

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS EMPATHY?

1. The English word *empathy* was used for the first time in the early twentieth century to translate *Einfühlung*, by the psychologist Edward Titchener.
2. Lipps, Theodor, *Einfühlung, innere Nachahmung und Organempfindung*. *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie*, 1(2), pp. 185–204.
3. Paul Ekman, in conversation, November 2009.
4. Darwin, Charles, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, 1872.
5. It is interesting to note that the Greek word *sumpatheia* also means “mutual interdependence.”
6. Darwin, Charles, *op. cit.*; Eisenberg, Nancy, & Strayer, Janet, *Empathy and Its Development*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
7. Waal, Frans de, *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society*, Harmony Books, 2009, p. 88.
8. In our day, the abundance and repetition of similar images in the media have ended up eroding empathic reaction and have given rise to

- an apathetic resignation in public opinion. See Boltanski, Luc, *La Souffrance à distance*, Gallimard, Folio, 2007.
9. Wilder, D. A., Social Categorization: Implications for Creation and Reduction of Intergroup Bias. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 19, 1986, pp. 291–355. Quoted in Kohn, Alfie, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
 10. Remarque, Erich Maria, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Ballantine Books, 1987, p. 223.
 11. Broad, Charlie Dunbar, Egoism as a theory of human motives. In *Ethics and the History of Philosophy*, Routledge, 1952, pp. 218–31.
 12. See especially Kohut, Heinz, *The Restoration of the Self*, University of Chicago Press, 2009.
 13. Batson, C. D. “These things called empathy: Eight related but distinct phenomena.” In Decety, J., *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, MIT Press, 2009.
 14. Batson, C. D. (2011), *op. cit.* The many scientific references corresponding to these various definitions of empathy can be found in his book.
 15. See Preston, S. D., Waal, F. B. M. de, *et al.* (2002), Empathy: Its ultimate and proximate bases, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 25 (1), pp. 1–20. The “Perception-action model” (PAM) was partly inspired by research into mirror neurons, which are present in some sections of the brain and are activated when one sees, for example, someone else making a gesture that interests us (see Chapter 5, sub-heading: “When two brains agree”). Mirror neurons can provide an elementary basis for imitation and intersubjective resonance, but the phenomenon of empathy is much more complex and involves numerous areas of the brain. Rizzolatti, G., & Sinigaglia, C., *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions, Emotions, and Experience*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
 16. Thompson, R. A. (1987). “Empathy and emotional understanding: The early development of empathy.” In *Empathy and Its Development*, 119–145. In Eisenberg, N., & Strayer, J., *Empathy and Its Development*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
 17. Batson, C. D., Early, S., & Salvarani, G. Perspective taking: Imagining how another feels versus imagining how you would feel, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(7), 1997, pp. 751–758.
 18. Mikulincer, M., Gillath, O., Halevy, V., Avihou, N., Avidan, S., & Eshkoli, N. Attachment theory and reactions to others’ needs: Evidence that activation of the sense of attachment security promotes empathic responses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(6), 2001, p. 1205.

