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Why empathy is an intellectual virtue

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ABSTRACT

Our aim in this paper is to argue that empathy is an intellectual virtue. Empathy enables agents to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. The agent who possesses this trait is: (i) driven to engage in acts of empathy by her epistemic desires; (ii) takes pleasure in doing so; (iii) is competent at the activity characteristic of empathy; and, (iv) has good judgment as to when it is epistemically appropriate to engage in empathy. After establishing that empathy meets all the necessary conditions to be classified as an intellectual virtue, we proceed to discuss Battaly's argument according to which empathy is a skill rather than a virtue. We contend, contra Battaly, that the agent who possesses the virtue of empathy: (a) sometimes foregoes opportunities to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy because it is the virtuous thing to do, (b) does not make deliberate errors, and (c) her actions are always ultimately aiming at epistemic goods.

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I. Introductory remarks

Most people share the belief that empathy is a valuable quality for both the agent that possesses it as well as those around them. There is something undeniably positive in being able to attain knowledge of another's mental state. The empathetic agent is both willing and able to determine the state of mind of other agents – for example, – she is able to gain insight into why another person is angry at her. This is valuable for both the agent who is able to understand others as well as for the people around her that feel (and actually are) understood. The question we seek to address in this paper is whether one would be warranted to classify empathy as an intellectual virtue. To achieve this, we examine the concept of empathy through the framework of virtue epistemology.

Roughly put, virtue epistemology involves the study of epistemological issues through the concept of intellectual virtue (see Brady & Pritchard, 2006). There are two distinct groups of scholars working in virtue epistemology: virtue responsibilists (such as Baehr, 2006, 2011; Code, 1987;

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Montmarquet, 1993; Roberts & Wood, 2007; Zagzebski, 1996) and virtue reliabilists (such as Greco, 1993, 2010; Pritchard, 2005, 2018; Sosa, 1980, 2007). One fundamental difference between these two camps is that the former understands intellectual virtues as traits of character (*character-based virtues*) while the latter conceives of them as faculties of the mind (*faculty-based virtues*). In this paper, we focus on the virtue responsibilist project since our goal is to argue that empathy is a responsibilist kind of epistemic virtue.

Virtue responsibilists maintain that intellectual virtues are epistemically valuable acquired traits of character. They model their understanding of intellectual virtue after Aristotle's conceptualization of moral virtue (Battaly, 2011, p. 289[1]; see, also, 2008, p. 645). For them, open mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual tenacity are typical examples of epistemic virtues[2] (see, Greco & Turri, 2013). On this view, the openminded agent is predisposed to see "others' ideas as plausible" (Montmarquet, 1993, p. 24; see also, Baehr, 2011, p. 153). For virtue responsibilists, an agent needs to have a strong desire to acquire epistemic goods (such as knowledge and truth) in order to possess intellectual virtues. Without epistemic motivations, an agent cannot possibly be intellectually virtuous – they lack the necessary drive that is required for the acquisition and development of intellectual virtues. For instance, it is due to their strong epistemic desires that the person who possesses the virtue of open-mindedness is motivated to take under serious consideration the plausibility of other people's viewpoints (Battaly, 2011, p. 289).

Despite numerous recent studies on virtue responsibilism, some of which seek to characterize various character traits as epistemic virtues (see, for example, Battaly, 2017; Hazlett, 2012; Kotsonis, 2021a; Watson, 2015), very few virtue theorists have looked into the concept of empathy from the viewpoint of virtue epistemology (for notable exceptions, see, Battaly, 2011; Simmons, 2014). Battaly (2011) is one of the few scholars who has considered the possibility that empathy could be a virtue. Her study is one of the most well-known and influential studies on the concept from a virtue theory perspective. She argues that empathy is not a virtue and should instead be classified either as a capacity or a skill. In this paper, we want to argue contra-Battaly (2011) that empathy is a virtue of the intellect. We seek to foreground this virtue in contemporary discussions of virtue epistemology discussions and forensically appraise its distinctive epistemic value.

