Irwin: "wisdom guarantees success whatever the circumstances," 1995: 56). Instead, it guarantees success under certain non-interference or non-prevention conditions. Such an account of abilities is also open to objections (which I will not rehearse here), and one might, of course, put forward alternative accounts of abilities, but at the very least (ABILITY*) is significantly superior to (ABILITY).[39]

We thus seem to have two possible accounts of abilities which might explain the relation between *epistēmē* (which is constituted at least in part by ability) and success. (ABILITY) offers an unqualified guarantee of success (though at a price); (ABILITY*) offers qualified guarantee of success (and seems to be an account of ability which Plato's Socrates is sympathetic to elsewhere). I don't know of any clear evidence in the *Euthydemus* which would decide the matter but I myself think that the (ABILITY*) is more charitable and—if we allow the view Plato's Socrates puts forward in the *Hippias Minor* to inform our views of the *Euthydemus*—it has better support. Regardless of which of these two views we opt for, we do nonetheless have a superior explanation of why *epistēmē* should be taken to guarantee success.

Furthermore, I should emphasise that, contrary to most readers, I am suggesting that whether *epistēmē* unqualifiedly or qualifiedly guarantees success should not determine how we construe the nature of the success which the relevant abilities are directed towards. Thus, regardless of which view of abilities one thinks is being assumed in the *Euthydemus*, an important question remains: how should one construe the sort of success which the relevant abilities are directed towards and which is guaranteed (whether unqualifiedly or qualifiedly) by the relevant abilities? For instance, is the success[40] guaranteed by the ability constitutive of *epistēmē* the performing of a certain action? Or is the success guaranteed by the ability constitutive of *epistēmē* and towards which it is directed the bringing about of a certain result or product? Such questions concern the *ergon* or the *telos* (to introduce a pair of paradigmatically Aristotelian terms) of the relevant abilities or the object(s) of our attempts. These questions have parallels with ancient questions concerning the difference between a *skopos* ("target") and a *telos* ("goal")[41] and contemporary questions concerning the object(s) of intention (e.g. Do we intend that *p*? Or do we attempt to φ?); they also seem rather difficult to answer.

We have seen that while readers of the *Euthydemus* do not explicitly invoke abilities in their discussions, most readers (e.g. Dimas, 2002; Price, 2011; Russell, 2005) think that *epistēmē* (infallibly) guarantees internal-success (i.e. something akin to the sort of manifestation of abilities described in (ii) above). For ease of reference, I repeat a crucial part of Russell's claim here:

> On Plato's view, success is determined not by the completion of some action, but by how one engages in all action with wisdom and intelligence. Success, then, is not so much a 'what' as it is a 'how'—it depends on how one does whatever one does, because success at acting wisely must always be available to a wise person, who has no need of further good luck (Russell, 2005: 30–1)

More concretely: Dimas characterises internal-success in terms of acting for the right reasons; Russell talks of performing the action in a rational way; and Price speaks of an "activity that possesses certain structural and aesthetic properties" (Price, 2011: 30–1).[42] However, one reason for thinking that the manifestations of abilities should be construed along such lines—i.e. as an activity performed well, as proposed by (ii)—is the language employed in the *Euthydemus*. The *Euthydemus* gives great emphasis to vocabulary of well doing (e.g. *eu prattein*, *eupragia*) and correctly acting (*orthōs prattein*). As Dimas points out (2002: 18), Plato has Socrates use verbs *prattein* ("act") or the noun *praxis* ("action") some two dozen times in the relevant passage of the *Euthydemus* (278e–281e). Furthermore, it deserves attention that even when Socrates speaks of good things, he often speaks of the value of the activities associated with the relevant things (e.g. being rich, being healthy, being beautiful, 2797–9; cf. 279b4–5) rather than of the things themselves and argues that without correct use (which requires *epistēmē*) the relevant so-called "goods" seem to have no value and bring no benefit (e.g. 280b8–e4, 288e4–289a7; cf. 280d4–e4).[43]

