

## **The Virtues and Happiness in Stoic Ethics<sup>1</sup>**

The Stoics hold that virtue is knowledge, and that knowledge is one: the good state of the rational soul. Unlike the rest of us, a person who is in this state of mind is happy. Today and throughout much of antiquity, Stoic ethics is compared to Platonic and Aristotelian views. The Stoics' immediate interlocutors, however, are skeptics.<sup>2</sup> With them the Stoics discuss how hard it is to think straight, to arrive at carefully considered views and stable insights. The skeptics regularly suspend judgment, assessing disputes as unresolved. The questions of what is good and bad and how to live appear to them difficult and deserving of extensive study.<sup>3</sup> The Stoics largely agree with the skeptics: these questions appear to them to be in need of further investigation. The Stoic approach is to ask what a person would be like who has the answers: how she would think, feel, and act.

A brief disclaimer. "The Stoics" as I speak of them never existed. Instead, there were individual philosophers. Stoic philosophy begins with Zeno (334/3-262/1 BCE), who spent more than twenty years in Plato's Academy, developing his views in conversation with the then emerging Academic skepticism (Zeno was roughly 20-30 years older than

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jens Haas, Sam McVane, and Nandi Theunissen for comments.

<sup>2</sup> On the closeness of skeptic and Stoic philosophy, cf. Michael Frede, "Stoics and Sceptics on clear and distinct impressions," in ed. Myles Burnyeat, *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 65-94.

<sup>3</sup> On the Socratic heritage in Hellenistic philosophy, cf. A.A. Long, "Socrates in Hellenistic philosophy," *Classical Quarterly*, 38 (1988): 150-71; and his "Socrates in Later Greek Philosophy," in ed. Donald R. Morrison, *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 355-380.

Arcesilaus, the first major Academic skeptic). Cleanthes (331/0-230/29 BCE), Zeno's successor, is best known for ideas in theology and physics. Chrysippus (c. 281-c. 208 BCE), the third head of the school, is as far-ranging as Zeno. Though he develops further Zeno's premises, he is an innovator, creating much of Stoic logic. Fast forward to the so-called Middle Stoa, whose main figures are Panaetius (c. 185- c. 110 BCE) and Poseidonius (c. 135- c. 50 BCE). And finally there is the Late Stoicism of Roman and Imperial times, with Seneca and Epictetus as the most influential figures.

The Stoics I refer to are the early Stoics, namely Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus. Their views are considered as orthodoxy. Dissenters or inventors depart from theories formulated by them. It is, admittedly, somewhat disturbing to suggest that the Stoics are cousins of the skeptics, and yet to ascribe to them an 'orthodoxy'. Are the Stoics, after all, the dogmatists that the skeptics take them to be? Compared to the skeptics they are, simply on account of putting forward theories. And yet, theirs is a movement where each philosopher aims to get clear(er) about questions that were previously addressed, and which prolific authors like Chrysippus discuss over and over again. None of the Stoics thinks that he is an example of the elusive figure that is theorized, the sage. That is, none of them thinks they have formulated a complete system of knowledge in logic, physics, and ethics. Further questions can be raised, theories can be refined, and so on. Hence the position I shall sketch has at times a skeptical feel. It sometimes involves several ways in which a given problem might be solved, indicative of a lively philosophical debate.

I begin with a sketch of a puzzle, the so-called Unity of Virtue, that is at the heart of Stoic views on virtue (Section 1). Outlining the Stoic response, I turn to virtue as a unified state of mind (Section 2), the three Stoic virtues logic, physics, and ethics (Section 3), as well as the conventional virtues and their place in Stoic ethics (Section 4). I argue that the Stoics hold a distinctive view about the relation between happiness and virtue (Section 5), and end with some remarks about the nature of happiness and misery as the Stoics conceive of them (Section 6).

### ***1. The Unity of Virtue***

The Unity of Virtue is one of the best-known ideas in ancient ethics.<sup>4</sup> A minimal version can be called Interentailment. It says that whoever has one of the virtues must have all of them. The Stoics accept this claim, and so does Aristotle.<sup>5</sup> Though Interentailment is discussed as an extreme position in today's ethics, it is a fairly uncontroversial and modest claim within ancient ethics. A stronger claim, cited alongside Interentailment in a report on the Stoics, is that whoever performs an action in accordance with one virtue, performs it in accordance with all virtues.<sup>6</sup> This claim is distinctively Stoic because it

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<sup>4</sup> On the Stoic version cf. Malcolm Schofield, "Cardinal Virtues: A Contested Socratic Inheritance," in A. G. Long, *Plato and the Stoics*, CUP (2013), 11-28; and his "Ariston of Chios on the Unity of Virtue," *Ancient Philosophy* (1984): 83-96. Much of my analysis is in agreement with Schofield, though I focus on knowledge while he starts out from discussion of wisdom.

