Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects   Graduate Center

9-2016

Virtue's Web: The Virtue of Empathic Attunement and the Need for a Relational Foundation

Georgina D. Campelia
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

Virtue's Web:

The Virtue of Empathic Attunement and the Need for a Relational

Foundation

by

Georgina D. Campelia

2016

Virtue's Web:

The Virtue of Empathic Attunement and the Need for a Relational Foundation

by

Georgina D Campelia

_____   _____

                                                          Jesse Prinz, Ph.D.

                                              Chair of the Examining Committee

_____   _____

                                                          Iakovos Vasiliou, Ph.D.

                                                          Executive Officer

                                              Supervisory Committee:

                                       Virginia Held, Ph.D. (Supervisor)

                                              Iakovos Vasiliou, Ph.D.

                                              Carol Gould, Ph.D.

                                              Linda Alcoff, Ph.D.

                                              Jesse Prinz, Ph.D.

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Virtue's Web:

The Virtue of Empathic Attunement and the Need for a Relational Foundation

by

Georgina D Campelia

Supervisor: Virginia Held, Ph.D.

This dissertation focuses on two questions. First, is empathy a virtue? Second, if it is, then why is it neglected, even ostracized, in contemporary discourses on virtue? In response to the first question, this dissertation develops and defends a distinction between empathic practices and moral excellence in those practices, which is termed 'empathic attunement'. This excellence is a virtue not because of its connection to standard altruistic behavior, but because it is a unique way of caring for, respecting, and understanding others' emotional experiences in response to the need to be emotionally understood and the good of being emotionally understood. This conceptualization of empathic attunement leads to the second question of why empathy is largely absent from virtue ethics. The fault lies partly with the standard dispositionalist framework for virtue, which takes the virtues to be psychological states of agents, rather than relationships agents hold with relevant persons and social structures. Empathic attunement is dependent on reliable empathic connections with others and, therefore, better suited to a conceptualization of virtue that more deeply incorporates these relational ties. Accordingly, a new account of character traits as embodied relational dispositions is explicated and its potential for expansion to other virtues is explored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great deal to my colleagues and students at the Montefiore Einstein Center for Bioethics. I would not have survived the heavily theoretical work of this doctorate without the constant grounding I found in their work and teaching.

I would like to thank my family for being there and being interested no matter how little they thought they knew about what I was doing. They have been a constant source of love and, every now and then, a much needed pull down from the clouds. I would especially like to thank Nick for always patiently listening to philosophical rants and pushing my arguments. He and Agnes have kept me sane and balanced.

Lastly, I hope that this project will offer a small step in the direction of social justice. Knowing that virtue in the world is rendered more difficult and even impossible to some because of social norms was my strongest motivating factor for completing this theoretical work and setting myself up to make practical change.

Virtue's Web: The Virtue of Empathic Attunement and the Need for a Relational

Foundation

CONTENTS:

Introduction:

Dispositions, Relationality, and the Possession of Virtue

Recent research in philosophy, psychology and neuroscience encourages us to revisit virtue at the very basic level of the possession of a character trait. Conceptualizations of the self are shifting away from atomism and independency, and towards dependency, relationality, and particularism. Feminist philosophy has developed and defended accounts of the self that are constitutively interrelational and interdependent. The situationist critique of character is built upon the contention that one's psychology and actions are integrally tied to situational factors. Contemporary work in social neuroscience and psychology has questioned the independence of habit and character, and is finding evidence that habits and characters significantly depend on social relations and social structures.

Thus far, these areas of research have developed along parallel trajectories with little interdisciplinary communication. The ontology of virtue, however, presents an intriguing locus for more cooperative philosophical examination. To what extent is the standard dispositionalist account of virtue amenable to a relational perspective of the self? In what regards does it reflect the kind of psychological independence that is criticized by feminist ethics, questioned by the situationist critique, and at odds with some contemporary work in social-neuroscience and psychology?

These are questions that require a lifetime of work to answer. Here, I intend to begin the examination through the lens of empathy. Work on empathy cuts across these academic disciplines. The *feeling with* others that is characteristic of empathy paints a picture of the human mind and human interaction that is deeply interdependent and relationally constituted. Feminist philosophers have relied on it in developing care-based ethics and feminist

epistemologies. Social-neuroscientists and psychologists have employed it to argue for the interconnectivity and interdependence of human minds and a social, even altruistic, understanding of human nature. Yet, while empathy is deeply associated with relational conceptions of the self and frequently tied to care, few have tried to argue that it is a virtue. In fact, some have rejected empathy from having any fundamental role in morality, let alone virtue.

Empathy, I submit, embodies a divergence between relational ontologies of the self and the standard dispositionalist account of virtue. Its seeming incompatibility with virtue is partly a result of ambiguity in its relation to caring practices and behaviors, but also partly a result of its relationality. It depends on the emotional openness and trust of others, it is made possible by relations with others and only complete in relation to others. But the standard dispositionalist account of virute, while significantly cognizant of social forces, still clings to a kind of psychological independence that is poorly suited to the practice of *feeling with*.

So, inspired by the relational self that is taking form in a variety of philosophical and scientific discourses, my objective is to develop and defend a virtue unique to empathy, what I will call *empathic attunement*, and to reconsider the standard dispositionalist framework in light of this important virtue. I will accomplish this in two parts. First, I develop a distinction between *empathic practices* and *empathic attunement,* and defend the latter as a kind of virtue. Second, I draw on feminist accounts of the relational self, as well as ongoing work in social-neuroscience and psychology, to challenge the standard dispositionalist account of virtue and sketch a new ontology for virtues of character that is better suited to *empathic attunement*.

0.1   Empathy: A Locus for Discovering Relationality in Virtue

In Part I, the virtue of *empathic attunement* is developed and defended. I begin, in Chapter 1, with a new taxonomy to organize the vast array of accounts of empathy and position

my own. I construct a distinction between *empathic practices* and the virtue of *empathic attunement. Empathic practices* are defined according to certain conditions that might be met by degree. It is within these practices that one finds both viciousness and virtue. A torturer, for example, might come to know how another feels so as to inflict greater harm, while a nurse might engage in empathic understanding as a mode of care. It is the nurse's concerned, reflective, open, and attentive empathy that is revered as morally excellent. To identify virtue in empathy, one must find a categorical way of distinguishing the nurse from the torturer and articulate how the empathic character of that nurse is constitutive of virtue.

Accordingly, Chapter 2 develops a unique distinction between broader *empathic practices* and the particular character of the *empathically attuned.* Drawing from intuitive cases and the literature on empathy, I establish conditions that separate the *empathically attuned* person. With these conditions in hand, I articulate and defend the *virtue* of empathic attunement. As examined more deeply in Chapter 3, those who reject any significant role for empathy in morality tend to focus on its lack of a necessary causal or conceptual tie to standard caring or altruistic motivations and behaviors. I maintain, however, that this line of reasoning is guilty of vagueness in reference to 'caring' and 'altruism'. These terms reflect a wide range of motivations, attitudes, activities, practices, and virtues, many of which are neither causally nor conceptually tied together with any necessity. One might, for example, always intend to ease others' pain, but fail to understand how to relieve pain and, therefore, fail to carry out the motive. Alternatively, one might be quite excellent at being patient with children (and so excellent at caring in one sense), but quite terrible at imaginative play (and so not very good at caring in another sense). I resolve some of this ambiguity by identifying the kind of care that is unique to empathy. I maintain that because *empathic attunement* is a distinctive way of connecting with others, caring for others, and respecting the emotional experiences of others, it is deserving of the name *virtue.* Finally, in Chapter 3, I elaborate on this point by defending it against common

critiques of empathy: (1) that it can be used for harm or accompanied by ill intentions, (2) that it can be overused or detrimental to the self, and (3) that it is merely a capacity or skill. While broader practices of empathy might be guilty of these faults, the conditions of empathic attunement set apart those empathic practices that both avoid these pitfalls and are integral to flourishing.

If empathic attunement accurately captures what most find morally praiseworthy about certain types of empathic attitudes, interactions, and relations, then it is worth asking why empathy has been marginalized in virtue ethics. It is this question that structures Part II of the thesis. I contend that empathy's absence from virtue ethics is due, at least in part, to the inevitably relational nature of empathy. Virtue ethics, while cognizant of the relational dependence involved in developing virtue and the social nature of flourishing, has a much more independent and even atomistic ontology of the possession and maintenance of virtue. As such, it is poorly set up for acknowledging the moral excellence of a trait like empathic attunement, which so heavily depends on others, on their honesty, openness, and participation.

0.2 Relationality: Motivations from Feminist Philosophy

Empathic attunement inspires a revision of the ontology of virtue that takes into account a relational ontology of persons. Although in many ways virtue theory already incorporates social relations, what it means to possess a particular virtue is not conceptualized in terms of relations, but rather in terms of psychological states of agents. This neglects the fundamental ways in which our virtues can depend on others, are structured by and constituted through relations with others, and find strength through social structures. This argument begins, in Chapter 4, with an analysis of the prevalent view in contemporary virtue ethics: the dispositionalist account of virtue. I contend this view is too individualistic. The virtues are located within individual agents, under the individual's control, and significantly detached from social

relations. As such, the prevalent conceptualization of the possession of virtue fails to capture the social nature of both the strength and structure of character and virtue.

In the case of empathic attunement, and potentially other virtues, it will be important to shift our stance on the ontological structure. In Chapter 5, I turn to a relational account of the self to help motivate and construct this ontological shift. Borrowing from the work of other philosophers, particularly Virginia Held, Carol Gould, and Jennifer Nedelsky, I formulate a view of the self as always partly dependent, relationally constituted but not determined, and embodied: *embodied relational identity*. According to this view of the self, one is never entirely independent. Even in moments of acting knowingly and decidedly, such actions will always be partly dependent on socially constructed capacities, on social recognition and support, and on knowledge and habits structured and continuously reinforced by others. Moreover, one's character will always be partly constituted by one's relations with others. Character traits are developed and honed with others, reinforced by social ties and recognition, and (insofar as they are chosen) are chosen with others and based on knowledge gained from others. Lastly, the self is embodied, but this does not mean that it is separable from aspects of its identity that exist (in part) external to that body. The boundary is porous.

It is this shift toward the relational self that pushes the limits of the standard dispositionalist account and can help ground a new ontology. Following the work of care ethicists such as Virginia Held, Martha Minow, Margaret Urban Walker, and Joan Tronto, I will employ 'relationality' in order to do justice to the relations involved in the possession of virtue. Moreover, following the work of feminist philosophers like Sandra Bartky, Claudia Card, and Lisa Tessman, my account is motivated by the systematic and profoundly influential nature of social norms, particularly how they can obstruct and facilitate particular traits of character. Although I will only draw on this discourse rather than engage with it directly, it played a strong hand in motivating my project and I will return to this motivation in my final conclusion.

With this view of an *embodied relational identity* in hand, I am able to sketch a shift in the ontology a virtue. In Chapter 6, I suggest moving from an internal psychological state to a web of relations. This will allow for a deeper recognition of the ways in which a person and, more importantly, her virtue, depends on and is constituted by relations she holds with other persons and with social structures such as norms and laws. Incorporating relationality into the foundation of virtue will help to elucidate how the possession of virtue can be thoroughly intertwined with aspects of virtue that are typically taken to be external to the person, such as other persons and social norms. Moreover, it will provide an ontological structure more appropriate to the virtue of empathic attunement.

0.3 Character, Virtue, and Locating the Shifting Ground

In Chapter 6, I focus on two kinds of relations: (1) relations between persons and (2) relations between persons and social structures. I take these relations to be constitutive of the possession of virtue in two ways. First, they partly constitute the strength of a given virtue; i.e. the social relations necessary to maintaining a particular virtue over time and in different circumstances. Second, these relations are partly constitutive of a virtue's structure; i.e. the particular ways in which a given person chooses virtue and embodies it over time. This shift in ontology will not stray from the long held view that virtue is a state of character, a firm and unchanging state. In this regard, I follow the vast amount of work in virtue ethics that identifies virtue with character, and character with deep and enduring traits. Like Nancy Sherman, I take character traits to be 'permanent' in the sense that they "explain not merely why someone acted this way now, but why someone can be counted on to act in certain ways" (Sherman, 1989, p. 1). So, unlike the concerns of the situationist critique of virtue, I will not challenge the idea that persons have characters or that traits of character are embedded within us in such a way that they persist over time and can be counted on by those around us. They are ways of responding

to the world in attitude and action that others see and expect in us, they identify us, and are so embedded in us that change is unlikely without significant effort and help from our social environment.

But what does it mean to possess a trait of character, particularly a morally excellent trait of character? The picture that is depicted on the standard dispositionalist account is agent-centered in a way that neglects external forces in the structure and strength of virtue. Even on accounts of virtue that pay significant due to the importance of social structures and interpersonal relations in upbringing, those same social forces are lost in discussions of fully formed character and virtue. Nancy Sherman, for instance, describes how the virtuous agent constructs a conception of the good life as follows:

> Ultimately, through an agent's construal of her environment, through her choice of friends, through her selection of how and in what way to act on her commitments, she weaves a life that expresses her character and aims at her conception of happiness. (Sherman, 1989, p. 10)

Here, one finds something characteristic of many such accounts: an agent whose virtue (particularly her practical wisdom in this case) is sourced (largely, even entirely) from within. It is because *she chooses* the right friends, not (in part) because *the right friends choose and support* her, that she "weaves" a flourishing life. Thus, Sherman's language (like other contemporary virtue ethicists) locates the possession of virtue in the agent's psychological state, rather than incorporating the external forces that also play roles in the strength of a character trait, its persistence over time, its identification with a particular person, and how it is understood and chosen.

Now, one might object that virtue ethics is already fundamentally relational. As Lawrence Blum puts it,

Both Aristotle and MacIntyre emphasize the fundamentally social nature of virtue — the way that particular forms of social life are linked with particular virtues. (Blum, 1998, p. 231)

The development or learning of virtue is widely accepted as fundamentally social. Aristotle makes it clear in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.1[1] that the virtues are acquired through habituation with the help of teachers (*NE* 1103b12) and that habituation from early childhood is crucial (*NE* 1103b23-25). Further, in Book I.3, he argues that one must have been brought up well in order to be a good student of ethics (*NE* 1094b3-8). The development of good habits, which occurs significantly at the hands of others (parents, teachers, etc.), is vital to the development of virtue. The sociality of this development is echoed in contemporary theory. It is widely recognized that we depend on others to help us develop the right habits and that our ethical education relies heavily on those around us. We may develop certain habits by being told how to behave (e.g. parents routinely forcing a child to eat her vegetables) but also by watching those around us and mimicking their behavior consciously and unconsciously.

Further, perhaps obviously so, many of the virtues depend on other persons and social structures for their manifestation. When we act courageously, we do so in the face of others who threaten us. When we act beneficently, we require recipients of that beneficence. We also require certain social structures, such as laws (*NE* 1129b15-25, 1130b23-26) and norms, to enable virtuous activity. Without basic norms of trust, for instance, we may be so concerned with our own safety that we become unable to look after the well-being of others. These are points that I will return to later on, particularly in Chapters 5, 6 and the Conclusion, but it is important to note that this linking of social life to the virtues in the prevailing view is typically in *development* and *activity*, while not in *possession*.

---

[1] Here, and throughout, I will be using the translation by Broadie, S. and Rowe, C. (2002).

The new ontology developed in Chapter 6 extends the import of social relations, particularly our dependence on other persons and social structures, beyond its role in the development and manifestation of virtue. I contend that social relations and social structures are constitutive of the possession of virtue as well. This position has been suggested by a couple of virtue theorists, but has yet to be defended. First, Lawrence Blum recognizes five potential connections between virtue and community that go beyond habituation or learning. Of these potential connections, two relate directly to what I will claim about possession: community as "sustaining" and community as "agency-constituting" (Blum, 1998, p. 232). In the first, community as sustaining, Blum (following MacIntyre) discusses the possibility of linking community to virtue so that one's community is necessary to sustaining or maintaining the virtues that one has acquired. In the second, agency-constituting, it is suggested that one's community is partly constitutive of one's moral identity. Blum does not expressly defend either position, but uses an example (the heroism of a village in Le Chambon, which sheltered 3,000 refugees during Nazi occupation) to demonstrate how a community can significantly affect the choices of individual members. The suggestion is that particular norms and social relations can allow for and encourage heroism. The community can do this both by influencing beliefs and values critical to choosing, and by facilitating actions accordingly.

Similarly, Robin Dillon recognizes greater potential for social relations in virtue. According to Dillon,

> …vice, virtue, and character needs to be revised in light of the recognition by feminist theorists, among others, that character is not simply a matter of what is inside the individual, for which the individual is wholly and solely responsible, but is also a matter of interpersonal, social, cultural and political contexts… (Dillon, 2012a, p. 90)

Dillon proposes an integration between virtue ethics and the relationality of feminist philosophy. She is primarily concerned with the reasons for developing a "critical character theory" so as to

centralize and analyze the effects of unjust power imbalances on moral character (Dillon, 2012b, p. 85). She is strongly motivated by the damage that domination and oppression inflicts on one's life and character and she sees relational perspectives of the self as essential to rectifying these harms. However, like Blum, there is room for developing and defending the claim.

Thus, inspired in part by Dillon and Blum, in part by work in feminist theory, and in part by contemporary work in social-neuroscience and psychology, I develop and defend a particular way of integrating social relations into the basic ontological structure of virtue. In the end, my objective is to argue for an integration between feminist conceptualizations of relationally and virtue ethics through the particular lens of empathy and within the specific scope of the ontology of excellence in character. I believe that this account holds potential for other virtues. Thus, in the Conclusion, I provide some preliminary reasons for expanding my conceptualization of *embodied relational dispositions* to other important virtues. I hope that my arguments persuade the reader that empathic attunement is a virtue and that it is time for a revision of the ontology of virtue so as to recognize the interrelational and interdependent nature of this and other important virtues.

Part I

Empathy's Web

Chapter 1

Empathy Reconsidered: A Brief Taxonomy and a New Perspective

Even so simple and seemingly direct a claim as "I know just how you feel" is potentially both caring, supportive, affirmative of mutuality, and coercive, intrusive, cooptive.
(Code, 1995, p. 130)

1.1   Introduction: Empathy Confusion

I know just how you feel. It is a claim that can conjure deep affiliation and moral praise or immediate question and spurn. On the one hand we can consider respectful partnerships, loving parents, supportive friendships, and conscientious classrooms. Within these interpersonal relations, one can find relief and appreciation, even love, in that empathic expression alone. It can demonstrate concern and respect, it can reflect resonance in defining experiences, and it can deepen a relationship. On the other hand, we can find that same expression in marketing, in exploitive business relations, in abusive partnerships, and even in torture. The car salesclerk will seem to empathize with your fears of safety, the politician with your experiences of racism and sexism, the military recruiter with your love for your family, the survivor of abuse with a violent partner. So, that same expression can come from a place of deep self-neglect, it can reflect deception and misunderstanding, it can cause retreat and spurn.

This empathy confusion has been taken up by theoretical discourse and empirical research. In philosophy, there are ongoing efforts to defend empathy's relevance to theory of mind and morality, as well as strong objections to any such theoretical or practical implications. In psychology and social-neuroscience, while many argue that empathy is fundamental to human development and interpersonal relations, others claim that it has no bearing at all on psychological development or on the biology of intersubjectivity. However, there is room for

middle ground here. Where we can appreciate these divergences in empathy's manifestations, but also define and defend some of the value it delivers.

My central project is to account for a virtue that is unique to empathy, but empathy's place in morality is entangled with questions about its phenomenological and biological realities. So, I will begin by clarifying current ontological approaches as well as my own conceptualization of the term. The ontological framework proposed here is meant to account for empathy in a way that is conversant with phenomenology, psychology, and neurology. It is not my intention to provide a reductionist view of what constitutes empathy, nor to argue for unfiltered moral value. Rather, I hope to develop an ontological structure that accommodates multiple conceptualizations of empathy, and provides a better foundation for grappling with the apparent moral disagreement. Specifically, I contend that we should think of empathy as a *practice,* rather than a specific mental activity (e.g. an emotion) or a narrow form of interaction (e.g. mirroring). As such, a spectrum of possible meanings of "I know just how you feel" is made available, while at the same time allowing for certain distinctions within the practice. Particularly, while many psychological states and interpersonal relations reflect empathic practices to some degree or another, only *excellence* in *knowing how others feel* will count as virtue. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let us begin with some standard distinctions and skepticism about empathy, before we move toward this new perspective of empathy as a practice.

1.2 Empathy: A Brief History and Taxonomy

Empathy's philosophical history largely begins within 'sympathy'. In the work of Adam Smith and David Hume, one finds detailed accounts of sympathy that contain whispers of what we now mean by 'empathy'. Namely, for these philosophers, the term 'sympathy' seems to encompass both *feeling for* (i.e. contemporary 'sympathy') and *feeling into/with* (i.e. contemporary 'empathy'). As Hume tells us,

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (Hume, 2006, p. 206)

Likewise,

Upon the whole, there remains nothing, which can give us an esteem for power and riches, and a contempt for meanness and poverty, except the principle of *sympathy*, by which we enter into the sentiments of the rich and poor, and partake of their pleasure and uneasiness. (Hume, 2006, p. 234)

For Hume, sympathy is about "the communication of passions", it is common to other animals, and a significant part of human nature (Hume, 2006, p. 255). Adam Smith's account of sympathy is similar to Hume's in regard to the object of sympathy, i.e. affect, feeling, or passions.

Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever. (Smith, 1759/2002, p. 13)

But Smith takes us away from the automaticity of Hume's sympathy and into the realm of a more controlled and reflective form of sympathy,

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something, which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (Smith, 1759/2002, p. 12)

One can see how both the more automatic/natural process described in Hume's account and the more imaginative/reflective process found in Smith's dip into a variety of ways in which we

feel with others, e.g. sense another's distress or conceptually grasp another's

phenomenological experience. Today, empathy is taken to refer to only those cases of feeling

with others in which we understand (to some extent or another) how it is that the other feels in

her own shoes. But it is not surprising that the distinction is so new. After all, it is often the case

that emotionally engaging with others incorporates both feeling for another (sympathy),

resonating another's emotions (contagion, resonance, mimicry), feeling into (projection) and

understanding how another feels/ feeling with (empathy).

The division between sympathy and empathy began with Theodor Lipps and the

translation of Lipps' term *einfühlung* by Edward Titchener. As Lipps is often understood,

einfühlung refers to *feeling into*, i.e. projecting oneself into another's experience. For example,

Max Scheler analyzes Lipps' case of a spectator and acrobat as follows,

> Thus, according to [Lipps], the absorbed spectator of an acrobat in a circus turn
>
> identifies himself with the performer, whose movements he reproduces within himself, in
>
> the character of an acrobat. Lipps believes that only the spectator's real self remains
>
> distinct here, his conscious self having sunk itself completely in that of the acrobat.
>
> (Scheler, 1954, p. 18)

Here, empathy is taken to be the kind of emotional engagement that is constituted by *feeling*

into/with. For Lipps, it takes on a form of projection, where one projects oneself into the other,

feeling as one would in the other's shoes. But Scheler is critical on this point, as he worries that

such feeling into does not or cannot preserve the difference and uniqueness of the selves

involved.

It is this critical stance toward emotional infection and projection that marks another leap

at the turn of the 20th Century in German phenomenology.[2] In Scheler's conceptualization of

genuine fellow-feeling and contemporary accounts of empathy, we see empathy transform into

---

[2] (Husserl, 1989; Stein, 1989; Zahavi, 2001)

feeling as the other does and *knowing how the other feels*, as opposed to emotional infection or projection (as in Lipps' work), or sympathy (as in Hume and Smith's work). In *The Nature of Sympathy,* Scheler is critical of the lack of precision in the use of the term 'sympathy' and canvases the differences between sympathy, empathy, emotional sharing, and emotional contagion.[3] It is here that Scheler directs us towards a substantial problem with Lipps' version of *einfühlung*. Namely, it does not entail understanding how the other feels as *other*. Projecting oneself into another's perspective or doing what Peter Goldie calls 'in-her-shoes imagining' (Goldie, 2014) can be important morally and epistemically, but this is quite different from knowing how she feels in her own shoes. And getting it wrong can be morally detrimental (Code, 1995). As Hume astutely recognizes above, another's subjective experience can be quite different from one's own. Making unreflective and self-centered assumptions about how another feels, has a long history of reinforcing unwarranted privilege and power, and otherwise causing emotional damage. False, patronizing, and selfishly motivated claims of *I know how you feel*, have been monstrously detrimental to the victims and survivors of imperialism and colonization, and continues to strengthen unjust power imbalances through false mutuality and fabricated empathic knowledge (Code, 1995, p. 130). For these reasons, contemporary discourse largely understands empathy as *feeling with* rather than *feeling into* (i.e. Lipps' projection).

    And the battles over the meaning, phenomenology, and moral relevance of empathy continue. Though Edward Titchener's first introduction of *empathy* (Titchener, 1909) translated and employed Lipps' understanding of einfühlung; today, it is largely agreed that empathy is a form of emotionally engaging with others that can be differentiated from emotional resonance or contagion, mimicry, projection and emotional sharing. In contrast to catching another's

---

[3] For Scheler, it is *love,* not sympathy or empathy, that grounds moral theory. But what he means by 'love' is not so unlike what many of us take to be a form of empathy (I will return to this point in Chapter 2).

happiness unaware of the source, or projecting yourself into another's experience (Lipps' *feeling into* the tightrope walker), or two parents emotionally sharing in the pain of a loss of a child described by Scheler (Scheler, 1954, p. 12), empathy is taken to involve some minimal level of self-other differentiation. Maintaining such differentiation is necessary (though not sufficient) to understanding how the *other* feels as opposed to merely feeling the same feeling or imagining what it would be like to be in her shoes. Accordingly, while some will say that emotional contagion, resonance and mimicry are "low-level empathy" or a developmental step towards empathy (Coplan & Goldie, 2014; de Waal, 2009; Hoffman, 2000), 'full-fledged' empathy will entail some appreciation of the difference in self and other, even while taking up the other's cognitive-affective experience. It is in this way that empathy becomes *understanding/knowing how another feels*, rather than *feeling into* (projection)*, or *feeling one with* (sharing)*, or *feeling as* (resonance/contagion)*. But this still leaves many questions about empathy unanswered.

The self-other differentiation that separates empathy from other forms of emotional engagement is just a first step in understanding the term. In what follows, I will investigate the meaning of empathy as *understanding/knowing how another feels.* As one can see from the start, "I know how you feel" is an ambiguous claim. Does it imply that I have some sense of how that experience might seem/feel *to you*? To what extent is *feeling with* possible and how is it accomplished? Can I access *your* phenomenological-biological experience rather than a parallel experience of my own for comparison? And, ultimately, how can we square our intuitive grasp of empathy with scientific knowledge of its processes, and create a more precise ontology?

A thorough investigation of the literature on empathy reveals three primary *dimensions* of empathy:

(A) Empathy's aim: what empathy aims at, its teleology, or how it is directed.

(B) Empathic processes: how one achieves the aim, the processes distinctive of empathy.

(C) Empathic outcomes: what can result from empathic processes.

Across these three dimensions, one finds four fundamental *divides*:

(1) the extent to which empathy entails cognition or affect,

(2) whether we simulate emotional experiences or make inferences by analogy,

(3) whether empathy is automatic or controlled, and

(4) whether empathy entails isomorphic experiences.

I will proceed by exploring the first of these divides as it is the most fundamental and significantly informs the three dimensions of empathy. Many theorists, after all, begin with a definition of empathy that takes a side in the cognition-affect divide before turning to the intricacies of their views. But a discussion of this first divide quickly reveals the three *dimensions* of empathy that I have categorized here and calls for further analysis. Accordingly, I will turn to those three dimensions, exploring them each in turn. Understanding these three dimensions will entail explicating the controversy found in each of the four divides. Considering each dimension in light of the four divides will help to clarify the contemporary discourse and the positioning of the account I offer here.

(i) An Illusory Divide: Cognition and Affect

The first fundamental divergence is between empathy as 'cognitive' (mind-reading, inference, etc.) and empathy as 'affective' (emotional/feelings-oriented). This question is complicated by the three dimensions of empathy (aim, process, and outcome). So, let's begin with overall division. Martin Hoffman draws the line as follows,

Empathy has been defined by psychologists in two ways: (a) empathy is the cognitive awareness of another person's internal states, that is, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions (see Ickes, 1997, for recent research); (b) empathy is the vicarious affective response to another person. (Hoffman, 2000, p. 29)

Hoffman's distinction here is one that can loosely be understood as a divide between cognition and affect. While some argue that that empathy is/ can/ should be primarily constituted by *cognition* (again, in aim, process or outcome)*,* others contend that empathy is/ can/ should be primarily constituted by *affect* (in aim, process, or outcome).

While Hoffman's primary field of concern is psychology, this affective-cognitive divergence can be found in social-neuroscience (Singer & Lamm, 2009; Jamil Zaki & K.N. Ochsner, 2012) and philosophy. Regarding the latter, take the epistemic projects of Lorraine Code and Michael Slote. Code describes empathy as "feeling with" and takes this to be central to empathy's epistemic import (Code, 1995), while Slote affiliates empathy's epistemic relevance with "open-mindedness" or receptivity to another's view (Slote, 2013, pp. 39-50). Code's focus and language suggests a stronger correlation to *feeling/emotional resonance,* while Slote is striving for a stronger correlation to *understanding/cognitive openness*. That being said, both engage in projects that purposefully muddy the waters. Code tells us,

> Now the claim "I know just how you feel" is at the furthest remove from the detached and impersonal knowledge claims that are the focus of standard epistemological analysis. Its *grammar* (in the Wittgensteinian sense) locates it in an exchange that assumes the possibility of engaging experientially, affectively with another person. (Code, 1995, p. 123)

And at the same time she maintains,

> Empathy at its best calls for a finely tuned sensitivity both in its cognitive moments (working out how much one can/should know) and in its active ones. And neither moment is self-contained: they are mutually constructive and inhibiting. (Code, 1995, p. 126)

Similarly, Slote advocates for empathy's role in epistemology by recognizing its role as a kind of openness to other views. While he intends to argue that the affective dimensions unique to

empathy are crucial to epistemology, he focuses on empathy for another's 'beliefs' or 'point of view' (Slote, 2013, p. 42). This all sounds very cognitive. In order for empathy to take on a vital role in epistemology, Slote carves it out so that it is directed at cognition (beliefs, points of view, arguments) rather than the affective experiences that Code focuses on. At the same time, Slote sees a minimal degree of affect as crucial to this endeavor.

> Intellectual objectivity requires one to be able to and in various circumstances actually to empathize with another person's intellectual or cognitive point of view; and, given what I have been saying, seeing another person's position or argument from that person's point of view means empathically (i.e., through empathy) seeing it in something like the favorable light in which the other person sees it. And that, in turn, means having a certain kind of (possibly mild) favorable emotion toward it. (Slote, 2013, p. 48)

So, Slote and Code are in many ways aligned. Both arguments are about drawing empathy and emotions away from the margins of epistemology. However, empathy's role in epistemology is highly cognitive on Slote's account, with some minimal (though crucial) affective requirements. For Code, it is quite the opposite, empathy is highly affective, with minimal (though important) cognitive requirements. Her cognitive check, the "finely tuned sensitivity…in its cognitive moments (working out how much one can/should know)" (Code, 1995, p. 126), is not the heart of the empathic-epistemic engagement. For Slote, on the other hand, "intellectual empathy" is primarily about being open and receptive to other's opinions and views (Slote, 2013, pp. 47-48, 52). And this is crucial to epistemic open-mindedness more generally (Slote, 2013, p. 214). While Slote is not clear about what empathy actually entails (could it be that he means that *feeling with* or *emotional resonance* is a key feature of this openness? Or, only the minimal positive feeling toward another's view?), it is clear that intellectual empathy is *about* seeing things from another's perspective (highly cognitive), which may entail *feeling favorably* for another, but not necessarily *feeling with* in Code's sense.

What is interesting about this particular divergence in emphasis, is that it can be present in three forms. First, we could say that empathy *aims at* a particular *affective* uptake/ understanding and/or at a particular *cognitive* uptake/understanding. Second, we could say that empathy is a *process*, which involves *affective* and/or *cognitive engagement* with another. Third, we could say that empathy is the *outcome* of a process; namely, a particular *affective* and/or *cognitive* mental/physiological state. The cognitive/affective distinction, as articulated by Hoffman above, is often vague on this very point. And few accounts take empathy to be on one side or the other of the supposed cognitive/affective divide on all three fronts.

Returning to Code and Slote for a moment, it seems that they disagree (at least regarding empathy's role in epistemology) about whether empathy aims at *understanding feeling.* For Slote, 'intellectual empathy' aims at understanding beliefs/perspectives, while for Code empathy (even as it pertains to intellectual or epistemic endeavors) aims at understanding feelings or emotions. Likewise, the processes have important differences. For Slote, 'intellectual empathy' entails favorable feeling, but it does not require any more robust forms of *feeling with.* For Code the process is largely feelings-oriented (i.e. primarily involves resonating, emotional receptivity, etc.). The moral-epistemic relevance rests largely in *the feeling*, such as the import of a nurse resonating or being affectively attuned to the feelings of a patient. Moreover, Code is significantly concerned with empathy that does not involve such resonance (Code, 1995, pp. 124-125) as it could so easily be false or powerfully, harmfully misused.

One can easily begin to see the confusion. Does empathy aim at understanding another's feeling or another's view or any mental state? Does that process entail feeling with another or is that not even possible and therefore not ontologically, epistemically or morally relevant? What are the specifically *empathic* results of these engagements with others?

(ii)   A Preliminary Teleology: I Know How You *Feel*

Let us now return to the three dimensions for a more thorough analysis, beginning with empathy's *aim.* Following the majority of the literature, my analysis starts from the common understanding of empathy as about *knowing/understanding how another feels*. This already rests on two particular claims. First, empathy is about *understanding.* Second, it is about *feeling.* The former is what differentiates empathy from other forms of emotionally engaging with others. It separates empathy from resonance, contagion and sharing, all of which might be absent self-other differentiation and even absent other-orientation[4]. Zaki and Ochsner, for instance, conceptualize two empathic processes, both directed toward the same goal of "understanding and responding to *another's* internal states" (Jamil Zaki & K.N. Ochsner, 2012, pp. 675, emphasis added). But I will return to this point in the coming sections as it is more pertinent to disagreement in the processes and outcomes of empathy. The second point takes empathy to be about understanding how another *feels,* as opposed to understanding any and all aspects of another's mental state. This means that my analysis will focus on *empathy as understanding the subjective experience of another,* which is likely to include thoughts and beliefs but only insofar as they pertain to how the other *feels* (very broadly construed).

Here, we quickly see the cognitive-affective divide creeping into the analysis. Some of the literature takes a broad stance regarding the goals of empathic interactions. William Ickes, for instance, focuses on "empathic inference", which he takes to be "everyday mind reading… a complex psychological inference in which observation, memory knowledge, and reasoning are combined to yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others" (Ickes, 1997, p. 2).[5] Similarly, Lewis and Hodges take empathizing to be "people's everyday attempts to accurately

---

[4] One might fail to be 'other-orientated' by failing to attain self-other differentiation, by merely projecting oneself into the other, and by only maintaining a selfish interest in the other's perspective. To be 'other-oriented', we will need to be able to distinguish between ourselves and others, but also take the other's emotional experience as the focus of our efforts.

[5] See also (Ickes, 1993, 2003).

understand the specific thoughts and feelings going on in the heads of others" (Lewis & Hodges, 2012, p. 5). In these accounts, the aim of empathy includes understanding any and all of the mental states of others. It could be about trying to accurately infer an opponents' next move in a game. It could be about gathering information about another's beliefs, such as religious or political beliefs. And it could be about trying to understand how a particular experience makes another feel. But such a broad scope runs slightly at odds with common understanding of empathy and with the majority of the current literature, which take empathy to be about *feeling* (though broadly construed).

Most accounts of empathy operate under the assumption that empathy is about knowing how an experience seems to someone, how it feels to them. Peter Goldie, for instance, differentiates his preferred "in-his-shoes" from "empathetic" perspective shifting, the latter of which he takes to mean "a process or procedure by which a person centrally imagines the narrative (the thoughts, feelings, and emotions) of another person" (Goldie, 2000, p. 195). Goldie's interpretation of what empathy aims at requires so much of us that it can never be merely about grasping another's thought, belief, or next move. Knowing the narrative is not enough either. We must take on the "*full-blooded notion of first-personal agency* that is involved in deliberation" (Goldie, 2014, p. 303). On Goldie's very narrow account, empathy is about getting into the other's experience so deeply that we know how the deliberation *feels* to her as if we were her. So, even Goldie's definition operates as if empathy cannot be about accurately inferring the beliefs or thoughts of another. It must always be directed towards feeling with the entirety of the other's subjective experience.

Most other theorists, like Goldie, do not consider empathy to include cases like a chess player trying to predict her opponents' next move or a soccer goalie calculating the directionality of a penalty shot. These cases may be pure inference, lacking significantly (if not entirely) in the 'full-blooded' perspective shifting that Goldie ultimately finds so problematic about empathy. This

is why most are focused on everyday use of the term: a nurse coming to understand how a

patient feels about continuing with chemotherapy, or conversations between parents that involve

shared frustrations and joys, or affiliating with friends and colleagues about shared/similar

concerns or shared/similar histories, etc. These are the common uses of the term 'empathy' and

the fuel behind the majority of the literature, which is why I will focus on empathy as about

understanding *feeling* (again broadly construed), whatever affect and cognition the processes

and results might entail.

It is in this way that most of the literature takes *feelings* to be the *end*, *aim*, *direction*,

even if such teleological language is not employed. For Martin Hoffman, empathy is a process

whose end result is making "a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's

situation than with his own situation" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 30). For Hoffman, mature empathy will

involve certain minimal levels of cognitive awareness as well, such as an understanding of the

difference between self and other so as to appreciate that the *feeling mirrors that of the other* as

opposed to one's own egoistic projection (Hoffman, 2000, pp. 30, 63). But even here we see

that cognition serves the purpose of understanding *feeling.* So, the process is directed toward

feeling as another *feels.* Other accounts are more explicit in this regard. Echols and Correll take

empathy to be essentially *about* "empathic understanding", which they define as "the capacity to

share and understand another person's affective or emotional experience" (Echols & Correll,

2012, p. 56). Decety and Meltzoff describe empathy as "an interaction between two individuals,

with one experiencing and sharing the feeling of the other" (Coplan & Goldie, 2014, p. 66). Amy

Coplan argues for a narrow conception of empathy in which affective matching is a necessary

component of experiential understanding (Coplan, 2014).

What these accounts direct us to is a particularly emotional teleology. Empathy is about

knowing how another feels hungry, or how she feels about gender discrimination, or how she

feels about the election, or how she feels about parenting. There is little or no explicit mention of

an 'aim' or 'goal', yet it is clear that empathic *capacity* is the capacity to understand the affective states of others (Decety & Michalska, 2012, p. 167), empathic *accuracy* is about accurately grasping (sharing and/or knowing) how others feel (and sometimes how others think), empathic *processes* are directed towards (consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily) understanding how others feel (i.e. some degree of sharing in and/or appreciating/ acknowledging the other's feelings). It may not be conscious or voluntary, but empathy's psychological and interrelational processes are directed towards grasping how something *feels* to another, as if it were the function of empathy in the Aristotelian sense (*Nicomachean Ethics,* Book I).[6]

So, while some will include all mental states within the ends of empathic activity, that is thoughts or feelings (Ickes, 1997, 2003; Lewis & Hodges, 2012; Preston & de Waal, 2002), most see empathy as primarily targeted at feelings or emotions (typically broadly construed) (Code, 1995; Coplan, 2014; de Waal, 2009; Decety & Michalska, 2012; Echols & Correll, 2012; Goldie, 2014; Goldman, 2012; Hoffman, 2000; Meyers, Forthcomming Fall 2016; Slote, 2007). Accordingly, I will take on the assumption that empathy is *directed towards* or *about feeling* rather than any and all mental states. This means that I will be addressing cases like empathizing with another's hunger, another's feeling of loss, another's joy, another's experience of discrimination, etc. These cases are likely to involve both affect and cognition in the processes and results of coming to understand how another feels. However, unlike cases of mind-reading, the cognitive aspects of these emotional experiences will be important only insofar as they are important to the *aim* of knowing how another *feels.* Even on a very broad interpretation of feeling, which is likely to include how a *subjective experience seems* to someone, aiming to understand another's feelings will be very different from the goal of accurately inferring what another thinks or what another's next move will be.

