

2 **A rumor of empathy: reconstructing Heidegger's contribution**
3 **to empathy and empathic clinical practice**

4 **Lou Agosta**

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7 **Abstract** Heidegger's 1927 call to provide "a special
8 hermeneutic of empathy" is linked with his later commit-
9 ment at the Zollikon Seminars to engage explicitly with
10 issues in psychodynamic therapy with psychiatrists. The
11 task of providing a special hermeneutic of empathy is one
12 that Heidegger assigns in *Being and Time*, but on which he
13 does not deliver. Inspired by the assignment, this article
14 applies the distinctions of Heidegger's *Daseinanalysis* to
15 human interrelations. This article generates a Heideggerian
16 account of empathy as a multi-dimensional process that
17 delimits and illuminates the field of possibilities of
18 authentic human relationships. The multiple dimensions of
19 empathy include affectedness (*Befindlichkeit*), under-
20 standing of possibility, interpretation, and speech, the latter
21 including listening. The result is a reconstruction of a
22 Heideggerian account of empathic human relations in the
23 sense that it goes beyond what Heidegger explicitly says to
24 what the Heideggerian method of inquiry can contribute to
25 understanding and implementing the process of empathy.
26 In particular, a two-by-two matrix is built and engaged in
27 detail, cross referencing the four possibilities of authentic
28 and inauthentic relationships with the individual and the
29 other. A specifically Heideggerian analysis of the multi-
30 dimensional process of empathy is the result. The clinical
31 relevance of Heidegger's work is made explicit as empathy
32 is positioned as the foundation of clinical practice as
33 exemplified in psychodynamic psychotherapy.
34

Keywords Empathy · Hermeneutics · Special 35
hermeneutic of empathy · Dynamic psychotherapy · 36
Compassion fatigue · Burn out · Vicarious 37
introspection · Understanding · Befindlichkeit · 38
Communicability of affect · Psychotherapy · 39
Talk therapy · Psychoanalysis 40

***Daseinanalysis* between thinking and practice** 41

This account of Heidegger's special hermeneutic of empa- 42
thy is a reconstruction in the sense that it goes beyond what 43
Heidegger explicitly says to what the Heideggerian method 44
of inquiry can contribute to understanding and implementing 45
empathic human relations. In particular, the method includes 46
distinguishing and applying affectedness, understanding, 47
interpretation, and speech (including listening) all of which 48
are described by Heidegger as being equally original in the 49
sense of forming a coherent whole that does not privilege any 50
one of them but allows them to be traversed sequentially. 51
This set of related distinctions is the heart of Heidegger's 52
Daseinanalysis [Heidegger 1927b: H134–165; 172–209 53
(*Being and Time*, Division I, Chapter V, Being-In As Such, 54
Sections 29–34)]. 55

The argument is as follows. The Heideggerian account 56
of empathy takes basic distinctions from Heidegger's 57
fundamental analysis of being in the world of human 58
existence (*Dasein*). *Daseinanalysis* is the application of 59
four related distinctions—affectedness, understanding, 60
interpretation, and speech in the explication and analysis of 61
a phenomenon such as human existence (*Dasein*), or, in 62
this case, the application of these distinctions to the multi- 63
dimensional process of empathy. 64

The argument applies these distinctions to human inter- 65
relations. It generates a Heideggerian account of empathy 66

A1 L. Agosta (✉)
A2 Philosophy Department, Illinois School of Professional
A3 Psychology at Argosy University, 225 N. Michigan Av.,
A4 The College on 13, Chicago, IL 60601, USA
A5 e-mail: LAgosta@Argosy.edu

67 that illuminates the field of possibilities of authentic human
68 relationships (including affectedness, vicarious introspec-
69 tion (and what that is), understanding, interpretation, and
70 speech). The power of this reconstruction of empathy in
71 practical terms is that it shows the way between such related
72 but not identical phenomena as “compassion fatigue,”
73 “burn out,” and/or “detached professional interest,” the
74 latter being a euphemism for a professionally motivated
75 lack of empathy. More on that shortly.

76 The idea of a contribution by Heidegger to the devel-
77 opment of empathy is surprising. The reader may well be
78 skeptical. The reader is wise to be so. The title is inten-
79 tionally provocative and expresses “a rumor of empathy”.
80 A “rumor” is a speech act. A rumor expresses a report
81 containing information that is indeed debatable yet of high
82 interest in that it might be the first disclosure of an
83 emerging innovation, new trend, or significant event. Thus,
84 in the Evangelist, Saint Matthew (24: 6), the report of
85 “wars and a rumor of wars” is taken to portend the time of
86 transition between one civilization and the next. In that
87 spirit, a “rumor of empathy...” points to empathic pro-
88 cesses where we might not have expected to find them or
89 not find them when we expected to do so. With that in
90 mind, we take a step back and put the issue in context.

91 The difficulty of Heidegger’s language is notorious and
92 raises the bar on engaging his thought from a practical,
93 clinical point of view. Nevertheless, after Heidegger
94 seemingly turned away from his most systematic work,
95 *Being and Time* (1927a, b), he made an astonishing com-
96 mitment. Heidegger engaged in a decade long series of
97 conversations with a group of Swiss psychiatrists, many of
98 whom had an appreciation for psychodynamic psychother-
99 apy and psychoanalysis (see Heidegger 1959/69). This
100 commitment to training psychodynamic therapists in the
101 basics of his most systematic work must invite a second look
102 by those of Heidegger’s circle maintaining that he left the
103 world of practical engagement behind. As a person, He-
104 idegger was a deeply flawed individual, banned from
105 teaching for 5 years after World War II by the de-nazifica-
106 tion process; and no excuses—none—should ever be made
107 for his lack of character and inexcusable involvement and
108 behavior in relation to the Nazi crimes (e.g., Farías 1987;
109 Safranski 1998). Still, the contribution of *Being and Time* as
110 a standalone text is one that requires no rehabilitation in its
111 astonishing innovation and disruptive originality. Likewise,
112 Heidegger’s interpretation of his own work is a matter in
113 which he arguably has a privileged position in expressing
114 what is the authentic contribution from his own perspective.
115 Heidegger delivers a kind of “*Daseinanalysis* for begin-
116 ners” to the colleagues of Medard Boss of the celebrated
117 Burghölzi Sanatorium in Zurich, Switzerland, and at the
118 Zollikon Seminars (Heidegger 1959/69). The conventional
119 wisdom is that Heidegger shifted in the mid 1930s from the

analysis of human beings in the world (*Daseinanalysis*) to 120
the ontologically more fundamental happening of Being 121
(with a capital “B”), in which “ontology” refers to the 122
possibility of the event of Being. It is less well know—and 123
needs to be better appreciated—that, after having been in 124
phenomenological suspension for so many years, Heidegger 125
again resumed his conversation and engagement with 126
practical, indeed clinical, considerations with the Zollikon 127
colleagues. This must give pause—significant pause—to 128
those of Heidegger’s circle who say he surpassed and left 129
behind *Being and Time* and the immediately following 130
philosophical interpretations of Aristotle, Kant and Nietz- 131
sche. For example, Heidegger says: 132

