Socrates, Irwin, and Instrumentalism

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Paul S. DiCola
June 2008
This thesis titled
Socrates, Irwin, and Instrumentalism

by
PAUL S. DICOLA

has been approved for
the Department of Philosophy
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

___________________________

John W. Bender
Professor of Philosophy

___________________________

Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

PAUL S. DICOLA, M.A., June 2008, Philosophy

Socrates, Irwin, and Instrumentalism (55 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Scott Carson

This thesis is intended to argue against Terence Irwin’s instrumental thesis that explains the relation of virtue to happiness in Plato’s early dialogues. Irwin’s instrumental thesis leads him to believe that virtue is a craft that “entirely distinct” from the end it pursues—happiness. His instrumental thesis rests on the idea of techne being a productive craft; however, I argue that Irwin’s interpretation of techne is skewed and leads him into trouble. Moreover, Irwin fails to answer the objection that claims virtue cannot be a craft since a craft is possible to be used for vicious ends. Finally, if we examine extreme situations, such as exile or bodily dismemberment, we notice that the relation of virtue to happiness is not as Irwin claims it to be.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

John W. Bender

Professor of Philosophy
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge and thank my thesis committee. I thank my director Dr. Scott Carson for his continual help and criticisms during the research and writing phases of this project. Dr. James Petrik provided me with valuable writing suggestions; his fresh perspective was very insightful. Dr. James Andrews pointed me to crucial contemporary scholarship that proved to be of great significance while formulating my own ideas. I would also like to thank Dr. John Bender for his insights on the philosophical issues I am concerned with. I want also to thank Penny Schall for helping each an every day run smoothly. Finally, I would like to thank all of the philosophy graduate students and friends who have pressed me on philosophical issues, read drafts, or have given me valuable criticism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historicity of Socrates</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irwin’s Conception of the Moral Theory of the Early Dialogues in <em>Plato’s Ethics</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguments Against Irwin’s View</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Instrumental Thesis and the Techne Analogy</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts and the Lesser Hippias</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficiency of Virtue and Instrumentalism</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

I take some things for granted in this paper; it cannot be avoided by anyone writing on Socratic philosophy. Perhaps the most important question to consider is whether or not the character in Plato’s dialogues is representative of the historical Socrates. The answer to this question greatly influences how one is to approach and analyze the dialogues. Furthermore, since I am concerned only with the group of dialogues commonly known as the “early dialogues,” I must inevitably presuppose a chronology. Finally, given my concern with the term *techne* a note on translation is appropriate.

Historicity of Socrates

Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, states that among other philosophers Socrates was a direct influence on Plato.\(^1\) We know that Socrates was an individual present in Athens during the time of Plato, but what kind of person—what kind of philosopher—was the Socrates that influenced Plato? In the same passage, Aristotle tells us that Socrates marked a change of philosophical direction: “[He] was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters.” Socratic philosophy marked the beginning of human oriented philosophy.

---

\(^1\) *Book A* 987a29-b10
We have no evidence indicating that Socrates recorded any of his philosophy. The only available means to study Socratic philosophy is through the work of other philosophers of the time. Some may have directly associated with Socrates. Plato, for example, may perhaps be the best source for information on Socrates. However, remarks from Xenophon give us some insight to his character and philosophical style as well.\(^2\) Aristotle discusses the philosophical styles in various texts; although he was not a part of the ‘Socratic circle,’\(^3\) his proximity to the era of Socrates and to those who benefited from Socratic teaching, makes Aristotle’s testimony extremely valuable when attempting to sketch out the personality of such a mysterious individual.\(^4\)

The fog is not cleared, however. It does not follow that the Socrates who discusses virtue, form, good, and the like, in Plato’s dialogues, is in fact the historical Socrates simply because we know he was a mentor to Plato. It is completely plausible that Plato used his favorite philosophical role model as a mouthpiece for voicing his own views. Ultimately, this is a puzzle that we cannot solve unless some bit of archaeological evidence is found and confirms the hypothesis one way or another; comparative analyses have been the preferred route taken by many as an attempt to resolve this worry. I assume the controversial: that the historical Socrates is depicted accurately in Plato’s early dialogues.

---

**Chronology**


\(^3\) Socrates, having died in 399 BC, before Aristotle was born in 384 BC.

\(^4\) Irwin 1995, 5
Although this present paper is neither the time nor place for an extensive comparative analysis of Plato’s dialogues, a brief sketch of some scholarship in the area is appropriate and provides a framework for comparing themes between the dialogues. Knowing the chronology of the dialogues will help us greatly, even though, given the methods at hand we cannot arrive at a definitive answer. Consider a remark by Gregory Vlastos:

I have been speaking of a “Socrates” in Plato. There are two of them. In different segments of Plato’s corpus two philosophers bear that name. The individual remains the same. But in different sets of dialogues he pursues philosophies so different that they could not have been depicted as cohabiting the same brain throughout unless it had been the brain of a schizophrenic.\(^5\)

If we are at all concerned about whether or not the philosophy articulated by Plato’s main character was in fact the set of beliefs of a once flourishing individual, then we certainly do not want to think of Socrates as a schizophrenic; yet, we want Vlastos to be correct. If he is correct, then the historical Socrates would be the philosopher of the early dialogues—strictly speaking, a moral philosopher concerned solely with one question: \textit{how do we live the good life?} Moreover, Socrates, having been completely uninterested in metaphysics of any kind, would have relied purely on the elenchus.

Of course, Vlastos may be incorrect, in which case, Plato refers to the same person in each dialogue but attributes two different philosophies to that person. The

\(^5\) Vlastos 1991, 46
question about the philosophy of the historical Socrates is then left open. One group of dialogues may represent the philosophy of the historical Socrates while another group, Plato’s philosophy; or, both philosophies may be Plato’s, and might simply be two different philosophical movements within his career. Still, even if we cannot come to firm conclusions concerning the philosophy of the historical Socrates, a chronology of the dialogues is useful and worth pursuing insofar as it would help us to better understand Plato’s philosophical development over his long career.

Leonard Brandwood, in his article entitled “Stylometry and Chronology,” discusses various attempts since the eighteenth century to organize and establish a chronology for the dialogues. Given only a few hints about the dialogues from Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius, and Olympiodorus⁶ various modern inquirers moved to establish chronology by means noting the uses of special words and expressions, pairs of synonyms, linguistic features, and even peculiar hiatus. These methods generated various conclusions but universal disagreement. Gerard Ledger, in 1989, conducted a computer analysis, the first of its kind, which traced out stylistic tendencies and the occurrence of particular words at particular points in a given work. Ledger assumed four broad categories of chronology: early group, early middle group, middle group, and a late group. The dialogues, according to Ledger’s analysis, are organized in the following way:

**Early Group:** *Lysis, Euthyphro, Minos*, *Hippias Minor, Ion, Hippias Major*, *Alcibiades I, Theages*, *Crito.

---

⁶ Cf. Brandwood 1992, 90
Early Middle Group: *Gorgias, Menexenus, Meno, Charmides, Apology, Phaedo, Laches, Protagoras.*

Middle Group: *Euthydemus, Symposium, Cratylus, Republic, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Phaedrus.*

Late Group: *Philebus, Cleitophon*, *Sophist, Statesman, Laws, Timaeus, Critias.*

Ledger’s analysis was the most technical of its kind; however, it did not end the matter. Vlastos favored an approach to chronology based on philosophical content; yet, similar to Ledger, Vlastos categorized the dialogues into four groups: elenctic, transitional, middle, and late dialogues, where the elenctic and transitional dialogues constitute Plato’s early dialogues:

Early Group: (a) Elenctic Dialogues: *Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Protagoras, Republic I.*
(b) Transitional Dialogues: *Euthydemus, Hippias Major*, *Lysis, Menexenus, Meno.*

Middle Group: *Cratylus, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic II-X, Phaedrus, Parmenides, Theaetetus.*

Late group: *Timaeus, Critias, Sophist, Statesman, Philebus, Laws.*

---

7 Cf. Brandwood 1992, 112 for insights in regard to Ledger’s methodology. Ledger included the ‘non-canonical’ works in his analysis. The * indicates non-canonical works—it is not agreed among scholars that Plato is the author of these works.
9 Vlastos lists the early dialogues in alphabetical order.
10 The middle and late dialogues are arranged in probable sequence according to Vlastos’ method.
11 Cf. n. 10 immediately above.
Like Vlastos, Terence Irwin believes that there was a historical Socrates and that part of Plato’s philosophical career was devoted to extrapolating the view of his mentor. Irwin claims that the early dialogues—or the “Socratic” dialogues—are the dialogues devoted to Socratic philosophy as opposed to the Platonic philosophy, more or less. I say “more or less” because Irwin cautions us not to forget that the dialogues are the work of Plato and not Socrates. It is then fair to assume that while Plato explained and elaborated on Socrates’ view in early dialogues, he inevitably found worries that Socrates would need to address in order justify various claims. According to Irwin, “Plato regards himself as trying to give the best account and defense of a basically Socratic position…he comes to see that he has to reject or supplement Socrates’ view on some points.” Irwin, however, does not list a chronology as rigid as Vlastos or Ledger, but Irwin implies that his diagnosis of Plato’s attitude toward Socrates warrants a few assumptions about chronology of the Socratic dialogues: the Apology, Crito, Laches, Charmides, Euthyphro, Hippias Minor, Ion, Lysis, and Euthydemus all precede the Protagoras, which then precedes the Gorgias.

