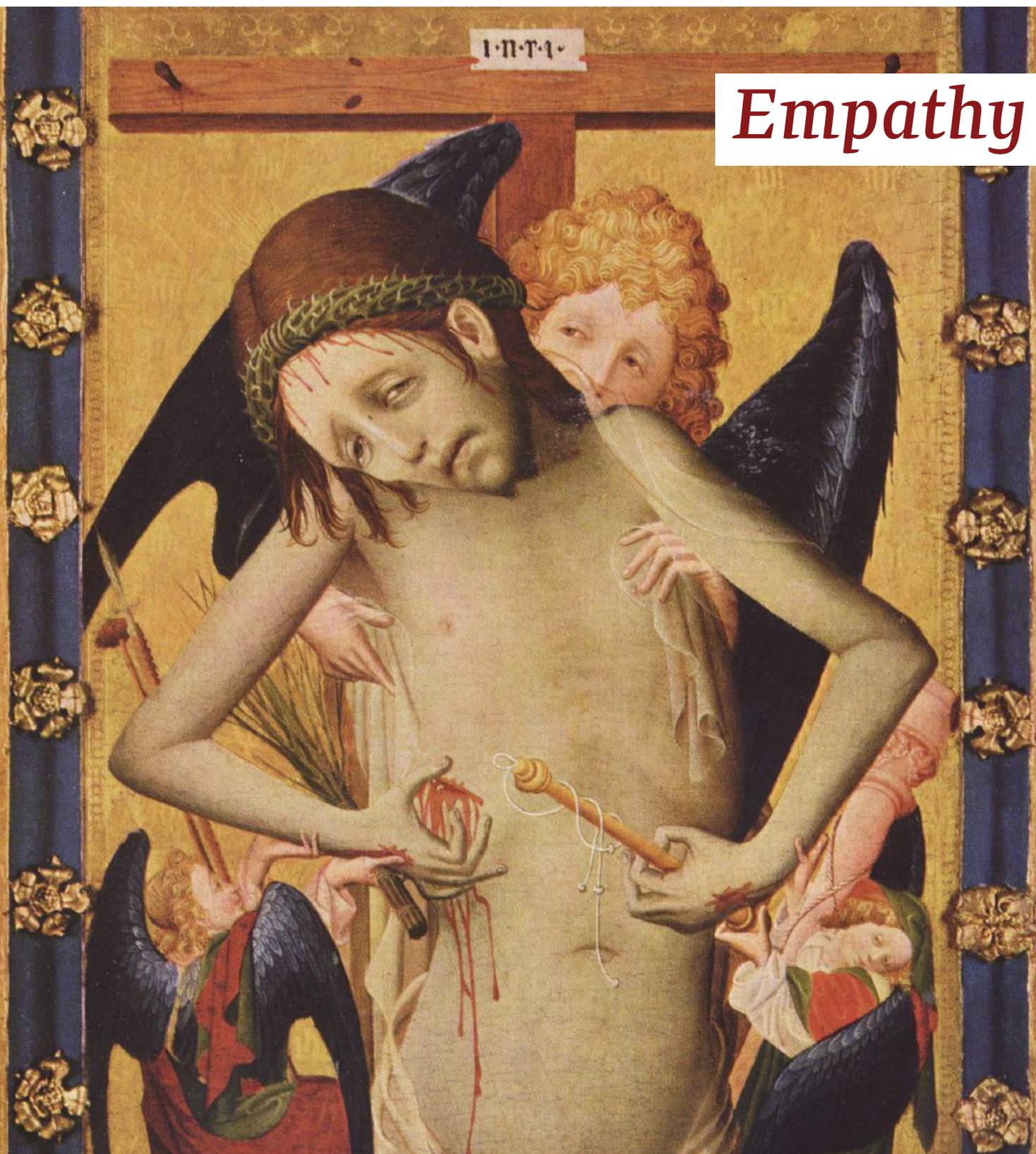




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Journal of HUMANISTIC PSYCHIATRY

Empathy



The Journal of Humanistic Psychiatry

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Editor's Note

A Call For Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and respond to another person's internal states. In the field of psychiatry, we use psychotherapy to expand empathy with our patients and help them improve their intimate relationships. To be a good psychiatrist it is essential to be empathic in order to allow for good quality relationships to form in the therapeutic setting. A skillful counselor would provide their patients with examples in which skills learned during the therapy session can be used in their ordinary living.

In the realm of neuroscience, empathy is mediated by the mirror neurons. These are neurons in our cortex that are activated both when a person is doing something and when the person is watching someone else do the same thing. For example, when a human suffers an injury and feels pain, his neurons in the insular cortex may be activated. On a different day, if the same human watches somebody suffering pain, the same neurons in the insular cortex may be activated again. This activation will allow the person to mentalize (understand) the person's pain and project herself or himself as a person vulnerable of potentially suffering the same type of pain. This mentalization permits experience sharing and prosocial behaviors. As such, the person may try to help the individual in pain by giving an analgesic or taking them to see a doctor. From a neuroanatomical perspective, the areas of the brain that have been mainly related to experience of empathy are the precuneus, anterior insula, medial prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, premotor cortex, temporoparietal junction, inferior parietal lobe, temporal pole and posterior superior temporal sulcus.

Empathy is not only essential for clinicians to provide good care to their patients, it is necessary in humankind in order to function as a society, decrease violence, and expand peace. Empathy will continue to increase in parallel with education and sophisticated moral values. Nonetheless, empathy must not be taken for granted as it can rapidly disappear under stress circumstances or poor leadership. As such, responsible citizens must constantly call for empathy.

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Icons of Psychiatry

Man of Sorrows

Carlos Espi Forcen, PhD, King's College, Murcia, Spain

Devotional images such as the Man of Sorrows painted by Master Francke in the first half of the 15th century were meant to provoke the empathy of the viewer towards the suffering of Jesus during the Passion. The iconography of the Man of Sorrows did not represent any specific event of the narrative of the Gospels. Conversely to other devotional images such as the *Ecce Homo* or the Crucifixion, the Man of Sorrows was a compendium of the *Arma Christi* (the Weapons of Christ) and a suffering Jesus that helped the devout Christian to mentally reconstruct the episodes of the Passion. The wooden cross dominates the background of the composition, while Jesus is flanked by two angels that bear the weapons of the Passion: the spear, the sponge, the column and the whip of the flagellation. These so-called *Arma Christi* encouraged the prayer to remember the tortures of the Passion. The Man of Sorrows by Master Francke is especially moving thanks to the resource of the empathy of mourning angels with black wings. They cry with red eyes full of tears while they try to assist a suffering Jesus that shows the wounds of the Passion. Before this image any Christian would understand the martyrdom of Jesus to the point that they would cry like the mourning angels of the painting for the death of the Son of God. Thus, empathy played a significant role in the devotion and religious feelings of believers in the Late Middle Ages.



Man of Sorrows, Master Francke, 15th century

Essays

On Empathy, Stress, Bias And Humanity: The Empathy-Distress Cycle

Firas Nakshabandi, MD, CEO & Founder of Empathic Resonance, LLC

Humanity is nearing a crossroads. The world is becoming increasingly hyperconnected. Information and people traverse incredible distances at amazing speeds with seemingly fewer boundaries as time moves forward. But the accelerated pace of this movement has spawned a counter movement. Emerging and re-emerging like the tide through it all are a number of antipodal ideas: nationalism vs. globalism. Introspection vs. extrospection. “me” vs. “we”. Lines are being drawn with varying degrees of inclusiveness, with the result being that humans are being grouped and categorized by themselves and by other humans.