<sup>5</sup> The principal point of reference in Aristotle is *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. Discussions of the Unity of Virtue in today's ethics mostly address Aristotle's view, a trend that was initiated by John McDowell's paper "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 331-350.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1046E-F = LS 61F. Throughout this paper, LS refers to A.A. Long and David Sedley's collection of fragments, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Many, though not all, texts I cite are included in LS.

presupposes a monistic psychology. For the Stoics, the soul is *one* faculty, rather than dividing up in parts or powers such as reason and desire, as the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition has it. Agents set themselves in motion by assenting to impressions like “I’ll walk now.”<sup>7</sup> No matter whether the agent wisely decides to get some exercise or leaves a room in anger, this motivation originates in her rational soul. Call this Motivational Monism. It supplies the Stoics with a strict version of another widespread view in antiquity, which I call the Knowledge Premise: virtue is knowledge. For the Stoics, virtue is knowledge in a straightforward sense, not knowledge of some distinctively practical kind as the Aristotelian tradition has it.

Interentailment, Motivational Monism, and the Knowledge Premise are the building blocks of the Stoic account of virtue. A yet stronger version of the Unity of Virtue says that conventional virtue terms are misleading. This can be called an Error Theory: we speak of different virtues, but we are consistently mistaken. We should speak, at every instance, of virtue in the singular. This Error Theory can be attributed to Aristo, a student of Zeno who turned into a ‘fallen’ disciple. The Stoics think he is pushing things too far.

To see why, turn for a moment to the most famous ancient discussion of the Unity of Virtue, in Plato’s *Protagoras* (328e-334c).<sup>8</sup> The dialogue addresses a question set in everyday life, a question that parents consider as well as young people who seek an

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<sup>7</sup> Stobaeus 2.88,2–6; Seneca, *Letter* 133.18.

<sup>8</sup> A classic contribution is Gregory Vlastos, “The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*,” in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981): 221-269.

education. What kind of environment, training, and so on, make one a better person? This question supplies the first leg of a puzzle. It implies that there is such a thing as being a good person. The puzzle's second leg is that we also refer to different virtues, such as justice, courage, wisdom and moderation. Moreover, it seems that some virtues rarely occur with others, to the extent that one wonders—given different dispositions and the limits of molding one's psychology—whether they *can* occur together.<sup>9</sup> This is how the Unity of Virtue becomes a problem and a puzzle.

Ethicists today often proceed as if only talk about several virtues was rooted in everyday practices. To them the Unity of Virtue appears to be a puzzling claim, grounded in abstract concerns that come into view only through theorizing.<sup>10</sup> Arguably, ethicists here miss out on an important set of phenomena. Plato's *Protagoras* is rather true to life. By starting from the question of how one becomes a better person it is firmly rooted in an additional set of phenomena, namely that we care a lot about a person's goodness. Parents typically do not just want their children to acquire specific traits. They hope to raise good people. Indeed, parents may think that, whatever specific traits their child has, if only she is a good person things will be fine. That is, the Unity of Virtue is not an abstract philosophical concern. It is as deeply rooted in everyday practices as the multiplicity of virtue. Philosophers face two puzzles, not one: how to make sense of the notion of a good person, and how to account for particular good features of persons.

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<sup>9</sup> *Protagoras* 349a-350.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Wolf, "Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues," *Ratio* 20 (2007): 145-167.

The Stoics take on both challenges. Hence they cannot endorse Aristo's Error Theory of Virtue. And their position is neither well described as virtue monism (that there is strictly one virtue) nor as virtue pluralism (that a given set of virtues is fundamental to ethics). According to the Stoics, the state of mind that is called virtue is unified: it is a state of mind where everything one holds to be true fits together as a systematic body of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> This is the core of virtue's unity. It is, however, a far cry from virtue monism. A body of knowledge can plausibly divide up into subfields. Moreover, it may be carved up into subfields in more ways than one. For example, today students in medicine take courses in micro-biology, clinical chemistry, pathology, and so on. They also take courses devoted to individual organs or parts of the body, like the heart, eyes, brain, and so on. Both are compatible ways of approaching the field, and yet they carve it up differently.

Similarly, the Stoics divide up virtue, understood as a unified state of mind, in multiple ways. Hence the label pluralism is as misleading as the label monism. It suggests that a given set of virtues is basic, as, say, talk about 'cardinal virtues' implies. But the Stoics consider physics, ethics, and logic—the three philosophical disciplines—as generic virtues, *and* they describe the traditional virtues wisdom, moderation, courage, and

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<sup>11</sup> *Epistêmê* is sometimes translated as 'scientific knowledge'. I refrain from doing so because it misleadingly implies that, for the Stoics, there is also some other, non-systematic or non-scientific knowledge. Katja Maria Vogt, *Belief and Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 7.

justice as generic. These are not competing classifications. And the fact that the Stoics put forward these distinctions does not mean that, fundamentally, there are three—or four—kinds of virtue. ‘Generic’ here means that more fine-grained distinctions between virtues classify them as falling into these kinds.<sup>12</sup> Physics, ethics, and logic are generic insofar as they each have subfields. Similarly wisdom, justice, moderation and courage are, for the Stoics, fields with subfields. Each of these virtues “studies” this-or-that.<sup>13</sup> And they have subfields insofar as, say, quick-wittedness is subsidiary to wisdom, endurance to courage, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

