

Plato and the Virtues of Wisdom

Eric Russert Kraemer

Introduction

Is wisdom a virtue? I think it is and also that it is an important virtue. But, it should be granted at the outset that the claim is controversial, that there are philosophers who either do not think of wisdom as a virtue¹, or do not think of it as relevantly similar to other virtues. For example, Stanley Godlovitch comments:

Wisdom sits alone. We cannot rehearse or practice it. We cannot be prompted to assume it —whether for our sake or for the sake of others. We cannot expect, should we be in possession of it, to win friends and influence people. Wisdom calls into prominence a state of mind rather than a readiness to act in specified ways. As such, its status as a virtue must remain rather aloof.²

While one may disagree with Godlovitch's five negative claims about wisdom, as I do, one can learn from him that any attempt to present wisdom as a serious virtue must not only be sensitive to the contrary view, namely that wisdom is an oddity, and must also be able to explain why this contrary view arises.

In this discussion I begin by considering two reasons that might be given to support the contrary claim. I then propose a simple, if somewhat familiarly "ontological" argument for wisdom's being a virtue. I then look to Plato to see what kinds of thing the virtue of wisdom might be. Attempting to accommodate as much of the positive Platonic data I can, I propose a pluralistic account of virtue, setting out a half dozen specific virtues of wisdom.

I recommend that when we call someone wise there is always one or another, or perhaps several of these specific kinds of wisdom-virtue to which we refer. I will argue that the pluralistic account can be used to explain both the controversy surrounding wisdom's status as a virtue as well as other concerns that have been raised about it. Attempting to forestall an obvious objection to such an account, namely that it is merely a hodgepodge, lacking all systematicity, I suggest an underlying conceptual core for all forms of wisdom, namely the disposition to make apt judgments. After clarifying and defending this account, I provide several instances of its explanatory power and turn to address some concerns the account raises.

Trying to anticipate yet another objection, I consider the role of reflection in wisdom. I argue that, while reflection is often a useful means to apt judgment, it is not a necessary feature of all instances of wisdom. I conclude by arguing that my account makes wisdom a more explanatorily attractive and a more interestingly egalitarian virtue, hence, a much less odd or "aloof" virtue than some have thought.

Two Introductory Concerns and an Argument

One factor that makes wisdom in general an especially difficult topic for philosophers to discuss is that we approach wisdom with a particular professional and largely self-imposed burden, namely we naturally tend to equate all wisdom worthy of the name with what it is that the best of our singular tribe—Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas

among others-do especially well, namely provide profound insights about the deepest and most important questions. Thus, it is common for philosophers to identify wisdom with weighty insight on thorny philosophical problems. So conceived, wisdom becomes an almost impossible trait for most human beings to acquire. But, if wisdom is impossible or almost impossible for most of us to acquire, then there would be little point to trying to get clear about wisdom. On this conception we are better served instead to concentrate our efforts on trying to understand the wisdom of those fortunate few who possess it.

A related problem we face when thinking about wisdom is that we use the same word, “wise” to refer both to individuals as well as to the things that individuals write or say. Unlike other traits that we recognize as virtues, such as courage and temperance, where the trait in question attaches to the specific actions of individuals, we often identify individuals as wise, not on the basis of what we know them to have done, but, on the quality of the things they write or say. Unlike those who act courageously or with temperance, we often cannot point to specific, observable and characteristic activity in which the producer of wisdom engaged. Since the wisdom philosophers publicly recognize is a product, it is natural for philosophers to question whether wisdom is also a distinctive process. As fools can utter wise maxims, parrot wise answers or claim allegiance to the wise theories, it is not hard to see how the virtue-status of wisdom could be cast into doubt. Further, unlike such virtues as courage and temperance, it is not clear from experience what distinctive inner feelings, if any, are associated with wisdom.