---

[6] Throughout I will be using the Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe translation (2002).

This teleological stipulation is also grounded in common linguistic practice. As Alvin Goldman acknowledges, "mimicry of action-planning states doesn't naturally invite the label of empathy" (Goldman, 2012, p. 34). In other words, we do not typically describe the chess player or soccer goalie as *empathizing* with her opponent. Rather, we take her to be reading the mind of her opponent, accurately assessing her environment, calculating the next move, etc. Meanwhile, we call the capacities, processes, and interactions with others that are aimed at understanding how another *feels* cases of empathy: the nurse who senses a patient's fear, the parent who knows a child's joy, the woman who feels with her friend's workplace discrimination, etc. As we will see, this does not mean that a process of empathy necessarily involves feeling, nor that it necessarily results in mirroring the other's feelings accurately, nor that it neglects other cognitive and physiological processes partly constitutive of feeling. Rather, I will consider varying roles for the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy as understanding how another feels, but for my purposes here I will leave aside the kind of mind-reading that is purely aimed at accurately identifying what another thinks or believes.

(iii) Processes of Empathy: How One Engages Empathically with Others

Allowing the assumption that empathy is 'about feeling' directs the discourse, but it does not absolve me of an explanation of meaning. I will have to articulate what is meant by 'understanding another's feelings' more precisely. First, we will need to address how we fulfill the aim, i.e. what will count as an empathic process or interaction. Second, we will need to articulate what one might come to understand, i.e. the understanding that empathic processes can result in. Sometimes the literature addresses one of these dimensions but not the other, or inconspicuously blurs the boundary. So, let us begin with the structure of psychological and interpersonal interactions that are constitutive of empathic processes. The discourse in regard to the processes of empathy typically reflects the first three of the major divisions above: (1) the

extent to which empathy entails cognition or affect, (2) whether we simulate or make inferences by analogy, and (3) whether empathy is automatic or controlled.

The cognitive-affective division addressed above continues to infiltrate these dimensions of empathy. In other words, even once we have agreed that empathy is *about feeling* insofar as it is about aiming to understand how another *feels,* we still must determine whether the *process of understanding* requires *feeling* and to what extent. The extent to which one can affectively share in another's experience and the extent to which one can cognize another's experience will depend on a host of contextual factors (e.g. individual biology, memory, past experiences, current emotional status, intimacy, etc.). One might, for instance, engage in affective matching or mirroring, with only minimal self-other differentiation. Such as when one senses another's distress without understanding the cause of the distress. Or, one might be able to develop a cognitive grasp of another's experience without sharing in much of the affect. We see this when one recognizes the hardships faced by a new mother without being able to mirror how those experiences feel since one has not been through it oneself. So, it seems that one can aim at understanding another's *feeling*, while the process of fulfilling that aim might involve varying degrees of cognition and affect.

In the case of empathic processes, this cognitive-affective divide leads us into the second division. What mental processes underly our cognitive and affective grasping? Do we simulate another's mental state, or make inferences by analogy? The second category of disagreement has largely been a concern of theory of mind and has had influence in social-neuroscience. Dan Zahavi and Soren Overgaard describe the disagreement as follows:

> Theory-theorists typically argue that we attribute mental states to others on the basis of a theory of mind that is either constructed in early infancy and subsequently revised and modified (Gopnik and Wellman 1995) or else the result of maturation of innate mind-reading modules (Baron-Cohen 1995). Simulation theorists, on the other hand, deny that

our understanding of others is primarily theoretical in nature and maintain that we use

our own mind as a model when understanding the minds of others. (Zahavi &

Overgaard, 2012, p. 3)

So, while one might see empathy as a matter utilizing cognitive processes to infer the mental

state of another (based on recognizing the other as other, knowledge about the other, etc.), one

might alternatively take empathy to be primarily constituted by simulating the other's mental

state or subjective experience. Catriona Mackenzie describes the latter as "reproducing the

other's thought process in our own minds" (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 299). The former procedurally

entails a cognitive grasp of other minds through which one uses beliefs and knowledge to infer

what another thinks or how another feels. The latter allows for immediate uptake, in which an

empathizer can instantly resonate another's experience or mental state and know that that is

how the other feels.

There is a parallel discussion in social-neuroscience: top-down vs. bottom-up

processing, or experience sharing vs. mentalizing (Singer & Lamm, 2009; Jamil Zaki & K.N.

Ochsner, 2012). Jamil Zaki and Kevin Ochsner describe this as a "tale of two systems": "the

shared representation system" and the "mental state attribution system" (Jamil Zaki & Kevin N.

Ochsner, 2012, pp. 208-210; Jamil Zaki & K.N. Ochsner, 2012, pp. 675-676). The former refers

to the somatic processes that we engage in when *feeling with* others. We mirror, mimic,

resonate, share in the experiences of others, such as when we catch the happiness of a friend's

good fortune or sense the distress in a stranger's facial expression. The idea is that our

understanding of how others feel begins with, or is wholly constituted by, this sharing or neural

resonance. Neuroscientists refer to the brain regions active during such shared representation

as the "shared representation system" (SRS) (Jamil Zaki & Kevin N. Ochsner, 2012, p. 209).[7]

---

[7] Some will call this 'low-level' empathic processing (Goldie, 2014, p. 304; Goldman, 2006). However, I will not employ the terminology here as I find that it ascribes a certain normative assumption about the demandingness and value of this form of affect.

The other system, the "mental state attribution system" (MSA), maps onto our abilities to attribute mental states to others. For instance, when we see someone rubbing her eyes we might infer that she is tired, or when we hear about a friend having trouble getting out of bed and know of some misfortune she has faced we might infer that she is depressed.

While these two forms of processing how others feel have been opposed to one another in the literature, we are now finding that there is much more overlap in the brain regions associated with each system. In fact, lesions in one system will affect the other suggesting that they are not dissociable biologically (Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, & Perry, 2009; Van Overwalle & Baetens, 2009; Jamil Zaki & K.N. Ochsner, 2012, pp. 675-676). The phenomenology of empathy has been quick to integrate these processes as well. It is typical of accounts of empathy to require some form of both. As we see with Code and Slote above, empathy is a multifaceted way of interacting with others that will involve some degree of experience sharing (or simulating) and some degree of mentalizing (or making inferences), both of which contribute to *understanding how the other feels*.

Ultimately, it is possible to arrive at a robust understanding of how another feels whether we start from experience sharing or from inference, as long as we incorporate both. For instance, I might come to understand how you are affected by gender discrimination whether I begin with an automatic resonance of the feeling (merely upon seeing you respond to a colleague) and then substantiate my understanding through discourse, or whether I begin by inferring your feelings based on knowledge of the circumstances and then move into emotional sharing through an open and intimate dialogue. In fact, all of this might happen simultaneously, alternating between and merging feeling, dialogue, fact assessment, inference, reflection, imagination, etc. Thus, the bio-psycho-social processes of empathy allow for variance in how one empathizes as long as it is geared toward understanding how something *feels* to another (i.e. the other's subjective experience of some event or environment).

Perceivers empathize with targets often, but not always. Some individuals are more likely to deploy experience sharing and mentalizing than others, and some situations are more likely to elicit these processes than others. (Jamil Zaki & K.N. Ochsner, 2012, p. 676)

As Bartky aptly recognizes, "our capacity to enter imaginatively into the lives of others—their joys and sorrows, the peculiar texture of their suffering—is also limited" (Bartky, 1997, p. 179). So, this variance may be a result of biological or contextual limitations. Moreover, for the time being we remain in the realm of ontology. So it is more than likely that one fails to deploy experience sharing when one can/should. Or that one does a poor job of recognizing individual difference. These could be moral-epistemic poverties in manifestations of empathy, but for now most agree that they will count as engaging in empathic processes to some degree or another and to varying moral praise or approbation.

So, the processes of empathy are multifaceted in regard to the structure of processing, but also the content. Whether one adamantly defends simulation or theory-theory of mind, SRS and MSA, both can accommodate variation in the level of cognition and affect involved in empathic interactions. For some, engaging affectively with another is not required for empathy (Ickes, 1997, 2003), for others it is necessary or definitional (Coplan, 2014; de Vignemont & Singer, 2006; de Waal, 2009; Goldie, 2014; Goldman, 2012; Hoffman, 2000). For all, some minimal level of cognition is involved in empathy, i.e. self-other differentiation (Hoffman, 2000). And, for many, understanding how another feels will entail significant cognitive appreciation of individuality as an essential aspect of understanding another's feelings (Code, 1995; Coplan, 2014; Goldie, 2014; Scheler, 1954; Slote, 2013).

This leaves us with one final question about the processes of empathy for our ontological account: is empathy automatic or controlled? In other words, to what extent do we consciously control or voluntarily engage in SRS and MSA, as well as affective resonance and

cognitive appreciation? Again one finds variance in theory and practice. As Sara Hodges and

Daniel Wagner clarify, "sometimes, empathy just happens" and sometimes "we work at

it" (Hodges & Wegner, 1997, p. 311). It is possible for the empathic response to happen

automatically or through great effort. For instance, a skilled nurse might fully empathize with the

distress of a patient merely upon walking into the room, immediately responding with comfort

and care. On the other hand, it might take a nurse time, reflection and dialogue with another

patient and her family to fully come to appreciate how that patient feels, perhaps because their

values and beliefs are so starkly divergent.

While the "simplest and clearest examples of automatic empathy are

emotional" (Hodges & Wegner, 1997, p. 315), it is possible for cognitive appreciation to be

automatic as well. This is particularly the case when another's experience is so familiar to us.

Accordingly, the automatic forms of empathy can be found in the unconscious mimicry of an

infant, e.g. crying when others are distressed (Decety & Michalska, 2012; Hoffman, 2000;

Simner, 1971; Waal, 2012) or in one's response to witnessing another's complex and familiar

experience, e.g. seeing a new parent hold her newborn for the first time.

While there can be great differences in how an adult and an infant empathize with

others, in part because adults are better able to distinguish between themselves and others, the

idea that adults largely mentalize or infer, or are largely in control of their empathic reactions, is

far from accurate.

For example, when we see a happy face, our smiling muscles react (Bush, Barr,

McHugo, & Lanzetta, 1989; Dimberg, 1988). When we see a pained expression, on the

other hand, our facial muscles react in the way we would if we were pained (Vaughan &

Lanzetta, 1981). These results occur to some degree even when people are asked to

inhibit their facial expressions in such situations (e.g. Bush et al. 1989; Vaughan &

Lanzetta, 1981), and this is a strong indicator that automatic activation is taking place.

(Hodges & Wegner, 1997, p. 316)

Further, the idea that automatic empathy is not cognitive is far from the truth. Familiarization and practice can lead to faster and greater empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1993; Singer & Lamm, 2009).

For example, parents may at first have some trouble understanding their children or responding to their needs; however, with practice they may reach the point where their child's welfare is their first concern and they know how to predict exactly what will promote their welfare in many situations. (Hodges & Wegner, 1997, p. 319)

Accordingly, one can automatically take up another's emotional state, as cognitive and complex as it might be, and even respond accordingly (Waal, 2009), without consciously trying to do so. A crying infant can lead a new parent to unconsciously jump from a deep sleep and rush to the crib, just as seeing a friend's joy can draw you out of your own misery to celebrate with her, just as witnessing someone fall onto the subway tracks can cause you to jump to their aid without weighing the potential harm to yourself. In all of these cases, we see how some level of cognitive-affective empathizing with another can be automatic.

But there is room for control as well. Just as a parent can practice and reflect on empathic responses to a child, improving them over time, so can a nurse use experience and education to perfect her skill in empathizing with her patients. Likewise, one can work to expand one's empathic skills in new or unfamiliar circumstances. For instance, there is some research that suggests that one might be more apt to accurately empathize with those who look or behave like oneself (e.g. those of the same race, same economic level, family, etc.) (Echols & Correll, 2012). But that does not mean that it is impossible to empathize with those who are different, nor does it excuse a lack of empathy when it is needed. For instance, it might be difficult for me, as a white privileged woman, to empathize with a black underprivileged male's experiences of discrimination, but that does not mean that I cannot try to open a dialogue,

invoke reflection and imagination, so as to understand how that discrimination feels to him. Culture can play a significant role here. Historical movements, novels, movies, etc. can help to deepen our abilities to imagine into other lives . Cultural norms, too, can do a better or worse job of fostering conscious efforts toward empathizing with others (de Waal, 2009).

While empathic engagement often involves good intentions, as Hodges and Wegner acknowledge, empathy can be employed knowingly for "much less noble goals" (Hodges & Wegner, 1997). One can engage in empathy so as to manipulate, even to cause harm. As Scheler famously considers,

> The *cruel* man owes his awareness of the pain or sorrow he causes entirely to a capacity for visualizing feeling! His joy lies in 'torturing' and in the agony of his victim. As he feels, vicariously, the increasing pain or suffering of his victim, so his own primary pleasure and enjoyment at the other's pain also increases. (Scheler, 1954, p. 14)

Here, Scheler claims that one can choose to engage in empathy. And, depending on the circumstances, one can control how and why empathy is engaged. Further, the extent to which one endeavors to understand all dimensions of another's experiential state may be under one's control. Perhaps a torturer finds happiness in resonating suffering, or perhaps she can separate the mentalizing from the emotional sharing, not feeling as the other does but knowing fully what kind of pain will force the victim to talk. Alternatively, perhaps one can sense another's experience well enough to know that she wants to be left alone, thus leaving empathic dialogue and deeper emotional sharing to another time.

In the end, the processes or routes to empathy are multifaceted. Depending on the view, there might be more or less focus on simulation or inference, cognition or affect, and automaticity or control. But it seems that most theoretical accounts offer degrees of these components rather than stark dissociation. Further, while all such processes aim at some level

of understanding how the other feels, their variance naturally and logically leads to difference in outcomes as well.

(iv) Empathy in Result: The Spectrum of Empathic Understanding

Depending on the empathic processes utilized, specific skill sets, as well as the context and personal histories involved, a variety of levels of empathic understanding, i.e. understanding how another feels, might be available to us.

For some, empathy in outcome means *sharing* or *matching* another's subjective experience or mental state. As Peter Goldie tells us,

> Empathy as a process is, in a sense, a refinement of empathy as outcome, in that it distinguishes between the various kinds of process by which the outcome of shared states of mind is achieved. (Goldie, 2014, p. 304)

On this kind of account, empathy entails sharing the other's subjective experience. For Goldie, this means a complete perspective shift such that one is able to "imagine *being* the other person" and "[shares] in *his* or *her* thoughts, feelings, decisions, and other aspects of their psychology" (Goldie, 2014, p. 302). Taken to the extreme, this might require *matching* another's mental state. De Vignemont and Singer, for instance, claim that empathy requires an affective state that "is isomorphic to another person's state" (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006, p. 435). Ultimately, empathy tends to require some degree of sharing in, or matching, another's emotional state. But this is also true of emotional sharing and mimicry.

What differentiates empathy from these other forms of affective sharing is its self-other differentiation and other-orientation. We might, after all, share in the joy reverberating throughout a baseball stadium in response to a home run, but this does not necessarily mean we have understood how that joy feels to the other fans. It may be quite indicative of some level of appreciation or understanding, but more is required to substantiate the claim "I know just how you feel". For Coplan, we must also achieve self-other differentiation and other-oriented

perspective-taking (Coplan, 2014). This means that in the empathic process one must maintain some minimal boundary between oneself and another, so as to direct one's attention to the other and understand *how the other feels*. Accordingly, when one has done this well enough, the result is likely to be some level of understanding *how the other feels*. This means differentiating between self and other so that the other's experience can be the focus of one's empathic endeavor. Moreover, the other's experience is the object of knowledge and understanding. Empathy, after all, is about understanding how *the other* feels. For Coplan, being 'other-oriented' is specifically about 'perspective-taking'.

> I imagine being the target undergoing the target's experiences rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target's experiences. To stay focused on the other and move us beyond our own experiences, perspective-taking requires mental flexibility and relies on regulatory mechanisms to modulate our level of affective arousal and suppress our own perspective. It also often requires at least some knowledge of the target, though how much depends on the context. (Coplan, 2014, p. 13)

What this means is that empathic understanding takes up the experience of the other and tries to see it as the other does. So, if a friend feels that flying is scary, though I do not feel this way myself, I can utilize relevant knowledge, experiences, and affective skills to imagine into how my friend feels when on a plane. In this way, I can come to some understanding of how she feels, regardless of how I would feel in the same circumstances.

While it is typical for such other-orientation to involve conscious effort toward imagining what it is like for another person, it need not be so cognitive. Some people seem particularly skilled at sensing the emotions of another *as the other's.* In fact, someone may reliably succeed in other-oriented emotional understanding (i.e. knowing how *the other* feels), where one is flexible and able to suppress one's own perspective, without any apparent cognitive effort in the way Coplan describes above.

The critical point is that one must be able to differentiate between self and other and be other-oriented, at least minimally, such that one grasps the other's emotional perspective as opposed to merely understanding how one would feel in the other's shoes. These requirements separate empathy from emotional contagion (e.g. catching another's happiness) and emotional sharing (e.g. sharing in another's suffering over a joint loss). While each of these forms of emotional sharing may be involved in the course of an empathic process, neither of them require self-other differentiation or other-orientation. These same requirements also insure that we do not wrongly assume another feels as we would in her shoes. The egoistic move of placing oneself in another's shoes and its resulting understanding may be an important step in understanding how another feels[8]; but, ultimately, it may say little, if anything at all, about how another feels under the same circumstances. Take one of the substantial realizations elicited and clarified by the Black Lives Matter movement; those of light and dark skin generally experience police interactions differently. There are deeply complex historical, contextual, biological and normative elements of these experiences. These nuances significantly affect how it feels to, for example, be pulled over by a police officer. When the context of this experience is substantially different, merely placing oneself in the other's shoes is unlikely to get you to a complete understanding of how she feels. This concern is widespread in the literature (Bartky, 1997; Code, 1995; Coplan, 2014; de Waal, 2009; Scheler, 1954) and largely leads to agreement that the outcome of empathic processes, the understanding of how *another* feels, requires self-other differentiation and other-orientation.

So, empathic understanding typically involves some level of (1) emotion matching/ sharing, (2) self-other differentiation, and (3) other-orientation. The question is to what extent. Some will argue that exact matching or achieving isomorphic states in regard to both (1) and (3) are entailed by empathy (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Goldie, 2014). Others will require

---

[8] See Peter Goldie's discussion of 'in-her-shoes-imagining' (Goldie, 2014).

matching emotional types if not isomorphic mental states (Coplan, 2014, pp. 5-6). And still others are more lenient, allowing for wider variation throughout the development of empathic abilities (de Waal, 2009; Hoffman, 2000). The disagreement, as I take it, is in part due to a muddling of the ontological and moral boundaries. Since many theorists undertake an ontology of empathy so as to prove its moral relevance, it matters to them what is entailed by empathic processes and outcomes. It seems that the stringency of some accounts is due, at least in part, to that goal.

Putting aside attempts to moralize empathy, it seems that there is some basic agreement here. There are many things that may result from an empathic practice: from no affective or cognitive uptake at all, to a substantial grasp of the other's experience as it feels to her both cognitively and affectively. The outcome that can be called uniquely empathic, i.e. *empathic understanding,* will require some level of (1) emotion matching/sharing, (2) self-other differentation, and (3) other-orientation. But, depending on the context, one might only succeed in feeling with another, or only achieve an accurate inference about how the other feels, or mixed and varying levels of each. For instance, despite all of my best efforts to imagine how another feels under certain circumstances, there may be such substantial experiential differences between us that I cannot imagine how she feels, and only make an inference based on what she tells me and other relevant knowledge about her circumstances. Here, the outcome is an acknowledgement and, perhaps, some cognitive appreciation of how the other feels, but I do not fully comprehend cognitively nor am I able to share in her emotion affectively. Alternatively, through an empathic process I might be able to quickly and accurately pick up on another's feeling, sharing in it successfully and knowing it is hers, but my understanding may end in that significantly affective mode. In this case, I may sense the other's emotion (as the other's), but I may not have the cognitive grasp required to respond appropriately. In that instance, I may have developed a robust affective appreciation but only very minimal cognitive

appreciation. It is in this way that one can engage in empathic processes to some extent or another, as well as achieve empathic results to some extent or another.

This is precisely why I have separated aim from outcome. While one can aim at the fullest most distinctively empathic outcome, i.e. understanding how another feels, there are various ways in which one's empathic processes might fail to achieve this end. Perhaps one's empathic attempts lack genuineness or appropriate experience. Perhaps the context somehow inhibits an empathic dialogue. For whatever reason, I may achieve little or no empathic understanding despite the best of intentions. We see this when a friend really wants to help, but only comes to understand what she would need in your circumstances, perhaps failing entirely to understand how you feel. Ultimately, there are many ways in which one can (justifiably or not) come up short in achieving empathic understanding in outcome.

Additionally, my success in achieving empathic understanding could vary from some minimal comprehension to a true and complete grasp of another's emotional experience. In order for *empathic understanding* to be achieved, some will require exact mirroring (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006), other's will see it as necessary yet declare it impossible (Goldie, 2014). Some will require specifically *affective* matching (Coplan, 2014), others will merely require accurate inference (Ickes, 1993). The key is that all of these accounts require *some* level of (1) emotion matching/sharing, (2) self-other differentiation, and (3) other-orientation.

What all of this suggests is that empathic aiming and empathic processes render a number of outcomes possible. Some of those outcomes will be distinctively empathic, i.e. some extent of *understanding how another feels*, and other outcomes will fail to achieve this understanding, e.g. emotional contagion or egoistic projection. The question that remains is how to accommodate this variance while also assessing and categorizing any moral roles that empathy might have. Must we have a strict account of empathy in order for it to be of moral worth? Or, must we acknowledge this variance and cede the logical conclusion that empathy is

not necessarily of any moral value? I'll propose another view that aims to accommodate both variance and moral worth. This view begins with an ontological shift.

1.3 A New Perspective: Empathic Practices

Instead of focusing on individual capacities, individual brain states, or internal mechanism, we should turn to the interpersonal nature of empathy. It is a way of engaging with others, not just events in our own physiology and psychology that correspond to the separate mental states of others. It is in everyday empathic interactions that I have found a way to conceptualize empathy that is implicit in some of these accounts (Bartky, 1997; Code, 1995; de Waal, 2009) and is able to make sense of the variance and moral controversy. Rather than thinking of empathy as either purely a mental state *or* a process, purely affective *or* cognitive, exact mirroring *or* absent mirroring altogether, and wholly good *or* not at all relevant to morality, it will be better to think of empathy as a kind of *practice* that can be engaged with by degrees and can manifest degrees of moral excellence.

Empathy can be easily conceptualized along standard interpretations of the term 'practice'.[9] One of the clearest comparisons can be made to the practice of *care.* As Joan Tronto explains,

> Care is perhaps best thought of as a practice… it is an alternative to conceiving of care as a principle or as an emotion. To call care a practice implies that it involves both thought and action, that thought and action are interrelated, and that they are directed toward some end. The activity, and its end, set the boundaries as to what appears reasonable within the framework of the practice. (Tronto, 1993, p. 108)

---

[9] See, for example, Ruddick 1990 who employs Habermas' work, as well as Caroline Whitbeck 1984, p. 65.

Hidden in the accounts of empathy above, it is easy to see empathy as neither an emotion nor any one specific activity. Rather, it is a collection of ways of engaging with others that are "interrelated" and "directed toward some end". As discussed above, it is largely agreed that the end is some form of *empathic understanding*. By this, I mean that engaging empathically with others is a kind of engaging with others that aims at or is generally directed at *understanding how another feels*. Further, while there is variance in how empathic processes and outcomes are defined, there is vast agreement regarding the central conditions, i.e. how all activities and states of empathy are "interrelated". Abstracting from the discussion above and common practice, I stipulate four conditions of the practice:

  (1) aim of empathic understanding,

  (2) self-other differentiation,

  (3) other-orientation, and

  (4) emotional receptivity.

In the survey of the literature above, we saw a common end of empathy: empathic understanding. We also saw varying ways of incorporating self-other differentiation, other-orientation, and emotional sharing/mirroring/uptake. Here, I will articulate how each of these common dimensions of empathy motivate conceptualizing empathy as a kind of practice and elucidate the activities constitutive of that practice.

What is the end of empathic practices? The question can become nonsensical if you see 'ends' as necessarily cognized *and* you see empathy as an un-cognized emotional resonance. But as we saw above, on most accounts of empathy one finds some kind of teleology. Namely, whatever the end result, there is an end typically aimed at in empathic engagement. On most accounts, the end of empathy is something like *understanding how another feels*. Without further clarification this end is nonmoral. It could be that we seek such understanding consciously or unconsciously, for the sake of another's wellbeing and caring relations or in order

to cause harm. In any case, it is clear that the activities of empathy must be aimed at understanding how another feels. Sharing in another's joy or picking up on another's emotional state does not mean that I have aimed at understanding how she feels. Without so aiming, my interaction can count as successful resonance, but it will not be an activity of empathy.

Further, there are varying psychological and physiological levels at which we might *aim* at understanding how another feels. Even in the automatic and involuntary empathy described by Adam Smith (Smith, 1759, pp. 257-261), we are, at least, affectively aimed at understanding how the other feels (even if this merely results in mirroring the other's affective states and understanding that it is the other's as opposed to our own). In this sense of aiming, my affective uptake and responsiveness is directed at another's emotional (cognitive-affective) experience rather than my own. Rather than engaging in some other emotional activity, e.g. cheering at a baseball game, where I just so happen to come to share in another's emotions, in activities distinctive of empathy my affective capacities and skills are aimed at coming to know how another feels, e.g. a nurse's emotional attunement to her patients in the course of care. In the latter case, one need not be *consciously* or *knowingly* aimed at empathic understanding to count as participating in empathic practices. It may be enough that one's affective state is appropriately directed so as to soak up some level of understanding without reflecting on it.

In this way, aiming at empathic understanding can be distinctive of empathic practices, even when those specific activities are not consciously known. This is much like a case of a child running through the grass or a defensive player sensing a fake. These activities are activities of particular practices (i.e. playing and defending, respectively), but the ways in which our bodies and activities aim at the ends of these practices (i.e. having fun and obstructing offensive moves) may be entirely unconscious. Likewise, unconscious aiming at empathic understanding can be enough to categorize an endeavor as partly constitutive of empathic practices. The pivotal point is that without conscious, voluntary aiming, one's actions will not be

enough to constitute virtue. When such a response is involuntary, unchosen, unreflective, and unconcerned with the right and the good, it cannot count as a virtuous aim, let alone a virtuous state of character. But we will return to this in Chapter 2.

For now, one begins to see how empathy has an end in a way similar to other practices. Moreover, one can begin to see how the aim of knowing how another feels is partly constitutive of activities of empathy insofar as it helps to distinguish it from other emotional interactions (e.g. emotional contagion and mimicry). These other modes of emotional engagement are likely to play a role in the development of empathy (Decety and Michalska 2012; de Waal 2009) or in a given empathic interaction, but they are not what most take to characterize empathy. As many have argued, it is crucial to center one's attention on the other and maintain some sense of distinction between self and other (Hoffman 2000, pp. 30, 56-9; Slote 2013, p. 37; Zahavi & Overgaard 2012). This is because when we "catch" another's feeling (as in emotional contagion) or "share" another's feeling or "mimic" another's feeling, we need not be aiming at understanding how she feels, we need not grasp the difference between our own subjective experience and another's, and we certainly cannot claim to know how another feels if we are missing these components. Accomplishing these further tasks, is what separates empathy from other ways of emotionally engaging and is, ultimately, crucial to empathy's moral and epistemic import.

So, like the first condition, conditions (2) self-other differentiation and (3) other-orientation are partly constitutive of empathy. As we saw above, these conditions are distinctive of both the processes and results of empathy. Together these conditions force us to consider *the other*. As such, we must move beyond an individual's psychological state and consider how that person is *interacting* (psychologically and otherwise) with a *specific other*. We see these conditions take form in particular activities, such as the mere question 'How are you feeling today?' or 'What's wrong? You seem upset.' We see them in nonverbal interactions like a

comforting hug or a gentle nudge. These activities demonstrate (a) differentiating the other as a distinct individual with particular feelings, and (2) focusing one's attention on the other and how she feels. Insofar as these activities reflect these two conditions, as well as empathic aiming, they jointly reveal a common practice. In other words, these conditions help us to articulate the defining shape of the practice. And they help us to see how empathy is parallel in structure to other practices. For instance, much like any practice, these activities can be *practiced* and someone might become quite skilled through *practicing* them. A teacher, for example, can practice differentiating her students from herself and from other students through years of honing her perception of her student's emotions. We might even classify someone as particularly skilled at other-orientation, easily able to push aside one's own worries and centralize those of another. Perhaps some fulfill these conditions naturally, others through great effort. In any case, we can begin to see the specifics of empathy develop, but not just as a mental state or single skill. Rather, these conditions reveal a set of activities and skills that are interrelated in the way Tronto describes above.

The fourth condition differentiates the kind of empathy that I am concerned with here from other ways of coming to understand the mental states of others. As Hoffman explains, some have taken empathy to include the capacity or practice of coming to know another's thoughts, perceptions, intentions, etc., which are not necessarily tied to any emotion (Hoffman 2000, 30). But, what is of concern to me, and most accounts of empathy, are those interactions that aim at and potentially achieve some level of 'emotion understanding' (Decety & Michalska 2012, 173-174). It is this condition that situates my stipulated account of empathy between versions that require affective matching (e.g. de Vignemont and Singer) or focus on affective uptake (e.g. Hoffman 2000), and those that only require cognitive appreciation (e.g. Ickes 2003 and Goldie 2014). In other words, the condition of emotional receptivity only demands that one be receptive to the components of another's emotional experience (again both cognitive and

affective) as far as one is able and allows for degrees of such receptivity and its potentially attendant emotional understanding.

Further, it is crucial not to confuse interactions that are 'emotionally receptive' with interactions that are 'non-cognitive'. At the least, empathy will involve the cognitive ability to differentiate self and other so as to adopt the other's emotional perspective. But there will be 'cognitive' aspects of taking up emotions as well, such as particular thoughts and beliefs that are integral to certain feelings. As Nancy Sherman articulates in regard to Aristotle's inclusion of emotions in ethical perception:

> On Aristotle's view, anger cannot be felt without an appropriate cognition that one has been slighted or injured, or fear without an appropriate cognition that one faces danger, etc. The cognitions are essential concomitants for experiencing the emotion. (Sherman 1989, p. 45)

Some argue that such cognitive components may not be present in "blind feelings like itches or throbs" (Sherman 1989, p. 45). But, in the case of empathy, even these 'blind' feelings will require a minimal cognitive appreciation of any difference between the experience of the other, perhaps even cognitive appreciation to which the other is blind, e.g. empathizing with an infant's sensation of the pain of an injection. Accordingly, I take 'feelings', as in 'knowing how another feels', to be very broadly construed and incorporate internal states that are both 'cognitive' and 'affective'. Empathy is about understanding how things feel to another, what another's subjective experience is like to her. One could know how another feels thirsty, just as one could know how another feels sad, just as one could know how another feels about the injustice of racial discrimination. For the purposes of my argument here, I take 'emotional receptivity' to cover all such forms of feeling. And, in each case of emotion understanding, or knowing about how another feels, one finds varying cognitive and affective components, which are made possible by (affective-cognitive) receptivity to another's emotions.

Again, like the other conditions, emotional receptivity does not characterize an internal psychological state alone. Rather, it is a way of relating to others. Moreover, emotional receptivity, like the other conditions, leads us toward the shift in ontology that I suggest. It is a receptivity characteristic of a kind of *practice*. Take the example of medical practice. It has a commonly understood aim of healing. And, one must be receptive to information relevant to that end, such as medical and personal information about a patient. That kind of receptivity is distinctive of a clinician *practicing* medicine. She will pick up on the details specifically relevant to that practice in a way that us lay-folk cannot or do not. This is a significant feature of what classifies her as practicing medicine, as being a clinician in the practice of medicine. A clinician might be more or less receptive to such information (and perhaps better or worse at her practice because of it), but she must be so receptive to some extent. Similarly, someone engaged in empathic practice must be receptive to the emotions of others. After all, these emotions will be critical to the aim of understanding how another feels. We cannot empathically understand without grasping those emotions to some extent or another. Someone who does not exhibit such receptivity, who is not open to taking up the emotions of another (cognitively and affectively), who is closed off, prohibitively biased perhaps, will not count as practicing empathy. Finally, as with the clinician's receptivity to pertinent information for healing, emotional receptivity allows for variance in excellence in the practice of empathy. One might be minimally receptive, only open to enough about how the other feels to convince her of something. Or, one might be incredibly open to other's emotions, always ready and waiting for someone who needs empathic understanding.

Thus, as we investigate these conditions, we begin to see the picture of empathy expand beyond individual mental states. A complex practice emerges with a common aim and interrelated activities. One that involves skill. One that can be only partially engaged with depending on the extent to which one fulfills each of these conditions. Moreover, it is a practice

that requires further categorization to delimit any moral worth. In this way, conceptualizing

empathy as a practice enables variance in how one empathically engages with others within

articulable limits. It also leaves itself open to moral disagreement, thus making sense of the

contentious divisions described above. Yes, empathic activities and their results may be top-

down or bottom-up, more or less cognitive, more or less affective, and may be more or less

emotionally congruent. This is what empathy *is on the whole*, but there is still room to identify a

morally excellent form of the practice.

1.4   Conclusion: Room and Direction for Excellence

When we identify empathic practices as such, there is space for normative qualification

and interpretation. We might say, for instance, that a self-centered salesclerk characteristically

engages in elements of empathy: she is, for instance, effective at knowing enough about how

her clients feel to be successful in sales. This means that she characteristically engages in

empathic practices in some sense, but not in the fullest, nor any morally excellent sense of the

term. Her empathic aim is qualified (i.e. she aims at empathic understanding only insofar as it

helps the sale), her apparent other-orientation is disingenuous and self-centered (i.e. she only

wants to know how you feel insofar as it helps her), and her receptivity is minimal (i.e. she is not

really open to understanding how you feel, just enough about your perspective to make you feel

that you need to purchase her product). Likewise, someone can be characteristically disposed

to engage in elements of beneficent practice (e.g. give away money or spend time

volunteering), but this, by no means, makes that person beneficent. This is because she may

not engage in those practices reliably, in the right way, at the right time, and for the right

reasons.

Thus, this way of conceptualizing empathy accounts for the breadth of different views in

the literature. Moreover, it allows for the variance in the practice that is found in everyday

occurrence and comes to the fore in academic disputes. These conditions help us to understand how one can be partially or wholly engaged in empathic practice. One can be more or less aimed at empathic understanding, as well as more or less successful at coming to any understanding. One can be more or less able to differentiate self and other. One can be more or less oriented toward the other, i.e. take the other's subjective experience as more or less the focus of the interaction. And one can be more or less cognitively and affectively receptive to the other's emotions. One easily finds people who are characteristically aimed at empathic understanding, but too self-interested to find much empathic success. Likewise, many people may be other-oriented, but too emotionally closed off to come to empathic understanding. Thus, these conditions reveal degrees of engaging in empathic practices, but, importantly, they do not yet clarify what it means to be excellently empathic. For that, we must turn to moral disagreement and see if there is a way to revise these conditions so that they elucidate what will count as moral excellence in empathic practices.

Chapter 2

Empathic Attunement: Virtue in Empathic Practices

It is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes" (de Beauvoir, 1962, p. 67)

2.1   Introduction: Excellence in Empathic Practices

The previous chapter reveals the variance in empathy and, accordingly, the potential for good and bad. It is this seemingly incompatible nature that my account is able to accommodate. Rather than contend with the moral controversy, my goal is to make sense of it. We are now equipped with an ontology of empathy in which empathy is a practice. It is a practice that has a definable aim and interrelated activities, one that might be engaged with by degree, and might manifest more or less moral excellence. In this chapter, I will explicate how this ontological structure allows for the possibility of viciousness in empathic practices, but it also allows for a virtue unique to empathy. What we will discover is a form of empathic practice that is set apart insofar as it is *empathy done well*; particularly, as a distinctive form of living well, flourishing, or eudaimonia. I will call this virtue specific to empathic practices *empathic attunement*.

In keeping with typical virtue ethical frameworks, I will take a deeper look at who we count as an *empathically attuned person.* Drawing from intuition, praxis and theoretical work on empathy, I will reformulate the conditions of empathic practices so that they differentiate those that are intuitively morally valuable. The empathically attuned person will inhabit these conditions characteristically.[10] Equipped with a way of differentiating cases of empathy that are intuitively morally valuable, I then investigate and defend the moral value of empathic practices

---

[10] Here, and throughout, I employ 'excellence' in the sense of virtue or moral excellence, as opposed to excellence in a skill. In section IV, I will defend my view against the view that empathy is nothing more than a skill.

that fulfill those conditions (i.e. empathic attunement). Ultimately, I maintain that empathic attunement is complete in the virtue-theoretical sense. While it can be helped by other virtues at times, it is its own mode of flourishing insofar as it *just is* a unique way of connecting with others, caring for and respecting others, and knowing (with and about) others.

2.3   Excellent Empathy, Characteristically

As previously established (Chapter 1), there is a great amount of disagreement over what, specifically, constitutes 'empathy'. It has been thought of as a tool, a skill, a capacity, an activity, a kind of feeling or communication, and a disposition, among other things (Basch, 1983). And, while most agree that empathy is about 'understanding how another feels', there are numerous accounts of what that entails. What is missing from these accounts is a way of differentiating empathic interactions generally, from ways of engaging in empathy well or poorly. In other words, how are we to separate the excellently empathically attuned nurse, who is sensitive, emotionally adept, reflective and caring in her empathic interactions, from the salesclerk who coldly and effectively reads your mind so as to sell a product for her own benefit?

This is a distinction drawn from common practice. While we admit that salesclerk can read our minds, or that a coworker can use knowledge of how we feel to manipulate us, or that a sibling always knows just how to push the right buttons to drive us crazy, we also have an understanding of what it means to be empathic with others in morally praiseworthy ways. We quickly pick out the nurse who is always attuned to the feelings and needs of her patients, the friend who always lends an ear despite her own troubles, the teacher who is always sensitive to her student's confusion and adjusts her lectures accordingly, and the parent who always offers just the right amount of comfort and encouragement to alleviate a child's fears. Yes, empathic practices vary, and many everyday interactions that demonstrate some form of empathy may

also exhibit vice. However, one need not toss empathy out of the moral window just yet. If moral excellence in empathy can be distinguished from lack thereof, then there may still be room for empathy in morality.

What we need is a way of accounting for this commonplace differentiation. When we identify empathy as a *practice*, there is space for normative qualification and interpretation. Take the conditions of *empathic practices*:

(1) aim of empathic understanding,

(2) self-other differentiation,

(3) other-orientation, and

(4) emotional receptivity.

These conditions, drawn from academic literature, praxis, and empirical evidence, can be fulfilled by degree and leave room for interpretation as to what counts as fulfilling them well or poorly. We might say, for instance, that the self-centered empathic salesclerk is, characteristically, effective at knowing enough about how her clients feel to make sales. This means that she is characteristically empathic in some sense, but not in the fullest, nor any morally excellent sense of the term. Her empathic aim is qualified (i.e. she aims at empathic understanding *only insofar as it helps the sale*), his other-orientation is disingenuous and self-centered (i.e. she only want to know how you feel insofar as it *helps her*), and her receptivity is minimal (i.e. she is not really open to understanding how you feel, just enough about your perspective to *make you feel* that you need to buy her product).

