

# "VIRTUE ETHICS" AND THE PROBLEM OF ADVISING FOOLS<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT: "Virtue ethics" tells us to do what the virtuous person would do in our circumstances. But if we are not virtuous—if we are "fools"—then the virtuous person would not be in our circumstances. What, then, can virtue theory say to advise a fool about what to do? I quickly suggest reasons to be pessimistic about recent approaches to this problem, and then I turn to the ancients' eudaimonism for a fresh alternative. The ancient Socratics, including especially the Stoics, counsel not causally promoting one's virtue or trying to follow "v-rules" but approximating virtue. I argue that Stoic psychopathology offers considerable help in making sense of how fools might approximate virtue and how advisers might use Socratic eudaimonism's conception of virtue to guide fools to the best action in their circumstances.

## 1. The Problem of Advising Fools

Some people believe that ancient Greek and Roman philosophy provides a plausible alternative to modern moral philosophy. Instead of thinking that one should act in accordance with the right moral principles or that one should act so as to promote the best consequences, these reactionaries suggest that one should act as a virtuous person would act in one's circumstances (see, e.g., Hursthouse 1999).

But there are problems with this formula, several of which are rooted in the difference between virtuous persons and the rest of us. First, we who are not virtuous sometimes find

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ourselves in circumstances foreign to any virtuous person. Hursthouse (1999, 50-51), for example, imagines a cad who has led each of two women to believe that he wants to settle down with her and has impregnated both. We cannot even begin to imagine what the virtuous person would do in such a circumstance because a virtuous person would not be in such a circumstance. Also, we are often unable to do what the virtuous person would do. Although the virtuous person would dine with the presenter after the colloquium and then finish her overdue grading after dinner, I might know that if I went to dinner, I would be unable to resist the wine that would make me unable to work responsibly later in the evening.<sup>2</sup> I cannot do what the virtuous person would do. So what should I do instead? Finally, it is clear that those of us who are not virtuous should spend some time working toward becoming virtuous, although of course a virtuous person does not do any such thing (cf. Railton 1986, 174n15). In each of these cases, one cannot appeal to virtue theory's formula to explain what a person should do.

Invoking the Stoics' provocative term 'fool' to describe all who are not virtuous, I call the problem posed by such cases the problem of advising fools.<sup>3</sup> The problem, thus far, is not that it is difficult to appeal to virtue theory's general principle in order to explain what should be done, or that it requires judgment to explain how the principle applies. The problem is that the principle simply does not apply.

So it is tempting to revise virtue theory's general principle. Perhaps one should act as one's virtuous counterpart would want one to act (cf. Railton 1986, 173-174) or as one's virtuous counterpart would advise one to act (cf. Smith 1994, 151). These revisions give us a general

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<sup>2</sup> I seem to recall Michael Smith using an example of a hothead who thinks that he should not try to shake his victorious opponent's hand after a hard-fought tennis match, though of course his idealized counterpart would, but I cannot find the reference. I'd love some help with this.

<sup>3</sup> It often appears in the journals as the "problem of action-guidance" or the "practicality objection." But these labels cover a host of distinct concerns, not all of which are predicated on the gap between the virtuous and the rest of us.

principle that applies even when we are far from virtue, as we will still have our virtuous counterpart who can take our current circumstances, internal and external, into consideration. But neither revised principle tells us anything about what to do, because neither tells us what to expect our virtuous counterpart to want or advise us to do. Although we now have a basic principle of virtue theory that has application even to decidedly vicious agents, it does not address our problem.

One way to notice this is to realize that our virtuous counterpart might, for all that the revised principle tells us, want or advise us to follow the right moral rules or produce the best consequences. Now, this objection can get traction against initial formulation of virtue theory's basic principle, too: for all that formula says, the virtuous person might be the one who follows the right rules or maximizes goodness. (This, after all, is what deontologists and consequentialists say about the virtuous person!)<sup>4</sup> But the objection has additional force against the revised versions of the principle, for the revised versions leave us with no content whatsoever unless we can determine what our virtuous counterpart would want or advise us to do. Of course our counterpart cannot want or advise us to do as she would do, not in the cases that prompt the problem of advising fools. So what else could our virtuous counterpart tell us?

After these maneuvers, the problem of advising fools is not that virtue theory lacks a formula that applies to some especially hard cases, but that it lacks a formula that offers any contentful application to fools. To be told that one should do as one's virtuous counterpart would want is a bit like being told to do the best one can. The problem is that this does not help us in any way to determine what action is the best available to us. Again, it is not merely that it is

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<sup>4</sup> Consider, e.g., how Rawls (1971) insists that moral worth derives from some prior articulation of the right or the good. Watson (1990) offers an especially searching reply.

difficult, or that it requires judgment, to apply the formula. It would remain difficult and require judgment if we knew, roughly, where to look. But we do not even know that.

The problem does not entirely disappear if we give up on a single general principle and embrace a litany of rules that express the essential commitments of virtuous dispositions. Hursthouse (1999, 51) hopes that these "v-rules"—virtue-rules such as "try a little tenderness" and especially vice-rules such as "don't be cruel"—would provide guidance to the cad. And of course they might. But they might not. For how is the cad to prioritize or otherwise sort through the various v-rules when they offer conflicting guidance? The virtuous agent was supposed to provide a standard for this purpose, but the virtuous agent does not apply to the cad's case.<sup>5</sup> The virtuous adviser applies, but without any hint of how she would sort through the v-rules. So the many v-rules have, in a way, too much application to the fool's situation. The whole set of v-rules, lacking any principle or model to guide our application of it, explains too many possible actions as the best action and thereby fails to explain what a person should do.

The v-rules are an improvement over a general principle that does not apply and over a general principle that applies without content. But I doubt that they remove the problem of advising fools. Again, it is not merely difficult, or a matter for judgment, to get from the v-rules to the thing to do. Without some principle or model or set of considerations to guide the application of the v-rules, it is entirely random which of the many actions licensed or even required by the whole set of v-rules in these particular circumstances should be done.