...[I]t is therefore possible that the relationship 133
between the one who does the *Daseinanalysis* and the 134
one who is analyzed can be experienced as a rela- 135
tionship between one Dasein and another. This rela- 136
tionship can be questioned regarding how this 137
specific being-with-one-another is characterized in a 138
way appropriate to Dasein.... The decisive point is 139
that the particular phenomena, arising in the rela- 140
tionship between the analysand and the analyst, and 141
belonging to the respective, concrete patient, must be 142
broached in their own phenomenological content and 143
not simply be classified globally under *existentialia* 144
(Heidegger 1959/69: H161–62; 124). 145

The meaning? The meaning of *Daseinanalysis* shifts from 146
an inquiry into the distinctions fundamental to the way of 147
being that human beings exist in the world to the practical 148
encounter between the psychotherapist and the patient. The 149
encounter of one human being (*Dasein*) with another—e.g., 150
patient and therapist—cannot be adequately captured by an 151
existing categorical classification, even one that is specific 152
to Dasein. Further inquiry into the relationship between one 153
Dasein and another in a practical clinical context is 154
required. 155

156 However, before we turn to that further inquiry, let us
157 engage with a potentially telling objection to this Heideg-
158 gerian approach to empathy in its entirety. The objector
159 might argue: “Medical doctors, nurses, and psychothera-
160 pists meet dozens of suffering individuals everyday and
161 throughout the year. Can they experience anything of the
162 suffering? Even if they can and do, should they? If they do
163 not suffer, then is the approach in this article dishonoring
164 their efforts in implying that these caring persons are un-
165 empathic? Rather the preferred approach is to bracket the
166 feeling dimension in favor of cognitive understanding.
167 What is translated as Heidegger’s affectedness (*Be-
168 fndlichkeit*) is too emotionally laden—too open to affect to
169 be effective in practical terms. It is cognitive understanding
170 that provides the basis for solidarity with suffering indi-
171 viduals and suffering humanity.”

172 What then is the response to this objection? When
 173 deployed in the full, rich sense of empathy used here and
 174 including receptivity, understanding, and the related
 175 dimensions of interpretation and speech discussed below
 176 (which, however, are not critical path for this objection),
 177 empathy is a powerful resource against suffering, burnout, or
 178 compassion fatigue. This is because empathy takes a *sample*
 179 of the suffering of the other without merging or over-iden-
 180 tifying with the suffering. If the other is suffering, the em-
 181 pathizer suffers also, *but not too much*. Empathy uses a
 182 *vicarious* experience of the other's experience akin to the
 183 vicarious experience that one gets in the theatre or movies or
 184 reading a novel. That is not to under-estimate the capacity of
 185 a vicarious experience to shake one to one's depths. Never-
 186 theless, echoing Heinz Kohut's use of "vicarious intro-
 187 spection" (1959: 459; cf., 1971, 1984), there is a significant
 188 difference between a vicarious experience, which is a rep-
 189 resentation, and the experience itself in life. However diffi-
 190 cult the situation may be, empathy can be a source of
 191 integrity in the face of suffering. This is the resourceful use of
 192 empathy without being a defense or resistance in the narrow
 193 sense of the word.

194 In short, if one is overwhelmed by the other's trauma
 195 and re-traumatized, experiencing "burn out" as in the
 196 above-cited objection, then one is not using one's empathy
 197 properly. Simply stated, one is doing it wrong. This must
 198 be emphasized—and empathized with. The vicarious
 199 experience in which the other is initially presented under-
 200 goes further processing through understanding, interpreta-
 201 tion, and language, which are deployed in their empathic
 202 dimensions. If "burn out" is occurring, then one needs to
 203 tune down, attenuate, and moderate one's empathic
 204 receptivity. One is over-identifying with the suffering of
 205 the patient. In contrast, if one is experiencing disconnection
 206 from the patient, an affective remoteness akin to not
 207 "getting" what is going on with the patient, then one's
 208 empathic receptivity is blocked, for example, by over-
 209 intellectualization, cultural differences, or other contin-
 210 gencies and obstacles. This is where "top down," cognitive
 211 empathic understanding can be mobilized to make a dif-
 212 ference in activating the attunement with the other where
 213 that attunement is otherwise missing. Optimally, in
 214 empathic receptivity one experiences a trace, a sample, a
 215 vicarious representation, of the other's experience of suf-
 216 fering, joy, or indifference, so that one "gets it" experi-
 217 entially and emotionally as well as cognitively. The
 218 boundary between self and other is firmly maintained, but
 219 the boundary is a permeable one, able to be traversed by
 220 the communicability of affect, sensation, and/or experi-
 221 ence. In a wider context, empathy is the capacity that
 222 enables the one person to humanize the other individual by
 223 recognizing and acknowledging the possibilities for
 224 growth, transformation, healing, and recovery in the other.

Without empathic understanding, one experiences "burn
 out," "compassion fatigue," emotional flooding, or affec-
 tive overwhelm (as in the above-cited objection). In con-
 trast, without empathic receptivity, one loses touch with the
 other person, devolving into detached professional concern,
 a euphemism for the careful application of diagnostic
 categories, in which one is at risk of drawing the wrong
 conclusion about what the other is really experiencing. The
 person becomes a mere bundle of neurons, a potentially
 interesting case, or an association of symptoms, instead of
 a struggling human being worthy of respect. This is not to
 say that humans are not bundles of neurons. We are.
 However, these neurons generate meaning, possibility, and
 conscious experiences; and these latter are what arouse,
 invite, and call forth the process of empathy as a method of
 data gathering, not further reducible without the loss of
 humanity that is of interest to this inquiry. In short, the
 surgeon with a helpless, bleeding patient in front of him on
 the table does not need to reflect on struggling humanity.
 He needs to clamp off the bleeding. However, the empathic
 surgeon discusses the surgical plan with the patient
 beforehand in such a way that questions are welcomed and
 addressed in detail, and he follows up afterwards with the
 appropriate level of affective attunement.