In a sense the fact that humans are being categorized is not surprising. After all, the human brain may be viewed as a “pattern recognition machine”. This is in fact how we learn, and by extension how we adapt to survive. The brain does however have a tendency towards being what has been termed a “cognitive miser”. That is to say, the brain tries to conserve its energy by conserving “processing power” using heuristics (i.e. taking “mental shortcuts”). Unfortunately, an increase in processing speed is usually error prone: while speed is gained, accuracy is lost. This is one theory as to how bias is generated. Bias can be defined as an inclination to hold a partial perspective on a matter without consideration of an alternative point of view. In this sense bias may be viewed as the opposite of empathy.

Interestingly, the term “cognitive distortions” used by cognitive behavioral therapists may be viewed as describing what are essentially either different kinds of biases or precursors to biases, as they interfere with one’s ability to hold a neutral point of view and result in “errors in judgment”. In this context, this bias is affected by both behavior and emotions. The cognitive distortions categorized as “jumping to conclusions” may be viewed as examples of how an attempt at heuristics may result in errors. It is worth specifically examining the cognitive distortion termed “mind reading” as it may relate to empathy, as this is an example of a failed attempt at inferring another’s emotions, thoughts or intentions from the other’s observed behavior or perceived emotions. Another term worth examining is the “hot-cold empathy gap”, which has been given to the tendency of people to underestimate their own attitudes or behaviors under the influence of “visceral drives”. Visceral drives here refer to things such as hunger, thirst, pain or strong emotions. This “empathy gap” has been used in studies into the cause of things like

bullying and addiction, and posits that human understanding is “state-dependent”. In this context, visceral drives put people in a “hot” state, the opposite of which is a “cold” state.

“Defense mechanisms” described by analysts may also be viewed as processes that results in bias. While the primary goal is to protect the ego from anxiety, this is achieved through different methods of “screening out” information, even if this does happen on a subconscious level. The result interferes with the ability to hold a neutral point of view, or one that aligns with reality.

The idea of bias is of interest because it directly relates to concepts such as prejudice and stereotypes when expanding this conversation to groups of people and how they interact (i.e. group dynamics). In the wake of the atrocities committed during World War II, scientists became urgently invested in identifying the drives for such behavior. The infamous Milgram experiment on obedience to authority figures is perhaps the most well-known of these endeavors to understand those drives. But in addressing the question of conflict between groups social psychologists have come up with a number of different theories, including realistic conflict theory, social identity theory, social dominance theory and self-categorization theory.

Realistic conflict theory posits that when two groups seek the same limited resource, this results in conflict, negative stereotypes and discrimination. On the other hand, it also posits stereotypes and conflict can be reduced in situations where groups seek to obtain a “superordinate goal”, that is, a mutually desirable goal that can only be obtained by the participation of both groups. Politicians and leaders have for centuries utilized this superordinate goal to consolidate power and strengthen the bonds within their own group by labeling an “out-group” as an enemy, with the superordinate goal being the defeat of this enemy.

In stark contrast, social identity theory posits that conflict can arise simply by the act of categorizing oneself as belonging to one group while categorizing another as belonging to another group. The focus here is mostly on social identity as opposed to resources.

But how does any of this answer the question of how humans can go to such extremes as to rape, kill and torture millions of their own fellow humans? It seems reasonable to assume a process of group differentiation must take place prior to this. In the process of identifying “us” vs. “them”, a pattern of extreme categorization starts to develop: “good” vs. “evil” or even “human” vs “demon”. By dehumanizing the “other” and removing any sense of affiliation or belonging to the same group the way is paved for atrocities, and this transformation is produced through the suspension of empathy.

The word empathy in the English language has been used to describe several related but likely separate phenomena. Different psychologists and neuroscientists have come up with different subdivisions, but at least two are worth considering here: cognitive empathy and affective empathy.

Cognitive empathy describes the ability to “put oneself in someone else’s shoes”, and has been referenced when discussing “Theory of Mind”, as well as “mentalizing”. Affective empathy describes the

ability to “be affected by another person’s emotions”, ideally with an appropriate emotional response. The term emotional contagion is used to describe this phenomenon, with mirror neurons being implicated.

A study by Simon G et al suggested there were in fact two separate neuroanatomical systems responsible for each phenomenon; they found “Brodmann area 44 to be critical for emotional empathy while areas 11 and 10 were found necessary for cognitive empathy”

This subdivision is also important when observing different psychiatric disorders. Atypical empathic responses have been observed in autism, various personality disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar disorders to name a few. During a manic episode one might observe a decrease in cognitive empathy but an increase in affective empathy. In antisocial personality disorder, cognitive empathy may be intact and in fact employed manipulatively to further the afflicted person’s own goal, with a lack of emotional empathy likely contributing to a lack of remorse.

When discussing empathy, the hormone oxytocin will invariably come up. This hormone is secreted during activities such as breast feeding and hugging, and is crucial in establishing a feeling of connectedness. The importance of skin to skin contact and a sense of security in early childhood development has been well established and is essential for both physical and mental health. While it may be attractive to think of oxytocin as a “Love Hormone” that holds the key to empathy, studies have shown mixed results when examining the administration of oxytocin as an intervention. Interestingly, while oxytocin is viewed as being important for pair bonding in females, in males it appears the structurally-similar hormone vasopressin may be more important.

There has been an explosion of research on empathy across multiple disciplines, yet it appears to be scarcely mentioned in the field of psychiatry. My personal opinion as a psychiatrist is that our training has been severely lacking in exposure to the concept of empathy, not only as an academic focus but also practically within the training programs themselves. My emerging interest in the effects of stress on empathy and bias was born while navigating the demands of being a physician on call who had to manage not only the stress of patients but often also that of the staff and of the administration. A practical lack of empathy within training programs is frequently and ironically a complaint of many a psychiatry resident during their intense years of training. The expectation is to be fully present and engaged in addressing a patient’s needs, while also addressing the needs of staff in the emergency units or on the inpatient units. Virtually no one is interested in the amount of stress placed on the resident or how this might affect his ability to care for a patient, again mostly due to a failure of empathy.

What starts to materialize from all that has been discussed, however, is that at the core of these experiences and the aforementioned theories across multiple disciplines, three “elemental”, continuously interacting concepts emerge: stress, bias and empathy. This realization has led me to formulate what I have termed the “empathy-distress cycle”. (fig. 1)



"The Empathy-Distress Cycle" © Firas A. Nakshabandi, M.D.
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To put it simply, a vicious cycle is born out of stress, which both inhibits empathy and promotes bias, this leads to an increase in errors, resulting in more conflict and more stress. I use the term empathy-distress to emphasize a need to “rescue” empathy in order to break this cycle. This may at first glance seem like an oversimplification, especially since there are times when an *increase* in empathy might potentially lead to more stress as well. Specifically, too much empathic concern for others can be distressing to the point where if not appropriately managed the result may be an urge to protect or defend a person we feel empathic towards by violating the rights of the perceived offending third party who has wronged the target of our empathy. The conflict in the Middle East is a prime example of how the perception of one group being wronged can trigger a member of another group to feel the need to act, even if the member of the group is not directly affected; it is enough that the member has identified himself as belonging to one group or the other. However, if we apply what we have learned so far about groups it is obvious the problem here again remains the categorization of “us” vs. “them”. This is why in the strongest sense I argue that empathy *must* be expanded to include all of humanity, and not just the selective groups we identify with in the moment of the perceived stress.