Contrary to said scholars (and also to Jones, 2013), I am not confident that the questions posed just now concerning what it is that the agent attempts to do when acting (or, in my terms, the nature of the success guaranteed by abilities or what kind of thing it is that abilities are directed towards) allow of uniform answers. Furthermore, the view embraced by Dimas, Russell, and Price cannot, I think, be quite right if it is meant to apply generally.[44] (I am not alone in thinking this, but the other principal critic of such a view, Jones, 2013, offers very different reasons). This is because it seems very odd to think that when an archer is taking a shot or a doctor is performing a surgery or a woodworker is working some wood (to use some of the examples appealed to by Socrates in the *Euthydemus*) what they are attempting to do is merely to act well (the sort of thing described in (ii) and what others call "internal-success"). Such a view seems problematic for various reasons.[45] First, it seems to imply a certain sort of indifference towards the outcome of one's action(s) which does not seem especially psychologically plausible. Secondly, it seems to imply a certain sort of indifference towards the outcome of one's action(s) which seems morally objectionable (think, for instance, of the doctor who does not intend that the patient come to be better, but merely that their action be successful in internal characteristics). Thirdly, as mentioned above, it is rather counterintuitive to think of the excellently aimed shot which—due to unforeseen circumstances—has a negative outcome (such as hitting one's allies) as a success.[46] The same seems to apply to sailing, healing, sculpting, and a range of other activities. Even if one sailed faultlessly, it seems difficult to regard one's sailing as a success if one drowns on the way to one's destination.[47]

Instead, I would propose that what success amounts to depends upon the end of the relevant ability or activity because in each case the end sets the normative standard with regard to which success is evaluated. Some abilities or activities have ends which are realised in the relevant activity (e.g. dancing); with regard to these the standard view (which privileges internal-success, that is, what was described as (ii) above) may indeed be largely correct. However, other abilities or activities have ends which are not realised in the relevant activity, but which are instead external to the relevant activity; with regard to these, as I have mentioned, it seems that the relevant success should not be construed as purely internal-success.

To better explain the view I am proposing, and offer something in the way of justification for it, it may help to say something about Aristotle's thought on these matters. Aristotle makes distinctions similar to (i)–(iii) above and gives careful attention to considering issues pertinent to what it is that we aim at (and by which criteria success should be evaluated) when discussing the *ergon* of agents or the actuality (*energeia*, *entelecheia*) of capacities (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a7–15; *Physics* 201b7–15). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that *to eu* ("the well")—which he equates with doing well (*eu prattein*) or living well (*eu zēn*) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a18–20)—is an *ergon* (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a11–12) and he is often taken to think that an *ergon* is an activity (at least *ergon* is often translated as "activity" in the *Ethics*); famously, the human *ergon* is "activity (*energeia*) of the soul in accord with reason (*logos*) or requiring reason" (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a7–8).

Several readers of the *Euthydemus* seem inclined to think that what agents aim at is always an activity and that their success is to be evaluated purely by reference to the internal characteristics of the activity; furthermore, they take Plato to be similar to Aristotle in this regard. However, at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that there is a difference among ends (*telē*). Some crafts, pursuits, actions, or choices have an activity

(*energeia*) as their end, while others have an *ergon* which is separate or distinct from the activity as their end (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a2–5) and sometimes Aristotle uses *ergon* to refer to an activity or an activity done well (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a11–12) and other times uses *ergon* to refer to the product of an ability which is separate or distinct from the relevant activity (e.g. the *ergon* of a shoemaker is a shoe and the *ergon* of a house-builder is a house, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1133a7–10; cf. Baker, 2015).[48] Thus, for instance, Aristotle emphasises that houses are separate from and exist independently of the activities which give rise to them and it is the house and not the act of house-building which is the *ergon* of the relevant art (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1097a18–20; *Eudemian Ethics* 1219a11–18). With regard to other arts, such as flute-playing, there is no separate end and the *ergon* of the relevant art is simply playing the flute or playing the flute well.

Given that Aristotle speaks of the *ergon* of each craft (pursuit, choice, etc.) as its *end* (*telos*) (e.g. *Metaphysics* 1050a21–3; *Eudemian Ethics* 1219a8), we may suppose that Aristotle would adopt a similar view when it comes to determining what is being attempted and construing success more generally. That is to say, if *A* exists or is pursued for the sake of *B*, then Aristotle would suppose that *B* is better than *A* (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a5–18; cf. *Eudemian Ethics* 1219a10–11) *and*—or so I suggest—would most probably say that the *ergon* is what the agent is attempting (e.g. to bring about a house in the case of house-building, to bring about a shoe in the case of shoe-making) and be reluctant to apply "success" to those cases wherein *A* does not bring about *B*.