While it is beyond contention that a rigid chronological sequence of the dialogues will help our understanding of the philosophical concepts therein, we need not trouble ourselves too much to establish one. Broadly general agreement among early, middle, and late periods in Plato’s philosophical development is sufficient enough to prevent willy-nilly theorizing.

---

12 Irwin 1995, 15
13 From my experience Vlastos’ chronology, based thematically on philosophical intricacies, seems to be largely accepted. Irwin (1995, 12-13), Kraut (1992, xii), Penner (1992, 124), and Benson (1992, 4-5) all generally adopt Vlastos’ division of the dialogues. Moreover—it is only worth a quick note—notice how
Translation

Translation concerns plague the study of all ancient philosophy. While we do not seem to have a problem using terms like “happiness” and “craft” in modern society today, we obviously do not have the same firm grasp of how such terms were used in ancient times. “Happiness” (eudaemonia) and “craft” (techne), although probably did not radically differ from our use today, should not be taken for granted. Translation issues with “eudaemonia” are addressed at the beginning of the first chapter, issues with “techne,” in the second chapter.

In regards to the use of “techne,” commonly translated as “craft” in literature today, I have tried to use the term “techne” whenever I am not examining the dialogues from Irwin’s point of view. In other words, Irwin translates “techne” as craft; so when I discuss Irwin’s view I use the term “craft” because he does. This should avoid ambiguities that may be read into Irwin’s view should I take the liberty to use “techne” where he uses “craft.” Therefore, my use of “craft” implies Irwin’s notion of “techne,” while my use of “techne” does not imply a particular notion.

Aim

Vlastos’ thematic based division (with regard to the early dialogues, since those dialogues are what this paper is concerned with) largely agrees with Ledger’s stylistic based technical analysis with the exception of the location of the Euthydemus: according to Vlastos is an “early transitional” dialogue while for Ledger it is a “middle dialogue.”
In the first chapter I hope to give a clear and concise interpretation of Irwin’s account of the moral theory championed in Plato’s early dialogues. He believes that Socrates upholds an instrumental principle about the relation of virtues to happiness. This, in turn, has ugly ramifications, namely, that Socrates is a hedonist. The second chapter is devoted to three arguments against Irwin’s attribution of an instrumental principle to Socrates. I am not currently concerned with giving a positive and definitive construal of Socrates’ moral theory; however, in the conclusion, I hope to shed light upon a few favorable alternatives to Irwin’s theory.

I

IRWIN’S CONCEPTION OF THE MORAL THEORY OF THE EARLY DIALOGUES IN PLATO’S ETHICS

It should be well understood by the reader that Socrates believes all individuals aim at eudaemonia or “happiness.” In the Euthydemus Socrates asks Clinias outright, if there is such a person who does not wish to do well—who does not wish to be happy, and Clinias replies that there is no such person. Again, in the Crito, Socrates asks, whether or not the most important thing is living well and Crito affirms it. In general, through

14 The term “eudaemonia” does not translate perfectly into English; “happiness”, “living well”, and “flourishing” are all suitable translations, however, “happiness” is the translation that I will use for the remainder of this commentary. I choose this translation because it, above all the other translations, is the most prevalent throughout most of the secondary literature in regards to the early dialogues. See Vlastos 1991, 200-3 and Annas 1999, 37.
15 Euthydemus 278e4-7
16 Crito 48b3-9
the interaction between Socrates and his interlocutors, throughout all of the early dialogues, we can reasonably infer that the individual aims at being happy and spends her life in the pursuit of happiness.

According to Irwin, the common sense idea that all individuals aim at having happy lives is not strong enough for Socrates. Simply put, Socrates is a eudaemonist. “But Socrates goes further”, Irwin writes, “making happiness that overriding end that determines the rationality of any action.”\(^{17}\) Happiness is not only what we all want, what we all aim at as human beings, it is the direction we go in simply because we are human beings—we simply strive for happiness. At this point there are two types of eudaemonism to keep in mind: (1) *rational eudaemonism* where happiness is, legitimately, the ultimate justifying reason for any action whatsoever. (2) *psychological eudaemonism* where happiness is a legitimate descriptive explanation of what motivates every action.\(^{18}\)

Such an inclination to a life of happiness affects how and why individuals make particular choices. Happiness is said to be the *ultimate* justification or explanation for choices big and small. In other words, happiness certainly does not play a direct role in each and every decision, only indirect. For example, for the sake of discussion lets say that I just love fast food hamburgers. The salty, greasy, taste makes my mouth water. I have not had a hamburger in a month—since my physician told me that I had to begin a healthier diet because I am hypertensive and heart disease runs in my family—but it just

\(^{17}\) Irwin 1995, 53

\(^{18}\) For a more in-depth discussion on the difference between rational and psychological eudaemonism see § 36 entitled “Eudaemonism” in Irwin 1995. He discusses Socrates various commitments and implications for adopting either type of eudaemonism.
so happens that I am on the road with my family and everyone is hungry. My wife says
not to eat the hamburger for the very same reasons my doctor articulated a month earlier.
So, because I really want to eat the hamburger, I give her several reasons why I should be
able to eat one: I am hungry. It is convenient to eat one right now. There are no other
suitable options available…etc. Finally, since none of these reasons are persuasive
enough to allow my wife to feel comfortable while I gobble down a hamburger, I say to
her: “it makes me happy to eat hamburgers.” At this point the only options are (1) to be
happy and eat a hamburger—in spite of all of the health risks—or (2) to be miserable and
not eat a hamburger. The ultimate truth of the matter was that I wanted to eat a
hamburger because it makes me happy to do so; wanting to be happy is a good enough
explanation or justification for eating one.

If we consider the hamburger example it might well be argued that above and
beyond wanting the hamburger, I wanted to be happy. Irwin claims that similar reasoning
is found in the \emph{Lysis}; he writes that in the \emph{Lysis} Socrates “distinguishes subordinate from
primary objects of love.” Also, “a subordinate object is loved for the sake of some
primary object of love, whereas the primary object is loved for its own sake and not for
the sake of any further object of love.” Naturally, then, “no good that is chosen for the
sake of the primary object is chosen for its own sake.” In order to prevent an infinite
regress Irwin stipulates: “Socrates believes that there must be a primary object of love
because the series of objects of love must be finite.”\footnote{19 All of these passages are taken from Irwin 1995, 54}

Consequently, Irwin implies that Socrates gives us a kind of model for choice
albeit a simple one. There is something that we all love, and therefore want, so we live
our lives making decisions according to that—and only that—thing, that we all love.

Irwin definitively claims:

[In the *Lysis*] Socrates claims that whatever is loved for the sake of some further end is not what we *really* love, and that what we *really* love is whatever we love without loving it for the sake of anything. He implies *that if we choose x for the sake of y, we cannot also choose x for itself.*

Irwin relies heavily on this passage from the *Lysis*, especially the second of the two sentences which can be conveniently termed the *Lysis principle.* For Socrates, a eudaemonist, it is only fit for happiness to fulfill whatever criteria there might be for being a primary object of love. If we mean to agree with Socrates in regards to happiness then it must be our final end and *all* else is chosen for its sake.