Is there good reason to think that wisdom is a virtue? Here is a simple argument for according the status of virtuehood to wisdom. We may call this the Anti-Luck Argument. Let us assume we can all agree that there are some wise products: maxims, saying, perspectives, theories, etc. How did these wise products arise? Either they emerged wholly by accident or they came about by means of some process. But, given the number of products and given that some individuals are consistently associated with numbers of them, it would be irrational to accept the accident hypothesis. If so, then there must be a regularly employed process associated with wisdom.³ A regularly employed process that standardly produces good results is a virtue. So, it is reasonable to suppose that this process, whatever it is, is involved with the exercise of wisdom. Thus, it is reasonable to accept, in addition to certain wise products, a virtue of wisdom.⁴

But, the claim that there is a virtue of wisdom is misleading, as it assumes that only one thing constitutes wisdom. I suspect that this assumption is a substantial part of what leads those such as Godlovich to despair regarding wisdom’s status as a virtue. To reply more effectively to the wisdom-skeptics we are better served to postulate a family of different but related behavior traits that all deserve to be considered as different forms of wisdom. As I think our snobbism about what philosophers do has led many into skepticism about wisdom’s status as a virtue, I want to identify a prominent source of this snobbery as well as categorize different forms of wisdom by examining Plato’s diverse comments on the subject. So, let us now turn to Plato.

Plato on Wisdom

Trying to pin Plato down on the topic of wisdom is a considerable challenge.⁵ The problem is not that Plato does not say much about it. Our difficulty, rather, is the opposite problem: Plato says much too much about wisdom and what he does say seems to change depending on the focus of the specific discussion in which he is engaged. Unlike other virtues such as justice, temperance or holiness, of the many dialogues he wrote there seems to be no single dialogue whose central focus is to discover the true nature of wisdom.⁶ Plato makes references to wisdom typically illustrate some other point, or criticize of some other view. And there are at least half a dozen different themes that Plato expounds regarding wisdom, a topic that he discusses in many different dialogues throughout his philosophical career.

Let us now consider the various claims that Plato makes about wisdom. The first and best-known theme, adulatory humility, occurs in early Socratic writings. Here is what he says in the *Apology*:

But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of god, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us, the wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless. [23b]

Remarks such as these contain at least two messages. On the one hand we have the claim that “real” wisdom is only had by the gods; the flip-side is the assertion that for humans, real wisdom consists of knowledge of the extent of one’s ignorance. Related to this early period we also find writings that suggest that the attainment of wisdom may only be possible once we have ceased to exist in our current human form, that is, upon death. Thus, in the *Phaedo* we discover the following:

Will a true lover of wisdom who has firmly grasped this same conviction—that he will never attain to wisdom worthy of the name elsewhere than in the next world—will he be grieved at dying? Will he not be glad to make that journey? We must suppose so, my dear boy, that is, if he is a real philosopher, because then he will be of the firm belief that he will never find wisdom in all its purity in any other place. [68b]

With wisdom as either a feature of the gods or of the pure soul, we see Plato’s early contribution to the aloofness of wisdom campaign.⁷ This position is weakened in Plato’s later writings. In *The Laws* we find grudging acceptance of some human wisdom:

The Athenian: “Wrong, arrogance, and folly are our undoing; righteousness, temperance, and wisdom, our salvation, and these have their home in the living might of the gods, though some faint trace of them is also plainly to be seen dwelling here within ourselves.” [10:906b]

But, there are many different claims regarding wisdom to be found in Plato’s writings. A second theme is wisdom as the supreme virtue. Here from the *Protagoras*:⁸

Are these also parts of virtue? Said I. Wisdom, I mean and courage?
Most emphatically. Wisdom indeed in the greatest of the parts.
And each of them is different from the others? Yes.
Has each also its own function? In a face, the eye is not like the ear nor has it the same function. Nor do the other parts resemble one another in function any than in other respects. Is this how the parts of virtue differ, both in themselves and in their function? It must be so, I suppose if the parallel holds good.
Yes, it is so, Socrates. [330a]⁹

A third theme we find is Plato applying wisdom to specific crafts or activities that are done especially well to our advantage, as in the following remarks from the *Euthydemus*:¹⁰

Consider the dangers of the sea. Surely you don’t think that anyone has better fortune than wise pilots, as a general rule? Of course not.
Well then, on a campaign, which would you like better to share danger and fortune with, a wise captain or an ignorant one? A wise one.
And if you were ill, which would you prefer to run risks with, a wise physician or an ignorant one? A wise one.
Don’t you think, then, I said, that it would be better fortune to do anything along with a wise man, than with an ignorant one? He agreed. Then wisdom everywhere makes men to have good fortune. For wisdom, I suppose, could never make a mistake, but must always do right, and have right fortune, or else it would not be wisdom any longer. [279d]

Fourth, Plato can be found equating wisdom with good counsel. In *The Republic* Plato tells us:

And, moreover, the first thing that I think I clearly see therein is the wisdom, and there is something odd about that, it appears.