Our plan for this paper is the following: in the next section we argue that (cognitive) empathy is an epistemic virtue. To accomplish this, we discuss Baehr's (2016) conditions for intellectual virtues and proceed to show that empathy meets all of them. We argue that empathy enables the agents who possess it to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. Having

posited that empathy meets all the necessary conditions for a trait to be classified as an intellectual virtue, we proceed in the third section to discuss Battaly's three reasons for not classifying empathy as a virtue: (i) foregoing opportunities, (ii) deliberate errors and (iii) not aiming at the good. We contend, contra Battaly, that the agent who possesses the epistemic virtue of empathy: (a) sometimes foregoes opportunities to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy because it is the virtuous thing to do, (b) does not make deliberate errors, and, (c) her actions are always aiming at the good. In the fourth section, we discuss Annas (1995, 2003, 2011) and Stichter's (2011, 2016) conceptualization of virtue as skill and draw attention to how their viewpoint challenges Battaly's argument, according to which, skills and virtues are mutually exclusive.

II. Empathy as an intellectual virtue

The term empathy is used to describe a multitude of distinct but related phenomena (Batson, 2009; Battaly, 2011; Cuff et al., 2016; Hall & Schwartz, 2019). Batson (2009), for example, identifies eight different uses of the term empathy: (i) cognitive empathy, (ii) motor mimicry, (iii) coming to feel as another person feels, (iv) projecting oneself into another's situation, (v) imagining how another is thinking and feeling, (vi) imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place, (vii) feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering, and (viii) feeling for another person who is suffering. Our focus, in this paper, is cognitive empathy – viz., the process by which "one attains a cognitive grasp, belief about, or knowledge of another's mental states" (Battaly, 2011, p. 287). This is because we believe, and want to argue, that cognitive empathy is an intellectual virtue.

According to the cognitive understanding of empathy, the defining characteristic of empathy is that it enables the agent to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs (see e.g., Boisserie-Lacroix & Inchingolo, 2021; Goldie, 2000; Hodges & Myers, 2007; Smith, 2017; Spaulding, 2017; Stueber, 2006, 2012). The activity characteristic of empathy entails employing available information in order to make judgments regarding what others experience in a given situation (see e.g., Harrelson, 2020; Hodges & Myers, 2007; Stueber, 2012). Cognitive empathy yields epistemic outputs: engaging in successful empathy enables the agent to know the target's mental state (Goldie, 2000, p. 195; Steinberg, 2014). Cognitive empathy should not be conflated with sympathy which involves caring for others (Goldie, 2000, p. 215; Coplan, 2004, p. 146). The agent who is good at empathizing with others does not necessarily care for them (e.g., she does not necessarily have the impulse to help them – Coplan, 2004, p. 146). For example, a good counselor may be able to understand that her client is feeling underappreciated by her partner but that does not necessarily mean that they

sympathize with the client (e.g., the counselor might dislike this particular client). Framed this way, empathy is the process by which an agent comes to gain insight into another person's mental state. This does not require that they share the target person's mental state, such as, feeling sad because they are feeling sad, or indeed, care for the other person. What's more, cognitive empathy involves understanding what is going on for the other as another and does not necessarily involve perspective-taking, interpreted here in terms of imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place. For the rest of the paper, unless otherwise specified, we use the term "empathy" to refer specifically to cognitive empathy.

In this section of this paper, we proceed to argue that empathy is an intellectual virtue. If the activity characteristic of this virtue is carried out successfully, it enables the agent to acquire epistemic goods about their environment – i.e., know what people such as their partner, children, parents, neighbors, coworkers and/or boss feel and think at a given time. In order to illustrate that empathy is an intellectual virtue, we discuss the conditions that are identified by virtue responsibilists as jointly necessary and sufficient for a trait to be classified as an epistemic virtue. We focus primarily on the conditions identified by Baehr (2016) and demonstrate that empathy meets all of them.[3]

A) The virtue of empathy: The motivational and the affective dimensions

As already noted in the introductory remarks, virtue responsibilists argue that epistemic motivations are an integral component of every intellectual virtue. Montmarquet (1993, p. 30) characterizes intellectual virtues as the qualities a truth-desiring agent would want to possess. In a similar vein, Zagzebski (1996, p. 167) argues that intellectual virtues entail a motivation to have "a cognitive contact with reality", while Roberts and Wood (2007, p. 305) maintain that love for knowledge is a necessary condition for the possession of all other intellectual virtues. In more formal terms, Baehr (2016, p. 87) notes that, "A subject S possesses an intellectual virtue V only if S's possession of V is rooted in a 'love' of epistemic goods".