Important questions begin to emerge at this point: if every thing is chosen for the sake of happiness then what does it mean to be happy? How do we know that we are happy? What are the signs of a happy life? Are there things that all who are happy have in common? In the modern era there are certainly things that we can reasonably presume happy people to have: good health, sufficient wealth to ensure that certain physical needs are met, some leisure time, friends and family…etc (of course there are happy people who may not meet the criteria completely, but it certainly seems fair). Although the times

---

20 1995, 67. The emphasis in this passage is mine.
21 Irwin cites *Lysis* 220a-b for support. As was already stated above, the *Lysis principle* does much of Irwin’s heavy lifting. The passage was treated similarly in *Plato’s Moral Theory* (1979) and it is from this earlier work that I recycled the term. In his earlier book, Irwin applied the term “*Lysis-principle*” to the idea that “if A chooses x for the sake of y, A does not choose x for itself” (*Lysis-principle* about choice) and to the same concept in regards to goods: “if x and y are goods, and x contributes to y, x cannot be a good in itself” (*Lysis-principle* about goods). For Irwin’s previous analysis of this concept refer to 1979, 85.
22 I do not think it would be wrong if one were to think ahead and foreshadow a hedonist view at this point.
have changed, a happy life in Athens consisted of many of the same things. The presence of non-moral goods such as wealth, a good birth, a strong body and such were valued in Greece at the time. The extent to which non-moral goods such as wealth, power, and even health should be valued is open for debate and much of what is discussed in the early dialogues pertains to just this idea.\textsuperscript{23}

The idea that the virtuous person is the happy person, that virtue is sufficient for happiness, that people should care first and foremost for the goodness of their soul, is sprinkled throughout the early dialogues.\textsuperscript{24} Quite often Socrates discusses virtue and the good right along with the non-moral goods that are claimed to be good to possess by his interlocutors. His persistent “what is $x$” question to his interlocutors in regards to what it is about the virtues that make them good, only reinforces Socrates attitude and passionate commitment to virtue that was made explicit in the \textit{Apology} and in the \textit{Crito}. At 28b-c in the \textit{Apology} Socrates states to the law court:

Someone might say: “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death?” However, I should be right to reply to him: “You are wrong, sir, if you think that a man who is any good at all should take into account the risk of life or death; he should look to this only in his actions, whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is acting like a good or a bad man.”

\textsuperscript{23} Annas makes a similar point in 1999, 33-35.
\textsuperscript{24} Socrates belief that virtue may be sufficient for happiness resonates in the \textit{Apology} at 30c-d and 41c-d, in the \textit{Crito} at 48b, and in the \textit{Charmides} at 173d and 174b-c. One’s well-being is tied to the state of ones soul in the \textit{Protagoras} at 313a-b and similarly in the \textit{Charmides} at 156e. Moreover, what is perhaps the most important argument in the \textit{Euthydemus} is that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. The significance of the sufficiency of virtue for happiness will discussed more in depth later on.
From this statement, his response (at *Crito* 46b-c) to Crito’s suggestion that he should escape from prison to avoid execution naturally follows:

> We must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not, as not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me.

It is obvious that for Socrates virtue is something of such great significance that for him it is much more than a set of concepts to philosophize about; it is, quite frankly, a way of life. Virtue is the individual’s guide throughout this life.

Returning to Irwin, we are now in a position to consider how he makes sense of Socrates’ attitude toward virtue and how it relates to happiness. Irwin believes Plato’s *Lysis* to be crucial and he draws various conclusions given what is said in the concluding pages (219-222a). Irwin commits himself to the view that happiness is the primary object of love: “there must be a primary object of love because the series of objects of love must be finite.” Since Irwin undoubtedly believes that Socrates is a eudaemonist, only happiness can be the primary object of love—the final end in the finite set of objects of love. Moreover, given Irwin’s acceptance of the *Lysis* principle, we are permitted to substitute “happiness” in place of $y$; hence, if $A$ chooses $x$ for the sake of happiness, then $A$ does not choose $x$ for its own sake. Therefore, the relation of $x$ to happiness is *purely instrumental*. Irwin writes: “if this general principle is accepted, then we cannot say that virtue is a constituent of happiness; for if it were a constituent…it would have to be
chosen both for its own sake and for the sake of happiness.”

Stated in this way, the implication of this claim is that virtue cannot be chosen for its own sake—virtue is purely instrumental to happiness. In *Plato’s Moral Theory*, he claims that virtue is “purely instrumental” and “entirely distinct” from the end it produces. At this stage all the evidence we have for instrumentalism is to be found in the *Lysis*; but surely, one passage from only one dialogue is not sufficient to legitimately attribute instrumentalism to Socrates. Irwin’s claim would be much stronger with additional evidence from other dialogues. He alleges that we can arrive at the instrumental thesis—that virtue is only an instrumental means to happiness—by considering the dialogue between Socrates and Polus in the *Gorgias*:

**Socrates**: Hence, it’s for the sake of what’s good that those who do all these things do them?

**Polus**: I agree.

**Socrates**: Now didn’t we agree that we want, not those things that we do for the sake of something, but that thing for the sake for which we do them?

**Polus**: Yes, very much so.

Ultimately, what is articulated here is, in essence, identical to what is implied by what is said in the *Lysis*: if there is something that we want, then whatever is done for the sake of

---

25 Irwin 1995, 67

26 In Irwin 1979, 300 n. 53 he discusses what is meant by “instrumental means” where he writes; “the end it [an instrumental means] contributes to is entirely distinct from it.” Vlastos also takes note of this passage, see 1991, 7.

27 146b-c
that thing we want carries only instrumental value. What, specifically, does this have to do with virtue and happiness? Given what we know about Socrates’ belief that virtue contributes in some way to happiness, once again we are forced to claim that the virtues are desired as means to happiness and, therefore, cannot be desired for their own sake. Consequently, “virtue cannot be either identical to happiness or a part of happiness”; indeed, virtue would be “entirely distinct” from happiness.

Furthermore, it could be helpful to conceive of virtue in this fashion. If happiness is the end all individuals pursue, then an appeal to it, as an end, may be used to rationalize the means to it. Irwin asks us to consider a bed. The idea is that there are various qualities that we all understand to be qualities that are present in a good bed: it has a sturdy frame, it has four legs that allow it to sit level on a level surface…etc. Our desired end—a good bed—determines what type of carpentry techniques and materials a craftsman is supposed to use; if we all agree on the nature of a good bed then an appeal to it will shine light upon the road to it. According to Irwin, Socrates claims that if we all hold that happiness is the final end of every individual then we can appeal to it to resolve any disputes about virtues.

Understanding Irwin’s instrumental principle about virtues by comparison with a carpenter and his knowledge of bed making draws us into the use and power of the techne analogy in the early dialogues. In regards to the techne analogy Irwin writes:

---

28 Irwin 1995, 67. In response to the passage in the Gorgias cited in the previous note Irwin writes: “Here Socrates claims that when we do x for the sake of y, what we want is not x but y; he states his claim more precisely when he says that in these cases we want x only for the sake of y and do not want x for itself.” See also n. 7. Irwin considers a reformulation of the passage by Vlastos but nevertheless concludes that it “still implies that we do not want these things [intermediate things] for their own sake.”
29 The first time was due to the Lysis principle.
30 Irwin, 1995: 68
31 1995: 68
Our defense of an instrumental conception of virtue used an example from a productive craft (techne), which can explain and justify its procedures by showing how they are instrumental to the production of a product with the features that are already taken to define an appropriate end for the craft. Socrates himself assumes some degree of analogy between virtues and productive crafts.32

To what degree does Socrates assume analogy between virtues and technai? In truth, how strong is the techne analogy? The answers to these questions vary; still, these questions are central to each possible description of a moral theory in the early dialogues. The techne analogy is a core topic of discussion between Socrates and all of his interlocutors. Why? What does Socrates hope to accomplish by reference to the techne analogy? Disagreements between philosophers about what Socrates really says often boils down to a difference of opinions on how Socrates uses the techne analogy.33 In a discussion about what science will make a person happy, Socrates and Critias agree that it is the science of knowing what is good and what is evil.34 Again, similarly, in a discussion with Nicias, Socrates points out that knowledge of goods and evils is the one kind of knowledge that will lead to success in various arts such as farming, medicine, and

32 1995, 68
33 For instance, Annas (1995), Nussbaum (1986), and—it could be argued—even Vlastos (1978), accept that virtue is, or at least may be (this is where Vlastos departs from the former two philosophers), a techne. These three philosophers attribute a lesser degree of strength to analogy between techne and virtue than Irwin; however, the views of Annas and Nussbaum are similar to his, while Vlastos’ view is very different. Cf. Roochnik (1996), whose view is definitely most akin to Vlastos’ view, who relies on the idea that the relation of virtue to happiness is fundamentally different than the relation of the means of production to the proper product of a techne. More on this topic will be discussed later; however, it is useful to hint at what a crucial role the techne analogy plays in the interpretation of, not merely the early dialogues, but in the whole of Plato’s corpus as well.
34 Charmides 174a-175a
generalship.\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Euthydemus} is devoted, almost solely, to this ideal. In the \textit{Euthydemus} at 288d-291a, Irwin takes Socrates to be asking: “what sort of craft secures happiness?” implying that the ‘kingly craft’—the knowledge using goods in accordance with what is good and bad—is the art that secures ones happiness.\textsuperscript{36}

If it is accepted that Socrates believes that the kingly art in the \textit{Euthydemus} is the craft that makes individuals happy then a potentially serious objection surfaces. The kingly art can be used in such a way to harm other people. The tyrant can conduct her affairs solely for the purposes of her own selfish satisfaction. Therefore, if virtue is analogous to the kingly art then—for the analogy to hold—a ‘virtuous’ person could do vicious things; but since virtue must be good we have a contradiction that cannot stand—virtue could not be such a craft.