## ***2. Virtue in the singular***

The unified state of mind of the virtuous person takes center stage in Stoic ethics. The Stoics define virtue as benefit. It is the state of mind that is also called wisdom or knowledge.<sup>15</sup> What does this mean? The Stoics distinguish between the kind of value one should ascribe to matters that are conducive to a life that is suitable for the kind of being one is—say, the value of intact limbs—on the one hand, and goodness on the other hand.<sup>16</sup> According to the Stoics, having one’s limbs intact is ‘to be preferred’ and ‘to be

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<sup>12</sup> Plutarch, in whose eyes Stoic philosophy is full of flaws, observes that Chrysippus recognizes too many virtues. *On moral virtue*, 440E-441D = LS 61B.

<sup>13</sup> Stobaeus 2.63,6-24 = LS 61D.

<sup>14</sup> Stobaeus 2.59,4-60,2; 60,9-24 = LS 61H.

<sup>15</sup> Aetius I, *Preface* 2 = LS 26A

<sup>16</sup> On virtue as good, cf. SE M 11.22 = LS 60G, Stobaeus 2.58,5-15 = LS 60K, 2.71,15-72,6; = LS 60M; on value/disvalue, cf. DL 7.101-2 = LS 58A and Stobaeus LS 58C-E; on value/disvalue as not benefitting/harming, cf. DL 7.101-3; on appropriate action and value, see all fragments in LS chapter 59.

taken'.<sup>17</sup> One should aim to keep one's limbs intact, seek treatment if one's arm or leg hurts, and so on, thereby responding to the value of intact limbs. Still, and this is a point to which I return in Section 5, it is not such that a human being cannot be happy if, say, she loses one of her arms.<sup>18</sup> Put more generally, a human being can be happy when losing something of value, even though she has reason to prefer what has value. A human being cannot, however, be happy without that which is good. What is good? Virtue, wisdom, knowledge: the state of mind that one needs to figure out correctly what to do. This state of mind is the only thing that genuinely benefits us.<sup>19</sup> It is thereby also the state of mind that permits one to lead a good human life when things of value are lost.<sup>20</sup>

Virtue, hence, is the state of mind that enables one to act as one should. In order to act as one should, one needs knowledge. This knowledge includes knowledge of what is valuable and disvaluable for human beings, such that we can lead lives that are suitable for the kind of being we are. But 'getting it right' in a way that is still subject to change—say, thinking today that whether one catches a cold is merely a question of value, and forgetting this insight tomorrow, despairing at the first symptoms of what might be a

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<sup>17</sup> The opposites are 'to be dispreferred' and 'not to be taken'. Stobaeus 2.79,18-80; 2.84,18-85,11 = LS 58C.

<sup>18</sup> On the good and the valuable, Vogt, "Taking the Same Things Seriously and Not Seriously: A Stoic Proposal on Value and the Good," in Dane R. Gordon & David B. Suits (eds.), *Epictetus: His Continuing Influence and Contemporary Relevance* (Rochester: RIT Press, 2014), 55-75.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cicero, *On Ends* 3.50 = LS 58I and 3.17,20-1 = LS 59D.

<sup>20</sup> Vogt, "The Good is Benefit. On the Stoic Definition of the Good," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (2008): 155-174.



cold—does not suffice. It would be, in Stoic terms, mere *doxa*, which is weak and changeable.<sup>21</sup> To lead a good life, one needs to integrate those views in such a way that gradually they become a system. The interrelations between one’s views stabilize them.<sup>22</sup> This means, *inter alia*, that one acts reliably on one’s insights.<sup>23</sup> This is why virtue is knowledge: a state of mind in which one knows what to do and actually does it. The motivational side of knowledge means that a widespread way of talking about knowledge today—in terms of what ‘we’ know, where some know A and others know B—does not make sense for the Stoics. For one’s affective and reactive attitudes to be reflective of knowledge, the knowledge must be one’s own.

### ***3. Three generic virtues: physics, ethics, and logic***

The Stoics are literalists about the Knowledge Premise. When they say that virtue is knowledge, they do not have some special kind of knowledge in mind—moral intuition, moral sensibilities, or anything of that sort.<sup>24</sup> Instead they propose that, in order to live well, one needs knowledge in an ordinary way: knowledge of the world. Hence one of their divisions between generic virtues is threefold. It is the Stoics’ most basic way of

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<sup>21</sup> Vogt (2012), ch. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sextus Empiricus, M 7.151: “Knowledge is a cognitive grasp that is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason.”

<sup>23</sup> Both wise and non-wise cognizers have so-called cognition, *katalêpsis*, which I here refer to as ‘getting it right’ or ‘insight’: a cognizer grasps something that is the case precisely as it is. Still, this grasping can be mere *doxa*, a changeable doxastic attitude.