What deserves emphasis then is that (e.g.) house-building ability is directed towards building houses and that this is what one attempts to do when one engages in house-building. Even if the house-builder performs his or her art faultlessly (e.g. the bricks are excellently placed, etc.), it still does not seem that the term "success" could easily or naturally be applied to the house-builder's action if no house comes into existence as a result. The house-builder's activity would be incomplete (*atelēs*) (*Metaphysics* 1048b18–36, 1050a23–34; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1174a21–b5) and thereby, I take it, defective in some important way.[49] The same applies to the navigator attempting to reach their destination and various other cases (cf. *Eudemian Ethics* 1219a13–18).[50] In short, there is a difference between faultless performance and success. In the kinds of cases I have just described, it seems to be outcome-success or the sort of thing described in (iii) which is most naturally construed as the relevant success. (Of course, for activities which lack a separate end, the relevant success seems to be most naturally construed as an activity performed well, i.e. the sort of thing described in (ii) or internal-success.) And there is, I think, something to be said for such a thought and for not supposing that all abilities have precisely the same sort of aims or the same sorts of success criteria.

Plato is often less explicit on these issues—and also often somewhat less clear (for instance, Plato's usage of *ergon* is often ambiguous in that he may use *ergon* to refer both to the activity and separate product of the same craft, (e.g.) *ergon* can be used to refer both to house-building and houses),[51] but so far as I can tell Plato's thinking (or rather, the thinking of Plato's Socrates) shares significant similarities to that of Aristotle on these matters. Thus, while the *Euthydemus* does not discuss this precise issue in detail, the examples Socrates discusses in his first exhortation seem to embrace both activities which lack a separate *ergon*, such as flute-playing (*Euthydemus* 279d8–2), and activities which have a separate *ergon*, such as wood-working (*Euthydemus* 281a2–4). In his later exhortation, it is assumed that various crafts (which are constituted at least in part by abilities) must have some *ergon* (291c7ff), and sometimes this seems to be an activity (e.g. 291c10), other times some product separate from an activity (e.g. 291e1–292c1), and other times the treatment is ambiguous (e.g. 292c4–d6).[52] In those cases where the activity or ability has a separate *ergon*, it seems far more natural to suppose that the agent is attempting to bring about some outcome-success (regardless, of what sort of guarantee of success, whether qualified or unqualified, the ability provides).

In the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates argue that when people act (*prattein*), what they want (*boulomai*) is often not the action itself, but that for the sake of which the action is done and offers examples which seem to tell against the internal-success reading. Thus, for instance, the act of taking or administering medicine is done not for its own sake, but in order that a person be healthy (*Gorgias* 467c5–10). The claims are put somewhat problematically in the text (and I simplify things somewhat), but it seems that when *A* is chosen or pursued for the sake of *B*, then *B* is more choice-worthy than *A* and that *A* is chosen or pursued insofar as it positively contributes to the pursuit of *B* (*Gorgias* 467d6–e1). (In the examples considered, the relevant end often seems to be something along the lines of (iii), i.e. a result which is not

itself an activity on the part of the agent; cf. Barney, 2010: 49.[53]) Something similar seems to hold in the *Republic*. There, the art of medicine—and presumably its exercises, such as healing or relevant actions such as taking medicine—exists for the sake of giving health; this is what medicine pursues or is set over (*Republic* 341d7–8, e3–7; 357b4–358a6).[54]

Accordingly, so far as I am able to tell, it seems that Plato's thought (or that of Plato's Socrates) is similar to that of Aristotle on these points. Concerning those activities which do have a separate end (e.g. house-building), it does not seem correct to suppose that what the agent is attempting is simply to act well (where acting well is characterised purely by features internal to the action); instead they are attempting to bring about a certain result and whether or not they bring about that result is what determines whether the relevant action is a success. If *epistēmē* guarantees success, then presumably what the ability constitutive of *epistēmē* guarantees (whether qualifiedly or unqualifiedly) is that kind of success. Concerning those activities which do not have a separate end, then it seems correct to say that the agent is attempting simply to act well. Presumably, what the ability constitutive of *epistēmē* guarantees (whether qualifiedly or unqualifiedly) is that kind of success. Finally, I should note that my focus here has been on explaining the claim that *epistēmē* guarantees success. So far as possible I have avoided detailed discussion of many of Socrates' loftier claims regarding *epistēmē* and happiness. However, if I am right and we are inclined to take seriously Socrates' claim that the *epistēmē* which makes us happy requires an ability to make things and to use them (*Euthydemus* 289b4–6) and so suppose that at least one of these abilities (the productive ability) typically has an end which is separate from the relevant activity, then there is reason to doubt that the sort ability or *epistēmē* required for happiness is directed exclusively at internal-success.