Irwin claims that Socrates realizes this potential problem and addresses it in the \textit{Lesser Hippias}. The idea is that the expert at doing something good has the capability to be the most powerful wrongdoer. Think of a computer programmer. A person who is an expert at building and programming computers and computer software understands all of the inner-workings of a computer. She knows all of the conditions that must be satisfied for a computer to operate successfully. Because she has such extensive knowledge of what has to happen for a computer to operate, she also understands, at the same time, what conditions would have to be satisfied for the computer to fail to operate. With such knowledge it is possible for her to implant a virus or anything that might cause computers to fail. Therefore, we can conclude that since she has the knowledge of what is good (for

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Laches} 198d-195b
\textsuperscript{36} 1995: 69. The fairness of Irwin’s reading of this passage in the \textit{Euthydemus} is up for debate. It certainly seems that more than one reading would be fair.
computers) she also has the knowledge of what is bad, she can do what is good, as well as
do what is bad.

Irwin indicates a way out of this dilemma for Socrates. The conclusion of the
dialogue between Socrates and Hippias is as follows:

Socrates: So the one who voluntarily...does what is shameful and unjust,
Hippias—that is, if there is such a person—would be no other than the
good man.

Hippias: I can’t agree with you in that, Socrates.

Socrates: Nor I with myself, Hippias. But given the argument, we can’t
help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate.37

It may be true that a techne of this sort will have the possibility of misuse but that need
not imply that virtue conceived of as a craft will face the same difficulty; “if there is such
a person” implies that this would only be the case if and only if there really were such a
person. There is no such person, however, so even though it is a logical possibility it is
not an actual possibility. Also, provided that Socrates accepts psychological
eudaemonism, it follows that an individual will invariably want to use the kingly art
correctly because it will be used for the sake of her happiness.38 Therefore, according to

---

37 Lesser Hippias 376b-c.
38 Irwin 1995, 69-70. Irwin seems to claim here that rational eudaemonism would be problematic. I do not
quite see why that would be so. Why is rational eudaemonism out of the question? It would seem that if x is
done for the sake of happiness then one would certainly be justified in doing x the right way since it would
be that way which would lead to happiness. The agent would consciously avoid actualizing the logical
possibility of misuse. A justification for an action is a legitimate explanation, but an explanation may not be
a legitimate justification. I simply assume that Irwin must believe that if rational eudaemonism is accepted
instead of psychological eudaemonism, then Socrates would have to think that a virtuous person might be
able to justify their use of their techne (the techne of knowing what is good and what is bad) viciously for
the sake of their happiness. This would be the case of the tyrant. However, it would seem to me that
Irwin, even though the misuse of the kingly craft is logically possible; it is ruled out by the very nature of an individual’s desire for happiness. Socrates can efficiently deflect the misuse objection and has no reason to doubt that virtue is a craft.

Before proceeding further we should pause and summarize Irwin’s view so far. Virtue is a craft. Based on the *Lysis*-principle—if *A* chooses *x* for the sake of *y*, *A* does not choose *x* for itself—and the support for it, found in the *Gorgias* at 146b-c, Irwin proposes that virtue is a craft with happiness as its determinate end product and virtue as a purely instrumental and distinct means to its end product.

At this point we are certainly justified in asking some questions. What does an instrumentalist conception of virtue hold in store for the Socratic notion that virtue is sufficient for happiness? It seems that such a conception of virtue runs counter to Socratic thought about the significance of virtue prevalent in the *Apology* and in the *Crito*.\(^{39}\) Is there any way to prevent this apparent conflict? Additionally, if virtue is a craft with happiness as its product, is there any way to shed light upon what the nature of happiness might actually be? Irwin realizes that an instrumental conception of virtues may leave the answers to these questions somewhat blurred; but they are important questions that he must answer.

In answering these important questions, Irwin begins by claiming:

> We all agree, according to the *Euthydemus*, that there is such a thing as happiness, that it is the ultimate end, pursued only for its own sake, and rational eudaemonism would not be at fault here. Alternatively, I think the problem would fall back to a shared conception of happiness. If the conception of happiness is different from person to person then agreeing upon the means to that happiness becomes problematic.\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) Cf. passages cited above: *Apology* 28b-c and *Crito* 46b-c.
that if we get it our desires will be fully satisfied (since we have no desire for anything that lies outside happiness)...If he [Socrates] can show that virtue ensures the satisfaction of the virtuous agent’s desires, he will have shown (he may suppose) that virtue is sufficient for happiness.  

Irwin implies many things in this passage: (1) individuals have desires that only happiness can satisfy, (2) virtuous agents have desires, (3) the desires that virtuous agents have are desires for happiness, and (4) if virtue satisfies the desires of virtuous people, then virtue will be sufficient for happiness. It follows that satisfying virtuous desires is sufficient for happiness. Without a doubt this is a form of hedonism. To label Socrates as a hedonist outright at this point is a little hasty; we should first examine other dialogues to see if Socrates says anything that may give us reason to believe that he would not hold the four beliefs just now adumbrated.

According to Irwin, Socrates can advocate this type of view, and still speak of virtue the way he does in the *Apology* and *Crito*. In essence, Socrates desires happiness, and he is so devout and committed to his belief that virtue is an infallible instrumental means to happiness that it plays the most central role in how to conduct his life—so much so, that he has no desire to *ever pursue anything that conflicts with virtue whatsoever*, despite the consequences. Socrates desires nothing apart from acting virtuously; not even the threat of death can change his mind. The non-virtuous person would certainly put more weight on non-moral goods—such as money, fame...etc.—as a means to happiness than on virtue, and so would desire such goods more than virtue; hence when a situation arises that prevents the non-virtuous person from attaining non-moral goods his desires

---

40 1995, 74
are frustrated. The non-virtuous person and Socrates could face the very same situation under the very same circumstances, but since Socrates desires nothing but virtue, his desires are not frustrated and he is happy. In sum, Irwin writes:

He [Socrates] claims that since he wants to be as virtuous as he can be and has no desire for anything that conflicts with being virtuous, he suffers no loss of happiness, and hence no harm, if he loses any of the supposed ‘goods’ that the virtuous person has to forgo…Socrates might also fairly claim that the virtuous person is less liable to frustrated desire than a non-virtuous person, since a non-virtuous person is liable to failures that do not affect a virtuous person.^[41]

Consequently, Socrates’ wholehearted devotion to virtue has actually changed his prospects for happiness since it changes his object of desire. If Socrates desires nothing but virtue since he believes it will bring him happiness, then happiness is always within his reach; regardless of the circumstances, Socrates is always able to act virtuously, and therefore he is always able to satisfy the means to happiness. We can say, in this situation, that Socrates can adapt his desires according to whatever circumstances he may be in. Let us consider an example, from the *Crito*. At 45a-46b Crito tries to persuade Socrates to escape prison. Facing the death penalty, Crito’s proposition is Socrates’ only chance to live. For the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates explains that the only course of action he desires to follow is the virtuous one. If Socrates were to escape with Crito, then he would be acting unjustly and viciously, which would not make him happy. Only

^[41] 1995, 75
by adapting his conception of happiness to no more than acting justly Socrates will die a happy man.\footnote{This idea is supported by the passage at 48c: “if it [escaping prison] is seen to be just, we will try to do so; if it is not, we will abandon the idea.}

Additional support for the adaptive conception of happiness is found in the \textit{Gorgias}. If Socrates does accept the adaptive conception, it becomes clear why someone like Callicles—who believes that to live correctly one must allow one’s appetites to grow as large as can be and satisfy them by whatever means possible\footnote{\textit{Gorgias} 491e. Cf. 492d-e offers additional support; Callicles affirms Socrates question: “Tell me: are you saying that if a person is to be the kind of person he should be, he shouldn’t restrain his appetites but let them become as large as possible and then should procure their fulfillment from some source or other, and that this is excellence?”}—sets himself to be very unhappy. Someone with a Calliclean conception of happiness\footnote{Irwin 1995, 117. Irwin calls it the ‘expansive conception of happiness’} will have to go to such great lengths to be happy that there are numerous external factors that will inevitably affect his success. Things such as natural disasters, war, failure to be elected as an official, and other such things can make it difficult, if not impossible at times, for someone to be happy. Since Socrates maintains an adaptive conception of happiness external factors that may be crippling setbacks certainly affect him, but they do not affect his happiness. Socrates simply desires to be virtuous, regardless of circumstance, and is happy by satisfying that desire.