<sup>24</sup> Contrary to, say, McDowell (1979).

dividing up knowledge into physics, ethics, and logic.<sup>25</sup> This is more pedestrian than, say, explaining the knowledge needed for virtue as moral intuition. It is also more laborious. The knowledge of virtue involves, in effect, knowing everything, or rather, everything that pertains to leading a good life.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it involves that one counteracts tendencies that the Stoics consider widespread. The Stoics think that we are prone to sloppy thinking, rash acceptance of impressions where careful consideration is needed, and so on.<sup>27</sup> That is, virtue is hard because of the sheer difficulty and scope of what needs to be known *and* because of the extensive training that is needed if one wants to consistently adhere to epistemic norms.

Consider first logic, the discipline that is perhaps least expected in this context.<sup>28</sup> Stoic logic comprises what today falls into several disciplines, including logic, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and normative epistemology.<sup>29</sup> The Stoics' extensive interest in logic is an implication of the Knowledge Premise: for the acquisition of knowledge, one needs well-trained thinking abilities. In the eyes of their critics, the

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<sup>25</sup> Aetius I, *Preface 2* = LS 26A.

<sup>26</sup> Frede, "Introduction," in eds. Frede and Gisela Striker, *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1-28; Frede, "Stoic Epistemology," in Algra et al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 295-322; Vogt, *Law, Reason, and the Cosmic City: Political Philosophy in the Early Stoa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 118-126.

<sup>27</sup> Graziano Ranocchia, "The Stoic Concept of Proneness to Emotion and Vice," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94 (2012): 74-92.

<sup>28</sup> In agreement with other scholars, I call "logic" what the Stoics call "dialectic" and what is only part of Stoic logic (the other part being rhetoric).

<sup>29</sup> On the subfields of logic, see DL 7.41-4 = LS31A.

Stoics are obsessed with the study of fallacies.<sup>30</sup> And yet this is a straightforward interest for anyone who assumes that flawed thinking translates into mere *doxa*, emotional uproar, bad decisions, and rash action. The Stoics observe that there are patterns, typical ways in which cognizers ‘jump to conclusions’. In part, a study of these patterns is motivated by an interest in the workings of our minds. But one may also study these patterns because one wants to avoid them.

Vagueness is a prominent example. The Stoic position differs from today’s epistemicism by taking, from the get-go, a normative perspective.<sup>31</sup> The Stoics envisage teachers who play ‘sorites games’ with their students, asking, say, “is two few?”, “is three few?” and so on. The novice at this game will say “yes,” “yes,” “yes,” until it is too late: she realizes that she should have stopped answering at some point, when her impressions were no longer (what the Stoics call) cognitive.<sup>32</sup> This is what the virtuous person does, she ‘shuts up’ when impressions are non-cognitive, not assenting to, say, “eight is few.”<sup>33</sup> Why did the novice assent? Perhaps he felt pressured when called upon and could not think clearly. Perhaps he made some irrelevant connection, say, thinking of a situation like having only eight minutes left until a store closes, which makes “eight” sound like an

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<sup>30</sup> Long, “Dialectic and the Stoic Sage,” in Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Williamson calls his position on vagueness epistemicism. *Vagueness* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> DL 7.46 = LS 40C; Cicero *Academica* 2.77-8 = LS 40D.

<sup>33</sup> SE M 7.416 = LS 37F.

awfully low number. And so on. The presumption is that practicing sorites games will help one become a more careful assenter in any number of contexts in life.<sup>34</sup>

Consider next physics.<sup>35</sup> Physics, according to the Stoics, covers bodies, principles, elements, gods, and limits/place/void. According to an alternative Stoic division into subfields, physics studies the world, the elements, and causality.<sup>36</sup> Stoic physics describes the world as a living being. The world is held together by the active principle (reason, god). The active principle acts on the passive principle, matter, such that they blend entirely. The active principle is strictly speaking the only cause. But it divides up into portions that—qua portions of the only cause—also are causes. In this sense, human beings, animals, plants, stones, and so on, are causes. They differ by their principle of movement: stones and logs can only be moved from the outside; plants move through the movement of growth; animals through their cognitive faculties; and human beings through reason.<sup>37</sup> This sketch, though minimal, helps see how the study of physics pertains to leading a good life: it supplies, among other things, a self-conception of us as

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<sup>34</sup> One topic where philosophical contributions today display a similar mix of technicality and normative injunctions is the study of generics. The truth-conditions of generics can be approached as a topic in philosophy of language; and yet they matter to understanding and counteracting prejudice, stereotyping, etc. Cf. Sarah-Jane Leslie, “The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice and Generalization,” *Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Menn, “Physics as Virtue,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 11, ed. John J. Cleary and William C. Wians (1995): 1-34. An influential contribution that aims to pull apart Stoic ethics and physics is Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 5.

<sup>36</sup> DL VII 132. On both lists, cf. Jacques Brunschwig, “Stoic Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (1999), 206-7.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *On principles* 3.1.2–3 = LS 53A.

parts of a whole; a perspective on other human beings as components of the same sort that we are; an analysis of the ‘whole’ as a living being with which we are, through our relations with many of its components, intricately interrelated; and an understanding of the causality of agency.

