



Empathy VII – Thought and Feeling

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I want to create empathy. Empathy is the key to collaboration and understanding. There are different kinds of understanding so there must be different kinds of empathy.

The notion of intellectual empathy – called cognitive empathy – complements emotional empathy as a kind of scaffolding. Intellectual empathy lacks content. We think about empathy in order to give it space, but it's the feelings that constitute empathy, not the thoughts.

Discussions of emotion are ineffective because most people are emotionally compromised. This is both a reflection of our incompleteness and our dysfunction. Our emotional range is built through

experience and one can never have all possible experiences. It might say that full emotional function, across all emotions, is unachievable.

Discussion undermines emotion. Emotional limitations are typical partly for this reason: we cannot think our way to emotion here or anywhere. This presents a problem; why talk about it?

Consider discussion a form of strategizing. We're not expecting to accomplish anything, we're hoping to come up with a plan. That plan, as far as I'm concerned, involves recording some self-hypnosis audios that elicit emotion and suggest resolve. We first need more clarity regarding what emotion is.

Emotion

Consider this as a working definition of emotion: a family of thoughts and associations that generates a feeling that other people understand. This is quite relative, it refers to anything that fosters consensus. Emotional levels are also relative. What's appropriate in one situation may not be in another.

If empathy is sharing another person's feeling—not knowing but sharing—then both people have to be able to recognize a common feeling, generate this feeling in themselves, and communicate the feeling. These three emotional things have to happen for empathy to manifest: recognition, generation, and communication.

Communication

Contrary to what some believe, empathy is not a one-person thing. You cannot “have empathy” for a situation that does not exist. You may feel empathetic toward a memory or an imaginary situation, but there's got to be something to empathize with. Empathy is not a solipsistic state.

Some situations that call for empathy may involve several emotions. If your emotional range does not include what the situation demands, then you're not going to be able to fully empathize. There are complicated situations where we are not sure we're fully empathizing.

On the other hand, there are situations where being unsure of your emotions is empathetic. The point is that there is not just one thing called empathy. You cannot “have empathy” as if it was “the thing.” Empathy is resonating with another emotional state.

There are interesting situations where one person feels they are empathizing but they are misunderstanding the situation. This is embarrassing when it happens in real life, but it is a standard ploy for engaging audiences in a performance. The plot of a mystery will typically create in you a misplaced feeling of empathy for a character who is not as they appear.

In real situations there is feedback and we strive to “get in touch” with the situation. This means that we look for common ground that ensures that everyone is on the same page. This is the communication part of empathy.

Recognition

One of the greatest mistakes we make repeatedly is assuming that we understand other people. Naturally, we usually see in other people what we understand so that we tend not to see what we don't. If you are suspicious, then you will question what you see. If you are trusting, then you will consider what you see as true. And if you're manipulative, you will evoke feelings in others that lead them to give you what you want.

One of the first steps in helping another person enlarge their understanding is helping them understand how much of each of these they normally engage in. This is meta-thinking; you are thinking about how you're thinking. You might start this by considering the idea that you're oblivious to each of these three conditions: suspicious, trusting, and manipulative. Then, recognizing that each would seem normal, ask yourself how things would develop and compare that with how they normally do develop.

If you're suspicious, then you'll find flaws in other people and their intentions. If you're trusting, then you'll share other people's plans and may lack discernment. And if you're manipulative, then you may find you achieve your undisclosed objectives but feel denied all that you expected.

Generation

I believe the greatest problem in becoming more empathic is being able to create emotional states in yourself. If you can't direct, amplify, and apply a feeling to a situation, then you will neither empathize nor understand the situation.

Love may not be a good example because it's complicated, but I believe many people cannot generate love in themselves. Because of that, they cannot love another person and they cannot empathize with the love others might feel toward each other or toward anything.

If you cannot feel fear, then you will not be able to appreciate fear in others. This may sound beneficial but it isn't. If you can empathize with fear then you cannot share with others on the level of their basic needs. If you can't understand fear then you become indifferent. Psychopaths typically cannot appreciate fear in others, but then psychopaths are unable to generate emotions generally.

Consider the connections between these words:

Creativity	Reason
Significance	Isolation
Body	Exposure
Comfort	Protection

These word pairs—those in the left and right columns—create contrasts that generate feelings. I have created the audio I’ve titled “Contrasts.” It’s a short self-hypnosis induction that asks you to build feelings around these ideas. I believe that the greater your skill at calling for feelings to populate situations, the greater will be your ability to empathize in situations of these kinds.

Click the following link to Listen to “Empathy, Contrasts I”

<https://mindstrengthbalance.substack.com/p/empathy-contrasts-i-a-hypnotic-induction>