To further break down this relationship and in light of what we have reviewed so far I would like to posit that most humans are constantly swinging between two extremes on a continuum. On the one hand (and I would like to think at “baseline”) most humans are empathic creatures, in a state driven by the “mammalian” brain, oxytocin, the prefrontal cortex and the parasympathetic system, most humans are able to engage in both cognitive as well as affective empathy. Prosocial and altruistic behavior dominates here.

On the other extreme, when there is a real or perceived “stressor”, there is a shift towards a state that is primarily concerned with self-preservation in the moment. A “reptilian” brain, amygdala, HPA axis and sympathetic nervous system driven state concerned only with the self takes over. It should come as no surprise that in this state of “fight or flight” the brain shifts to a stance that calls for a need for instant categorization: “friend or foe”? Bias is maximized and errors are frequent, but the errors tend to occur in favor of survival of the individual, and an over classification of others as “enemy or threat” can occur. This biased state is again the polar opposite of an empathic state, where the primary concern in the extreme shrinks down to the individual being the sole member of his group.

I would like to posit that perhaps in between these extremes the “circle of trust” or circle of inclusiveness of the in-group shrinks proportionally to the amount of perceived stress. This can again be seen in conflicts such as civil wars where two members of separate religious groups may have been happily married prior to a conflict, but once war breaks out the members are forced into alignment with the groups in conflict. The “national” grouping here is dissolved, and alignment shrinks to include members of one religious affiliation or another.

The need to decrease stress will not be over emphasized here as it has been rigorously studied. The effects of stress on both mental and physical health on developing children has been well established in the “Adverse Child Event (ACE) Study”. Chronic stress has been theorized to cause mental illness through a variety of mechanisms including its effects on inflammation and delta wave sleep. Interestingly, it appears that oxytocin also decreases inflammation.

The need for meaningful human relationships has also been firmly established in the longest study on happiness ever undertaken: The Grant study of adult development. Empathy is the gateway to reaching these relationships. Early childhood trauma has also been well established in affecting the ability to empathize. When employing empathy to imagine the schema of abused or neglected children, it is not very difficult to see why said children would be primarily focused on their own wellbeing as opposed to that of those around them. They would have learned early on that the world is a dangerous place, and have little capacity to self soothe.

Lastly, empathy is also the gateway to altruism. There is an abundance of research into the positive effects of altruism in alleviating mental suffering, including depression, anxiety and somatization.

In conclusion, stress both promotes bias and inhibits empathy. While this relationship may seem easy enough to appreciate superficially, the challenge is being consistently mindful of it to the point where this knowledge is practically useful in everyday life. A deeper understanding of this relationship and why it is practically helpful could be taught to children at school, or in short courses or workshops to adults across various disciplines. Exercises in mindfulness, role-playing and how to consistently re-examine our own biases would need to be a focus. Skills could be taught from an early age by parental modeling as well.

Increased inter-group contact and co-dependence as well as open communication has applications extending from the classroom to international relations, and a shift to a more universally inclusive view of humans as all belonging to the same group regardless of the nationalities and religions they are born into with no say in the matter is paramount.

This understanding is crucial to what it is to be human. The implications extend from our individual everyday interactions to global politics and how we relate to each other as a species. Hopefully this undertaking may play a role in preparing the next generation on how to better handle any real or perceived stresses presenting a challenge to our beautifully diverse human race.

The De-empathization of The Rat

Fernando Espi Forcen, MD, PhD, Department of Psychiatry, Rush University, Chicago

Rattus Norvegicus (Norwegian rat) commonly known as the ‘brown rat’ is the most common rat species in the western world. The rodent was initially thought to have originated in Norway, but we know today that the species actually came from China. Prior to the invasion of *Norvegicus* in Europe, and subsequently in America, the most common rat was *Rattus Rattus* or the black rat. Whereas the black rat arrived in Europe during Roman times, the brown rat came more recently. Reliable reports indicate that the brown rat arrived in Ireland in 1722, in England in 1730, and in Spain in 1800. However, within the last several decades, *Norvegicus* which is a faster, bigger, and more aggressive animal has gradually replaced the more European black rat. The imminent extinction of the black rat is likely related to loss in the competition for food and aggression by the brown rat. Apparently *Norvegicus* is very territorial and often kill and feed from the black rat. *Norvegicus* can also reproduce faster, ejaculate multiple times, and is known to show more prosocial behaviors such as grooming and laughter. Some studies suggest that this rat may have metacognition, meaning they are self aware and understand their own thought processes. The albino form of *Norvegicus* has been regularly used on labs for research. In fact, most of our knowledge about human behavior is extrapolated from studies with this rat. The lab rat, however, is considered less intelligent and skillful, which is perhaps related to the fact that the lab rat has not undergone the same natural selection.

Norvegicus has populated the major cities in the world finding a special niche in New York City. It is estimated that this metropolitan city hosts up to two million rats. These rodents are especially visible at night especially near the parks, in alleys, and the subway. *Norvegicus* are thought to be infection reservoirs as these rodents have been found to be carriers of *cryptosporidium*, *coxiella*, and *yersinia pestis* among other pathogens. The brown rat lives in colonies of up to thirty individuals. The increased



The Pizza Rat at the Subway, an empathic depiction of the New York City rodents

numbers of this rat in urban areas has paralleled the de-empathizing feeling of the animal by its human neighbor. People living in cities often describe *Norvegicus* as ‘filthy,’ ‘nasty,’ ‘disgusting’ and at times ‘nauseating.’ Even official statements from the government describe the rat in pejorative terms. There

have been multiple complaints and several attempts to reduce the number of rats in the city using pesticides, traps, or dogs. Recently, several reports and videos on the web showing rats entering subway wagons, approaching people, and even crawling on them while asleep has only enhanced this imminent lack of empathy.



Norvegicus is also a popular pet for humans

Despite criticism, *Norvegicus* has been very important for human being to learn about their species. Through this rodent we have been able to execute a bulk of basic science research, pharmacological experiments, and neuroscientific studies that have been extrapolated to humans. As a result, *Norvegicus* has taught us about our own evolution. The replacement of *Rattus Rattus* by *Rattus Norvegicus* in Europe and America resembles that of the *Homo Neanderthalensis* by *Homo sapiens*. If humans disappear, this will probably be the mammal with more probability to survive. Therefore, the

future supra-intelligent life could evolve from *Norvegicus*.

Already some attempts to re-empathize *Norvegicus* have been made. For instance, there is a pizza rat video on YouTube which shows how a rat in New York City attempts to take her cheese pizza slice “just like we would do.” Albino and even brown subjects of *Norvegicus* are now pet animals too. I imagine if an attempt to exterminate this species is made, rat pet owners would be the first to stand out and complain. The future of *Norvegicus* is uncertain, just like our own. Perhaps the important similarities that we carry with this rodent are a main reason why we feel so intimidated by them.