Further, one might be more or less engaged in empathic practices (e.g. a nurse consistently attuning to her patients' emotions vs. a co-worker only emotionally attuning when a colleague's emotions are unavoidably distracting), just as one might be more or less engaged in other practices (e.g. professional soccer vs. Sunday pick-up games). These everyday examples reveal degrees of satisfying the conditions of empathic practices. One easily finds people who

are characteristically aimed at empathic understanding, but too self-interested to find much success in knowing how another feels. Likewise, many people may be other-oriented, but too emotionally closed off to come to know *how* something feels to another. As these conditions stand, they help us to articulate when and how someone is more or less engaged in empathic practices. However, they do not yet clarify what it means to be excellently empathic.

What is particularly interesting about practices of empathy is that we cannot just say that the person who engages in each condition *as much as possible* is excellently empathic. In fact, much like other virtues, excellence in empathy will be a particular balance, a way of fulfilling each condition in the right way, at the right time, and in the right context. So, while these conditions help identify what counts as empathy, they can only help us to identify excellent empathy when they are re-envisioned with the normative structure of interactions that are typically identified as morally excellent. So, much in the form of analysis of other virtues in virtue ethics, I will look to the sort of person we take to be excellently empathic, and identify how this sort of person stands out within practices of empathy. Only once the conditions that distinguish such a person are identified, can the virtue be understood and tested against counterarguments.

Take the following cases:

(1) A nurse who walks into a room and immediately senses a patient's pain or anxiety. She does this openly, genuinely, with sensitivity to slight shifts in emotional tones, with knowledge and reflection on each patient's history, and she does all of this regularly. Her patients feel more thoroughly cared for and her care is often more accurate and successful because of her attunement to her patient's needs.

(2) A friend who senses your state of mind the second she sees you or hears your voice on the phone. She always wants to know how you're doing, and listens genuinely, even asks to hear more. She is so well attuned, that she is sensitive to when you

need an open ear, or a happy distraction, or just some time to wallow. She is also

particularly sensitive to personal differences, when she can't know exactly how you

feel, or when you don't want her to know. She is thoughtful and responsive.

(3) A teacher who is always attuned to her students, such that she senses their

confusion, frustration, or boredom and adjusts her lecture accordingly. She is likely to

pull individual students aside because they are in need of further encouragement or

a firmer push. She spends time, when preparing for lectures, considering the

reactions of the previous class, the particular students and how they seem to be best

motivated or more encouraged to participate. This 'feeling with' her students happens

regularly inside and outside of class.

(4) A parent who is sensitive to a child's pain, but not frozen by it. She knows just the

right amount of comforting vs. urging forward. She notices subtle shifts in mood,

such that she knows when and how to punish wrongdoing, as well as when and how

to celebrate accomplishment. She is adept at recognizing these emotions from the

perspective of the child, but not so that she is consumed by that perspective, only so

that she can understand and care as is best for the child.

Many will agree that empathy can be of great value when it is accompanied by virtuous aims

(e.g. beneficence or care). The nurse *cares* for her patients and may employ empathy so as to

insure that she is meeting their emotional needs. The friend *cares* for you and seeks to

understand how you feel in order to *comfort* you in some way. The teacher seeks to *understand*

her students and employs empathy so as to *care* for them in the learning process, make them

feel capable, and be accommodating in the face of distress. The parent strives to develop a

good relationship with a child and *support* a child's *flourishing*, and empathy can be

incorporated admirably in those endeavors.

However, it is not just because empathy *can be* an important part of care, beneficence, trust, etc. that it is of moral worth. Nor can it be a *virtue* when its value lies in external ends (e.g. beneficence) alone. Rather, empathy must be of moral value in its own right to be deemed a virtue. It is this point that I defend in what follows. First, I develop four conditions that reflect the moral praiseworthiness in cases like those above. Second, I contend that the form of empathy that meets all four conditions, i.e. *empathic attunement*, is a distinctive kind of moral excellence. Specifically, it is a unique way of caring for others, respecting others, and connecting with others. As such, empathic attunement is more than a capacity or skill that might be important to other virtues. Rather, it is a virtue in its own right.

2.3   Four Conditions: Re-structured for the Virtue of Empathic Attunement

While many champion empathy's value to social relations (Echols and Correll 2012; Hoffman 2000), human development (Decety and Michalska 2012), and moral or altruistic behavior (Batson 1991; Hoffman 2000; de Waal 2009; Simmons 2014), others dismiss it because of the potential for things like overempathizing and harmful stereotypes or prejudice (e.g. Paul Bloom 2014 and Jesse Prinz 2011). But there is a middle ground here, upon which we can recognize the import of empathy when it does not fall into these problems. In this section, I will elaborate on the conditions of empathic practice by articulating the normative force exhibited in the above cases. I re-formulate the conditions as follows:

(1) Aiming at Empathic Understanding Completely

(2) Sensitivity to Particularity in Self and Other

(3) Empathic Concern

(4) Responsive Emotional Receptivity

I will articulate how each condition, so re-structured, guides moral excellence in our empathic relations, how each is partly constitutive of *empathic attunement*, and how, together, they form a

distinctively virtuous character trait. I will reinforce these claims in subsequent sections by directly addressing viciousness in empathic practices and articulating how empathic attunement is *complete* in the Aristotelian sense.

(1) Aiming at Empathic Understanding Completely

As previously explained, one can aim at empathic understanding by degree and with ulterior motives. One can merely aim at coming to know (propositionally) another's self-reported emotions. One can aim to know just enough about the affective-cognitive dimensions of another's emotions to manipulate her actions. But what about in cases where the empathic interaction strikes us as morally valuable? Here, I contend, the empathizer is aimed at empathic understanding, completely. Namely, she aims at the fullest extent of empathic understanding possible (both cognitive and affective dimensions), and she aims for such understanding in itself (not for some other gain, or other reason). Elaborating on what is meant by 'understanding' and how one empathizes *for the sake of* such understanding, is just a first step in articulating and categorizing empathy's virtue.

Let us begin with aiming at empathic *understanding*. The term 'understanding' is critical here. The goal is not to *know x* in the sense that one performs an experiment to *know that X hypothesis is true*. Understanding how someone feels may be, in part, about discovering the truth of how she feels, but it will also be about *feeling with*. This means that the empathizer is not performing a methodical and distanced assessment, which aims at making the correct inference about how the other feels. Though, at times, the excellent empathizer might step back and reflect on the situation at hand, aiming at *understanding how* another feels will require more. In the cases above, we see how the excellent empathizer seeks the fullest form of such affective-cognitive understanding. She engages with another so as to attune to all dimensions of the other's emotional perspective. This can manifest in an excited sharing of experiences over a glass of wine, or in a cautious process of building relations with a stranger over time, or in a

short but deeply affective engagement with a patient who has just received a distressing diagnosis.

As we see in the above cases, this kind of knowing consists in *understanding how*, which is something mixed. It is partly *knowing that x,* but the excellent empathizer undertakes affective physiological resonance as well. In this way, a nurse engages so as to *know how* the other feels affectively-cognitively, rather than merely *knowing that* her patient feels *x.* It is something akin to Nagel's *knowing what it is like*, but where similarities in the subjective experiences of humans and the ability to communicate can afford far greater insight than they would in the case of a bat (Nagel, 2000).

Moreover, the term 'understanding' pushes toward something like 'being understanding' as opposed to 'cognitively grasping'. The latter may be possible at a distance, once one has all the appropriate information, but the former is performed through closeness, understanding *with* another. So, aiming at empathic understanding in the excellent cases above, is like other forms of *knowing how* insofar as it takes us beyond the propositional and into physiological resonance. But the nurse, teacher, friend and parent also engage in *being understanding* insofar as their efforts at understanding are engaged with the other so as to be understanding of the other's emotional perspective. They are not just aimed at *understanding that*, but *understanding how* and *with*. Their understanding is about attuning to/with another. Without this necessarily relational component any claim of 'I know just how you feel' is highly dubious. This is because empathy is unlike other kinds of knowing, it is about emotions and aims in part at resonating emotions. Empathic understanding is something that requires sensing another's emotions and ensuring we have sensed correctly through conversation. We cannot depend on third person accounts or even detailed narrative alone to understand in all of these regards. To do these things alone, to remain in one's own mind distanced from the other, is not to aim as fully as

possible at empathic understanding nor is it to demonstrate hitting the target of understanding *how/with* (emotional/relational).

One can begin to see how this aim will partly differentiate the athletic competitor, the salesclerk, even a torturer, who may all be skilled at reading the minds/feelings of others, from the loved clinician, the caring teacher, and the sensitive friend. The former, more cold and calculated forms of empathy, can be quite successful in their own way (e.g. successfully attaining knowledge that *X* feels frightened). In fact, we can imagine a case in which a salesclerk is skilled at inferring the emotions of others from a distance, but without ever requiring interaction to attain that knowledge. This can count as an empathic practice in some sense, but it will not count as empathic attunement because (1) she does not aim at understanding how/with, (2) she does not aim at the fullest degree of understanding possible, and (3) her aim is likely to be qualified rather than for its own sake. For these reasons, her actions will not demonstrate the kind of flourishing that we see in the cases of excellence above. As we turn to the second and third dimensions of this aiming we will begin to see how empathic attunement partly constitutes other's flourishing, one's own, the particular relationship, and even the society at large.

Let us now turn to centralizing the aim, i.e. aiming at empathic understanding *for its own sake*. Think, for a moment, about how you feel when another tries to understand how you feel, when this is the empathizer's central aim and when she *really* tries to understand your feelings as they feel to you, as they matter to you. At once, you can feel loved, respected, of value, etc. And as one comes to understand how you feel, to some extent or another, you may feel weight lifted from your shoulders: 'ah, someone else understands me… someone else has felt this too… I'm not crazy, I'm not stupid…' Likewise, in so empathizing, the empathizer might recognize similarities in her experiences and flourish in the sharing, the commonality, the acceptance: 'ah, yes, I have felt like this too, though not quite the same.'

This means that empathic activity must be chosen for its own sake. As Aristotle tells us, virtuous action must be done knowingly as well as decided or chosen and done for its own sake (*NE* II.4). This is precisely what we find in the cases of excellent empathy above. First, aiming at empathic understanding for its own sake distinguishes a case of a nurse who has good (though unchosen/unconscious) empathic habits from a similar nurse who has reflected on the moral worth of her habits and chosen them insofar as they are good in themselves. Now, this conscious aiming need not happen at every turn. As Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethicists have explained, the well-practiced, fully virtuous individual will master such transitions seamlessly. As Annas acknowledges, "[the virtuous] respond *directly* and *immediately* to situations in a way that often contrasts with the more inhibitedly thoughtful response of the less virtuous (Annas, 2011, p. 28). In other words, we must be intentionally aimed at understanding the feelings of the other, but this intentionality may not appear fully conscious in the moment because it is so well-habituated. As Annas explains, this response may be immediate but it must be "intelligent" (Annas, 2011, p. 28). In any case, whether it is obviously chosen in the moment or done knowingly over the course of time, it is this intentioned, voluntary, complete aiming through which we reliably come to understand how others feel.

Second, aiming at empathic understanding for its own sake means that one has no ulterior motive. With this qualification, one is more likely to achieve a successful empathic connection, as only then is our attention well-directed and only then will others reliably share their emotional perspectives with us. This is because others are more likely to connect and share with us. And we are less likely to miss out on emotional and verbal cues. If our true aim is something else entirely (e.g. making a sale, manipulation, etc.), then we may easily become distracted by only the cues we want to see and misinterpret or miss out altogether on a more complete understanding of the other's emotional experience.

Now this is not to say that this aim cannot be accompanied by other aims, such as the aim to care or benefit or act courageously, but it should not be done for the sake of those other ends, just as it should not be done for the sake of self-benefit or manipulation or causing pain in others. In the course of the empathic interaction, empathic understanding should be *the end*. This is because too great of a focus on even something like beneficence can distract us from subtle cues about how the other feels. We might want to help so intensely that we miss the perceptual and somatosensory cues that tell us that someone doesn't want or need the kind of help we thought we could give or that someone needs a form of help quite different than what we have the ability to offer. This will be critical to the moral excellence of empathic attunement on its own, as well as to its contributions to other virtues. Empathic attunement (much like sympathy or trustworthiness) can be crucial to strengthening and manifesting other virtues (e.g. beneficence). But, an empathic character or empathic interactions will not count as empathic attunement (i.e. a virtue) if one is only so engaged as a means to other ends.

This is not to say that empathic practices cannot or should not be used as a means to other ends, only that empathy will not count as a virtue under such circumstances. Moreover, empathic interactions that do not aim at empathic understanding in itself, are less likely to actually be of value in respect to other virtues. This is precisely because empathic interactions that do not aim at understanding how another feels for its own sake are more likely to miss out on knowledge important to acting beneficently (e.g. how does this person feel about being in a homeless shelter?), more likely to allow for attitudes ultimately destructive to beneficence (e.g. an attitude of superiority or a racial bias), and are less likely to make another feel cared for (e.g. insofar as their feelings only matter in regard to their medical diagnosis and appropriate treatment).

So, as one can see in the case of the nurse or the friend above, each may have other aims, e.g. to enable the health of a patient or to be a good friend, but in each empathic

interaction, these aims are pushed aside. In these moments, an *empathically attuned* nurse or

doctor aims at empathic understanding *completely*. This means that they do not run through a

'how do you feel…here…when…etc.' checklist, only politely listen, and then move on. Rather,

they genuinely aim to know how you feel, forgetting the standard patient intake for the moment

and having a conversation. Likewise, an *empathically attuned* friend, focuses on you so as to

understand your emotions. She does not just politely ask about your day, fail to listen, and then

direct the conversation to her own story. Nor does she mechanically sit there, asking questions

and listening to your replies, just so she can check off a good deed for the day and return home

satisfied in 'being a good friend'. Rather, she *really* listens. She *really* wants to know how you

feel and engages with you accordingly. In these instances, we find that empathic understanding

is *the aim*, it is part of what makes the interaction complete because it is not done for any other

purpose.

Moreover, we must aim at both cognitive and affective dimensions of empathic

understanding. To strive for only one or the other, or to only seek some minimal grasp of each

dimension, could similarly lead to missed knowledge and missed connection. For instance, take

the clinician who only reaches a diagnosis from a questionnaire, only needing some basic

cognitive knowledge of your reported experience. This clinician does not aim to understand your

emotions fully (cognitively and affectively). And, since she is only looking for a specific cognitive

report, she is likely to miss out on certain facial cues or vocal tones. And, her care is likely to be

incomplete because of it, especially if the illness involves greater complexity than, say, a

common cold or UTI. The patient may not only be given the incorrect treatment, but she may

also feel less than fully cared for. By contrast, take the parent who aims to understand a child's

emotions fully, such as the fear of being bullied in school. Such a parent seeks to understand

the objects of fear, the child's beliefs about the bullies and what they might do, as well as how

such fright and anxiety *feel* and how those feelings can wreak havoc on social and academic

success. When a parent's central aim is to understand all of these dimensions *with the child*, the child is likely to be more open and honest and the parent is more likely to come to some understanding. And that connection and care, even in the effort alone, is significant.

Further, to say that we must aim to fully comprehend how another feels, includes sensitivity to how she feels about the empathic interaction. An excellently empathic friend will know when you need space and when you need comfort *because she knows how you feel*. Temporarily backing off can demonstrate success in empathic understanding because one understands that the other feels the need for space now. In that case, one is not backing off so as to avoid empathic engagement, but in demonstration of empathic understanding and so as to leave further engagement possible. A friend who is truly excellently attuned will also be adept at grasping more robust details about how you feel. For instance, maybe you are someone who says you want space when you do not. Or, perhaps you feel the need for space now, but will not later. Someone who aims at this more complete empathic understanding will be responsive in this regard. It is not that she ceases to aim at empathic understanding at any point. Even the move to back off can demonstrate a continued effort at empathic understanding. It simply means that the empathic activities shift temporarily (e.g. reflection and imagination) in direct response to how the other feels. In this way, the friend is sensitive to the particular forms of empathic interactions or activities that are called for by the context and by her friend. She may be pushed away, but that does not stop her from reflecting on what her friend has said and putting that together with her friend's narrative and other information so as to understand how she feels. This *just is* to aim at understanding and respond empathically (back off for now, send flowers, call her later on, etc.) and to remain sensitive to shifts in how her friend feels. Similarly, she will understand when her friend is resistant to being exposed, wishes not to seem vulnerable, or feels embarrassed by others knowing how she feels. These are complex feelings. Feelings that the most praiseworthy empathizer will aim to comprehend as they are all

dimensions of how someone feels. In such circumstances, she adjusts her interactions so as to manifest her empathic aim appropriately in actions. For her to force an embarrassed friend to recount an experience when she is entirely disinclined to do so would be to completely miss the target as it would be a failure in empathic understanding.

Moreover, despite every effort, even the most excellent empathizer may not *succeed* in completely mirroring the other's emotions. Still, she will aim to understand them to the fullest extent *possible*. This is to say that a white woman of economic privilege ought not assume that she can fully comprehend the emotional perspective of an economically under-privileged black woman. An excellent empathizer will recognize a gap in her understanding and do her best to appreciate the reported emotions without feeling them herself insofar as she is not able. Yet, at the same time, she cannot shirk her responsibility to push her own capacity to empathically understand as much as possible. There is *a lot* one can come to understand about people whose experiences are very different from oneself and feigning ignorance is likely to be harmfully dismissive. Maintaining sensitivity to these limits *just is* part of aiming at empathic understanding and hitting that target.

So, we can begin to see how this aim will partly constitute a kind of flourishing unique to empathic activities, which will be secured by its conjunction with the other 3 conditions. In part, the empathic aim helps to insure against practices that masquerade as empathy. For instance, when we merely put ourselves in the other's shoes, we may come to some shared understanding OR we may fail entirely to understand how the other feels. Consider the case of a privileged man who only aims at understanding what *he would feel like* in the shoes of an impoverished man. All too often, this leads to false claims of empathy and ignorant conclusions; e.g. Charles Payne claiming that "it gets to be a little comfortable to be in poverty" (Fox News's "Cavuto on Business" March 30, 2013), or the prevalent American right wing conservative testament that "if you don't want to be poor, just get a job, that's what I would do." These

statements demonstrate cases of failed or deficient empathic aiming. The individuals *do not even try* to understand how *the other* feels or only try in a half-hearted way. Not only does this mean that they are likely to have false beliefs or only partial information, but that 'knowledge' can be quite harmful insofar as it renders invisible the significant efforts that are made by those who are underrepresented to overcome an unrelenting racist and classist socio-economic structure.

Though empathic attunement, like other virtues, will not require a constant state of empathic activity, it must be responsive to others and our relationships *calling for* such attunement. One must be ready, sensitive to where it is needed or otherwise called for, and where it will instantiate flourishing. This responsive effort, alone, can instantiate care and respect. For instance, even when my childless friends cannot fully understand the first few months of a new parent's life, their efforts to try to understand and, at least, their cognitive recognition of how I feel, is caring. It makes one (particularly one's emotions) feel important, legitimized, respected, and worthy of care. As such, this empathic aiming enables and strengthens our caring relationships and maintains those friendships through times when efforts at friendship become more difficult, when difference in experience has the potential to push friends apart (even when those friendships are greatly needed). This is why the empathic *aiming*, when done for its own sake and with complete (possible) empathic understanding as its end, is partly constitutive of the moral excellence of empathic attunement. It both deepens our connection with others by making others feel important and respected, but also ensures empathic *understanding* or *knowledge* insofar as it encourages openness and prevents other epistemic obstacles (e.g. self-centered motivations).

One can begin to see how the condition of aiming at empathic understanding gains normative force, i.e. when it is *the aim* and when its object is complete understanding how/with (as possible and called for). And it is not just at the interpersonal level that this dimension of

empathic attunement finds moral importance. Additionally, this aim partly constitutes flourishing at a societal level. Imagine if larger governmental structures discouraged or prevented us from aiming at this kind of emotional understanding, such as in the norms and laws that once prevented African-Americans and women from equal participation, or the structures that demonize undocumented immigrants in the U.S. In all of these cases, we see not just a lack of understanding of the emotional perspectives of others, but also social structures that discourage aiming at such understanding. In providing little or no legal recourse for undocumented immigrants and their families, we demonstrate a lack of empathy for their position and inhibit their ability to share their subjective experience. And, in demonizing such immigrants as 'illegal' or 'alien', we obstruct normal pathways toward empathic understanding (one ought not empathize with a criminal, one cannot empathize with an alien, etc.). This manifests a form of depriving others of the ability to flourish insofar as they feel misunderstood, lacking in value and respect. It also prevents a kind of flourishing on the part of documented immigrants and citizens; namely, we ignore the feelings of others and so miss out on shared feeling/understanding, we do not even try come to understand others and so miss out on knowledge, and we cannot help in light of such understanding.

More, however, must be done to establish a necessary connection between empathy and virtue. It will only be in conjunction with the other conditions that a complete and distinctive virtue arises from empathic practices. When all of these pieces are brought together, we will find a definable structure behind the praiseworthy character of those we take to be excellently empathically attuned.

(2) Sensitivity to Particularity in Self and Other

It is not just the aiming, but the activities and interactions that constitute so aiming and hitting that target, which reveal virtue in empathy. The ability to differentiate between self and

other is a distinguishing feature of empathy,[11] but it takes on a distinctive mode in the case of empathy done excellently. As Code (in an interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir) informs us, empathy, when done well, is uniquely and importantly sensitive to the particularity of others.

> De Beauvoir writes: "It is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes" (de Beauvoir, 1962, p. 67). Empathy at its best preserves yet seeks to know the "strangeness," respects the boundaries between self and other that the "forbiddenness" affirms, does not seek to assimilate or obliterate the "freedom." Its ambiguity is manifested in coming to terms simultaneously with the other's likeness to oneself, and her/his irreducible strangeness, otherness. (Code, 1995, p. 141)

Moreover, as Scheler aptly recognizes, this preservation of another's particularity is a key feature of a morally honorable sense of empathy (for Scheler, 'fellow-feeling').

> Does it not seem as if the purely maternal instinct [to protect her young, to 'self-sacrifice' for the preservation of her young]—unmixed with love—were seeking to draw the child back, as it were, into the protecting womb? It is maternal *love* which first checks this tendency, directing itself upon the child as an independent being, slowly making his way from the darkness of mere physical life into the increasing light of consciousness. (Scheler, 1954, p. 27)

Likewise,

> True fellow-feeling betrays itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and character of the other person as an individual, as part of the object of commiseration or rejoicing. (Scheler, 1954, p. 39)

---

[11] We see it across the literature on empathy in psychology (de Waal, 2009, pp. 93-101, 125; Hoffman, 2000, pp. 63, 80) as well as philosophy (Code, 1995; Coplan, 2014, pp. 15-16; Scheler, 1954).

And finally,

> It may seem extraordinary that we should be able to feel the emotional states of others,
> and really 'suffer' over them, that the result of rejoicing *with* them should be, *not*, that we
> are joyful on their account, for this would then be simply our own joy, but that we are
> able to *savor* their joy without thereby needing to get into a joyful mood ourselves; but
> this is just what happens in the phenomenon of *genuine* fellow-feeling. (Scheler, 1954,
> pp. 41-42)

What Code and Scheler recognize is the unique way in which empathy involves emotional
bleeding without the loss of appreciation of the differences between self and other. It is not just
vicarious feeling, where there is no such differentiation. And it is not just a mere
acknowledgement of different selves. Rather, excellent empathic interactions are those which
fully recognize and respect the important differences and particularities of others.

As such, this mode of empathizing strikes a balance between pure emotional contagion
and distance/abstracted understanding. In other words, it runs contrary to the view that in order
to separate 'empathy' from 'emotional contagion', "the experience you empathically understand
remains that of the other. The focus is on the other, and the distance between self and other is
preserved, and upheld" (Zahavi & Overgaard, 2012, p. 6). While Zahavi and Overgaard are
correct that some *minimal* distance must be maintained, empathic attunement is able to
simultaneously uphold and break down the barriers between selves. It is defined by an ability to
uptake the emotions of others *while understanding* who the emotion stems from and the
particularity of her experience. Thus, distinction is importantly maintained, but not in the form of
distant observer. Rather, in the case of empathic attunement, the interaction is built on both
emotional transference (by degree possible) *and* understanding of particular difference or
individuality.

The special import of this sensitivity to particularity becomes abundantly clear when we consider cases where it is missing. Code, for instance, considers the false empathy that results from power imbalance and, as I would argue, blindness to another's particular emotional experience and knowledge.

> The negative, imperialist potential of declared empathy is most evident in situations informed by spectator epistemologies, and marked by an obvious power differential… Where there is a difference of power, knowledge, expertise, a claim that I "know just how you feel" can readily expand into a claim that I will tell you how you feel, and *I* will be right… (Code, 1995, pp. 130-131)

Failing to appreciate the particular epistemic positions of others (e.g. when power obscures its own privilege and renders the unpowerful emotionally and otherwise unknowing and unknown) can lead to significant harm. It is a lack of such a grasp of the particularity of another that has led religious missionaries to do more harm than good in their journeys to other cultures, insofar as they impose their own perspectives on others. Moreover, attention to difference will lead us to probe further, to be sure that we are not making assumptions from our own experiences by asking further questions, opening the dialogue. And, finally, it allows for levels of understanding based on such differences between self and other. Even encouraging us to recognize, usefully, when we cannot fully comprehend how another feels *because* we are different.

Thus, differentiation between self and other *excellently* will mean paying attention to all the important nuances of our particular experiences that make those experiences different. A full regard for these perspectival particularities, as Scheler recognizes above, is a way of respecting others, at least in the minimal sense of understanding that others have experiences different from our own, so we cannot assume to know how they feel. So, excellence in this condition will both make our empathic efforts more epistemically valuable (i.e. achieve more accurate and complete knowledge), but also more interpersonally excellent insofar as such

differentiation manifests respect and humility in a unique way. These claims of moral excellence will become clearer as we address the final two conditions.

(3) Empathic Concern

One cannot find virtue in the empathic aim and in sensitivity to particularity alone. I said, above, that empathic attunement must be aimed at empathic understanding for its own sake. In fulfilling this aim, the excellent empathy embodies certain attitudes, particularly *empathic concern*. What this means is that in striving to understand how another feels for its own sake, we do so with an attitude of concern for the other's feelings. Much like beneficence, which aims at benefiting others but is best done *with concern for other's wellbeing* (not because it will make us famous or bring reward)*,* empathic attunement aims at understanding how others feel, but is best done *with concern for other's feelings.* Accordingly, this condition helps to specify *how* we are so directed, but not the ultimate object. As such, it clarifies our other-orientation; namely, we must be oriented in such a way that the other's emotions are our focus, our primary concern, and our efforts are directed at understanding the other's subjective experience with that concern. It is this condition, along with the fourth condition, that provides content to both our empathic aiming and how we ought direct our attention to the particularity of the other.

'Empathic concern' is a term used throughout the literature, and is sometimes taken to be *the* moral force in empathy. Simmons, for instance, claims that moral worth is found in empathizing with another's concern for her own well-being (Simmons, 2014). But this is a very narrow form of empathic concern. More generally, it is defined as the "experience of another's distress (e.g., sadness or pain) [when it] conjures up an other-oriented emotion for the victim (e.g., concern, goodwill, or tenderness)" (Light & Zahn-Waxier, 2012, p. 111). Likewise, Echols and Correll define it as "an other-oriented emotional reaction that can occur when perceiving an individual in distress [that] leads the observer to experience a unique profile of emotions, including feelings of sympathy, compassion, warmth…" (D. Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987;

Echols & Correll, 2012, p. 60). Here, I take empathic concern to mean being *concerned with*

another's emotions. Namely, not only is one oriented toward or focused on the other, as is found

to some extent or another even in the case of the salesclerk, but, moreover, one takes the other

(particularly her emotions) seriously, takes her emotions to be important and central to

interactions that aim at understanding how she feels.

Accordingly, while the excellent empathizer is engaged in empathy for the sake of

empathic understanding, this activity is accomplished with an attitude of concern for the other's

emotions. As such, this condition helps to prevent disingenuous empathic activity, such as using

empathic knowledge for my benefit or being concerned with your sadness only because it is

bringing me down. In cases like these, as Scheler explains,

> The really instructive feature here is the way the agent brings his own pleasure or pain
>
> into the foreground of attention, so as to *mask* their presence in the other person, and
>
> concentrates upon these obtrusive feelings of his own… commiseration or rejoicing are
>
> never self-regarding states of feeling. (Scheler 41)

There are many examples of practices that masquerade as empathic attunement, but flounder

under scrutiny. For instance, take the missionary who brings her own religion and cultural codes

to another culture thinking 'of course these savages will be better off with my religion and

propriety'. This missionary not only fails to appreciate the particularity of another, but also fails to

be genuinely concerned with the other's feelings. She is much too focused on her own

conception of the right and the good, her own disgust at another's practices, and what will make

her feel accomplished.

We can exhibit self-regarding (or not sufficiently other-regarding) attitudes in two ways

here that prevent empathic attunement. First, we can only/merely put ourselves in the other's

shoes or get caught up in our own experiences (which may also be a failure of self-other

differentiation). Second, we can be concerned with the other's feelings only/primarily insofar as they affect us.

In the first case, we are guilty of false empathy insofar as we *only* come to know how we have felt or would feel in the other's circumstance. This happens when we feel sadness or frustration because we imagine ourselves going through what the other is going through. Or, when we harken back to our own experiences and assume that the other feels as we once did, as in Scheler's description of "the rapt historian" whose gaze cannot be diverted "from his own career to our present troubles" (Scheler 46). In both of these cases, one becomes primarily focused on oneself. This will obstruct one's ability to understand how the other feels, as self-focus inhibits the ability to recognize difference and uniqueness in the other's experience.

Likewise, if one is only interested in another's emotional experience insofar as it affects oneself (i.e. one is sensitive to particularities, even other-oriented in some sense, but self-concerned), then one is likely to miss out on a full understanding of the other's experience but only understand the bits that affect oneself. And, therefore, fail to come to much of any understanding of how the other feels. In fact, one may simply push the other away so as to avoid catching her melancholy. Such self-involvement, or self-concern, is not only likely to blind one to important cues about the other's emotional state, but is also likely to dissuade the other from sharing her experiences openly, which will provide yet another impediment to achieving understanding of how the other feels.

As I take it, the primary import of this concept is that it requires us to be other-oriented in a specific way. Namely, our attention is drawn to others such that we become wrapped up in their emotional perspectives as their own, as they matter to them. This is much like what Scheler describes as unique to fellow-feeling.

> True fellow-feeling betrays itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and
>
> character of the other person as an individual, as part of the object of commiseration or

rejoicing. Can one rejoice more profoundly with a person than at his being the perfect,

talented, unspoiled individual *that he is*? Or commiserate more deeply than for his

having to suffer as he does, being the sort of man he is?… Thus wherever fellow-feeling

has a direct reference to the other person, as such, or to the *individual uniqueness* of his

sorrow or joy… it follows that 'comparison' must already be ruled out as insufficient for

an understanding of the situation. (Scheler, 40)

In this way, the condition of empathic concern, in conjunction with the condition of sensitivity to

particularity and the condition of openness below, prevents a comparison between selves

insofar as it is self-focused (how is the other like me?). Empathic concern directs us to the

uniqueness of the other's perspective by making her emotional perspective central. Namely,

empathic attunement will neither be guilty of mere emotional infection, nor of detached objective

assessment, nor self-focused assimilation. In undertaking efforts that are for the sake of

empathic understanding, one centralizes the emotions of the other in a way that reflects concern

for those emotions particularly.

This mode of orientation to the other in attitude enables and partly constitutes a special

kind of flourishing. There are many ways in which we can be concerned with others. We can be

concerned with their health, their knowledge and beliefs, their success, their happiness, etc.

Empathic concern is to be particularly concerned with their emotional state. This sort of concern

can make others feel cared for, respected, and even loved in a unique way. Further, it directs us

to knowledge about others that we might otherwise be blind to. Without such concern, why

would we make efforts to understand other's feelings and to respond accordingly? Without such

concern, how would we know the best way to alleviate another's burden, or to celebrate with

them when they find success?

Some might argue that the extent of other-orientation that I am calling for here is

impossible. But notice that empathic concern does not require complete mirroring. Rather, it

requires concern for all of the dimensions of another's emotional perspective, even if we cannot come to understand (cognitively and affectively) all such dimensions completely. And, perhaps to Goldie's dismay (Goldie, 2014), this does ask a lot of us, just as other virtues can be demanding and difficult to live up to. The extent of effort required explains why so many of us are quite bad at being empathically concerned with different people across different contexts, but our cases above reveal both the possibility and value of such an orientation. With practice, it is no longer difficult for the nurse, the teacher, the friend, or the parent to be so concerned with other's emotions in all of their complex particularity. We see such people move fluidly from one person to the next, one context to the next, easily orienting to the other in a particularized and uniquely concerned way. Some have even argued that the automaticity with which we do this is actually quite common in practice (de Waal, 2009).

So empathic concern is possible and valuable, but on its own, it is not sufficient for the virtue of empathy. After all, such concern does not guarantee empathic interaction. One might be so concerned without trying to understand how another feels or without actually being open to another's emotional state. This brings us to the final condition, an answer to what, precisely, one is concerned with and what, exactly, one aims to understand.

(4) Responsive Emotional Receptivity

Being empathically attuned, means that one easily and often takes up the emotional perspectives of others. While this means maintaining some self-other differentiation so as to know we are taking on *another's* perspective, there is a significant amount of bleeding between our psychological states. And, as we will see here, it is our full and reflective receptivity that makes us more empathically successful (epistemically and morally) in our attunement to others.

As with any virtue, openness will be crucial to the character trait. Even excellently formed habit will have to be sensitive to nuances and differences. The same will be true for the

unique way in which empathic attunement manifests excellent receptivity. As Lorraine Code explains,

> There is no doubt that empathy is central among the ingredients that make and sustain close friendships… If I could never believe that my friend knows how I feel, it is not easy to see how a friendship could survive. Yet even in personal relationships, centered around warranted assumptions of mutuality, of knowing how things are with one another, such declarations have to be kept open to reinterpretation. One can always get it wrong, "vicarious introspection" can be trusted only when it finds confirmation, often in ongoing conversation. The "fit" of each empathetic claim has to be assessed, separately and sensitively. (Code, 1995, p. 130)

Code is sensitive to the pitfalls of empathy, the ways in which we can make false claims to it, exhibit bias and emotional immaturity, and harm others in the wake of such deficiencies. But what we see in her reflection on excellent friendship is that empathy can be a crucial character trait, a crucial element to that friendship. In fact, as she says, it is difficult to imagine friendship without it. What she recognizes is how empathy can be done excellently when it manifests complete receptivity to all aspects of the other's emotional perspective. This means that even when we have developed an excellently empathic relationship with a friend, we must be careful to remain *open* to new dimensions of that person's experience. Likewise, part of what it means to possess the character trait of empathic attunement is to be continuously receptive of (attuned to) subtle shifts in the emotional experiences of others and the environment that is so deeply integrated with those experiences.

Most importantly, as I mentioned above, this receptivity does not *require* that we come to mimic the other's emotional state. True receptivity is necessary for full affective-cognitive understanding of another's emotions, in which we *feel* with the other. However, it will also mean that we are cognizant of instances in which we cannot take on or mimic the emotional state of

another. In other words, the excellently empathically receptive person will sense when another's emotional state is too different from one's own to be affectively taken up or fully understood. At least for those of us who are not perfectly experienced so as to inhabit any and all subjective experiences, there will be times when we cannot fully understand how another feels. But this does not preclude empathic attunement. It is the person who is sensitive to these differences who *is* empathically attuned. For instance, a male physician's sensitivity to the embarrassment and fear of a female patient who has just been raped and his recognition that he cannot possibly feel as she feels *just is* excellent empathic attunement. He is so fully attuned to her experience that he knows he cannot feel as she does and should do his best to keep the conversation open and his care responsive to her expressions of fear and pain. He is likely to bring in another caregiver who can understand more about her experience and help provide better care. Thus, it is his full receptivity that enables as much cognitive and affective understanding as is possible for him in this context. And his responses to her emotional state, while not involving complete mimicry, certainly demonstrate an understanding of how she feels, particularly insofar as he defers to her (to her facial expressions, bodily movements, and speech) and to people who are better positioned to understand the experience of rape for a woman. To know what you don't know and cannot fully understand about another's experience just is to understand how another feels.

Moreover, when one is able to understand how/with on both cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy, one finds more robust connections with others and unique knowledge. Certainly, the physician's empathic engagement with the patient (his openness and receptivity, his efforts at ongoing dialogue, his concern with her emotions) enables a much deeper, more understanding, and more caring relationship with the patient. It is his receptivity in the course of their interaction, in conjunction with the other elements of empathic attunement, that encourages and even partly manifests a deeper connection and more caring relationship. It

demonstrates both respect and concern for the wellbeing of the patient. It says that her emotional perspective is important enough to him that he would like to share part of the burden with her if possible and that it is important to providing her with the best care for her. Thus, already, his receptivity is indicative of a more caring relationship. But this receptivity opens up an even deeper level of relating to and understanding others. The physician might come to feel with aspects of the patient's experience, even if not as fully as a sister or survivor. The conjunction of a sister's receptivity, personal experience and intersectional identity enables connection and knowledge in a way that is not quite available to the male physician. Likewise, another survivor of rape can share in experiences of violence, threat, blame, and fear, and can understand the freshness of a new wound more fully than the physician. But this does not preclude some level of emotional resonance and understanding on the part of the physician. Nor does it excuse the physician from making efforts to empathically grasp her emotions in the process of caring for her.

Thus, this emotional receptivity opens connections with others that are unique to empathic engagement. We open ourselves to sensing, receiving, and understanding the emotions of others. This openness may cause immediate uptake of another's experience (as in more automatic cases of empathy) and it will invite others to share more with us. At its best, it both allows for complete affective-cognitive understanding of how another feels *inclusive of* the understanding that another does not want us to *feel with* or *share in* their pain. Moreover, when it is coupled with aiming at empathic understanding, sensitivity to particularity, and empathic concern, we can easily see the empathically attuned person take shape. This person will be adept at understanding the emotions of others, will be sensitive to shifts in mood and context, will connect deeply when she is needed and hold back when she senses she is unwanted, she will remain open and receptive across different relationships and contexts, and she will do all of this for the sake of understanding how/with another and out of concern for those feelings. This is

the excellently empathic person, and we can begin to see how this unique attunement to others just is a kind of flourishing.

2.4   The Completeness of Empathic Attunement

Many of empathy's critics are too quick to discount the epistemic and moral import of empathy. These critics aptly contend that empathy has the potential for stereotyping, misuse, and self-abuse. Likewise, they are correct in claiming that empathic practices (according to the broad construal I offer in Chapter 1) are neither necessary nor sufficient for helping others, neither necessary nor sufficient for morality.[12] It is important to take these skeptical concerns seriously. Much like scientific investigation, we have to be on the lookout for mistreatment of experimental participants, allowing biases and stereotypes to inform methodology and conclusions, etc., but we should not cease scientific investigation or entirely discount its value when performed well. Rather, we change our scientific methods so that they better represent science done excellently. Likewise in the case of empathy, there is room to distinguish dimensions of the practice: separate the morally flawed empathic endeavors from the morally excellent ones.

In response to these, sometimes flippant, dismissals of empathy (which I will address directly in Chapter 3), supporters of empathy have focused on its role in helping others. Aaron Simmons, for instance, argues that a form of empathic concern is necessary and sufficient to caring for another's well-being (Simmons, 2014). And while I agree with Simmons' analysis, I endeavor to push his argument further. I claim, here, that empathy's moral import goes beyond its role in caring or beneficent behavior. Rather, as Simmons faintly suggests, its value, is largely found within the process or engagement itself. Empathic attunement is a character trait

---

[12] See, for example, Prinz, J. 2011.

and activity that instantiates flourishing in and of itself, regardless of whether it results in 'helping behavior'. Max Scheler makes a similar claim in regard to 'fellow-feeling'.

