1 Introduction

"Stoic eros"? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? The ancient Stoics are notorious for their claim that the ideal human life is free of passion. So when it comes to arguably the most passionate emotion of all, we might expect them to take a uniformly dim view. Just like anger, fear, grief, and the other passions censured by Stoic theory, erotic love would seem to have no place in the best human life.[1]

Matters are not so simple, however. The Stoics identify an infamously erotic symposiast as their philosophical model – Socrates – and see themselves as working out with systematic rigor the theoretical outlook he introduced. For Socrates, *erōs* is by no means alien to the good life but rather intimately bound up with the acquisition of virtue and happiness. Underscoring this optimistic view, Socrates himself claims to possess erotic expertise (Plato, *Symposium*, 177d7–8; *Lysis*, 204b7–c2).

One goal of this Element is to show that the Stoics self-consciously embrace this Socratic precedent in formulating their account of *erōs*. Following Socrates, the Stoics make room in their ethical theory for a positive form of erotic love. The ideal human agent – the wise person or Sage, as the Stoics call her – is also a lover: her erotic expertise is an aspect of the knowledge in which the virtues consist, and her erotic efforts seek to improve the person whom she loves.[2] The Sage's *erōs* is not pathological, then, but a source of benefit and part of a happy, well-lived human life. But just as Socrates recognizes multiple expressions of *erōs*, only one of which reflects proper philosophical understanding and virtue, the Stoics distinguish a good form of erotic love, practiced by the Sage on the basis of her knowledge, from a blameworthy and passionate love that flows from ignorance. The result is a complex picture aiming to vindicate the Socratic insight that *erōs* can cooperate with virtue – and the powerful intuition that erotic love can be part of an objectively flourishing life – while also doing justice to the precarious and miserable nature of *erōs* grounded in vice.

Stoic philosophy is systematic, and so to better appreciate their account of erotic love – in particular, its duplex structure – we need to contextualize it within broader strands of Stoic thought. The Stoics posit virtue as the sole good and, as such, the one thing that genuinely benefits us and bestows happiness (*eudaimonia*); analogously, vice is the sole bad and, as such, the one thing that genuinely harms us and renders life miserable. Furthermore, the Stoics offer

[1] In what follows, I translate the Greek term *erōs* as "love" or "erotic love."

[2] As I discuss in Section 2.2, the Stoics maintain that "the virtue of men and women is the same" (DL 7.175), and they strenuously reject the idea that virtue is open to men alone. For this reason, I use both male and female pronouns to refer to the Sage.

a purely epistemic analysis of virtue and vice, according to which virtue consists in knowledge, and vice just is ignorance. The value of *erōs* for human beings thus depends on its relationship with these fundamental good and bad things – virtue and knowledge on the one hand and vice and ignorance on the other.

This relationship is the topic of Section 2. Here we will see that the Stoics distinguish the two basic forms of *erōs* according to the moral and epistemic condition of the lover. The Sage's *erōs* is good because it is inseparable from and guided by her virtue and knowledge, whereas vice and ignorance control the non-Sage's love (Section 2.1). The Stoics justify this account with their insistence that *erōs* is in every case a *rational* activity, in the sense that it is always a product of the lover's rational mind and responsive to her judgments about what is necessary for happiness. These value-judgments amount to ignorance in the non-Sage, since they are unstable and often false, but to knowledge in the Sage.

Here one might object that there is nothing rational about erotic love: surely it is rather a blind drive issuing from a part of us that lacks reason, floating free of our considered judgments about happiness and potentially opposing them. This intuition, however, is flatly denied by the Stoics. In general they reject the existence of non-rational parts of the soul, which motivate independently of the agent's cognition of the good, of the kind found in the tripartite theory of Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. Instead, adopting a position they consider originally Socratic, the Stoics defend a monistic psychological theory, on which the mature human mind is rational through and through. Consequently, every impulse for action is an expression of reason, according to the Stoics – reason perfected by virtue, in the case of the Sage, or reason corrupted by vice, in the case of the non-Sage.

This psychological theory has some surprising results. First, passions such as anger, fear, and grief spring from defective reasoning and rest on faulty cognition of what is good and bad for the agent. The same holds of the non-Sage's *erōs*, which the Stoics classify as a passion (Section 2.3). Second, the rational causes of our behavior are sometimes phenomenologically opaque to us: erotic love may present itself as an unbidden, inexplicable force, but in principle it can be traced back to the lover's views about the good (or so the Stoics argue). Third, there is no such thing as simultaneous mental conflict, that is, two impulses for contrary courses of action at the same time. Rather, as we will see in Section 2.3.1, when we consider Medea and Thrasonides – two ancient archetypes of conflicted lovers – the Stoics provide an alternative analysis.