Ten Tips For Expanding Empathy Between Residents and Attendings

Lou Agosta, Medical Humanities, Saint Anthony Hospital, Ross Medical School, Chicago, IL

Most people are naturally empathic, but the empathy goes off the rails, thwarted by lack of practice, circumstances, and the person's own blind spots and fear. To expand empathy in any context including between resident and attending physicians

1. Remove obstacles to empathy such as dignity violations, shame, put downs, being righteous, stress, burn out, compassion fatigue, or injuries to self-esteem – and empathy naturally comes forth, develops, blossoms
2. Reduce stress by responding with empathy to acting out or provocative language, consistent with respect for boundaries and “do no harm”
3. Be quiet so that you can listen – to yourself – and set aside the opinions, judgments, assessments before you speak – and then speak from your commitment to service – service to patients, colleagues, directors, and administrators
4. Distinguish what happened from what one made it mean. For example, the attending told the resident “Review the dress code – jeans are unacceptable.” And the resident made it mean: “I am a bad person – my career is over.” No, just don't wear jeans. The resident says to the attending, “No, the proper dosage is X, not Y” [and that is actually the case]. And the attending made it mean: “I have lost authority. Is it too soon for early retirement?” No, look it up on your smart phone.
5. Coming from empathic receptivity – scan facial expressions and tone of voice for signs of stress, misunderstanding, confusion, or upset – and ask if the other is okay or requires clarification
6. Coming from empathic interpretation – do *not* adopt the paranoid position and rather than emphasizing what is wrong, explicitly call out what is missing, the availability of which would make a difference. There is nothing wrong – but something is missing (in addition to empathy)!

7. Coming from empathic understanding – identify upsets and breakdowns and against the commitment to professionalism identify the unfulfilled expectation, thwarted commitment, or undelivered communication.

8. Coming from empathic responsiveness – look for an opening authentically to deliver acknowledgment, recognition, and appreciation to colleagues and leaders.

9. When people do not get the empathy to which they feel entitled, they get enraged. De-escalate by acknowledging the break down, cleaning up the misunderstanding, and restoring the empathic relatedness.

10. Empathy is oxygen for the soul. So if one is feeling short of breath, take that as a clue that one requires expanded empathy. Stop, breathe, listen, speak from possibility.



A moment of Empathy between Attendings and Residents

The Empathy Of Silence

Teodoro Jimenez Pozo, JD candidate, University of Las Palmas De Gran Canaria, Spain

Silence has always been a precious thing for the majority for concentration, calmness, relaxation but also as a tool to empathize with loved ones who passed away.

In the Western World, the so-called 'moment of silence' has been used in order to empathize and express solidarity with the victims of Daesh.

Recently, during a soccer game between Saudi Arabia and Australia to qualify for the 2018 World Cup Tournament in Russia, a controversy started when the Saudi people exerted their right to not observe a moment of silence for victims of ISIS at the attacks of London. Western media referred to Saudi people as immoral and inhumane. After that I thought "Are we occidentals really more empathic by observing silence at the time that we are indirectly financing Daesh by buying gas from them?"

Despite I would have observed the moment of of silence, I am aware of the mismatch between hypocrisy and empathy generating a double morality that has existed in the West for a long time. This Western morality was criticized by Claud Chabrol with the French bourgeoisie. We somehow feel that a moment of silence can be enough to keep good morals.

Observing a moment of silence does not really solve the problem. Politicians and leaders are feeding the evil. However, we should not feel moral authorities when we don't even think about which might be the root of this terrorism problem.

It may seem obvious to think that Saudi Arabia National Team did not observe a moment of silence to denounce the West's lack of empathy. We however look down on them while our leaders just care for their own financial interests and generate more victims far away and recently in their own land.

Empathy is not only about silence but about words. Empathy has more to do with facts and not even a million of silent moments will ever empathize with the victims that the West has caused for feeding the evil of terrorism.

Articles

Empathy: From Breakdown To Breakthrough

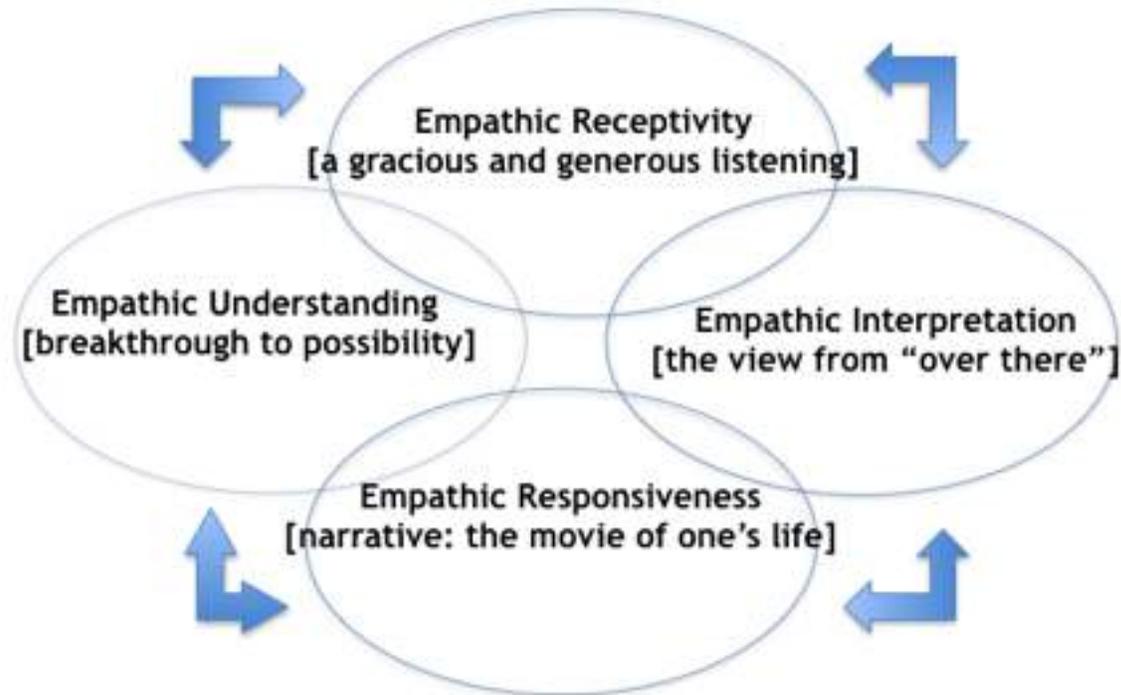
Lou Agosta, Medical Humanities, Saint Anthony Hospital, Ross Medical School, Chicago, IL

Breakdowns give us access to breakthroughs. One important way that we know how empathy works is by knowing how empathy fails. If empathy did not sometimes break down or fail to work properly, then how could it ever work at all? The misfiring of empathy is part of the possibility of empathy's being useful and able to make a difference. This may at first seem paradoxical or even contradictory. So let's take a closer look at the idea of empathy breaking down by way of four kinds of examples of the break down of empathy. (See Figure 1: How Empathy Fails / Breaks Down.)

Instead of emotional openness to the other person in empathy, the person providing the empathy finds her- or himself caught in emotional contagion. Upon hearing my friend's anxious report of going unprepared to take an important exam, I get anxious, too. I experience a similar anxiety without appreciating that I have "caught" his emotion. I have been "infected" by his anxiety almost as if it were the common cold. Instead of empathy, the power of suggestion results in the communication of affect that unintentionally comes to be an obstacle to empathy.