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<sup>5</sup> If I understand her right, Hursthouse (1999, 52-62) accepts (and tries to mitigate the apparent undesirability of accepting) that there are cases in which virtue theory cannot provide any guidance beyond a list of v-rules whose recommendations appear to conflict in ways that a non-virtuous person (especially an inexperienced, non-virtuous person) would be unable to sort through. Presumably, she thinks that anyone unlucky enough to be stuck in such a circumstance should seek advice from his moral superiors (35). But my question concerns this advice: how exactly does thinking about virtue help the moral superior advise the fool? Hursthouse's general principle and her v-rules do not make it clear how it could.

This is a problem for "virtue ethics." It is not necessarily fatal. Perhaps useful advice for fools is too much to ask of a normative ethical theory. The virtue theorist's appeal to "v-rules" puts her on equal footing with many theorists of other stripes, and they could all say that no more applicable account of what should be done is plausible. Still, other things being equal, it would be good for the virtue theorist to solve the problem of advising fools by offering more guidance about how to determine what a fool should do. This is so for two reasons. First, it is entirely plausible that, as Aristotle insisted, the point of engaging ethical theory is to live better (EN I.4 1095a5-6), and plausible that ethical theorizing will not help us unless it gives useful advice to fools.<sup>6</sup> Given these points' plausibility, we cannot easily believe that the problem of advising fools is a pseudo-problem. Additionally, because, as we have seen, the problem raises nagging questions about how best to formulate the basic principle(s) of "virtue ethics," a solution to the problem promises to offer a better way of understanding the core commitments of "virtue ethics."

In this essay, I suggest a potential solution to the problem by looking back. I argue that some ancient Greek theorists of ethics have a way of understanding "virtue ethics" that solves the problem of advising fools.

## 2. Eudaimonism and the Problem of Advising Fools

At first blush, it might seem obvious that the ancients offer a solution. They appeal to a practical principle more basic than virtue theory's dictum that one should act as the virtuous

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<sup>6</sup> We could, I suppose, flatter ourselves with the thought that we are not fools. But it would be disastrous for our theory of virtue to suppose that it is regularly attained by the likes of us, as the best responses to Doris' (2002) challenge to "virtue ethics" recognize (see esp. Kamtekar 2004). In any case, even if we were virtuous, would virtue theory then help us to live better? It seems that if virtue theory is going to help anyone at all, it needs to show the way toward virtue for people who are not virtuous.

person would. This is the eudaimonist principle that one should act always for the sake of one's own success (eudaimonia, which I shall henceforth treat as an English word). The eudaimonist principle is taken to be more basic than virtue theory's dictum because it is supposed to explain and justify virtue theory's dictum: according to the ancients, one should act as the virtuous person would because if one acted as the virtuous person would, one would achieve success. The eudaimonist principle seems to apply simply to all human beings, virtuous and vicious alike, and so it seems to solve, quite straightforwardly, the problem of advising fools.<sup>7</sup>

But things are not so straightforward. The ancients disagree about what eudaimonia is and, more importantly, about how one acts for the sake of it. According to some, to act for the sake of one's eudaimonia is to act so as to bring about one's eudaimonia as a separate state of affairs. I call this consequentialist eudaimonism.<sup>8</sup> Its most prominent ancient proponents are the Epicureans, but one might also consider the theory that Socrates moots in the Protagoras and the theory that late-antique sources attribute to Democritus. According to other ancients, eudaimonia is an activity—it is virtuous activity—and to act for the sake of one's eudaimonia is to try to instantiate it.<sup>9</sup> This view takes literally and seriously the ancient platitude that eudaimonia is

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<sup>7</sup> Hursthouse (1999) also maintains that eudaimonism underwrites the principle that one should act as a virtuous person would, but she does not try to extract practical guidance directly from any eudaimonist principle. (Indeed, it is not clear that she should, since on her commonsense notion of eudaimonia, virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient for it [172-173].) Instead, she appeals to eudaimonism only to elucidate the general grounds on which we can properly identify which character traits are virtues.

<sup>8</sup> I take myself to be stipulating what 'consequentialist eudaimonism' means. I do not mean by 'consequentialist' exactly what Anscombe (1958) meant, when she coined the term, or what most philosophers presently mean. On these other construals, 'consequentialism' evaluates actions by their consequences for everyone, and not just for the agent, and 'consequentialists' usually do not insist that the consequences relevant to evaluating an action exclude the action.

<sup>9</sup> Note that the second claim here does not follow from the first. One might think that one can successfully  $\phi$  for the sake of X only if  $\phi$ ing efficiently causes X, in which case one could successfully act virtuously for the sake of virtuous activity only if one's virtuous action brought about more virtuous activity. But no Socratic eudaimonist would accept that evaluation of one's virtuous action: they want their principle to explain why one should find intrinsic value in one's virtuous action itself and not merely in some future "virtuous activity" that one's action might bring about. So they do not think that one can successfully  $\phi$  for the sake of X only if  $\phi$ ing efficiently causes X. They recognize non-efficient causal relationships (or efficient causal relationships broader

"living well" or "doing well," and I call it Socratic because it is native to Socrates' most prominent followers, including Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics.

This classification of ancient eudaimonisms might raise some eyebrows,<sup>10</sup> but it does not matter for my present purposes whether it is exhaustive (it is not)<sup>11</sup> or whether it accurately represents Plato,<sup>12</sup> Aristotle,<sup>13</sup> or Epicurus<sup>14</sup> (who are, I take it, the most contentious cases).

than Humean strictures would allow) and non-causal 'for the sake of' relationships (for which, see Kraut 1989, 87-88, and Lear 2004).