In conclusion, in the *Euthydemus* Plato's Socrates claims that *epistēmē* guarantees a certain kind of success. Recently, several readers have taken Socrates to mean that *epistēmē* always guarantees a kind of internal-success. That is to say, that the person with *epistēmē* may not always achieve a certain result (such as the hitting of their target or the reaching of their destination), but they will always act well (for instance, they will always shoot well or sail well). I have raised some objections to this view, proposing that it does not seem to adequately explain how *epistēmē* guarantees success and neither does it seem to be true. I have suggested that in order to explain how *epistēmē* might guarantee success we should construe *epistēmē* as being constituted at least in part by an ability and that, depending upon how we view abilities (two construals were of ability were considered), *epistēmē* guarantees success either unqualifiedly or qualifiedly. Finally, I turned to consider the nature of the success guaranteed by *epistēmē*. A distinction was drawn between different ways of construing the manifestations of abilities and I suggested that it is worth giving careful attention to the manifestations of abilities and what it is that agents attempt when they attempt to act. While it is not clear to me that Plato's discussion allows of an entirely clear determination, with some support from Aristotle I suggested that—regardless of how we construe abilities—it does not seem that the abilities constitutive of *epistēmē* (or?*epistēmē* itself) should always be taken to aim at merely internal-success.

ENDNOTES

[1] Socrates appeals to a distinction in the senses of "learn" to show that "learn" can be applied to (i) a person's acquiring the ability to read so that they come to know how to read, and (ii) a person's exercise of their already acquired ability to read to come to know what the content of some particular written material is (cf. *Euthydemus* 277e3–278a, 280b5–282a6; Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1146b31–3). In the *Theaetetus*, a seemingly similar distinction is drawn between possessing (*ktēsis*) and having (*hexis*) (*Theaetetus* 197b9ff).

[2] Such claims raise a number of questions concerning how luck or good fortune (*eutuchia*) is being thought of (especially with regard to the claim that wisdom is good fortune). For discussion, see Dimas (2002); Rider (2012); Jones (2013).

[3] Socrates initially seemingly identifies wisdom with good fortune (279d6–7), but later he claims that it produces good ?fortune (280a6, 282a4–5; cf. Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b37–1247a5; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1153b21–2). As noted, in saying that the relevant epistemic state produces good fortune, Socrates seems to be playing upon the fact that the term *eutuchia* may be applied both to successes we attain through intentional action (and our own agency) and to positive outcomes attained due to things outside of our control. Gifford (1905: 22), who adverted to earlier work by Bonitz, made the observation long ago and it has probably been repeated in almost every discussion of the relevant passages of the *Euthydemus* since (most recently, Jones, 2013: 8n19). This present paper is no exception.

4 Translations follow Sprague (1993), with some adaptations. Sprague translates *tugchanein* as "be lucky," but I follow LSJ (s. v., B)—which offers "gain one's end or purpose, succeed" and gives this very instance in the *Euthydemus* (280a8) as one of its examples—and here translate *tugchanein* as "succeed."

5 Socrates speaks here of being present (*pareinai*) (280b2, 6, 7). In her translation, Sprague often renders this as "has" (e.g. 280b–c). Given the later issues (cf. 301a4ff), this seems relevant but it is very difficult to capture in English (e.g. to say "many goods were present" seems rather unnatural), so I have followed Sprague. Notice that, until 280c6, Socrates generally avoids explicit talk of having (*echein*) or possession (*ktēsis*) and uses a construction employing the dative of possession (279a2–3, 280c1, 2, 4).

6 Cf. *Symposium* 204e1–205a3.

7 Precisely how these goods should be regarded is controversial. For recent discussion, see Reshotko (2001); Russell (2005); Price (2011).

8 The view put forward in the *Euthydemus* concerning the nature of goods like health and wealth seems to anticipate Stoic views concerning so-called "indifferents" (cf. Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.101–5 cf. 2.30–2; 7.37; Cicero *De Finibus* 3.51ff) and it is no coincidence that while there was much wrangling over Socrates' legacy among the Hellenistic schools, the Stoics had a legitimate claim to call themselves "Socratic." For discussion of the *Euthydemus* passage and its influence upon Stoic views regarding indifferents, see Long (1988); Annas (1993); McCabe (2002). For the legacy of Plato's Socrates among the Stoics more generally, see also Striker (1996). For an examination of Stoic cognitive states, with some discussion of action-guiding norms, see Nawar (2014).