What, then, is left for Stoic ethics, other than to fill out this picture—a picture that leads to the Stoics’ distinctive kind of cosmopolitanism? Major topics in Stoic ethics are impulse, appropriate action, the good and bad, value and disvalue, the emotions, virtue, and the end.<sup>38</sup> The Stoics propose that human beings are born with a ‘first impulse’, that is, an initial motivation for actions. These early motivations are directed at that which immediately ‘belongs’ to the human being. A newborn child experiences its own arms, legs, vision and so on as hers. She is attached to being able to move around, see, hear, and so on. The child’s so-called affiliation, however, is not only with her own body and faculties. It extends to those closest to her, her immediate family. They are felt to be ‘hers’, and motivations for things of value extend accordingly. One wants food, shelter, health, and so on, not just for oneself but also for those with whom one belongs together. This is the beginning of the so-called *oikeiôsis* theory.<sup>39</sup> *Oikeiôsis* means, roughly, integration of X into the scope of what belongs to oneself, where belonging is an affective and motivational relation.

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<sup>38</sup> DL 7.84 = LS 56A.

<sup>39</sup> Brunschwig, “The Cradle Argument,” in Schofield and Striker (eds.), *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 113-144.

First impulse is merely a starting-point. This starting-point is not itself considered ethically good. It provides the agent with an initial familiarity with, and a psychological root of, the attitudes that are essential for ethical behavior. For there to be virtue, the scope of what is affiliated must grow. As the Stoics see it, it grows once a human being gains insights about the natural world and its components. Eventually, and this is the motivational disposition required by cosmopolitanism, one relates to everyone in the world as a fellow-inhabitant of the same ‘home’.<sup>40</sup> This relation involves an ability to figure out which actions are appropriate (*kathêkonta*). In these actions, matters of value and disvalue as they pertain to oneself and to everyone else are ‘selected’ and ‘deselected’ in the way in which perfect reason—the mind of the person with knowledge—selects them. This is how the theory of appropriation leads to the theories of what is to be done; of value and disvalue; of the right affective attitudes, namely ‘rational feelings’ instead of emotions; of the goodness of virtue, which consists in selecting rightly; and of happiness or the end (to which I turn in Sections 5 and 6).

What, then, does it mean to call logic, physics, and ethics virtues? The claim here is not merely that the study of logic, physics, and ethics is conducive to becoming virtuous. It means that mastering these fields immediately translates into virtuous action. A person who, for example, has mastered epistemic norms is not going to act rashly or in emotional uproar; a person who understands that she is a part of a whole acts differently from someone who conceives of herself as a self-standing individual; a person who sees

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<sup>40</sup> Vogt (2008), ch. 2.

others as parts of the same sort that she is relates to them with concern for value and disvalue in *their* lives; and so on.

#### ***4. Four generic virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation***

How then do the conventional virtues fit into the picture? The Stoics distinguish between *phronêsis*, *sôphrosunê*, *andreia*, and *dikaïosunê*, each identified with a particular body of knowledge. Wisdom, here, is the science of what should and should not be done and which actions are neutral; moderation the science of what should be chosen and avoided and what is neutral; justice is the science concerned with distribution; courage the science of things that are fearful and not fearful and neither of these.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, Chrysippus defines courage as knowledge of matters requiring persistence. A variant of this definition captures the idea that knowledge is a stable way of holding-true: courage is “the maintenance of stable judgment in undergoing and warding off those things which seem fearsome.”<sup>42</sup> This formulation highlights how the distinction between mere belief (*doxa*) and knowledge matters to ethics. In the face of danger, it is easy to forget earlier insights. Occurrent impressions—the approaching tiger!—are vivid. If one’s insights are not *firm* judgments, and that is, knowledge, one is not virtuous. This idea has also a physiological side. In the language of physics, virtue is a matter of the overall tension that controls and unifies an agent’s soul. According to Cleanthes, the soul of the virtuous agent has the right kind of tension, namely ‘strength’. Applied to matters that demand

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<sup>41</sup> Stobaeus 2.59,4-60,2; 60,9-24 = LS 61H.

<sup>42</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.53 = LS 32H.

persistence, this strength is called wisdom; to matters requiring endurance, courage; to questions of desert, justice; and to choice/avoidance, moderation.<sup>43</sup>

These definitions raise two puzzles, which I shall take in turn. One puzzle concerns the status of wisdom. Wisdom is, like virtue and knowledge, a name for the overall condition of the good agent's soul. Hence it can hardly be one of the virtues. Instead the virtues should be subfields of wisdom, as they are subfields of knowledge. This view is reported on behalf of Zeno, who defines the virtues as subfields of wisdom: justice is wisdom in matters requiring distribution, moderation is wisdom in matters requiring choice, and courage is wisdom in matters requiring endurance.<sup>44</sup> Here wisdom is the master-virtue, and does not show up alongside justice, moderation, and courage. Presumably, the definition of wisdom cited earlier (and ascribed to the Stoics in general) is an outlier. It pretends to delineate a specific domain for wisdom ('what should be done'), while actually ascribing the whole sphere of action to it.