- <sup>10</sup> Many scholars have recognized that at least some eudaimonists think of eudaimonia as virtuous activity whereas others think of it as something separate from and produced by virtuous activity, but I do not know of any scholar (aside from Brown 2008) who has emphasized this distinction or drawn significant inferences from it. Perhaps Annas (1993, esp. 36-37) comes closest, but instead of articulating a contrast within eudaimonism, she insists that one has to abdicate eudaimonism to claim that one's final good is a state of affairs to be brought about. I believe but cannot argue here that this misconstrues Epicurean ethics, inevitably misrepresents the theory of the Protagoras (cf. Annas 1993, 37 and 228), and cannot easily accommodate later antiquity's understanding of Democritean ethics. I also depart from Annas' account by distinguishing the non-consequentialist eudaimonism according to which eudaimonia is simply virtuous activity (Socratic) from the one according to which it is virtuous activity and more (Peripatetic: see the next note).
- <sup>11</sup> Some ancient eudaimonists saw the final good for the sake of which one should act as a grab-bag including one's action and a motley assortment of goods, some of which would be consequences of one's action. This Peripatetic view (cf. Magna Moralia 1184a25-30) became prominent in the wake of Carneades' mischievous division of ethical theories (see esp. Cicero, De Finibus V, and Stobaeus II 7.3). The view would have us consider, in addition to how we might best try to act virtuously or at least in accord with virtue, how we might best bring about the other goods that it counts as part of the eudaimonia we should bring about. Whatever insights or advantages this view might offer—and I believe that it offers more confusion and disadvantages than insights and advantages—it first needs to determine how we can best try to act virtuously or at least in accord with virtue. So the work I do in this essay might help to clarify Peripatetic eudaimonism, even though I have to leave for another occasion a fuller reckoning of the Peripatetic view.
- <sup>12</sup> White (**citation**) thinks that Plato is not a eudaimonist at all, principally because he thinks that the Republic's philosophers sacrifice their eudaimonia to rule, but see Brown (2000 and 2004). Other scholars would question the claim that Plato's eudaimonism is what I call Socratic. Some want to extract from Republic IX or the Laws some hedonism that might be in tension with Socratic eudaimonism (**citations**), and others want to extract from the Philebus a view like the one the Peripatetics developed (**citations**). By contrast, I am impressed by Socratic dialogues' frequent insistence that the goal is "living well" or "doing well" (Charmides 171e-172a, Crito 48b, Gorgias 507c; cf. Republic I 354a), and by Socrates' use of these phrases interchangeably with eudaimonia and being eudaimōn in the Euthydemus (278e-282d), and I do not see anything that requires Plato to retract these simple identifications of that for the sake of which we should act with virtuous activity. Obviously, though, this needs fuller argument elsewhere.
- <sup>13</sup> Kraut (1989) appeals to a discussion of exile in the Politics and argues that Aristotle is not a eudaimonist, and Whiting (**citation**) appeals to the discussion of friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics and argues the same. But there is a general reason resist these moves: if Plato embraced eudaimonism, then we should expect Aristotle to make more noise renouncing it. Besides those doubters, so-called "inclusivists" readers (**citations**) attribute to Aristotle the view I call Peripatetic eudaimonism (see note 00 above). But the Peripatetics and inclusivists misread Aristotle. Aristotle avows again and again that eudaimonia is virtuous activity, even as he is working hard to show that this view can embrace and even explain apparently conflicting platitudes concerning the importance of external goods. (See especially λόγος at EN I 8 1098b20 and 1098b31, I 9 1099b25, and I 10

Three points matter. First, only the consequentialist sort of eudaimonism offers a simple solution to the problem of advising fools. It says that one should do whatever best promotes one's own eudaimonia, and it is clear where to look to determine what a fool should do, even if the determination might be difficult and require judgment. The Socratic sort of eudaimonism, by contrast, simply says that one should act virtuously, and so it plainly faces the problem of advising fools.

Second, consequentialist eudaimonism's simple solution to the problem of advising fools will not appeal to most adherents of "virtue ethics." Adherents of "virtue ethics" believe that a virtuous person must value his or her virtuous actions for their own sake. Consequentialist eudaimonism cannot directly accommodate this requirement, because according to it, a virtuous action is valuable only because it brings about eudaimonia as a state of affairs separate from the action. The virtue theorists on whose behalf I am toiling today do not want to embrace this view.<sup>15</sup>

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1100b11; but also [EN I 8 1099a29-31](#), [I 10 1100a13-14](#), and [I 13 1102a5-6](#). Brown (2006b) discusses these.) But Aristotle does complicate his identification of eudaimonia with virtuous activity by adding that it must be virtuous activity temporally extended over a complete life. (See [EN I 7 1098a18-20](#), with [I 10 1101a16](#), [X 7 1177b25](#), and Brown 2006b, 224-225. Cf. [EN III 2 1111b28-29](#) with Brown 2006b, 239-240.) It is worth emphasizing that a Socratic eudaimonist can reject Aristotle's addendum; indeed, some Stoics might have. Plutarch offers contrasting testimony at [Stoic. rep. 1046c-e](#) and [Comm. not. 1061f-1062a](#).

<sup>14</sup> Mitsis (1988) and Annas (1993) argue otherwise. But I am struck by the fact that Epicurus finds mere instrumental value in so many of the things that most eudaimonists consider intrinsically valuable, including friendship (see Brown 2002 and 2009) and philosophical activity (see Brown 2008). I also suspect that Epicurus cannot consider eudaimonia to be virtuous activity because he takes it to be pleasure and he takes pleasure to be a passive condition (pathos). Indeed, he must take pleasure to be a pathos because, on his view, if it were not passive, it would not be an inerrant guide for action as sense-perception is an inerrant guide for judgments. But, again, this requires more argument elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> One might suggest that consequentialist eudaimonism can accommodate the requirement that a virtuous agent find his or her virtuous actions intrinsically valuable. One might insist that nobody can successfully act for the sake of their eudaimonia except by accepting the fiction that virtuous actions are intrinsically valuable. Alternatively, one might construe consequentialist eudaimonism as a "two-level" view, according to which (level one) a person should be virtuous because it best brings about his or her own eudaimonia and (level two) a virtuous person should value virtue for its own sake. (O'Keefe (2001) attributes such a view to Epicurus, but I believe that [RS 25](#) rules it out.) But these are also unlikely to appeal to the fans of "virtue ethics." These fans typically believe that virtue requires clear-eyed, correct apprehension of the value of one's actions and why they have that value. Relatedly, ancient eudaimonists desired that the agent's pursuit of his own good directly give

So if any ancient eudaimonism can solve the problem of advising fools for theorists of "virtue ethics," some ancient Socratic eudaimonism can. A third point about my classification now matters: it is uncontroversial that at least the Stoics were what I am calling Socratic eudaimonists. Stoics distinguish between the target (skopos) a rational agent aims at (namely, a body of a certain sort) and the goal (telos) for the sake of which the agent acts (namely, being or living a certain way), and they are explicit that the goal is to live virtuously.<sup>16</sup>

So my primary claim in this essay is that Stoic eudaimonism offers a promising response to the problem of advising fools. But I will continue to speak more generally of Socratic eudaimonism and to suggest that Socratic eudaimonism offers a promising response to the problem of advising fools. I do this to set the stakes of my position accurately, and to invite objections to my full position. But though I am proposing, and giving some support to, the broad claim about Socratic eudaimonism, I am arguing conscientiously only for the narrow claim about the Stoics. Everything I say about non-Stoic Socratic eudaimonism should be read as a promissory note for a fuller argument, and an invitation for objections.