Likewise, the psychotherapist is well-advised never to
 forget the challenge of being in tune with—getting
 inside—the world of the patient, a challenge in which
 empathic receptivity further processed by empathic
 understanding, empathic interpretation, and an empathic
 use of language (i.e., listening) are on the critical path to
 success. Nor should the power of an empathic relationship
 be under-estimated even in cases when such practices as
 surgery or emergency room medicine are front and center.
 Medical doctors and helping professionals that maintain a
 listening relationship with patients—sensitive handling and
 clear communications—components of empathy—tend to
 avoid legal entanglements over liability and issues (Vin-
 cent et al. 1994; cf., Halpern 2001; Hojat 2007; Hojat et al.
 2009; Thomas et al. 2007; Gleichgerecht and Decety 2012;
 Gallese 2007; Farrow and Woodruff 2007).

What is the point? The continuum between empathic
 receptivity and empathic understanding allows for signifi-
 cant interpretive flexibility in the application and articula-
 tion of empathy as a multi-dimensional process. Echoing a
 celebrated statement by the philosopher Immanuel Kant,
 empathic receptivity without understanding is blind; and
 empathic understanding without receptivity is empty. Both
 are required to have empathy in the full, complete sense.

In engaging in long term relationships with patients and
 clients over weekly or daily meetings, sustained empathy
 comes to the fore. It should be noted that more than just
 receptivity and understanding are on the critical path to a
 Heideggerian account (since empathic interpretation and

empathic speech are also engaged). However, the objection was formulated in terms of just receptivity and understanding, so the response needs only to deploy those. The others will be marshaled shortly to fill out the account.

This continuum between aspects of the process of empathy—an affective and an understanding one—is a common place in the clinical literature in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. For example, Greenson (1960) writes of an oscillation in empathy between the two poles of participation and observation; Fliess (1942) of the transient back-and-forth identification of empathy in the metapsychology of the analyst; Basch (1982) of a reciprocity between the emotional aspect, heretofore not well defined in analysis, and understanding; Goldberg (Goldberg 2011) of sustained empathy that identifies patterns of meaning and behavior across time and narrative; and Kohut (1959; cf., 1971, 1977, 1984) of empathy as the process of data gathering in psychoanalysis through vicarious introspection that relates to the other but in a way that preserves the difference between self and other. What is new here is the appreciation of just how well the two dimensions map to Heidegger's distinction between affectedness and understanding of possibility, and, even more, how a Heideggerian approach enables the inquiry to advance further in gathering interpretation and speech into empathy as a multi-dimensional process.

At this point, the author of the above-cited objection may well follow the example of the individual, who, having first dismissed the proposal of a Heideggerian approach to empathy as inaccurate, false, and a failure for so many reasons, now finds that the proposal was obvious all along, and so is equally worthy of dismissal. However, “hidden in plain view” is different than “obvious”; and hidden in plain view is also the fate of the theories of today that become the special cases of tomorrow. So too with empathy.

With that in mind, this article now engages in an inquiry that uses some “special cases” and the “fundamental analysis of Dasein” (Heidegger 1927b: H41; 67) to define, articulate, and reconstruct the authentic encounter of one Dasein with another in the context of therapy. This interpretation of the Dasein-to-Dasein encounter connects the dots (so to speak) between an authentic way of being with one another amongst human beings in the world and Heidegger's assignment to provide a “special hermeneutic of empathy”. This is a task that Heidegger assigned, but he did not deliver the result. This article delivers it, albeit in an abbreviated form that fits the modest format of a journal article. Authentic human relatedness of Dasein-to-Dasein is engaged in terms of the key *Daseinanalytic* distinctions of affectedness, understanding, interpretation, and speech (“discourse”), and, consequently, this inquiry delivers a Heideggerian approach to empathy.

Authenticity and individuality

Heidegger calls for a special hermeneutic of empathy (Heidegger 1927b: H125; 163) to explicate the contribution of the other person to authentic human interrelations and then does not give one. In spite of the apparent complexities of the *Daseinanalysis*, the possibilities are remarkably simple and straightforward when presented visually. Figure 1 does this. The two-by-two matrix connects and cross-references ways of being authentic or inauthentic with the individual alone or in relationship. Four possibilities result. Two of the possibilities are marked with an “X” and are detailed by Heidegger in chapter-length engagements.

First, on the bottom right, “inauthentic being with one another” is the most common, generally unempathic way in which human beings relate to one another in terms of the so-called inauthentic, distracted “they self” [1927b: H113–129; 149–69 (*Being and Time*, Division I, Chapter IV, The ‘They’, Sections 25–27)]. Second, on the top left, “authentic but alone,” recovering authentic being in the face of death occurs as a “wake up call” to the lone individual, unrelated to others and confronting finite existence [1927b: H113–129; 149–69 (*Being and Time*, Division II, Chapter I, Dasein's Possibility of Being-a-Whole, and Being-Towards-Death, especially Sections 52–53)]. The lower left includes inauthentic being alone, which is a caricature of existentialism, such as one might find in a stereotype of a beatnik poet, indulging in a form of hip narcissism, or a self-isolating anti-establishment drop-out. Heidegger does not discuss this option in *Being in Time*, but made critical remarks elsewhere about Sartre's “Existentialism is a Humanism” (1946) in his (Heidegger's) “Letter on Humanism” (1947). Inauthentic being alone,

Individual human being Being together with others

Authentic	X [authentic but alone] Ownmost Possibility Commitment: Being toward Death	Special Hermeneutic Of Empathy
Inauthentic	Caricature Of Existentialism	X [inauthentic being with one another] Das Man (the One) The “They Self”

Fig. 1 Possibility of Heidegger's special hermeneutic of empathy

364 even if someone tries to live that way, is an “idle wheel,”
 365 moving no other part of the debate, and is not considered
 366 further in this article. Finally, there is the explicit call for a
 367 “special hermeneutic of empathy” (1927b: H125; 163),
 368 which, however, is left undeveloped by Heidegger. This
 369 development effort fills in the upper right quadrant of
 370 Fig. 1, including authentic being with one another.