If the Sage's *erōs* is not a passion, what is it? And how is it constitutively related to her knowledge and virtue? As we will see in Section 2.2, the Stoics

define the Sage's love as "an effort to gain friendship." Such an effort is characteristic of the Sage, since to gain friendship (*philia*) with the beloved the Sage must reproduce her own knowledge and virtue in him.[3] This is because the Stoics restrict friendship to the wise, and the Sage's beloved is not yet in this perfected state. The Sage's *erōs* is thus essentially pedagogical – and asymmetrical in the moral and epistemic standing of the lover and beloved. The goal of wise love is to develop the talents of someone presently vicious to their full potential, so that he himself becomes happy, virtuous, and a friend to the Sage.

It is a commonplace in ancient thought that *erōs* is a response to beauty. The Sage's *erōs* is no exception, as it is more expansively defined as "an effort to gain friendship *resulting from the beauty that has been made to appear*" (emphasis added). Section 3 investigates what, exactly, the beauty of the Sage's beloved amounts to (Section 3.1), and how it is made to appear in the mind of the Sage (Section 3.2). I contend that this beauty is a feature of the beloved's soul, grounded in his heightened potential to become virtuous. This character trait – talent-beauty, as I will call it – is directly perceived by the Sage as a consequence of her possession of erotic expertise. In interpreting the Stoic theory this way, we can integrate their recognition of erotic expertise – on which the first two leaders of the school, Zeno and Cleanthes, each composed a full treatise – with their doctrine of "expert impressions." According to this doctrine, expertise enhances the precision and detail of the impressions (or appearances, *phantasiai*) the expert forms. So when faced with the same stimulus – for instance, a Beethoven symphony – the expert musician hears more in the piece than the amateur. Analogously, I suggest, features of character lost on the erotic amateur are made to appear in the mind of the Sage when a suitable beloved presents himself – including, crucially, his talent-beauty.

In Section 4, I examine the ways in which the Stoic theory of *erōs* can be understood as a response to, and development of, Socratic ideas on love as they are presented in Plato's *Symposium*. I contend that both Socrates and the Stoics understand *erōs* as a rational state, admitting of expertise, which motivates the lover to pursue what she takes to be good, beautiful, and productive of happiness (Section 4.1). For the Stoics, this Socratic insight offers the correct starting point for any satisfactory treatment of *erōs* and is seen as detachable from the metaphysics of Forms they regard as problematic. Here I depart from the scholarly consensus that identifies Pausanias, not Socrates, as the speaker in the *Symposium* who most directly influences the Stoic account (Section 4.2).

[3] As we will also see in Section 2.2, the Sage's love is neither hetero- nor homoerotic, and so in what follows I alternate between using male and female pronouns to refer to the Sage's beloved. Note that "friendship" will be my standard translation of *philia*, in contrast to "love" or "erotic love" for *erōs*.

This standard interpretation overlooks the deep theoretical affinities between Stoic and Socratic moral psychology and downplays the Stoics' principled criticism of traditional pederastic relationships, of the kind championed (with slight modifications) by Pausanias.

Finally, two remarks on the scope of my inquiry in this Element. First, I will say nothing about Stoic views on marriage, since the Stoics typically investigate the value and appropriateness of marriage on the assumption that spouses ought to feel goodwill and friendship for each other but not *erōs*.[4] Second, my discussion of sex will be limited to contexts where it is clearly related to *erōs* – for example, as the product of an erotic impulse (Sections 2.2.1, 2.3, 2.4). I therefore set aside questions about the role of sex within marriage and Stoic justifications for parenthood, since the Stoics tend to address these topics separately from their treatment of *erōs*. We must avoid the temptation, then, to construe the Stoic account of *erōs* as a general theory of sexuality – and still less as a general theory of interpersonal attraction and affection. In Section 5, I assess how the Stoic account of wise *erōs* fares in relation to our intuitions about the non-egoistic and particularized character of love, concluding that it preserves the former but struggles with the latter: although it is the beloved's good, not her own, that motivates the Sage to enter into an erotic relationship, we might worry that she places too little value on the concrete individuality of the beloved, above and beyond his possession of talent-beauty.