### 3. Socratic Eudaimonism and the Problem of Advising Fools

According to Socratic eudaimonism, we should act for the sake of a final goal and that goal is simply virtuous activity. So how can this view explain what the fool should do? The fool is incapable of virtuous activity, and not merely because he cannot do what the virtuous person does in the way that the virtuous person does it (that is, from virtue) but also because he cannot

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him or her reason to act virtuously, so that the reasons that explain the virtuous person's behavior would also be the reasons that justify it. The fictionalist and two-level consequentialist eudaimonists do not satisfy these desiderata.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Stobaeus II 7.6c 77,1-5 (with the Stoic-inspired Stobaeus II 7.3c 47,7-11) and 7.6e 77,16-27.

perform some actions the virtuous person would perform and because he should perform some actions the virtuous person would not. The Socratic eudaimonist plainly has a problem advising fools.

One might try to help the Socratic eudaimonists by investigating more closely their idea of virtuous activity.<sup>17</sup> The Socratics broadly agree that virtuous activity is wise activity,<sup>18</sup> that wise activity is activity from wisdom, and that wisdom is a coherent set of psychological commitments. The first two of those identities are widely recognized, but the third is perhaps not. To see why the Socratics identified wisdom with psychological coherence, consider Socrates. Socrates' pursuit of wisdom largely consists in examining himself and others to see whether his or their commitments (beliefs, desires, emotions) cohere. When he finds inconsistency, he is certain that those he is examining fail to have knowledge. But what must he think about wisdom if he takes himself to be pursuing wisdom in this way? Socrates could not be the paradigmatic philosopher if the coherence he tests for and tries to cultivate were not at least plausibly linked with knowledge or wisdom. His principal followers, and most clearly the Stoics, actually identify wisdom with psychological coherence.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> One may contrast what follows with Hursthouse's (1999) strategy of filling in the account of virtuous actions by reference to "v-rules."

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle would want the qualification that "fully virtuous" or "virtuous activity strictly speaking" is wise activity (EN VI 13). Plato and the early Stoics are typically less accommodating of "ordinary virtue," but notice Plato's notion of "political courage" (politikē andreia, Rep. IV 430c2-4).

<sup>19</sup> See Brown 2006a. It is true that Socrates disavows knowledge (Gorgias 509a) even as he also claims for himself some measure of coherence (Gorgias 481d-482c), but this does not require that he conceive of knowledge as something entirely other than the coherence he has. It would be well explained by his thinking that knowledge does (or even might) require more of the coherence he has. In any case, Plato runs with the conception of wisdom and knowledge as coherence, insisting that wisdom appears only in the person who sees how things hang together as one (e.g., Rep. VII 537c6-7, Phdr. 270c1-2 with Brown 2003) and whose soul hangs together as one (e.g., Rep IV 443c9-444a2). Aristotle characterizes the knower as unpersuadable (A.Po. A2 72b3-4) and the wise as knowing everything so far as possible (Metaph. A2 982a8-9). The Stoic identification of knowledge with a coherent psychology is clearest, though: they define knowledge, whether a cognitive grasp, a system of grasps, or a state of receiving impressions, as secure, stable, and unshakeable by reason or argument (Stobaeus II 7.51 73,19-74,1; Diog. Laert. VII 47; Sextus, M VII 151; Pseudo-Galen SVF 2.93; Philo SVF 2.95; and Cicero, Acad I 41-42, who attributes the account to Zeno of Citium).

This adds some flesh to Socratic eudaimonism, but alas, it does not immediately solve the problem of advising fools. For a fool—one who cannot be helped by the advice that he act as a wise person would—surely lacks the wisdom of a coherent mind and is thus not going to be helped by the advice that he act so as to express and sustain a coherent set of commitments.

Fortunately, there is evidence that Socratic eudaimonists were aware of this problem. Perhaps the most striking piece of evidence comes in Seneca's 116th Moral Letter. Seneca is discussing the question of whether it is better to have moderate passions or none at all (Ep. Mor. 116.1), and he is addressing the concern that while it might be easy for a sage to live without passions, it is hard to see how one of us could do so (Ep. Mor. 116.4 and 116.7-8). He notes,

Panaetius seems to me to have responded elegantly to some young man who asked him whether the sage would become a lover: "Concerning the sage, we shall see; but you and I, who are currently far from the sage, should not commit ourselves to fall into a condition that is disordered, uncontrolled, enslaved to another, contemptible to itself. For if [our beloved] shows regard for us, we would be excited by the kindness; [but] if [our beloved] scorns us, we would be kindled by our pride. Ease in love hurts us as much as difficulty; we are captured by the ease, and we struggle with the difficulty. Therefore, knowing our weakness, let us remain quiet. Let us not commit a weak mind to wine, or beauty, or flattery, or anything that attracts us seductively." What Panaetius said about love in response to the questioner I say about all passions. Insofar as we can, let us step back from slippery places; even on dry ground it is hard enough to take a sturdy stand.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ep. Mor. 116.5-6 (trans. with some borrowing from Gummere 1917-1925): *Eleganter mihi videtur Panaetius respondisse adulescentulo cuidam quaerenti an sapiens amator esset. 'De sapiente' inquit 'videbimus: mihi et tibi, qui adhuc a sapiente longe absumus, non est committendum ut incidamus in rem commotam, inpotentem, alteri emancipatam, vilem sibi. Sive enim nos respicit, humanitate eius iritatur, sive contempsit, superbia accenditur. Aequae facilitas amoris quam difficultas nocet: facilitate capimur, cum difficultate certamus. Itaque conscii nobis inbecillitatis nostrae quiescamus; nec vino infirmum animum committamus nec formae nec*