The agent who does not have a desire to obtain epistemic goods lacks the epistemic drive that is necessary for the possession of epistemic virtues. Consider, for example, an agent who has no interest in obtaining truth about her environment. Suppose for a moment that he prefers to sit on the couch all day and play videogames. Such an agent does not possess intellectual virtues – he is not interested in obtaining intellectual ends. Epistemic motivations are necessary for an agent to possess intellectual virtues even if the agent seems to consistently act in accordance with a specific virtue. For instance, the person who acts in accordance with the epistemic virtue of curiosity[4] because she is interested in acquiring the means that will enable

her to beat her business competitors, does not possess the virtue in question. She is not ultimately driven to act due to her desire for epistemic goods but rather because she wants to make money.

In line with the motivational dimension of intellectual virtues, the agent who possesses the virtue of empathy is motivated to act out of their desire for the acquisition of epistemic goods. She is motivated to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs out of her epistemic desires (rather than some other ulterior non-epistemic motive – say, making money[5]). The activity characteristic of empathy might (or might not) spark in them the desire to sympathize with the target, but it is their desire to know the truth that ultimately motivates them. Consider for instance, the following case. Carla, who is a most empathetic person, goes to medical school. During a class, she witnesses one of her professors have a panic attack, in part triggered by a combination of stage-fright, poor sleep quality and an ongoing mid-life crisis. Given that she excels at empathizing, Carla has the epistemic motivations to acquire the truth about her surrounding environment. Empathy allows her to gain insight into her professor's inner state of mind. Nevertheless, because this professor was overly strict when marking her mid-term essay, Carla dislikes them, and as a result, is not feeling any sympathy for them.

Besides the motivational dimension of intellectual virtues, Baehr (2016) also argues that intellectual virtues are characterized by an affective dimension. According to Baehr (2016, p. 89), "S possesses an intellectual virtue V only if S takes pleasure in (or experiences other appropriate affections in relation to) the activity characteristic of V". Baehr gives two main reasons as to why he distinguishes the affective dimension of intellectual virtues from the motivational component. First, there are instances where an agent is motivated to pursue epistemic goods out of a sense of duty rather than out of genuine affection for epistemic goods – for Baehr – this would indicate that the agent lacks epistemic virtues. Secondly, Baehr understands the motivational component as the initial spark of the inquiring process, and this does not guarantee that the agent will enjoy the process through which they come to acquire epistemic goods – i.e., one might desire epistemic goods but may perceive the process through which such epistemic goods are acquired as not worth the effort, dull and/or painful.

Whether one understands the affective principle as part of the motivational component of intellectual virtues or as a distinct component, it still remains the case that a person who excels in empathizing takes pleasure in (or experiences other appropriate affections in relation to) the activity characteristic of empathy – i.e., gaining insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. In other words, such a person is not simply driven by their epistemic desires to acquire epistemic good via empathy but also enjoys the activity characteristic of this trait. Consider, for example, again, the case of

Carla. Carla does not only have the epistemic motivations to gain insight into her professor's emotions and beliefs, she likewise enjoys the process through which she comes to obtain such goods,[6,7].

B) The virtue of empathy: The competence and the judgment dimensions

Having the motivation to acquire epistemic goods and taking pleasure in the activity characteristic of virtue X do not suffice for an agent to possess virtue X. One must also be competent at the activity characteristic of this virtue. Baehr (2016) calls this the competence dimension of intellectual virtues. For him, "S possesses an intellectual virtue V only if S is competent at the activity characteristic of V" (Baehr, 2016, p. 91). Accordingly, agents who possess strong epistemic motivations but lack the ability to acquire epistemic goods cannot be categorized as intellectually virtuous. More specifically, an agent cannot possibly be considered open-minded if they are incompetent at the activity that is characteristic of this virtue, that being, "able to transcend a default cognitive standpoint in order to take up or take seriously the merits of a distinct cognitive standpoint" (Baehr, 2011, p. 153).

An agent who excels in empathizing does not only possess the motivation to acquire epistemic goods and take pleasure in the process. They are also competent at the activity characteristic of empathy – i.e., gaining insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. Going back to Carla's example, Carla has the motivation to acquire the truth about her professor's panic attack, enjoys the process through which she comes into the possession of such goods, and is competent at the activity that is characteristic of this trait. It is due to her competence that she is able to acquire the truth about her professor's inner state of mind. Had Carla being incompetent at the activity characteristic of empathy, we would not consider her an empathetic person.