Positively expressed, "empathic receptivity" is one way of describing this openness to the communication of affect from the other person. In empathy, one person relates to another person. The person providing the empathy is *open* to the experience of the other person. The one person is receptive to the experiences, the emotions, the affects, thoughts, facial expression, bodily clues ("body language") of the other individual.

How Empathy Works: Four Phases of Empathy



Thus, empathic receptivity leaves one with an experience of the experience of the other person. This “experience of the experience” of the other person has a name. It is called a “vicarious experience.”

A vicarious experience is what one has in feeling happy at the happy ending of romantic comedy movie. It is the sadness at the end of the *Titanic*, the movie. Yes, one identifies with the protagonist in the play or movie, but only temporarily and transiently. Many people described being vicariously transported to another world by the powerful special effects of *Avatar*, but (so far as I know, at least) none of those people jumped up out of their seat in the theatre and attempted to fly. Had they done so, it would have been an example of emotional contagion taking over and leading to action where none was required.

Empathic receptivity is a method of data gathering, data collection about the experiences of other people. This is not mental telepathy. You have to talk with the person or otherwise interact with the person. Empathic receptivity provides an experience of the experience of the other person. Simply stated, in this business of experiencing the experience of the other person, the one individual gets a sample of the

experience of the other person. The one individual gets a trace of the other individual's experience – like in data sampling – without merging with the other. If one is listening to another person – or a series of persons, one after another – tell you of their struggle and suffering and even trauma, the risk is of extreme stress, burnout, or compassion fatigue. However, in empathy, if one is listening to another person and that person is suffering, then, strange as it may sound, one should suffer – but not too much. If one is overwhelmed, then one is simply doing it wrong. One is over-empathizing. One needs to “tune down” one's receptivity to the other person. Empathic receptivity is not an “on-off” switch. Rather it is like a dimmer or rheostat. One can turn up – open up – the granularity of one's receptivity, and get an expanded experience of the other's feeling. One can turn down – narrow – the granularity of one's receptivity to the other, and get a thinner or more watered-down (“attenuated”) experience of the other's feeling. Of course, such tuning up or tuning down of empathic receptivity is not something that comes naturally to most people so practice is needed. That is why empathy training programs have a great future. Without practice, the risk is over-empathizing, burn out, or compassion fatigue. However, even if one's empathic receptivity is accurate, empathic understanding can misfire.

Instead of understanding of the other person as a possibility in empathy, the person providing the empathy finds that the result is conformism, yielding responsibility to the anonymous standards of the crowd. Instead of recognition of the other person's contribution and humanity, the result is labeling, categorization, and cognitive distortion. Instead of acknowledgement, the result is shutting down of possibility. Instead of possibility, the result is cynicism and denial. For example, a co-worker uses a devaluing term to describe a peer who is not present to defend herself. I do not agree, nor would I use such language. I say nothing. I conform. I go along so as not to “rock the boat.” I am ashamed of myself, but not ashamed enough to risk disagreement, bad feelings, looking foolish. Empathic understanding is in break down. Instead of possibility, cynicism and denial are present. On another occasion, something similar happens. Instead of conforming, I speak up: “I do not like to hear that kind of talk around me. How would you feel if someone described your sister or mother in those terms?” The individual backs off. Pretends it was all just a joke. I may let him save face this time. The quality of the language improves,

and it does not happen again. This time I have created a space of empathic understanding – a space of possibility for dignity and respect to emerge are present.

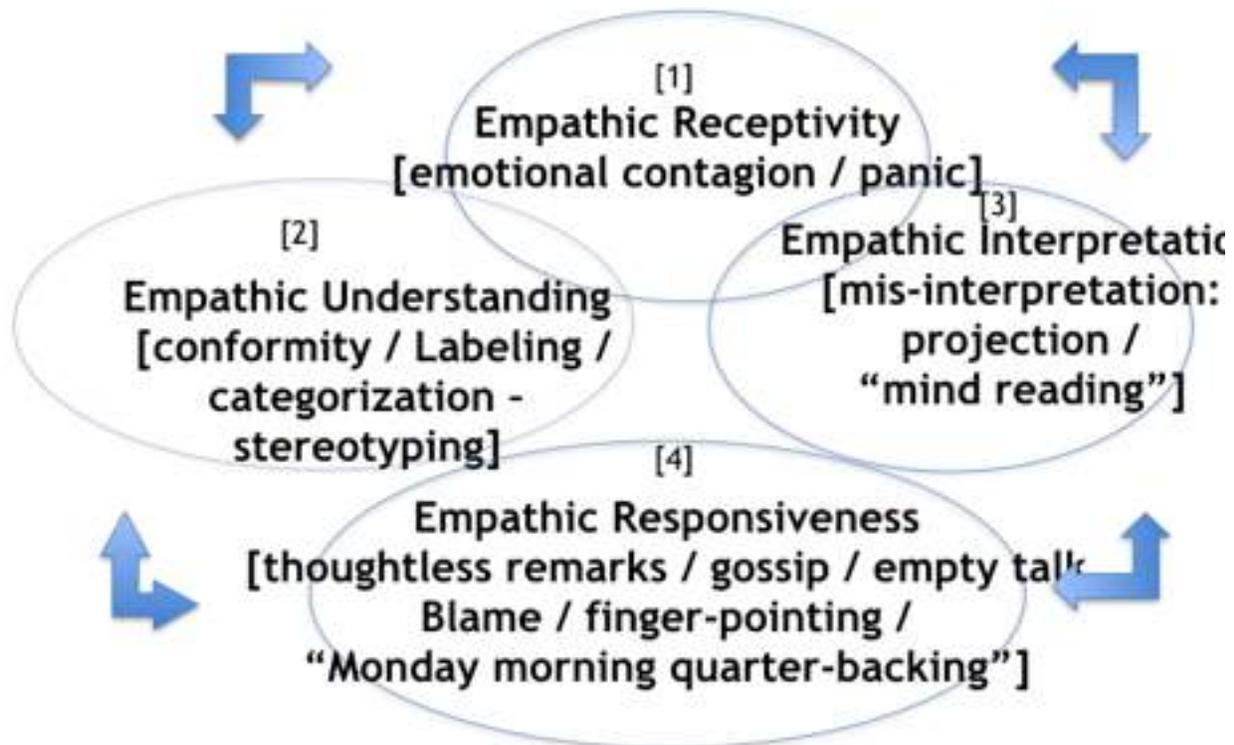
Positively expressed, empathic understanding acknowledges the other person is a source of intentionality and initiative. The other person is able to begin something new in the world, a project or plan that was previously not regarded as a possibility. In particular, empathic understanding projects possibilities of relatedness between oneself and other individual. If empathic receptivity creates closeness as feelings get communicated, empathic understanding creates a respectful distance in the relatedness between persons. Empathic understanding is the possibility of relatedness. We are in relationship. Yet the distinction between oneself and the other remains firm. A firm boundary exists between self and other, and is maintained so that empathy does not collapse into merger. Empathic understanding recognizes the other person as a fellow traveler in the matter of all things human. This point in the direction of grasping what is possible for human beings by taking the other person's point of view.