Panaetius and Seneca urge that precisely because a fool lacks the self-control that the virtuous sage possesses, a fool should turn away from love. At first blush, this makes it strange that Seneca quotes this advice to answer the objection that fools cannot easily live without passion. But as I explain more fully below, Panaetius and Seneca mean not that the youngster should extinguish his ardor, as if he easily could, but that he should turn away from love's typical behaviors to mitigate his desire's harmful effects. This advice addresses the complaint that it is difficult to live without passion by insisting that living as a sage, without passion, is not what a fool should try to do. Rather, a fool should avoid the situations and behaviors in which passions do their damage.

The attention to passion in this passage should call dozens of others to mind. Of course, the Socratic eudaimonists are aware of the problem of advising fools, because they see that fools need psychotherapy. Few themes are more prominent in the philosophical ethics of ancient Greece and Rome, and especially in the Hellenistic Age and after (see, e.g., Nussbaum 1994). So, for instance, Aristotle does not recommend that everyone simply imitate the virtuous person and habituate themselves into virtue. He says,

We should look at what we ourselves, too, are more carried away towards, for we are naturally carried away toward different things and this can be recognized from the pleasure and pain we feel. We should drag ourselves to the opposite extreme, for by leading ourselves far away from error we will come to the intermediate state, just as those who are straightening bent sticks do.<sup>21</sup>

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adulationi nec ulli rebus blande trahentibus.' Quod Panaetius de amore quaerenti respondit, hoc ego de omnibus adfectibus dico: quantum possumus nos a lubrico recedamus; in sicco quoque parum fortiter stamus.

<sup>21</sup> EN II 9 1109b1-7: σκοπεῖν δὲ δεῖ πρὸς ἅ καὶ αὐτοὶ εὐκατάφοροί ἐσμεν· ἄλλοι φάρ πρὸς ἄλλα πεφύκαμεν· τοῦτο δ' ἔσται γνώριμον ἐκ τῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ τῆς λύπης τῆς γινομένης περὶ ἡμᾶς. εἰς τὸναντίον δ' ἑαυτοῦς ἀφέλκειν δεῖ· πολὺ γὰρ ἀπάγοντες τοῦ ἀμαρτάνειν εἰς τὸ μέσον ἤζομεν, ὅπερ οἱ τὰ διεστραμμένα τῶν ξύλων ὀρθοῦντες ποιοῦσιν.

According to this sensible advice, each of us should act not as the virtuous person would in our circumstances but as we need to act so as to become virtuous.

But this introduces an apparent shift in the structure of the Socratics' ethical theory. Perhaps the sage acts for the sake of eudaimonia simply by (partly or wholly) instantiating it, but fools, who cannot do this, should act for the sake of eudaimonia by acting so as to become virtuous agents. The Socratics might accept some consequentialism after all!

In what follows, I argue that this is not the best way to understand the Socratics' advice to fools. I attend more closely to the Stoics' psychotherapy to show that they mean to advise us to act so as to approximate the virtuous agent and not (or at least not simply) to act so as to bring about our being a virtuous agent.

#### 4. Stoic Psychotherapy

Stoic psychotherapy is widely misunderstood. According to a common misconception, Stoics conceive of passions as false evaluative judgments and so conceive of the practical aim of psychotherapy as replacing them with true evaluative judgments.<sup>22</sup> This is a double mistake.

First, passions, according to the Stoics, can be true evaluative judgments. Cicero records an especially vivid case: Alcibiades feels distress (aegritudo) about his vice and desires to be made virtuous by Socrates.<sup>23</sup> Of course, by a Stoic's lights, Alcibiades is vicious, his vice is bad

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<sup>22</sup> Even scholars who know better say that passions are false judgments. Compare Brennan 1998, 48-51, with Brennan 1998, 31. The former passage does an excellent job explaining what is wrong with the latter, and includes a fine discussion of Cicero, Tusc. III 77-78. For an apology, see Brennan 2003, 290.

<sup>23</sup> Tusc. III 77: For what shall we say—when Socrates, as we are told, persuaded Alcibiades that he was not at all a man and that there was no difference, though he was born in the highest class, between him and any porter, and when Alcibiades, distressed, tearfully begged Socrates to give him virtue and drive baseness away,—what shall we say, Cleanthes? Surely not that there was nothing bad in the cause which made Alcibiades feel distress? (Quid enim dicemus, cum Socrates Alcibiadi persuasisset, ut accepimus, eum nihil hominis esse nec quidquam inter Alcibiadem summo loco natum et quemvis baiulum interesse, cum se Alcibiades adflicaret

for him, and it would be good for him to become virtuous. His judgments are all true. But he is experiencing the passion of distress nonetheless, and this distress is bad for him and could substantially interfere with his progress (by, say, discouraging him from hanging out with Socrates, who reminds him of his vice).

Chrysippus defines passions not as false judgments but as weak ones.<sup>24</sup> Weak judgments contrast with the strong judgments that a sage necessarily makes (Stobaeus II 7.11m 112,1-2). The sage's judgments are strong because they are all pieces of knowledge, that is, secure, stable, and unshakeable by reason or argument (citations in n. 19 above). So the strength of a judgment comes from its larger network of judgments whose contents are all inferentially related: all the knower's judgments hold every one of the knower's judgments in place, unshakeable by argument. By implication, the fool's judgments are all weak because the fool's network of judgments contains mistakes or gaps and so does not hold any one of the fool's judgments unshakeably in place (cf. Stobaeus II 7.11m 111,20-21). Even the fool's true judgments are weak, because of the network in which they are insufficiently held in place; they are shakable and insecure, outside of one's perfect control.<sup>25</sup>

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lacrimansque Socrati supplex esset, ut sibi virtutem traderet turpitudinemque depelleret, quid dicemus, Cleanthe? num in illa re, quae aegritudine Alcibiadem adficiebat, mali nihil fuisse?)