> Fellow-feeling possesses this value in its own right; it is not occasioned by the acts of beneficence which come about through fellow-feeling, and pity especially. For 'A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved; joy shared is joy doubled' is one of the few proverbs which brook examination from the moral point of view. However, it is one of the marks of genuineness in pity, that it should lead to acts of beneficence. (Scheler 138)

While there are certain differences between my conception of empathic attunement and his conception of fellow-feeling, there is this important similarity. Namely, like Scheler, I take empathic attunement to be *complete*. And, as Aristotle rightly attests, it is this completeness that makes it a virtue rather than a skill or other capacity that is 'merely' important to virtue or 'only' a component of virtue. In what follows, I will begin with Simmons' argument that empathic concern is necessary and sufficient for helping, therefore morally significant. But I will push his argument further and claim that empathic concern, while morally significant, is not enough for virtue. Only empathic attunement, as categorized above, demonstrates the kind of moral excellence that we find in other virtues.

For empathic attunement to be a virtue on the standard neo-Aristotelian account, it must be the sort of character trait that "a human being needs for *eudaimonia,* to flourish or live well" (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 29). More specifically, for empathic attunement to count as a virtue, rather than a skill or capacity important to virtue, it must be complete, i.e. done for its own sake because it is good in itself. But few have tried to argue that empathy, in any form, is so complete. Most focus on its connections to altruism (C. D. Batson, 2012) or 'targeted helping' (de Waal, 2009) or moral development (Hoffman, 2000). Aaron Simmons, however, comes quite close to suggesting empathy is complete in this sense. He maintains that empathy is a virtue insofar as it is "sufficient to care for others' well-being when (a) one empathizes with

particular others' concerns for their basic well-being and (b) one empathizes in the fullest sense of empathy" (Simmons, 2014, p. 98). Here, I contend that Simmon's argument helps us to see how empathy can be complete in the sense of virtue. However, his account misses the mark insofar as it remains too attached to the idea that empathy is morally important *because* and *only because* of its link to helping behavior.

Simmons addresses a major concern of empathy's skeptics; namely, that empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient to caring for another's well being or to helping another. Since Simmons focuses on empathy *with another's concerns for her basic well-being* (Simmons, 2014, p. 101), when that empathy is constituted by both cognitive and affective dimensions of that concern, then he is able to sidestep claims to insufficiency. As he says, it is typical of these skeptical claims to lean on conceptualizations of empathy that are lacking in their cognitive or affective dimensions. Some are too focused on empathy as mind-reading or perspective-taking (Goldie, 2014), others neglect the cognitive dimensions in favor of the affective (Hoffman, 1977; Prinz, 2011). Simmons, however, requires empathic understanding along both dimensions.

> To fully empathize with another's suffering entails experiencing a similar feeling of concern or dislike for the other's pain or distress. This is not consistent with failing to feel any concern for the other's suffering. Likewise, if I empathize with another's basic desire to continue living or be free, I will share in the other's desire to fulfill her goals, whether by providing positive assistance or by not interfering with her goals such as confining or killing her. (Simmons, 2014, p. 102)

Simmons claims that such empathic concern is a virtue insofar as it is necessary to ethical life and is useful to promoting ethical behavior. He considers an autistic individual or an individual who behaves in respectful or beneficent ways but does not feel concern for others.

> But there is a degree to which this person is not fully ethical, flourishing, or good person because she lacks the proper emotional responses. Although she may treat others with

respect, she doesn't do so because she empathetically feels concern for their well-being.

(Simmons, 2014, p. 106)

He appeals here to the intuition that it matters to morality how and why we help or respect others, not just that we perform the right actions. Accordingly, he leans on Michael Stocker's intuition that the person who visits her grandmother in the hospital only out of duty (not care and concern) is morally insufficient. Moreover, such concern means experiencing the other as "worthwhile and mattering" (Simmons, 2014, p. 107). So, it seems that Simmons wants to provide an account of empathy that is sufficiently moral and necessary to moral life. Empathetic concern, on his view, is necessary to ethical life as we would not flourish with mere helping behavior alone.

Unfortunately, Simmons' argument strays from the good of empathy on its own. He leans on its connection to altruistic motivations too heavily, which is counter-productive to the claim that it is a virtue rather than a skill or emotion that is necessary to other virtues. For instance, he takes the way in which empathic concern entails seeing other's experiences as "worthwhile and mattering" to mean "that I will want, to some degree, to help fulfill her purposes, not frustrate them" (Simmons, 2014, p. 102). Namely, he relies on the connection between empathic concern and the motivation to help in order to handle empathy's critics. But what if such empathic concern does not result in helping behavior or motivate it? How can we then say that it is a virtue rather than a morally relevant attitude, emotion or skill?

So, Simmons gets us part of the way towards identifying empathy's completeness in the virtue ethical sense, but he comes up short. In order for empathy to be a virtue, it must be established as a character trait that is desirable in its own right, not for the sake of something else (e.g. motivation to help). As Julia Annas tells us,

> Completeness is here explained as an end's putting a stop to desire (desire in the broad sense indicated above, of course). If I desire A because of B, but B just for itself, then B is complete and A is not; B has put a stop to my desire. (Annas, 1995, p. 40)

Here, Annas is referring to the *final end*, the end for which all others are sought (Aristotle, 2002, pp. Book I.1-2). So, she is specifically addressing *eudaemonia*, but the virtues too are complete in some sense. As Aristotle tells us,

> Happiness seems most of all to be like this [i.e. complete]; for this we do always choose because of itself and never because of something else, while as for honor, and pleasure, and intelligence, and every excellence, we do choose them because of themselves (since if nothing resulted from them, we would still choose each of them), but we also choose them for the sake of happiness. (*NE* 1097b1-5)

Depending on the interpretation, we might say that the excellences, the virtues, are complete in the way that happiness is complete, because they are one and the same. But even if we acknowledge that the virtues are chosen for themselves as well as *eudaemonia* or happiness, they are still complete in the sense that they are not chosen for anything other than these things. This means that if empathy is to be a virtue, it must be *chosen for itself*, not for any other mean or purpose beyond *eudaimonia*, including another virtue.

Simmons' account of empathy, even empathic concern, does not hold this same form of completeness. His focus on empathic concern is both too narrow and remains too concerned with its connection to helping behavior. It may be true that empathic engagement is partly relevant to virtue insofar as it often motivates helping others or involves skill and knowledge crucial to helping others, but it must be more than that to count as a virtue that can stand alone.

I submit that the virtue of *empathic attunement* lies not in its connection to helping behavior of the typical sort, but rather in the unique way it manifests respect, concern, and care for another. Thus, my goal here is to argue that empathic attunement is a virtue, not because it

is somehow necessary or vital to caring for others (though it can be), but because it *just is* a unique way of connecting with others in a way that manifests a particular dimension of care and flourishing.

This un-linking of empathy from helping behavior is also in line with some feminist concerns about the connection between altruism and empathy. As Diana Tietjens Meyers points out regarding her own conception of empathy,

> If an altruistic motivation were incorporated into empathy, the problem of difference would seem more tractable than it actually is. In other words, to equate empathetic concern with sympathetic concern would be to underestimate the magnitude of the rifts among differently positioned women and the intensity of the anger and mistrust that fuel the problem of difference. (Meyers, Forthcomming Fall 2016)

Here, Meyers points us to an important problem with ingraining altruism in empathy. To assume that one can empathize across great difference and, moreover, that engaging in empathic processes is always helpful, always altruistic, can actually be quite damaging. It can be to assume epistemic privilege or moral superiority where you have none. It can be to assume that others want your emotional connection when it is intrusive. And it can incite a lack of true empathic recognition of difference between oneself and others. Empathy does not necessarily lead to helping behavior, helping behavior does not necessarily entail empathy, and empathy is not always called for by the context. However, this does not mean that empathy cannot be virtuous. To see this, we need to separate it from standard helping behavior.

The virtue in empathy is not found in its link to altruism, nor is it found in forcing empathic processes and successful empathic inference. The problem that Meyers is sensitive to is a problem of assuming moral-epistemic privilege and, consequently, forcing 'help' and 'understanding' in a way that doesn't appreciate the emotional experiences of another. Often 'empathy', particularly false empathy, is trotted out as the problem in such circumstances. The

thought is that we ought recognize when we cannot find empathic success (when we cannot fully understand) and, therefore, recognize that 'empathy' in such cases is not actually helpful. But this is a misunderstanding of empathy. Firstly, to fail to recognize difference in emotional perspective just is a failure of empathic attunement. It just is to misunderstand the other's perspective and a failure to be sensitive to the other's particularity. The empathically attuned person would be sensitive to this difference, and sensitive to when another is not in a state of needing or wanting affective sharing or when mimicry is not possible. Secondly, excellent empathic sensitivity across difference need not be linked to helping behaviors to be morally worthwhile. Attunement to difference and backing off when complete emotional engagement with another is not wanted, not called for, and not conducive to flourishing *just is* to understand and be understanding of how another feels*.* This is a moral and epistemic kind of excellence that is unique to empathy.

The conditions that I articulate above clarify how empathic attunement is a way of interacting with others that manifests a particular kind of concern for the other and an important mode of emotionally connecting with and understanding others. So, while empathic attunement may not necessitate actions that, for instance, alleviate the pain of others (e.g. feeding the hungry or comforting the bedridden with massage and conversation), it does indeed provide care in the engagement itself. Namely, the cognitive-affective process of attuning to the other's emotions *just is* a form of alleviating pain and a particular instantiation of respect and concern.

Empathic attunement does this in two ways, one more characteristic of 'practical' virtue and the other more characteristic of 'intellectual' virtue. First, in reflection of Scheler's passage above, empathic attunement exemplifies an excellent way of being connected with others and the world around us. Namely, we share in the burden of others' misery as well as in their joys. This form of relating to others through emotional openness and understanding is a form of flourishing in itself. Second, empathic attunement is an excellent way of knowing. Namely, it is a

unique kind of epistemic receptivity that characteristically results in important and even unique knowledge. So, while it is also true that empathy can be crucial to other virtues, in the following I will argue that its completeness as a virtue in itself lies in these two dimensions of its moral-epistemic worth.

Let us begin with its relevance as a practical virtue. I have already said that I plan to unlink the virtue in empathy from the virtue of helping. There has been a lot of work done to demonstrate correlation between empathic behavior and helping, altruistic, or prosocial behavior. We see it in psychological work on empathy, where it is often taken to be a "mechanism underlying prosocial behavior" (Vaish & Warneken, 2012, p. 131). Some have argued that it is a kind of capacity that is integral to prosocial interactions like helping and sharing (Hoffman, 2000) or that discourages or precludes harmful human interactions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Others have found some correlation between empathic responsiveness (broadly construed) and 'social competence' (Eisenberg, Huerta, & Edwards, 2012). While this work is promising insofar as it reveals potentially important roles for empathic practices in broader social relations, the research is still in its infancy. As Eisenberg et al. recognize, it can be quite difficult to tease empathy apart from other similar forms of response (e.g. sympathy and perspective-taking) even in an experimental setting (Eisenberg et al., 2012, p. 158). Moreover, even if one could demonstrate a correlation between empathy and prosocial attitudes or behavior, this would plant empathy in the category of 'morally relevant capacity' but not 'virtue'. A virtue must be good in itself, an end in itself, i.e. *complete*. If its moral import is only that it contributes to, or even that it is vital to, prosocial behavior, then it cannot be classified as virtue insofar as it is incomplete.

But empathic attunement alone reveals a distinctive mode of caring and flourishing in social relations and it is fundamental to our own self-care as well as ascriptions of self-worth and self-respect. Empathic attunement is a crucial mode of caring in both intimate caring and

loving relations as well as in impersonal and distant relations. Take the examples above, the nurse, the teacher, etc. The simple act of genuinely asking how another feels is to care. This is not just because one expresses concern for the other's wellbeing, but also because the interaction allows for shared emotion, shared burden and benefit. It is a way of saying 'you matter to me', 'you matter', not just because you count as human or you count as a rational being, but because your emotional perspective matters. In this way, interactions that manifest empathic attunement make others feel cared for and, as Scheler says above, can lift their burdens and excite their happiness. This care can be seen in interpersonal interactions, but also in more structural practices, such as the group counseling. In such cases, corporate institutions demonstrate care for their employees by providing clear, safe, and open space for employees to express their emotional perspectives and for those emotions to be heard.

This kind of emotional engagement is importantly different from mere emotional sharing. In emotional sharing one does not necessarily understand the source of emotion or the particularity of that source, but just feels as the other feels. In empathic attunement, one's empathic concern and sensitivity to particularity make the emotional sharing *about the other's emotions* and *her* emotional wellbeing. The other's emotions are recognized, taken seriously, appreciated. This means that empathic attunement is also about respect for others, particularly their emotional states. In making another's emotional state matter, we instantiate a dimension of respect that is often neglected. Take the case of the 'hysteria', or even the more contemporary assumption that a woman's hormones make her unfit for U.S. presidency. These are systemic issues with gender norms that partly reveal a lapse in respecting women as rational human beings, but also a lapse in respect for others' emotional perspectives. It is not just a misunderstanding of hormones and physiology, nor just a failure of rationality and respecting another's rationality, but a lack of effort at trying to understand others' emotional perspectives, effectively disrespecting the subjective, emotional elements of their being.

In fact, cases of this sort do not necessarily reflect disrespect in the standard sense. Saying that a woman is unfit to be president because of her hormonal fluctuations does not necessarily deny her humanness, nor does it necessarily deny respect for her status as a rational being (though it often does this too). Rather, it denies that her emotional perspective is at all deserving of understanding. All too frequently, our treatment of others can be lacking in virtue in regard to this specifically empathic deficiency. For instance, it is easy to identify a patient as 'non-compliant' based on an assessment of her behavior alone. Or, to identify a patient as lacking in capacity to make decisions if her stated value judgments and beliefs lack consistency. However, it is typical upon opening a dialogue with these patients so as to understand their subjective perspective, how the care of the medical team *feels to them*, that we find that we have failed to respect their emotional perspective and that this is precisely why they are not 'complying'. This can be a significant breakdown in communication and a failure of care. It can lead to forced unchosen medical treatment (e.g. the case of Samantha Burton, a pregnant woman forced to remain in the hospital against her will). It can even put a patient's life in danger when coupled with other immoral attitudes, norms and behaviors (e.g. the case Alan Pean, a college student who was shot in his hospital room in part because his 'non-compliant' behavior was not given an appropriate psychiatric evaluation despite requests from himself and his family for such an evaluation). But, more importantly, a failure to empathize as is called for by the context, just is a failure of care that reveals itself in patients refusing treatment in seemingly irrational ways. In fact, it is typically the first step of an ethics consult to establish, or reestablish, respect for the patient by engaging in an empathically attuned dialogue. It is this dialogue that makes the patient *feel respected*.

Finally, we can see how such attunement is reflexively important and crucial to our social connections. When we empathize with others and have others empathize with us, we find commonality and understanding that buttresses self-respect and self-care. When others do not

understand us, do not *know how we feel*, do not even try to share in our emotional perspectives, or do not demonstrate respect for differences in our perspectives, we can become lost in cognitive dissonance, unable to give ourselves (or accept from others) the care and concern we deserve. On the other hand, when we empathize with others excellently, as described above, when others so empathize with us, and when structural norms encourage empathic attunement, deeper connections with others are formed. Rather than trot along on our distinct emotional paths, we find deeper friendship and love (for others and ourselves) through efforts and success in empathic understanding.

This brings me to the epistemic dimension of the virtue of empathic attunement. Not only does such attunement instantiate a unique kind of care, respect, and connection with others, but it also makes available and reliably achieves a unique kind of knowledge: what I have called elsewhere 'empathic knowledge'. Empathy's epistemic role here falls under the more general claim that "emotions affect how and what we see, but equally how others see and respond to us" (Sherman, 1989, p. 45). Moreover, the intellectual virtue of empathic attunement is not so different than an acknowledgement made by Jesse Prinz,

> It is undeniable that empathy sometimes leads us to see good and bad actions whose status we might have otherwise missed. This is especially clear when we move beyond paradigm moral categories, such as murder and charity, and consider isolated cases whose worth depends on emotional impact. (Prinz, 2011, p. 223)

What Prinz suggests here is that empathy can be an important capacity in moral endeavors and social behavior, if not necessary to morality, because it enables us to see emotional impact and, therefore, gain morally important information that might have been missed. But, much like in my above assessment of its relation to prosocial behavior, I contend that empathic attunement *just is* a way of *knowing* or *seeing* morally and epistemically relevant facts about others.

Take the following example:

When I was working as a medical assistant, I once brought a patient into the room and, after checking his vitals, noted an elevated heart rate. I presented his physician with this information, and after the physician spoke to the patient and asked for a few more tests the patient was prescribed medication to bring his heart rate down. However, the nurse who ran one of the tests sensed that the patient was feeling anxious. Her emotional receptivity to the patient, which caused her to sense (and possibly feel) his anxiety, led her to ask the patient more questions. In witnessing the robust dialogue between the nurse and patient, it became obvious that she was not merely gathering data about the patient, but aimed at understanding how the patient felt. The nurse treated the patient as a particular person (rather than "patient in exam room 2"), she asked him questions based on what he had said before and based on his particular experiences, and she engaged nonverbally through emotional openness and sensitivity. Based on this process of empathizing, the nurse concluded that the medication the physician had prescribed would only mask the patient's condition rather than treat it. The patient needed a psychiatric consult.

This nurse manifests empathic attunement and it is this attunement that leads her to important knowledge about the patient that would have otherwise been missed. This is a common case in medicine, and parallel situations can be found in many other social interactions. What is important to recognize is the way in which empathic attunement acts as a unique epistemic method[13] and, unlike other more information-based practices, allows for understanding (how/ with) that is importantly emotional.

Empathic attunement does not require success in understanding the other's emotions in the most complete sense, as this may not be possible and is not always called for. But it does

_____

[13] See Lorraine Code for a more robust argument concerning empathy's distinct epistemic methodology (Code, 1995).

make some degree of empathic knowing possible, even reliable. Namely, as we see in the case of the nurse, excellent attunement to her patient's emotions, which involves an open and reflective sensitivity to those emotions in their particularity, renders some understanding of *how* the patient feels quite probable. This means more than understanding facts about another's emotional experience or being able to recite another's self-reported emotions. Empathic practices can direct us to facts about the other's experience, but they can also be deeply emotional, where knowledge comes out of past experience, imagination, and current emotional attunement. And we can confirm this deeper knowledge in our dialogue with the other person, as we share experiences and attune ourselves to each other. Thus, empathy may be one epistemic method among many when it comes to attaining facts and bits of information, but it is unique in its ability to foster knowledge that is entrenched in subjective experience and emotion.

With these dimensions of virtue in mind, I ask you to imagine a world without empathic attunement. Such a world would be lacking in concern for other's emotional perspectives, lacking in treating other's emotional perspectives as worthwhile and respecting them affectively and cognitively; moreover, it would be lacking in relations of love and care. Could we really be said to treat others as worthwhile if we do not endeavor to understand their emotional perspectives? Likewise, could we really be said to love and care for others without not only concern for their emotional perspective, but also efforts and success in understanding those perspectives affectively and cognitively? I contend that a world without such empathy (of the kind accomplished in the right way, at the right time and for the right reasons) would be a world insufficient for flourishing. To flourish is to live excellently in our relations with others, with ourselves, and intellectually. It is a world in which we develop friendships and love, unburden others and have ourselves unburdened by others, treat others as mattering (cognitively and affectively), and learn from the particularities of experiences that are like and unlike our own.

Flourishing, therefore, cannot be *fully* accomplished, and perhaps not accomplished at all, without empathic attunement as I have described it above.

Accordingly, empathy is unique. Sympathy cannot accomplish this kind of concern, as sympathy does not entail trying to understand how another feels from the other's perspective. Caring relations will be incomplete without this particular kind of understanding, this mode of care. And our relations might not count as caring or, more broadly, flourishing at all without genuine attempts at such understanding. Imagine loving relations and friendships with only the distanced respectfulness afforded by respect for autonomy, with only the cognitive recognition of how another feels, with mere feeling badly for at a distance, with no attempt to fully understand the emotions of another. It would be a world lacking in the connection afforded in *feeling with*, a world lacking in the care felt in moments of attuning to the emotions of others out of concern for those emotions, a world lacking in a particular dimension of respect (respect for another's emotions). Our connections with others would be more superficial and distanced without this kind of openness and (partially or wholly) shared emotional understanding. And knowledge would be missed without this way of knowing.

The dimensions of connection, care, and respect found in processes of empathic attunement make empathic attunement unique. They categorize and justify the moral excellence found in the cases with which we began this chapter. Finally, as will be justified more fully in Chapter 3, they lift empathic attunement beyond its potential value as an attitude or skill and into the realm of virtue.

2.5   Conclusion: A Return to Aristotle

The distinction that I have made between empathy as a practice (Chapter 1) and empathic attunement as the virtue unique to that practice is reflective of some of Aristotle's discussion of the other virtues.

As has been said, then, courage is an intermediate state relating to things that make for boldness and things that make for fear, in the circumstances we have stated, and it makes its choice and stands firm because doing so is fine, or because not doing so is shameful. Dying to escape from poverty, or sexual passion, or something painful, is not a feature of courage but rather of cowardice; for it is softness to run away from things because they are burdensome, and the person in this case accepts death not because it is a fine thing to do, but because he is running away from something bad. (*NE* 1116a10-16)

Granted, Aristotle is talking about a "state" and does not use the word "practice", but his implications are parallel to what I have tried to establish here. Just as courage has to do with the capacities, responses, emotions, etc. relating to fear, empathic practices are the sets of states, interactions, and relations that have to do with coming to understand and understanding how others feel. Practices of empathy (i.e. practices relating to understanding how others feel) similarly range from excesses (e.g. constant emotional contagion) to deficiencies (insensitivity and unappreciation for how others feel). In the case of empathy-related practices/characters, empathic attunement is the mean, it is a way of being attuned to the emotions of others in circumstances that 'make for' such understanding. In those same circumstances, the insensitive person lacks openness, awareness/appropriate aiming, and other-concern, or, the hypersensitive person is open to such an extent that she loses a sense of self-other differentiation altogether and/or a sensitivity to her own particularities as well as those of the other. So, just as courage is the excellent way of fearing/responding to fear, empathic attunement is the excellent way of understanding how others feel.

In the end, empathic attunement is both importantly different and significantly similar to the other virtues. What makes trustworthiness a virtue is much like what makes empathic attunement a virtue. Namely, the way in which it instantiates flourishing lies in its ineliminable

value to our relations with others and to society as a whole. Moreover, trustworthiness, beneficence, courage, and the like must be done in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reasons to count as such. Empathy, too, is a diverse practice and has its own ways of falling into excess and deficiency. This brings us to some of the arguments against empathy's moral worth. As one will now see in Chapter 3, the conditions I have articulated above help to differentiate empathic attunement from empathic deficiencies and excesses. They clarify its mean, its unique mode of excellence. Moreover, elaborating on these conditions and how they distinguish the excellence of empathic attunement will reveal that empathic attunement cannot be subsumed under emotion or skill, or even other forms of virtue. Empathic attunement just is an importantly different kind of flourishing and a crucial component of an excellent life.

Chapter 3

The Torturer and the Salesclerk: Examining Viciousness in Empathy

The cruel man owes his awareness of the pain or sorrow he causes entirely to a capacity for visualizing feeling! His joy lies in 'torturing' and in the agony of his victim. As he feels, vicariously, the increasing pain or suffering of his victim, so his own primary pleasure and enjoyment at the other's pain also increases. (Scheler, 1954, p. 14)

3.1   Introduction: Empathy Skepticism through Three Cases

Empathy, as a broad practice of understanding and coming to understand how others feel, is capable of being used for vicious purposes. We see people come to some degree of knowledge about how others feel in order to sell them something, get something from them, and even to inflict harm. Further, empathy might be problematic insofar as it uses stereotypes or harmful when it overly supplants concern for oneself. I take these cases to be excesses or deficiencies in empathy and, more importantly, not cases of *empathic attunement*. I will explain how my distinction between empathic practices and empathic attunement avoids these pitfalls in light of three cases, the stereotyping salesclerk, the pain-seeking torturer, and the overly empathic nurse. Moreover, I incorporate Aristotle's understanding of virtue as a mean, as I find it a helpful structure for understanding which kinds of cases of empathic practice fail to count as empathic attunement. Finally, against the criticism that empathy is a mere skill, I contend that the conditions of empathic attunement establish virtue.

3.2   The Torturer, the Salesclerk, and the Nurse: Failures of Empathic Attunement

Each of the cases that I will present here reflect common moral resistance to empathy. I will address each in turn and establish how each, depending on how the case is articulated, demonstrates viciousness unrelated to empathy or fails to manifest empathic attunement in

regard to one or more of its conditions. To recount, the conditions of empathic attunement are as follows:

(1) Aiming at Empathic Understanding Completely

(2) Sensitivity to Particularity in Self and Other

(3) Empathic Concern

(4) Responsive Emotional Receptivity

These conditions identify the characteristics of moral excellence in empathy as is recognized in common practice and reveal empathy's unique moral relevance. As explained in Chapter 2, empathic attunement is a virtue insofar as it is a unique way of caring and respecting others, and connecting with others. As such, it demonstrates a mode of flourishing on its own accord, regardless of its connection to more standard 'helping behaviors'. So, with the distinction between empathic practices and empathic attunement, the conditions of empathic attunement, and the completeness of empathic attunement in mind, let us now turn to some objectionable cases.

(A) The Empathic Torturer

If our understanding of empathy is rather broad, then a torturer might empathize in two ways. She might seek propositional knowledge about her victim (i.e. knowledge that the victim feels a certain way) in order to know what techniques will be more effective (leaving aside the speciousness of the idea that torture is ever effective). But, more than that, the torturer might actually seek to *feel with* the pain of the victim because it gives her pleasure. Max Scheler considers just such a case.

> The *cruel* man owes his awareness of the pain or sorrow he causes entirely to a
> capacity for visualizing feeling! His joy lies in 'torturing' and in the agony of his victim. As
> he feels, vicariously, the increasing pain or suffering of his victim, so his own primary
> pleasure and enjoyment at the other's pain also increases. (Scheler 14)

This is a difficult case to address, as one cannot claim that it is merely fiction or that it is not a legitimate instance of empathy in some sense. The concern is that if such examples count as empathy, then it cannot be considered a virtue.

However, there are two counterarguments available to my account. First, it is not that empathy itself that is objectionable in this case. Rather, it is the harm to the victim and the way in which the torturer derives pleasure from that harm. Too many collapse empathic behavior with helping/harming behavior, when they are two different activities and can be assessed separately (in fact, as explained in Chapter 2, this distinction is necessary for establishing empathic attunement as a virtue).

Second, even if one objects to separating empathy from the other morally reprehensible factors of this case, and so finds the empathy itself objectionable, it is clear that this is not a case of empathic attunement. While my structure allows us to admit a high level of empathic knowledge in this kind of case, and even "empathic sensitivity" (Zahavi & Overgaard, 2012, p. 6) insofar as the sadistic torturer might *feel* the suffering of the the victim and relish in that feeling. The torturer is in no way *concerned* with the feelings of the victim. Her focus and her motivation is her own pleasure and understanding the pain of the other only matters insofar as she gets something out of it. Thus, while she may achieve success in coming to know how the other feels, her engagement does not fulfill the criteria I have listed above for empathic attunement, though it may count as empathy. She does not aim at empathic understanding for its own sake, nor does she do so with appropriate concern for how the other feels. The criteria of *empathic attunement* are meant to identify the sort of person we consider excellently empathic, not the sort of person who might find some kind of empathic success here and there. The case of the torturer, like that of the salesclerk below, simply does not meet the appropriate criteria.

Thus, even if this case counts as some degree of engaging in empathic practices, its deficiencies preclude the excellence of *empathic attunement*. We can find parallels in other

virtues. Take beneficence for instance. A way in which one might demonstrate a deficiency in beneficence is in cases where one successfully benefits others (e.g. donates money that provides necessary medical care to children in another country) but the donation is selfishly motivated (e.g. publicity) and made without concern for the effects it has on its beneficiaries. In many cases, such moral and epistemic poverties will mean a failure of conferring any sort of benefit to others. And while we may be thankful when benefit is found, we still do not consider such a person beneficent. She is deficient in the virtue insofar as her intentions, motivations, and relationship to the beneficiary do not manifest beneficence. Likewise, the torturer may be motivated by being the cause of pain alone, may be motivated by her own pleasure alone, and may relate to the other in a way that is not empathically concerned. So, while the torturer may come to know how the other feels just as the public figure benefits children, and so, respectively, engage in empathy or helping practices to some extent, both cases are otherwise entirely deficient in the virtues at hand and so cannot be called empathic attunement or beneficence.

Thus, the distinction between empathic practice and empathic attunement allows one to count the empathic torturer as engaging in empathic practices (at least to some degree or another), but also discount her activity and character as empathically attuned.

(B) The Efficient Emotion-reading Salesclerk

One can imagine a salesclerk who is empathically attuned. For instance, the herbalist in a health conscious grocery store may be very much concerned with your emotional state and want to work with you on your diet and fitness to help you find greater happiness and less stress. But this example screams 'virtue' not 'vice'. The concern I address here lies with the salesclerk who may be said to engage in empathic practices (e.g. sense your feelings, open a dialogue with you about your emotions, etc.), may even be epistemically accurate to some extent or another, but who only empathizes so as to benefit herself and/or uses harmful

stereotypes and other tricks in the process. After all, how can empathy be virtuous if it goes hand in hand with labeling tricks, stereotype shortcuts, and other marketing maneuvers that play on our emotions, our desires, our fears?

There are two ways in which a salesclerk might abuse empathic practice. First, she might engage in empathy solely to sell an item and so lack in the centrality of her empathic aim and in her empathic concern. For instance, a marketing agency who recognizes and uses the vulnerability of young girls' concern with their appearance to push them to purchase makeup. Second, a salesclerk may use stereotypes in her effort to understand other's emotional states, such as when someone selling a car focuses on different features of the car for men and women, even pitches different prices based on gender, race, and/or class assumptions. In both cases, there is not (necessarily) a failure of knowing how another feels, insofar as the salesclerk or company may correctly come to understand the feelings of a client or set of clientele and do so in a way that minimally meets each of the four criteria of empathic practice. Rather, failures are usually found in some deficiency in empathic attunement. It is typical, in the objectionable cases, to find deficiency in (1) aiming at empathic understanding for its own sake, (2) empathic concern, and (3) openness to another's particular emotional perspective.

I will begin with the first two deficiencies as they exhibit a clearer lack of fit. The salesclerk who objectionably engages in empathic activities, typically takes the form of someone who aims to know how you feel so as to sell something. Are you in the store to buy a new refrigerator or toaster? Are you overwhelmed and could easily be talked into more purchases? Are you concerned about efficiency and could be talked into more elaborate and more expensive models? Etc. While this salesclerk is aimed at understanding, or at least knowing, how you feel, she is only so aimed in order to sell more. Thus, she is not truly aimed at understanding how you feel for its own sake. She only needs to know *enough* about how you feel so as to sell you as much as possible. And her attitude is not one of concern for your

feelings, but concern for herself and her wellbeing. These deficiencies in her aim and concern

make her empathic process less robust and even less reliable. Namely, she is likely to fail at

connecting with you in an open and concerned way. This means that she is also less likely to

achieve some level of empathic understanding (let alone any rich empathic understanding).

Since she is simply open to your emotions only insofar as they help her make a sale, you are

less likely to be open with her and she is more likely to miss out on any empathic knowledge

that is not relevant to the sale (even some that is). Moreover, the connection forged (if one is

forged) will be disingenuous and lacking in respect. The salesclerk is using you, specifically your

emotional state, to sell something.

The more complex problem that the empathic salesclerk brings to light is the problem of

stereotyping. Often, salesclerks will successfully use stereotypes to predict our behavior. If a

particular practice is inevitably influenced by stereotypes to the detriment of its epistemic aim or

to the moral detriment of persons involved, then it ought not count as a valuable epistemic

practice or an epistemic practice at all. But, evidence of stereotypes in empathic interactions

does not yet lead to the conclusion that stereotypes are inevitable to the practice or inevitably

detrimental. There is some research that suggests that stereotypes can decrease empathic

accuracy (Lewis & Hodges, 2012). But this, of course, is not startling news. Other epistemic

practices have been and continue to be riddled with stereotypes. And, just as with any practice,

harmful and inaccurate stereotypes may make it more likely that we are unsuccessful, let alone

manifest viciousness. This is a problem for any epistemic or moral practice. More importantly, it

is not clear that this is an unavoidable aspect of empathic interactions. This research does not

suggest that we cannot train our empathic abilities so as to avoid harmful and inaccurate

stereotypes just as we continuously strive to do in scientific investigations. The people we take

to be the excellent empathizers (as I have articulated in the conditions above) are just those

people who are open and receptive as well as other-concerned, which are precisely the skills

that resist such stereotyping. In other words, if we are subject to bias and harmful stereotypes, we will not count as receptive to another's emotions simply in virtue of the fact that those biases constitute a lack of openness.

Moreover, not all stereotypes are necessarily detrimental (Jussim, Harber, Crawford, Cain, & Cohen, 2005; Lewis & Hodges, 2012). In fact, some evidence suggests that we are more accurate with partners and friends (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003), which may support the claim that positive biases improve accuracy. Likewise, as Lewis and Hodges show in an experiment that investigated stereotypes with positive valence in empathizing with new mothers, drawing on positive stereotypes about strangers seems to increase empathic accuracy (Lewis & Hodges, 2012). Thus, concerns with stereotypes and even the biases that reflect in-group affiliations (Echols & Correll, 2012) are not necessarily problematic for empathic understanding and may even increase empathic accuracy when they are employed in appropriate ways.

Ultimately, even if one can find an empathically accurate salesclerk, that clerk may still fall short of empathic attunement. While she may meet each of the four criteria of *empathic practice* minimally and, therefore, count as empathizing, her focus on the sale over empathic understanding, her concern for herself over the other person, and her use of broad stereotypes rather than sensing particularities, renders her deficient in the conditions of empathic attunement. It is this deficiency that allows us to recognize her activity as a form of empathic practice, but also articulate how it is empathy done poorly, even viciously and so not the virtue of empathic attunement.

(C) The Overly Empathic Nurse

Lastly, we reach a case that I take to be the most challenging to my argument. If empathic attunement can count as virtue, then can there ever be too much of it? It is widely agreed that the virtues are always modes of flourishing, that there can never be 'too much' of a virtue. If it is impossible or simply nonsensical to have too much of a virtue, but possible to have

too much empathy, then my argument fails. This is the concern with "overempathizing". If one

can empathize too much, such that one is harmed by her empathic engagements, then empathy

cannot possibly be a virtue. Some examples that are disconcerting along these lines include: (1)

the tendency to empathize with others at risk to self-care, such as abusive partners, and (2) the

tendency to 'empathize' constantly, hyperactively, losing oneself in the process (Bloom, 2014),

(3) the tendency of disempowered individuals to empathize from the perspective of those in

positions of power (e.g. slave empathizing with slave owner, or factory worker empathizing with

factory owner). These cases are concerned with the harm that seems to accompany the

empathic activities: e.g. passivity, self-deprecation, internalizing harmful norms, and cognitive

dissonance.

I cannot address all of these examples here, but I can respond to the underlying

concern. The parallel structures of skepticism are best understood through two cases: (a) the

overly empathic nurse, and (b) the empathic survivor of abuse.

(a) the overly empathic nurse

Jodi is a nurse in pediatric oncology. She spends her days rounding on patients,

children, to whom she's grown attached. She sees them regularly because they are

typically in the hospital for extended stays and, even when they go home, they typically

come back for more treatment. She knows the likelihood of survival or, more realistically,

the greater likelihood that these children's lives will be cut short, whether because of the

cancer or because of the effects of treatment. Even so, she cannot help herself, she is

an empathic person. When she walks into a room she immediately senses the parents'

fear and sadness, as well the child's frustration at being stuck in a hospital. She cannot

stop herself from empathizing, it's unchosen, a constant state of engaging with others. At

the end of the day she is exhausted, so overrun with others' emotions that she is not

sure where she begins and others leave off. She is distressed, emotionally

overwhelmed, burnt out.

(b) the empathic survivor of abuse

Riley has been married to her partner for twenty years. They have two children. She is

employed part-time, raises the children, and takes care of the home. Her partner is

usually loving, caring, and is always good with the children. But, every so often, he

comes home from work frustrated, which is only amplified, it seems, by certain things

she does or hasn't done. On these nights, he tends to drink and, as his frustration

mounts and her efforts to calm him fail, he becomes aggressive and abusive to her.

While his actions are physically and emotionally damaging to her, she can't help but

empathize with him. She sees things from his perspective easily, automatically.

Recognizing and fearing how each attempt she makes at quelling his anger might

actually be perceived as annoying, stupid, maddening. She *feels with* his emotional

perspective of herself. She feels both his anger at her annoying habits and inability to

predict his needs, as well as his regret after the fact, his love, his need for her. She

doesn't fight back, or try to leave him, but stays because she understands his

perspective and sympathizes with it.

I take these cases together because they touch on two of the most significant attacks on

empathy's role in morality. In the first case, the nurse's empathy is in overdrive. She may be a

good nurse because of it, but to her own detriment. In the second case, the woman accurately

empathizes with her husband's inaccurate and damaging perspective of her; so her empathy

seems to be done well and hit its mark, but that empathic engagement seems uncalled for and

is certainly detrimental to her own wellbeing. What these cases suggest is that empathy can be

done well, but be significantly harmful. If this is the case, empathy cannot be morally obligated,

it cannot be a mode of flourishing, it cannot be a virtue.

I contend, however, that a virtue ethics framework actually helps to make sense of these cases and maintain that empathic attunement is a virtue. First, depending on precisely how the cases above are cashed out, they might not count as empathic attunement. If, for instance, either woman loses herself, her own emotional perspective, to the emotions of others, she does not meet condition (2). Empathic practices, let alone empathic attunement, require self-other differentiation. This means, as explained in Chapters 1 and 2, that individuality (on both counts) is preserved in spite of significant emotional bleeding and sharing. To be so overcome by another's emotions, so open to another's emotional perspective such that one loses one's own perspective, is a failure of both empathy and empathic attunement. Instead, it would be a case of emotional contagion.

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is helpful here. What is key is that the excess or deficiency cannot be in the virtue, but in aspects of broader, related practices. For instance, a person can be overly giving when she gives beyond her means or when it is at the detriment to herself and/or her family or when her 'giving' does not actually help those in need as best suits their actual needs. In those cases, her excess (the giving to others) is in relation to a deficiency (not maintaining enough for herself and her family). These are excesses and deficiencies relating to the practice of helping others. And, because of those failures to meet the mean, she is not fulfilling (completely) the virtue of beneficence. Likewise, when one is overly 'empathic' what we really mean is that one is overly resonating the feelings of others or concerned with the feelings of others in ways that do not accurately respond to the others' emotional needs, perhaps fails in some way to self-other differentiate, and is too open (loses herself and concern for herself) in her relations with others. Thus, with the four conditions in mind, we can say that the nurse is not empathically attuned (perhaps not even empathic) insofar as she manifests excess in her openness to others and she worries about others in a way that exceeds what is called for by their emotional state. She also manifests deficiency in self-other differentiation

(perhaps among other virtues, such as the reflexive modes of care and respect). Likewise, in the case of the abused partner, we can say that she may be similarly in a state of resonance (overly open and lacking in self-other differentiation). Moreover, she may fail to acknowledge particularities of her own perspective, even if she does well to understand the particularities of her partner's. Typical descriptions of both kinds of cases often fail to acknowledge how virtue in empathy requires the empathizer to balance her own particularity with her level of openness, and that empathy does not require her to lose concern for herself in order to maintain appropriate/effective concern for others.

Moreover, if the empathy is uncontrollable, unchosen, a drive or instilled habit, then these cases will not count as empathic attunement. As with any other virtue, empathic attunement must be the kind of character trait that is chosen. In many such cases, it is likely that the empathy of the nurse, spouse, etc. is more reflexive than reflected on and chosen, a feature of character, but not (yet) virtuous character. But these are easy claims to make, what of the case where such empathy is chosen and appreciation of particularity in self and other is maintained?