Closely related to the competence dimension of intellectual virtues is the judgment dimension that characterizes every agent that possesses intellectually virtues. According to Baehr (2016, p. 92), "S possesses an intellectual virtue V only if S is disposed to recognize when (and to what extent, etc.) the activity characteristic of V would be epistemically appropriate". In other words, the motivation to acquire epistemics goods, the enjoyment of the process through which such goods are acquired and the competence at the activity characteristic of virtue X are not sufficient for the possession of intellectual virtues. The agent must also be able to judge well regarding when it is epistemically appropriate to engage in the activity characteristic of this virtue. Put another way, they must be "able to judge when, for how long, toward whom, and in what manner" to engage in the activity characteristic of virtue X (Baehr, 2016, p. 93). For instance, an agent should not engage in activity characteristic of open-mindedness when discussing with agents that want to indoctrinate or brainwash her.[8]

A person who excels in empathizing is characterized by her good judgment concerning the epistemic appropriateness of the activity characteristic of empathy. Consistent with this, Carla judges correctly that it is epistemically appropriate to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy when her professor is having the mental breakdown. In addition, Carla also knows that it is not epistemically appropriate to engage in the activity characteristic of this virtue during normal class time, notably, when her professor is lecturing on human anatomy. In the latter case, trying to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs is epistemically inappropriate since: (i) there is no insight to be gained through the activity characteristic of empathy at this time; (ii) it would distract Carla from acquiring epistemic goods through other means, (i.e., giving her full attention to what the professor is saying about human anatomy), which are epistemically more fruitful given the situation.

To sum up, the character trait of empathy satisfies all the necessary conditions, identified by Baehr (2016), as jointly necessary and sufficient for the possession of intellectual virtues. The excellent empathizer is: (i) driven to engage in acts of empathy by her epistemic desires; (ii) takes pleasure; (iii) is competent at the activity characteristic of empathy; and (iv) has good judgment as to when it is epistemically appropriate to engage in empathy. Therefore, we argue that we should categorize empathy as an intellectual virtue,[9].[10]

C) The virtue of empathy: The reliability objection and low-grade goods

One could argue that empathy lacks epistemic reliability in the sense that the epistemic outcomes of the activity characteristic of empathy are often inaccurate. For instance, Carla may think that she has understood the reasons behind her professor's mental breakdown, but she might be mistaken. This relates to Zagzebski's (1996) success condition of intellectual virtues. According to her, for an agent to possess an intellectual virtue X, they need to be reliably successful in acquiring epistemic goods (see, e.g., Zagzebski, 1996, p. 270). Hence, since the activity characteristic of empathy does not allow even the most skilled empathizer to successfully acquire epistemic goods on a reliable basis, one could argue that perhaps empathy should not be classified as a virtue.

First, one could challenge the view that empathy lacks epistemic reliability. For instance, an experienced counselor who is competent at the activity characteristic of empathy is reliably successful in acquiring the truth about her client's inner state of mind (see, e.g., Barone et al., 2005 on how accurate empathy can be educated for). Secondly, the success condition of epistemic virtues put forward by Zagzebski (1996) has been challenged by scholars such as Baehr (2011, 2016) and Watson (2015) who

maintain that reliability is not a necessary condition of intellectual virtues.[11] These scholars build on Montmarquet's (1987) arguments against the view that intellectual virtues require epistemic reliability. To illustrate his argument, Montmarquet discusses cases of hostile epistemic environments (e.g., evil demon cases) in which an agent, despite possessing intellectual virtues, is unable to acquire epistemic goods on a reliable basis. For Montmarquet, this does not show that agents stop being intellectually virtuous in hostile environments, but that reliability is not necessary for the possession of epistemic virtues. Aligning with scholars such as Montmarquet (1987), Baehr (2011, 2016) and Watson (2015), we maintain that reliability is not a necessary condition for the possession of intellectual virtues. In the case of empathy, the agent who possesses this intellectual virtue is not characterized by her ability to acquire epistemic goods reliably but by her competence in the activity characteristic of this virtue. This should not be taken to imply, however, that the virtuous empathetic agent is not reliably successful at acquiring epistemic goods in non-hostile epistemic environments (viz., one cannot be a virtuously empathic agent and yet consistently fail to correctly infer the mental states of others under normal conditions). It simply shows that reliability is not a necessary condition for empathy to be a virtue.[12]

Besides the reliability objection, one could also argue that empathy does not have significant epistemic value since it only yields low-grade epistemic goods. The empathetic agent is not able to acquire important truths (e.g., the chemical composition of oxygen, the second law of thermodynamics) but only low-level goods such as the inner state of mind of a given person (e.g., that John is feeling angry toward the agent because he feels neglected). Still, the kind of epistemic goods acquired through empathy are quite important for the wellbeing of agents both individually and collectively (see, Steinberg, 2014). Being able to understand the emotions and beliefs of other people is crucial for harmonious co-existence (Morris, 2019); and being listened and feeling understood is what a lot of people lack in their lives. From such perspective, it seems that epistemic goods acquired through the activity characteristic of empathy are on par with the goods acquired by virtues such as open-mindedness and intellectual tenacity. Being able to gain insight into the reasons why one's partner is angry at them could make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful relationship – hence such epistemic goods are not of detrimental value. The truth-desiring agent would certainly want to possess such goods.