<sup>24</sup> See the canonical definitions of passions cited below, along with Stobaeus II 7.10 82,22-89,2 and Cicero, *Tusc.* IV 15: "The judgment that we have included in all the above definitions they want to be weak assent" [Opinionem autem, quam in omnes definitiones superiores inclusimus, voluit esse imbecillam adsessionem].

<sup>25</sup> Frede (1986) rightly saw that the way one judges is crucial to whether one's judgment is a passion, but he did not stress that this way is determined by the relation between this judgment and one's other judgments. He also wrongly inferred that the content of the judgment was not also crucial, as the Stoic definitions of generic passions (cited below) suggest they are. So according to Frede's Stoics grief is not necessarily the judgment, e.g., that Socrates' death is bad for me but can be the judgment that Socrates is dead, judged in a certain way. In fact, however, Chrysippus thinks that it must be the judgment that Socrates' death is bad for me, judged in a certain way (namely, weakly and, as we shall see, freshly). Frede overreaches from two pieces of evidence. First, based on an argument by Arcesilaus against the Stoics, he maintains that the Stoics understand judgment in such a way that the judger assents to an impression, and not merely to the propositional content of an impression. But Arcesilaus says, "If the katalepsis is assent to a kataleptic impression, then it is non-existent, since, first, assent is not to an impression but to rational content (for assents are to propositions)..." [Sextus, *M* VII 154: εἴπερ τε ἡ κατάληψις καταληπτικῆς φαντασίας συγκατάθεσις ἐστίν, ἀνυπαρκτός ἐστι, πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι ἡ συγκατάθεσις οὐ πρὸς φαντασίαν γίνεται ἀλλὰ πρὸς λόγον (τῶν γὰρ ἀξιωματῶν εἰσὶν αἱ συγκαταθέσεις)...].

All weak judgments are defective then, relative to the norm of knowledge (that is, virtue), but they are not for that reason all passions. Passions are an especially problematic subclass of weak judgments. Weak evaluative judgments of the form that "This is good (or bad) for me" or "That would be good (or bad) for me" are especially problematic because if they are "on-line" or "fresh," they motivate me.<sup>26</sup> "Fresh" here is a term of art such that if I freshly judge that "This is good for me," I necessarily also judge that it is appropriate for me to act in a certain way because this is good for me, and I thereby act in that way.<sup>27</sup> If my judgment that "This is good for me" is not fresh, I do not judge that it is appropriate for me to act in a certain way because this is good for me.<sup>28</sup> Exactly how I judge that I should act and how I thereby act depend upon me: perhaps I merely swell inside with pride, and perhaps I clap my hands and point heavenward while I swell with pride. But if I am freshly judging that something is good for me, I am also judging that it is appropriate to act in some way because that thing is good for me. So Chrysippus defines passions both as fresh, weak evaluative judgments of the form "This is good (or bad) for me" or

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His modus ponens could well be the Stoic's modus tollens (cf. Inwood 1985, 57). Indeed, there is independent evidence that in the Stoic account of judgments, one assents to the propositional content of an impression (Stobaeus II 7.9b 88,4). If some Stoics occasionally skipped this persnickety point and said, loosely, that one assents to the impression, Arcesilaus would have pounced. Second, Frede points to how powerful the way an impression is formed can be, as it must distinguish between whether an impression is clear and distinct or confused and obscure. This is right, but it does not show that the way an impression is formed suffices to distinguish as well between a passionate and dispassionate judgment that Socrates has died (cf. Brennan 1998, 46, minus his mistaken insistence that the passionate and dispassionate judgments must differ in truth-value). In sum, there is no good reason to think that Frede is right about the Stoic doctrine of the passions—it is a mere possibility—and there is good evidence for thinking that he is wrong. He simply takes too far his entirely correct point that the way a judgment is formed is crucial to the Stoics.

<sup>26</sup> To judge that something is good or bad for me is to judge that it bears on my success. That is why the judgment has such motivational force. We can have other practical judgments that motivate with lesser force: we can judge that something is preferable in some way without it bearing on my success. Frede (1999, 75 and 92) and Cooper (2005) miss this, but see Brennan 2003, 283-290, and Kamtekar 2005, 222-224.

<sup>27</sup> "I thereby act in that way" because a judgment that it is appropriate for me to  $\phi$  just is an impulse to  $\phi$  (Stobaeus II 7.9b 88,1). Notice that the impulse to  $\phi$  cannot be the judgment that, say, Socrates' death is bad for me: to be the impulse to  $\phi$ , it must be a distinct judgment whose content includes the predicate (Stobaeus II 7.9b 88,2-6).

<sup>28</sup> The connection to motivation is what distinguishes a fresh evaluative judgment from an "off-line" or unfresh one (Stobaeus II 7.10 88,22-89,3). This is another way in which Frede (1986) was right that a passion must be a judgment formed in a certain way, although again, the certain way involves the connection between the primary judgment and other judgments (see note 00).

"That would be good (or bad) for me," and as the impulses (actions) necessarily joined to these fresh, weak evaluative judgments.<sup>29</sup> Understood in this way, passions outstrip my control (they are weak, unstable, shakable), and they move me. This is why the Stoics characterize passions as "excessive" and "contrary to right and natural reason."<sup>30</sup>

By now, we can see the second way in which the usual view of Stoic psychopathology and psychotherapy is mistaken. Not only does it misconstrue passions as false evaluative judgments; it misconstrues the therapy as the attempt to replace them with true evaluative judgments. Cleanthes might have thought something like this (Cicero, Tusc. III 76-77), which is why Cicero raises the case of Alcibiades against him. The trick with Alcibiades is not to get him to think that his vice is good for him or that becoming virtuous would not be good. Rather, the point is to break Alcibiades of the thought that he should beat himself up about his vice, for this is the thought that might cause him to avoid Socrates. Alcibiades' therapy needs to target not his passion but the most problematic manifestations of his passion.