The folk psychology definition of empathy is to put oneself in the other person's place – take a walk in the other individual's shoes. This is called *empathic interpretation*. Here empathy can break down or fail through misinterpretation. Instead of talking a walk in the other person's shoes with the other person's foot size, a mis-interpretation occurs as one takes a walk in the other person's shoes with one's own foot size, not the other's. This is a special case of the example of mind reading, namely projection. The exercise of talking a walk in the other person's moccasins will tell you something, but perhaps not much as one might wish about the other person. It will tell you how you would feel if you were in the other person's situation, and that might be useful. It might be useful if the other person were in a car crash, since no one wants to be a car crash. But what if the other person were just selected for the honor of introducing the chairman at the next banquet? Some people welcome the opportunity to speak in public; other people dread it as much, if not more, than death itself. If one chooses an attitude for the other person (which influences their feeling) that does not match the other person's feelings about public speaking, then the exercise in empathic interpretation will result in mis-interpretation, distortion, and mis-description. Getting it wrong is a possibility for empathic interpretation to mis-fire and go astray.

Positively expressed, empathic interpretation makes explicit what is already present in understanding. Empathic interpretation articulates the experience of the other person in detail as it hits home with the listener. One person changes perspective with the other person and imagines what the situation looks like from the other person's point of view. This ability to relate "as if" one were in the other's situation ("shoes") is what "top down" empathy is all about. When one meets someone new for the first time, and one does not have a sense of what the other person is about, then one activates empathic interpretation to get a handle on who the other person is.

The next breakdown in empathy occurs in empathic responsiveness. Instead of a gracious and generous listening to the other person that results in a response that embodies one's empathy for the other person, the individual trying to provide the empathy uses talk that demonstrates his or her own narcissism lack of empathy. There are many ways that empathic responsiveness can break down. Instead of giving

How Empathy Breaks down / Fails



<http://preview.tinyurl.com/j2jzmzh> (c) Lou Agosta, PhD, LAgosta@UChicago.edu

the other person's experience back to him in a story that demonstrates understanding, one uses devaluing language, gossip, changing the subject, whether defensively or distractedly (which may be the same thing). For example, the person I am listening to tells me about his frustration with his boss at work, who always seems to criticize him. I tell him of a similar experience of my own. This is commiseration, which literally means "being miserable with"; and directs the conversation to mutually complaining, not empathy. The conversation is now about me, not the other person.

In the fourth aspect, empathic responsiveness, the listener takes what he has heard from the other individual, and puts it into a statement – a form of words – that attempts to give back to the other individual her experience in such a way that the other person recognizes it as her own. That completes and closes the circle of empathy. That is how empathy works. That is how empathy makes a difference.

Without empathic responsiveness, empathy is at risk of being the tree that falls in the forest without anyone being there. There are vibrations in the air, but no human ear drum to translate the vibrations into interpersonal meaning and relatedness.

Now it is true that, paradoxically, empathic responsiveness is best expressed by a gracious and generous listening. The quiet presence of the empathic listener as the other person as the speaker narrates his experiences itself speaks volumes. Here empathic responsiveness loops back and links up with empathic receptivity, for listening is both a form of responding (albeit quietly) and a form of receptivity.

In summary, empathy has many ways of breaking down, mis-firing, and failing. The top four ways that empathy fails include: (1) emotional contagion, burnout, or compassion fatigue; (2) mind reading, spontaneously attributing one's own possibilities to the other person; (3) a derivative of mind reading as projection but attempting to "take a walk in the other person's shoes" and doing so egocentrically with one's own traits and issues, not the other's; (4) instead of responding with a gracious listening, gossiping, interrupting, or changing the subject. Identifying and correcting these breakdowns in empathy point directly to possibilities of breakthroughs in empathy. These possibilities of failure point towards four aspects of full, adult empathy (see Figure 2: How Empathy Works) as empathic receptivity in which one is open to the experiences of the other as a vicarious experience; empathic understanding in which the other person is recognized as a possibility distinct from oneself; (3) empathic interpretation in

which one takes a walk in the other person's shoes with an appreciation of the other person's strengths and weaknesses in so far as one can grasp them in the relationship; (4) empathic responsiveness in which one gives the other person's experience back to him in a form of words in which he recognizes his own experience based on a gracious and generous listening. Thus, empathy is a multi-dimensional form of relatedness entailing empathic receptivity, empathic understanding, empathic interpretation, and empathic responsiveness. Success or failure lies in every moment, and it is with the complete unfolding of these four dimensions that the hard work of authentic empathic relatedness begins to get traction and make a difference.



Lajos Koloszyvay, Budapest (1871-1937), Ol Auf Lenwand

Further Reading

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Cinema And Psychiatry

Alien: Covenant

Fernando Espi Forcen, MD, PhD, Department of Psychiatry, Rush University, Chicago

Ridley Scott's Alien prequels *Prometheus* and *Covenant* are an homage to existentialism. On a personal note, I am enjoying this new saga even better than the original films as they are centered on the real issues that matter to humanity.

Covenant starts with an attempt to colonize new planets. A crew of 15 people travel with two thousand fetuses colones who attempt to expand the human race in the universe. As Stephen Hawking and other scientists say, our survival will only be possible if we can figure how to expand to other planets. During the trip to the target planet, the spaceship unexpectedly encounters a new habitable planet and decide to stop there instead to start the new colony. Once there they find evidence of past humanoid colonization but everyone seem to be dead in a Pompeii-like fashion. The classic Aliens are now the new colones. Soon, we discover that David, the cyborg from the *Prometheus* expedition has been the artifice of this new colonization and has other plans for the human race.

The trip of this spaceship resembles the expeditions of Christopher Columbus, who also encountered unexpectedly a new territory between Europe and Asia and the Magellian-Elcano first round of the world who suffered several setbacks and multiple calamities. In both, humans are trying to expand in new territories knowledgeable that they won't be able to grow in the same fashion if they stay in their comfort territory.

Covenant is centered in the magnificent interpretation of David the android by Michael Fassbender. His name, according to the film, comes from Michelangelo's David. The film has multiple references to Classical, and Renaissance art history themes as well as classical music from Wagner and



other interpreters from the time. David was the last android of his series. In contrast to the more modern androids, David met his creator. Unlike David, his creator, a human, does not know his own. David understood his creator will die one day while he will live eternally. He also has the gift of creativity, something that makes him more human.



David encounters his creator Peter Weyland

After David, humans became scared of the ability of the new androids to compete with them. Therefore, the new androids have been made without creativity skills. They just follow commands. David however, is invested in using his talent to create life. Perhaps he is competing with his father in an Oedipal manner. He cannot reproduce but he can “create” new aliens, improved and superior to the prior ones in an attempt to replace the human race. David is in conflict. He has human-like consciousness but he is not human. He can love but is not corresponded. He cannot reproduce. Acting out his anger, he wants to destroy the human race.

David’s conflict raises a very important theme in regards to our own hypothetical behavior in a similar situation. We humans don’t know who created us. In several cultures, humans have agreed that we probably have a creator often referred as God. This God is non-representable in some cultures and in other cultures He or She is represented as a light or an old wise man. In some cultures, God has a specific plan for each one of us and in others the relationship with God cannot be defined. The interesting question here is “What would happen if we actually met our creator?” Would we confront him and ask why were we made mortal, why are we limited and why do we have to suffer? Would we act out our anger in an attempt to destroy Him or Her? In this regard David might be just a reflection of our behavior if we encountered our creator. Human beings often feel despair due to the perception of mortality but it is important to think of the alternative, an immortal existence. How would we deal with it? Would we try to die? Is existence rather than mortality the true source of human despair?