What? He said.

Wise in very deed I think the city that we have described is, for it is well counseled, is it not?

Yes.

And surely this very thing, good counsel, is a form of wisdom. For it is not by ignorance but by knowledge that men counsel well.

Obviously. [4:428b]

A fifth broad theme in Plato's writing involves equating wisdom with various other virtues, or as the foundation of all virtue. In the *Symposium* we come across the following revealing comment:

Wisdom and all her sister virtues, it is the office of every poet to beget them, of every artist whom we may call creative. Now by far the most important kind of wisdom, she went on, is that which governs the ordering of society, and which goes by the names of justice and moderations. [209: a-b]¹¹

And, sixth, in *The Laws* Plato discusses the relation between wisdom and reason as follows:

Ask me the question why we first call both things by the name of *virtue*, and then speak of them as two—*courage* and *wisdom*. I will give you the reason. One of them, courage is concerned with fears, and so is to be found in the brutes and in the behavior of mere infants. In fact, a soul may attain to courage by mere native temperament independently of discourse of reason, but without such discourse no soul ever comes to understanding or wisdom...[12: 963e]

When we consider these various claims from Plato on wisdom, regarding its almost inaccessible quality, its advantage, its practical nature, its relation to counsel, its importance, its foundational role for other virtues, yet its difference from all the virtues, it is hard to find a single interpretation. And, although Plato often takes wisdom to be a virtue, hence a process, some times he takes wisdom to be a product, as in the following remark from the *Theatetus*:

Socrates: And what makes people wise is wisdom, I suppose.

Theatetus: Yes.

Socrates: And is that in any way different from knowledge?

Theatetus: Is what different?

Socrates: Wisdom. Are not people wise in the things of which they have knowledge?

Theatetus: Certainly.

Socrates: Then knowledge and wisdom are the same thing? [145e]

So, to rely on Plato to provide a clearly enunciated, single theory of the virtue of wisdom would indeed be folly.

What explanation might we give of these many different claims that Plato makes regarding wisdom? One interpretation of the many accounts of wisdom in Plato's writings is that Plato kept changing his mind on what wisdom was, and that one or another or perhaps none of these accounts is correct. The extreme wisdom skeptic will, of course, favor the latter pessimistic view, namely that what we are to learn from Plato is that there is really no such thing as wisdom, or, at best, that it is nothing mere mortals can hope to possess.

Another interpretation, the one I favor, is that Plato kept discovering different forms of wisdom, and that he nicely gives voice to these very different forms on different occasions. What I take to be the lesson that we are to learn from Plato's various positive comments is that we should think of wisdom as a virtue that is not a single sort of disposition; rather, we are to think of wisdom as something that can take an important variety of forms.¹² Once we have identified a significant set of such forms we will then be in the position to ask what, if anything, might unify them. We will also then be in a position to see how well we might respond to the various complaints against wisdom with which we began.

The Several Virtues of Wisdom

Let us suppose that a virtue is a behavioral disposition or trait which tends to promote the good, or, in humans, flourishing. Let us also note that different virtues seem to apply to different aspects of human life, such as the individual aspect (temperance, prudence), the practice aspect (truthfulness, persistence) or the societal aspect (loyalty and generosity). Thinking of these three different aspects helps us to consider the various forms that wisdom can take.

If we try to think of different forms that wisdom as a virtue might take, then, taking our cue from Plato we can identify (at least) the following six forms: [1] craft wisdom, as in the wise physician, [2] personal wisdom, as in "Know thyself,"¹³ [3] the wisdom of counsel, [4] social wisdom¹⁴, [5] theoretical or esoteric wisdom¹⁵, and [6] wisdom as the meta-virtue, the virtue which rules the other virtues. To call someone wise, I suggest, is just to call that person wise in one or more of these different respects.