2 The Two Basic Forms of *Erōs*

In this section, I present the Stoic distinction between the two basic forms of *erōs*, one virtuous and the other vicious. At its worst, erotic love is a passion and so an erratic and disobedient impulse born out of unstable and false value-judgments. But at its best, erotic love is a beneficial activity that flows from the wise person's virtue and knowledge, helping the not yet wise beloved become good. The wise person will fall in love, the Stoics argue, but this virtuous form of *erōs* differs from the passionate and ignorant kind that afflicts the vicious. In Section 2.1, I lay out the ethical, psychological, and epistemological theses that lead the Stoics to draw this distinction. In Section 2.2, I consider the Sage's *erōs* in particular, which the Stoics define as "an effort to gain friendship," before examining in Section 2.2.1 whether sex has any role in this effort. In Section 2.3, I turn to the Stoic account of *vicious erōs*, contextualizing it within their more general theory of the passions; and in Section 2.3.1, I analyze the character of

[4] Musonius' claim to the contrary (fr. 14, 75.12–14, ed. Hense) is presented as exceptional and counterintuitive. See discussion in Reydams-Schils 2005, 145–59, and Gill 2013, 151–3. See also Epictetus' comments on the unusual marriage of Crates and Hipparchia (*Diss.* 3.22.76) and discussion in Inwood 1997, 68–9.

Thrasonides, the literary model used by the Stoics to illustrate how vicious lovers are capable of reform. Finally, in Section 2.4, I explain what unifies the two basic kinds of *erōs* and, with this account in hand, address some scholarly disputes concerning the different ways that *erōs* is characterized in our sources.

2.1 Virtue, Vice, and the Two Forms of *Erōs*

One central contention of this Element is that the Stoic account of *erōs* cannot be fully understood in isolation from the school's wider ethical, psychological, and epistemological theory. We thus find here a case study of the celebrated systematicity of Stoic philosophy. In this section, I show how Stoic thinking on virtue and vice supports their distinction between two forms of *erōs*.

One of our most informative reports on Stoic *erōs* is prefaced with the following remark:

> **T1**: And [the Stoics] say that the wise man does everything [he does] on the basis of all the virtues; for every action of his is perfect, and so is bereft of none of the virtues. (Stob. 2.65.12–14, Wachsmuth's text)

Before we discuss its relevance for the Stoic account of *erōs*, we should pause to notice how strong the claim in T1 is. It is not merely the claim of the "unity of the virtues," traditionally associated with Socrates in the *Protagoras*, that the agent who possesses one virtue (e.g. courage) necessarily possesses all the others too (e.g. prudence, justice, moderation). To be sure, the Stoics accept the unity of the virtues, on broadly Socratic grounds, since they hold that courage, prudence, justice, and moderation each consist in knowledge – and indeed in knowledge of the *same theorems* – so that one could not possess the knowledge that is courage without also possessing the knowledge that is prudence (or justice or moderation). For this reason, the Stoics say these virtues are "inseparable" from one another (Stob. 2.63.6–8) and "mutually imply" one another (DL 7.125).[5] However, the claim in T1 is that, each time the Sage acts, *all* the virtues are active. So in standing firm on the battlefield or distributing money to the needy, no less than in taking a walk after dinner, the Sage jointly exercises courage, justice, prudence, moderation, and all the other virtues too. No action of his is "bereft" of a single virtue.

This strong claim I will call the *cooperation of the virtues*, and, on the face of it, it seems quite implausible. Without further elucidation, it is hard to see how

[5] Strictly speaking, not all virtues consist in knowledge, but the non-epistemic virtues are said to "supervene" on the epistemic ones (Stob. 2.62.15–20) and hence will be inseparable from them (DL 7.90). Throughout this Element, I set aside this complication and use "virtue" to mean "virtue consisting in knowledge."

the knowledge that constitutes courage, for instance – the knowledge of "what is terrifying, not terrifying, and neither" (Stob. 2.59.10–11) pertaining to matters of endurance (Stob. 2.60.14) – could be active in the Sage's distributing money to the needy, or even in physical exercise. Why must *all* the virtues be active in such cases, rather than just one virtue or none at all?