The other puzzle concerns the nature of subfields. If knowledge is a system, as the Stoics think it is, what are subfields? This puzzle relates to the Stoics' dispute with Aristo and Aristo's claim that conventional virtue terms are misleading. Virtue should only be spoken of in the singular. That captures how things really are, namely that the so-called virtues are nothing but virtue relative to a given context. To posit several virtues, in

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<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1034C-E = LS 61C.

<sup>44</sup> Plutarch, *On moral virtue* 440E-441D = LS 61B; Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1034C-E = LS 61C.



Aristo's view, is as if one posited "white-seeing" and "black-seeing" as different faculties of vision.<sup>45</sup> This comparison makes fun of an idea that is by no means far-fetched.

Namely, virtue, understood as the state of mind of the wise person, may be brought to bear on different spheres of action; it may be adequately referred to as justice, moderation, and courage depending on the sphere in which the wise person acts.

Why is this a view that the Stoics reject?<sup>46</sup> A further report on Stoic doctrine may help.

All virtues, it says, share their theorems; and yet they differ by the topics they put first and that are specifically theirs.<sup>47</sup> Courage, for example, primarily studies the theory of everything that should be endured; and secondarily that with which the other virtues are concerned. This proposal implies a way in which one may conceive of subfields: as having some subject matter of their own, and yet being tied to a body of knowledge by sharing theorems with the system as a whole. That is, the Stoics' disagreement with Aristo seems genuine. They do not propose that one system of knowledge is brought to bear on different circumstances, such that the differences between the virtues lie, as it were, entirely outside of the agent's mind and in the spheres of action she encounters. Instead, they seem to take seriously the idea of subfields in a system: subfields with specific content of their own, and yet integrated into the body of knowledge.

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<sup>45</sup> Plutarch, *On moral virtue* 440E-441D. Cf. Schofield (1984) on Zeno's and Cleanthes rejection of Aristo's views.

<sup>46</sup> This question is especially urgent in the light of Stoic claims to the effect that the sage does everything—or rather, everything that she does—well. Stobaeus 2.66,14-67,4 = LS 61G.

<sup>47</sup> Stobaeus 2.63,6-24 = LS 61D.

### ***5. The Possibility of Happiness***

Alexander asks a desperate question on behalf of the Stoics: “how could man not be the most miserable of all creatures in having vice and madness ingrown in him and allotted?”<sup>48</sup> This question picks up from the Stoic view that people are prone to ignorance and vice—sloppy thinking, rash actions, irrationality, and so on. That is, Stoic views about virtue translate into pervasive ascriptions of misery. And yet, happiness is possible, in the very way in which it is possible to attain virtue. Moreover, in spite of pervasive ascriptions of misery, there is a positive side to Stoic thought about happiness: human beings can be happy under rather diverse, sometimes challenging, circumstances.

Scholars tend to distinguish between three ways in which ancient ethicists think of the relationship between virtue and happiness:

- Necessity: Virtue is necessary for happiness.
- Sufficiency: Virtue is sufficient for happiness.
- Identity: Virtue is identical with happiness.

Necessity clearly misdescribes the Stoic position. It means that, though virtue is necessary for happiness, other goods too affect happiness and misery. Sufficiency and Identity are more plausible candidates.<sup>49</sup> In a sense, the Stoics think that if an agent is virtuous, this suffices for her happiness. And they identify living virtuously with living

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<sup>48</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias, a Peripatetic philosopher and commentator on Aristotle, *On fate* 199.14-22 = LS 61N.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Christopher Bobonich on Identity, “Socrates and Eudaimonia,” in Donald R. Morrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 293-332, esp. 314-16.

happily.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, neither Sufficiency nor Identity addresses the relationship between virtue and happiness on Stoic terms. All three options—Sufficiency, Necessity, and Identity—are conceived in a tradition that thinks about ‘goods’ in Platonic-Aristotelian terms. But the Stoics do not distinguish between different kinds of goods, asking how goods other than virtue affect one’s happiness. Instead, they propose a distinction between two kinds of valence: goodness (*agathon*) and value (*axia*). The goodness of good deliberation is not one ‘kind of good’ next to other kinds of goods. Its value is of a different nature than the valence of what is considered in deliberation.<sup>51</sup> Why? One reason is that its goodness relates differently to happiness than value. It is impossible to be happy without the good; it is possible to be happy when things of value are lost.

‘Indifferent’ is used in two senses: unconditionally, of things which contribute neither to happiness nor unhappiness, as is the case with wealth, reputation, health, strength, and the like. For it is possible to be happy without these, though the manner of using them is constitutive of happiness or unhappiness. In another sense those things are called indifferent which activate neither impulse nor repulsion, as is the case with having an odd or even number of hairs on one’s head, or stretching or contracting one’s finger. But the previous indifferents are not spoken of in this sense. For they are capable of activating impulse and repulsion. Hence some of them are selected and others disselected, but the second type is entirely equal with respect to choice and avoidance. (DL 7.104-5 = LS 58B, tr. LS)

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<sup>50</sup> Plutarch reports the reverse identification, of living viciously and living unhappily. *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1042A = SVF 3.55 = LS 63H.