Chrysippus seems to have favored this sort of psychotherapy generally. As Cicero reports, "Chrysippus thinks the main thing in consoling is to remove that [viz., the second] judgment from the mourner, if the mourner thinks that he is discharging a just and obligatory duty."<sup>31</sup> Chrysippus, in other words, does not try to remove the passion of grief from a

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<sup>29</sup> See especially the canonical definitions of the four generic passions (pleasure, pain, desire, and fear) at Andronicus, On Passions 1; Cicero's Tusculan Disputations IV 14; Stobaeus II 7.10b 90,7-18. Galen separates the part of the definition in terms of an evaluative judgment (Galen, PHP IV 2.1) from the part of the definition in terms of an impulse (Galen, PHP IV 2.5), but he presumably does this because he wants to insist Chrysippus contradicts himself. Inwood (1985, 146-147) suggests, on the basis of some silence in Andronicus, On Passions 1; Cicero, Tusculan Disputations IV 14; and Stobaeus II 7.10 88,22-89,3, that only distress and pleasure must be fresh judgments, and not fear and desire. But this misses Stobaeus II 7.10b 90,7-18, which attributes freshness to fear's judgment. We can also explain the silence, if the Stoics assume that the motivational force of evaluative judgments about future goods and bads for me are more obvious (and less likely to wane) than the motivational force of evaluative judgments about present goods and bads for me.

<sup>30</sup> See Stobaeus II 7.10 88,8-10 with 7.10a 89,5 and 89,14-16, and cf. Galen, PHP IV 2.14-18.

<sup>31</sup> Cicero, Tusc. III 76: Chrysippus autem caput esse censet in consolando detrudere illam opinionem maerenti, si se officio fungi putet iusto atque debito.

mourner—the evaluative judgment that something bad has happened, which (if fresh) necessarily prompts some impulse—but tries to remove the judgment that it is appropriate to mourn, to have this particular mourning impulse (instead of a mere sinking feeling).<sup>32</sup> This will mitigate the effect of the grief, and make it more manageable. Of course, this is not the end goal for Chrysippean therapy: he wants mourners to progress to the point at which they accept the Stoic view that the loss of a friend is not something bad for them. But Chrysippus thinks that psychotherapy needs to attend to a larger network of commitments than simply their belief about something bad, and in particular it needs to attend to how intentional actions fit into this larger network.

This attention to actions and a broader network is what Seneca likes about Panaetius' advice to the young man looking for love. Panaetius tells the youngster to turn away from love,

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<sup>32</sup> Sorabji (2000, esp. 32-33) and Graver (2002, 90-94 with appendix C) argue that Chrysippus' is eliminating the passion of grief by removing the judgment that it is appropriate to mourn. This seems to me impossible: if the evaluative judgment is fresh, it must entail some impulsive judgment or another, and all Chrysippus can do is change the impulsive judgment and hope that by changing the impulsive judgment he can induce the evaluative judgment to go stale (and thereby extinguish the passion). Graver finds Cicero, Tusc. III 61 ad fin. and 68-70 especially telling for her claim, but I suspect that these passages represent some Ciceronian flourishes and not Chrysippus' view. Sorabji offers four reasons. The first, that a passion must involve both an evaluative judgment and an impulsive judgment (33), is correct, but it says nothing about the possible connections between these judgments. The second, that the evaluative judgment can be true but passion's judgments cannot be wholly true (32), misconstrues the defect of passionate judgments. The third, that the impulsive judgment is the main target of Chrysippean therapy (32, cf. 176-179) is correct but does not show that this side of Chrysippean therapy is supposed to extirpate passions. And the fourth is the evidence of Galen, PHP IV 7.12-14 (33, cf. 109-112): "Chrysippus also testifies in Book Two of On Passions that passions soften in time even though the beliefs remain that something evil has happened to them, when he writes thus: 'One might inquire also about the lessening of distress, how it happens, whether with change in some belief or with all the beliefs continuing, and why this will be.' Then, proceeding, he says, 'I think belief of this sort remains, that the actually present thing is bad, but when it grows older, the contraction and, as I believe, the impulse to the contraction lessen.'" ("Ὅτι δ' ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ μαλάττεται τὰ πάθη, κἂν αἱ δόξαι μένωσι τοῦ κακόν τι αὐτοῖς γεγονέναι, καὶ ὁ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ Περὶ Παθῶν μαρτυρεῖ γράφων ὧδε: "ζητήσαι δ' ἂν τις καὶ περὶ τῆς ἀνέσεως τῆς λύπης, πῶς φίνεται, πότερον δόξης τινὸς μετακινουμένης ἢ πασῶν διαμενουσῶν, καὶ διὰ τί τοῦτ' ἔσται." εἴτ' ἐπιφέρων φησί, "δοκεῖ δέ μοι ἡ μὲν τοιαύτη δόξα διαμένειν, ὅτι κακὸν αὐτὸ ὃ δὴ πάρεστιν, ἐγγχρονιζομένης δ' ἀνιέσθαι ἢ συστολῆ καὶ ὡς οἴμαι ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν συστολὴν ὀρμή.) Sorabji may be right to say that Chrysippus here links the fading of a passion ("the contraction") with the changing of the impulsive judgment ("the impulse to the contraction"). But I note that these occur as the evaluative judgment grows stale ("when it grows older"). So Chrysippus could well insist that the passion will lessen to the point of dissipation only if the evaluative judgment is so stale that it necessitates no impulsive judgment, and even in this case (which goes further than Chrysippus entertains here), the passion can be rekindled should the evaluative judgment become fresh again.

not by magically losing his desire but by acting on it differently. We can fill this out a bit more. The Stoics define both the passion and the "science" of erotic love in the same behavioral terms. For both the sage and the fool, erotic love is a kind of desire, "an attempt at making a friend on account of manifest beauty."<sup>33</sup> The fool experiences this erotic love as a passion, an appetite.<sup>34</sup> The sage, on the other hand, experiences it as knowledge.<sup>35</sup> It is plausible that the fool and the sage assent to the same propositions about making friends with a beauty, although they assent to them differently. One might easily explain the difference in terms of other propositions concerning which the fool and the sage disagree. Does the fool identify beauty as the potential for virtue, as the sage does?<sup>36</sup> Does the fool want as his friend a sex partner, or does he, like the sage, want a virtuous friend?<sup>37</sup> And does the fool notice, as the sage does, that erotic love gives way to the love of a friend once one succeeds in making one's beloved a friend?<sup>38</sup> Most fools experience love passionately because they err in one or more of these particulars. But even if the fool copies the sage in all of them, there is some weakness in the way that the fool loves, because the fool's love, unlike the sage's, is not secured by a perfectly coherent set of commitments.