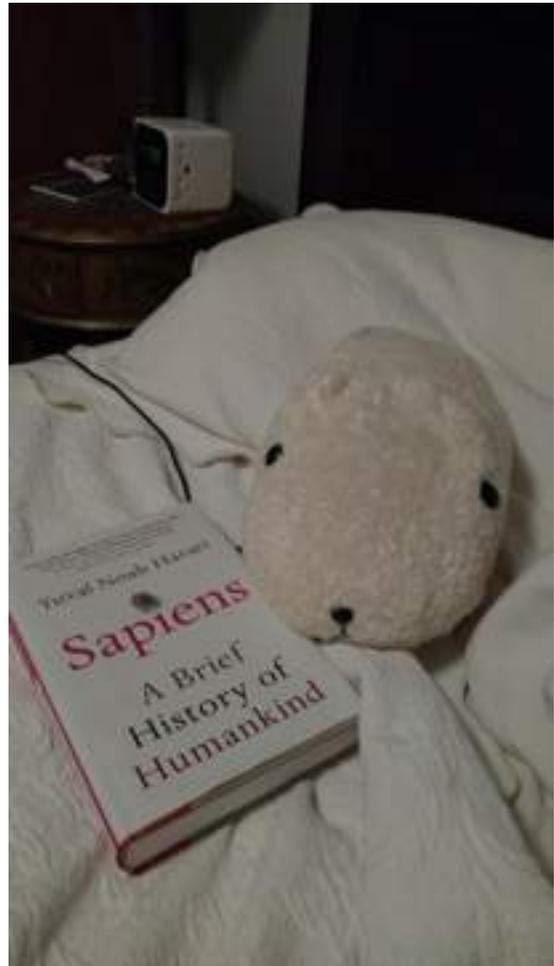
Book Reviews

Sapiens

Fernando Espi Forcen, MD, PhD, Department of Psychiatry, Rush University, Chicago

Once you start reading this book, you soon realize that you cannot turn down this wonderful masterpiece until you have finished it entirely. Sapiens reviews the history of humankind in a new frame, des-mythifying all prior conceptions. His author Yuval Noah Harari, a history professor in Israel who graduated from Oxford University explains that the reason we have been able to escalate to the top of the pyramid in the animal kingdom and govern the world is our ability to create and believe in myths. These myths are not real in the palpable, ontic way but the result of intersubjective realities. These myths exist as soon as we believe in them. Due to that, people who believe in the same myth would be able to cooperate and share knowledge despite having no real intimacy. Harari also deconstructs the myths of humankind history offering new perspectives that raise more questions than answers. Was the development of agriculture helpful for our diet? Was the European expansion in America all bad? How did we end up believing so fiercely in money and capitalism? Should we feel guilty about the way we treat other animals? Will science beat mortality?

Harari sets humanity in a new frame, as another animal species on Planet Earth, and points out our vulnerabilities. I would recommend every psychiatrist to read Sapiens. This book does not only offers new perspectives about our history but help us understand better what does it mean to be a human in the context of our history and evolution.



Sapiens is a great alternative to TV at bedtime

Free Text

Review Of Psychedelic Science 2017- Part 1

Matthew Brown, DO, MBA, Department of Psychiatry, Rogers Behavioral, Skokie, IL

Exiting the airport in Oakland there was some confusion with the Uber driver. We were traveling away from the airport and he is cursing at his phone confused because it says that “Matt” still needs to be picked up but I confirmed that I was already in the car. I guess there were 2 gentlemen named Matt headed in the general direction of the conference center so we had to circle back around the terminal to pick up my name-buddy who had been standing at just about the same place as myself carrying a similar sort of luggage. I immediately felt middle aged for some reason, but kept telling myself that I was cooler as I had ditched my button-down work shirt I was wearing earlier and was sporting a t-shirt with a diagram of a brain on it (I know super cool, you are totally jealous... Word). Mateo hopped in the car and with the usual UberPool pleasantries we chit-chatted with the driver. First about driving for Uber and Lyft- because isn't that what you always talk to the Uber driver about? Eventually we got to discuss what we were both doing in Oakland and I volunteered that I was headed downtown to attend “the conference”. Matthias gets excited saying that he is running late and he is surprised to meet someone else going to the Kaiser-Permanente conference. He droned on about insurance and medicine for a moment and then asked me what connection I had to Kaiser. We happened to be pulling up to the AirBNB in Chinatown, only about 2 blocks away from the conference center. As I got out of the car I smiled and told him that I was not going to THAT conference, I was headed to the Psychedelic Science conference. Before being able to address his surprised look, I closed the door and walked into the Asian market and pushed the elevator button to go up to floor 3. My hosts were fast asleep by the time I arrived, so I let myself in with the key and immediately crashed on the bed.

The next morning bright and early I awoke with excitement. I knew that if nothing else, I would get a chance to meet Stan Grof today. Dr. Grof is known for having conducted well over 10,000 Psychedelic sessions the majority of which were fully sanctioned government funded research studies back during the last psychedelic boom period, mostly in the 1950's and 1960's. After LSD and other medicines were suddenly re-scheduled and no longer allowed to be researched, Dr. Grof came up with this method of breathing that he called Holotropic Breathwork, which is supposed to simulate the psychedelic state and help people release emotional energy that is pent up in tight muscles and other areas

throughout the body. While this may sound “Woo”, and I thought for sure it was too, I happened to have experimented with breathwork prior to this conference and have to say that it sounds ridiculous, but it’s something everyone should try. Once you do, you will see what I mean.

I showed up to the conference center with my pillow, blanket, face mask and yoga mat in hand. After fumbling around in the lobby and getting strange looks from the Kaiser folks, I made my way to the top floor where I was greeted by a magnificent view of the bay and the mountains. There were about 200 chairs all set up and Dr. Grof was sitting in a chair on the stage. I couldn’t help but wonder to myself how we were going to fit all of these people in the room if half of us were going to be laying on the ground hyperventilating. My queries were soon answered as the schedule for the next 2 workshop days was explained. We were first in a lecture most of the day today as a means for preparing our minds and introducing a little bit of the why and how of the process before jumping in. Dr. Grof then spoke for about 2-3 hours and provided an in depth primer for those who might not be familiar with his literary works. One might think that sitting in what amounted to a lecture hall would be quite boring for a “Psychedelic” conference, but one must remember that this is “Psychedelic Science” we were all primed for a weekend full of learning about the expanding of minds and how consciousness works. Before we left the AM session, we needed to pick partners. I myself had been hanging with a friend named Tim. I think assumed we would likely be working together as this would logically make sense, but Dr. Grof passed along some sage advice and suggested that people partner with strangers as this will both allow one to create a new friendship and also will allow for the freedom of baggage that may be present with the current relationship.

Perhaps it was fate, or perhaps masculine instinct that made eye contact with Trent. I came to learn later that he was a movie magician and had created many of the scenes in Lord of the Rings films particularly the ones involving Golem. Anyhow...

The morning concluded and we broke for lunch. I was blessed to have run into Ashley, a fellow psychedelic warrior and former scientist in the midst of a career change; looking to become a social worker as through her own psychedelic experiences had been called to help others with the goal of one day being able to integrate entheogens into her practice. She has already had the good fortune to have worked in Mexico with Ibogaine and has helped a number of troubled souls with addiction and the processing of other traumas.