Again, there are hints of hedonism. Callicles is certainly a hedonist; but is Socrates really a type of hedonist? Yes, but of a different type than Callicles. Is happiness nothing more than the pleasure one feels from satisfying the right kinds of desires? Yes. Evidence that Socrates adopts hedonism is found in the \textit{Protagoras}. Hedonism is introduced in response to Protagoras’ disagreement with the Socratic conclusion that
wisdom is courage (350c-351a)—more generally, his disagreement with the unity of virtue thesis. Socrates, feeling a need for a new strategy, appeals to hedonism with the notion that, when conceived correctly, it demonstrates that individuals cannot, in the pursuit of happiness, knowingly do something bad for themselves. This is the thesis of the impossibility of incontinence. It is his opinion that a clear discussion of hedonism and the impossibility of incontinence will ultimately demonstrate to Protagoras the unity of the virtues.\textsuperscript{45}

Socrates argues that the rabble accept hedonism from 353b-345e. Basically, there are things that individuals engage in that bring about immediate pleasure, but are ruinous in the long run. The best examples of these are indulgences that produce some kind of instant pleasure but over time become ‘bad’ habits. Therefore, these things, that ultimately bring pain and deprive individuals of other pleasures, are bad.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, the same thing holds true for activities that are immediately painful; Socrates’ examples are athletics, military training, and cauterization among others. Stru...
Socrates: So then you pursue pleasure as being good and avoid pain as being bad?

Protagoras: Yes.  

Therefore, the answers to the questions: ‘is Socrates a type of hedonist?’, and ‘is happiness nothing more than the pleasure one feels from satisfying the right kinds of desires?’, are both yes.  

Essentially, in regards to incontinent action, Socrates claims that hedonism renders incontinence impossible because pleasure is good; therefore, one cannot do what is bad for oneself by claiming that he was overcome by pleasure, because that would amount to saying nothing more than he was overcome by goodness. So it is absurd to say that a person knowingly did something bad because he was overcome by goodness. Ultimately, since it has been established that the rabble would agree with Socrates’ premises, he has shown that their own views of what is good and pleasant undermine their belief in incontinence.  

The fact that Socrates takes the rabble to accept hedonism is important. It opens doors to the objection that the argument for hedonism is not used because he believes it himself, but used only as a tool for proving the impossibility of incontinence; in other words, it may be argued that the argument from hedonism is ad hominem. Irwin believes

---

48 Protagoras 354c
49 Callicles simply wishes to maximize pleasure at whatever cost, thus he is a ‘quantitative hedonist’, cf. §77 of Irwin 1995 entitled “quantitative hedonism.” Socrates does not maintain this type of hedonism; he is concerned with ones life being pleasant on the whole. Irwin calls this ‘epistemological hedonism.’ According to Socrates something is pleasant if and only if it is good, therefore a pleasant life is a good life—what we all want. Under the Calliclean quantitative hedonism what is pleasant is not necessarily what is good; hence the pleasant life may not be, and probably will not be, the good life.
50 Protagoras’ acceptance of hedonism is crucial for the success of the impossibility of incontinence and the unity of virtue theses. Cf. n. 29, my interest is to extract the view of hedonism that Irwin claims Socrates maintains; so I am not currently concerned with the ripple effect caused by the hedonism argument.
that there is good reason to believe that Socrates himself accepts hedonism on the
grounds that incontinent action would constitute a strong blow to psychological
eudaemonism if hedonism were not accepted; the argument for hedonism is the only
explicit argument given by Socrates—in any dialogue—that can argue for psychological
eudaemonism. So, according to Irwin, “the hedonist argument does what it needs to do
only if he believes it.”\textsuperscript{51}

Furthermore, hedonism need not conflict with conceiving of virtue as a craft. In
the same sense that reference to a sturdy desk shines light upon how to construct one,
reference to pleasure should help us to decide which actions maximize our prospects for
happiness.\textsuperscript{52} Hence, Irwin deems it fair to conclude:

Hedonism allows Socrates to claim not only that each virtue is a craft but
also that all the virtues are the same craft aiming at the same end; for,
according to the \textit{Protagoras}, the only relevant difference between one
pleasure and another is purely quantitative.\textsuperscript{53}

We can safely conclude, under Irwin’s view, that for Socrates virtue is a craft.
Just like any typical craft—carpentry, cobbli ng, what have you—there is a procedure and
a product. Virtue is the procedure with an instrumental relationship to its product of
happiness, where the happy life is a life where pleasure outweighs pain. According to
Irwin, virtue is a sufficient means to happiness because it is an infallible means. So if we,

\textsuperscript{51} 1995, 86
\textsuperscript{52} Irwin 1995, 90
\textsuperscript{53} 1995, 90. Irwin also refers to \textit{Protagoras} 356a-c.
like Socrates, only care about acting virtuously, then that is a good enough ethic to secure our happiness.

II

ARGUMENTS AGAINST IRWIN’S VIEW

That virtue is instrumental to happiness is the central thesis of Irwin’s view, but this thesis occupies center stage in a view that I believe Socrates does not maintain. It is not my aim to overthrow the entire view that Irwin attributes to Socrates, but only to show that the instrumental thesis is untenable. First, I intend to argue that the instrumental thesis is incorrect on the grounds that it presupposes the implausible notion that virtue must only be a “craft” that has an end that is entirely distinct. Second, if virtue is a craft in this sense, then the possibility arises that—just like any other productive craft—it can be used for vicious purposes, and it seems to me that Irwin does not beat this objection. Lastly, I hope to reinforce my first argument against Irwin; I move to articulate an argument from contemporary philosophy—one that shows that instrumentalism prevents virtue from being sufficient for happiness—in such a way as to give us an additional reason for rejecting Irwin’s notion of techne as a productive craft exclusively.

*The Instrumental Thesis and the Techne Analogy*
The *Euthydemus* teaches us that above all else all individuals wish to be happy—they desire only this as their final end. Irwin’s reading of the early dialogues implies a rigid procedure for Socrates: we know what the end is and we have to figure out how to get there. In other words, we have a sufficiently distinct end in mind, so an appeal to that end can help us determine the means to it.

Nowhere in the dialogues does Socrates state that virtue plays an instrumental role to happiness. Irwin argues that Socrates puts forth an instrumental principle, derived from *Lysis* 219c-220b, and supported in the *Gorgias* at 468b-c:

If we choose *x* for the sake of *y*, we cannot also choose *x* for itself. If this general principle is accepted, then we cannot say that virtue is a constituent of happiness; for if it were a constituent…it would have to be chosen both for its own sake and for the sake of happiness…[moreover], to find explicit evidence of his accepting it [the instrumental principle] elsewhere, we must turn to the *Gorgias*. Here Socrates claims that when we do *x* for the sake of *y*, what we want is not *x* but *y*; he states his case more precisely when he says that in these cases we want *x* only for the sake of *y* and do not want *x* for itself…In these two passages, then, Socrates makes claims about non-final goods that, taken together with his conviction that virtue contributes to happiness, imply that virtue is purely instrumental to happiness, cannot be chosen for its own sake, and therefore cannot be either identical to happiness or a part of happiness.

---

54 278e and 282a. Hints of a similar idea are also found in the *Crito* at 48b.
55 Irwin 1995, 67-8. Cf n. 8 in previous chapter above. The statement from the *Gorgias* stated above “we want *x* only for the sake of *y* and do not want *x* for itself” will be referred to as the ‘*Gorgias* principle.’ This is my coinage and not Irwin’s. The *Gorgias* principle differs from the *Lysis* principle in one important sense. It is not quite as strong as the *Lysis* principle; the *Gorgias* principle implies that we can ultimately only want one thing for itself and want all other things only insofar as they are instrumentally valuable to the final end. The *Lysis* principle, on the other hand, claims that it is only logically possible to desire one
As Irwin rightfully understands, “Socrates himself assumes some degree of analogy between virtues and crafts (techne).”\(^{56}\) Since this is true for Socrates, Irwin assumes that even though Socrates does not explicitly accept the instrumental principle, an appeal to the nature of a techne would demonstrate various reasons why Socrates would accept the instrumental principle. So the question arises: What must be true about the nature of a techne that would incline Socrates to accept Irwin’s instrumental principle?

The techne analogy is a central aspect of the early dialogues and is a tool used again and again by Socrates to progress through an elenchus. Commentators have translated “techne” multiple ways\(^{57}\); Irwin translates it as “craft”—namely, a craft of a productive nature. He does note, however, that Socrates does not explicitly state his exact conception of the nature of a craft.\(^{58}\) Despite this fact, Socrates does offer criteria. Look to 465a in the Gorgias:

> It [flattery\(^{59}\)] guesses at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best. And I say that it isn’t a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing. And I refuse to call anything that lacks such an account a craft.\(^{60}\)

---

\(^{56}\) 1995, 68

\(^{57}\) It has been translated as an “art,” “craft,” “skill,” “expertise,” “profession,” and “science.” I found this tip in Roochnik 1996, 1

\(^{58}\) Irwin 1995, 70. He cites 465a2-7 in the Gorgias for support.

\(^{59}\) It has been suggested that “pandering” is also an appropriate translation of kolakeia.

