Plato’s *Euthydemus* is despised and neglected of scholars, not least because it seems deeply unserious. In part it is a collection of sophisms—some silly, some challenging; in part it is a strange representation of Socratic views; as a whole it seems a parody of the confrontation between Socrates and his traditional enemies, the sophists. If it is a joke, it falls flat too soon; if it is serious, it defies us to see what it is serious about. So why should we bother with it at all?

Some have said that the *Euthd.* is a handbook of fallacy. The dialogue is constructed to show us a series of fallacies, compared to their discredit with good Socratic arguments; by familiarity with these bad arguments we may learn how to avoid both them and their practitioners. So the *Euthd.* is Plato’s version of Aristotle’s *de Sophisticis Elenchis*; it (only) seems to lack a proper topic because its topic is the arguments themselves.

If that is right there will be two immediate reasons for the dialogue’s neglect. First, the fishy arguments are not restricted to the sophistic episodes; Socrates seems to trawl as heavily in the sea of equivocation as...
the sophists themselves. Second, Socrates' diagnoses of the fallacies are neither systematic nor decisive. Not every fallacy has its own diagnosis; but when it does, the point is often obscure. So even if there are fallacies here, it's a lousy handbook.

But comparison with the SE may after all be instructive. Aristotle supposes that logical form is a matter of evidence: valid forms are, in the canonical cases, just obvious, (cf. e.g., Prior Analytics 24b22 ff.) and our account of entire logical systems is developed from the obviousness of the canonical cases (cf. APr. 25b26). Plato, however, is not committed to a methodology of the obvious: he is more likely to suppose that what is obvious is directly problematic, at best the trigger for the rational but unobvious account that we should give for the way things really are. From Aristotle we should expect continuity between phenomena and theory; from Plato what we often get is the reverse. So is Plato's purpose in producing a collection of fallacies likely to be a systematization of the argumentative phenomena?

Is this a collection of fallacies, anyway? Suppose we think about fallacy as a formal matter—where there is a fault in the formal structure of an argument—rather than an informal one—where, for example, unacceptable conclusions follow from false premises. To collect fallacies, then, we need not only an antecedent account of what constitutes validity, but also reassurance that it is by faulty reasoning, rather than from unacceptable premises, that these arguments go through. It is not obvious that this is what we get in the Euthd. Again, Aristotle may illuminate the matter. He bases his account of fallacy on logical principles themselves based on his own metaphysical theory (cf. e.g., SE 6, 169a 10 ff.; 24, 179a27 ff.). In Plato's case, it is not clear—yet, at least—what

3 Not only does he seem to slither about with some old favourites, ἐπιπάτητε (278e3 ff) and ἑπταπλατία (279c7 ff.), he may also be seriously unclear on what exactly he means by the good (279a ff.); and in any case, his arguments end in an important regressive aporia (291b; 292e). In fact, I think these appearances may be deceptive; but this is not the place to discuss them in detail.

4 The first—and famous—analysis of what seems to be an equivocation on 'know' and 'learn' may instead be a comment about differences in tense, 277e; I have discussed this in McCabe 1993.

5 On this see Lear 1980, Ch.1.

6 This, I think, can be said of Plato without prejudice to the question whether or not he has, or always had, a two world metaphysics.

7 Even the thought that there might be a difference between apparent syllogisms or refutations and real ones has a metaphysical cast, 165a18.