Is this the final list? Some will be tempted to suggest additional forms of wisdom. Before we do, we might also attempt to see if we can construct or deconstruct these allegedly new forms out of one or several of the six forms already mentioned. Consider "conventional wisdom". Perhaps it is a diluted version of theoretical wisdom.¹⁶ Again consider 'practical wisdom'. Though similar to craft wisdom, it seems not to be tied to any particular craft and to incorporate many elements of conventional wisdom as well. Further, the skeptical perspective on wisdom—she is wise who knows not to make a claim to know—is certainly an important aspect of Platonic and Socratic thought. But, if it is appropriate to interpret one's not claiming of wisdom in certain circumstances as itself a form of wisdom, then perhaps this, too, would fall under the meta-virtue aspect of wisdom described above.

Conversely, we can imagine some who would opt for a more parsimonious original list, who would suggest that we collapse various elements on the list of six to a specific form of craft wisdom, such as wisdom of counsel or social wisdom. Or, perhaps one might propose reducing personal wisdom to meta-virtue wisdom. As I am not able to provide a convincing argument for this suggestion, I will not attempt to settle these matters here and choose to remain officially neutral regarding any enlargement and reductive efforts. My primary concern in the present discussion is merely to argue that a pluralistic approach to wisdom as a virtue, whatever its ultimate details, is preferable to privileging a specific form.¹⁷

My reasons for preferring a pluralist approach to wisdom are several. First, I take it as a basic datum, established with Plato's examples, that there are an important variety of ways in which we find beings to be wise. While we may think of some forms of wisdom as more valuable or more difficult to attain than others, it seems unfair to count only those who possess these latter forms as wise. Second, the prospects it affords for analysis are more promising. If we begin with varied data to be analyzed, we may reach a more satisfying general account of what is the common feature of these diverse instances of the virtue of wisdom. Third, the pluralistic approach better fits with what we find to be true regarding other virtues such as courage, temperance, prudence, and justice, namely that they come in a variety of degrees and that they are to be found in a variety of kinds of beings and situations. It would indeed be odd if wisdom turned out to be the only one of the major virtues that was tied to a single absolute standard and was to be had only by a small group of remarkable individuals (i.e., the gods and the near-gods, such as Plato and the Buddha).

Developing a pluralistic account

What might defenders of such an account claim about the virtue of wisdom? The following three non-controversial claims strike me as worth enunciating. First, and most obviously, there are many ways in which one can be wise. Some individuals have some craft wisdom (and most likely some practical and conventional wisdom) but no other. Other individuals may have only great theoretical wisdom. Still others may have considerable social wisdom. Others may be wise counselors. Some with significant personal wisdom will also have considerable meta-virtue wisdom. But, there is a second obvious point: being wise in one way does not guarantee having any other sort of wisdom. Those who have craft wisdom may lack theoretical wisdom, and vice-versa. Third, wisdom is, fundamentally, an epistemic virtue; it importantly involves knowledge. We should note that one can be wise with respect both to knowing how to do something and one can also be wise with respect to being able to apply a particular branch of propositional knowledge. Being an epistemic virtue also brings with it many of the special features possessed by knowledge, including its intentionality.¹⁸ For example, like much knowledge, wisdom is not necessarily transparent to the one who has it. One can be wise in one particular manner without knowing that one is wise in that way.

But, the analyst still wants to know: granted that there are half a dozen assorted forms of the virtue of wisdom, is there something that all of these dissimilar types of wisdom have that makes them all forms of the same virtue? Perhaps. Wise people possess knowledge that the non-wise lack. To call a person wise says something about the significance of her use of this knowledge either regarding some particular subject matter or regarding some range of areas. And, second, this use must also lead the wise person to make a judgment. Without judging there can be no wisdom.

That it is the combination of knowledge and judgment that forms the basis for all forms of wisdom as a virtue can be seen by considering the following two cases. Imagine first a person, K, who is possessed of great information on some matter, X, but refuses to use this information to form a pertinent judgment regarding X in a situation that calls for judgment. While K may be a great resource for others who wish to evaluate the subject in question, K seems to lack wisdom regarding her subject of expertise. It is not enough to have relevant information and relevant evaluation skills; one must also be typically disposed to combine the information and skills to produce judgment in order to count as wise.