Here, I argue that the issue is not one of empathic attunement, the vice lies elsewhere. It may be that the non-virtuous or vicious behavior of others is the true harm (as in the case of the abusive spouse). It is his cruelty that should be at issue, not her empathy. It should be questioned why people seem so quick to judge the empathy of the woman, perhaps over the abuse of her partner. And, even when the vice truly lies elsewhere, we might question whether the empathizer is lacking in other important virtues. Is she appropriately courageous? Truthful with herself? Reflective? She may, for instance, fail to acknowledge how her abuser needs legal restraints, compulsory training, etc. for his own benefit. In other words, she may empathize with his inability to control his behavior (an important aspect of any loving relationship), but lack in her reflective capacities to see what he really needs to overcome that inability for himself, for

her, and for their relationship. A caregiver needs to see another's needs (Noddings, 1984, 2002), but she can do this in two ways: (1) seeing the other's emotional perspective and (2) seeing what the other needs from her environment. Both will be important in caring for another. If the woman is able to see the first, but not the second, then it is a failure of beneficence and perhaps some intellectual virtue, not empathic attunement. Further, and most importantly for a feminist perspective, the lack of attention paid to one's own care and benefit can be a failure of virtue on many fronts (e.g. honesty (with oneself), care (for oneself), etc.).

Finally, I maintain that what cases like these call for is not for the nurse or spouse to guard against empathy. More robust solutions may actually be found in *greater* empathy. Significant success in dealing with clinician burnout, for example, has actually been found in group counseling or debriefing in hospice care and oncology, where the objective is to share the emotional burden (Halpern, 2012). A culture of emotional support and empathic understanding is a more ideal solution because both the clinician and her patients are afforded more substantial emotional care. Likewise, the abused partner may find flourishing in support groups, rather than disabling her empathic attunement for her abusive partner. Through such a group practice of empathy, she may come to an even better understanding of her partner's anger and how it is misplaced, as well as develop other virtues (courage, self-respect, etc.). This is not to say that there aren't times when empathy is not called for. As with the other virtues, certain contexts will call forth certain virtues and not for others. The point is that cutting off such empathic interactions and structures could be harmful to all involved, so this is not the appropriate solution to the emotional burdens of empathy. This is because cutting off empathy disables the modes of care, respect, and connection that I articulated in Chapter 2.

3.3   Excesses and Deficiencies in Empathy: From Insensitivity to a Bleeding Heart

As briefly addressed above, Aristotle's conception of virtue as a mean provides a helpful

structure for understanding ways of engaging in empathic practices that do not meet the criteria

of empathic attunement. As he tells us,

> Excellence, then, is a disposition issuing in decisions, depending on intermediacy of the
>
> kind relative to us, this being determined by rational prescription and in the way in which
>
> the wise person would determine it. And it is intermediacy between two bad states, one
>
> involving excess, the other involving deficiency. (*NE* 1106a37-1107a4)

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean provides insight into the process of discovering and delineating

virtue. He looks to practice and finds the activities that seem to avoid harms from one direction

or another. He then takes care to define the middle ground, the broader practice in its most

excellent form, and then distinguishes that as the virtue. For instance, while rashness,

courageousness and cowardice are all character traits or activities pertaining to fearing and

responding to fear (*NE* 1116a10-16), courageousness is the excellent state/activity within the

broader practice of fearing and responding to fear.[14] This is important to the discourse on

empathy as many of the moral criticisms of empathy revolve around construals of empathy that

are too broad and, accordingly, incorporate ways of doing it poorly, even using it for harmful

purposes. In other words, too many look to the varying activities related to the practice of

understanding/knowing how others feel (i.e. empathy) rather than attempt to draw virtue out of

broader practice, separating excellence from deficiency and excess. In response, my proposed

conditions for empathic practice (see Chapter 1) and empathic attunement (see Chapter 2 and

above) provide a structure by which we can categorize empathic practices as well as

understand when they are carried out morally excellently (with neither excess nor deficiency).

---

[14] For further discussion, see Chapter 2, Section V.

Here, I will summarize the potential deficiencies and excesses and demonstrate how *empathic attunement* avoids these non-virtuous states of character.

One set of deficiencies in empathy lies in the intentions of the empathizer. Just as we would not call someone beneficent who is condescending or only out for their own fame, we would not call someone empathic who is only trying to grasp how another feels so as to hurt someone more thoroughly or use them for some selfish purpose. These failures, as we see in the empathic torturer and empathic salesclerk, are failures in the empathic aim and in empathic concern. The empathically attuned person will aim at understanding how others feel for its own sake and with an appropriate attitude of concern for those feelings.

Another kind of deficiency and its related excess is that of too little self-other differentiation and/or too much openness. Receptivity is a key component of empathy and crucial to flourishing in the uniquely empathic sense (described in Chapter 2). However, too much of it can be detrimental to empathic endeavors. If we are so open, so 'bleeding heart', that we lose ourselves in others, then we have crashed over the side of the emotional engagement. When we lose ourselves in others we are no longer empathic at all, as we can no longer differentiate between self and other and so we cannot know how *the other* feels (as we are not cognizant of another). As in the nurse's case above, this can also be to our own detriment, as it goes hand-in-hand with a lack of understanding and concern for oneself.

One final kind of deficiency or excess, depending on how you frame it, is that of self-centeredness. When we are excessively self-involved, our attitude will be deficient in empathic concern. This, as articulated above, inhibits empathic accuracy because we are blinded by our own biases or not open enough to different perspectives. Moreover, it prevents empathic engagement and obstructs our goal of *understanding with* insofar as we are less willing to be open with those who are not concerned with how we feel. This can be a failure of empathy altogether, let alone a failure of empathic attunement.

As I take it, these modes of immoral, unvirtuous, or at least questionable behaviors relating to practices of *understanding how others feel* are important to recognize. Knowing how others feel should not be unreflectively endorsed morally and otherwise *because* of these ways of engaging in broader empathic practice poorly. But the conditions I have outlined allow us to make sense of a practice that can be done well or poorly. They allow us to criticize the practice and explain its harm more accurately. More importantly, they also provide a framework for identifying the excellently empathic person and articulating the content of that moral excellence.

3.4   Morally Significant, but not Virtue?

As I stated at the outset of Chapter 2, many critics of empathy's moral significance focus on its causal role in helping behavior. Heather Battaly, for instance, addresses four conceptualizations of empathy and argues that none are able to provide an account of empathy in which caring or helping behavior is necessitated by or indispensable to empathy (Battaly, 2011). In light of this argument, she contends that empathy is at best a skill, not a virtue. In what follows, I break her claims down into two parts. In regard to the first, I allow that typical altruistic and caring behaviors are not necessitated by empathy. But I contend that there is room for a different kind of value in empathy. I reiterate the main argument of Chapter 2, that it need not, and ought not if it is to count as virtue, only be valuable insofar as it is causally related to other caring behaviors. In regard to her second claim, I contend that my account of empathic attunement counts as virtue in light of the very criteria that she borrows from Aristotle.

Allow me to start by articulating Battaly's concern and explain how it does not apply to the account of empathy I have provided above. Battaly provides four conceptions of empathy:

(1) Folk concept: empathy as caring, and/or sharing, and/or knowing

(2) Empathy as sharing by multiple means

(3) Empathy as sharing and knowing/mindreading

(4) Empathy as knowing/mindreading by multiple means

It should be obvious already how my conceptualizations of empathic practices and empathic attunement come apart from these four concepts, but I will take a moment to address how each of these seems to fail the test for virtue according to Battaly.

The first concept allows for numerous formulations of empathy and typically assumes some connection between empathy and care. But, as Battaly recognizes, this folk conceptualization is simply too broad. In order to provide some satisfactory analysis of whether it is a virtue, we must provide some specification (Battaly, 2011, pp. 281-282). And, while I agree with this point, I am less inclined to follow her investigation of the three more precise concepts of empathy, as none entail the four conditions that I take to be characteristic of empathic practices and empathic attunement. Further, the critique of each empathy concept revolves around its relationship to caring attitudes and behaviors, which is a misunderstanding of the relationship of empathy to virtue.

Regarding concept (2), empathy as sharing by multiple means, Battaly focuses on Hoffman's account of empathy, which takes empathy to be a psychological process of vicarious affective response (Battaly, 2011, p. 283; Hoffman, 2000, pp. 29-30). This account of empathy allows for, even focuses on, emotional contagion or vicarious feeling, so it is outside the bounds of empathy as I have defined it in Chapter 1. On my account, emotional contagion may involve a process quite similar to empathy or may be involved in a process of empathy, but I do not count emotional contagion as empathy so as to be more precise and so as to stick to the general definition of empathy as 'understanding how another feels'. If we stop at emotional contagion alone, in which case we do not distinguish our own emotional state from another's and are not perspectively oriented to the other, then we cannot be said to understand how she feels. Such a claim would be specious, as we would have little or no justification for believing that is how *she* feels. Without dialogue and/or the minimal reflection needed to consider the fact that her

perspective might be different from our own, it would be false and even dangerous to claim to understand her feelings. But I have argued this already (Chapter 2) and so will not linger on the point here.

The more pressing issue is why Battaly does not take concept (2) to count as virtue. Specifically, she critiques it for not "requiring caring about others" (Battaly, 2011, pp. 284-285). She claims that empathy, on this view, does not conceptually entail caring about others (as Hoffman suggests (Hoffman, 2000, pp. 87-88)) and does not necessarily cause such altruistic behavior (Battaly, 2011, pp. 284-285).

> For instance, in the earliest developmental stages of empathy—newborn reactive cry and egocentric empathic distress—infants lack altruistic motives. Additionally, in cases of over-arousal, the empathic distress of the observer is so painful that it causes her to ignore the target and focus solely on alleviating her own distress. (Battaly, 2011, p. 285; Hoffman, 2000, pp. 198-205).

Here, Battaly's argument rests on the connection between empathy and helping, caring, or altruistic behavior. Since empathy of this sort (i.e. emotional sharing by multiple means), is not necessarily causally or conceptually linked to these behaviors, she claims it cannot be a virtue. But this claim not only rests on a conceptualization of empathy that is too broad (i.e. one that counts emotional contagion as empathy), it also misconceives empathy's relation to virtue. Empathy can (in a specified form) instantiate flourishing in its own right, regardless of whether it leads to altruistic behavior. Its relation to such behavior is, indeed, specious in some cases, but the same can be said of other virtues (e.g. sympathy, honesty, etc.).

The same arguments can be made against the final two empathy concepts that Battaly presents. First, neither concept maps onto the account I have provided above. Concept (3) does not fit because it requires empathic knowledge or, at least, the mirroring of the other's mental state, which is neither required by my formulation of empathic practices or empathic attunement.

While this conceptualization is quite close to my account of 'empathic knowledge', I do not take the achievement of such knowledge to be necessary to empathic attunement because it fails to acknowledge proper sensitivity to when we cannot, or can only partially, mirror the other's emotional perspective. Even the excellently empathic person will find herself in circumstances in which she cannot come to know how another feels (completely) and will, importantly, be sensitive to the need to step back or accept the other's statement of her perspective. This is much like when a parent must step back and allow her child to work through a problem on her own. The action of making room for the other is still a moment of empathy and care insofar as it manifests a sensitivity to the emotional perspective of the other (i.e. 'you can't know how I feel, you must just listen and help me to be heard' or 'I just need to be alone right now').

Concept (4) similarly does not fit my account of empathy as it focuses on a cognitive grasp of the other's mental states alone. It is a kind of mind reading, which we see most clearly in William Ickes' work (Battaly, 2011, pp. 286-287; Ickes, 1997, 2003). Again, while I allow for this kind of mind reading within my concept of empathic practice, it is not sufficient for empathic practices as it does not fit within the realm of understanding how another *feels*.

We can categorize Battaly's missteps here in two regards. First, she addresses conceptualizations of empathy that largely arise from social science and have not yet been normatively categorized. Though it is no fault of her own, as these concepts are reflective of the literature, each concept is guilty of collapsing empathic practices with excellence in those practices. In order to provide a stronger moral counterargument, one would have to first distinguish a formulation of empathy as virtuous from any and all modes of understanding/ knowing how another feels. In this sense, she misses the first step I have made, which is to distinguish broader empathic practices from the character trait that reflects excellence in those practices. As such, her move is akin to considering a variety of modes of responding to fear, where none reflect a focused attempt to identify the excellence of courage.

Second, and more importantly, Battaly's arguments regarding both of these last concepts revolve around the link to altruistic motives, attitudes and behavior. For instance, concept (3) "does not require caring about the target" (Battaly, 2011, p. 286) and concept (4) does not "entail caring about the target" or "concern for the target" (Battaly, 2011, p. 287). Her point is that empathy, broadly construed or under certain specific definitions, does not necessarily involve care for the other in terms of attitude or behavior. So, even if we assume empathic concern to be a condition of empathic attunement, Battaly will be right that this does not entail altruistic or typical caring behaviors (e.g. offering comfort to ease pain). But she fails to address the care and respect unique to this uniquely empathic mode of concern and understanding.

The second misstep in her account becomes clearest through her claim that empathy might have moral significance, but not in the form of virtue. At best, she contends, it is a skill. To understand this argument, we have to consider the distinctions that Aristotle draws between virtue, skill, and capacity. Capacities and skills can be important to virtue, even causally necessary, but they are also importantly different. A capacity, as Aristotle tells us, does not merit praise or blame, "for neither are we called excellent by virtue of being capable of being affected, simply, nor are we called bad, nor are we praised nor censured. Again, we are by nature capable of being affected, whereas we do not become excellent or bad by nature" (*NE* 1106a6-10). This reveals an important distinction between involuntary capacities and virtue. As Battaly explicates, capacities are involuntary (Battaly, 2011, pp. 287, 290-291).

> They are either innate, or acquired in the standard course of development. We lack
> control over their acquisition and operation: capacities are not the sort of thing that can
> be improved via effortful practice. Consider vision… For those of us who lack 20/20
> vision, effortful practice will not help us attain it… Arguably, mimicry and mirroring are
> involuntary in this way. (Battaly, 2011, p. 290)

While it is arguable that not all capacities are entirely involuntary, we can improve our vision, we

can become capable of lifting 100 lbs. or running a 7 minute mile, what Battaly wants to focus

on are the capacities we have that are not up to us. So, I may be capable of lifting 40lbs now

and 100lbs with practice. I may be capable of 20/40 vision now, or 20/30 with eye exercises. But

I am simply not capable, even through practice, of lifting 300lbs or 20/20 vision. In these cases,

the capacity, on its own, provides no reason for praise or blame. Likewise, while I may be

capable of beneficence, whether this means I could achieve this ability with practice or that I am

actually able here and now, the mere capacity does not make me beneficent. We have to

develop, choose, and hone that capacity before it can be called virtue. We praise people for the

traits they have chosen and excellently honed. Likewise, we do not blame or punish people who

are merely capable of harm (at least we ought not), we blame and punish once the harm has

been committed. Ultimately, what I want to question is not Battaly's definition of capacity, but the

idea that empathy is merely a capacity in the way she describes. Often, investigations of

empathy treat it as an involuntary capacity, one that may be quicker and more robust with brain

development, but still one outside of our control. And I think that this is right when it comes to

mimicry or contagion. As we see in psychology, the capacity to mimic the emotions of others is

typically present in humans from the start (de Waal, 2012; Hoffman, 2000). This capacity is

crucial to the development of 'mature' empathy, but, alone, it cannot be called virtuous or

vicious. This is because it is involuntary. It can happen automatically even when we try to avoid

it, even *because* we try to avoid it (Hodges & Wegner, 1997).

But, as Battaly acknowledges, while there may be dimensions of empathy that are like

involuntary capacities, one can also develop and hone empathy as well. This takes us to the

notion of skill. Skills, as Battaly defines them, are different from capacities insofar as they can

be honed and chosen. But, they are not quite at the level of virtue. As Battaly explicates, there

are three main features of skills that differentiate them from capacities. First, they "require

reliable success in attaining their ends" (Battaly, 2011, p. 290). This entails the second condition, namely that they cannot be accidental. As Aristotle claims, "One will only count as literate, then, if one both does something literate and does it in the way a literate person does it; and this is a matter of doing it in accordance with one's own expert knowledge of letters" (*NE* 1105a24-26). Thus, these first two conditions distinguish the person who haphazardly throws a basketball into the air and it happens to go through the hoop from someone who is well practiced in shooting and whose shots regularly hit and sink. Finally, Battaly's third condition is that of voluntariness. As she says, "skills are voluntary abilities—they are acquired, and we exert some control over their acquisition and exercise" (Battaly, 2011, p. 290). In other words, skills are not easily or often performed. One is unlikely to sit at a piano and effortlessly and brilliantly play one of Mozart's concertos. No, that takes practice, choosing to practice, and determination to keep up that practice in addition, of course, to developing musical capacities, tutoring from others, etc. Similarly, emotional mimicry can become a skill as it develops into empathy. While humans are born with the ability to mimic others' emotions, that ability must be encouraged and practiced, and its higher level affective-cognitive components must be developed, in order for it to become skilled empathy.

But, ultimately, as Aristotle explains, skills are not like virtues in some very important ways. While both can be honed, must be chosen and practiced, the focus of excellence in skill is how they turn out (*NE* 1105a26-28). On the other hand,

> …things that come about in accordance with the excellences count as done justly or
> moderately not merely because they themselves are of a certain kind, but also because
> of facts about the agent doing them—first, if he does them knowingly, secondly if he
> decides to do them, and decides to do them for themselves, and thirdly if he does them
> from a firm and unchanging disposition. (*NE* 1105a28-35)

According to Battaly, what this means is that the virtuous cannot forego opportunities of virtue, cannot make deliberate errors, and must aim at the good (Battaly, 2011, pp. 292-295). While the skilled person can decide not to perform (e.g. a guitarist can refuse a request to play at a party), or make a blithe error (e.g. the soccer player who kicks the ball much too far for her teammate to reach easily), the virtuous cannot forgo opportunities (e.g. to help others) and still be considered virtuous (Battaly, 2011). Neither can she decide to err (e.g. act cruelly) and still count as virtuous. This is because, as Aristotle tells us, virtue must be done from a "firm and unchanging state", which I take to mean that they must be done when called upon. A person who sometimes acts cruelly, or sometimes simply opts out of helping, will not count as the sort of person who is beneficent.

Most importantly, while skills involve aiming at their particular, individual ends, they are not done for their own sake and are not good in themselves. As Battaly explains,

> …to be benevolent, one must be motivated to help others because one desires the
> moral good and believes that helping others is morally good. Likewise, to be open-
> minded, one must be motivated to attain truths because one desires the epistemic good
> and believes that truth is epistemically good. (Battaly, 2011, p. 294)

This is a crucial distinction of virtue and key to Battaly's argument against empathy as a virtue. Skills, like those of musicians, writers, and technicians, are accomplished for purposes beyond their particular activities. The skill with which one hits the keys is not for its own sake, but for the sake of beautiful music. Likewise, the skill with which a writer develops her characters is not for its own sake, but for the sake of a brilliant and engaging story. In contrast, the excellence with which one helps others just is for the sake of helping, which just is for the sake of the good and the just.

While these distinctions become complicated and sometimes melt here and there, as virtues require skill and skill can require virtue,[15] Battaly's distinctions help us to discern the requirements of virtue and to see how empathy might, on some descriptions, be better suited to the classification of 'skill'. If empathy is to be a virtue, whether a virtue of character or of intellect, it must fulfill these criteria. It must be done knowingly, voluntarily, and for its own sake, and it must come from a firm character. Battaly, equipped with the four construals of empathy she describes, contends that empathy is either a capacity or a skill. If the latter, then one can be empathic and still forgo opportunities to be empathic and one can be empathic while "deliberately flouting the ends of empathy" (Battaly, 2011, p. 295).

Battaly illustrates these points through the following two examples:

(1) Katie is a seasoned therapist who is quite reliable at imaginative perspective-taking. She routinely succeeds in using her imagination to share the affect of her clients and others… But, today, she is bored and complacent. When her final client of the day arrives, Katie knowingly foregoes opportunities to engage in perspective-taking. I submit that in foregoing these opportunities, she does not forfeit her imaginative ability. For *if* she *were* to exercise it, her perspective-taking would reliably produce shared affect and true beliefs. Rather, she is what we might call an 'empathic underachiever'…(Battaly, 2011, p. 296)

(2) Suppose that Jackie and Joan are adult sisters. Jackie excels at imaginative perspective-taking with respect to Joan, but Joan does not excel at perspective-taking with respect to Jackie… Suppose that in today's conversation with Joan, Jackie is tired of being taken for granted. As a result, Jackie deliberately engages in a sub-standard imaginative process, knowing that it will result in skewed affect and false beliefs about

---

[15] See, for example, Miranda Fricker's work on the connection between morality and epistemology (Fricker, 2007).

Joan's emotions. I submit that in so doing, Jackie does not forfeit her imaginative

ability…(Battaly, 2011, p. 298)

These examples are meant to demonstrate how empathy is better suited as a skill than a virtue.

However, my account above makes an important clarification, which does not render these

claims false but misapplied. Namely, it is true that empathy can be couched as a capacity or a

skill. In the literature, we find capacities for emotional mirroring and perspective-taking, which

are crucial to empathy and sometimes defined as empathy. Likewise, achieving empathic

accuracy (coming to appropriately know or understand affective-cognitive dimensions of

another's emotions) requires great skill. It requires skill in emotional sensitivity, in reading facial

expressions, in helping others to feel safe, in communication, etc. One might be quite adept at

some of these skills and, therefore, reliably achieve some knowledge about others' emotions,

yet sometimes forgo such empathic opportunities, avoid empathizing when it would be hurtful,

or always and only exercise that set of empathic skills so as to gain advantage over others.

The key feature of my account is that it allows for people who are quite skilled at many of

these empathic tasks and so can be said to be 'skilled' at coming to understand others'

emotions, yet not exercise those skills all of the time, or choose not to, or only do so for one's

own advantage. These can still be cases that reflect empathic practices, and successful (to

some degree or another) at least in terms of inferential accuracy. But this is not empathic

attunement. It is not reflective of the empathic excellence in the cases articulated in Chapter 2.

Much like we distinguish the skilled helper (e.g. the person who reliably and efficiently helps

others so as to manipulate them and use them for his own advantage), from the beneficent (i.e.

the person who helps others for the sake of helping, for the sake of the good), we can

distinguish the skilled empathizer (e.g. skilled in making accurate empathic inferences) from the

empathically attuned (i.e. the person who aims at and reliably understands how others feel for

the sake of understanding how/with, for the sake of the good).

Finally, while these two examples are meant to address the claim that empathy is more appropriate to a skill, they also reveal precisely what I have been saying about empathic attunement's unique mode of flourishing. Namely, it is true that one can be skilled in imaginative perspective-taking and yet not instantiate virtue. It is easy to see that the therapist's boredom and complacency reveal deficiency in her care in that session, even if not overall. Likewise, we may not blame Jackie's frustration and momentary lack of empathy, we might say that she remains overall caring towards her sister and retains the imaginative skills of emotional sharing. But, in that moment *she is uncaring*, the relationship does not instantiate flourishing. Like the therapist, the deficiency lies precisely in empathy. The lack of empathic attunement in both cases demonstrates a lack of caring connection and emotional respect even if only for that moment. Perhaps we can say that both Jackie and the therapist are 'overall' beneficent or even 'overall' empathically attuned, but in these moments they fail in their virtue in a way specific to empathy. For instance, it might be said that the patient is unfazed by the therapists complacency or that Joan is so self-involved that she is unperturbed by Jackie's curt responses, so they might not feel wrongly treated and might even feel some benefit from the interaction. However, empathic attunement allows us to identify what has gone wrong in those instances. It is the therapist's failure to attune to her patient in a moment of need that divorces her actions from what the truly virtuous person would do in that moment. It defines a failed connection, a failure in caring activity, and a failure in respect. It is precisely because of the lack of empathic attunement that she is uncaring in some sense and is not respectful of emotions. Similarly, it is both Joan's and Jackie's failures in the moment and Joan's failure overall, to empathically attune to each other that characterizes how their relationship fails to demonstrate care and flourishing in the moment or on the whole.

Just to push the point, let us delve into the possibility that Jackie and the therapist still successfully provide some care to their counterparts, yet fail to empathize. As I said above, it is

possible that Joan's venting is what she needed to feel better or that the patient's responses to

the therapists questions are still helpful to that patient working through some psychological

distress. The concern is that empathy is disconnected from pro-social or helping attitudes and

behaviors in these instances. Prinz, for example, considers whether empathy is necessary for

moral conduct in just this way. As he structures the point,

> Let's suppose someone arrives at the judgment that it would be good to give to charity. It
>
> might be possible to make such a judgment without feeling motivated to act on it.
>
> Perhaps empathy with the recipients of charity is what converts moral judgment into
>
> moral conduct. (Prinz, 2011, p. 218)

Rightfully, Prinz's answer here is no. Using multiple empirical examples, he concludes that

"empathy only weakly correlates with pro-social behavior" (Prinz, 2011, p. 220). In other words,

firstly, the therapist might be found to help the patient while lacking empathy. And, secondly, the

presence of empathy may be easily overwrought by her fatigue and result in failures to ask the

patient appropriate questions, actively engage in their usual dialogue, and so fail to help the

patient as she might otherwise. But even if we assume Prinz is right, that there is a weak

correlation between empathy and prosocial behavior, this is besides the point. Empathy's

necessity to morality does not lie in having a necessary connection to prosocial behavior in the

standard altruistic sense. It is necessary to morality insofar as it is a distinctive form of care and

respect. These cases, as Battaly describes them, are morally wanting regardless of whether

Joan is able to appropriately vent or whether the patient is still psychologically benefitted by the

session. The lack of flourishing is not just one of a skill unused, or capacity untapped, but a

failure to manifest a virtue. While Joan might be benefitted in some sense, she is not fully cared

for and their relationship is not fully caring because there is deficient empathic attunement.

Jackie is frustrated by the relationship and feels uncared for by her sister *because* Joan does

not empathically engage. Moreover, the particular action might be good in some sense insofar

as Jackie does not interrupt her sister or walk off, but continues to listen, and so Joan might feel

heard and reassured. But in another sense the care is lacking in virtue insofar as there is only

good in effect, Jackie remains hurt, frustrated, and unwilling to care for her sister. In other

words, some of Jackie's actions manifest beneficence, but her attitude and her connection with

her sister explicitly lack emotional connection. In fact, it is the missed empathic attunement,

rather than missed beneficence, that identifies the moral inadequacy of the interaction.

So, with my account of empathy and empathic attunement in hand, we can better draw

the distinctions that fit our sense of practice and persons. We tend to distinguish the skilled

emotional mind-reader from the empathically attuned. While both require similar capacities and

inhabit similar activities and skills, there are important differences that fall precisely along the

lines of the distinction between broader practices of understanding how others feel and the

virtue of empathic attunement.

3.5   Conclusion: Empathy's Web

Here, I have tried to dismantle the common critiques of empathy's role in morality by

identifying an important distinction between *empathic practices* (Chapter 1) and *empathic*

attunement (Chapter 2). Specifically, I have argued for four conditions of *empathic attunement*

that are reflective of common ascriptions of empathic excellence, categorizing those practices

so as to better identify and differentiate their virtue. Additionally, I have argued that the virtue of

empathic attunement lies not in its role in altruistic behavior, but in the way it uniquely, in itself,

instantiates care and flourishing.

But this does not explain why empathy is absent from virtue ethical frameworks. Thus, if

you are convinced that empathic attunement is to count as virtue, we must also consider why

adversity to this claim is so prevalent. I surmise that this absence is due, at least in part, to the

fact that the standard dispositionalist account of virtue does not fully acknowledge human

relationality. Despite the tendency of virtue ethics to be more concerned with sociality than other moral theories (excepting care ethics), the virtues are still premised on a largely individualistic view of the self. Meanwhile, empathy, especially empathic attunement, is in many ways the antithesis of atomism and individualism. Rather, it aims at understanding *with* others*,* it assumes the possibility and regularity of emotional bleeding between selves, it requires receptivity to other psychological states, and it depends on the openness of others in sharing emotional experiences.

In light of this, the next part of this project considers empathic attunement's web of relationality and uses it to challenge the standard dispositionalist account. Specifically, I contend that empathic attunement is better fit for virtue understood as a *web of relations* rather than a *psychological state*.

Chapter 4

Dispositional Detachment: Rethinking the Structure of Virtue

These two related sets of facts, those concerning our vulnerabilities and afflictions and those concerning the extent of our dependence on particular others are so evidently of singular importance that it might seem that no account of the human condition whose authors hoped to achieve credibility could avoid giving them a central place. Yet the history of Western moral philosophy suggests otherwise. (MacIntyre, 2001, p. 1)

4.1   Introduction: Motivating a New Ontology

New developments in philosophy, neuroscience, and psychology have encouraged us to question the nature of the self and the source(s) of agential activity. Research on mirror neurons, for example, continues to suggest that the neural activity of humans and some non-human animals involves more interconnections across brains than generally assumed (e.g. mirroring, emotional contagion, etc.).[16] Additionally, the psychology of changing and maintaining habits has shifted toward recognizing individual dependence on supportive networks, as we see in the increasingly social atmosphere of health and productivity.[17] Similarly, and more importantly for my project here, in the ethics of care and other feminist philosophy, we see a significant ontological move to conceptualize the self as an interrelational and interdependent being.[18] This rethinking of the self and what constitutes agential activity could be particularly relevant to contemporary virtue theory and ought to be given some consideration.

In many ways, virtue ethics is already concerned with the interdependence of persons. Following Aristotle, contemporary theorists recognize many ways in which moral excellence

---

[16] See, for instance, Frans de Waal (2009) and Tania Singer and Claus Lamm (2009).

[17] See, for instance, Charles Duhigg (2012).

[18] See, for instance, Annette Baier (1981); Carol Gilligan (1982); Carol Gould (1998); Virginia Held (2006); Eva Feder Kittay (1999); Martha Minow (1997); Jennifer Nedelsky (2011); Nel Noddings (1984); Sara Ruddick (1990); Joan Tronto (1993).

depends upon our relationships with others and certain social structures; such as, upbringing, friendship, and social, economic, and political structures. However, such interrelationality is left out of the basic structure of what a virtue is, particularly, what it means to be in possession of a virtuous trait. When it comes to a fully developed virtue, the independent and detached agent comes into focus as the proprietor and executor of her virtue. In some ways this is unsurprising. In one sense virtue ethics is plainly individualistic. It is, after all, aimed at what is the good, what is living well and doing well, for *an individual*. So, it already comes apart from a theory like care ethics that focuses on the good of *relations*. But just like care in which the focus on relations does not preclude individuals, virtue ethics does not preclude the social. The question is to what extent the individual is relationally constituted and how this impinges on the possession of virtue, especially a virtue like *empathic attunement*.

I will argue that the standard dispositionalist account of virtue takes the individual to be social in a moderate sense. Namely, one can allow that there are some very important ways in which virtue depends on others (i.e. upbringing) and in which eudaimonia depends on others (i.e. external goods, activity in/with others). But there is a much stronger sense in which virtue depends on others. On this point, I argue that we could take the what it means to have a virtuous trait to be partly constituted by our relations with others.

In what follows, I will explicate the dispositionalist account of the possession of virtue in greater detail. I contend that this framework neglects the interdependence of persons insofar as it locates the virtue within the agent in a way that is inconspicuously detached from the relationships that continue to make it possible and robust. Finally, I will lay the foundation for a strongly relational interpretation of 'the possession of virtue' (which will be addressed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6), which more readily acknowledges human interdependence in the basic structure of the virtues, is more consistent with other aspects of virtue theory, and leaves room for a more complete inculcation of human relationality.

4.2   Virtue as Psychological Disposition: An Analysis of the Traditional View

The virtues are largely taken to be dispositions. We see this association in contemporary virtue ethics, in British sentimentalism, in medieval philosophy, and, of course, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*. But what does it mean to say that a virtue is a certain kind of disposition? Aristotle, to start, offers some help.

We first see the association between virtue and disposition in *NE* Book I, where Aristotle is just broaching the discussion of excellence.

> Well, our account is in harmony with those who say that happiness is excellence, or some form of excellence; for 'activity in accordance with excellence' belongs to excellence. But perhaps it makes no little difference whether we suppose the chief good to be located in the possession of excellence, or in its use, i.e. in a disposition or in a form of activity. For it is possible for the disposition to be present and yet to produce nothing good, as for example in the case of the person who is asleep, or in some other way rendered inactive… (*NE* 1098b30-1099a3)[19]

Here, Aristotle differentiates possession from activity, where the two forms of virtue are in some sense distinct. It is the 'possession of virtue or excellence' that is identified as a disposition. Though we later find out that one must practice the virtues to possess them at all, once possessed, related activity does not necessarily follow depending on the context. For instance, as we see in the above passage, we may be beneficent in our character, but we certainly do not act accordingly when we are asleep, when performing unrelated activities, and generally when it is not called for by the situation at hand. So, while the disposition and the activity are linked,

---

[19] Here and throughout, I will be using the Broadie and Rowe translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2002).

there is some level of detachment, such that the possession of virtue might persist without accompanying activity (perhaps even for significant periods of time).

Further, Aristotle gives us some reason for identifying virtue with the particular state of being *disposed*. He considers three possible states of the soul: affections, capacities or dispositions (*NE* 1105b20). His reasoning for identifying the virtues with dispositions is treated rather quickly, but the argument rests on the observation that we do not praise people for their affections (*NE* 1105b30-32). Rather, we praise people or call them excellent because they are 'affected' in the right way (1106a1) and because their state or activity has involved some form of decision (1106a3-4). Similarly, we are not praised for what we are capable of, but for the condition we are actually in (1106a7-10). For instance, a toddler may be capable of developing empathy, but the child is not praised for that capacity, only for the later development of an empathic character. Similarly, an adult may be capable of empathic activity, but she would only be praised once she develops and (reliably) manifests that capacity in activity. So, for Aristotle, this leaves us with the last remaining possibility: the virtues and vices are dispositions (1106a10-12). This means that the virtues are more than capacities, something developed and more reliably tied with activities. It also means that they are something beyond affectation insofar as one must develop ways of being affected in the right way. But what is meant by disposition, beyond its dissimilarities with affections and capacities, remains to be seen.

Aristotle, like many contemporary virtue theorists, quickly moves on to working through the kind of disposition that constitutes a virtue. He operates under the "basic assumption that this kind of excellence is a disposition to act in the best ways in relation to pleasures and pains" (*NE* 1104b28-29). So, virtue is a disposition to act or to respond to the world excellently. We see this, likewise, in contemporary virtue theory.

> The virtues (and vices) are all dispositions not only to act, but to feel emotions, as
>
> reactions as well as impulses to actions. (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 108)

A virtue is a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or

acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way.

(Swanton, 2003, p. 19)

We see the same general structure in each definition of the virtues. And while a great deal of

work has been done on what counts as excellence in acting or otherwise responding to the

world, little has been done in virtue theory to clarify the ontology of 'disposition'. So, if a

disposition is deeply connected to action (broadly construed), but not itself action,[20] then what

does the disposition consist in?

In contemporary theory we see that virtue, as a dispositional state of an agent, must be

relatively fixed or firm. Nancy Sherman refers to them as "a person's enduring traits" and

"permanent states" (Sherman, 1989, p. 1). Robert Audi, similarly, claims that traits of virtue

"must have a measure of stability" (Audi, 1997, p. Chap 7). In fact, Audi suggests that not all

dispositions are quite so strong.

If Jean's fairness can be slept off, or she can be dissuaded from it by a mere suggestion,

then it is at best a disposition of hers, not part of her character. (Audi, 1997, p. Chap 7)

Accordingly, virtue must be the kind of dispositional state that is deep-seated and not easily

altered by external circumstances or opposing desires. It is in this way, I take it, that a trait of

fairness differs from the disposition to dress a certain way. The latter might qualify as a

disposition, but not the sort of disposition that define our character. Thus, our virtues must be

dispositions that are so engrained in us that they last overtime, in different circumstances, and

are not easily rendered inactive by fleeting desires or external opposing forces.

Julia Annas, similarly, refers to the virtues as "features of persons" that are "persisting,

reliable, and characteristic" (Annas, 1993, p. 8). She takes her definition a step further with the

---

[20] David Ross, likewise, splits the intrinsically good into virtuous disposition and action, where
the disposition is the virtue per se (Ross, 2002, p. 134).

claim that a virtue "is not merely a lasting feature…It is active: to have it is to be disposed to act in certain ways" (Annas, 1993, p. 8).

> Thus, although it is natural for us to think of a virtue as a disposition, we should be careful not to confuse this with the scientific notion of disposition, which just is a static lasting tendency. A classic example is that glass has a disposition to break under certain circumstances… A virtue is not a static condition like this; it is a disposition as a result of which Jane acts and thinks in a certain way, and which is at any time strengthened by her generous responses and weakened by failures to have them… (Annas, 1993, p. 9)

Thus, for Annas (and other contemporary theorists), to say that virtue is a disposition is to say that it is a state of an agent, particularly a state of character. It is a reliable trait that an agent holds, but it is not entirely static.[21] It is about *acting* and it is *malleable* insofar as it involves responding to the given context. It is also non-static in the sense that it can be weakened by underuse or strengthened by other psychological states and abilities (relevant skills, other virtues, etc.). For instance, a glass vase will not become more resistant to breaking the more it withstands external force, but the courageousness of a person is likely to become stronger the more she defends herself against oppressive norms. So, while it is distinct from action, particularly insofar as it is located within an agent as a "deep feature" (Annas, 1993, p. 9) of an agent, it is certainly linked to responsive and fluid activity. Accordingly, these dispositions are reliable but not static insofar as they are importantly linked to relevant contexts, activity, reflection, choice, external forces, etc.

In addition to being strong/deep features that are active/responsive, dispositions of character are developed through action. For Aristotle, dispositions are not something that we have by nature (*NE* 1106a9-10). We become just or courageous by doing just and courageous

---

[21] See also: (Audi, 1997, Chap 7).

actions (*NE* 1103a35-1103b2). And acting justly or courageously entails agency, choosing, deciding (*NE* 1105a32-33). As Annas notes in regard to what constitutes a change in character,

> I might discover that I have an unsuspected talent for Sudoku, but this, although it enlarges my talents, does not alter my character. But someone who discovers that I have an unsuspected capacity to feel and act on compassion, and *who develops this capacity*, does come to change as a person, not just in some isolated feature; he comes to have a changed character. (Annas, 2011, pp. 9, emphasis added)

In other words, character is something we develop. It may be helped by natural tendencies, but the habituation of character, particularly in the case of virtue, ultimately involves choosing certain kinds of actions. We develop and strengthen a tendency to be courageous by *doing* courageous actions. We might start by partaking in activities that look like generosity, such as sharing as a child in order to be praised by one's parents. But, ultimately, we must choose to partake in beneficent activities in order for the habit to become conditioned in us as a feature of character, particularly one that demonstrates virtue, such as choosing to spend time tutoring fellow students in high school, and then continuing to choose to help coworkers with projects as an adult, and so on.

So, a virtue, as a disposition, is a trait of character, which is to say a deep/strong feature of oneself, a feature that is active/responsive and developed through action. Moreover, these dispositions, if they are to count as virtues, must be dispositions toward excellence.

> …but we do also praise someone accomplished in something for his disposition, and the dispositions we praise are the ones we call 'excellences'. (*NE* 1103a8-10)

So, virtues are the dispositions that we praise, that we call 'excellent'. Further,

> …every excellence…both gives that thing the finish of a good condition and makes it perform its function well… the excellence of a human being too will be the disposition

whereby he becomes a good human being and from which he will perform his own

function well. (*NE* 1106a16-24)

At this point, Aristotle delves immediately into his discussion of the virtue as a kind of mean and

does not return to the ontology of the possession of virtue. Most virtue theorists follow suit.

Subsequent to the definitions we see above for Sherman, Hursthouse, Swanton and Annas, is

some discussion of what counts as excellence, which traits are excellent and why, and what

they look like when actualized in the world. Thus, it is at this point that we are left to our own

devices for further articulating what it means to 'possess a virtue', particularly the extent to

which that state is *relational*.

