

Age of Empathy?

NEW VIEWS OF HEALTH, HUMAN NATURE, AND RELATIONAL CREATIVITY

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(Tea and Talk on Tuesdays)

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Empathy—5 issues

- 1) **DEFINITION** (along with complex questions that arise)
- 2) **DEVALUED?** (Whence, for example, “The Lost Darwin”?)
- 3) **AND RELATIONAL CREATIVITY**
(Can creativity help us be more caring—and courageous?)
- 4) **AGE OF EMPATHY?** (Needed even to survive?)
- 5) **MORE CONNECTED THAN WE KNOW?**
(Could empathy open new realms of human possibility?)

Can we even imagine...

Hurricane Katrina



*Selected examples...in what way is
empathy relevant?*



3 perspectives on empathy

1. Cognitive empathy...perspective taking
2. Emotional empathy...share the experience
3. Compassionate empathy ...understand and feel, are moved and able to help

--Paul Ekman

Judith Jordan—some process issues in empathy

Relational-Cultural Model

(Stone Center, Wellesley)

...involves affective surrender and cognitive structuring... ego boundaries must be flexible...empathy begins with...human relatedness ...followed by a surrender to affective arousal in oneself – producing a temporary identification... (and finally) a resolution period in which one... understands what has just happened.”



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Far from “survival of the fittest”...familial and social bonds bring a new dynamic
In Darwin’s *Descent of Man*,

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST was mentioned only **2** times
By contrast, *LOVE* was mentioned **95** times
MORAL SENSITIVITY **92** times
and *SYMPATHY* (closest to *EMPATHY*) **61** times



We have seen how...the social instincts—that prime principle of our moral constitution —lead over our evolution to the golden rule, “As ye would that others should do unto you, do ye to them likewise.”

--Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*



DANGERS OF... mindless conformity

*Humans can be highly
influenced by context...
as in the shocking Stanford
Prison Experiment from
the 1970s.*

*(the good news is...we
humans can also **change**)*



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Seeing, knowing,
discovering... often with the
joy of a child.

Understanding in new and
different ways... being fresh,
open, flexible, richly aware,
beyond biases and
preconceptions,.. delving
deeply, intuiting, guessing,
playing... going bravely
without knowing the
destination! it's a PROCESS
... and can even be a way of
life- a brave, mindful, flexible
and joyful one...

everyday creativity

(2 criteria only)

1. originality

2. meaningfulness



Mutuality or (Mutual Empathy) in Interaction

meet the criteria for Everyday Creativity



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"WHEN NEW ENERGY REGIMES CONVERGE WITH NEW COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTIONS"

- hunters/foragers
- Agricultural/hydraulic
- 1st industrial revolution
- 2nd industrial revolution

oral
script
print
electronic

• IDEALLY

• 3RD (distributed renewable energies in a dispersed Internet age)