\(^{60}\) 454c-455a, and 462b supports this claims as well.
Two important statements are implied here: (1) a particular methodology is required, (2) a methodology is *particular* because it must be able to give an account of what it does and why, and (3) it follows that a craft is teachable. These implications are visible in Irwin’s interpretation. Each craft has a proper end, a certain product, which owes its existence to the correct procedure. By appeal to the product, provided that there is agreement in regards to its nature, we can justify the means used to produce it; a craft is rational by nature, so therefore, it is teachable.  

If we understand techne in the sense that Irwin does, then we can support his instrumental principle by appeal to a productive craft. Order is of vital importance here. First, Irwin looks to the *Lysis* and the *Gorgias* for his initial formulation of the instrumental principle. At this point, the instrumental principle requires a final end—i.e., an end desired only for its own sake. The only object Irwin deems fit for this criterion is the conception of happiness Socrates discusses in the *Euthydemus*. He reasons that in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates does not put forth any disagreements about the idea that happiness is desired for its own sake, while, at the same time, explaining why other things are desired for the sake of happiness; with this consideration in mind, according to Irwin, we have good reasons for attributing to Socrates the belief that happiness is the only final end—an end suitable for the instrumental thesis. It follows, therefore, that if happiness is

---

61 Such a description of the nature of a craft appears throughout Irwin’s discussion of the early dialogues. Of fifteen sections listed in the index of *Plato’s Ethics* under ‘craft,’ (those devoted to the early dialogues, that is) each one either specifically refers to, or implies that, techne, for Irwin, is a productive craft.

62 Irwin (1995, 68) writes: “Our defense of an instrumental conception of virtue used an example from a productive craft, which can explain and justify its procedures by showing how they are instrumental to the production of a product with the features that are already taken to define an appropriate end for the craft. Socrates himself assumes some degree of analogy between virtues and productive crafts.” This passage was already stated in chapter one, however, it is certainly worth noting again at this point.
the only end desirable for its own sake, and virtue promotes happiness, then virtue must be purely instrumental to happiness, and, hence, one can only desire virtue for its purely instrumental value. Irwin looks to his notion of techne as a productive craft for support since the means of production are instrumental to the production of a product. Irwin’s instrumental principle implies that the means are necessarily distinct from the product it produces. Since the means to the product of many technai are not distinct—let alone, entirely distinct—Irwin’s appeal to techne as a productive craft, for support of his instrumental principle, is weak. I argue, and hope to demonstrate that an appeal to technai need not support his thesis; in fact, it actually undermines the instrumental principle altogether.

Not surprisingly much of the scholarship on the meaning of techne has resulted in disagreement. Many commentators do not agree on the narrow conception that Irwin deems true. In her book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum argues that Irwin’s conception of the meaning of techne is incomplete. She writes:

Irwin has claimed that ‘techne’, like English ‘craft’, includes as part of its meaning the notion of an external end or product, identifiable and specifiable independently of the craft and its activities. What the craft does is to provide instrumental means to the realization of this independently specifiable end.⁶⁴

---

⁶³ Cf. Irwin 1995 54, 67
⁶⁴ 1986, 97
In fact, she claims that there are “several varieties of techne, with several structures.” Nussbaum believes Irwin is seriously misguided; his identification of techne with ‘craft’ is not the only one. First, there are productive technai; carpenters, blacksmiths, and shoemakers are all craftsmen who produce something distinct from their craft. In this respect a techne is very similar to Irwin’s ‘craft’; however, Nussbaum does claim that Irwin’s notion is still stubbornly narrow:

Even here, however, we note that what makes shoemaking artful and good, rather than merely adequate, may not be specifiable externally and in advance: for once the art exists, its own activities—fine stitching, elegant ornamentation—tend to become ends in themselves.

Other technai are productive crafts but not in such a rigid fashion: medicine for instance is different in the sense that both the end and the process are somewhat indeterminate. The nature of medicine is to produce health. In producing health the craft of medicine also investigates the procedure taken in order to produce health more effectively. Consider the modern example of brain surgery. There once was a time when open brain surgery was necessary to remedy an aneurism; however, whenever the body is opened, especially the cranium, the risk for life threatening infection arises. In pursuing health,
the medical science inevitably found it beneficial to strive to eliminate the risk of life threatening infections whenever possible. Therefore, a new procedure for curing aneurisms has been developed—one that will produce the same result, however, more efficiently. Therefore, according to Nussbaum, “when a doctor prides himself on his techne, he includes work on the end as well as his investigation of the productive means.”

Moreover, other technai resemble Irwin’s notion even less. Activities such as music, dance, and athletic achievement, have no distinct product whatsoever. The only product that such activities can be said to have is its own practice; what we value is the quality of the practice itself. This does mean that these types of activities fail to qualify as technai. To borrow from Nussbaum once more: “because of the disciplined, precise, and teachable character of these practices, they are unhesitatingly awarded the title of techne.”

Nussbaum’s opinion of Irwin’s notion of techne is apparent. So the question arises: In light of such strong opposition, what is Irwin’s motivation for maintaining the narrow notion of techne being only a productive craft, especially when Nussbaum’s views are so plausible?

When Socrates refers to technai, the great majority tend to be technai of a productive nature. Aside from that, Irwin’s motivation seems to me to be found in the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Gorgias*. Irwin summarizes this passage from the *Lysis* at 219c-220b and forms his *Lysis* principle:

---

68 1986, 98
69 1986, 98
If we choose $x$ for the sake of $y$, we cannot also choose $x$ for itself.\footnote{1995, 67. The passage from which this statement was extracted was discussed in the previous chapter. Cf. n. 7 and 8 above in previous chapter.}

Irwin’s reference to 468b-c in the Gorgias designates what I call the Gorgias principle:

We want $x$ only for the sake of $y$ and do not want $x$ for itself.\footnote{Irwin 1995, 67. Cf. n. 2 above (this chapter).}

We should follow Irwin’s lead and consider the Lysis principle and the Gorgias principle in combination with the argument of the Euthydemus—the argument for eudaemonism, i.e., that ultimately all individuals want happiness. If the statement, “if we choose $x$ for the sake of $y$, then we cannot also choose $x$ for itself”, is true, then it seems that we could run into problems if we consider technai to be anything but a strictly productive craft. Take for example, dancing—to pick an example that Nussbaum believes produces nothing outside of itself. If Nussbaum is right, and dancing produces nothing outside of itself, then—according to the Lysis and Gorgias principles—a dancer would technically choose dancing for its own sake, since, presumably, the dancer would know that dancing produces nothing other than a dance—nothing other than its own practice. Moreover, if the dancer were asked why he chose to dance, then—according to the Euthydemus—happiness would have to be his ultimate reason; therefore, he actually chose to dance for the sake of happiness—since happiness is the only thing we choose for its own sake, and everything else is chosen for the sake of it. So, ultimately, it would have to be argued that
dancing produces something other than its own practice; if it cannot be argued that
dancing produces something distinct from itself, it should be argued that the *Lysis* and
*Gorgias* principles would have to be rejected. If the *Lysis* and *Gorgias* principles fail,
then the instrumental principle fails, from which it would follow that dancers could
conceivably choose dancing and happiness both for their own sakes\(^\text{72}\) —which entails
that dancing *just is* happiness for the dancer.

Since, Irwin notes, Socrates does not give an explicit analysis of a techne\(^\text{73}\), but
does explicitly state both the *Lysis* and *Gorgias* principles, we have to infer that a
Socratic analysis of techne *would* obey both principles, and therefore ultimately obey the
instrumental principle. Hence, contra Nussbaum, a techne conceived of as a productive
craft seems to be the *only* notion of a techne that can truly satisfy this line of reason.

It seems to me that this is the only way that Irwin can argue against Nussbaum’s
techne pluralism. Thus, Irwin’s account fails. For he believes that Socrates would accept
the instrumental thesis because he accepts the instrumental principles stated in the *Lysis*
and *Gorgias*. Irwin, however, appeals to technai to support and justify the validity of the
instrumental thesis; yet, his very conception of techne—as only a productive craft—is
dependent on the validity of the instrumental principle, which, if attributed to the relation
of virtue and happiness, yields undesirable conclusions.

\(^{72}\) Nussbaum claims in 1986, 445 n. 19 that one passage from the *Lysis* is hardly sufficient to stand as a
foundation for the moral theory Irwin attributes to Socrates. In Vlastos 1991, 306-7, he claims that Irwin’s
use of the passage from the *Lysis* is unwarranted because its use resulted from an unjustified generalization
from non-moral to moral goods. I have ignored this particular argument from Vlastos so far. Although, it
seems to me that Vlastos’ argument against Irwin’s use of *Lysis* 219b-220b is accurate and sound, Irwin
must not have agreed; it is used the same way in *Plato’s Ethics* as it was in *Plato’s Moral Theory*. Thus,
what I hope to demonstrate in my argument here is that Irwin’s instrumental principle fails *even if his Lysis
principle is true*.