So, first, it is unlikely that Panaetius would deny that a friend is good for one or that it is appropriate to want to turn someone who manifests beauty into a friend. These evaluative propositions are not the problem. It is the related judgments that are problematic, either related

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<sup>33</sup> ἔρως ἐπιβολὴ φιλοποιίας διὰ κάλλος ἐμφαινόμενον. So say Stobaeus II 7.10c 91,15-16 and Diog. Laert. VII 113, in lists of passions, and Stobaeus II 7.11s 115,1-2, Diogenes Laertius VII 130, and Cicero, Tusc IV 72, in an account of the sage's love. For explicit acknowledgement that the definition of love applies to what both sages and fools experience, see Stobaeus II 7.5b9 66,9-13.

<sup>34</sup> Both Stobaeus II 7.10c 91, 15-16 and DL VII 113 treat love as one species of appetite.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Stobaeus II 7.5b9 66,6-9.

<sup>36</sup> See Diog. Laert. VII 129-130, and Stobaeus II 7.5b9 66,6-8 and II 7.11s 115,2-4 .

<sup>37</sup> See Diog. Laert. VII 130 (cf. Stobaeus II 7.5b9 66,6-8), with the Stoic insistence that only the virtuous are friends: Stobaeus II 7.11m 108,5-25; DL VII 33; DL VII 124; Seneca, Ep 81.12; Philo SVF 3.634; Cicero, Nat D I 121; Clement SVF 1.223.

<sup>38</sup> See Plutarch, Comm not 1073a and Paradoxically 1058a.

evaluative judgments or related behavioral commitments. Second, how problematic these related judgments are varies. If the fool is inflamed by physical beauty with a desire for a significant other, he is in more trouble than if he recognizes the potential for virtue with the desire to make a new friend but does so without a perfectly coherent set of psychological commitments. So exactly what therapy the fool needs will vary. Panaetius is addressing someone he is sure is far from wisdom, and so he recommends sweeping behavioral safeguards. But he might well, despite his rhetoric ("we are far from the sage"), allow himself to be moved by erotic love to try to make a friend.

This approach to behavioral psychotherapy, common to Chrysippus, Panaetius, and Seneca, manifests two commitments. First, the concern is to mitigate the damage to one's psychological coherence. Stoic psychotherapy targets passionate actions that wreak havoc on the patient's mental life and seek to replace those actions with less damaging swellings and contractions. Second, Stoic psychotherapy targets passions by locating them in a broader network of commitments, including evaluations and intentions. For Stoic psychotherapy to succeed, the adviser must recommend an action that expresses and sustains the patient's mental condition better than any alternative.

It is true that the ultimate goal of such therapy is virtue. In some sense, then, the therapy must be judged successful or not by whether it promotes this ultimate goal. But the careful work of Chrysippean therapy is not well characterized by saying that the Stoic recommends that one choose the action, whatever action, that best promotes her becoming virtuous. Rather, the Stoic recommends an action based on its fit with the agent's mental conditions, his or her overall psychological commitments. The agent is to approximate what the sage does, not by mimicking the sage's behavior, but by mimicking the virtuousness of the sage's behavior, that is, by finding

a fit between his action and the rest of his commitments that approximates the fit between the sage's action and the rest of the sage's commitments.

### 5. A Principle for Advising Fools?

Stoic psychopathology and psychotherapy offer subtle advice to the fool. On this view, all of us should try to act virtuously in the sense that all of us should try to act in a way that expresses and sustains a coherent mind. Those of us who have perfectly coherent minds thereby act virtuously. Those of us who do not have perfectly coherent minds can only express and sustain an approximately coherent mind. More exactly, our action can fit our mind in a way that only approximates the way that the virtuous person's fits hers.

According to my suggestion, then, "virtue ethics" can find an answer to the problem of advising fools by trading its general principle (Act as the virtuous person would in one's circumstances) for a subtly different eudaimonist principle (Act for the sake of one's virtuous activity) and by recognizing two distinct ways of acting for the sake of one's virtuous activity. One can act for the sake of virtuous activity as a virtuous person by performing a bit of virtuous activity, and one can do it as a fool by approximating virtuous activity. To give some content to this notion of approximating virtuous activity, advocates of "virtue ethics" can follow the Socratics further by identifying virtue with psychological coherence and the approximation of virtuous activity with the approximation of a virtuous action's fit with the rest of the agent's psychology.

This answer is, at least in broad outline, plausible. But it obviously needs more development. It requires an account of psychological coherence and especially of degrees of

coherence. It also requires an account of the fitness between an action and the agent's psychology and especially of degrees of such fitness. I believe that Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics do pay enough attention to these issues to suggest that my interpretation of how they relate the norms of virtue to ordinary agents is plausible.<sup>39</sup> But whether that account can be given detail and made fully persuasive is another question that awaits further investigation.

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<sup>39</sup> Again, the details are fullest in the Stoics, but they are hardly absent in Plato and Aristotle. Consider, e.g., Plato's Republic, which articulates an account of virtue as psychological coherence (443d-e), an account of degrees of virtue (472c-d), and an account of virtuous action as that which not only expresses a certain state of mind but also sustains the (already virtuous) agent's psychological coherence or helps to bring it about (443e-444a). For Aristotle, one might start with Lear's (2004) finding that Aristotle countenances approximation as a way to act for the sake of something. I suspect that the Socratics were moved to use approximation to evaluate and advise those who lack virtue in part to answer a puzzle about Socrates, the puzzle of how he could seem so virtuous, could listen to others attribute virtue to him without demurrals, and yet could lack the knowledge that he took to be necessary for virtue.

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