Envision a second individual, J, who happily makes a judgment regarding some matter, but who unfortunately lacks proper information structures regarding it. Even if J's judgment about X turns out to be correct, if it is not formed in the proper manner by a reliable process or mechanism, then J is clearly not wise, but simply a lucky guesser who might pass for wise until suitably queried about her judgment.

What can we learn from the cases of K and J regarding the elements required for wisdom? Let us propose the following. One feature that all of the six different forms of wisdom seem to have in common is the feature of judgment. A second requirement involves information. In order to be wise it is not sufficient just to be able to spout off the right sort of information. This information must somehow appropriately derive from the wise person as its source. But, we should not confuse wisdom with creation, invention or discovery in the strong sense of being the very first person to happen upon a particular truth, correct procedure or effective strategy. Rather, as a source the wise person must rather merely be one who appropriately so judges regarding the item in question, and in so doing makes the knowledge her own. Apt judgment, I claim, is what is common to all of the various forms of wisdom.¹⁹

Let us see how this account fares with respect to the six forms of wisdom presented above. The wise craftsman judges that a particular method is appropriate to reach a particular result. The possessor of personal wisdom judges that she should follow a particular course of action. The wise counselor judges that a particular piece of advice is what is required for her client in a given situation. The wise judge determines that a particular

decision is best in a given social situation. The wise theoretician judges that a particular theory best addresses some problem at hand. And, the wise meta-virtuous person judges that one specific virtue, say courage, needs to be favored over another virtue, say prudence, in a specific context that has presented itself. Thus, reliance on apt judgment seems to provide a unifying element across the multiple forms of wisdom put forward.

What makes a judgment apt is determined by the kind of judgment it is. What is relevant for craft aptitude is determined by craft standards.²⁰ What is relevant for wise counsel depends upon the specifics of the counseling situation as well as relevant data, theory and rules that apply. What is wise for the theoretician is determined by the relevant historical theoretical precedents, the kinds of problems that one is trying to solve, concerns about the various explanatory virtues that need to be balanced, etc. But this is still a bit vague. Can we do better?

One common epistemic mark that a judgment is apt is that it will strike the neophyte or uninstructed as insightful, that it puts information together in a way that feels “just right for the occasion”. But, although initially attractive as an explanation of what makes a judgment apt so as to count as wisdom, on reflection it seems more reasonable to admit that talk of insight related to wisdom is potentially confusing. There are two reasons.

First, the wise person may not necessarily see her judgment as in any way special, but merely as what is called for on the occasion. So, insight, oddly enough, may function best as criterion of wisdom for those who lack it or lack it to the degree possessed by those more talented. Second, although to see something as insightful is, standardly, to see it as wise, nevertheless seeing something as wise and something’s actually being wise are not the same things. Appeal to insight is insufficient as a mark of wisdom. What is there about a particular insightful judgment that makes us call it an instance of genuine wisdom as opposed to a piece of mere superficiality?

Perhaps the best we can do is to appeal to the notion of ‘due consideration’, but ‘due consideration’ of what? It seems that acts of wisdom involve due consideration of a significant number of diverse factors. What makes wisdom distinctive is that these factors involve the potential for making conflicting decisions. Further, in situations requiring wisdom there is no simple algorithm for determining which of these factors to count when. A wise person, we can summarize, is one disposed to make judgments that are apt with respect to giving due consideration for potentially conflicting factors not according to some single simple rule.²¹

To assess the adequacy of these additional requirements we need again to consider the various proposed forms of wisdom. When we do so, once more we see that each involves these added elements. The wise craft-person must consider conflicting aspects of the crafting process, the different materials, forms, processes, etc. that must all be managed simultaneously. The possessor of self-wisdom needs to take into account all of the diverse elements of her history, personality, circumstances, and plan-of-life. The wise counselor must consider the very different and conflicting sorts of advice that might be given in a particular situation and hone the specifics to fit the context appropriately. The wise social planner needs to take into account the multiple elements of the social situation, the potential conflicts between them on particular plans, and the multiple goals that the particular society wishes to attain. The wise theoretician must consider the current state of the data regarding a particular subject matter, the various conflicting explanatory hypotheses that have been given, and their strengths and weaknesses. And, finally, the wise meta-virtue possessor needs to take into account all of the details of a particular situation and all of the other virtues that might apply as well as her long-term goals and commitments. Thus, for each of these six forms of wisdom, multiple conflicting factors come into play in making the appropriate judgment and each requires due consideration before an apt judgment can be rendered. And, in each of these cases there is no single simple rule that one might follow to resolve conflict.