371 It must be acknowledged that *if* Heidegger’s account of
 372 affectedness (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding, authenticity,
 373 the one (“they self”), are invalid, *then* the conclusions of
 374 my argument would also be “taken down” as invalid, too.
 375 This article does not separately argue in favor of these
 376 distinctions—that is the purpose of Heidegger’s *Dasein-*
 377 *analysis*, given that it is basically successful and useful. If
 378 such a separate argument is required, then the reader may
 379 usefully engage with an exposition of *Being and Time* as
 380 provided by Dreyfus (1985, 2007), Hatab (2000), Polt
 381 (1999), Schürmann and Critchley (2008), or Agosta (2010,
 382 2012). The present article is a Heideggerian account of
 383 empathy that uses the framework and mechanism of He-
 384 idegger’s *Daseinanalysis*. Relying on the maxim that
 385 “meaning is use,” this work does not separately or addi-
 386 tionally demonstrate the validity or usefulness of such
 387 distinctions as authenticity, *Befindlichkeit*, or understand-
 388 ing, etc.; it *uses* them. The remainder of this article works
 389 towards connecting the dots as it were between the basic
 390 distinctions of the *Daseinanalysis* (affectedness, under-
 391 standing, and so on) and delivering the special hermeneutic
 392 of empathy.

393 Let us work now through the quadrants in Fig. 1 in turn,
 394 acknowledging that the caricature of existentialism as
 395 humanism is “not applicable”.

396 On the lower right of Fig. 1, authenticity is conspicuous
 397 by its absence in everyday life the main approach to which
 398 is inauthentically going through the motions on “automatic
 399 pilot,” doing what “one does”. The short definition of
 400 “authenticity” (1927b: H42–43, H52; 68,78) is that human
 401 existence (*Dasein*) is “mine” in that it is personally owned
 402 by oneself and that it is the source of possibility. The
 403 philosophical way of saying “the source of possibility” for
 404 Heidegger is “existence precedes essence” (H42; 67).
 405 Human beings are not fundamentally any particular
 406 essence such as (in admitted over-simplification) a sex
 407 drive (Freud); the will to power (Nietzsche); an instinct of
 408 aggression (Konrad Lorenz); productivity through labor
 409 (Marx); or God’s children (Saint Matthew). Human beings
 410 are the possibility of all these possibilities and more.
 411 Human beings are fundamentally the possibility of possi-
 412 bility (1927b: H145; 185). In authentic possibility, human
 413 beings are engaged in a way that creates possibilities for
 414 human flourishing and well being through decisive human
 415 engagement with the matters that are important such as
 416 relationships, family, productivity, well-being, education,

and contribution to community. The self is the source of
 initiative and engagement—the source of what Saint
 Augustine called the possibility of beginning something
 new. However, for the most part human beings function as
 if on “automatic pilot”. We conform. We do “what one is
 supposed to do.”

Continuing on the lower right of Fig. 1, human beings
 are creatures of habit. We behave according to patterns of
 speaking and doing that are habitual and that further our
 survival on a day-to-day basis. There is nothing wrong
 with survival. Yet survival is not flourishing or accom-
 plishing anything extraordinary or amazing, even by one’s
 own standards of personal best. A life of going through
 the motions of doing what one needs to do to survive is
 empty of meaning and satisfaction. It is the life of the
 lonely crowd; and the modern mass of persons living lives
 of quiet desperation. Yet Heidegger, under this interpre-
 tation, has no aspiration to be a social critic. He is not
 proposing to reform society based on a critique of con-
 formity, so that, for example, people are supposed to
 spend more time living authentically. This pervasive
 inauthenticity is the way things are—get over it. The
 possibility of expanded authenticity—or expanded empa-
 thy—is a definite possibility for humans, yet it is not a
 predicted or recommended outcome of Heidegger’s *Da-*
seinanalysis and everyday being in the world. For the
 most part, the way we humans are with others (at least for
 Heidegger) is that we are inauthentic [1927b: H113–129;
 149–69 (*Being and Time*, Division I, Chapter IV, The
 ‘They’, Sections 25–27)]. We are going through the
 motions in diverse role-playing paradigms. Strictly
 speaking, people are not themselves in their day-to-day
 surviving of life’s petty challenges and vicissitudes. Who
 then are we? We are a container for conforming to social
 norms and conventions that specify what “one does”. For
 example, “One does not discuss religion or politics in the
 office.” In general, this is good advice. However, such a
 commitment does not create spirituality or advance a
 politically compelling cause. To do that, something more
 is needed than conformity and an attitude of “doing what
 one does” (the “they self”). That “more” is the next
 quadrant.

On the upper left of Fig. 1, for Heidegger, human beings
 are awakened from this form of conformity and unaware-
 ness by the confrontation with the inevitable necessity of
 death: “...Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death”
 (H250; 294). No one gets out alive. Everyone has to die.
 The confrontation with the inevitability of death as a
 relationship to death brings Dasein back from inauthen-
 ticity to an authentic awareness that life is not a dress
 rehearsal. In contrast to the dress rehearsal in the theatre,
 this is the event itself. This inspires a certain freedom
 (H266; 311) from the inauthenticity of living life on

470 “automatic pilot,” but at a cost and impact that requires
471 further analysis.

472 Continuing on the upper left of Fig. 1, such an awak-
473 ening leaves the individual alone in the face of death. Yes,
474 I am authentic. But I am alone. Once again, there is nothing
475 wrong with that as such. This is indeed an accurate
476 description of the phenomenon of finite human life. Death
477 individualizes human existence. Dasein faces death alone.
478 “The non-relational character of death... individualizes
479 Dasein down to itself” (H263; 308). But what then is the
480 role of the other Dasein? Where is the other individual in
481 all this? This is addressed in the concluding quadrant.

482 The other individual shows up in the upper right of Fig. 1,
483 in which we have the possibility of authentic being with one
484 another. To his credit, Heidegger allows for the possibility
485 of an authentic way of being with others, yet he leaves this
486 possibility undeveloped (1927b: H122; 158). This is the
487 celebrated but otherwise isolated and undeveloped passage
488 in which the one Dasein can “leap ahead” of the other in
489 order to give the other her authentic possibility (of life, well
490 being, and the person’s authentic commitments) rather than
491 “leap in” and take it away from her (1927b: H122; 158).
492 However, this option remains a mere logical possibility. The
493 further development of this possibility is the special her-
494 meneutic of empathy (1927b: H125; 163).