9 Such a claim finds parallel in other dialogues, but I will focus on the claim primarily as it appears in the *Euthydemus*. While *eu prattein* can sometimes simply mean "being happy," I will not discuss in detail the relation between success or well-doing (*eupragia*) and particular accounts of happiness (*eudaimonia*). For discussion, see Vlastos (1984); Dimas (2002); Russell (2005); Rider (2012); Jones (2013).

10 As Irwin notes, "[Socrates] needs to assert the extreme claim that wisdom guarantees success whatever the circumstances. [...] But he has given us no argument for the extreme claim about wisdom and success" (Irwin, 1995: 56).

11 See, for instance, Hawtrey (1981: 80).

12 I here use the terms employed by Jones (2013), who offers a clear characterisation of the relevant positions. See below for discussion of Jones's own account

13 Russell concedes that the view is "seriously incomplete in some important ways [...] We need more of an argument to the effect that the very exercise of wisdom is its own success than Plato offers in the *Euthydemus*—and, I think, Plato knows it" (Russell, 2005: 42).

14 This problem is considered by Jones (2013: 9–10).

15 For agreement regarding the *Euthydemus*, see, for instance, Jones (2013: 5n12, 14n28). For a detailed study of Plato's epistemic vocabulary, see Lyons (1963).

16 See Burnyeat (1980); Moravcsik (1979); Nehamas (1985). For recent discussion over whether *epistēmē* is best construed as knowledge or understanding (with special attention to the *Meno*), see Fine (2004); Schwab (2015).

17 Burnyeat argues that something similar holds of Aristotle's account of *epistēmē* and also of Augustine's account of *scientia*. For a discussion and detailed response to Burnyeat as regards the latter, see Nawar (2015).

18 According to Burnyeat, the phrase *aitias logismos* "is Greek for working out the explanation of something, not for assembling a justification for believing it, which the slave already has at a stage when Plato denies he has knowledge (85C)" (1980: 187). For discussion of the phrase, see Fine (2004: 55–61).

19 See, for instance, Kvanvig (2003) and Pritchard (2010). Both argue that it is understanding (rather than knowledge) which possesses distinctive epistemic value and they appeal to several considerations similar to those indicated above.

20 That is why, on this sort of view, Plato often has Socrates discuss the "first-handedness" of *epistēmē* (e.g. travelling the road for oneself, *Meno* 97a9ff; seeing the crime for oneself, *Theaetetus* 201a7–c6). For discussion of such claims in the *Theaetetus*, see Nawar (2013).

21 The claim Gould argues against is that Platonic *epistēmē* is "an understanding of the moral truths of the universe, that is [...] an intellectual insight into the nature of right and wrong" (Gould, 1955: 4).

22 For detailed discussion and a response to Gould, see Vlastos (1957). There has been debate over whether Plato distinguishes between knowledge-that and knowledge by acquaintance (e.g. White, 1976: 54–5n8, 57–8n29; Fine, 2004: 48–9; Burnyeat, 2011: 3–8) and also discussion of the structural semantics of epistemic verbs (e.g. *eidenai*, *gignōskein*, and *epistasthai*), their cognate nouns, and whether these might be translated as "knowledge-how" (Lyons, 1963: 177, 182–6, 206–8, 225–8; Burnyeat, 2011). However, that knowledge-how might be a useful way of conceiving of *epistēmē* is often quickly dismissed and attention to the abilities constitutive of *epistēmē* is relatively rare.

23 For instance, on the basis of passages in Greek literature where *epistēmē* does not appear to be factive (as, for instance, in Herodotus), Gould seems to think that *epistēmē* is constituted by so-called "subjective certainty" (e.g. 1955: 15), "moral

assurance" (1955: 21), or "moral conviction" (1955: 24). I do not think that this is correct and it is not clear to me that this is consistent with Gould's desire not to construe *epistēmē* as a propositional attitude.

[24] "It is simply false, however, that ascriptions of knowledge-how ascribe abilities [...] ascriptions of knowledge-how do not even entail ascriptions of the corresponding abilities. For example, a ski instructor may know how to perform a certain complex stunt, without being able to perform it herself. Similarly, a master pianist who loses both of her arms in a tragic car accident still knows how to play the piano. But she has lost her ability to do so. It follows that Ryle's own positive account of knowledge-how is demonstrably false" (Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 416). One might here argue that in such cases agents retain the relevant abilities, but that these abilities must be characterised in a more fine-grained manner or that circumstances are such that they cannot be manifested. See Hawley (2003: 22–4).