So, we know that virtue on the dispositionalist account is taken to be a firm condition of

an agent, one that is non-static, one that involves decision in its development, an excellent sort

of condition, and one that is actualized in activity and other ways of responding to the world that

demonstrate flourishing. Thus, we can conclude that to possess a virtue is to be in a particular

kind of condition or state that is then intimately, reliably, and excellently connected to certain

features of the world (the things we might respond to) and to activity (our responses generally

construed). As we will see, this state of the agent, i.e. the having of a certain virtuous trait, is

also distinct from the relevant features of the world and corresponding activity. But how distinct

and how independent is left open for further analysis. In what follows, I contend that there is

some reason to believe that standard dispositionalist accounts detach the possession of virtue

from external elements of virtue (i.e. features of virtue that are not housed in our own

psychology) in ways that neglect how such possession not only depends on our relations with

others and social structures, but is also partly constituted by those relations.

4.3   The Internalization and Detachment of Character

There is so much left open regarding the ontology of the possession of virtue, but what I would like to consider is the level of detachment, particularly the extent to which that possession is thought to be independent of our relations. On the standard dispositionalist account, which largely follows Aristotle's conceptualization of virtue, the possession of virtue is largely depicted as an agent's own doing and is located within the agent rather than a sort of relationship the agent holds with the world. These two aspects of the picture of virtue, (1) individualistic agency and (2) internal location of the virtues, paint the possession of virtue (though not the development of virtue in upbringing) as significantly independent of the agent's relations with other persons and with social structures.

To begin, this move from the interdependency of the development of virtue (particularly upbringing where social education is famously important to the development of virtue) to the independent possessor of virtue is subtle but discernible in Annas' discussion above. Notice how her discussion of the role of upbringing in the development of character is clearly social,

> Becoming virtuous requires habituation and experience. We encounter habituation first
> through our education, both in school and in the family. We are not just told what to do
> but given role models and encouraged to act in ways that promote and show
> appreciation of loyalty or bravery. (Annas, 2011, p. 12)

Here, we see how important our social relations are to the habituation of good traits in the early stages of ethical education (i.e. upbringing). This stage of habituation seems to necessarily and obviously include interdependent (even sometimes wholly dependent) relations with adults (e.g. parents and teachers) and social structures (e.g. formal education, norms, etc.) as we develop the skills and habits that will ultimately facilitate virtue (if upbringing has been done well).

However, as she turns to the condition of an agent once character traits have been developed, the relationality found in upbringing becomes suspiciously absent from the

conversation. For instance, Annas compares the mastery of virtue with that of an expert pianist

to demonstrate how these habits are different from mere routine (e.g. a routine morning

commute).

> The expert pianist plays in a way not dependent on conscious input, but the result is not
>
> mindless routine but rather playing infused with and expressing the pianist's thoughts
>
> about the piece. Further, the pianist continues to improve her playing. The way she plays
>
> exhibits not only increased technical mastery but increased intelligence… the ability,
>
> though a habituated one, is constantly informed by the way the person is thinking. If the
>
> pianist resolves to play the first movement in a different way, her playing will all reflect
>
> this… (Annas, 2011, pp. 13-14)

Like the pianist's skill, Annas tells us, virtue is a disposition that "needs *constant monitoring* for

improvement and worsening… [that is] always developing, being sustained or weakened… a

kind of actively and intelligently engaged practical mastery that we find *in practical*

experts" (Annas, 2011, pp. 14, emphasis added). While in the passage on upbringing there is a

clear place for social relations as significantly constitutive of the process of habituation, here

such relations are entirely absent. The focus is the agent. Mastery is done by the agent, under

the control of the agent, and lies within the agent. Now, perhaps the more individualist language

found here is unintentional, but it is reflective of an underlying assumption that virtues, those

things we are praised or blamed for, are our own doing and their strength is housed within the

agent. But this needs further substantiation.

One reason to interpret the possession of virtue as the agent's own doing can be found

in the strong association between virtue and certain internal decision processes. For instance,

Aristotle makes repeated reference to the agent's ability to arrange her own internal states

excellently,

> For having knowledge turns out to be without benefit to such people, as it is to those who lack self-control; whereas for those who arrange their desires, and act, in accordance with reason, it will be of great use to know about these things... (*NE* 1095a9-12)

Similarly, we seem to be the source of virtuous activity. So, while others help us to develop virtue in the first place, each individual acts alone in maintaining and strengthening her virtue. For instance,

> We should drag ourselves away in the contrary direction...in the way that people do when they are straightening out warped pieces of wood. (1109b5-8)

One finds this sentiment echoed in contemporary theory. Nancy Sherman, for instance, states the following,

> Ultimately, through an agent's construal of her environment, through her choice of friends, through her selection of how and in what way to act on her commitments, she weaves a life that expresses her character and aims at her conception of happiness. (Sherman, 1989, p. 10)

Depicting each individual as the source of virtue because she decides to act and because she moves herself, certainly lends itself to the contemporary picture of the liberal individual who is the sole source of her own excellence, and therefore, solely responsible for maintaining and even creating her excellence. So, while one sees such great dependence on others in the formation of habit (particularly in upbringing), that dependence is lost when Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethicists turn to the possession of virtue (i.e. excellent character once developed). It is, then, the agent who arranges her own desires, considers (alone) appropriate responses and reasons, and pushes herself toward excellence. The picture this paints is that of an individual who is not at all, or not significantly, dependent on others for her virtues. In other words, it suggests that even if others helped an agent to develop courageous habits and often

others are involved in her acting courageously, she is solely responsible for her *possession* of

the virtue of courage. While this very individualistic sense of agency is not the only possible

interpretation, it is very difficult to shake, especially when we turn to the location of the virtues.

Part of the reason I find it difficult to assume a more interdependent interpretation is the

use of the word 'possession', which, perhaps as a result of Western cultural influence, we take

to mean individual ownership (usually as a result of one's own doing) and firmly under one's

own charge.

> …and our hunch is that the good is something that belongs to a person and is difficult to
>
> take away from him. (Aristotle, NE 1095b26-27)

This claim echoes the assertions above that virtue is a deep/strong feature of an agent. To say

that a virtue is a strong feature, it seems, it to say that excellence is something possessed by an

agent, something so embedded in her that it becomes difficult for external forces to pry it away

once it is there within her. To say this is to say that it belongs to her, that she owns it, controls it,

and that it is somehow fortified within her. In other words, it is located in her, something

substantially separate from the world around her and fortified against that world in significant

ways.

While I do not contend with the point that the virtues are firmly entrenched in our

character, or with the idea that persons agentially participate in and strengthen their virtue in

significant ways, or with the idea that a virtue is a virtue of a particular person and so, in some

sense, belongs to that person, there are (at least) two ways to conceptualize the structure of

that strength of agential attachment and identification. The first, which we see in much of the

language of *Nicomachaen Ethics* and the contemporary dispositionalist accounts, locates that

firmness in the agent. The agent's internal psychological state (perhaps her particular neural

pathways) is firmly engrained *in her*, so that we cannot *reach in* and break it apart (at least not

very easily). So, even if being in a virtuous state is not entirely her own doing, the strength of

that state is located inside of her and only dependent on and constituted by her thought and activity.

In other words, when we take virtue to be a firm or persistent state of an agent, it is easy to assume that it is somehow housed within the agent, a "deep feature" of an agent, importantly distinct from external forces and relations, even if intimately connected in its manifestation. But there is another perspective here; namely, one might conceptualize the possession of virtue in terms of relational strength. Here, I mean something more than the relationship between the agent and her activity. Evidence that humans are extremely susceptible to external influences when it comes to moral action is building in social sciences. These studies may ultimately support a different conclusion about the steadfastness of an agent's virtue. Namely, it is difficult to take the good away from an agent because her goodness is not just her own, but, rather, is built up by a multitude of such relations with the world. For example, she is not just trustworthy to her family, but also to her friends, co-workers, strangers, etc. In this way, her trustworthiness is not some internal psychological state that is persistent, but a network of certain excellent relations that secure her trustworthiness and facilitate it. It is deeply entrenched and difficult to take away from her because, in addition to her more internally sourced *choosing* trustworthiness in action, there are so many trustworthy relations that one would have to disconnect. These relations she holds with other persons and numerous contexts make her disposition strong and facilitate her responsiveness under new circumstances; in other words, this set of relations is constitutive of the firmness of her virtue and represent her responsiveness in regard to a particular virtue (i.e. to what extent and in what way is her character non-static?).

There is little evidence, however, in Aristotle's work or in the work of contemporary virtue theorists, that suggests this interrelational perspective. Even while the development of virtue and the manifestation of virtue is recognized as significantly dependent on others, the possession of virtue is not discussed in the same terms. Once fully developed or possessed,

virtues become dispositions, i.e. psychological states of persons, not (significantly or explicitly) dependent on or constituted by relations with others. But we need not conceptualize the possession of virtue in this way. As I will demonstrate, the interdependence of persons that saturates the discourse on the development of virtue can easily be extended to the possession of virtue.

4.4   Conclusion: Reasons for an Interrelational Perspective

The more relational view of the possession of virtue that I have alluded to here is motivated by work in care ethics and feminist ethics, the psychology of habit and character, and even social neuroscience (all of which I will return to in Chapters 5 and 6); but, here, I will focus on a motivating force located within virtue theory. Namely, the indispensability of good upbringing. I contend that an interdependent and more deeply relational conceptualization of the possession of virtue, as suggested above (and to be further articulated in Chapters 5 & 6), will be more consistent with the interdependence that pervades the development of virtues in the first place.

While Aristotle and contemporary virtue theorists paint a more individualistic picture of the possession of virtue, their depiction of the development of virtue reflects a significantly relational understanding of the self. For Aristotle, upbringing is crucial, even necessary, to the development of virtue.

> …in order to listen appropriately to discussion about what is fine and just, i.e. about the objects of political expertise in general, one must have been well brought up. (*NE* 1095b4-5)
>
> For it is through acting as we do in our dealings with human beings that some of us become just and others unjust… (*NE* 1103b15-16)

…This is why it is necessary to ensure that the activities be of a certain quality; for the

varieties of these are reflected in the dispositions'. So it does not make a small

difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another from

childhood on, but a very great one; or rather, it makes all the difference in the world. (*NE*

1103b23-26).

In other words, our upbringing, particularly the development of good habits, is all important to

the excellence of our dispositions. Further, our upbringing is not something that happens in

isolation, but rather in a web of relations with others. Given the current state of the world and the

biology of human reproduction, we do not develop at all, let alone develop good habits, without

others. This is not to say that we have no influence on our own habits, but only that we are

significantly dependent on others, particularly in our childhood. Thus, we are dependent on

others for developing the habits that make virtue possible.

This view is echoed in contemporary virtue theory. Rosalind Hursthouse articulates the

importance of training for excellence in emotional responses (Hursthouse, 1999, pp. 113-116).

Julia Annas reiterates the crucial role of upbringing in our ongoing development of virtue. As she

states,

…it is crucial to bear in mind that by the time we reflect about virtues, we already have

some… We have developed to have the characters that we have by having been

brought up and educated, and then living and reflecting, in ways that developed and built

character in certain ways. This did not involve injecting new motivations into us, but in

forming the unformed motivations that we start with… (Annas, 1993, p. 10)

Similarly, Nancy Sherman describes the role of parents.

But it would be a mistake to think of the child's love and trust of his parents as primarily

establishing the child's compliance to rules and precepts. Rather, what Aristotle points to

in the above passage [NE 1180b3-12] is a view of parents informing certain ideals of

character, through reason and example (logoi kai ethē), that influence (enischuei) the child's own sense of virtue. (Sherman, 1989, p. 153)

In the work of Annas and Sherman, we see that our relations with others in the course of our upbringing and development make a great difference to our virtue. Our development of good habits is informed by our parents, teachers, friends, and other role-models. We mirror others, consider our habits in relation to others, and practice virtue in particular relations with others. It is in this way that the dispositionalist account of virtue is already *moderately* relational. Namely, because the development of excellent traits is considerably dependent on others. But, that notion of dependency is lost once the virtues are developed. As discussed above, once these same theorists enter the realm of the adult acting virtuously, one no longer sees the ways in which the continued maintenance, choosing, and strength of virtue depends on others.

Why is it that virtue theorists do not recognize the persistence of interdependency beyond upbringing? Certainly, as Annas suggests above, when we grow into adulthood, we become more able to reflect upon our habits and character traits and we become more able (at least in some ways) to make choices about and to affect our own character. But it is not as if this 'adult' or mature reflection happens in isolation. There is room for a *stronger* sense of relationality in which our ongoing development and maintenance of virtue continues to depend on others and its strength/deepness is partly constituted by those relations. Though many virtue theorists, including Aristotle, acknowledge the importance of friendship to happiness,[22] the necessity of certain material goods to virtuous activity and happiness,[23] and even the role of certain political structures (e.g. laws) to virtuous activity,[24] little of that dependence on persons (even things) external to the agent is carried into the discussion of the possession of virtue. This

---

[22] See, for example, *NE* VIII; N. Sherman (1989), 118-156; and S. Schwarzenbach (2009) (Schwarzenbach, 2009), 135-175.

[23] See, for example, *NE* I.8 Par 15.

[24] See, for example, *NE* X.9.

inconsistency can be solved by the relational interpretation of the possession of virtue that I have suggested above (addressed more fully in Chapter 6).

Ultimately, the phenomenology of the virtues, specifically what it means to be in possession of a virtue, is under-theorized. However, it seems fairly clear that most contemporary theorists locate the virtues in the psychological states of agents. Further, and more importantly for my analysis, the language of the possession of virtue suggests independence from other agents and social structures. While an agent depends on others for the development of virtue and depends on certain resources in order to act virtuously, once the agent fully develops virtue X, she is not taken to be dependent on others for possessing virtue X. In fact, the strength of the virtue is understood as a kind of fortification against external forces and relations. As will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6, this internalization and independence of the virtues is a misstep. The mistake lies partly in its inconsistency with the development of virtue and moral education. Additionally, the view is at odds with a compelling and increasingly accepted view of persons as interrelational and interdependent. It is this ontology of the self that I will now turn to in Chapter 5. As we will see, a firmer grasp on the interdependency and relational constitution of persons will help to re-envision the ontology of virtue in a way that is more consistent with the virtue of empathic attunement and other deeply relational virtues.

Chapter 5

Embodied Relationality: Notes from Relational Ontologies of the Self

This system is real in the detail of its functions, not out of them, and lives in its vital processes, not away from them. (Bradley, Ethical Studies, 176)

5.1   Introduction: Motivating Virtue's Web of Relations

Virtues are deep and strong features of agents, things that particularly characterize agents. As articulated in Chapter 4, the standard dispositionalist account describes these strong features of agents as something not easily shaken, seemingly because it is located within agents and significantly detached from extracorporeal elements of virtue (e.g. a particular context or activity). As I take it, this means that these theorists are likely to reject classifying virtue as a particular kind of excellent relationship between an agent and the field of virtue *X*,[25] in which the strength of that character trait is strength found in the set of relationships relevant to said virtue rather than independent of those relations. If I am right about this, then the ontology of virtue on standard accounts (more particularly, what it means to possess a virtue) rests on a significantly independent and individualistic picture of persons. This association between 'disposition' and internal psychological states of agents neglects human relationality. It neglects the ways in which relations are partly constitutive of the dispositions, or traits of character, that ultimately constitute virtue.

As a preliminary step in advancing a more relational view of virtue, this chapter offers a conceptualization of human relationality. Primarily drawing on the work of Virginia Held, Carol Gould, and Jennifer Nedelsky, I will focus on two forms of human relationality: (a) interpersonal relations and (b) relations between persons and social structures. This chapter will motivate a

---

[25] The phrase "field of virtue *X*" is borrowed from (Swanton, 2003).

relational conceptualization of virtue by elucidating three aspects of relationality: (1) that we are

always dependent even in our 'independence', (2) relations are constitutive but not determining,

and (3) our relational identity is embodied. I take these three dimensions of human life to be

constitutive of my understanding of *relationality* and the groundwork for the reconceptualization

of virtue that I will formulate in Chapter 6.

5.2   The Myth of Independence

There is a myth of independence that permeates discourses on value and identity,

particularly in the US. The fantasy is twofold: (a) that humans *are/can be* independent, and (b)

that humans *ought strive* for independence. Both of these dimensions pervade our political

discourses. The idea of 'freedom as independence' is what the US was founded on and it

continues to characterize the American ideal. To be independent is to think and act on one's

own, to be free of the control or coercion of another, to not rely on others' support or aid, and for

one's actions not to be contingent on someone or something else.[26] Further, it is often grouped

together with autonomy and self-sufficiency (Fineman, 1993, p. 8). *Choosing* is something done

on our own, without the aid of others. It is often assumed that such independence is constitutive

of the moral worth of autonomous activity. Processes of informed consent, for example, are

meant to respect autonomy, but they are often taken to be sufficient in this regard by merely

ensuring disclosure of information so that necessary information can be internally incorporated

in and individual's independent decision making processes. As such, relations necessary to

supporting decision making and, therefore, respecting autonomy, can be disregarded or

neglected (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Likewise, it is thought that one should work towards the

self-sufficiency of building one's own wealth, one's own home, and one's own identity. This is

what we see in dictionary descriptions, in ideology, and in common usage. To be independent is

---

[26] See dictionary.com and *Merriam Webster online.*

to be able to act and think on one's own, which can easily be taken to mean (and often is taken to mean) *without any dependence* on other persons or institutions.

The ontological and normative understanding of humans as independent facilitates, and is facilitated by, ignorance of the multitude of social structures and persons that make day-to-day life possible and worthwhile. In the US and elsewhere, we commonly see people make pronouncements that seem oblivious to the fact it takes a lot of *people,* time, money and effort to maintain the most basic structures of a city or town. We see this in the visceral reaction to President Obama's pronouncement, "you didn't build that", in a 2012 campaign speech. Many people have such a strong hold on their own independence (their freedom, agency, autonomy, self-sufficiency, etc.) that they become unable to see, let alone appreciate and respect, the ways in which their actions, thoughts, and creations depend (usually significantly) on others.

Care ethics counteracts this myth by centralizing relations. Persons are relational in the sense that they constantly find themselves attached to, and defined by, relations with other persons and social structures. It is essential to our nature to embed ourselves within relationships. This attachment begins with dependency on others for survival. We come into the world necessarily in relations with others because we are entirely dependent on others for survival and development. And we continue to depend on others for survival, health, and development throughout our lives.

> This conception [of the liberal individual] fosters the illusion that society is composed of free, equal, and independent individuals who can choose to associate with one another or not. It obscures the very real facts of dependency for everyone when they are young, for most people at various periods in their lives when they are ill or old and infirm, for some who are disabled, and for all those engaged in unpaid "dependency work" (Kittay, 1999). (Held, 2006, p. 14)

Even as adults, we depend on caring relationships (broadly construed) both physically and emotionally. We depend on others when we are young and old, when we are sick, when we are pregnant or nursing, when we face (biological and social) conditions of disability, and otherwise when we are burdened by physical or emotional hardships.

Sometimes, as I think is often the case in the US, we reserve the term dependency for those who are significantly disabled or ill and thoroughly depend on others for day-to-day care needs. Those of us who are generally able to get around without the constant aid of others take ourselves to be independent, even in the fantastical way of being *completely on our own*. But when you stop to think about it, you can see dependency in every step of your day. We depend on social resources to help us with the care of our dependents, what Fineman calls "derivative dependency" (Fineman, 1993, pp. 34-37). We depend on childcare workers, on hospitals and their staff, on functioning roads and subways and those who build and maintain them, on gas and electricity and those who supply and manage it. We buy vegetables we did not grow, wear clothes we did not make, we live in homes we did not build, and we depend on currency that only functions because of interdependent socio-economic systems. This point is present in Marx's work,

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness… It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1859)

We depend on economic and other social systems that not only sustain the economy and a way of life, but also partly constitute our thinking and acting in the world. Whether or not we are able to have any money (e.g. earn wages), and whether or not those wages are sufficient for meeting basic needs, is significantly dependent on our social-economic systems. Compensation for care work is structured differently based on gendered social values. Such work is systematically undervalued and, consequently, wages are often insufficient for meeting basic needs (e.g. buying groceries). Likewise, whether you are able to work at all can depend on your status as a particular race or gender. Women and minorities have been, and continue to be, prevented from earning wages through the conjunction of explicit legal structures and hidden/unrecognized social norms. Moreover, keeping a job likely depends on paid care for loved ones, which likely depends on less expensive or unpaid care for the loved ones of the care-worker, which depends on social support for meeting basic needs given the meager capital that has trickled down based on inequalities in the underlying norms of production.

And yet these relations are often difficult to see, particularly in a society that extols the values of independence and autonomy. Many (especially those of means) are led to think that they freely choose their occupations, that they build their own livings, independently choose their material possessions, and ultimately govern their identities. But all of those seemingly autonomous activities greatly depend on political, economic, and otherwise social structures. The child does not exist without the parent, the producer without the consumer, the CEO without the factory, etc. Moreover, how we think, decide, and define ourselves is grounded in that "social being" or Marx's "social consciousness". What we 'choose to' buy depends on socio-economic positioning, who has more money to advertise, how those advertisements fit with how we see ourselves and want others to see us, even desires that are jointly constructed by producers and consumers. And all of these dimensions of consumerism are significantly constructed by cultural

norms (e.g. what wealth looks like, what beauty looks like, what constitutes power, etc.) (Bordo, 2006).

Care ethics counteracts the myth by providing a view of personhood in which individuals are never really detached from their relations. Even in moments of relative 'independence', where one is not defined by one's relations alone or determined by them, where one acts creatively or against the pushes and pulls of others, even then one is not acting uninfluenced by or absent others' opinions, beliefs, desires, etc. Occupational decisions, for instance, might seem to us as if they are chosen independently of parental desires or social norms. But, choosing one's path in life significantly depends on socio-economic status and upbringing (do you dream of being a bus driver or a lawyer?), it can be constituted by some shift outside of your control (a particular teacher or devastating life event), it can be constrained by social norms (girls/women succeed more in humanities than sciences), and these choices are typically made in and through discussions with loved ones. Even when one chooses a field or goal that social norms discourage (e.g. a woman in computer science or a child who has grown up in public housing aiming for an ivy league school), it is unlikely that one does so without any social support whatsoever. At the very least, such a choice will be partly constituted by seeing oneself as the kind of person who is special, succeeds, battles adversity, and breaks norms (an identity likely developed in upbringing with the help of others). Moreover, following such a path will be obstructed by a lack of support, questioned because of it, even abandoned if no haven of encouragement is found.

To say that we are always dependent on others and/or social structures is simply to say that the complex processes of thinking, deciding, and acting always depend at least *partly* on others, but not wholly. For instance, one might think that a trip to the grocery store for a healthy and 'able-bodied' individual is fully independent. And, surely, there are multiple individual decisions that one makes in the course of that errand. However, there are multiple ways in

which that trip depends on others. There are those who supply and maintain the store, who make it possible for one to buy groceries in the first place. But even one's decisions and actions at the store depend on things like the needs of individual family members (e.g. allergies and likes/dislikes), one's views about health and wellness (which typically stem from upbringing and/or social norms), and even how the store is set up (it is no accident that vegetables and fruit are front and center, that the cereal is in no helpful order, and that all those snacks and treats are conveniently placed in the checkout line). Now, again, this is not to say that one's trip to the grocery store is *entirely dependent* on others or *determined* by forces outside of oneself. It is only to recognize the hidden vastness of our dependence and the strength of external forces (even in moments of agency).

So, my conception of the self will borrow from the care ethics literature, which exposes the illusion of the liberal individual. Not only does this view highlight our interdependence as an unavoidable aspect of being human, but it *appreciates* that interdependency.

> Those who conscientiously care for others are not seeking primarily to further their own *individual* interests: their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for. (Held, 2006, p. 12)

It is not merely that we must consider our inescapable interdependence in efforts to further our own interests and the separate interests of others. Rather, we value the ways in which we are intertwined with others and should seek to promote care in those relations. Elements of this view are not entirely foreign to virtue ethics, just rarely acknowledged.

> We human beings are vulnerable to many kinds of affliction and most of us are at some time afflicted by serious ills. How we cope is only in small part up to us. It is most often to others that we owe our survival, let alone our *flourishing*, as we encounter bodily illness, injury, inadequate nutrition, mental defect and disturbance, and human aggression and neglect… (MacIntyre, 2001, pp. 1, emphasis added)

Dependency is a universal and inevitable (Fineman, 1993, pp. 33,35) aspect of our existence, but should also be seen as crucial to flourishing. Even when we distance ourselves from our relations with others, as Virginia Held argues, the goal ought not be the "splendid independence, self-sufficiency, and easy isolation of the traditional liberal ideal of the autonomous rational agent" (Held, 2006, p. 49). Such independence is not only a fantasy, but not characteristic of living well. Our day-to-day lives are consistently wrapped up in social systems that are necessary to meeting the basic needs required for flourishing (e.g. survival and basic development of capacities). But, beyond that, we seek out loving partnerships, families, and friendships because we take those *relationships* to be *constitutive* of *living well*. We also form beliefs and values, and make important decisions in and through relationships with others. The more significant a medical decision, for instance, the more it will happen through a process of shared or supported decision making where any decision arises through conversations with clinicians and loved ones. In this sense, we do and should aim for creating and sustaining caring relations, rather than the fantastically impossible life of independence. Here, our relations become partly constitutive of elements of flourishing rather than merely elements of life that we depend on for flourishing. It is this constitutive role of relations that takes us beyond the facts of our interdependence with others and into the structure of those relations.

5.3   Constitutive but not Determining

The perspective I take here, and consequently in the discussion of virtue, is one in which individuals are not only dependent on relations, but continuously constituted in, by, and through relations. On many relational conceptualizations of persons, persons are dynamic, interactive and creative beings. They are distinct and autonomous in some sense, and accordingly can be attributed uniqueness, praise and blame, etc.; but they are never fully distinct, never fully separable from their relations. In order to maintain such a view, one in which we are always

dependent on and partly constituted by social relations, while simultaneously understanding each person as agential, responsible, capable of praise and blame, etc., we need a non-deterministic account and a non-holistic account of relationality. I will address the former point in this section and the latter in the following section.

Jennifer Nedelsky offers just such a conception of relational self. On her view, other persons, norms, and various features of our environment continuously interact with our internal psychology and become constitutive of who we are as well as how we decide and act, but are not necessarily determinative. As Nedelsky explains,

> … for a relational self, nothing can ever be "only" one's own. The processes by which we make something our own are always enabled by the relations of which we are a part, and the resources we use in this process—ideas, frameworks, values—always come to us from the creations of others. Just as neither fact denies the possibility of the genuine creativity of our unique interaction with these sources, neither fact denies the significance of the experience of making or claiming something as one's own—or the value of using that language in a duly relational way. (Nedelsky, 2011, p. 49)

Nedelsky's claim here breaks down into two components. First, she argues for a conception of persons in which relations are constitutive. This is to say more than that a person is dependent on her relations. After all, one might depend on relations with others (e.g. for sustenance or security) without possessing an identity that is constituted by those relations (partly or wholly). Second, Nedelsky contends that our relational constitution does not entail a determinative view of the self. In other words, while our relations with others are partly constitutive of who we are, our values, the decisions we make, etc., there remains a (non-detached and interdependent) individual whose relations do not completely determine her behavior. Allow me to explain and justify each claim in turn.

Like Nedelsky, I maintain a view of the self in which persons are inevitably constituted by their relations.

> …each individual is in basic ways constituted by networks of relationships of which they are a part—networks that range from intimate relations with parents, friends, or lovers to relations between student and teacher, welfare recipient and caseworker, citizen and state, to being participants in a global economy, migrants in a world of gross economic inequality, inhabitants of a world shaped by global warming. (Nedelsky, 2011, p. 19)

One finds this view in care ethics as well:

> The ethics of care…conceptualizes persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others; to many care theorists persons are at least partly constituted by their social ties. (Held, 2006, p. 46)

This does not imply that we are reduced to our relations (as I will explain in the next section) or *only* constituted by relations. Rather, the relational perspective recognizes how self-definition and self-understanding inevitably incorporate the relations one is, has been, and will be enmeshed in. The negative form of the argument is quite easy to see. Imagine stripping yourself of all of your relations (parents, children, teachers, friends, partners, etc.), of all institutional affiliations (employment, state, residence, academic, religious, etc.) and of all the beliefs and values acquired with and from others (religious beliefs, world views, moral values, cultural values, etc.). Is there anything left? Anything of substance?

A skeptic may admit that we are significantly dependent on others in our day to day activities and over the course of our lives, but retort that surely the choices, beliefs, and values we hold will remain when all relations disappear. I contend that this line of thinking both ignores how one comes to possess those aspects of identity in the first place and how crucial it is that others continue to help one maintain and give meaning to those values, beliefs, etc. For instance, one can imagine a teenager in a strongly Christian family developing the belief that

God does not exist. Can we say that this belief came from no where but the teenager herself? Even minimal reflection suggests that the belief is likely, if not necessarily, to have arisen in concert with others (e.g. teachers and friends at school) or as a result of other practices, values and beliefs developed with and through others (e.g. having been taught to criticize and question). Further, sustaining that belief over time requires some form of support. Imagine what would happen to the atheistic teenager in a culture without *anyone* maintaining the same belief, a culture without any norms of teenage rebellion or without any cultural value placed on critique and freedom of thought. Even the most creative and seemingly independent thinking is, at least partly, constituted by relations with others and/or the practices, beliefs and values generated by those relations.

Thus, to say that one is relationally constituted is to say that one's identity is developed in concert with others (even in rebellion), that the beliefs and values one takes as self-defining are developed and sustained with and through others, and that even one's choices and creative activity rely on and inevitably incorporate relations with others. Further, it is not only our relations to other persons that are constitutive of the self, but also our relations to certain social structures (e.g. gender and race norms, educational and economic institutions, etc.). I take this to be a descriptive fact of our existence. It is revealed in the ways we identify ourselves (and are identified by others) as spouses, parents, teachers, citizens, etc., but additionally in the ways the beliefs, values and choices we take to be central to who we are, are made possible by, and are rendered substantial and meaningful through our relations with those same social structures. Again, this is not to say that one is *nothing* without relations or that one is *only* one's relations, but rather that one is *substantially* and *inevitably constituted* in part by relations with others.

This brings us to the push against determinism. I maintain a relational conception of self that is not deterministic. While I cannot justify a non-deterministic perspective fully here, I can

elaborate on the possibility of such an account and the motivation for it. The view proposed here

lies between the stark opposition of the independent/self-creating/self-sufficient self and the

holistically/reductively relational self. Instead of forcing an ultimately individualistic or ultimately

relational account, following Nedelsky I will invoke an alternative possibility, that of the jointly

individual and relational self. When the self is constituted *both* by one's relations *and* one's

individualized/particularized responses to and interactions with the surrounding world, a far less

deterministic and more dynamic picture emerges.

While my claim, like Nedelsky's, is more generally metaphysical, a parallel stance is

taken in epistemology in the form of *situatedness*. Our views and knowledges will always be

positioned in some socio-political-biological-historical location (Haraway, 1991), never fully

abstracted, never from nowhere (Nagel, 1986). Steven Winter characterizes this view as

follows,

> Situatedness is…a way of describing the epistemological ecology in which we are
>
> simultaneously constituting and constituted. We are constituting because meaning arises
>
> in the imaginative interaction of the human being with the environment. We are
>
> constituted because the situated quality of human existence means that both the
>
> physical and social environment with which we interact is already formed by the actions
>
> of those who have preceded us. (Winter, 1990, p. 1486)

While we can abstract, reflect, adjust beliefs and values, adjust biases, etc., we always do so

from some particular location or multiple locations. I can motivate my students to recognize and

adjust gender biases, for instance, but they will always do so from a particular set of feminist

perspectives, from my classroom, from their own particular histories, etc. Our thought, choices,

knowledge, actions, etc. are always partly constituted by our relations with others and/or

elements of our culture already created by others. But there is still room for creative interaction

within that relational framework. Yes, each of us may be already situated within vast networks of

relations, but *from that location* or *set of locations* each may reflect, incite creativity, and respond to the world in unique ways. The key to this view is that even these processes of reflection, creativity, and response, engage our relations in significant ways.

For instance, one is sometimes able to reflect on a particular relationship and choose to maintain it or change it. Even if that process of reflection and choice is informed and constituted by elements of ourselves that have been developed and maintained through relations with others (such as certain beliefs, habits, etc.), there is still a dynamic quality to it. As Martha Minow explains, "[identity is] not a thing but a process, a process of negotiation" (Minow, 1997, p. 50) and it is "held through communication, managed, arranged in conference" (52). So, a choice to change a romantic relationship will very much depend on my relations to others. I might find support in motivation in friendships (e.g. the advice and support of friends or the motivation found through observing another couple). Choosing such a change might be constituted in part by beliefs, values and habits formed in relations with others. And following through in action could be significantly hampered or facilitated by social norms (e.g. the pressure to marry and have children might cause one to stay in a relationship one would otherwise leave). Yet, the relations that are partly constitutive of one's identity and/or are relevant to the choice at hand, will uniquely combine and interact in one's particular psychology. We cannot merely look to the relations to determine how one might choose, we will also have to understand precisely how those relations will interact within *one's psychology.*

In this way, the very same relations that are constitutive of one's psychology in the first place and constitutive of the decision-making process in the second place, are not all there is to the process. There is no static or determined chain of cause and effect, where relations enter into some empty box and result in some calculated activity output. Rather, there are multiple elements within a person's psychology, which are deeply influenced and constituted by relations that person holds, that can dynamically interact across socio-physiological borders. There

remains a non-independent and significantly relationally constituted *I* through which beliefs,

desires, affectations, values, etc. (all of which partly constituted by relations with others and

social norms) come to interact in a particular physical brain and produce particularized

decisions, choices, etc. This particularized process of interaction allows for individualized

responses to the world that dynamically integrate aspects of identity and cognition with

influential and constitutive relations. In other words, there is a non-static and creative individual

mind to be found in this picture, a unique site at which internal (beliefs, memories, values,

cognitive capacities, etc.) and external elements (e.g. relations with other persons and norms)

come together in a distinctive way. Thus, even if choice, reflection, change, and so forth are not

possible outside of relations with others, they are not *necessarily* determined by those relations

either.

   The primary motivation for this non-deterministic standpoint is quite simple. It allows for

relational agency, which, in turn, allows for a more robust and consistent moral discourse. If we

were simply determined to act in the ways that we do in virtue of the relations we hold, then it

would be counterintuitive to hold us accountable or blame us for our actions. But, if we find the

evidence for a non-deterministic relational perspective convincing, then we have an account of

persons that allows for individual accountability as well as greater accountability throughout

relevant relations. A view of this form can make sense of the intuition that while a woman in an

abusive relationship is partly responsible for escaping such abuse, this responsibility extends

beyond her individual psychology and into the social norms and persons with which she is

constitutively linked. Recognizing the causal force of her relations, which are physically and

psychologically intermixed in her agency, demands a broader moral investigation, one that

cannot ignore the roles that norms, institutions and other persons play in the decision to stay

with an abusive partner. Once we take these relations to be partly constitutive of this woman's

actions, we can spread accountability to those relations and, therefore, hold all those who

contribute to decisions to stay and/or inability to escape partly responsible (whether directly, e.g. a police officer ignoring her requests to charge her partner, or indirectly, e.g. anyone who actively or passively helps to maintain norms of abuse and acceptance that are constitutive of such choices and actions). In other words, this view does not place all onus on the abused woman, nor does it rob her of choice. Instead, it reveals a greater network of accountability and calls on all of us to change the norms and institutions that are responsible for her actions, at least in part.

One finds similar motivation in current work in psychology, which suggests that we are not solely responsible for the good habits that we form. Take a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance. In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg articulates several ways in which a former addict might depend on others to sustain her abstinence. One's motivation for joining AA in the first place might have depended on the pressure of others, a life changing event in which one put others in harms way, etc. It often involves admitting ones own powerlessness, both in joining AA and maintaining habits of abstinence. As one member put it, "[w]ithout admitting my powerlessness, none of it was going to work…Those days, I look for the higher power, and I call my sponsor, and most of the time we don't talk about drinking…" (Duhigg, 2012, p. 83). Further, it has been found that changing an alcoholic's individual neurophysiology on its own is not enough. Mueller and his colleagues conducted an experiment in which small devices were implanted in the brains of five alcoholics, which were initially successful at overriding the urge to drink, but were not successful enough to stop their drinking habits without further routes of altering the habit, such as AA meetings and therapy (Duhigg, 2012, pp. 72-73). While neuroscientists continue to search for avenues to obstruct neurological pathways of addiction, we continue to find success in the avenues that involve the help of others. Networks of support, such as in AA, seem to have a great deal of success in helping individual members to create and maintain habits of abstinence. These relations, in

addition to the individual's psychology (which is significantly relationally constituted), are

constitutive of one's habit of abstinence. One depends on others to create and sustain the habit,

one's relations with others are crucial to the value and meaning of the habit, and one's

responses to the world that manifest this habit are conjointly strengthened by one's own resolve

and the supportive relations one maintains with others.

While Alcoholics Anonymous is an example that may only apply to cases of addiction, I

believe that it reveals something about human psychology and habit that is ultimately relevant to

developing and maintaining character. Groups like AA simply draw out and render more tangible

the ways in which others participate in our identity on a daily basis. They help to create it,

change it, and sustain it. It is in this sense that we are relationally constituted by relations with

persons and social structures, yet not determined wholly by those relations. There is an 'I' that

plays a role as a site of a particularized psychology within which these relations interact with

each other and with elements of that psychology (relationally developed). So, the individual can

choose, create, decide in unique (non-determined) ways, even if always in, by and through

social relations. To further this point, I now return to the claim that there is room for an individual

on a relational account of the self, which I categorize as an *embodied relational identity.*

5.4   Embodied Relational Identity: The Particularized Person

Examining or referring to an 'individual', as is often the case in virtue ethics where we

must consider the character of a particular individual, does not entail that the individual is ever

non-relational. She remains a relational being. What changes is our perspective. Relations are

always constituted partly by individuals and individuals always partly by relations, but we can

shift the focus of our study between the relationship and the individual. Thus, one can examine

and morally evaluate the character of a particular individual, but that individual, even in our

intellectual investigation, can never be detached from her relations. Her individualized and

particularized characteristics are always already relational.

In order to grasp the phenomenology of the individual on this account, a biological

example will help. I take the boundary between any one individual and her external environment

to be permeable, much like anatomical boundaries (skin, organs, cellular membranes, etc.). As

Nedelsky clarifies in reference to groups:

> Like skin, a boundary both separates and interacts with the world, keeping some things
>
> out, letting others in. Boundaries can be thick or thin, solid or permeable, fixed or elastic.
>
> (Nedelsky, 2011, p. 103)

For Nedelsky, and other feminist philosophers, the boundary that distinguishes one person from

another and from the outside environment is elastic and permeable. Much like the skin is always

interactive, simultaneously a barrier to the external environment (e.g. infection) and deeply

suffused with it (e.g. oxygen), the boundary of an individual is always intermixed, always

susceptible. In this way, each individual is constantly relational, constantly constituted in part by

her relations with the external environment. Yet, this porous boundary is still a boundary. Just as

the skin *can* act as a defining line and a shield, we *can* define and fortify ourselves against

relationships with others that are harmful or unchosen.

Moreover, this view neatly ties in with the non-deterministic component of relationality

articulated above insofar as it locates agency. The relationship between the internal elements of

an individual and external elements of her relations is dynamic and interactive. As Agosta

explains, the relational person is not a "diffuse bundle of social roles" (Agosta, 2010, p. 24), but

an interaction in which we are continuously shaped in and through relations with others. This is

a process in which we, as individuals, play a crucial role. There is a definable individual who

chooses, who acts, who participates in the world. Accordingly, we have what I will call an

embodied relational identity. We are particularized individuals, with particularized physical

anatomy and psychologies, housed in a porously bounded body. It is in this way that we are always relational, always interacting with elements of our environment and significantly constituted by those relations, but also individually recognizable and identifiable.