III. Empathy as an intellectual virtue: Virtue versus skill

Having posited that empathy is an intellectual virtue, we proceed in this section to discuss Battaly's (2011) recent argument according to which empathy should not be classified as a virtue. Battaly puts forward three

reasons as to why she believes this to be the case: (i) foregoing opportunities, (ii) deliberate errors and (iii) not aiming at the good. We discuss all three reasons and argue, contra Battaly, that the agent who possesses the epistemic virtue of empathy: (a) sometimes foregoes opportunities to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy because it is the virtuous thing to do, (b) does not make deliberate errors and (c) her actions are always ultimately aiming at the possession of epistemic goods.

Battaly (2011) dismisses the idea that empathy is a virtue.[13] She argues that, depending on one's understanding of this concept, empathy is either a capacity or a skill. As already discussed, we understand empathy as enabling agents to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. For Battaly, when framed this way, empathy is a skill, and one important reason for that centers on foregoing opportunities, since one may possess the skill but choose when to use it – or for that matter – repeatedly not use it. For her, an empathetic person can sometimes forego the opportunity to exhibit empathy, and this shows that they lack the motivation that is required for the possession of intellectual virtues. Hence, she argues that empathy is a skill.

We believe that Battaly is wrong to classify empathy as a skill due to foregoing opportunities. As she herself notes, an agent may fail to exhibit a specific virtue in a given situation but that does not mean that the agent has ceased to possess this virtue. She goes on to point out that, one could "fail to help a friend in need, and still be benevolent" (Battaly, 2011, pp. 293–294). Similarly, we maintain that an empathetic person may fail to gain insight into another person's emotions and beliefs and still possess the virtue of empathy. Nonetheless, Battaly rightly highlights the fact that the reasons for the agent's failure are quite important. She believes that for a virtuous agent to fail and still be virtuous, the reasons of their failure must be due to unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

We maintain that the agent who possesses the virtue of empathy sometimes foregoes opportunities to engage in the characteristic activity of empathy because it is the virtuous thing to do. Virtue does not automatically confer superhuman powers on the possessor. An empathetic person does not have boundless empathy. How could they? They would end up in an early grave and be of no use to man nor beast. We argue that the empathetic person is not authentically empathetic if they "have to be" empathetic all the time and toward everyone. Being authentically empathetic toward everyone would be the excess of the virtue of empathy. It might even lead the agent to acute mental distress (whereupon they might be forced to "switch off" or "temper" their empathy as a defense mechanism). If empathy is something an agent cannot have some measure of control over, there's a real risk that they will burnout; and if they have to be empathetic all the time, they are a slave to the virtue. This dovetails with the idea of empathy regulation (see,

e.g., Ray & Gallegos de Castillo, 2019) whereby the virtuous empathetic person has the ability to control their empathy and exhibits it only when it is the virtuous thing to do. Different people and different situations merit different levels of empathy (some do not merit any empathy at all), and the agent needs to be practically wise to determine the mean where the intellectual virtue of empathy lies. This relates to Baehr's (2016) judgment component of intellectual virtue: the intellectually virtuous person is good at judging when (and to what extent, etc.) the activity characteristic of empathy would be epistemically appropriate – it is to be expected therefore that they will forego the opportunity to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy when foregoing it is the virtuous thing to do [14].

Battaly (2011) also discusses deliberate errors as a further reason for regarding empathy as a skill. She notes that an empathetic person can deliberately engage in "a process that she knows will produce botched effects and false beliefs" (Battaly, 2011, p. 297). For Battaly, this does not show that the agent has forfeited her ability to engage in skillful empathy, but rather that the agents might have decided to willingly produce poor results. According to her, this shows that the skillful empathizer lacks the motivation that is necessary for virtue, therefore, empathy should be classified as a skill. But why should we surmise that empathy is not a virtue on the basis of the fact that certain agents have the capacity to engage in actions that are characteristic of this trait but nevertheless sometimes decide not to do so in a skillful manner due to a lack of epistemic motivations? Lacking the motivations necessary for virtue might simply show that the agent in question lacks the virtue of empathy – instead of being considered as evidence that empathy is a skill. Very few people possess the virtue of empathy and this is, to a large extent, due to the fact that most of us have imperfect epistemic motivations – more precisely – we are not interested in acquiring epistemic goods when doing so would inconvenience us. We prefer to engage in a process that may "produce botched effects and false beliefs" than go out of our way to acquire epistemic goods.