[25] Consider the sentence "Hannah knows how to ride a bike." According to Stanley and Williamson, this sentence "is true relative to a context *c* if and only if there is some contextually relevant way *w* such that Hannah stands in the knowledge-that relation to the Russellian proposition that *w* is a way for Hannah to ride a bicycle, and Hannah entertains this proposition under a practical mode of presentation," see Stanley & Williamson, 2001: 430). For criticism of so-called "practical modes of presentation," see Fridland (2015).

[26] More accurately, Ryle claimed that when a person is described by certain terms denoting intelligence "the description imputes to him not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but the ability, or inability, to do certain sorts of things" (Ryle, 1949: 27).

[27] For Ryle, a skill should be construed as "a disposition, or complex of dispositions" (1949: 33) and the abilities constitutive of know-how should be construed as multi-track dispositions "the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous" (1949: 44).

[28] For Ryle, the manifestation of an ability is competent and successful performance of the relevant action (all the relevant activities mentioned—e.g. explaining, predicting, working things out, etc.—are seemingly manifestations of a single ability to do things well or competently). According to Ryle, in describing people as knowing how to do a thing, "part of what is meant is that, when they perform these operations, they tend to perform them well, i.e. correctly or efficiently or successfully" (Ryle, 1949: 28); "the knowledge that is required for understanding intelligent performances of a specific kind is some degree of competence in performances of that kind" (Ryle, 1949: 54).

[29] For Ryle, a person argues intelligently "also by the fact that he is ready to recast his expression of obscurely put points, on guard against ambiguities" and so on. As he goes on to note, "these words "ready", "on guard", [...] are semi-dispositional, semi-episodic words. They do not signify the concomitant occurrence of extra but internal operations, nor mere capacities and tendencies to perform further operations if the need for them should arise, but something between the two" (Ryle, 1949: 47–8). I am suggesting that, on a hybrid view of knowledge-how, one need not follow Ryle on these details.

[30] Bengson and Moffett (2011: 162n5) indicate this as a possibility but as far as I am aware the view has found few takers.

[31] Cf. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 4.6.1; Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b25–6; *Metaphysics* 981b7–9. It deserves mention that the view that *epistēmē* is know-how (or some bastard offspring of Rylean know-how) seems to explain some claims about *epistēmē*—such as the fact that it cannot straightforwardly be transmitted through testimony—just as well as the view that *epistēmē* is understanding does. This is because, as Ryle observes, "Learning *how* or improving in ability is not like learning *that* or acquiring information. Truths can be imparted, procedures can only be inculcated, and while inculcation is a gradual process, imparting is relatively sudden" (Ryle, 1949: 59).

[32] Thus, for instance, at the beginning of the *Euthydemus* the two sophists are introduced as knowing everything about war (273c4–5) and being skilled at fighting (273e3–4). In his exhortation, Socrates' examples are those of knowing how to play the flute (279e1–2), how to write (279e2–4), or how to sail (279e4–6). In the later protreptic, Socrates' examples are often similar (e.g. knowing how to recognise where gold is hidden, 288e2–4, or how to turn stones into gold, 288e7–288a1).

[33] *Republic* 346a1–3, 477b6, c1–4, d8–e1; *Laches* 192a9–b3; *Gorgias* 447c1–3, 449e4–5; *Protagoras* 330a4–b2; *Euthydemus* 274c6–d3 (cf. 294b3–6); *Theaetetus* 197c7–d3. Cf. *Hippias Minor* 366b7–c4; *Protagoras* 356c8-357a3; Ps-Plato *Definitiones* 414b10–c2.

[34] Thus, unlike Ryle, Gould, and others, I am not claiming that one should avoid construing understanding as a propositional attitude, or that Platonic know-how does not involve "internal acts of considering propositions."

[35] Most notably, such a view seems to lie behind the claims made at *Republic* 340d2–e5 (and arguably several other ancient discussions). For detailed discussion, see Nawar (forthcoming).

[36] We might think to evaluate such basic actions as successful or not by considering whether they accomplish the agent's aims. Thus, for instance, I aimed to move my finger and, in moving my finger, my action was a success. However, considered purely in virtue of themselves, many basic actions do not seem to be especially felicitously evaluated as being successes or failures, or good or bad in the manner that Plato's Socrates seems to have in mind. For instance, it is not immediately obvious what it might mean to say that one moved one's finger well (unless one thinks of the relevant action under some other description where it is arguably being evaluated primarily with regard to the non-basic action of which it is a part, e.g. playing the piano, etc.).