495 Without the other individual, Dasein is left apathetic,
496 lethargic, lifeless, lacking in vitality—in short, bereft of his
497 or her humanity. The other humanizes Dasein. Yes, death is
498 formidable and not to be avoided; and, yet, what is also
499 overwhelming is that the other is lost along with oneself.
500 The loss of the other is so devastating as it is the loss of
501 one’s own humanness (being human), the loss of emotional
502 vitality, the loss of the advantages and disadvantages of
503 human interrelatedness with the other. If one is still alive
504 physically, then one is a mere shell of oneself. Empty.
505 Nothing happens anymore (e.g., Lear 2008). From that
506 perspective, the loss of the other is equally original
507 [“gleichursprünglich” as Heidegger writes (e.g., H142;
508 182)] with the inevitable possibility of death; and it does
509 not make sense to try to say which is more basic. From the
510 perspective of individualization, death has priority; from
511 the perspective of humanization, the other does. According
512 to this approach, empathy is not merely a cognitive func-
513 tion of knowing what is going on with the other (although it
514 is that too); it is a foundational way of being in the world
515 with the other. This is worth repeating—empathy is fun-
516 damental to being with others, and its withdrawal or
517 absence is a crisis that calls into question one’s relatedness
518 to other individuals that renders individuals and commu-
519 nities vulnerable to breakdowns that are dreaded as much
520 (and sometimes more) than death itself.

521 Now that we have argued in detail for the possibility of a
522 special hermeneutic of empathy (1927b: H125; 163) as a

form of authentic being with the other (and one another), 523
and have found a logical space for it within the matrix of 524
Heidegger’s inquiry, the task is to provide it. This is 525
accomplished by applying the Heideggerian distinctions 526
affectedness (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding, interpretation, 527
and speech in an inquiry into empathy. We now turn to this 528
task. 529

Empathic receptivity in affectedness 530

All of Heidegger’s distinctions—affectedness (*Befindlichkeit*), 531
understanding (*Verstehen*), interpretation (*Auslegung*), speech 532
(*Rede*)—are equally original [*gleichursprünglich* (e.g., 533
H142; 182)]. However, the distinctions will be engaged 534
sequentially, because that is the way that human language 535
processing works. “*Befindlichkeit*” is often translated as 536
“affectedness,” for example, elation or ill humor or being 537
affectively burdened by a mood (e.g., H134; 172). Basically 538
it is a form of receptivity. It is a way of being open to the 539
situation or environment, including the other human being 540
in the situation. Literally, Heidegger’s distinction “*Be- 541*
findlichkeit” actually means “how one finds oneself.” “*Wie 542*
befinden Sie sich?” also translates as “How are you?” This 543
implies how an individual is affected by the situation in 544
which the individual finds her- or himself. This implies 545
openness to the situation that is characteristic of human 546
beings in community. We say, “His displeasure could be 547
felt.” This extends to sensations, too, as when we wince at 548
the sight of someone taking a nasty fall or are literally 549
moved to tears at the sight of another’s tearful distress. All 550
the examples of emotional contagion belong here as when 551
panic or enthusiasm or aggression sweeps through a crowd. 552
Make no mistake, *Befindlichkeit* is not reducible to emotion. 553
The paradigm examples of *Befindlichkeit* include such 554
moods as anxiety, elation, and boredom (H134; 173). But 555
all kinds of experiences, including sensations, emotions, 556
and affects, have to be considered in so far as they disclose 557
the individual’s openness to a situation. In short, it is a 558
fundamental misunderstanding to say that *Befindlichkeit* is 559
exclusively emotional. *Befindlichkeit* is equally original 560
(*gleichursprünglich*) with understanding, interpretation, 561
and speech. But to discard the affective dimension would be 562
to throw out the baby with the bath water. That is why the 563
process of applying these basic distinctions in sequence to 564
empathy will eventually traverse all of these distinctions 565
and come back around to include the complete process in 566
the form of the hermeneutic circle (Fig. 2). 567

In short, empathy is not reducible to affectedness (*Be- 568*
findlichkeit), but affectedness is input to the same process 569
that eventually develops, explicates, and elaborates affect- 570
edness and produces full-blown adult, mature empathy. 571
Affectedness (*Befindlichkeit*) is a significant distinction 572

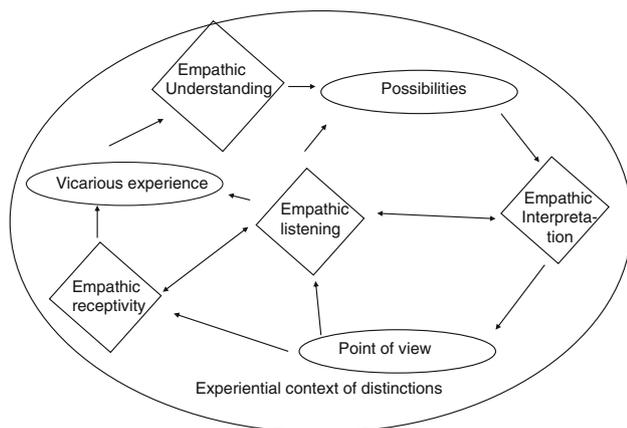


Fig. 2 The hermeneutic circle of empathy

573 upon which empathic understanding, interpretation, and
574 speech perform further explicative processing and work.

575 Vicarious experiences are exemplified as the feelings
576 aroused in an authentically engaged encounter with liter-
577 ature, narrative, theatrical performances, film, or listening
578 to story telling of real world human relations and the
579 emotions, desires, beliefs aroused in the engagement. The
580 word “vicarious” relates etymologically to “vicar,” whose
581 fundamental meaning is that of “representative”. No anal-
582 yst or therapist can hope to experience the complete depth
583 and breath of human experiences, nor would anyone want
584 directly to experience all possible forms of pain and suffer-
585 ing. However, vicarious experience gives individuals the
586 opportunity to sample experiences that would not other-
587 wise be available and to experience a “trace affect” or
588 “signal” without an overwhelming loss of individuality in
589 submersion or merger. Exposure to the diversity of human
590 experience as depicted in the process of sustained empathic
591 listening is arguably what is missing in professional
592 training programs for medical doctors and mental health
593 professionals that neglect the humanities and experience-
594 rich, “thick” social sciences in favor of distinguishing
595 categories of diagnostic data [useful though the latter may
596 be in other contexts (Halpern 2001; Gendlin 1962; Hacking
597 1999)]. Overlooking vicarious experience in the herme-
598 neutic circle of empathy results in a misunderstanding that
599 grasps only the cognitive dimension and reduces the pro-
600 cess of empathy to an over-intellectualized “putting one-
601 self in the other’s shoes.” While there is nothing wrong
602 with “jump starting” empathy by imagining the pinches
603 and discomforts of walking in the other’s shoes, there is
604 something missing—namely, receptivity and the dimension
605 of affectedness, corresponding to *Befindlichkeit*. A He-
606 ideggerian approach does not reduce empathy to mere
607 emotional contagion. Far from it. *Befindlichkeit* includes
608 openness to experiences of the other person of diverse

kinds such as sensations, pains, moods, affects, and emo- 609
tions in the narrower sense of the term. 610