<sup>51</sup> Deliberation is *not* concerned with virtue/vice. In Chrysippus’ terms, “virtue quite on its own has no relevance for our living.” Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1039E = SVF 3.761 = LS 61Q.

The formulation employed here—it is possible to be happy without X—deserves close attention. It names a fourth option:

Possibility: Virtue is that without which it is not possible to be happy.

Consider an example. Someone climbs in the mountains. His arm gets stuck between a dislodged boulder and a canyon wall. He cannot extricate it in more than five days of trying. After careful consideration, he cuts off the arm, walks down and checks into a hospital. A year later, he is back climbing in the mountains. With some caveats (perhaps a wise person would not climb in remote areas alone and without informing others in advance—but for the purposes of the example, I set this aside), this person acts precisely as the Stoics say a virtuous person would. He considers having his limbs intact as valuable. Nevertheless, he judges that it is possible to live well without one of his limbs. Hence he cuts off his arm, and yet, responding to the value of health, seeks the best treatment he can. He continues to lead a good life, albeit a different one, namely a life that can be lived with only one arm.<sup>52</sup>

How does the example depart from Necessity, Sufficiency, and Identity? Virtue, here, is more than just a necessary ingredient of happiness. Nevertheless, to say it is sufficient for happiness is to make a non-sensical claim, given that virtue precisely consists in dealing

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<sup>52</sup> The Stoics use ‘mutilating oneself’ as an example; cf. DL 7.108-9 = SVF 3.495, 496 = LS 59E. Cf. Vogt (2008), 212-3, where I also use the example of the mountain climber.

well with matters of value/disvalue. Similarly, to say that virtue is identical with happiness neglects that the Stoics take seriously the question how value/disvalue affect one's life. As long as limbs can't be restored biologically to the effect that they are fully like 'natural' limbs, it seems ridiculous and perhaps even offensive to claim that losing a limb does not affect how the life of the agent goes. Indeed, one needs to adjust a lot in one's life if one loses an arm. Nevertheless, this does not affect whether one *can* be happy. The agent can build a life after the accident in which he lives well—as many indeed do after life-changing accidents. Matters of value/disvalue affect one's life. And yet they do not affect whether it is possible to be happy.

### ***6. Happiness, the good, and the end***

What, then, is happiness for the Stoics? According to a formal notion, happiness is the life that is all things considered best for a human being.<sup>53</sup> Like a number of ancient ethicists, the Stoics endorse this notion. Further, and again like other ancient ethicists, the Stoics offer a philosophical version of traditional notions of happiness that have religious overtones. *Eudaimonia*, here, is a life that goes well because divinity is present in it. *Eu-* means good, and a *daimon* is a god or demi-god. Intuitively speaking, a person who is *eudaimôn* is someone for whom 'the stars align': things go well for her because a god is at her side. According to the Stoics, the wise person's mind is perfectly in tune with the

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bobonich (2011).

world's reason, and that is, with god's reason.<sup>54</sup> This semblance is so strong, and taken so literally, that the sage's life in no way falls short of the life of a god.<sup>55</sup> Her actions are consistently appropriate. Happiness, according to Chrysippus, supervenes on these actions if they are done with the kind of firmness and stability that characterizes the mind of the wise person.<sup>56</sup>

The Stoics' substantive account of happiness, or the end, is expressed in well-known formulae. Zeno describes the end as "a good flow of life" and as "living in agreement (*homologoumenôds*)."<sup>57</sup> The Stoics elaborate on these proposals in various ways, describing the end as life in agreement with nature, with virtue, with reason, with experience of what happens by nature, and so on.<sup>57</sup> But Zeno's initial formulation may capture, concisely, a complex idea. The virtuous agent's life is 'in agreement' in multiple ways: insofar as her own reason is in a consistent state; insofar as being guided by perfect reason is to live in agreement with the world's reason; and insofar as doing so means that one's actions reflect knowledge of one's own nature, human nature in general, and nature as a whole.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. DL 7.87-9 = LS 63C. This aspect of Stoic ethics is fore-fronted in John Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 2012), 150-158.

<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, *On common conceptions* 1076A = LS 61J.

<sup>56</sup> Stobaeus 5.906,18-907,5 = LS 59I.

<sup>57</sup> Stobaeus 2.77,16-27 = LS 63A; Stobaeus 2.75,11-76,8 = LS 63B. Gisela Striker, "Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1991): 1-73.

<sup>58</sup> These are ideas captured by the various Stoic formulae; cf. DL 7.87-9 = LS 63C.