[37] As Plato's Socrates observes (cf. *Laches* 185e9–186a1), abilities seem to have a certain reliability or counterfactual robustness about them. Having the ability to φ requires that the agent successfully φ in a variety of circumstances. However, this does not amount to the claim that having the ability to φ requires that the agent successfully φ regardless of the circumstances.

[38] Sprague follows Lamb and takes ὡς ἐπὶ πᾶν εἰπεῖν (*Euthydemus* 279e6) to mean "as a general rule." Jones (2013: 6n15, 7n16) renders it as "for the most part," and offers some detailed discussion, noting it may also be rendered as: "on the whole," "as a general rule," or "to speak generally." Jones notes the phrase also occurs in the *Laws* 917a4–5, and also in Aristotle where the phrase is used "to indicate that the general rule under consideration admits of exception" (Jones, 2013: 7n16).

[39] For detailed discussion, see Nawar (forthcoming).

[40] We have already noted the ambiguity which attaches to a number of the relevant terms used in the *Euthydemus* (e.g. *eupragia*, *eu prattein*, and *eutuchia*).

[41] For the Stoics, a *skopos* is typically a concrete, material thing—designated by a noun—while a *telos* is typically an activity—expressed by means of a verb. For recent discussion, see Klein (2014).

[42] "What determines the presence of εὐπραγία in a particular action is its internal structure, i.e. whether the agent who performs it is moved by the right reasons and acts for them as they prescribe" (Dimas, 2002: 25). "Plato seems to think of 'doing well' not as completing some noble project but as behaving in a rational way, whatever one is doing, and however uncooperative external circumstances may turn out to be. In fact, in order to take seriously Plato's account in the *Euthydemus* of wisdom and success, we have to think of wisdom in terms of how one *behaves* in acting, rather than in terms of what one *accomplishes* in acting" (Russell, 2005: 34).

[43] Motivated in large part by the desire to make sense of the "for the most part" remark offered at 279e4–6 (cited above), Jones (2013) is a notable exception to trend of taking *epistēmē* to infallibly guarantee internal-success. As he puts it: "'For the most part' makes no good sense if good fortune is internal-success. Taking good fortune to be outcome-success, however, allows us to make excellent sense of this qualification" (2013: 10). Accordingly, Jones argues (against Russell and others) that *epistēmē* does not infallibly produce internal-success; instead, it fallibly produces outcome-success:

> Even the wise pilot may encounter storms that cannot be weathered. But the wise pilot will handle each situation as well as it can be handled. The wise pilot will have the best outcomes possible given the conditions in which he has to act. [...] Socrates claims that "wisdom ... would never err" (280a7). In every circumstance, wisdom produces the greatest outcome-success possible given that circumstance (Jones, 2013: 10).

I agree with Jones (and indeed other readers, such as Russell) that Socrates does not offer an argument for why wisdom (*epistēmē*) should be thought to suffice for success. However, I have endeavoured to offer an account which explains such a claim and I should here indicate that it seems that Jones's account is vulnerable to several objections. First, Jones seems to think that taking wisdom to infallibly produce internal-success requires taking good fortune and wisdom to be identical (e.g. "The appeal of taking Socrates to be talking about internal-success rather than outcome-success results mainly from taking Socrates' claim that wisdom is good fortune to be an identity claim." 2013: 9). However, that does not seem right. With regard to (ABILITY), I have discussed an account which may be described as infallible and it does not take wisdom and good fortune to be identical (and indeed, I place little weight on that remark in the *Euthydemus*). Insofar as many of Jones's criticisms target the identity claim (wisdom is good fortune or success) rather than the sufficiency claim (wisdom suffices for good fortune or success), then they leave me unmoved. Secondly, Jones thinks that introducing qualifications (e.g. "for the most part") upon the conditions under which *epistēmē* guarantees success indicates that the relevant successes are outcome-successes. Jones seems to think that is the case because if the claim that *epistēmē* guarantees success is unqualified, then this suggests internal-success and if it is qualified, then this suggests outcome-success. However, the latter conjunct does not seem to be correct. Even if the claim is qualified, it may indicate internal-success. Thirdly, Jones does not provide much in the way of support for his suggestion that the relevant success is outcome-success. I myself am in partial agreement with Jones on this point but, as far as I can tell, my reasons for thinking this are rather different.