The critical skeptic will, of course, not be happy with this final characterization, demanding an even clearer account. How many factors must be considered? How do we determine which factors are relevant? What is really involved in due consideration? How are apt judgments actually made? These are all questions for which no truly informative answers are currently available. And, in their absence, the critic may think herself justified in remaining skeptical about wisdom.

But, I think it would be a mistake to take our current inability to specify better what is going on in apt judgment situations as an indication that wisdom is something about which we should be skeptical or to claim that wisdom is something about which we now have no understanding and will never understand. All of us can identify individuals whom we count as wise and on whom we count for wise counsel. So, it would be silly for us to invoke skepticism regarding real world wisdom. And, I think we can understand a number of things about wisdom, namely the six different forms and the several elements just listed.²²

In the meantime, there is still a bit more that can be said about wisdom conceived as apt judgment. The account of wisdom as apt judgment has explanatory power. It can be used to explain why some have not taken wisdom to be a virtue but something else. This is because, unlike many other virtues, one often cannot observe the forces involved in an individual's acting in a wise manner. Further, we cannot directly view the judging process in others, only its product. Thus, we can see how lack of observation in others and lack of attention to or lack of transparency regarding one's own thoughts might lead one to deny that wisdom is a virtue process, and view it as only a sort of knowledge product.

There is another useful explanatory aspect of the apt judgment account of wisdom. This concerns the fact noted in several of the Platonic references cited above, that there seem to be situations in which we count wisdom as a virtue *determinable*, that is, as something general that can take a variety of forms, and then count other specific forms of virtue, such as justice, temperance, prudence, for instance, as virtue *determinates*, that is, as specific forms of the virtue of wisdom. Without the common element of apt judgment, this might seem confusing. But, it is reasonable to suppose that there are many different kinds of apt judgment. Thus, we should reject Plato's apparent claim cited above from the *Protagoras*, that all of the virtues are completely different.²³ If wisdom has many forms, then some of its more specific forms can also be specific virtues, where the specificity is determined by a particular circumscribed subject matter. Thus, temperance is that form of wisdom regarding decisions about food, drink and sex; prudence is that form of wisdom regarding what is in one's self-interest, leaving justice as that form of wisdom regarding how to regulate the state.²⁴

The Reflection Question

While the pluralistic account of wisdom here proposed does have many promising features there is a further important objection that needs to be addressed. This is the complaint that the current approach to wisdom has left out a very important element, namely that of reflection. You will notice that I have not included either contemplation or reflection as an explicit aspect of my account. Some, however, will insist that all judgment involves a reflective element. I would not want to deny that there are many wise judgments that we do make reflectively. But, strictly speaking the account here proposed leaves open the possibility that there could be apt judgments that were non-reflective. Is this a mistake? Consider the example of the drugged priestesses at Delphi who uttered significant deliverances from the gods. The priestesses were just the medium by means of which wisdom emerged; the medium is not necessarily itself wise. The same goes for the priests who interpreted the deliverances; they also, arguably, fail to qualify as wise, as they are but the interpreters of the gods. Are such examples sufficient to demonstrate the need for reflection in an account of wisdom?

Perhaps the friends of reflection and contemplation are really still committed to the significance of insight for wisdom. They might hold that it is the experience of phenomenal insight that secures a consciousness requirement for attributions of wisdom. And, how does one get insight? It is natural to claim that insight requires both experience and deep reflection on this experience. The idea of being wise and young, and so without significant experience on which to reflect, is, to be sure, rather odd, it is hard to give ordinary examples; we are limited to a few limited religious exceptions (such as the young Dali Lama and the young Jesus). Thus, one often finds philosophers claiming that reflection and experience are both required for wisdom. But, although it seems correct to claim that much wisdom that we treasure involves reflection on experience, there seem to be at least two good reasons to think that reflection is not necessary for wisdom, as there do appear to be cases of wisdom

without reflection, some of which also require experience but some which do not.

