

EXCERPT FROM PLATO'S

EUTHYDEMUS

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SOCRATES: Do all men wish to do well? Or is this question one of the absurdities I was afraid of just now? For I suppose it is stupid merely to ask such things, since every man must wish to do well. 278e

CLEINIAS (A YOUNG BOY): Everyone in the world. 279

SOCRATES: Well then, as to the next step, since we wish to do well, how can we do well? Will it be if we have many good things? Or is this an even sillier question than the other? For surely this too must obviously be so.

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Come now, of things that exist, what sort do we hold to be really good? Or does it appear to be no difficult matter, rather than the sort of thing we need some important person to answer, because anyone can tell us that to be rich is good, surely?

CLEINIAS: Quite true.

SOCRATES: Then it is the same with being healthy and handsome, and plenty of the other bodily endowments? b

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Again, it is surely clear that good birth and talents and distinctions in one's own country are good things.

CLEINIAS: True.

SOCRATES: Then what do we have left, in the class of goods? What about being temperate, and just, and brave? Tell me, Cleinias, do you think we would be right to rank these as goods, or to reject them? For there may be someone that would dispute it. How does it strike you?

CLEINIAS: They're goods.

SOCRATES: Very well, I went on, and where in the troop shall we station wisdom? Among the goods, or where?

CLEINIAS: Among the goods.

SOCRATES: Let's be careful not to pass over any of the goods that may deserve mention.

CLEINIAS: I don't think we are leaving any out.

SOCRATES: Yes, by Heaven, we are on the verge of omitting the greatest of the goods.

CLEINIAS: What is it?

SOCRATES: Good luck, Cleinias: a thing which all men, even the worst fools, refer to as the greatest of goods.

CLEINIAS: You're right, he said.

SOCRATES: We've almost made ourselves laughing-stocks, you and I, son of Axiochus, in front of our visitors.

CLEINIAS: What is wrong now?

SOCRATES: Because, after putting good luck in our list, we have just been discussing the same thing again.

CLEINIAS: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: Surely it is ridiculous, when a thing has been before us all the time, to set it forth again and go over the same ground twice.

CLEINIAS: To what are you referring?

SOCRATES: Wisdom is presumably good luck: even a child could see that. Can you be unaware, Cleinias, that when it comes to success in flute-music it is the flute-players that have the best luck?

CLEINIAS: That's true.

SOCRATES: And when it comes to success in writing and reading, it will be the grammar teachers?

CLEINIAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well now, when it comes to the dangers of a sea-voyage, do you consider any

pilots to the luckier, as a general rule, than the wise ones?

CLEINIAS: Surely not.

SOCRATES: Well, then, suppose you were on a campaign, with which kind of general would you prefer to share both the peril and the luck—a wise one, or an ignorant?

CLEINIAS: With a wise one.

SOCRATES: Well then, supposing you were sick, with which kind of doctor would you like to take your chances, a wise one, or an ignorant?

CLEINIAS: With a wise one.

SOCRATES: And your reason is this: you would have better luck in the hands of a wise one than of an ignorant one? 280

CLEINIAS: Right.

SOCRATES: So that wisdom everywhere causes men to be lucky, since I presume wisdom could never err, but must act rightly and achieve the right results, otherwise it would no longer be wisdom. The truth in general is this: when wisdom is present, he with whom it is present has no need of good luck as well. But we agreed that, if many goods were present to us, we would be happy and do well. b

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then would we be happy because of our present goods, if they gave us no benefit, or if they gave us some?

CLEINIAS: If they gave us benefit.

SOCRATES: And would a thing benefit us if we merely had it and did not use it? For instance, if we had a lot of provisions, but did not eat them, or liquor, and did not drink it, could we be said to be benefited? c

CLEINIAS: Of course not.

SOCRATES: Well then, if every craftsman found the things he needed for his particular work already prepared for him, and if he then made no use of them, would he do well because of these acquisitions, since he acquired all the things necessary for a craftsman to have at hand? For example, if a carpenter were furnished with all his tools and a good supply of wood, but did no carpentry, is it possible he could be benefited by what he had got? d

CLEINIAS: By no means.

SOCRATES: Well now, suppose a man had got wealth and all the goods that we mentioned just now, but made no use of them; would he be happy because of his possessing these goods?