Here it might be helpful to discuss the example that Battaly (2011, p. 298) uses. Jackie and Joan are sisters. While Jackie is able to step into Joan's shoes and see things from her perspective (e.g., understand the reasons why Joan is frustrated with her job and her marriage), Joan lacks this ability – i.e., she is unable to gain insight into her sister's emotions and beliefs. Being frustrated by her sister's inability to see things from her perspective, Jackie decides not to engage in a competent empathetic understanding of her sister's feelings, willingly does a poor job and hence ends up forming false beliefs about her sister's emotions. Battaly argues that Jackie has not lost the skill to be empathetic, for she can truly understand her sister's emotions if

she chooses to do so. According to Battaly (2011), Jackie simply lacks the motivation to be truly empathetic and this shows that empathy is a skill rather than a virtue.

On the contrary, we believe that, though Battaly readily surmises that her example illustrates that empathy is a skill rather than a virtue, she fails to consider the possibility that empathy could be a virtue and that Jackie does not possess this virtue because, although she is competent at the activity characteristic of this trait, she lacks the epistemic motivation that is required for it. To better explain our argument, let us consider again the case of John. John has the competence that is required for an agent to be open-minded. He is able to consider other people's perspectives and take them under serious consideration. However, John despises his brother Michael. Blinded by his hatred, John is consciously not allowing himself to seriously consider what his brother says. He knows that Michael is an expert in sports, but he purposely denies seriously listening to anything Michael has to say. John clearly lacks the virtue of open-mindedness. He has the competence to evaluate alternative viewpoints with an open mind but, in the case of his brother, lacks the epistemic motivation to do so competently. On the contrary, he only does a poor job at being open-minded and that leads to poor results. Similar to John, Jackie has the competence to engage in empathetic understanding, but when it comes to her sister, she lacks the motivation to do so competently. Correspondingly, Michael lacks the virtue of open mindedness and Jackie lacks the virtue of empathy.

Lastly, Battaly discusses not aiming at the good as a final reason for categorizing empathy as a skill. For her, the virtuous person aims at what appears to be good to them and the ends at which they aim are objectively good (Battaly, 2011, p. 299). She argues that empathy is a skill – and not an intellectual virtue – because the person who engages in the activity characteristic of empathy does not necessarily do so out of her desire for the acquisition of epistemic ends. For example, one could attempt to gain insight into another person's emotions and beliefs for some ulterior non-epistemic end such as getting rich. But why should we conclude that empathy is a skill simply because some agent who is competent at the activity characteristic of this trait engages in it out of her desire for wealth rather than the truth? Could we not simply posit instead that the agent who is competent at the activity characteristic of empathy but lacks the proper epistemic motivation for doing so, does not possess the intellectual virtue of empathy because she lacks the necessary epistemic motivation that is required for the possession of this virtue? After all, according to most (if not all) virtue responsibilists, the goodness of intellectual virtues is located in the goodness of epistemic motivations (see, e.g., Baehr, 2016; Roberts & Wood, 2007; Zagzebski, 1996), and one cannot possibly possess intellectual

virtues (irrespectively of whether they are competent at the characteristic activity of a given virtue or not) if one does not possess perfect epistemic motivations.

Battaly (2011) discusses an example to back up her argument. Katie, who is a therapist, is quite good at "stepping into her clients" shoes' and seeing things from their perspective. However, Katie does not do so out of her desire for the truth but out of a non-epistemic motive – her desire to earn money (i.e., be paid by her clients). Battaly (2011, p. 300) concludes, on the basis of this example, that "since truth is an objectively good end, one cannot be empathic, so construed, without having at least one end that is in fact epistemically good. But this is insufficient for virtue possession because empathizers may also have competing or ulterior motives that are epistemically bad".