While I take selves to be embodied, following Carol Gould, I do not consider the embodied self primary to relations or vice versa. For Gould, humans are understood as social beings rather than self-interested, egoistic, atomized individuals (Gould, 1998, p. 27). She contends that understanding the person does not necessarily mean choosing between an individualistic perspective and a holistic perspective (Ibid., 104). That is to say, we can account for depth in our relations with others without losing sight of the individual. For Gould, relations play important roles in the internal constitution of the person. What she means is, first, that we are interdependent beings. In other words, we would not be who we are without the relations we have, but we are also in some sense distinct from those relations since we can reflect on our relations and make choices regarding them (Ibid., p.111). Furthermore, Gould argues for a second sense in which sociality is internal to the self; namely, in how we take other minds into account when deliberating and acting. For instance, in the deliberative process, we often consider how our actions affect others and our relations to them, or at least that there are other minds (like ours) and consider how those other minds interpret particular situations (Ibid., p.111). Ultimately, others and our relations to them are internalized during deliberation. We recognize others, we grapple with how our actions affect others in specific instances and take others' particular needs and ends into consideration. Moreover, our beliefs and attitudes are not formed in a vacuum but rather in concert with others (as explained in the previous section). Thus, Gould has articulated the possibility of conceptualizing an individual being that is never detached from relations, even in processes of choice and deliberation. Gould terms this phenomenon "individuals-in-relation", but this lends itself to the interpretation that individuals are

the primary component. In order to avoid such an assumption, I will call it an 'embodied relational identity'.

What I want to take from Nedelsky's and Gould's conceptualizations of the individual is the idea that we can conceive of an individual even on a relational account of the self. A person is distinct insofar as she has a particular psychology that is housed in a specified physical space, such that *she* can act in the world in specifiable ways. Yet, this same person is never separate from relations. Her decisions and actions always happen in and through relations with others. Namely, her particular *individual* identity is constituted in, by and through relations with others and with social structures. As Gould articulates and as I have explained above, relations are integral to those things that make us who we are and that we take to be internal aspects of ourselves (e.g. beliefs, values, desires, etc.). Moreover, the processes through which we respond to the world (e.g. making a decision) incorporate relevant aspects of ourselves *and* the relations relevant to those responses. Thus, relationality is integral to every component of the individual, but we can still articulate an individual who does not become lost in her relationality. It may be a very porous boundary, and it may come into and out of focus depending on the object of investigation, but it is a boundary nonetheless.

So, following Gould and Nedelsky, I will hold onto a conception of individuality while never letting go of relationality. While we are embodied beings who can reflect on our relations and make choices both with and against those relations, that embodiment is always already relational. We have developed our character, beliefs, desires, attitudes, etc. in relations with others, our deliberations are typically (if not always) dialogical or concerned with social relaions, and, as I will argue in Chapters 6, our relations with other persons and social structures continuously affect and constitute the character traits that we maintain over time. It is in this way that I want to adjust the conception of virtue. Not only do we develop excellent habits in relations with others (as many of the prevailing accounts of virtue acknowledge), but we also maintain

those excellent traits with others. In other words, the possession of virtue, like other features of the self, is not entirely bounded by our skin or brain. In fact, it is located across that boundary, dependent on and constituted by our internal states and on other persons.

5.5   Conclusion: The Shift in Focus and Its Impact on Virtue

What I am suggesting here is a shift in focus or perspective, such that the relational agent becomes the subject of our moral discourse. In doing so, one need not force a primacy of individuals over relations or relations over individuals. And even when we focus our study on one particular body/person/individual, we cannot help but attend to (and should attend to) the relations that are important to her and constitutive of her identity. Accordingly, this account can be maintained in a character based moral methodology, as long as we open the character traits of particular individuals to a more deeply relational ontology. The difference I am striving to elucidate is a difference in focus and grounding, much like Carol Gilligan's use of the rabbit-duck illusion but without the loss of one image for another (Gilligan, 1982). If one takes relationality, as I have outlined it here, seriously, then one must also consider certain important moral theoretical repercussions. Specifically, how might this amalgamated relational view change the landscape of virtue?

A relational view of the self is a shift in focus and structure, but it does not change the elements involved. As Virginia Held explains;

> Virtue theory also focuses on individual persons and their dispositions. The ethics of care, in contrast, conceptualizes persons as deeply affected by, and involved in, relations with others; to many care theorists persons are at least partly constituted by their social ties. (Held, 2006, p. 46)

It is typical of the prevailing views in virtue ethics to be 'individualistic'. First, virtue ethics seeks to articulate the good by investigating the flourishing of individuals. In this way, virtue ethics

centralizes individuals in a way that care ethics does not, as care ethics focuses on articulating the good in relations. But focusing on 'individuals' does not necessarily assume individualism nor preclude relationality. This assumption requires a second move. As we saw in the previous chapter, the possessor of virtue on the standard dispositionalist account is characterized as a being significantly detached from her relations. Even on views that acknowledge relationality in upbringing, that relationality is lost in the investigation of developed character and virtue. It is in regard to this latter point that there is room for a significant shift in virtue ethics. While some level of focus on individuals is inevitable in virtue ethics, insofar as it seeks to understand virtue and eudaimonia through a person's character, that person need not be seen in the standard individualistic way. Instead, we can take the relational ontology of the self offered above, and take that *relational self* to be the focus of our investigation into virtuous character.

Ultimately, even standard dispositionalist accounts of virtue incorporate relationality to an extent. First, it is widely agreed that relations relevant to upbringing are vital to the development of virtue. Second, manifesting virtue typically requires acting within and responding to relations with others. Third, the context, inclusive of relevant social relations, will call for certain virtues and affect how they ought manifest. It is for these reasons that I take the standard account to be *minimally* or *moderately* relational (depending on the particular account) (See Chapter 4). However, there is room for a more robust inculcation of relationality. In particular, even when standard accounts recognize relationality in upbringing, they neglect relationality when it comes to the possession of virtue. In other words, the standard dispositionalist account may require some relations for good habit in upbringing and virtues will inevitably be practiced and habituated in particular relations with others. But if we take the relationality describe above seriously, then our characters are far more suffused with social relations than these accounts imply, especially in the case of the possession of virtue. Virtue could become both more dependent on our relations as well as relationally constituted in the senses articulated above.

With some recognition of the depth of human relationality, we come to question the standard framing of the possession of virtue. And we can begin to envision a new interpretation. To start, we should look more closely at what we are doing when we are developing virtue in the first place. For Aristotle, the virtues require practice.

> For example people become builders by building, and cithara-players by playing the cithara; so too, then, we become just by doing just things, moderate by doing moderate things, and courageous by doing courageous things. (*NE* 1103a34-1103b2)
>
> We may sum up by saying just that dispositions come about from activities of a similar sort. (*NE* 1103b22)

When we practice these things, we are not merely introspecting, thinking, or generally building psychological states within ourselves. Rather, we are building relations with the world around us. We practice being kind with others, being courageous in certain contexts, beneficent when others are in need of help, and so forth. In practicing these behaviors, whether because our parents forced us to, or because we were praised by others, or because rules obliged us to, or because we thoughtfully considered how we should act and then went out into the world to behave accordingly, in all of this we build and strengthen certain relationships with others and with the world around us. For instance, we might build a sympathetic relationship with those who are less fortunate than ourselves, a responsiveness to certain contexts, and the empathic relations necessary for helping appropriately. What we have built in this instance is not just some specific internal psychological state, but, more robustly, a specific set of relations with 'persons in need of our help'.

It is a relationship that is both particular and universal. We practice it, develop it, and maintain it with particular others. But when we have practiced it well and have developed many such relationships, then it becomes easier to develop more such relations. So, rather than locating the disposition or trait of character in our internal state alone, which then directs and

facilitates future virtuous activity; a relational view will locate that trait of character between (inclusive of) the agent's internal state and relevant others. So, just as the strength of a friendship is something found between two (or more) agents and the relationship(s) between them, we might take the strength of a virtue to lie within a relationship, particularly within a set of relations between an agent's psychological state and certain relevant features of the world (inclusive of the individuals within those relations).

This will be a shift in perspective rather than a shift in the elements that ultimately compose virtue on the whole. When one takes the relationality that I have articulated here seriously, one cannot help but understand each person as always already dependent on and constituted by relations with others and social structures. This grasp of relationality should not disappear when we turn our attention to examining the character of a particular individual, as it does on the standard dispositionalist account. As explained above, the boundary that houses that individual is porous, so *she* always extends beyond that boundary in some sense or other (depending on our line of inquiry). More specifically, we can always locate her beliefs, judgements, values, etc. across that boundary between herself and others, even while we attribute them to her. With this relationality in mind, one can begin to see how a character trait can be understood as a relationship between a person and the environment. Persons and social structures will no longer be external, yet relevant, aspects of virtue on the whole. Rather, they will partly compose the possession of virtue, much like they compose the 'individual' above. The strength and reliability of a virtue *becomes* the strength and stability of a relationship (or set of relations). Character is no longer something located in an internal psychology alone, but something that extends out into relevant relations. The point is simply to shift our understanding of 'deep and strong' features of agents so that social relations are centralized. This is the objective of Chapter 6, where I formulate this view in greater detail and demonstrate its import in the case of empathic attunement. Ultimately, I contend that such a view more accurately depicts

our character insofar as it integrates the relationality articulated above and is more compelling

insofar as it offers a more complete understanding of empathic attunement and other

importantly relational virtues.

Chapter 6

Embodied Relational Dispositions: The Interrelationality of Possessing and Maintaining Virtue

Character needs to be revised in light of the recognition by feminist theorists, among others, that character is not simply a matter of what is inside the individual, for which the individual is wholly and solely responsible, but is a matter of interpersonal, social, cultural, and political contexts. (Dillon, 2012b, p. 90)

6.1   Introduction: Sketching a New Ontology

Thus far, it has been argued that the term empathy encompasses a broad range of practices within which one can find a unique virtue, what I have called *empathic attunement*. Its excellence lies in its distinctive demonstration of emotional respect, connection, and care. It is a deeply relational virtue; one that can reveal vulnerability and manifest in substantial emotional bleeding between self and other. The empathically attuned person must be receptive to other's emotions, but she must also depend on the openness of others. It is this relationality that provides some reason for its absence in virtue ethics. Virtue ethics continues to rely on a dispositionalist framework of virtue, which tends toward an individualistic notion of the self, at least in regard to the possession of virtue. Given empathy's heavily relational dependency and constitution, it is easy to see how it could be at odds with an individualistic ontology of virtuous character traits. How can something that is defined by open, emotionally transparent relationships, which are partly constituted by others, be something within us, something within our independent control? For some, this is reason enough to exclude empathy from the moral framework. But let us not give up just yet.

There is room for a more thoroughly relational structure in the ontology of virtue, one that would facilitate the inculcation of empathic attunement and be fitting for other relational virtues (e.g. trustworthiness). Virtue ethicists, more than other moral theorists, have long recognized

some of the sociality of the virtues; some of the ways in which we depend on others in developing virtue (e.g. developing good habits with parents and teachers) and even the ways in which eudaemonia depends on living virtuously with others (e.g. manifesting virtue with others, developing friendships, appropriate laws, etc.). However, as Chapter 4 elucidated, the standard dispositionalist account continues to locate virtues within agents, significantly detached from the external environment, and strongly within an agent's individualistic control. Possessing virtue is something accomplished by an individual and it is strong because it is housed deeply within that individual. In this prevailing view, the relational or social aspects of virtue are peripheral to the possession of virtue. But they need not be.

Following feminist ontologies of relationality, I maintain that virtue's relationality runs more deeply. In fact, we can conceptualize possessing virtue as being a part of a kind of relationship. In a healthy, loving relationship, one must contribute to the relationship, but the meaning and strength of the relationship is not derived from the individual alone. Much like standard accounts of cultivating the virtues, one might have to spend a great amount of time building a relationship and some time here and there strengthening it or repairing it, but an excellent relationship is something reliable, even automatic and easy, overtime. As such, the (relational) agential activity of an individual is necessary and constitutive, but it is not sufficient to a relationship. A loving or caring relationship is made strong in part because of the efforts of 'individuals', but not through them alone. Its strength is derived through the connections formed. It becomes deeper and stronger as more connections are developed (e.g. finding more avenues of emotional and intellectual resonance) and as each connection solidifies (e.g. making common interests habitual activities). Because of this, love becomes difficult (if not impossible) without support: the reciprocity of one's partner, the receptivity of one's family, and the recognition of one's community can matter greatly. In this way, the relationship is constituted and made strong

by the individuals involved, by the ties they form, and by the support of other persons and social norms.

Virtue, perhaps surprisingly, can be thought of in much the same way. It requires individual effort, in part, to develop and strengthen, but this development is only possible with the help and support of one's loved ones and social environment. It requires attentiveness to maintain, but this is done more effortlessly with the encouragement of friends and community. In other words, our virtues require the care, conscientiousness and commitment of love. When we neglect them or ignore them, the habit falls away, the disposition weakens and is lost. Likewise, when they are obstructed by our social environment (e.g. raced, classed, or gendered norms), they can be inhibited and unavailable from the start or weakened and lost overtime. Empathic attunement without dialogue, without the openness of those around us, is weak, fractured, or impossible. A 'trustworthy disposition', without others' trust, is disheartening and incomplete. A courageous attitude without fearsome circumstances to combat, or without legions to lead, is meaningless and unworthy of rapture. 'Virtue', when lacking in support, when unrequited, when unrecognized in these ways, strikes me as fragmented and insufficient. But virtue, when buttressed by the community, when encouraged by norms, and when fulfilled in and through others, then it is strong and deep.

In what follows, I will sketch how one could expand the conceptualization of a character trait to both internal and external social relations and provide some further justification of the view. We have already seen that the standard dispositionalist account is rather individualistic (Chapter 4) and that there is reason for a more thoroughly relational view of the self (Chapter 5). Here, I will bring those two points together by articulating an alternative ontology of the possession of virtue and elaborating on some of its appeal. I will explain just how the making, strengthening, and maintaining of excellence is interrelational. Not only is the possession of virtue dependent on others for proper upbringing, but its ongoing strength and depth is

constituted in part through our relations with others. In this way, the virtue remains a character

trait of a particular person (unlike virtues in relationships with others perhaps), but its self-

defining structure and strength lie in the connections between that person and her social world.

6.2   Upbringing: Forming Character and the Place of Social Relations

As we saw in Chapter 5, many standard dispositionalist accounts of virtue will

acknowledge the import of upbringing for instilling habits critical to the formation of excellent

character (Annas, 2011; Hursthouse, 1999; Sherman, 1989; Swanton, 2003). Much of this

contemporary work stems from Aristotle's acknowledgement that how we are habituated from

childhood "makes all the difference in the world" (*NE* 1103b23-26).

The cultivation of the capacities and habits crucial to living well and doing well begins

early. It begins even before one can understand reasonable explanations, as one must be ready

to listen and capable of being persuaded (*NE* 1179b24-31). The training will involve making

habitual certain capacities: perceptual, affective, and deliberative (Sherman, 1989, p. 166). But,

we have to be open to this training from the start, which means having appropriate attitudes

toward the training itself, such as curiosity and a drive to do well. These may be, in part,

biological. Even so, they can be destroyed or obstructed by traumatic experiences early in life.

They can also be supported and developed through caregivers. It is this exact intuition and its

ongoing support in psychological studies[27] that has led to stronger efforts to support parents and

make early childhood education more widely available.

The idea that we depend on others for appropriate upbringing is not new. As we saw in

Chapters 5, we depend on others for survival, for the basic goods necessary to the development

of our capacities, for mimicking and learning good habits, and, ultimately, for molding virtuous

---

[27] See, for example: (Anders et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2014; Carneiro, Meghir, & Parey, 2012; Slaby, Loucks, & Stelwagon, 2005).

traits. Early encouragement and support will strengthen curiosity and good habits of

investigation. Early and ongoing loving relationships will buttress trust and, with it, the capacity

to form future caring relationships. And learning about the world through a narrative in which

people who look like you are intelligent, successful, loved, and lead countries will facilitate your

intellectual growth and happiness. On the other hand, with a lack of encouragement or

prohibitive norms, budding curiosity will wilt. Early abandonment will typically lead to mistrust

and difficulty forming loving relations later. And the early introduction of negative stereotypes will

infiltrate one's self-awareness, guiding and limiting one's habits, thoughts, and actions.

So, it is acknowledged that upbringing is crucial to the development of character, but

what does that mean? Is it merely instrumental? In other words, do we depend on others only

for forming appropriate habits, which are then up to us to turn into virtuous character traits? Or,

do these relations with others in upbringing play a more intrinsic role in our virtue? If we take the

relational ontology characterized and defended in Chapter 5 seriously, then our social relations[28]

in upbringing and throughout our lives are integral to who we are. This leads one to consider the

possibility that our character is not just dependent on those relations, but is partly constituted by

them.

To see the constitutive nature of relationships, we must bridge the gap between

immature capacities and habits and mature character. We can begin to see this in a case

highlighted by Rosalind Hursthouse. She considers the case of racism to articulate the

complexity of the education of the emotions. She provides a particularly robust explanation of

how such training happens early, is highly complex, and underlies one's ongoing cognitive-

emotional development throughout life, whether that training is good or bad. But this case also

---

[28] Here, and throughout, I will use "social relations" to mean both interpersonal relations and relations
between persons and social norms.

demonstrates the depth at which social relations in upbringing and education affect who we are and who we come to be.

> Recall, firstly, how extreme racism expresses itself in emotion, the way it generates not only hatred and contempt, but fear, anger, reserve, suspicion, grief that one's offspring is going to marry a member of the rejected race, joy when evil befalls them, pity for members of one's own race who are bettered by them, pride when one succeeds in doing them down, amusement at their humiliation, surprise that one of them has shown signs of advanced humanity… (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 114)

The inculcation of racism is so highly complex and so diffuse that it can be difficult to recognize as such. These attitudes and beliefs run so deeply it is as if they were entirely biological, inescapably essential to one's identity, one's character. Yet, they are also taken to be morally reprehensible and blameworthy, as if they are a part of a character that you chose and is up to you to change.

However, we now know that such traits are not entirely up to us. Whether one is the racist or the subject of racial discrimination, one's traits are something both socially inculcated and socially secured.

> The last thirty years or so have seen growing awareness of the ways in which we are influenced by the representations of racial stereotypes, of the racism implicit in many of our myths and metaphors, our images and archetypes, and a corresponding awareness that the most dedicated and sincere concern for charity and even justice is liable to be perverted or misdirected until we have both recognized, and rooted out, the racism that expresses itself in *emotional responses*… (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 114)

What one finds here is a relationship with racist norms that starts early and is continuously reinforced over time. The relationship with those norms becomes such a part of us that it comes to constitute our habits and, ultimately, our character. It is not as if a woman, upon adulthood, is

suddenly able to break free of the gendered oppression that kept her out of mathematics in early education. Those norms will stick with her, and they will continue to inhibit certain avenues toward success even after coming to understand gendered forms of oppression, *because* they run so deeply. They are the very norms that partly constitute her soft-spoken attitude and her trepidation of standardized testing, as well as her great sympathy and her selflessness. This suggests something more than instrumentality or mere dependency. Surely, our relations with others are instrumental to this process. We depend on others and on social norms to be introduced to racism in the first place, but those relations also make racism as strong and deep as it is in a particular person.

If social relations in upbringing were merely instrumental to racist character traits, then we would only depend on others for forming certain capacities or habits (e.g. mistrust, fearfulness, lack of sympathy, etc.). The development of character would be something done on one's own, aided by the capacities that were formed through relations with others but not constituted by those relations. In other words, on a non-constitutive view, relations could be critical to developing capacities crucial to developing character, yet distinct from the character traits themselves. But this would imply two specious consequences:

(a) If social relations with other persons (e.g. racist family members) were relevantly altered (e.g. those family members started to question and combat their racist tendencies), this change, in itself, would not alter the status of one's racist character, leaving it *entirely intact*.

(b) If one developed relations with others that challenged racist norms (e.g. forming friendships with persons of another race), this change, in itself, would not alter one's racist character, leaving it *entirely intact*.

I take these claims to be specious because it is typically the breakdown in racist tendencies of those around us and the introduction of social relations that question racist beliefs that breaks

down our own racist traits. When one is forced to relate to persons of another race as colleagues, one may come to form bonds that allow for greater sympathy and trust. The formation of these bonds demonstrates a shift in character in the first place. One's tendencies, who one is (on a relational view), is changing in and through those relationships. The claim is not that the introduction of a few such relationships will completely overhaul one's long history and widespread relations that support and manifest racism, just the opposite. While the formation of some relations that challenge racism *is* a partial breakdown of one's racist character, these can only just begin to affect a character that has been inculcated with racist norms since childhood.

As Hursthouse acknowledges,

[I]t is, of course, non-rational, or *ir*rational, in the sense that the whole system of the application of the terms, their putative explanations and justifications, is a tissue of falsehoods and inconsistencies. But, as we know to our cost, the recognition of this fact does not suffice to undo the training. Coming to realize that some of one's emotional reactions have been not only entirely stupid but wicked is no guarantee that one won't go on having them. (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 115)

Surely, knowing others who challenge racist norms, recognizing conflicting beliefs and false beliefs, and even seeing loved ones change their attitudes and perspectives, may not upend the racism that is such a deep feature of oneself. But this is not because your character is detached from these relations, nor does it suggest that your character has not been altered at all. Just the opposite.

First, the fact that we form relations with others that express racism from early childhood, means that those relationships have become deeply imbedded in us and difficult to shake. As society's myths, laws, narratives, images, and norms continuously reify those racist relations toward others, they become all the more deep features of ourselves and self-defining. As such,

one teacher or colleague who challenges those beliefs, will be up against a vast web of social relations that have constructed one otherwise.

Second, the very formation of relationships with others that manifest sympathy rather than hatred, demonstrates a partial shift in character. One may not be consistent in curtailing racist tendencies because of the fast and deep array of ongoing racist social relations, but one's character has changed from one that always/largely exhibits hatred, lack of sympathy, mistrust, etc. for those of another race, to one that sometimes manifests care, sympathy, trust, etc. with those of another race. So, even if it is difficult to relinquish a number of the relations one has formed with racist norms because of the ongoing influence of relations formed in upbringing, one's disposition can shift slightly in and through newly developed relations.

The case of racism reveals the extent to which our ethical education is affected by others. We are not only dependent on parents and teachers to supply us with basic tools instrumental to moral education, as if they were supplying us with food and water. Rather, we form deep and lasting relations with family, friends, and educators. From these relations we are supplied with basic sustenance (e.g. food) and tools critical to growth and development (e.g. language, affective mirroring, computational skills, etc.), but we also form particular capacities and habits (e.g. sympathy, empathy, curiosity, courage, practical reasoning, etc.) in and through those relations. It is not as if teachers provide us with some moral-scientific method and then we go off to investigate and construct ourselves accordingly. Instead, it is through others that we hone communication skills and develop ways of understanding the world in part through their eyes, we take up norms as others see them and encourage them, we sharpen perspective shifting through dialogue and practice affective sharing, etc. In these regards, our relations are constitutive of who we are and who we are becoming. More importantly, we *continue* to do these things *with others* as we mature into adulthood. We do not suddenly make decisions on our

own, but continue to shape our characters in relations with others and be shaped by those relations.

To say that these relations are constitutive of upbringing, but then lose sight of them in the 'fully' formed adult virtue suggests that there is some magical leap of maturity or selfhood. This would imply a very static dichotomy between child and adult, immature and mature, which does not seem to be in line with Aristotle's discussion of development, practice, and ethical growth. As Nancy Sherman argues, though Aristotle sometimes lumps together children and animals, in contrast to adult persons, he also consistently makes remarks congruent with a developmental model of the child in which the child is "progressing toward full humanity" (Sherman, 1989, pp. 160-162). If we take a non-static, developmental view of the ethical growth of children (as many virtue ethicists do), then we have more reason to question a view in which the relations constitutive of capacities and habits in upbringing are not merely instrumental, things we were once dependent on, but no longer. Instead, we might conclude that social relations continue to be partly constitutive of those deep features of the self that define virtue and vice, but they are also something we come to reflect on and choose with and through others.

6.3   Strength and Structure: How the Possession and Maintenance of Virtue is Relationally Constituted

The relationships through which we learn skills and form habits in childhood really take hold on us and continue to affect us throughout the development of character, even into adulthood. In this way, we are not merely dependent on others to provide us with appropriate tools or guide our habits, but our beliefs, attitudes, values, and responses are partly constructed by our social relations. We take up the fearfulness of our parents and build on it in our relations with others. We emulate the courageousness of an older sibling and practice it with the

encouragement and recognition of others. At this point, we should question what it means for a character trait to be a strong and deep feature of the self as Annas puts it (Annas, 2011, pp. 8-9). In particular, why think that this strength is internal and individualistically driven, when so much of the development of character happens with and through relationships with others? Why not think that the strength and structure of our character continues to be constituted, in part, by relations with others?

None of us arise as adults fully formed, let alone perfectly virtuous. Even when one is motivated to live well and do well, efforts at such a life are continuous. This is particularly the case when we have developed detrimental habits. Changing these habits so that they reflect the values we have forged with and through others is something very difficult, if not impossible, to do on one's own. In fact, recent work in psychology suggests that what is required for changing who one is begins with a recognition of relational dependence and constitution. Take the example of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AA). This group aims to change habits through the recognition of dependence and social support. As Charles Duhigg explains, it is not the drinking of alcohol that perpetuates itself (Duhigg, 2012, pp. 66-93). Instead, it is the relationship between a cue (e.g. social event), a routine (e.g. drinking), and a reward (e.g. relaxation) (Duhigg, 2012, pp. 63, 68-70). For AA to work, it has to keep everything but the routine the same. A new relationship must form in which the routine has changed, and this must overpower the old relationship.

As Duhigg contends, "you cannot extinguish an old habit, you can only change it" (Duhigg, 2012, p. 63). What happens in the course of forming a new habit is that one lays down a new set of relations between cues (e.g. social events, bad news, good news, coming home from work, etc.), routines (e.g. drinking, calling a sponsor, going to a meeting, etc.), and rewards (e.g. relaxation, venting, having fun, etc.). By laying down a new set of relationships in which drinking is not part of the routine, the hope is to develop a habit that will eventually

overcome the old habit in which drinking was the main routine. This process is visible in brain scans. A smoker who quits and begins to exercise and eat healthier will perpetuate a shift in neural patterns on brain scans. The neural circuitry of the old habit will fade and new neural patterns will emerge and become stronger (Duhigg, 2012, p. xiv).

As Duhigg recognizes, habits and their shifts can be visibly mapped in the brain, but there are external elements that are constitutive of those habits as well. In AA, relationships with other members are critical to the ability to change the habit *and maintain it.* In other words, one is typically dependent on those relationships (among others) to change a habit in the first place and continues to rely on them to keep up the new habit. The stronger those relationships are the stronger the new habit will be. Certainly, a significant amount of this process entails personal choice and effort, but these efforts are always made with or through relationships with others.

This point becomes particularly clear when we look at recent work in neurology. Even brain implants that use electrical impulses to obstruct a neurological pathway (e.g. blocking an alcoholic's cravings) will not succeed on their own. As Duhigg explains, people need to change their routines as well, such as attending AA meetings, calling a sponsor, going to therapy, etc. (Duhigg, 2012, pp. 72-73). As I take it, what this means is that the right pathways have to be built and changed outside of the brain as well. The import of forming and sustaining these relationships with others and with social norms suggests that strengthening a particular habit is about strengthening pathways both inside and outside of the brain. The habit is not a habit until there are strong internal neural patterns *as well as* strong patterns of relating to others in the world.

To visualize the relational shift that I am suggesting here, we can simply extend the patterns of the brain scan outside of the brain. Forming, strengthening and maintaining a habit will mean forming, strengthening, and maintaining a set of relationships that span across the typical self-other boundary line as the habit is simultaneously psychological, physiological, and

social. It is a shift in neural structure *and* social relations. The external elements of the pattern are constitutive on this picture insofar as they are necessary to the strength of the habit and partly define its structure. For instance, the new habits of a member of AA will involve calling a sponsor or going to a meeting when presented with cues that would otherwise lead to drinking. The relationship built with sponsors and AA members, as well as support from family and friends, will make all the difference to the habits of abstinence or temperance. If attending meetings is difficult because of one's work schedule, if friends continue to foster old habits, if your sponsor isn't available, if promotions happen at the bar, the habit is weaker. In this way, what it means to have a strong habit of abstinence just is to hold practiced, reliable, and expansive relations of abstinence. As such, our social relationships are *partly* constitutive of the strength of the habit.

This web of relations also define the habit's structure. For instance, upon joining AA, one person may immediately begin to construct new routines with the help of others. Her sponsor checks in, her friends encourage her, she changes her after work routines. As she practices these new activities with others (meetings, calling her sponsor, gathering at a coffee shop, etc.), she develops new relationships and new neural patterns that reinforce each other. We can begin to visualize a web of relationships that become deeper with each instance (crave alcohol, call sponsor, relax, repeat), that expands through the development of more relationships (new clients at work, new social events, exercise groups, eating healthier, etc.), and the old relationships fade. This set of relations is *defining* of *her* habit insofar as it looks different than another person's. Her habit just is the set of relationships that she has built with others and has been co-constructed in her neurology. Her habit of abstinence may include going to a meeting instead of going to the bar with friends after a rough day, while another may call a sponsor. Likewise, she may come to reliably pass on drinks with friends in celebration of a promotion, but

another may not. So, these relational structures not only constitute strength in habit for each person, but also partly define the particularities of habit from one person to the next.

With the basics of this new structure in mind, we can turn to the continuous construction and maintenance of character, particularly virtuous character traits. As we saw in Chapter 4, virtues are developed and become routine much like habit, but they are also necessarily chosen and self-defining. This is why something like addiction, which is typically unchosen in significant ways, is unlikely to count as a character trait, let alone a virtue. Similarly, some aspects of my morning ritual will be mere routine (e.g. the time I set the alarm for, or the fact that I typically feed the dog, run, make breakfast, drink tea, etc.), but other features of the routine will be defining of character and virtue (e.g. my healthfulness in exercise and food choices, or the care expressed in the morning family meal, etc.). While my work schedule might force a shift in routine, it will not necessarily effect who I am (e.g. run at a different time of day or take up biking instead). It is only when those persistent, chosen, and defining features of myself change that I become a different person (e.g. if I stop running altogether). So, the character traits that compose virtue are different from mere habit, but there is little reason to suppose that the habituation of character can leave us with traits whose definition, strength, and maintenance over time do not arise in part from our relations in much the same way as mere habit. In fact, much like habit, we can visualize a web in which the *strength* and *structure* of a particular person's virtue comes in part from one's social relations.

The shift is both in what counts as a strong, deep feature of the self (as Annas puts it) (Annas, 2011),[29] as well in what it means for a particular person to hold or possess such a trait. The standard interpretation of a virtuous character trait, as I take it, is that others help us to foster good habits. We then voluntarily inhabit, reflect on, and choose to develop and hone those habits as traits of character. As we continue to practice and habituate the activities typical

---

[29] See Chapter 4 for further analysis of Annas' account.

of the character trait, it becomes something more sensitive, more broadly responsive, and easily carried out. As this responsiveness develops across different circumstances and is maintained overtime, one comes to be defined by it. In this way, the strength could be said to lie within your psychology insofar as it maps onto a particular set of neural pathways that have been fortified by your individual efforts.

But as we saw above in the case of habit, there is little reason to suppose that relationships external to individual neurological patterns are merely peripheral to the creation, strengthening, and maintenance of that internal psychology or one's particular character. As we saw already, we develop our capacities and habits in and through our relations with others, but we also choose and mold them into character through the very same relationships. As such we develop our virtue in part through social relations. What might begin as a mimicking of one's parent's reactions of sympathy to those in need, morphs into the habituation of such responses in oneself, is then chosen through reflection with others and through capacities learned from others, and practiced with others and through the support of others. Much like for an alcoholic, an individual change in neurological patterns will not be enough to spur new habits. Nor will an individual psychology be enough to create character. As we saw in Chapter 5, choice happens in and through social relations. We reflect in dialogue with others, consider options with others, think through how someone else might act or another's needs, and invoke capacities, beliefs and attitudes that were formed through relations with others. Moreover, virtuous character is not created in the decision alone, it is practiced with others, facilitated by others, made possible by social norms, and recognized by others as such. So, virtue forms in our social relations, in part through our own efforts, but also in part through our relations to others and to social norms.

As Annas clarifies, virtue is something deep and strong, but also non-static (Annas, 2011). On a standard view, this strength would be something internal in the sense of strong neurological pathways in our brain. When a character trait is developed, honed, and well

practiced, one's neurological pathways will demonstrate this clearly on an fMRI. But, as we saw above in regard to habit, this will not be enough. That the strength comes in part from external elements of our character. As we expand the relations relevant to a particular trait and deepen each relationship through practice, we can see character strength in and through our relations as well as our neurology.

For instance, as one broadens one's beneficence carefully across multiple kinds of relations and social contexts, hones that beneficence in those relations with others, and deepens those relations by practicing them time and again, it is not just one's neurological patterns that are strengthened in particular ways, but also one's relations with others. One comes to be expected to behave beneficently, seen as beneficent, relied on for beneficence, encouraged in her practice of beneficence, and trusted in regard to beneficence. Through these structures of support and an ever expanding and deepening web of beneficent relations with others, her virtuous trait of character finds its strength in part beyond her own psychology. She will be encouraged to act beneficently even with meager means, in part because it is what is expected of her. And that expansion of her web of beneficent relations will facilitate further similar activities. It is through these relations that she will be able to *maintain* the strength of her virtue over time. In fact, maintaining that structure of relations *just is* to maintain the virtue. So, rather than think of the strength as in our minds entirely, we can take the strength to lie in an inclusive web of relations between an embodied being and her social surroundings. As such, an expansive (multiple diverse relations expressive and supportive of *x* trait) and deep (well rehearsed, automatic, continuously interrelationally chosen, etc.) web of relations will be constitutive of the trait's strength.

Lastly, it is the ongoing maintenance of these webs of relations that perpetuates a certain level of strength and defines the particular structure of one's virtue. It is in part because of ongoing support and recognition that one's virtue can remain strong over time. For instance,

when a woman suddenly finds herself in a work environment that is discouraging for women, takes them to be less intelligent because they are less aggressive, and continuously devalues their work, her once seemingly resilient character of courageousness, powerfulness, intelligence, and insightfulness begins to break down because she is not recognized as such. This is not to say that she cannot maintain pieces of those character webs through other relations, but she will also have to make adjustments in light of these new relations. There is a partial breakdown in her web, one that is deeply felt, and one that will have to be rectified in order for her virtues to be complete again. In this kind of case, the woman's internal psychological dispositions may remain in tact (at least for a little while), but she does not feel herself because her relations with others in the workplace conflict with her ongoing webs of courageousness, powerfulness, intelligence, and insightfulness. She is not able *to inhabit* those virtues in her workplace relations and, so, is not able *to be* the virtuous person she sees herself as in that environment.

Now one might retort that this is merely an obstruction of her virtuous activity, not of her possession of the virtue itself. In other words, she remains courageous, intelligent, etc. but is unable to manifest those virtues. However, this fails to account how such circumstances feel to a particular woman. The misogynist norms reach much more deeply. They prohibit her from being herself, they break down her understanding of herself, they disrupt the depth and strength that those traits once had for her. It seems to her as if she is not *as* courageous, not intelligent, etc. And, it takes time to adjust these relations to establish or reestablish one's character, or otherwise to fortify one's character through relations outside of the workplace so as to minimize the detriment to one's character that occurs within the workplace.

This example also helps to demonstrate the ways in which our social relations define our virtue (and vice) over time. Much like habit above, though different insofar as they are chosen and self-defining, virtue is not merely defined through internal psychological states. This

motivates the ontological shift suggested at the end of Chapter 5; a view of virtue in which social relations are partly *constitutive but not determining*. What it means to possess a particular virtue will be about the particular sets of relations one holds over time. The fact that one has expansive and deep relations that demonstrate insightfulness and powerfulness outside of the workplace, but self-doubt and meekness in the workplace, just is defining of the character and virtue one has. We can find such a character troublesome insofar as pieces of it (specific relations with others) conflict with who we would ultimately like to be and with living well and doing well, but they are still defining of who we are and the completeness of our virtue. In fact, that is precisely what is so personally damaging about a case of such fracture in one's character.

6.4   An Excellence Across Relations: The Bullet and the Bite

To say that the strength and depth of my virtue is wholly my own, wholly constituted by my own psychology (as developed at one point through the help of others perhaps), is to do a disservice to the way my support systems continue to expect and encourage virtue from me. It is in part because I get confirmation through these relations that I am doing the right thing in the right way at the right time, because they expect it of me, because they love me for it and help me to respect myself for it, that my virtuous relations are strong. This relational support of virtuous character goes beyond personal relations, infiltrating norms as well, sometimes unnervingly so. For instance, it is in part because I am a young, 'professional' looking, white woman, and so inhabit the image of a trustworthy person, that I can easily help a stranger on the street. That person will trust me because I look, talk, and behave a certain way and this is part of what facilitates my trustworthiness, recognizes it, constitutes it.

Some may be hesitant to take virtue so far, to allow it to be partly constituted by forces outside of ourselves. But it is this very intuition that rests on the myth of independence

discussed in Chapter 5. As we saw above, our social relations play significant roles in the development of capacities and habits in our upbringing. And they remain integral to who we are, what character traits we form, even as these pieces of our identity are partly (interrelationally) chosen. With the examples above it becomes clear how virtue can be seen as a web of relations. It is a web of relations between (a) persons and (b) social structures, which is inclusive of these elements (i.e. not holistically relational). As such, social relations are constitutive of virtue in two ways: (1) they constitute strength (insofar as they are expansive and deeply/reliably held), and (2) they are defining (delineate the bio-psycho-social structure of a particular trait).

What this means for the ontology of virtue is a shift such that one's excellence lies across one's relations, at least when it comes to relevantly relational virtues.[30] As such, a virtue of empathic attunement or trustworthiness, will count as a virtue one possesses insofar as one maintains strong relations relevant to the virtue. These relations will construct a web that includes relevant mental states (beliefs, attitudes, values, motivation, etc.) (which are partly relationally constituted), relationships with other persons that reliably invoke the virtue and through which it reliably manifests, and relationships to social norms that partly constitute the social understanding of the virtue and the extent to which one can possess and manifest the virtue. This will become clearer as we return to the case of empathic attunement.

In Chapter 2, the virtue of *empathic attunement* was differentiated from other ways of engaging in practices of empathy. It is a virtue insofar as it demonstrates a distinctive mode of respect and care. When we open ourselves up to others such that we can take up their subjective experience and come to understand their perspective, we just are respecting that emotional experience and caring for it in a particular way. But this requires that others are open

---

[30] I do not intend to claim that this shift in ontology is appropriate for all of the virtues here, as that claim would require substantially more work. But I will make some remarks to that end in the conclusion of this thesis.

with us, that we can communicate with them verbally and physiologically, that they trust us in times of great vulnerability, and so forth. As such, it would be odd to say that a person who is always pushed away, not trusted, and not included in such dialogue could count as empathically attuned. Surely, such a person might be more than *capable* of empathic attunement, but to never or only rarely be allowed to realize that capacity in relations with others would obstruct the formation and strength of the virtue. An empathically attuned character is surely due in part to a person's individual efforts, emotional capacities, and dialogical skills. But these things were formed with and through relations with others. Moreover, even with those tools in hand, empathic attunement requires that others are open to us, that they confide in us. It also requires that social norms facilitate such interpersonal engagement. If a particular other is socially understood as an object rather than subject, as threatening, as unintelligent, etc. in our social consciousness, this will provide obstacles toward empathy in even a very empathically attuned individual. The thoroughly empathically attuned person will find and establish enough support to overcome such social barriers, but those relationships will be difficult to form.

Ultimately, the more empathically attuned a person is, the more expansive and deep her web of empathic relations will be. Someone who quickly and easily engages in empathy with those who are very different from oneself, always with sensitivity to their particularity and her own, with empathic concern, and with ongoing receptivity, just is someone who has a vast array of empathically attuned relations. It is because she has formed and maintained relations that manifest empathic attunement, that accept it, encourage it, and facilitate it, that she will readily form new such relations with others. The strength and structure of her empathic attunement lies in those relations with others (in their breadth and depth). As such, her virtue lies partly in the hands of others. Their openness, their trust, their recognition and support, will both matter to the strength of her virtue and to how it is particularly structured for her.

