Age of Empathy?

NEW VIEWS OF HEALTH, HUMAN NATURE, AND RELATIONAL CREATIVITY

Ruth Richards, M.D., Ph.D
Saybrook University
and Harvard Medical School
AHIMSA “TTT” Presentation
(Tea and Talk on Tuesdays)

May 17th, 2011, 7:30 p.m.
Berkeley Buddhist Monastery/
Institute for World Religions
Berkeley, California
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?

jonathan richman: not so much to be loved as to love
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
...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.”
Empathy—5 issues

1) DEFINITION (and some complex questions)

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?)
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*
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)
Empathy—5 issues

1) **DEFINITION** (and some complex questions)

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?)
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
Empathy—5 issues

1) DEFINITION (and some complex questions)

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?)
”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

1) DEFINITION (and some complex questions)

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?)
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
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