\(^{73}\) 1995, 70
Crafts and the Lesser Hippias

Problems with Irwin’s notion of techne as a productive craft seem to me to be to insurmountable; still, even if we simply grant Irwin his notions, we run into problems. Socrates himself recognized that the possibility of misuse of the craft of virtue constitutes a serious threat; surely virtue cannot be a craft, if it can be used for ill.

Socrates discusses the issue in the Lesser Hippias. As was stated in chapter one, Irwin claims that Socrates realizes the logical possibility of virtue of being used for vicious ends but does not believe that the mere logical possibility will be realized if we agree that all individuals pursue happiness; if this is true, we can reasonably identify virtue with a craft and thereby support the idea of psychological eudaemonism. The truth of Irwin’s hypothesis rests almost entirely on an interpretation of Socrates’ attitude in the concluding sentences of the Lesser Hippias. If and only if Irwin correctly pinpoints Socrates’ attitude can we appeal to the notion of a common desire for the same type of happiness to prevent the logical possibility of misuse from realization.

Does Irwin accurately understand Socrates attitude at the conclusion of the Lesser Hippias? We should revisit the relevant passage at 376b-c:

Socrates: So the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, Hippias—that is, if there is such a person—would be no other than the good man.

Irwin 1995, 69-70
Hippias: I can’t agree with you in that, Socrates.

Socrates: Nor I with myself, Hippias. But given the argument, we can’t help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate.

I mentioned that Irwin relies almost entirely on the conclusion of this dialogue. That statement needs modification. Irwin relies entirely on only one statement of all the concluding sentences: “that is, if there is such a person.” According to Irwin’s interpretation, Socrates utters this phrase knowing full well that there is not such a person who is both good and unjust—who is virtuous and vicious. In other words, the qualification is intentional, and it signifies to us that Socrates understands that if there exists such a person who voluntarily acts viciously, shamefully, and unjustly, then—if there really is such a person—that person must be a good person. As far as this particular statement is concerned, I think Irwin is exactly correct; but only up to this point. Irwin completely ignores Socrates’ response to Hippias’ disagreement with the conclusion.75 It is surprising that Irwin ignores the rest of the passage. Clearly, the last two sentences stated above represent Socrates’ opinion. Both Hippias and Socrates claim to disagree with the conclusion, but then Socrates states “but given the argument, we can’t help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate” which is just specific enough for us know that he has the conclusion of the argument in mind, but, at the same time, it is undoubtedly vague enough to leave us unsure about his real opinion in regards to the

75 Cf. Irwin 1995 where he discusses this issue in § 47 entitled “Is Virtue a Craft?” (68-70). The second half of the discussion in this section is devoted solely to this problem. Irwin gives an account for the expression “that is, if there is such a person” but does not acknowledge Socrates’ next two sentences whatsoever in the remainder of the section.
truth of the conclusion. Does Socrates disagree with the conclusion or is the argument good enough to convince him despite his intuitions? As of now we cannot tell.

Since Irwin ignored this aspect of the concluding passages of the *Lesser Hippias*, he obviously did not argue that Socrates ultimately agrees with the conclusion; he merely implies it. If Socrates does agree with the conclusion, then Irwin would be right, and it would be safe to infer that Socrates acknowledges the logical possibility of misuse—by the use of “that is, if there is such a person”—but does not believe that it would be realized. Therefore, according to Irwin, Socrates might believe that virtue is a craft, and that this objection of ill use need not cause alarm. Hence, all that needs to be demonstrated is that Socrates might not accept the conclusion. If we can show that Socrates might not accept the conclusion—or, at the very least, if after careful analysis it still cannot be definitively determined whether or not he does accept it—then Irwin’s notion seriously deflates, to the point that it would not be a strong enough argument against the possibility of misuse. Irwin cannot then claim that Socrates has a sure and easy way around the objection undertaken—meaning that Socrates cannot simply push this objection to the side. If we can show that Irwin goes too far in his treatment of the conclusion of the *Lesser Hippias*, then it becomes very risky for Socrates to maintain that virtue is a craft.76

---

76 The motivation for the argument must be made crystal clear. In the cited passage from the *Lesser Hippias* Socrates’ attitude is vague. If we argue that Socrates agrees with the conclusion then he agrees that one who voluntarily does what is unjust must be a good person. Moreover, if this is true, then the only way out for Socrates is the route that Irwin claims: to concede that an unjust and good person is logically possible but can never be realized. On the other hand, if we say that Socrates does not agree with the conclusion he and Hippias arrived at, then it would seem that there is no problem—i.e., Socrates would not think that there could be a good person who voluntarily does injustice. This, however, is not what I want to deal with here; I only intend to show that Irwin’s view rests on a highly questionable reading of this dialogue and perhaps not even the best read. In this section of this paper I am not suggesting a particular read of the
A passage from the *Crito* may give Irwin reason to assume that Socrates would accept this conclusion. Socrates states at 46b:

> At all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me.

If we keep this passage from the *Crito* in mind, then the statement, ‘but given the argument we can’t help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate’ could signify that Socrates would accept the conclusion in the *Lesser Hippias* regardless of how counterintuitive it may sound.\(^{77}\) In other words, truth is Socrates’ primary concern. Furthermore, Irwin claims Socrates assumes that the elenchus yields true conclusions.\(^ {78}\) We know that Socrates values philosophy more than any other activity\(^ {79}\) and undoubtedly has a great deal of faith in the elenchus, so why should we think that he would not accept the conclusion of the argument in the *Lesser Hippias*?

To a certain extent textual evidence from other dialogues does support the idea that Socrates would assent to the conclusion; however, textual evidence from other dialogues, in general, might favor his reluctance to accept the conclusion of the argument in the *Lesser Hippias*. But before we look for evidence in other dialogues, we should critically examine the last two sentences by Socrates stated above: “Nor do I with myself, **Lesser Hippias.** If I were, my inclination would be to think that Socrates would claim that this argument is the direct result of thinking of virtue as a craft. Since I wish only to argue against Irwin, it is not within the scope of this paper to suggest an alternate reading of an entire dialogue; I do think that when faced with this question, however, I might be sympathetic to a view similar to David Roochnik’s. Cf. Roochnik 1996, 260-261

\(^{77}\) Further support for this claim may be ascertained from the *Charmides* at 166c-d.

\(^{78}\) 1995, 86.

\(^{79}\) *Apology* 38a
Hippias. But given the argument, we can’t help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate.” There is much that is not said here that may be of great significance. Very simply, ‘now’ implies only that this may only be true at this point in time—there is nothing in or about this sentence that hints of any permanence whatsoever. In other words, we may say, that this particular conclusion in the *Lesser Hippias* is valid at this moment because of the argument used, but is ultimately unsound because it is not the way the world really is. Another important component of the sentence to unpack is the first subordinate clause: “but given the argument.” There is nothing about the sentence as a whole that indicates that the preceding argument is correct or even appropriate to begin with. It is plausible that the phrase “but given the argument” suggests that Socrates realizes that the conclusion is validly derived but nonetheless false because it follows from one or more false premises and thus is the product of an unsound argument. If my interpretation is correct, then another way to understand Socrates would be in the following way:

*Socrates:* So the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, Hippias—that is, if there is such a person—would be no other than the good man.

*Hippias:* I can’t agree with you in that, Socrates.

*Socrates:* *I don’t agree with this conclusion either, Hippias. But given our current line of reasoning, we are committed to the conclusion, although it is unsatisfactory, the argument leads us to it at this point in time.*

This, however, is simply one way to interpret Socrates; such an interpretation, in isolation, is far from sufficient to serve as strong evidence.
Evidence from the *Charmides* may strengthen my claim about Socrates’ dissatisfied attitude at the end of the *Lesser Hippias*. At the end of the *Charmides* (175a-176a) Socrates expresses his dissatisfaction with the argument about temperance. Toward the beginning of the dialogue Charmides and Socrates agree that temperance is fine and admirable\(^{80}\); yet, the elenchus leads to conclusions about temperance that are just plain unacceptable—namely that temperance is not beneficial.\(^{81}\) In response to the conclusions arrived at about temperance Socrates states:

> And yet, I think, there could be nothing more irrational than this. But in spite of the fact that the inquiry has shown us to be both complacent and easy, it is not a whit more capable of discovering the truth. It has, in fact, made fun of the truth to this extent, that it has very insolently exposed as useless the definition of temperance we agreed upon and invented earlier.\(^{82}\)

This does not imply that the guiding principle of the elenchus is responsible for yielding problematic conclusions; so we need not question Socrates’ faith in the elenchus. For he states:

> I am very vexed indeed, if, with such a body and, in addition, a most temperate soul, you should derive not benefit from this temperance nor

\(^{80}\) 159a  
\(^{81}\) 175a  
\(^{82}\) 175c-d
should it be of any use to you in this present life… I really do not believe this to be the case; rather I think that I am a worthless inquirer.\textsuperscript{83}

From which we can rightfully infer that Socrates can maintain his faith in the elenchus, and reject the conclusion of an elenchus, ultimately, because he is not immune to error—he acknowledges the possibility that he did not provide a suitable argument to account for some of his beliefs.