Vice is the opposite. It is the misery of flawed thinking, emotional uproar, being torn between different views, and so on—in short, the absence of the stability of knowledge. Psychological dissonance and cognitive chaos are disturbances which, the Stoics think, are perceived as agitation. They come with fear and feelings of powerlessness, with excessive longing and turmoil.<sup>59</sup> Of course, someone who is not wise might at times feel elated and say that she is happy. But she would make a mistake, and soon enough, or so the Stoics think, the agonies of being less-than-virtuous would again make themselves felt.

These proposals seem comprehensible, at least in outline. What is harder to understand is the way in which happiness, for the Stoics, is the end. In calling something the end, one assigns to it a crucial role in motivation. And yet, it is not a straightforward matter in which sense happiness, according to the Stoics, motivates. The Aristotelian tradition assumes, roughly, the following.

1. Human beings desire happiness.<sup>60</sup>
2. Particular actions are performed for the sake of some end; agents are motivated by seeing the action or its outcome as good.
3. Other things are pursued for the sake of happiness, but happiness is not pursued for the sake of anything else; it is the final end.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. for example Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.29, 34-5 = LS 610.

<sup>60</sup> Any more precise formulation, in particular one that would take a stance on whether this is a descriptive or a normative claim, would be contentious. For present purposes, I'm setting these questions aside.

The Stoics must share (1), otherwise their discussion of how it is possible to be happy when something of value is lost is incomprehensible. (3) is, at least according to Stobaeus, a claim the Stoics endorse.<sup>61</sup> And yet the Stoics do not endorse (2). Namely, they do not analyze particular actions as motivated by the pursuit of ends. This makes Stobaeus's ascription of (3) puzzling. If at all, the Stoics must hold (3) in a sense that does not imply a hierarchy of ends. They think of agents as selecting and deselecting matters of value, not as acting for the sake of ends or as pursuing goods. Action is set off by assent to an impression to the effect that a certain action is 'to be done', not to the effect that such-and-such is good. The thought that is crucial to motivation, for example, "I'll have a cup of tea," occurs as the conclusion of a thought process about what to drink at a given occasion. Assent to "I'll have a cup of tea" sets off an impulse for the action of drinking the tea. The considerations that lead up to this thought are concerned with value, as well as perceptual and descriptive matters. "I need something to drink," "it is too early in the day for wine," "I've had too much coffee lately," "I'm cold," "there's tea in the kitchen," etc., are such considerations. All things considered, it seems to the agent that she should have a cup of tea, and that is the thought she assents to.<sup>62</sup> The Stoic account of what goes on in the agent's mind, thus, does not involve reference to particular ends of particular actions, or to a relation between immediate ends and higher-order ends. Their proposal is so deeply at variance with standard approaches that it even affects the textual

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<sup>61</sup> Stobaeus 2.77,16-27 = LS 63A.

<sup>62</sup> Vogt, "I Shall Do What I Did: Stoic Views on Action," in Ricardo Salles, Pierre Destrée, Marco Zingano (eds.), *What is Up To Us? Studies on Agency and Responsibility in Ancient Philosophy* (St. Augustine: Academia Verlag, 2014); Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).



evidence. The authors on whose reports scholars draw offer unsympathetic sketches.

Indeed, one ancient critic finds the Stoic proposal absurd, another idiotic.<sup>63</sup>

What can be said on behalf of the Stoics?<sup>64</sup> One premise is well-attested: only the good—virtue—qualifies as desirable.<sup>65</sup> Valuable things are reasonably preferred and selected, but only virtue is desirable. The Stoics argue that in growing up a person learns to select things of value. She becomes acquainted with selection and deselection that is according to nature. And she observes instances of virtue. Even if these instances are far from perfect, agents can extrapolate. They form a conception of virtue, and that is, of the good, in the Stoic sense. This glimpse of the good provides a motivation that is of a different nature than motivation that responds to value and disvalue. It is a motivation for becoming, as one might put it, a good deliberator. Agents acquire this motivation if and when they progress toward virtue. But it is not easy to sustain. As a non-wise agent, one easily falls back into seeing—mistakenly—matters of value as good. That is, the good is not simply, as a matter of course, desired. It is the only thing that *should* be desired. On the Stoic construal, (3) thus amounts to the following: in any given situation where an agent decides what to do, what should ultimately motivate her is the end of becoming a

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander, *On soul* II 164,4-9 = LS 64B; Plutarch, *On common conceptions* 1070F-1071E = LS 64C.

<sup>64</sup> Scholars have recognized this question as tantalizingly difficult. Michael Frede, “On the Stoic Conception of the Good,” in Katerina Ierodiakonou, *Topics in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71–94; Brad Inwood, “Getting to Goodness.” In Inwood, *Reading Seneca. Stoic Philosophy at Rome*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 271-301. My sketch draws on two sources, interpretation of which is contentious: Seneca, *Letter* 120; Cicero, *De finibus* 3.20-2.

<sup>65</sup> Only the good is, according to the Stoics, *haireton*. Stobaeus 2.78,7-12.

good deliberator. This end is not pursued for the sake of anything else, but for its own sake.