Some might take issue with aspects of virtue lying outside of one's complete control, but this intuition relies on the myth of independence invalidated in Chapter 5. The relational ontology of the self defended and articulated there, motivates this shift in our understanding of virtue. To think that any of our self-defining features could be independent of our relations with others and with social structures is to under-appreciate human interdependence and the influence that social relations have on our lives. Drawing this point into the ontology of virtue helps us to reshape virtue as similarly relational. Virtue, as we see in the case of empathic attunement, is better characterized as an *embodied relational disposition*. It is something that one holds and that defines one, insofar as it is chosen and distinctive of a particular body. But it is always relationally so. Choices are never made entirely independent of relations, whether we discuss those decisions with others or utilize capacities formed with others. Moreover, the strength and structure of those character traits will always extend beyond a particular body, partly defined by the social structure that surrounds us.

Therefore, the excellence of virtue can be said to be one's own, but only relationally so. As such, empathic attunement can be accommodated quite easily. Yes, it is a virtue that strongly depends on the emotional openness of others, relations of trust, and a receptivity to others such that one is always porous, always already in relation to others. But, on this account, it is precisely how that web looks that is defining of the virtue at hand. Are one's ongoing relations with others responsive to the call for empathic understanding? Do one's responses reliably aim at empathic understanding *with* another and about how *she* feels? Does one reliably sense particularity in self and other and confirm it through dialogue, especially with others who are quite different? Does one hold empathic concern across a wide range of types of relations? And is one emotionally receptive even in relations where social norms obstruct that sensitivity? Finally, are others open and trusting of oneself, such that engaging empathically with others is possible and well-received? These questions direct us to a web of relations that may partly or

wholly reflect empathic attunement. The stronger the possession of empathic attunement, the more such relations one will hold and the more readily/automatically one will engage in those relations.

Through this example, we can begin to see how a relational ontology of virtue will better reflect relational ontologies of the self, new work in the psychology of habit and character, as well as accommodate the more relationally dependent virtues like empathic attunement. It requires shifting how we conceptualize virtue such that it is partly in the hands of others. Some may take issue with this point, but I contend that this loss in control is ultimately compelling because of its simultaneous expansion of responsibility.

6.5   The Bite: When Social Relations Prevent Our Virtue

Let us delve a bit more deeply into the above example of obstructed virtue. We are imagining a case in which intellect and insightfulness in the workplace may exclude certain types of individuals by not including certain ways of proving a point (e.g. phrasing something as a question or supportive comment or relying on emotional data), or certain physical posture (e.g. slouching or otherwise shrinking one's presence), or simply looking a certain way (e.g. wearing makeup, looking younger, looking female). So, a woman's aggression in making a point may not be interpreted as intelligent because she is a woman, or a stated argument may not be considered insightful because she has relied on emotional experiences. When such obstruction is systematic though, perhaps, localized, it can deeply affect one's actions and how one understands oneself. The question is: does it affect one's virtue? There are three possible explanations of what happens in such a case:

1. *P* is virtuous in respect *Y*: virtuous in *P*'s internal psychology, but external forces prohibit manifestation.

2. *P* is not (fully) virtuous in respect *Y*: *P*'s internal psychology is not disposed to be *Y*.

3. *P* is not (fully) virtuous in respect *Y*: the web of relations that represent *P*'s virtue no longer consistently/completely reflect said virtue.

On the relational account articulated above, our explanatory response will correspond to the third option above.

A case like this can manifest a significant disruption of virtue. While some will argue that these are instances of the misrecognition of virtue or only an obstruction in the manifestation of one's virtue, these explanations are not altogether coherent with how being in those circumstances feels. When one is constantly discounted from intelligence because of how one looks or when one demonstrates insightfulness but is seen as missing the point, it becomes impossible for one to be (fully) virtuous despite a capacity to act thusly in the world. As one fails to manifest one's virtue over and over again, as one's virtue continuously lacks recognition as such, and as social norms conflict with the sort of person one wants to be, one's character becomes damaged. This is because who one is in her relations with others no longer reflects (completely) who one would like to be. No longer is intelligence and insightfulness something that just happens fluidly, one has to constantly work at it, constantly convince oneself with other's support that one is so intelligent. And even when one is able to find confidence in oneself, one will still feel as if pieces of one's virtue are missing and misshapen.

The difference is that one is not just prevented from manifesting virtue or happiness, and so not eudaimon in that sense. Rather, one is prevented from developing and maintaining the sorts of relationships with one's surrounding environment that would otherwise significantly constitute the deepness and the strength of one's virtue. One is no longer (or cannot become in the first place) the sort of person who is easily and fluidly courageous in the world if the world constantly misinterprets one's actions in that regard. Further, while one's psychological state might be fluidly insightful/intelligent in some sense, one easily identifies the best argument and is disposed (psychologically) to express it, following through on it will always be work and

constantly be seen otherwise. As such, one's intelligence cannot be as deep, as fluid, as strong in the world, with these obstacles in place. As such, one is denied the full sense of the virtue, not just its manifestation, because one is precluded from *being* that sort of person. One may still make statements that are objectively intelligent, one might still know that one is doing the insightful thing (though one might have doubts), but one is disallowed the appropriately fluid relationship that others have access to in regard to this virtue. It is in this vein that one is not (fully) virtuous because one's relations with the world are partly obstructed as such.

The motivation behind this view comes in part from the compellingness of a relational account of the self (Chapter 5), but also in part from the felt damage of cases like this and the responsibility it confers. For instance, what are we to say about those prohibiting one's courage in fighting for certain rights and misinterpreting it as petulance, uncivil, even criminal? Perhaps those misrecognizing and obstructing such virtue are lacking in certain virtues themselves (generosity? sympathy? beneficence?), but on a standard account we cannot say that they are at fault insofar as they are prohibiting *another's virtue*. At least not easily. If virtue lies within one's internal psychology alone, is chosen independently, and made strong internally, then there is no inherent structure to articulate the depth of the harm done by those who obstruct the possession of virtue in others.

However, on the relational interpretation offered above, others will inevitably be partly responsible for the character traits, and ultimately the virtue, of others. Insofar as others are partly constitutive of a person's virtue, they are partly responsible for it. This intuition is not new when it comes to children. We take parents to be significantly responsible in regard to the development of good habits and, ultimately, virtue in their children. In fact, we punish parents when children make bad decisions, when they harm others, or put themselves in harm's way, *because* we take their relationships with their children to be substantial features of who the children are and who they are becoming. As we have seen above, there is little reason to

suppose that such relational identities disintegrate upon maturity. Surely, children develop greater abilities to grasp value, assess risk, appreciate consequences, and, ultimately, make decisions for themselves. But none of this is suddenly independent of others. It continues to reflect capacities instilled by others, be actualized in concert with others, and be susceptible to social norms. For these reasons, I articulated a relational view of virtue above, in which our relations with others are partly constitutive of the strength and structure of our virtues. And for these same reasons we can hold others partly responsible for our virtue. So, when laws prohibit empathic attunement (e.g. slaves as property), when norms prevent intellectual and beneficent pursuits (e.g. norms of parental leave discourage women from returning to work), and when particular persons make statements that classify a social group as vicious in some way (e.g. Donald Trump's comment that Mexicans are rapists), this relational account can classify those social relations as deeply detrimental and blameworthy. Such social institutions and persons ought to be held morally responsible insofar as they damage character and even prohibit virtue in others.

6.6   Conclusion: Aristotle's Relational Underpinnings

The relational ontology suggested here, in which virtues are conceptualized as *embodied relational dispositions* whose structure and strength is defined by a web of social relations, is motivated by work in psychology, relational ontologies of the self, and the virtue of empathic attunement. Moreover, it is not necessarily at odds with Aristotle's own conceptualization of the possession of virtue.

In the first place, Aristotle contends that our social relations are crucial to virtue. Though this point is somewhat marginal to the topic of this paper, it is worth mentioning insofar as it suggests that virtue and goodness are not found in independent individuals. Aristotle discusses the importance of social relations in a variety of ways. At the outset of *Nicomachean Ethics*, he

claims that the good of the city or of a people is a more complete good than that of an individual (*NE* 1094b8-12). This implies that the good of the community (and all the relations therein) is the ultimate goal and that settling for the good at an individual level would be inferior. But, still, at this point he has not yet discussed how relations could play a role in the good or in virtue. Moreover, it is possible that I am merely reading-in the importance of relations to the concept of 'people' or 'city'. The point is that such an interpretation is not entirely improbable.

Additionally, as discussed above, the development of good habits and in the societal understanding of which habits are good. Aristotle claims that we ought to begin our exploration of virtue from what we have already learned about virtue (*NE* 1095b4-6). We learn about good habits and develop good habits through our upbringing, which consists of our relations to our family and to our society. Thus, our relations are fundamental to our understanding of virtues and our development of them. Even so, this does not yet suggest that the virtues themselves should be understood as relational. Accordingly, I will return to his conceptualization of virtue momentarily.

Aristotle depicts the virtues as a matter of being in a particular state (*NE* 1106a10-14). Dispositionatlist accounts interpret this state as a psychological state of the agent. However, Aristotle's account leaves room for other interpretations. We can see this potential both in his direct discussion of the state of virtue and in his discussion of particular virtues. For example, in Aristotle's discussion of virtue as a mean, we see that the mean is defined as "relative to us". This suggests that what we call virtue is dependent on us and on our relations to objects in the world. This becomes clear in Aristotle's discussion of how the right amount of food depends on the size and activity level of the person (*NE* 1106b1-16). This suggests that what is right or what a particular virtue consists in cannot be articulated without an understanding of the relevant web of relations between persons and objects.

For Aristotle, upbringing, which depends on teachers, parents, other caretakers and role models, makes all of the difference.

> So too both with builders and the rest: good building will result in good builders, bad building in bad ones. If it were not like this, there would be no need at all of anyone to teach them, and instead everyone would just become a good builder or a bad one. This, then, is how it is with the excellencies too; for it is through acting as we do in our dealings with human beings that some of us become just and others unjust… (*NE* 1103b10-16)

As we saw above, the formation and maintenance of habits has been increasingly recognized as a relational endeavor. Their strength and definition come from relations formed with others. This claim is not contrary to what Aristotle says here, in fact it seems significantly cohesive. If Aristotle is so adamant that learning through others and practicing with others makes all the difference to *becoming* virtuous, then why think that those relations do not continue to play integral roles in the *maintenance* of virtue once developed?

Moreover, towards the end of his discussion of virtue as a mean, he states, "By virtue I mean virtue of character; for this is about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition" (1106b17-19). Certainly, there are many instances when Aristotle distinguishes between the internal state of the agent and action; however, he also has moments where virtue of character is inseparable from interaction and is even defined through it. For instance, if we look to his particular discussions of the virtues, such as the courageous person, we find a discussion of the way the brave person *relates to the surrounding world*. Most importantly, during these discussions, it is not clear whether the psychological state of the agent is more fundamental than the other dimensions of the virtues. In fact, it seems that virtue is understood relationally. As Aristotle says,

Now while courage has to do both with being bold and with fearing, it does not have to

do with the two things equally, but more with what is fearsome; for the person who is

undisturbed in the face of fearsome things and is in the condition one should be in

relation to these is courageous, more than the person who is so in relation to the things

that make for boldness. It is by virtue of their withstanding what is painful, then, as has

been said, that people are called courageous. (*NE* 1117a29-34)

The discussion of the virtue of courage above does not discuss dispositions, it does not claim

that the courageous person will be disposed to act in these ways but that she *relates to the*

world in a certain kind of way. From this, we might conclude that virtue is not about being in the

right psychological state of disposition, but being in some particular state of relation with the

word. This state of relation will involve action, emotion, wisdom, and so on. After all, there are

many ways in which we can relate to the world courageously. Now, Aristotle does not use the

world 'relationality' in the sense articulated in Chapter 5, but this interpretation is not quite off the

mark either. His discussion of courage as about being in a kind of relation, about action and

feeling, and about it being understood in relation to other virtues, suggests a relational

interpretation of the virtues. Virtues are not dispositions as distinct from other dimensions of

virtue; rather, to possess some particular virtue (e.g. to be a courageous person), one must

stand in relation to the world in a way that involves relating to threatening or fearful

circumstances in a particular way.

Ultimately, Aristotle maintains a very social view of human beings and how they form

their identities, their character. Some of his concerns echo those of the relational ontologies

discussed in Chapter 5 as well as Hursthouse's discussion of race above.

…the idea that the fortunes of one's descendants and all one's loved ones should make

not the slightest contribution to one's state seems too devoid of fellow feeling, and

contrary to what people think; however since the things that come about are many and

exhibit all sorts of variety, and some penetrate to us more and some less, to make

distinctions in each and every case appears a long, even endless task, and it will

perhaps be enough if we deal with the matter in general terms and in outline. (*NE*

1101a22-27)

Aristotle does not spend much time on this point, but it is clear that he takes it to be obvious that

our relations with others, particularly loved ones, "penetrate to us". So, even while his

discussion of virtue is laden with 'choosing' and 'deciding', it is not clear that the import of these

processes should be seen as entirely independent, nor should they necessarily be interpreted

as knocking out the influence of social relations. In fact, the relational ontology that I have

sketched above allows us to make sense of both of these points insofar as choosing remains

important but is always already relational.

In the end, Aristotle does not provide an ontology of virtue that is undeniably relational,

nor is his account decidedly individualistic or independent. Conceptualizing the possession of

virtue as a way of *relating* to the world is present throughout *Nicomachean Ethics*. Moreover,

our social relations seem to have profound import in the development of virtue and in the

ultimate end of living well and doing well. So, perhaps, a relational ontology of the possession of

virtue could draw these elements together more coherently. At the least, the account that I have

offered here finds some motivation in Aristotle's own discussion of the virtues.

Conclusion

Expanding Virtue's Web: Some Preliminary Remarks on Trustworthiness and Courageousness

The relational account of the possession and maintenance of virtue that I have offered in Chapter 6 is merely a sketch, but we can begin to see it take shape. Rather than conceptualizing virtues as dispositions that reside within agents, dispositions whose strength and structure are defined within an individual psychology, my view takes them to be webs of relations that extend outside of an individual psychology. They are webs of relations between (a) persons and (b) social structures, which constitute the strength and structure of a given person's virtue. They are still held by persons, but only as embodied relational beings. As such, they are *embodied relational dispositions*, which is to say that they are chosen and enacted by a particular person (a particular body) but those choices and activities are always already relational. This view is better able to accommodate the virtue of empathic attunement because it recognizes how virtue partly depends on others (i.e. their openness, trust, etc.) and takes virtue to be constituted in part by relations with others (i.e. structured by the set of relations that define being so attuned), but it also holds promise for other important virtues. Here, I present some preliminary remarks on trustworthiness and courageousness.

7.1   Trustworthiness and Being Trusted

Take, for example, the virtue of trustworthiness. Being trust*worthy* is a matter of being prepared not to take advantage of another's trust[31] or standing in relation to others such that others can be vulnerable to you (Baier, 1994) and count on you not to take advantage of their

---

[31] Thank you to Virginia Held for her discussion on this point.

trust. But what does it mean for this to be a deep feature of oneself? For it to be firmly

entrenched and maintained over time? For it to be a feature of the self that can be relied on by

others and expected by others?

One is likely to develop trustworthiness with the encouragement of others (e.g. parents

and friends), in relationships with particular others (e.g. trustworthy to friends, to siblings, to

teachers, etc.), and with the recognition of others (e.g. described/treated as trustworthy by

others). As this web of particular trustworthy relations grows, a pattern develops. The person's

trustworthiness is firmly grounded in continuing relations in which she responds appropriately to

the trust of others and, therefore, facilitates future relations of trust across varying contexts. As

the breadth and depth of these relations grow, it becomes more than an amalgamation of

different relationships. In this way, the relations in which she is trustworthy can take a more

abstract form, *a character of trustworthiness*, that is partly formed by, and made concrete

through, particular and ongoing relationships.

But what if no one ever extends trust to us, or if we are systematically characterized/

recognized as untrustworthy (e.g. because of the color of our skin or the gender we inhabit)?

Can one be prepared not to betray another's trust if one is systematically untrusted? Perhaps

one could have the capacity for such trustworthiness, but would it count as a feature of

character without practice with others and the recognition of others? Even if we can say one is

prepared not to take advantage of another's trust despite others not taking one to be

trustworthy, one will still be obstructed from the actual activity (because one is not trusted) and

from *being* trustworthy to any particular other. My account allows us to say that there is

something missing here in regard to moral character, something that is deeply felt by those

unjustly characterized as untrustworthy. It is not just that such persons have the virtue but are

unable to manifest it. Rather, they are obstructed from developing it, systematically prevented

from strengthening and maintaining it across relations with others, and may identify themselves

as untrustworthy because they are not trusted and because others systemically characterize them as untrustworthy.

These considerations motivate us to think about how the possession of the trait of trustworthiness is structured by relations of trust. In other words, the firmness of our virtue rests on the expansiveness of the set of relations and the strength of each such relationship. For those for whom trust is expected, encouraged, and recognized, the depth and breadth of relationships in which one is trustworthy will be far greater than for one who is systematically untrusted and who does not fit the social constructions of the 'trustworthy person'. As such, the strength and structure of the character trait will be quite different in each scenario, to the detriment of the character of those who are obstructed from being trustworthy. Whatever internal psychological capacities and dispositions they have, cannot be as deep and strong in their character when that character is consistently undercut by their external social environment.

Thus, like empathic attunement, the 'internal disposition' is constantly informed by the external environment. Even if one's internal psychology were separable in some sense, one's strength in character will always depend in part on others. In this way, it is more apt to describe trustworthiness as being in a particular *relation*, or holding a particular set of *relations*, to those who are trusting.

As Annette Baier so nicely articulates, to trust is to "make oneself or to let oneself be more vulnerable than one might have been to harm from others—to give them an opportunity to harm one, in the confidence that they will not take it, because they have no good reason to" (Baier, 1994, p. 15). As Baier articulates, the relationships of trust and trustworthiness are complicated, they respond and must be responsive to particularities in persons and social contexts. Most importantly for my discussion here, being trusting and trustworthy are constituted relationally.

…But trusting is rarely begun by making up one's mind to trust, and often it has no definite initiation of any sort but grows up slowly and imperceptibly. What I have tried to take from the notion of entrusting is not its voluntarist and formalist character but rather the possible specificity and restrictedness of what is entrusted, along with the discretion the trustee has in looking after that thing. Trust can come with no beginnings, with gradual as well as sudden beginnings, and with various degrees of self-consciousness, voluntariness, and expressness. (Baier, 1994, p. 105)

Here, Baier centralizes the person *trusting* rather than the person *trusted*. However, her point is pertinent for our purposes as well. *Being trustworthy* is about standing in such a relation to the world that others can make themselves vulnerable to you without being taken advantage of. Though one might have a natural capacity to be so trustworthy, it takes forming and maintaining relations in which one appropriately responds to the vulnerability of the trusting person in order to count as one who *is trustworthy* rather than one who is merely *capable of being trustworthy.* Moreover, only when we appropriately form relations with others in which others can become vulnerable to us and in which others can grow to trust us or trust us immediately and reliably over time, can our character be strong or firm. It is in these relations that trustworthiness is tested, affirmed, and maintained over time. Without holding relations in which one is trusted and appropriately responds to that trust, any internal disposition of trustworthiness will be debilitated and powerless.

This point may be lost on those of us who are regularly assumed to be trustworthy, for whom it is often easy to respond to trust appropriately because norms encourage even demand such actions from us. These very same relations can become fragile and even impossible in a world where you inhabit the image of a person who is 'not to be trusted'. In such circumstances, one is likely to be untrustworthy to many and, as such, inhabit a web of 'trustworthiness' that is

weakened by social norms and fragile because of a lack of relations in which one can *be trustworthy to others*.

Thus, while some of us may be immediately trustworthy to many, develop those relations thoroughly and expand them overtime, others of us will be counted as untrustworthy due to social norms, struggle to form trustworthy relations in some (perhaps many) contexts, and ultimately fail to expand relations of trustworthiness as fully as others. These differences in strength and structure may be due to personal failures or social failures. It may be that despite all social encouragement to be a trustworthy person and despite fitting the image of a trustworthy person, I reliably take advantage of others' vulnerabilities, of their trust. Or, it may be that despite never taking advantage of another's trust, and despite being prepared to always respond appropriately to another's trust, I continue to fit the socially constructed image of an untrustworthy person and fail to inhabit the virtue as fully as another but through little or no fault of my own.

This is the trickiness of the relationality of virtue, but also its import. In order to understand such vulnerability, we have to appreciate that virtues, too, are susceptible to social forces. Moreover, recognizing how traits of character, like trustworthiness, depend on others and can be prohibited by social norms allows us to see a deeper kind of moral damage (Dillon, 2012b). It is in this way that we can begin to see how trustworthiness, like empathic attunement, is structured and strengthened in relation to others. Certainly, we depend on others for its development, but we also depend on others to possess and maintain it as a trait of character.

7.2   Courageousness in the Face of What?

In some ways, trustworthiness may be a particularly obvious candidate for a more relational ontology of virtue, but what about a virtue like courage? I submit that this account can similarly apply to virtues like courageousness. For instance, if we consider an agent who is

courageous, we can locate the strength and structure of that virtue in a person's neurology, but also in her courageous relationships with others across varying contexts. While many of us are only courageous in certain contexts, and so firm in our courageousness in relation to certain features of the world (e.g. courageous in competitive athletic events), some of us have developed a multiplicity of relations that display courage (e.g. courage in our field, in athletic activity, in political activity, in relations with different kinds of people such as different genders, etc.). What I am suggesting here is a shift in the location of the firmness, embeddedness, and characteristic nature of virtue. Namely, a shift from locating it in the agent's psychology as distinct from others (e.g. her specific neural networks) to locating it in the relevant relationships that stretch across the boundary between an agent's psychology and relevant features of the world around her (inclusive of the agent and other agents).

The idea that courage is a particular way of *being in relation* to the social world around us does not exactly run contrary to Aristotle's own description. Quite the opposite in fact.

> As has been said, then, courage is an intermediate state relating to things that make for boldness and things that make for fear, in the circumstances we have stated, and it makes its choice and stands firm because doing so is fine, or because not doing so is shameful. Dying to escape from poverty, or sexual passion, or something painful, is not a feature of courage but rather of cowardice; for it is softness to run away from things because they are burdensome, and the person in this case accepts death not because it is a fine thing to do, but because he is running away from something bad. (*NE* 1116a10-16)

Here, Aristotle makes no mention of how one's courageousness might rely on others or how its strength might be constituted in part by social relations. However, social structures are bound to define what counts as facing fear, who can count as one who faces fear, and who is encouraged or obstructed from inhabiting the character of one who faces fears excellently.

As Judith Butler rightly queries:

Who can I become in such a world where the meanings and limits of the subject are set out in advance for me? By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become? What happens when I begin to become that for which there is no place in the given regime of truth? (Butler, 2001, p. 621)

These questions are enormous and take us well beyond our purposes here. However, they provide some motivation for rethinking character, even a trait like courageousness, in terms of the influence of other persons and social structures.

Think for a moment about the meaning and availability of courageousness in character to a transgendered or transsexual person. In a society whose norms disallow or discourage becoming a particular kind of person (i.e. not one's biological sex/gender, or only one of two predefined biological sexes/genders), efforts to *courageously be otherwise* cannot be understood apart from these structures of domination and oppression. First, *being courageous* in this sense (if the social discourse allows courageousness to be intelligible as such) will heavily depend on the support of others to feel, affirm, and inhabit such courageousness. Without minimal support from family, friends, role models, or clinicians, it will be difficult or impossible to *be courageous* in this regard. Without support can any of us *be courageous*? Would a soldier take a grenade for a friend if such actions were not praised by society? Would Martin Luther King Jr. have stood up to racist social structures and violence as fervently as he did without the support of great swaths of society? Research on the psychology of habit suggests not (see Chapter 6).

Moreover, it is not just one's actions that can be prohibited by a lack of social support, but also one's character. Even if a transgendered person courageously (from most standards) completes a transition, she exists within a society in which large constituents do not count this as courageous. It can be impossible to entirely defend oneself against such perceptions

depending on where one lives and what social groups one is a part of, as such one can *feel* and *be* lacking in courage in character. For instance, one might slowly and visibly go through a transition in a work environment that finds gender and sex transitions to be odd, offensive, incomprehensible, even immoral. In such an environment, performing another gender and going through sex reassignment surgery is to face something fearful in the way Aristotle articulates above. But coworkers will not see it this way, may deride her for such a transition, even physically assault her. Inhabiting the sex and gender of a woman, then, becomes something not just fearful but life-threatening, and something that is not seen by others as courageous but as viciously/offensively bold or cowardly. Even if she continues with the reassignment, the lack of recognition of courageousness in her work environment (where she may very well value the opinions of others) may weaken her confidence in her own courageousness, may damage her courageousness in other circumstances, and disallow her from developing and maintaining the relations of courageousness that are available to others.

Even if somehow one is somehow able to be courageous despite a lack of social support, it is precisely that lack of support, that fear of ridicule and violence, that makes her courageousness all the more praiseworthy. In this sense, her courageousness is structured in part by a fear that is socially constructed and made concrete in her particular relations with others and social norms. In other words, other's attitudes and actions constitute the fearfulness of the context that *makes her courageous*.

There is so much more to be said about the relationality of courageousness. I have certainly not justified it fully here, but these remarks call for further investigation. Moreover, as with empathic attunement and trustworthiness, we can begin to see some important moral-social-political motivation for developing this analysis further.

7.3   Moral Damage and Responsibility in a Relational Ontology of Virtue

I have argued in the course of this project that empathic attunement should be considered a virtue unique to empathic practices. Looking at intuitive cases of moral excellence in empathy and moral poverty in empathy resulted in a set of conditions that not only distinguish the one kind of case from the other, but also elucidated why these cases should be counted as virtuous. Specifically, I argued that empathic attunement demonstrates a distinctive kind of caring connection with others and respect for others.

But there is a lot of resistance to empathy's role in morality. It is largely left out of work in virtue ethics. Empathy is dependent on others' openness, on their trust, and it is constituted by being *attuned* to others. This means being readily receptive and responsive to other's emotions, which depends on physiological connections *to others* (e.g. neurological and somatic mirroring). Moreover, empathic understanding is something only accomplished in relations with others. One cannot be so *attuned* without considering who one is attuned to and whether one's 'empathic understanding' accurately captures the other's perspective and is understanding of a particular other's emotional experience. Thus, the multitude of ways in which empathic attunement relies on and is constructed by relations with others provides a lens for rethinking the structure of the possession of virtue in terms of relationality.

With empathic attunement in mind, I argued that the standard dispositionalist account of virtue provides a rather individualistic ontology. It allows for the import of social relations in upbringing and potentially in the manifestation of virtue. But it detaches agents from their relations in regard to the possession and maintenance of virtue. Virtue becomes something done on one's own, not significantly dependent on social relations and structures, and constituted by one's psychological state alone. But this runs at odds with empathic attunement and the increasingly relational perspectives of the self found in feminist philosophy and elsewhere. So, using a relational conception of the self, in which the self is (1) interdependent,

(2) significantly constituted but not determined by social relations, and (3) embodied, I sketched a new ontology of virtue.

This new ontology is meant to capture how the structure and strength of the possession and maintenance of virtue is constituted in part by our relations with other persons and social structures. This is quite clear in the case of empathic attunement, where being so attuned is impossible without the openness of others, without communication with others, and without the consistent receptivity to and taking up of the emotional perspectives of others. As such, one can easily define the strength and structure of empathic attunement in terms of the breadth and depth of one's empathically attuned relations. This relationality may be less obvious in the cases of trustworthiness and courageousness, but the potential remains.

In order to defend the prospect that other virtues, too, are *embodied relational dispositions*, I have suggested that social relations can weaken or strengthen one's virtue, can make it impossible, and can change the structure of one's particular traits of virtue. This reveals a new form of moral damage. Insofar as the possession of virtue is relational, others can weaken or obstruct virtue. This means that others can prevent you from acting virtuously, but it also means that others can prevent you from *being virtuous* in certain ways, perhaps even entirely. As such, a relational ontology of virtue allows for a deeper sense of moral damage, one that may more accurately depict how it feels to be someone who constantly faces obstacles constructed by others in the development and maintenance of virtue. It is damage done to moral character. As such, this account is likely to do justice to Dillon's worry that contemporary views of virtue neglect the influences of oppression and domination on character (Dillon, 2012b). A relational account will necessarily take these things into consideration insofar as they are inherently a part of social relations and social structures.

If empathic attunement, trustworthiness and courageousness are taken to be relational in the sense articulated here and in Chapter 6, then other persons partly constitute our

character and our virtue. This means that those who obstruct such relations not only prevent the manifestation of virtue but also its possession and maintenance in character. Accordingly, greater responsibility lies in all of us to facilitate virtue in others. When we treat others as untrustworthy or cowardly merely because of their gender, sexual orientation, or race, when we disallow others from developing relations in which they are able to inhabit empathic attunement or be so attuned with, we are at fault for damaging their excellence in character. In this way, we can hold a racist teacher at fault for not allowing a student to inhabit trustworthiness by not trusting her based on the color of her skin. We can morally fault one coworker for simultaneously causing fear and disabling courageousness in another. And we can make social norms and legal structures answerable to the ways in which they prevent relations of empathic attunement with those who are identified as somehow 'other' (i.e. not needing of understanding, not to be empathized with).

Thus, the relational ontology of the possession of virtue offered here holds potential for other virtues. But, even more importantly, it provides a concrete basis on which we can begin to articulate the forms of moral damage that have been of great concern in feminist and race theory. Moreover, it provides an infrastructure upon which we can ground new forms of responsibility and disperse/share responsibility across social relations. I hope these preliminary remarks on the matter help to motivate such meaningful work and expand it into different realms of moral-political discourse.

Bibliography

Anders, Y., Rossbach, H.-G., Weinert, S., Ebert, S., Kuger, S., Lehri, S., & Maurice, J. v. (2012). Home and preschool learning environoments and their relation to the development of early numeracy skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 27*(2), 231-244.

Annas, J. (1993). *The Morality of Happiness.* USA: Oxford University Press.

Annas, J. (1995). *The Morality of Happiness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Annas, J. (2011). *Intelligent Virtue.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aristotle. (2002). *Nicomachean Ethics* (C. Rowe, Trans. S. Broadie & C. Rowe Eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Audi, R. (1997). *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Baier, A. (1994). *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics.* Cabridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bartky, S. (1997). Sympathy and Solidarity: On a Tightrope with Scheler. In D. T. Meyers (Ed.), *Feminists Rethink the Self*. Oxford: Westview Press.

Batson, C. D. (2012). The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy from Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Batson, D., Fultz, J., & Schoenrade, P. A. (1987). Distress and empathy: Two qualitatively distinct vicarious emotions with different motivational consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55*, 19-39.

Battaly, H. D. (2011). Is Empathy a Virtue? In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bloom, P. (2014). Against Empathy. *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*.

Blum, L. (1998). Community and Virtue. In R. Crisp (Ed.), *How Should One Live: Essays on the Virtues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bordo, S. (2006). Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture. In E. Hackett & S.

Haslanger (Eds.), *Theorizing Feminisms*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bush, L. K., Barr, C. L., McHugo, G. J., & Lanzetta, J. T. (1989). The effects of facial control and facial mimicry on subjective reactions to comedy routines. *Motivation and Emotion, 13*, 31-52.

Butler, J. (2001). Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality. *GLQ, 7*(4), 621-636.

Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Pungello, E., & Pan, Y. (2014). Early Childhood Investments Substantially Boost Adult Health. *Science, 343*(6178), 1478-1485.

Carneiro, P., Meghir, C., & Parey, M. (2012). Maternal Education, Home Environments, and the Development of Children and Adolescents. *The Journal of the European Economic Association, 11*(Supplement s1), 123-160.

Code, L. (1995). *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. New York: Routledge.

Coplan, A. (2014). Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects. In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coplan, A., & Goldie, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1962). *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (B. Frechtman, Trans.). New York: The Citadel Press.

de Vignemont, F., & Singer, T. (2006). The empathic brain: How, when and why? *Trends in Cognitive Science, 10*, 435-441.

de Waal, F. B. M. (2009). *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

de Waal, F. B. M. (2012). Empathy in Primates and Other Mammals. In J. Decety (Ed.),

Empathy: From Bench to Bedside (pp. 87-106). Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Decety, J., & Michalska, K. J. (2012). How Children Develop Empathy: The Contribution of Developmental Affective Neuroscience. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Dillon, R. S. (2012a). Critical Character Theory: Toward a Feminist Perspective on 'Vice' (and 'Virtue'). In S. L. Crasnow & A. M. Superson (Eds.), *Out from the Shadows: analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy* (pp. 83-113). New York: Oxford University Press.

Dillon, R. S. (2012b). Critical Character Theory: Toward a Feminist Perspective on 'Vice' (and 'Virtue). In S. L. Crasnow & A. M. Superson (Eds.), *Out from the Shadows: analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy* (pp. 83-113). New York: Oxford University Press.

Dimberg, U. (1988). Facial electromyography and the experience of emotion. *Journal of Psychophysiology, 2*(277-282).

Duhigg, C. (2012). *The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do and how to change*. London: Random House Books.

Echols, S., & Correll, J. (2012). It's More than Skin Deep: Empathy and Helping Behavior across Social Groups. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institue of Technology.

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., & Spinrad, T. L. (2006). *Prosocial dvelopment* (N. Eisenberg Ed. Vol. 3). New York: Wiley.

Eisenberg, N., Huerta, S., & Edwards, A. (2012). Relations of Empathy-Related Responding to Children's an dAdolexcents' Social Competence. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Fineman, M. A. (1993). *The Autonomy Myth*. New York: The New Press.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Goldie, P. (2000). *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goldie, P. (2014). Anti-Empathy. In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goldman, A. I. (2006). *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Goldman, A. I. (2012). Two Routes to Empathy: Insights from Cognitive Neuroscience. In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gould, C. (1998). *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Halpern, J. (2012). Clinical Empathy in Medical Care. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Held, V. (2006). *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hodges, S. D., & Wegner, D. M. (1997). Automatic and Controlled Empathy. In W. Ickes (Ed.), *Empathic Accuracy* (pp. 311-339). New York: The Guilford Press.

Hoffman, M. L. (1977). *Empathy, its development, and prosocial implications.* Paper presented at the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Lincoln.

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice.*

New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hume, D. (2006). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (D. F. Norton Ed.). New York: Oxford University

Press.

Hursthouse, R. (1999). *On Virtue Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Husserl, E. (1989). Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological

Philosophy: Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution (R. Rojcewicz

& A. Schuwer, Trans.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Acadmic Publishers.

Ickes, W. (1993). Empathic accuracy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 587-

610.

Ickes, W. (1997). *Empathic Accuracy*. New York: Guilford.

Ickes, W. (2003). *Everyday Mind Reading*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Jussim, L., Harber, K. D., Crawford, J. T., Cain, T. R., & Cohen, F. (2005). Social reality makes

the social mind: Self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotypes, bias, and accuracy. *Interaction

Studies, 6*, 85-102.

Kittay, E. (1999*). Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. New York:

Routledge.

Lewis, K. L., & Hodges, S. D. (2012). Empathy is Not Always as Personal as You May Think:

The Use of Stereotypes in Empathic Accuracy. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From

Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Light, S., & Zahn-Waxier, C. (2012). Nature and Forms of Empathy in the First Years of Life. In

J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside* (pp. 109-130). Cambridge, MA: The

MIT Press.

MacIntyre, A. (2001). *Dependent Rational Animals*. Chicago: Open Court.

Mackenzie, C. (2006). Imagining Other Lives. *Philosophical Papers, 35*(3), 293-325.

Mackenzie, C., & Stoljar, N. (2000). *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy,*

    Agency, and the Social Self. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marx, K. (1859). *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (S. W. Ryazanskaya,

    Trans.). Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Meyers, D. T. (Forthcoming Fall 2016). A Modest Feminist Sentimentalism: Empathy and Moral

    Understanding Across Social Difference. In R. Debes & K. Stueber (Eds.), *Ethical*

    Sentimentalism. Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univeresity Press.

Minow, M. (1997). *Not Only for Myself: Identity, Politics & the Law.* The New Press: New York.

Nagel, T. (1986). *The View from Nowhere.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Nagel, T. (2000). What is it Like to be a Bat? *Philosophical Review, 83*(4), 435-450.

Nedelsky, J. (2011). *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy, and Law.* New

    York: Oxford University Press.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education.* Berkeley:

    University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating Moral People.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Preston, S. D., & de Waal, F. B. M. (2002). Empathy: Its Ultimate and Proximate Bases.

    Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 25, 1-72.

Prinz, J. J. (2011). Is Empathy Necessary for Morality? In A. Coplan & P. Goldie (Eds.),

    Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives (pp. 211-229). New York:

    Oxford University Press.

Scheler, M. (1954). *The Nature of Sympathy* (P. Heath, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan

    Paul.

Schwarzenbach, S. (2009). *On Civic Friendship: Including Women in the State.* New York:

    Columbia University Press.

Shamay-Tsoory, S. G., Aharon-Peretz, J., & Perry, D. (2009). Two systems for empathy: a

    double dissociation between emotional and cognitive empathy in inferior frontal gyrus

versus ventromedial prefrontal lesions. *Brain, 132*, 167-627.

Sherman, N. (1989). *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue*. Oxford: Clarendon

Press.

Simmons, A. (2014). In Defense of the Moral Significance of Empathy. *Ethical Theory and Moral

Practice, 17*, 97-111.

Simner, M. L. (1971). Newborn's crying response to the cry of another infant. *Developmental

Psychology, 5*, 136-150.

Singer, T., & Lamm, C. (2009). The Social Neuroscience of Empathy. *The Year in Cognitive

Science, 1156*, 81-96.

Slaby, R., Loucks, S., & Stelwagon, P. (2005). Why is Preschool Essential in Closing the

Achievement Gap? *Educational Leadership and Administration, 17*, 47-57.

Slote, M. (2007). *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. New York: Routledge.

Slote, M. (2013). *From Enlightenment to Receptivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, A. (1759). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Smith, A. (1759/2002). *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (K. Haakonssen Ed.). Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Stein, E. (1989). *On the Problem of Empathy* (W. Stein, Trans. Vol. 3). Washington, D.C.: ICS

Publications.

Swanton, C. (2003). *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, G., & Fletcher, G. J. O. (2003). Mind-reading accuracy in intimate relationships:

Assessing the roles of the relationship, the target, and the judge. *Journal of Personality

and Social Psychology, 85*, 1079-1094.

Titchener, E. (1909). *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes*. New

York: Macmillan.

Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York:

Routledge.

Vaish, A., & Warneken, F. (2012). Social-Cognitive Contributions to Young Children's Empathic and Prosocial Behavior. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Van Overwalle, F., & Baetens, K. (2009). Understanding others' actions and goals by mirror and mentalizing systems: a meta-analysis. *Neuroimage, 48*, 564-584.

Vaughan, K. B., & Lanzetta, J. T. (1981). The effect of modification of expressive displays on vicarious emotional arousal. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 17*, 16-30.

Winter, S. L. (1990). Indeterminacy and Incommensurability in Constitutional Law. *California Law Review, 78*(6), 1441-1542.

Zahavi, D. (2001). Beyond Empathy: 'Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity'. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 85*(7), 151-167.

Zahavi, D., & Overgaard, S. (2012). Empathy without Isomorphism: A Phenomenological Account. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy: from Bench to Bedside*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Zaki, J., & Ochsner, K. N. (2012). The Cognitive Neuroscience of Sharing and Understanding Other's Emotions. In J. Decety (Ed.), *Empathy from Bench to Bedside*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Zaki, J., & Ochsner, K. N. (2012). The neuroscience of empathy: progress, pitfalls and promise. *Nature Neuroscience, 15*(5), 675-680.