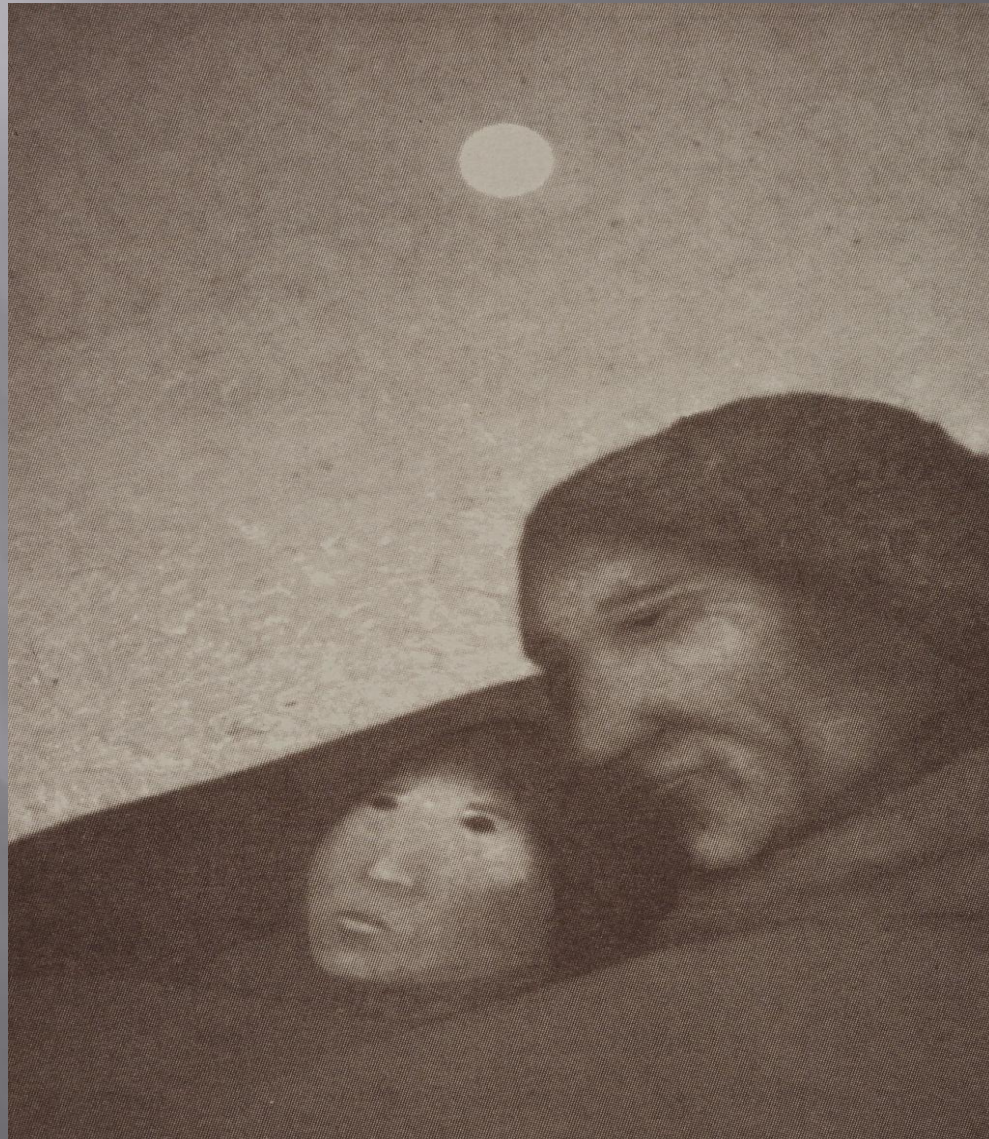
could extend empathetic sensibility to the biosphere itself and all of life on earth.... sustainable post-carbon economy that is both globally connected and locally managed.