611 Although the language of the celebrated psychoanalyst
612 Heinz Kohut’s is completely different than Heidegger’s,
613 the two make converging and complementary, if uncon-
614 ventional, allies. The point is that, for Kohut as for He-
615 idegger, empathy provides the ontological foundation of
616 the human being’s authentic relatedness with the other
617 individual. It is not only empirical; it is constitutive of the
618 psychological life of the human being. Thus Kohut:

619 Empathy is not just a useful way by which we have
620 access to the inner life of man—the idea itself of an
621 inner life of man, and thus of a psychology of com-
622 plex mental states, is unthinkable without our ability
623 to know via vicarious introspection – my explanation
624 of empathy...what the inner life of man is, what we
625 ourselves and what others think and feel (1977: 306).

626 Coming toward the end of Kohut’s *The Restoration of the*
627 *Self* (1977), this statement might mistakenly be taken as
628 simply rhetorical or inspirational (although it is these also).
629 This statement, however, should be taken at face value.
630 When it is taken in this way, it is astonishing. It is an
631 assertion that the very idea of the mental life of the human
632 being—what we ourselves and others think and feel—is
633 “unthinkable” without the ability to access (and know)
634 others by means of empathy. Empathy is constitutive of the
635 mental life of human beings, what we ourselves and what
636 other think and feel. Of course, vicarious experience
637 requires additional processing by the understanding, inter-
638 pretation, and speech to become “empathy” in the full
639 sense of the word.

640 The fundamental clinical paradigm with affectedness is
641 vicarious experience. Kohut defines empathy as “vicarious
642 introspection,” meaning that one individual has an expe-
643 rience that provides access to the experience of the other
644 (Kohut 1959). However, this experience is not direct or a
645 quantitative merger—it is *vicarious*, providing a repre-
646 sentation of the other’s experience that is numerically
647 different but qualitatively of a kind that the other is
648 experiencing. Temporarily and transiently identifying with
649 the protagonist in a theatrical play, novel, or film is a
650 vicarious experience. Of course, vicarious experience is not
651 complete empathy in itself, but a fundamental input to the
652 empathic process. We now turn to empathic understanding.

653 Empathic understanding as possibility

654 According to Heidegger, understanding as human beings
655 live understanding is not primarily a form of cognition such
656 as thinking or intellectual intuition (H147; 187). Under-
657 standing includes cognition, but is not primarily cognition.

658 Understanding is characterized as pressing forward into
 659 possibilities supported by a network of meaningful plans,
 660 patterns, and insights (H145; 185). The cognitive aspect is
 661 derivative, coming later. Instrumentally, Heideggerian
 662 understanding is a Swiss Army knife for managing how to
 663 get things done in the practical world of instrumental
 664 relationships. It is practical understanding in the manner of
 665 Aristotle's *phronesis*. It is "know how" in the sense of
 666 making friends and influencing people, putting a new
 667 patient or client at ease with one's attuned listening, or
 668 turning a skeptical opponent into a friend or at least a
 669 neutral individual. Here "know" has little or nothing to do
 670 with "epistemology." Rather it has to do with individuals
 671 who are highly competent in dealing with other people.
 672 This extends from relationships such as psychotherapy,
 673 counseling, life guidance, problem solving, executive
 674 coaching, platoon leadership in the armed forces, all the
 675 way to sales and marketing, public relations, community
 676 building and action—think of Saul Alinsky's community
 677 organizing or Pablo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
 678 (1968)—as well as an M.D.'s "bedside manner," a teacher's
 679 didactic approach, and a car mechanic's respectful
 680 explanation of a clogged fuel injector to a client who lacks
 681 mechanical know how.

682 How is this possible as possibility? The short answer:
 683 understanding is the source of possibility, the possibility of
 684 possibilities:

685 As long as it is, human being [*Dasein*] always has
 686 understood itself and will understand itself in terms of
 687 possibilities.... As projecting, understanding is the
 688 mode of being of human being [*Dasein*] in which it is
 689 its possibilities as possibilities (Heidegger/Stambaugh
 690 1927a: H145; 136).

691 Now the task is to use understanding to implement—one
 692 might say "schematize" or "process"—empathy. "Schematize"
 693 means to process the distinction "understanding"
 694 through a particular domain of experience unfolding in time.
 695 That is, take empathy and apply it to human interrelatedness
 696 as it occurs in the back-and-forth of a conversation in context
 697 using the distinction "understanding".

698 For example, practically, the psychotherapist uses
 699 empathy to understand the experiences of the patient in the
 700 latter's isolation, loneliness, and distress; meta-psychologically,
 701 the patient creates the condition of possibility of
 702 empathic receptivity and understanding on the part of the
 703 therapist by the patient's being ready for a generous and
 704 gracious empathic listening that contributes to and recovers
 705 the patient's being human. Therapy takes the form of a joint
 706 inquiry into how we humans take the past—whether as
 707 relations of power, sexuality, narcissism, etc.—and put those
 708 possibilities into the future, continually reenacting instead of
 709 recalling and transforming them. The patient, by his very

being, gives the therapist her humanity—making the therapist
 a fellow inquirer into being human—so that the therapist
 can give it (being human) back to the patient in a hundred-
 and-one contingent circumstances requiring empathy.

The individual who is empathizing takes a stand for the
 other person so, for example, the other's blind spot is
 recognized, identified, and becomes visible (to the other)
 for insight and working through. The possibility of possibility
 (H145) becomes the clearing. Empathy provides a
 clearing for the possibility of breaking through—engaging
 and resolving—the obstacles confronted by the individual
 in thrown contingency, the past standing in the way of
 possibility as such.