CLEINIAS: Surely not.

SOCRATES: So it seems one must not merely have acquired such goods if one is to be happy, but use them too; else there is no benefit gained from their possession.

CLEINIAS: True.

SOCRATES: Then do we have here enough means, Cleinias, for making a man happy, if he is in the possession of these goods and uses them? e

CLEINIAS: I think so.

SOCRATES: If he uses them rightly, or even if he does not?

CLEINIAS: If he uses them rightly.

SOCRATES: Well answered; for I suppose more harm is done when a man uses anything wrongly than when he doesn't do it at all. In the one case it is bad; in the other there is neither bad nor good. Isn't this what we should say? 281

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: To proceed then: when it comes to working with and using wood, is there anything else that brings about the right use than the knowledge of carpentry?

CLEINIAS: Surely not.

SOCRATES: Further, I presume that, when it comes to making furniture, it is knowledge that brings about the right work.

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then similarly, in the use of the goods we mentioned at first—wealth and health and beauty—was it knowledge that controlled and directed the right use of all those things or was it something else? b

CLEINIAS: It was knowledge.

SOCRATES: So it would seem that knowledge supplies mankind not only with good luck, but also with doing well in all that he either possesses or conducts.

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then can we, in Heaven's name, get any benefit from all the other possessions without prudence and wisdom? Should we say that, if a man were a fool, he would profit more by possessing and doing a lot or by possessing and doing little? Consider it this way: wouldn't he err less if he did less; and so, erring less, do less harm; and hence, doing less harm, be less miserable? c

CLEINIAS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: In which of the two cases, when one is poor or when one is rich, will one be more likely to do less?

CLEINIAS: When one is poor.

SOCRATES: And when one is weak, or when one is strong?

CLEINIAS: Weak.

SOCRATES: And when one has high position, or has none?

CLEINIAS: None.

SOCRATES: When one is brave and temperate, will one do less, or when one is a coward?

CLEINIAS: A coward.

SOCRATES: So too, when idle rather than busy?

CLEINIAS: Yes

SOCRATES: And slow rather than quick, and dim of sight and hearing rather than sharp, and in all other such cases? d

CLEINIAS: Yes

SOCRATES: To sum up then, Cleinias, it seems that, as regards the whole lot of things which at first we termed goods, the correct account is not that they are in themselves and by nature goods, but rather, I think, as follows: if they are guided by ignorance, they are worse things than their opposites, since they are more capable of serving their bad master; whereas if prudence and wisdom controls them, they are greater goods; but in themselves e

neither sort is of any worth.

CLEINIAS: I think the case appears to be as you suggest.

SOCRATES: Now what result do we get from our statements? Is it not precisely that, of all the other things, not one is either good or bad; only these two: wisdom is good and ignorance bad?

CLEINIAS: Yes.

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SOCRATES: Let us consider, then, the further conclusion that lies before us. Since we are all eager to be happy, and since we were found to become so by not only using things but using them rightly, while knowledge, we saw, was that which provided the rightness and good luck, it seems that every man must prepare himself by all available means so that he may be as wise as possible. Isn't that right?

CLEINIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if a man thinks, as he well may, that he ought to get this from his father much more than money, and also from his guardians and his ordinary friends, and from those who profess to be his lovers, whether strangers or fellow-citizens—praying and beseeching them to give him his share of wisdom; there is no disgrace, Cleinias, or reprobation in making this a reason for serving and being a slave to either one's lover or any man, and being ready to perform any service that is honorable in one's eagerness to become wise. Is not this your view? b

CLEINIAS: I think you are perfectly right, he replied.

c

SOCRATES: Yes, Cleinias, if wisdom is teachable, and does not present itself to mankind of its own accord—for this is a question that we have still to consider as not yet agreed on by you and me.

CLEINIAS: For my part, Socrates, I think it is teachable.

SOCRATES: Well spoken indeed, my excellent friend! How good of you to relieve me of a long inquiry into this very point, whether wisdom is teachable or not teachable! So now, since you think it is both teachable and the only thing in the world that makes man happy and fortunate, can you help saying that it is necessary to pursue wisdom or intending to pursue it yourself? d

CLEINIAS: Why, I do say so, Socrates, with all my might.