T2 suggests one potential line of response. The Stoics, we learn, are committed to the unity and cooperation of the virtues, but they also maintain that the virtues

> **T2**: differ from one another in their main concerns (*kephalaia*). Prudence's main concerns are, in the first instance (*proēgoumenōs*), to theorize about and put into action what is to be done, but on the second level (*kata de ton deuteron logon*) to theorize also about what distributions one ought to make, what choices one ought to make, and what one ought to endure, for the sake of putting unerringly into action what is to be done. The special main concern of moderation is, in the first instance, to make one's impulses steady and to theorize about them, but on the second level to theorize about the matters that come under the other virtues, in order to conduct oneself unerringly in one's impulses. Similarly, courage theorizes in the first instance about everything one ought to endure, but at the second level about the matters that come under the others, and justice, in the first instance, investigates each person's due, but on the second level the remaining things too. For all the virtues look to the concerns of them all (*pasas gar tas aretas ta pasōn blepein*) and to the matters that are ranged under each other. (Stob. 2.63.10–25, trans. Cooper modified, Wachsmuth's text)

It is not immediately clear what it means for a single virtue (e.g. courage) to theorize about one group of theorems "in the first instance" (*proēgoumenōs*) and another group "on the second level" (*kata . . . ton deuteron logon*). However, following recent scholarship, we can say that although all the virtues consist in knowledge of the same theorems, each virtue has its own "main concern" or special "perspective" on those theorems, such that it gives primary attention to a subset of them.[6] Thus courage differs from the other virtues in having a privileged theoretical awareness of "everything one ought to endure." But in order to comprehensively grasp these theorems related to endurance, courage cannot fail to "look to" the theorems given primary attention by the other virtues, and so it knows them too, albeit "on the second level." This is because, for the Stoics, neither the special perspective of justice, concerning "each person's due" and what should be distributed to whom, nor the main concerns of prudence, relating to "what is to be done," are ever fully separable from or

[6] See Cooper 1999, 96–104, Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 1, 384, and Schofield 1984, 93–4. Long and Sedley translate *kephalaia* in T2 as "perspectives," where Cooper gives "main concerns"; Schofield has "chief provinces."

irrelevant to determining which things ought to be endured and why. The principles of courage, which make *x* the thing to endure in a given scenario, are consistent with and informed by the principles of prudence, which make enduring *x* the thing to do, and so on with the other virtues: "the things to be done are also to be chosen, to be endured, to be held to, and to be distributed" (DL 7.126). It is impossible, then, that prudence would recommend φ-ing and courage not-φ-ing. Whoever acts on the basis of one virtue necessarily acts on the basis of them all, given how their main concerns are interrelated.

The Stoics defend the strong thesis of the cooperation of the virtues, then, because they think that each virtue contributes something from its primary area of concern to the production of each virtuous action. Thus Seneca speaks of the "inseparable entourage" (*individuus comitatus*) of the virtues and claims that every action performed by the Sage is "the work of one single virtue but arises out of the judgment of the whole council" (*una virtus facit, sed ex consilii sententia*: *Ep.* 67.10). So when the Sage donates money to the needy, she is acting justly, as she relies on her knowledge of "what distributions one ought to make" (e.g. that this kind of person should be helped before that person). But her just action in this case relies on the primary perspectives of all the other virtues as well: for instance, how to endure criticisms from others, should they arise, and so on. Indeed, the Stoics maintain that even something as humdrum as taking a walk after dinner, when performed by the Sage, reflects the global knowledge in which the virtues consist.[7] Why postprandial exercise is appropriate in this instance, in what way it should be performed, in preference to which other practical goals, etc., would be answered by the different virtues and their different perspectives on the common stock of theorems. The actions controlled and guided by the Sage's virtues are thus considerably wider in scope than those which philosophers today would classify as morally right or wrong.

But to what degree is the Sage aware of each of the individual virtues' epistemic contributions when she decides to act? In selecting the virtuous action, does she consciously attend to each virtue's perspective on why that action is correct? Or, rather, is at least part of the holistic knowledge in which the virtues consist latent and not consciously entertained? Since the subject matter of the virtues ranges widely, it seems the latter view is more charitable: consciously attending to the epistemic contributions of all the virtues at once would seem to require a superhuman feat of cognition, and the Sage is held out as a demanding, but still humanly attainable, ideal. Yet the Stoics also insist that the virtues are "always present" in the Sage "at every moment"

[7] Thus we find "prudent walking" (*phronimōs peripatein*) listed as one example of a virtuous action (*kathorthōma*) at Stob. 2.96.20–22. See also Seneca, *Ep.* 66.5, 36.