But is it not the same with open-mindedness? One may keep an open mind out of an ulterior motive to earn money (rather than acquire epistemic goods). Consider, for example, an agent named Christin who is characterized by her competency to engage in the activity characteristic of open-mindedness. She is willing and able to seriously consider alternative viewpoints to her own. However, there are many instances where Christin exhibits an open mind for some ulterior motive other than the truth – i.e., the truth is not the end goal of her actions. For instance, Christin keeps an open mind during a business meeting in order to be able to evaluate and make the most profitable choice. She is interested in knowing the truth (e.g., that the stock market is going to skyrocket) but is not interested in the truth for its own sake but for the purpose of making money. In other words, she is acting in a very similar manner to Katie who has an ulterior motive for acquiring the truth via empathy. Our view is that both Christin and Katie meet the competence conditions of open mindedness and empathy correspondingly but lack the motivation necessary for the possession of these virtues.

IV. Empathy as an intellectual virtue: Virtue and skill

Thus far we have taken for granted the view that skills and virtues are mutually exclusive – i.e., skills cannot be virtues [15]. Battaly (2011) argues for this view on the basis that skills lack the motivation that is necessary for a quality to be classified as a virtue. Battaly's three reasons for concluding that empathy is a skill rather than a virtue narrow down to a lack of epistemic motivations: the agent is not motivated to acquire epistemic goods and hence (i) foregoes opportunities to do so, (ii) makes deliberate mistakes and (iii) has non-epistemic ulterior motives.

Still, it is wrong to assume that all scholars working in virtue theory accept this sharp distinction between skills and virtues. For Stichter (2011, 2016) challenges the view that virtues involve certain motivations while skills merely entail a capacity to act well. He argues that skill acquisition requires certain motivations. This is also true in the case of empathy. For an agent to become skilled in gaining insight into other people's emotions and beliefs, it is not enough that she has the capacity to develop this skill – she also needs to have the necessary epistemic drive for doing so. Moreover, Stichter argues that the performance of a certain skill by a given agent can be evaluated on whether they are "committed to achieving the ends of their practice" (Stichter, 2016, p. 435). Thus, in the case of the therapist who exhibits empathy for some ulterior motive other than the acquisition of truth, one could maintain that they lack the skill of empathy because they are not committed to achieving the ends of this practice.

Stichter's (2011, 2016) viewpoint builds on Annas (1995, 2003, 2011) arguments according to which every intellectual and moral virtue involves the possession of certain skills. Annas' position[16] also partly informs Baehr's (2016, p. 91) understanding of the competence principle of intellectual virtues. As already noted in the previous section, according to Baehr, for an agent to possess an intellectual virtue, they need to be competent at the activity characteristic of this virtue – they need to possess a certain competence/skill. Baehr also points out that it is due to the different skills/competences that are characteristic of each virtue that we can differentiate between virtues such as open-mindedness, attentiveness, and curiousness. Every epistemic virtue ultimately aims at the possession of epistemic goods, but each one is characterized by a different skill/competence – i.e., "an open-minded person is competent or skilled at one type of virtue-relevant activity, while an intellectually attentive person is skilled at a different type of activity, and the curious person at yet a different type" (Baehr, 2016, p. 91). The idea that a certain skill is necessary for the possession of an epistemic virtue undermines Battaly's (2011) argument that skills and virtues are mutually exclusive.

In the previous section, in spite of taking for granted the view that skills and virtues are mutually exclusive, we have argued that empathy is an intellectual virtue. Still, instead of refuting one by one Battaly's reasons for maintaining that empathy is a skill, one could simply side with those scholars challenging the viewpoint that virtues and skills are mutually exclusive – and hence argue, contra-Battaly, that being a skill does not preclude empathy from being considered an intellectual virtue (viz. empathy is an intellectual virtue characterized by the skill to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs).

V. Concluding remarks

To sum up, our main goal in this paper was to classify empathy as an intellectual virtue. Following scholars such as Goldie (2000) and Hodges and Myers (2007), we argued that empathy is a trait that enables the agents who possess it to gain insight into other people's emotions and beliefs. The agent who possesses the virtue of empathy is (i) driven to engage in acts of empathy by her epistemic desires, (ii) takes pleasure in the activity characteristic of empathy, (iii) is competent at the activity characteristic of this trait and (iv) has good judgment as to when it is epistemically appropriate to engage in empathy. Having established that empathy meets all the necessary conditions for a trait to be classified as an intellectual virtue, we proceeded to discuss Battaly's (2011) reasons for maintaining that empathy is a skill rather than a virtue: (i) foregoing opportunities, (ii) deliberate errors and (iii) not aiming at the good. We discussed all three reasons and argued, contra Battaly, that the agent who possesses the epistemic virtue of empathy (a) sometimes foregoes opportunities to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy because it is the virtuous thing to do, (b) does not make deliberate errors and (c) her actions are always ultimately aiming at epistemic goods. Lastly, we discussed Stichter's (2011, 2016) and Annas's (1995, 2003, 2011) arguments according to which moral and intellectual virtues involve certain skills and highlighted the fact that one could use their arguments in order to challenge Battaly's (2011) sharp distinction between virtues and skills.