In a blind spot, distractedness in the superficiality of
 everyday life prevents the other's seeing without the one
 who is empathizing being able explicitly to show him the
 matter needing seeing. This is so since to tell another about
 his blind spot does *not* make it visible—the blind spot is
 cognitively impenetrable. The blind spot is kept in place by
 hidden and undeclared commitments. This is where, as an
 empathizer, one's listening can provide a clearing for the
 other's self discovery in the ongoing context of interaction
 and reenactment with the other, using analogies and simulations
 from experience to plant a seed that grows into an
 "Ah ha" experience—an insight—by the other person. "The
 sight [*Sicht*] which is related to Dasein we call transparency
 [*Durchsichtigkeit*]" (H146; 186). A pattern switch occurs,
 a new possibility emerges, and what seemed inevitable—for
 example, the patient's father doesn't *really* love her—gets
 distinguished from what actually happened—he moved out
 of the house and she made up something—invented an
 understanding about the depth and direction of his affection,
 an understanding of what was possible and what the possibility
 meant. What was previously cognitively impenetrable
 is penetrated and broken up by empathy. The empathy provides
 the ontological possibility of the pattern switch, in this
 case, from "love is not possible with this person" to "granted
 the behavior was an issue, on that occasion, he had a different
 way of showing his love."

Empathic interpretation as social referencing

For Heidegger, interpretation is a form of understanding
 (H148; 188). We live implicitly in an understanding of
 possibility. Interpretation makes explicit the possibility in
 which we already live so that it can be talked about or acted
 on. Thus, interpretation is a derivative form of understanding;
 and interpretation is based in understanding (H148;
 188). Let us consider a paradigm case of interpretation that
 is relevant to empathy, namely, social referencing.

The identification of social referencing (Baron-Cohen
 1995; Hobson 2002, 2005; Zahavi 2005) provides a stern

760 warning to those philosophers who regard the experience of
761 pain as the paradigm of incorrigibility—an experience of
762 something = x about which the first person (“I”) cannot be
763 mistaken and corrected by the future course of experience
764 or by the second person (“you”). We do indeed check with
765 one another about what we are experiencing and allow
766 other individuals to guide and even correct us in a way
767 mediated by vicarious experience.

768 Consider the child of tender age who has fallen down
769 and turns around and looks back over her shoulder at her
770 father (or caretaker) to see if he has a worried expression
771 on his face. If he does look worried, then she breaks out
772 (authentically) into tears. In contrast, if he looks happy like
773 this is all good fun, then she laughs along too or at least
774 continues in a spirit of play. The child’s experience is
775 processed as a pain by her if the father does indeed have a
776 worried look. It is processed as fun that is part of the game
777 if he looks happy and laughs. What is happening here? The
778 child is literally looking for guidance in identifying,
779 understanding, and interpreting what she is experiencing—
780 if the care-taker looks worried, then her experience is
781 identified as “pain”; if not, then it is identified as a posi-
782 tively nuanced excitement or even what fun feels like. The
783 care-taker’s empathic receptivity immediately expresses on
784 his face the severity of the fall—an implicit empathic
785 interpretation—and the child’s own receptivity resonates
786 with it.

787 This is a crisp example of the child’s referencing the
788 other to check how potentially injurious and therefore
789 painful the other considers the fall prior to expressing
790 completely any emotion in the matter. In short, the child is
791 checking with the care-taker to “see”—to understand and
792 interpret—how she should feel. The child’s feeling is
793 evidently still an unexpressed something = x where the
794 care-taker has a critical role in deciding whether to bind the
795 “ x ” to fear (“hurt”) or bind the “ x ” to happiness (“having
796 fun”) and crying or laughing, respectively. In a marvelous
797 example of emergent empathy, the empathic care-taker
798 expresses the emotion on behalf of the child, which emo-
799 tion is then, in turn, taken up and further processed and
800 expressed by the child in reciprocal affectedness and
801 attunement with the care-taker’s response, completing the
802 circle (and the expression of emotion). While this example
803 focuses on the child where the behavior is most visible,
804 adults apply social referencing, too, checking with one
805 another more than is customarily acknowledged about what
806 one is supposed to feel or does in fact feel.

807 Empathic speech as listening

808 Paradoxically, the optimal form of speech in which
809 empathy is articulated is as empathic listening. “Keeping

silent authentically is possible only in genuine speaking” 810
(H165; 208; translation modified with “*Rede*” translated as 811
“speaking,” not “discoursing”). Listening gives way to 812
that for which one listens. In the above-cited example 813
where the child who has fallen turns around to check with 814
the parent, the care-taker’s affect is adequately expressed 815
in her or his facial expression. The child gets the mes- 816
sage—fun versus danger. Common sense applies here, too, 817
and the listening is to provide a clearing for the other to be 818
self-expressed and heard. This is distinct from a silence 819
that withholds a response out of desire to control or dom- 820
inate, resistance to communication, or fear of shame or 821
humiliation. 822

823 It is worth pointing out here that the process of empathy
824 comes full circle. Listening is a form of speech—a priva-
825 tive form—and it is also a form of receptivity. The multiple
826 dimensions of empathic receptivity, empathic understand-
827 ing, empathic interpretation, and now finally empathic
828 speech, are connected with one another such that one can
829 engage with one of them and invoke the others as part of a
830 coherent, whole empathic process.

831 Empathic listening is a form of one’s authentic possi-
832 bilities that Heidegger calls out as “conscience,” making
833 use of the close association of “conscience” with “con-
834 scious”. Here conscience is transformed in its meaning by
835 Heidegger, but with a specific goal of getting us to listen
836 anew to the resonances implicit in language that have
837 previously escaped serious consideration. Conscience is
838 *not* authentically a function of praising or blaming; but that
839 is the way consciousness initially shows up in the everyday
840 devaluing judgments that people think to themselves but do
841 not express out of politeness and awareness that the judg-
842 ment itself is questionable. The message is not an explicit
843 exclamation such as “Bad!” or “Wrong!” However, if one
844 listens, just being present with the other, the result is to
845 quiet the idle talk, the devaluing judgments, and superficial
846 evaluations. The result is to silence this “voice over”
847 running on in one’s head. Those who do not believe in a
848 “voice over” may want to listen to whatever it is that is
849 asking them, “What voice over? There is no such thing!”
850 This quiescing of the on-going idle chatter (*Gerede*)—both
851 between individuals and within the individual’s own verbal
852 thinking—is such as to occasion and reinforce empathy. In
853 order to listen, human beings must fall silent:

854 We characterized silence [*Schweigen*] as an essential
855 possibility of speech [*Rede*]. [...] Thus this calling
856 [*Ruf*] is a falling silent. The speech of conscience
857 never rings out loudly. Conscience only calls silently,
858 that is, the call [*der Ruf*]... calls [*rufi*] being human
859 thus called back to the stillness of itself, and calls it to
860 become still... [C]onscience thus understands this
861 silent discourse appropriately only in falling silent

862 [Verschweigenheit]. It takes the words away from the
863 commonsense idle chatter of the one [*das Man*]
864 (Heidegger/Stambaugh 1927a: 273; H296; translation
865 modified).