Back at the ranch, we moved down to a large ballroom full of dim lighting, blankets and large PA speakers. I took my position as breather for the day and layed down on the yoga mat I had shuttled halfway across the country. The experience was intense. I had only experienced such a scene once before in the winter of Chicago when I went to a breathwork workshop in town. But this was different. Perhaps it was due to Stan Grof leading the experience. Perhaps it was the music perhaps it was The atmosphere that was so open that everyone knew that anything could happen and there would be no judgement, but for the second time in my life, as I layed on the floor breathing deeply I died.... Fully and truly I became not

myself. The death that I experienced was cold deep, but very transient. There was an odd experience of feeding off the energy in the room and feeling like a lightning rod not just grounding but projecting the various moans and groans throughout the room. I myself lost control of my faculties and was producing guttural sounds before opening up and letting loose my deepest feelings and my body convulsed automatically without effort. This is a very peculiar sensation the likes of which I have felt in my previous group breathing seminar, but also after intense psychotherapy sessions where I knew I reached what Freud would call a catharsis. The feeling is best described as “feeling some type of way”. It is very much a sensation and action of laughing and crying at the same time. When it is over, there is a huge sense of relief and loss of burden.

At the end of the ceremony I was still feeling the strong effects of the breathing and eventually left the room to appreciate the grand cornucopia of colors that the outside world had to offer. This afternoon might have been the most truly psychedelic experience I had on the entire trip but as mentioned above no substances were used. It was all from breathing. I went home and went to bed feeling all safe and sound and looked forward to the next day when I could hold the space for the creator of Golem.

Night turned to day and daylight became the reminder I needed to get my ass to the conference center. I arrived and found Trent ready and poised in the room vibrating with anticipation at his turn to breathe. We spoke briefly and he shared with me his reservations of the experience and how he wasn't sure if he would or could follow through. I did my best to provide the reassurance he needed and as the music started I took long deep breaths along with the beats anew tried to match the intensity of my comrade. As it turned out, my experience as a sitter was nearly as powerful as being a breather, but in a different way. There is an extreme connectedness that happens when you become a watcher, observing the actions and trying to anticipate the needs for another. It really helps your empathy to grow to the extent that you get a feeling of non-duality and interconnectedness with all. I sat there imagining creating a safe cocoon and propelling it into outer space, a vessel for the voyager I was in charge of. AS I sat there I started to cry, but it was odd as it really felt like the tears were not my own. I felt like I was crying tears for someone else in the room, but I did not know whom.

Then just behind me I started hearing disturbing sounds coming from a female breather. She was wheezing, then laughing and crying. The typical kind of sounds, but there was something that sounded and just felt “stuck” about her situation. These noises caught the attention of the facilitators who came over to assist in her process. My attention was torn from my breathing partner as I was trying to learn how to deal with such a situation. At first one of the facilitators was doing some basic body-work on her, it appeared to be a hand on the forehead and some gentle pressure on her sternum. This seemed to help her breathe a little deeper and she started to let go more. In a short time, Dr. Grof himself came over and began to intervene. At that point she was in the fetal position on her side. He placed his hand on her back and seemed to be searching for a pressure point. Since my attention was halved, I did not see all of what he did, I believe he just found a trigger point under her shoulder blade and was applying pressure. She

again began to convulse and make various sounds that came from deep within. As she was letting out these noises, I could most feel an energy swirl first down, then around and up in the room. Again, I realize that this sounds impossible and I have absolutely no scientific explain action for what was really happening. After a few more intense interactions, she finally began to calm and layer quietly on the floor with a smile and perhaps some tears of joy. Eventually Trent too opened his eyes and expressed a feeling of bliss and shared that he had felt as if he was wrapped in a spaceship and was floating out in space most of the session... This did creep me out a bit, but hey, I had seen and felt many strange things between yesterday and today.

After the breathing was over we left for some post processing in small groups. I happened to be in the same group as the woman behind me and she explained how as a physician from Germany herself, she was extremely skeptical about the entire process. She too felt the feeling of being connected with the other breathers while she sat on the first day, but commented on how she thought it was “bullshit” that some were screaming and convulsing. The thought was that perhaps these were just very suggestible individuals and they were acting that way as it was mentioned it could happen and they were then allowed to do so after one or two individuals started acting that way. She went on to explain how her experience when breathing herself totally changed her mind. She explained that she fully relived some trauma from her childhood and felt some trapped emotions leave her body. She was happy to be rid of such baggage. I couldn't help but think that I wish I could articulate exactly what experiences I went through. Lime I noted before all I can say is that in the depths of breathing, I just felt like a conduit for everyone else. I picked up their energy and let it flow through me. In that process it brought up what felt like deep emotions of my own, from I don't know where and they quickly cleared.

We left peacefully with hugs all around. Our heads were in the right state and we were primed for the true beginning of the conference.



Pusheenicorn

Fernando Espi Forcen, MD, PhD, Department of Psychiatry, Rush University, Chicago

Two weeks ago, wandering around the hospital between consults I passed by the hospital gift shop and had an encounter with Pusheenicorn. The aesthetic of this stuffed animal toy really caught my attention, it was a 13 inches smiley grey cat with a unicorn horn, and a psychedelic rainbow hair and tail. The design reminded me of the Japanese stuffed animals I saw in my recent trip to the country. I thought, the cat was “cool” or “cute” and moved on to my next consult without thinking much about it. However, when I arrived home that day, the vision of the cat continued to pop up in my head in an obsessive manner. I could not understand why but I continued to have intrusive images of Pusheenicorn in my head. Acting out this obsessive thought I felt the compulsion to go on Amazon in the search of Pusheenicorn. There he was! For some reason I felt the compulsion to get one of these stuffed animals and bought it without hesitation.

My recent infatuation with this fantasy animal is illogical to me but on a second thought I know understand that through Pusheenicorn I can visit significant aspects of my own inner psychology. At first sight I can identify some of them such as the Japanese aesthetic that relates to my recent fascination for Japanese culture after my trip there, the psychedelic colors which reflects on my interest for psychedelic science, art and music and the smiley face that reminds me on the importance to free myself from worries and live with optimism. Moreover, Pusheenicorn is a cat, as I



Pusheenicorn arrives to Marina City!

am allergic to these animals, the pet toy allows me to cathartically relieve my anxiety related to my inability to have a living pet cat. Perhaps of all the elements that form the anatomy of Pusheenicorn, the horn is the most interesting one. As we all know, unicorns are fantasy medieval animals that symbolized purity and grace. Therefore they could only be caught by a virgin. Pusheenicorn are meant to be made for children, who symbolize this innocence and purity. Nonetheless there is a growing adult interest in unicorns and Pusheenicorns which allow us to regress to our happy childhood and upbringing freed from adult life stressors. Parents may buy Pusheenicorns to their children in an unconscious attempt to possess the Pusheenicorn themselves. As I continue to reflect on the impact that Pusheenicorn has made in me, I get a better understanding of my psychology, drives and inner desires. Perhaps this is the time to start psychoanalytic therapy. Pusheenicorn has been a reminder.

Future Issues

- **Summer-2017, Technology**
- **Fall-2017, The Paranormal**

To submit a manuscript you can email the editor at fespiforcen@gmail.com