Notes

1. "Like Aristotelian moral virtues, the intellectual virtues require that one perform virtuous actions, possess virtuous motivations, and hit the mean".
2. We are using the terms "intellectual virtue" and "epistemic virtue" interchangeably throughout the paper.
3. Baehr (2016) identifies four components that are necessary and jointly sufficient for a trait to be classified as an intellectual virtue: (i) the motivational dimension, (ii) the affective dimension, (iii) the competence dimension and (iv) the judgment dimension. These four components are the building blocks of every intellectual virtue.
4. For more on the virtue of curiosity see, Ross (2020) and Watson (2015).
5. One might use their competency in the characteristic activity of empathy to inflict harm – e.g., a torturer employing it to discover their victim's "weaknesses" in order to inflict greater pain to them. This is a case of vicious employment of empathy. The agent is motivated to act out of some vicious motive (i.e., harm others) rather than for the acquisition of epistemic goods.
6. In contrast, for example, to a counselor who is motivated to acquire the truth about their client's state of mind through empathy but nonetheless finds no enjoyment in the process.

7. The virtuous person takes pleasure in the activity characteristic of (cognitive) empathy, and this pleasure does not stem from and/or hinge on sharing the feeling of others and/or caring for them.
8. This relates to Battaly's (2018a, 2018b) recent arguments according to which closed-mindedness is a virtue in hostile epistemic environments.
9. The virtue of empathy is an acquired trait. One is not born possessing this virtue. One acquires it through practice and experience. It may be the case that the capacity for empathy is part of the human biological endowment (viz., we are born with this capacity) but been born with a certain capacity and employing this capacity virtuously are two different things (among other things, the latter requires practical wisdom and experience).
10. It is important to note that scholars such as Prinz (2011) and Bloom (2016) have recently criticized empathy. Still, their critiques are aimed at emotional empathy (sharing in feelings and thoughts and caring for others), and as such our approach is immune from their criticisms. We do not make the claim that emotional empathy motivates us to do good and/or brings about good (which is the claim/argument that Prinz and Bloom criticize) but that cognitive empathy is an intellectual virtue (with its value stemming from the agent's motivation to acquire epistemic goods).
11. Scholars such as Watson (2015) have identified intellectual virtues that are not characterized by the agent's ability to acquire epistemic goods on a reliable basis but by the agent's competence in the characteristic activities of these virtues.
12. One may disagree with us and insist that reliability is a necessary condition of intellectual virtues. This, however, would not preclude them from accepting our overall argument according to which empathy is an intellectual virtue. It would simply require one to challenge the view that empathy lacks epistemic reliability (see the 1st paragraph of section II. C on how one may go about doing so) and argue that those who are not reliably successful at acquiring epistemic goods through the characteristic activity of the virtue of empathy do not possess the virtue in question.
13. For more on this see, also Kristjánsson (2014) who seems to agree with Battaly's (2011) arguments.
14. It is worth noting that one can forego the opportunity to engage in the activity characteristic of empathy *although it would be virtuous to be empathetic* (e.g., ignoring a person in distress because the agent is late for work). Having the practical wisdom to determine when to exhibit empathy and when to forego the opportunity to exhibit empathy is a feature that distinguishes between agents who possess the virtue of empathy and agents who do not possess it. The virtuous empathetic person would be, in the vast majority of cases (if not always), in a position to recognize when they should engage in the activity characteristic of empathy and would engage in it even if it inconveniences them – e.g., even if they end up being late for work.
15. Besides Battaly (2011), this view is upheld by scholars such as Wallace (1978), Zagzebski (1996), Rees and Webber (2014), and Klein (2014).
16. Annas (see, e.g., Annas, 2003) is putting forward a modernized version of the Platonic and Stoic understanding of virtue as a skill – as opposed to Battaly (2011) who is following the Aristotelian conception of virtue and understands virtue and skill as mutually exclusive. For more on the Platonic conception of virtue and its significance for virtue epistemology, see, Kotsonis (2021b).

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