866 Heidegger's text is rich with paradoxes about calling
867 silently, authentic speech expressing itself as listening, and
868 conscience having something to say but expressing itself in
869 stillness—all of which are ways humans are called back
870 from distractedness in the world of gossip and idle chatter.
871 What does this text really want to accomplish?

872 The suggestion is that Heidegger is *doing* something in
873 this text—doing something other than asserting, arguing,
874 describing, or telling. The matter engaging Heidegger (and
875 the reader) is the possibility of stilling [i.e., making quiet
876 (quiescing)] the idle chatter running on-and-on in one's head
877 by invoking the equivalent of a Zen Koan. The latter is, of
878 course, a paradoxical statement that opens an inquiry into
879 what one does not even know that one does not know—one's
880 blind spot(s). The expression “in one's head” is fraught with
881 overtones, even if it is figurative, and is descriptively cap-
882 tured phenomenologically as a faint echo in one's awareness
883 and listening as a discourse—verbal thinking—that is con-
884 tingently only mine. Once again, what's the idea here?

885 Having critiqued the subject-object relationship and
886 subjectivity, Heidegger cannot suddenly launch into a
887 discussion of introspection, meditation, listening to oneself,
888 in completing his analysis of human existence. In general,
889 Heidegger is not interested in introspection and con-
890 sciousness (as distinct from subjectivity) and does not even
891 mention “consciousness” until the very last page of *Being*
892 *and Time* (H437; 487).

893 Thus, if Heidegger were to start on an account of
894 introspection, it would have “a positive structure” [as
895 Heidegger puts it (H437; 487)] in a listening for the silent
896 call of conscience. Such a listening has to quiesce the idle
897 chatter of the inauthentic relations with others as well as
898 the idle chatter that is owned as “mine” by us humans and
899 loosely described in everyday speech as “a voice over”
900 streaming off within one's head, commenting—often in a
901 devaluing way—on everyone and everything that goes by.
902 Quiescing the idle chatter is what Heidegger is doing here
903 by presenting paradoxes. Without exactly saying how one
904 causes such a quiescing, once the quiescing is engaged and
905 occurs, however transiently, the individual is ready to lis-
906 ten, ready to empathize. A parallel result can be approxi-
907 mated by reflecting deeply on the paradoxes as if they were
908 Zen Koans, by engaging in other rigorous spiritual disci-
909 plines such as meditation, certain forms of physical exer-
910 cise, free association from the psychoanalytic couch,
911 psychodynamic psychotherapy, and related practices.

912 Putting all the pieces together now—empathic recep-
913 tivity (“affectedness”), empathic understanding, empathic

914 interpretation, and empathic speech (“listening”), we
915 complete the hermeneutic circle of empathy. We can begin
916 with empathic receptivity, in which case the need for
917 understanding and interpretation will be evoked by the
918 otherwise mute receptive manifold of affectedness in a
919 vicarious experience. Or we can begin with understanding,
920 in which case the need for receptivity will be evoked by an
921 otherwise unfulfilled interpretation of possibility. Or we
922 can begin by listening, which arouses receptivity, under-
923 standing and interpretation in turn. In any case, the process
924 comes full circle—the Hermeneutic Circle of Empathy in
925 Fig. 2.

An ontological bridge over troubled waters: empathy 926

927 Human suffering is vast and deep. The motivation for
928 another analysis of empathy is the intention of relieving
929 suffering. For all the limitations of Heidegger's *Dasein-*
930 *analysis*—neglecting the possibility of authentic being with
931 one another (empathy), simultaneously founding existen-
932 tialism and debunking it, demonstrating a grasp of tech-
933 nology consistent with the sophistication of an individual
934 stemming from Bavarian peasant stock, and the limitations
935 of its all-too-human author, who like Goethe's Faust makes
936 a deal with the devil—the possibilities are unmistakable.
937 Granted that, according to Heidegger, the modern under-
938 standing of being and of being human, i.e., history, wan-
939 dered from the way of truth of the pre-Socratic
940 philosophers at about the time that Plato tried to write
941 down the teachings of Socrates and develop a theory of
942 ideas with presence at its core; granted that everyone who
943 touches metaphysics, including Heidegger, seems to be
944 ensnared by it; is there any point in pursuing the possibility
945 of relieving suffering? Life is tough and then one dies; get
946 over it. Is that the only consolation of philosophy? Is this
947 back sliding into existentialism (as humanism)?

948 These are all “big ideas,” and invite an equally grand
949 scale response; yet none is available initially. Instead the
950 invitation is to a special hermeneutic of empathy—“spe-
951 cial” because, as an inquiry, it is an example of itself.
952 Humans inquire into what it means to be human, and the
953 inquiry itself humanizes. Thus, a special hermeneutic of
954 empathy in the spirit of Heidegger is not humanism, it is a
955 clearing for the possibility of being human; it is not exis-
956 tentialism, it is the clearing for the possibility of human
957 possibility; it is not ethics, it is a clearing for respect,
958 integrity, altruism, and a recognition of who is one's
959 neighbor that expands one's humanness; it is not psycho-
960 therapy in the narrow sense, it is a clearing for human
961 interrelatedness in the context of an inquiry into being
962 human that unmask inauthentic behavior and relieves
963 emotional distress; it is not aesthetics, it is a clearing for the

964 communicability of affect; it is not rhetoric, it is a clearing
 965 for being effective through language; it is not parenting,
 966 teaching, or leadership, it is a clearing for a commitment to
 967 community, making a difference, and improving the qual-
 968 ity of life. Make no small plans. A research program on
 969 empathy is envisioned. Meanwhile, this hermeneutic of
 970 empathy is an attempt to light a single candle in the form of
 971 empathy against the darkness of human suffering. This
 972 does not require a regression into pity or fear or even an
 973 idealization into a sentimental utopia. What it does require
 974 is an appreciation of the challenges of the human condi-
 975 tion—often called “difficulty”—in the face of which
 976 empathy is more than a method and an ontic tool to lift
 977 ourselves up by our bootstraps, not like a treadmill of
 978 infinite progress, but rather like generating a possibility that
 979 was not visible before and as a concrete way of being with
 980 one another as a particular possibility to be implemented, a
 981 challenge to be engaged empathically.

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