Turning back to the concluding passages of the \textit{Lesser Hippias}, we find it at least plausible for Socrates to disagree with the conclusion of the argument with Hippias. Socrates’ attitude toward the argument about temperance, made obvious at the end of the \textit{Charmides}, may in fact be identical to his attitude about virtue being compatible with unjust action. We still do not know if, in truth, Socrates rejects the conclusion of the \textit{Lesser Hippias} but we do not need to. Evidence in Irwin’s favor is minimal; yet, there is much more favorable evidence, against Irwin’s interpretation of the closing passages of the \textit{Lesser Hippias}, suggestive of an alternate read. If Socrates does reject the conclusion, then we are justified to say that he does not imply what Irwin claims he does: i.e., Socrates can maintain that virtue is a craft due to a logical possibility that will never be realized. Regardless, evidence on Irwin’s side is simply insufficient for him to claim that his view can protect the notion of virtue as a craft from the objection of misuse.

\textit{Sufficiency of Virtue and Instrumentalism}

\textsuperscript{83} 175d-e
Throughout the early dialogues Socrates implicitly and explicitly claims that virtue is sufficient for happiness. We find confirmation for this in the *Apology*, just to consider one example:

For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul, as I say to you: “Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively.”

If we believe that Socrates holds that virtue is sufficient for happiness, then it seems that *prima facie* virtue cannot be purely instrumental to happiness. If we consider other passages in the *Apology* we can see why. At 28b, Socrates professes that one must act only in regard to virtuous actions and not in regard to anything else. Irwin acknowledges this passage, but believes Socrates can hold both theses simultaneously. As was elucidated in chapter one, Irwin believes that if Socrates maintains the adaptive conception of happiness, he can argue for the sufficiency thesis despite the *prima facie* difficulties of instrumentalism. In other words, Socrates can skirt the seemingly serious difficulties associated with the instrumental principle by appeal to satisfying the virtuous agent’s desires. The virtuous person desires happiness and realizes that virtue is the only means to it; so, the virtuous person desires only virtue. Even at the most extreme

---

84 30a-b. Cooper notes an alternative translation: “Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence brings about wealth and all other public and private blessings for men.” In Irwin 1995, 59, *Apology* 30c-d, 41c-d, *Crito* 48b, and *Charmides* 173d, 174b-c are also cited for support of the sufficiency thesis.

85 Cf. Irwin 1995, 125. He writes: “The value to be attached to rational planning is explained by appeal to an adaptive view of happiness, from which Socrates defends the sufficiency of virtue for happiness.”
situations, a virtuous person can limit her desires to only acting virtuously, which, according to Irwin, would lead her to happiness.\(^86\)

The problem associated with accepting the sufficiency of virtue and instrumental theses is not readily dismissed. Scott Senn makes obvious a major problem in Irwin’s remedy.\(^87\) The charge is against Irwin’s implicit understanding of Socrates’ attitude towards extreme cases. In extreme cases\(^88\) the problem makes itself apparent: Irwin maintains that Socrates does not value virtue for its own sake, but only for the sake of happiness—it is valued as a *purely instrumental* means only; however, Irwin claims that Socrates adopts an adaptive conception of happiness, so that at such extreme times, the virtuous agent will limit his desires to nothing more than virtue. At this point virtue is desired for its own sake, *contra* beliefs about instrumentalism. The consequences of Irwin’s view are, in this case, contradictory. Senn writes:

> Socrates will in that case be satisfied with possessing just this purely instrumental good and with possessing *no intrinsic goods*: in the extreme case a purely instrumental *means* will become the sole ultimate *end*.\(^89\)

It would be unreasonable to claim that Socrates really believes he does not desire virtue for its own sake, despite saying that a person should choose virtuous action come what

\(^{86}\) Cf. § 51, entitled “Why Is Virtue Sufficient for Happiness?”, (primarily the second half of the section) in Irwin, 1995.

\(^{87}\) Cf. Senn 2005. Entitled, “Virtue as the Sole Intrinsic Good in Plato’s Early Dialogues,” Senn’s paper deals with many of the ideas prevalent among philosophers. Since my discussion focuses on Irwin’s interpretation, section 7 (“If only instrumentally good, is virtue sufficient for happiness?”) of Senn’s paper is of primary interest to me.

\(^{88}\) Cases acknowledged by Socrates himself in the *Apology* at 30c-d—death, banishment, even bodily disenfranchisement—are appropriate. Senn notes this as well in 2005: 12.

\(^{89}\) 2005, 12
may. Thus, Senn’s argument against Irwin’s proposed way out of conflict between instrumentalism and the sufficiency of virtue constitutes a strong one.

Senn highlights a contradiction deep in Irwin’s view that reveals itself only in the most extreme cases. Although Senn’s line of reasoning is convincing, more can be said. We know that Socrates would act with regard to virtue and nothing else—even if faced with death or dismemberment\(^{90}\); and, we know that if he is to remain happy in such dire circumstances by acting in this fashion, then Socrates must value virtue for its \textit{intrinsic} good. At this point, the \textit{source} of happiness changed. Socrates, in extreme cases, can preserve his happiness, by desiring virtue not as a means but as an end. Since, in this case, virtue is desired as an end and happiness is still preserved, then we have, consequently, succeeded in removing another reason for Irwin to appeal to productive crafts for justifying his instrumental principle. If the desire to appeal to technai simply cannot be resisted, then it would be much more suitable to appeal to one like dancing or flute playing than it would be to carpentry, since at this point the source of happiness \textit{is} the execution of virtue.

We have already discussed reasons why Irwin believes Socrates appeals to productive crafts when considering virtues and happiness: a productive craft has a determined end which is entirely distinct from the instrumental means that produce it; and, therefore, by appeal to the end, we can resolve conflict about the means to it. If we assume that happiness is the end that everyone desires, then—if the analogy holds—we can appeal to happiness as an end in order to remove conflict about the instrumental

\footnote{\textit{Apology} 30c-d. This idea is also supported by 28b-c, 32b-c, and 32d.}
means to it. On the other hand, if Socrates can find happiness—even when caught up in the most debilitating and most extreme circumstances—simply by seeking virtue as the ultimate end, then there is no conflict to be dissolved about how to be happy in the first place. In the case of Socrates in the *Apology*, virtue is sufficient for happiness precisely because it is not a means “entirely distinct” and “purely instrumental” to it—precisely because virtue is not a productive craft akin to carpentry.

**III**

**CONCLUSION**

In regard to Socrates, Irwin writes:

If we are trying to understand Socrates’ own theoretical account of virtue and happiness, insofar as he has or presupposes one, we ought to be persuaded that he accepts an instrumental view. Even if it does not offer a very plausible defense of some of his convictions, that is not by itself a good enough reason for supposing that he does not accept the view; many philosophers have accepted theories that fail to justify some of their convictions.\(^{92}\)

---

\(^{91}\) Irwin 1995, 68

\(^{92}\) Irwin, 1995: 77
Is this satisfying? Do we want to attribute to Socrates a view that fails to justify his central beliefs? No. It seems to me that if we desire to understand a Socratic moral theory we should start with his central convictions.

I have argued against Irwin’s instrumental principle. Among the implications of my arguments is the idea that virtue just is happiness. Since Vlastos argued for the thesis that the virtuous life is the happy life, he and I are in general agreement about various issues. First, if virtue constitutes happiness then any problems with the sufficiency thesis seem to dissolve; and second, Socrates need not be a hedonist of any kind. Irwin does not conceive of him as the type of hedonist that Callicles certainly is, but he does consider Socrates as a type of hedonist insofar as pleasure is identified with good and that type of pleasure is what the virtuous person desires as a means to a happy life. Just because one desires a pleasurable life does not mean that one is a hedonist; if it did, then to call someone a hedonist would not be very informative. If Socrates does not maintain that virtue is only instrumental to happiness but constitutive, then Socrates acts virtuously because there is a particular aspect of the nature of virtue that makes the virtuous person happy. It seems to me that this type of view is much more accepting of Socrates main convictions in the *Apology* and the *Crito*.93

Although we both arrived at our conclusions individually, Vlastos and I tend to agree about the relation of virtue to happiness in the early dialogues. The virtuous life is the good and happy life. A positive argument that may show that Socrates would incline to this belief would be to subject the thesis that virtue is sufficient for happiness to an elenchus. Given that Socrates is concerned with whatever it is about virtue that makes it

---

93 *Apology* 28b and 28d and *Crito* 48c-d.
good, and that the good life is the happy life, the elenchus may lead us to accept that virtue is sufficient for happiness if and only if virtue is a constituent of happiness, thus allowing for both virtue and the good life to possess whatever it is that makes both good. Demonstrating this thesis, however, must be left for a date yet to come.