First, let us recall Plato's examples of different crafts. These suggest that one can speak of wise practitioners of various crafts, for example the wise pilot and the wise physician. While some competent practitioners may in specific cases want or need to reflect, others may not need or want to do so. Perhaps reflection was helpful at an early stage of the learning process that brought the practitioner to her current state of expertise, but, for some instances of wise crafting, there seems not to be the need for continued reflection in all cases.

And, second, there may also be at least two cases of wisdom without either reflection or experience. Here's the puzzle. Is God wise? It seems appropriate to say "yes". In fact the two most significant virtues we typically attribute to God are wisdom and justice.²⁵ But, does God reflect? It seems appropriate either to say "no", or perhaps better, to say that we really do not know one way or the other. While contemplation may be typical of certain wise humans, it would seem presumptuous to think that an omniscient being would need to reflect before coming to an appropriate judgment. And, of course, there is also the case of the angels that needs to be considered. Could God create an angel who was wise without needing to reflect? That would seem well within God's power. Further, it also seems that much of what we have been told of angels reflects both their being wise and their not reflecting. So, for these two reasons, while contemplation may be useful for many apt judgments, I urge that we not make it a conceptual requirement on wisdom but rather rely on empirical efforts to determine contemplation's proper role in specific forms of wisdom.

Conclusion

It is time to draw this discussion to a close. I have here defended wisdom as a virtue, or rather as a half-a-dozen different kinds of virtue. I propose that what ties specific forms of wisdom virtue together is the concept of apt judgment. I suggest this approach helps us understand why many have had such a hard time with wisdom, following as they were the quixotic questioning of Socrates in the early Platonic dialogues. Only recognizing as wisdom that possessed by the gods leads Plato in the early dialogues to reject all other forms of wisdom, including many forms that he later came to discuss and value. Some of us have been or will be blessed with craft wisdom, some with theoretical wisdom, and some with the wisdom of counsel. Finding these as well as other forms of wisdom all around us is an empowering perspective, as it helps us better appreciate the many different gifts with which each of us has been endowed.²⁶

Endnotes

- 1 For a survey of theories of wisdom see Sharon Ryan's discussion, "Wisdom," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (entry dated 1/8/2007), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wisdom/>. Ryan discusses various views of wisdom, including those which equate it with believing one is ignorant, having knowledge/justification for one's beliefs, having extensive factual knowledge, knowing how to live well, and being successful at living well. Of these alternatives, only the last would seem to count as the sort of disposition required for virtue-hood.
- 2 See Stanley Godlovich, "On Wisdom," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (March 1981), reprinted in Christina Hoff Sommers and Fred Sommers eds., *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*, 2nd ed., San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989, p. 279.
- 3 My argument is a variation on Descartes' Ontological Argument for the existence God from *Meditation III*. There must be as much wisdom in the creator of the wise produce as there is in the product. Mere chance does not explain this. A fool or amateur lacks the means to produce wise products. So, wise products must come from wise producers—so, wisdom must be a virtue, too.
- 4 An additional line of support comes from a point already noted above, namely we can recognize many who cite wisdom as lacking in wisdom, and do not hold them responsible for the wise comments they ape.
- 5 All citations are from Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961 (6th printing, May 1971).