--Jeremy Rifkin

Empathy—5 issues

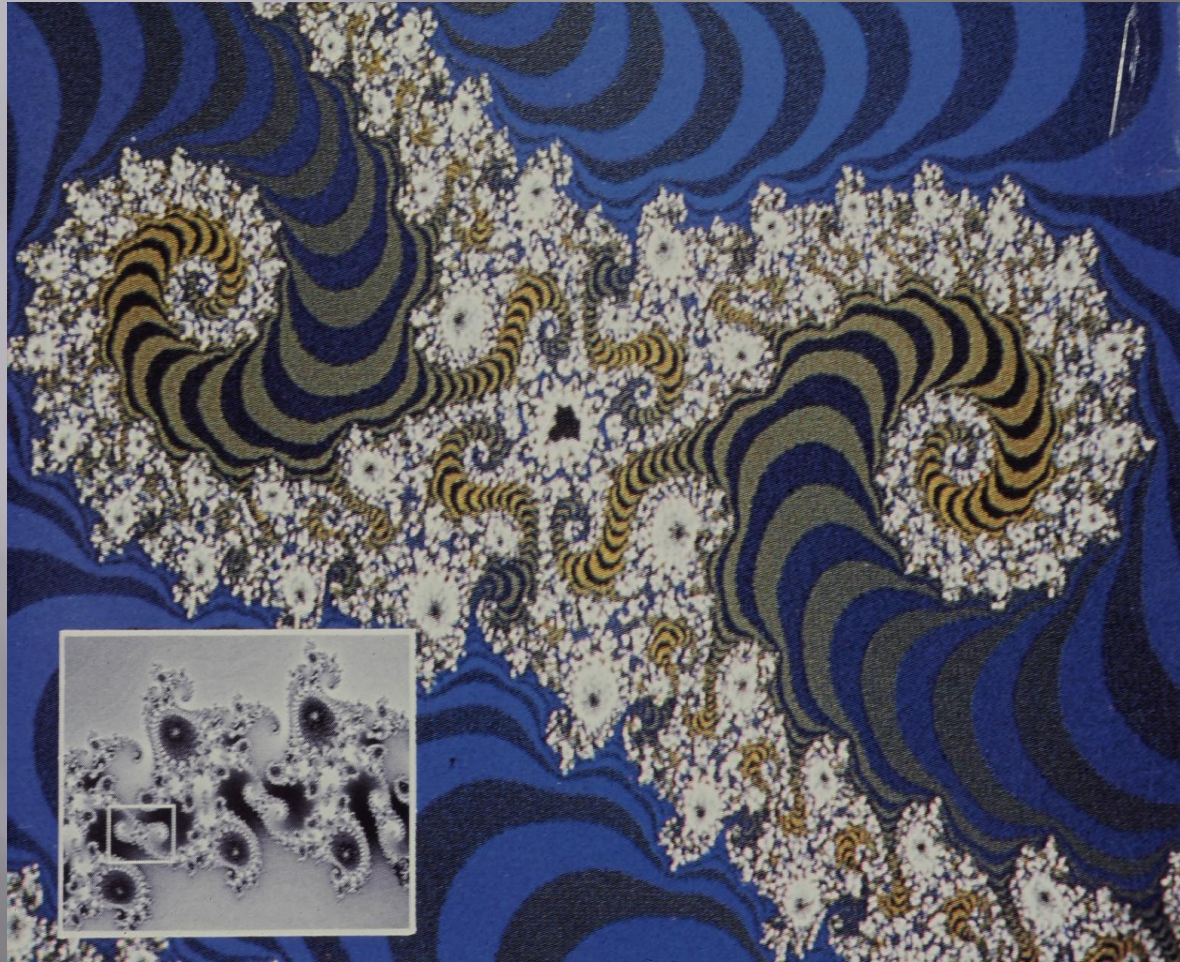
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*Some young people may be way ahead of us here...
broadly connecting, globally oriented*



More interconnected than many have realized...we see this through psychology, biology, physics, spirituality





A human being is part of the whole...a part limited in time and space. He experiences his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us...

--Albert Einstein

The four immeasurable minds

“The four aspects of true love”

“ If you practice them, they will grow in you
every day until they embrace the world.”

--Thich Nhat Hanh

1. Lovingkindness
2. Compassion
3. Sympathetic joy
4. Equanimity



Empathy—SUMMARY

- 1) **DEFINITION** More than simply "standing in someone's shoes," a complex cognitive-affective capacity, with different variants, found across time and space and across diverse species, essential to evolution and cultural progress.
- 2) **DEVALUED?** Yes—a huge problem in itself for human beings, at times related to cultural biases and stereotypes
- 3) **AND RELATIONAL CREATIVITY**
FOCUS ON PROCESS NOT PRODUCT. By enhancing our creativity AS A WAY OF LIFE, we can become more aware, flexible, courageous, able to resist conformity, and find new paths. We can value our fullest human potential including EMPATHY. Together, our personal connecting in the moment can show relational creativity, enhancing intimacy, mutual growth and change, and personal (and social) development.
- 4) **AGE OF EMPATHY?** Needed now like never before, on a shrinking globe. A sign of humans finding a higher potential. A new form of consciousness?
- 5) **MORE CONNECTED THAN WE KNOW?**
Profoundly! — offering joy, support, meaning, and a path to change



Thank you