19. Coke, J. S., Batson, C. D., & McDavis, K. Empathic mediation of helping: A two-stage model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36 (7), 1978, p. 752.
20. According to the various authors, this kind of empathy is called:
- “Empathic distress,” in Hoffman, M. L., “The development of empathy,” in J. P. Rushton and R. M. Sorrentino (eds.), *Altruism and Helping Behavior: Social, Personality, and Developmental Perspectives*, Erlbaum, 1981, pp. 41–63.
 - “Distressed sympathy,” in McDougall, W., *An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Methuen, 1908.
 - “Personal distress,” Batson, C. D., Prosocial motivation: Is it ever truly altruistic? *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 20, 1987, pp. 65–122.
 - “Unpleasant feeling provoked by observation,” in Piliavin, J. A., Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Clark, R. D., III, *Emergency Intervention*, Academic Press, 1981.
 - Empathy, in Krebs, D., Empathy and Altruism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(6), 1975, p. 1134. Quoted by Batson, C. D. (2011), *op. cit.*
21. Revault d’Allonnes, M., *L’Homme compassionnel*, Seuil, 2008, p. 22. This confusion is understandable if one holds to the Latin etymology of *compassion*, a term derived from the words *compatior*, “to suffer with,” and *compassio*, “shared suffering.”
22. Batson, C. D., *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social Psychological Answer*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991; Batson, C. D. (2011), *op. cit.*
23. Spinoza does not use the terms “pity” and “compassion,” but, according to Alexandre Jollien, in the language of the time, he explains that in pity, sadness comes first, and in compassion, love. In his *Ethics*, Book 3, Number 28, he says: “Commiseration is a sadness brought on by the idea of pain experienced by another whom we imagine to be similar to us.” And in Number 24, Spinoza writes: “Pity is love as it affects man in such a way that he rejoices at another’s happiness and is on the contrary saddened by another’s misfortune.” Conversation with A. Jollien, January 29, 2012.
24. Zweig, Stefan, epigraph to *Beware of Pity*, trans. Phyllis and Trevor Blewitt, NYRB Classics, 2006, p. xxv.
25. If pain is at stake, the sections of the brain involved will include the anterior insular cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). If disgust is at issue, it will also be the anterior insular cortex. If you

experience a neutral tactile sensation, the secondary somatosensory cortex will be activated. If you experience pleasant emotions and agreeable sensations, the insula, the striatum, and the median orbito-frontal cortex can be involved. Cognitive apprehension rests on the medial prefrontal cortex, the temporal parietal junction (TPJ), and the superior temporal sulcus (STS), a network that is activated when one asks people to reflect on their thoughts and beliefs.

26. Which specialists call “theory of mind.”
27. See Vignemont, F. de, & Singer, T. The empathic brain: how, when and why? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 10(10), 2006, pp. 435–441. Aside from this article, this chapter is chiefly based on explanations given by Tania Singer, with whom I have collaborated for several years, during the course of conversations in January 2012.
28. Singer, T., Seymore, B., O’Doherty, J. P., Stephan, K. E., Dolan, R. J., & Frith, C. D. Empathic neural responses are modulated by the perceived fairness of others. *Nature*, 439(7075), 2006, pp. 466–469; Hein, G., Silani, G., Preuschoff, K., Batson, C. D., & Singer, T. Neural responses to ingroup and outgroup members’ suffering predict individual differences in costly helping. *Neuron*, 68(1), 2010, pp. 149–160; Hein, G., & Singer, T. I feel how you feel but not always: the empathic brain and its modulation. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 18(2), 2008, pp. 153–158.
29. Batson, C. D., Lishner, D. A., Cook, J., & Sawyer, S. Similarity and nurturance: Two possible sources of empathy for strangers. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 27(1), 2005, pp. 15–25.
30. For more details on these different points quoted above, see de Vignemont, F., & Singer, T. (2006), *op. cit.*
31. Singer, T., & Steinbeis, N. Differential roles of fairness and compassion-based motivations for cooperation, defection, and punishment. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1167(1), 2009, pp. 41–50; Singer, T. The past, present and future of social neuroscience: A European perspective. *Neuroimage*, 61(2), 2012, pp. 437–449.
32. Klimecki, O., Ricard, M., & Singer, T. Empathy versus compassion—Lessons from 1st and 3rd person methods. In Singer, T., & Bolz, M. (eds.), *Compassion: Bridging Practice and Science*, a multimedia book [e-book], 2013.
33. Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Lamm, C., & Singer, T. Functional neural plasticity and associated changes in positive affect after compassion training. *Cerebral Cortex*, 2012.
34. In various pathologies—narcissism, psychopathy, and personality disorders—different components of the chain of affective reactions

involved in social interactions do not function normally, and empathy is inhibited. See Chapter 27, “The Deficiencies of Empathy.”