[44] As mentioned above, Jones (2013) also finds the common view objectionable, but for very different reasons, ones which I myself reject.

[45] Russell (2005: 42) is sensitive to the fact that there is something odd here, but sees the problem somewhat differently.

[46] Jones (2013) comes close to this view at one point, notably when he claims that "success for a pilot consists in, roughly, getting one's ship safely to the desired port" (2013: 7). However, the point is only made briefly and it does not seem that Jones wishes to make quite the same point as me, i.e. that what agents attempt or intend is not merely to act, but to bring about a certain result through their actions and that it is with regard to this target that their actions are to be evaluated as successes or failures.

[47] Two points should be made here. First, one might say that a doctor does not always aim at restoring the health of the patient because in some cases the doctor knows this is no longer possible (cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1355b10–13). This is

consistent with what I claim here. I am claiming that what is odd is to think that the doctor acts without attempting or intending to bring about a certain outcome (such as the patient's comfort or minimisation of pain). Secondly, in some dialogues, Plato's Socrates entertains the view that perhaps (e.g.) drowning would be of value because, if the relevant person is bad, it will prevent them from further bad actions and further worsening themselves (*Gorgias* 512b1–2; cf. *Laches* 195c7–d2). However, even if drowning were ascribed value, it is not clear to me that the drowning of the relevant person (which seems to come about unintentionally) can easily be regarded as a success or an instance of good action.

[48] As Baker (2015) shows in a recent paper, Aristotle's use of the term *ergon* is careful; it signifies the natural end of the relevant activity and what *ergon* refers to in the relevant instances depends upon whether the relevant activity (pursuit, choice, etc.) has an end which is separate from itself (e.g. as in the case of shoe-making) or not (e.g. as in the case of flute-playing).

[49] In fact, Aristotle claims, almost certainly too strongly, that when an art or ability gives rise to a separate end as its *ergon*, the *ergon*—e.g. a house, a shoe, etc.—is evaluated purely by reference to its intrinsic features and not by how it came about (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a27–8).

[50] As mentioned above, a doctor may not aim at restoring the health of the patient because this is no longer within human means (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1355b10–13). However, it still seems to be the case that what is being aimed at is a certain result, e.g. to make a person as healthy as possible (and not merely to perform a medical procedure which is correctly done).

[51] Cf. Irwin (1978: 116).

[52] It is initially suggested that the political art is the cause (*aitia*) of correctly acting (*orthōs prattein*, 291c10). It is then suggested that it produces some *ergon* (291e1) and the examples given (medicine produces health, farming produces nourishment; 291e4–292a2) as well as the parallels in phrasing in other dialogues (e.g. *Charmides* 165d) suggest that this *ergon* is something separate from the relevant activity. It seems that the suggestion that the political art makes citizens wise and gives them some *epistēmē* (292b4–c1) can also be read along such lines. The suggestion that the kingly art makes men good (292c4–d6) seems ambiguous.

[53] "[...] the objects of desires are properly speaking the 'things' to be 'acquired' by our actions, not the actions themselves [...] What is important for Socrates' argument is that there is always a conceptual *gap* of some kind between an action and the prospective benefit in virtue of which we perform it, so that an action can always fail to attain its end and thus fail to have value" (Barney, 2010: 49).

[54] Socrates actually makes a stronger claim: "Then isn't it just the same in every case? If anyone does something for the sake of something, he doesn't want the thing he does, but the thing for the sake of which he does it?" (*Gorgias* 467d6–e1; cf. 468b8–c1). Furthermore, he goes on to claim that what people want is what is good or beneficial (*Gorgias* 468c2–7). I simplify things here significantly on several fronts. Thus, for instance, some think that wanting (*boulomai*) is a rather specific pro-attitude (perhaps one which is distinctly rational). Equally, I do not discuss the context. At this point in the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates make a distinction similar to that made in the *Republic*, where a distinction is drawn between: goods chosen for their own sake and not their consequences; goods chosen for their own sake and their consequences (e.g. thought, sight, health); and goods chosen not for their own sake but only for their consequences (e.g. medicine) (*Republic* 357b–358a). Goods of the last kind seem to be unpleasant or otherwise troublesome, but contribute positively to other ends. Finally, my discussion is not exhaustive. For instance, the *Protagoras* very briefly (345a1–c3) considers criteria for good action and success (*eupragia*), but merely says that what makes a person a good doctor is having learned to take care of the sick (*Protagoras* 345a3–4).

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