- 6 We should not count attacks on the Sophists as such an effort. Here is a typically unhelpful remark from the *Phaedrus* as to what is not sufficient for wisdom:
 “And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for the writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men are filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows.” [275a]
- 7 This is reiterated elsewhere, as in the following comment from the *Phaedrus*: To call him wise, Phaedrus, would, I think, be going too far; the epithet is proper only to a god. [278d].
- 8 The same assertion occurs later in *The Laws*:
 The Athenian: “Of divine goods, the first and chiefest is this same wisdom, and the next after it, sobriety of spirit; a third, resultant from the blending of both of these with valor, is righteousness, and valor itself is fourth. All of these naturally rank before the former class, and of course, a lawgiver must observe that order, next, he should impress it on his citizens that all his other injunctions have a view to these ends, and that among the ends, the human looks to the divine, and all the divine to their leader, wisdom.” [1:631c]
- 9 And, later in the same dialog we find the following claims:
 352c: [Prot]...but I above all men should think it shame to speak of wisdom and knowledge as anything but the most powerful elements in human life.,
 358c: To ‘act beneath yourself’ is the result of pure ignorance; to ‘be your own master’ is wisdom.
- 10 These remarks fit Plato’s theme in the *Meno* that only the virtuous life is worth leading:
 Soc: In short, everything that the human spirit undertakes or suffers will lead to happiness, then it is guided by wisdom, but to the opposite, when guided by folly.
 Meno: A reasonable conclusion.
 Soc: If then virtue is an attribute of the spirit, and one which cannot fail to be beneficial, it must be wisdom, for all spiritual qualities in and by themselves are neither advantageous nor harmful, but become advantageous or harmful by the presence with them of wisdom or folly. [88c-d]
 The same theme is echoed later in the *Laws*:
 The Athenian: “What lives, then, are there, and how many, from which, on a review of the desirable and undesirable, a selection must be made and erected into a self-imposed law, if the choice of the course which is pleasant and attractive as well as virtuous and noble may lead us to an existence of supreme human felicity? We shall, of course, name the life of temperance as one, and may count that of wisdom as another, that of courage of course as another, and that of health as another, thus making four in all, against which we may set four other types, the lives of folly, cowardice, profligacy, disease...” [5:733e]
- 11 In addition Plato concludes the above claim from the *Meno* with the remark:
 “If we accept this argument, then virtue, to be something advantageous, must be a sort of wisdom.[ibid.]
- 12 Compare Gilbert Ryle’s distinction between “generic” and “specific” dispositions. See Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson and Co., 1949, Chapter 5.
- 13 As in celebrated maxim from the Oracle of Delphi, “Know thyself.”
- 14 Social wisdom is that possessed by judges and urban planners, and is envisioned by Plato in *The Republic*.
- 15 Theoretical or esoteric wisdom is wisdom regarding deep matters which at least the gods have for Plato.
- 16 Perhaps conventional wisdom is distinguished from theoretical wisdom by lacking all serious theoretical components whatsoever. For the origins of conventional wisdom see John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Economics of Innocent Fraud*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004, p. ix.
- 17 While I am non-committal on whether additional forms of wisdom are justified, I am firmly committed to the view that it is not possible to reduce all of the items on the current list down to just one item.
- 18 For a good overview of intentionality, see Roderick Chisholm’s entry, “Intentionality,” in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967, Vol. 3, pp. 201-204.
- 19 Compare Ernest Sosa’s discussion of epistemic virtue in *Reflective Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2009.

- 20 Aristotle rejects the suggestion that mere craft could count as virtue, as he requires that all virtuous actions also be just and temperate. (See his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Chapter 4, 2.14.) But, Aristotle's objection is based on his requirement of the unity of the virtues, a requirement that the present view rejects—as I have claimed that there is no necessary unity of the various forms of wisdom alone.
- 21 There is the objection to be faced that many judgments will count as apt yet they are not wise; for example the perceptual judgment, that yonder there is a mountain goat (as made by a shepherd) may be accurate, yet it seems overblown to call it wise. Thus, we need to understand an apt judgment as not merely an accurate judgment but one that uses a process the complexity of whose conflicting factors forces a significant piece of judging as opposed to a routine perceptual recognition.
- 22 Whether humans will ever be able to make significant additional headway on understanding wisdom may turn out to be an empirical matter, to depend, not on philosophers, but upon what is learned in the future regarding how the brains of real wise people actually work.
- 23 Plato claims in *Protagoras* [330a] that the virtues are all different as are the parts of the face. It seems better to say, instead, that different virtues are formed by different arrangements of common elements, thus, comparable to the making of different “faces”.
- 24 One can see here the beginnings of an argument for a kind of conceptual Unity of the Virtues!
- 25 It seems odd to attribute courage, prudence or temperance to a being that is both omnipotent and omniscient.
- 26 I am very grateful for the hospitality and helpful discussion from participants at the Viterbo University Conference on Wisdom, April, 2010.

Address correspondence to:

*Eric Russert Kraemer
Dept. of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin at La Crosse, WI.
kraemer.eric@uwlax.edu*