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Empathy between Death and the Other

Abstract

The special hermeneutic of empathy now moves decisively beyond Heidegger's *Being and Time*, although the interpretation also circles back to inform our reading of the role of conscience, the self, death and trauma (the latter not a Heideggerian term). The critical path lies through distinguishing everyday, ontic empathy from empathy as ontologically creating the possibility of being human – and what that means. The loss of the other is equally fundamental with the inevitable possibility of death; and, in the final analysis, it does not make sense to try to say which is more basic. From the perspective of individualization, death has priority; from the perspective of humanization, the other (individual) has priority. According to this approach, empathy is not merely a cognitive function of knowing what is going on with other (although it is that too); it is a foundational way of being in the world with the other. Empathy is ontological, and its withdrawal or absence is an ontological crisis ('who am I?') that renders individuals (and communities) vulnerable to breakdowns – traumas – that are dreaded as much (and sometimes more) than death itself.

Empathy: the third alternative to the inauthentic crowd and authentic aloneness

Now, after much textual exegesis, we finally arrive at an alternative to being alone in the face of death or being inauthentic with others (as 'the one'). Here, for the first time, individual human beings are with others *and* authentic. It has not been easy to get here, and this chapter might have been entitled 'Empathy: Between a Rock and Hard

Place'. Even so, Heidegger mixes in a good measure of 'being together with things at hand', which is his terminology for the way of being of tools and instruments. He almost gets distracted by hammers, jugs and shoes again, but then recovers and acknowledges 'concerned being with... others'. We are now engaged authentically with the other. This releases authentic being with others with the emphasis on freeing others for their own possibilities. Here our interpretation and amplification of Heidegger reaches a culmination as 'becoming the conscience of others', a close paraphrase for 'listening empathically':

The commitment toward itself first brings human beings to the possibility of letting the others who are with it 'be' in their own ability-to-be, and also discloses that ability in concern which leaps ahead and frees. The committed [*entschlossene*] human being can become the 'conscience' of others. It is from the authentic being a self of commitment that authentic being-with-one-another first arises, not from ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative partying with the boys [*Verbrüderungen*] in the they and in what 'they want to do'.

(Heidegger 1927a: 274; H298; translation modified)

Note that a subtle shift has occurred from conscience being a way of relating to oneself – calling an individual back from the flight into distractedness in conforming to 'what they do' – to conscience being a way of relating to others. Heidegger's use of conscience shifts. Conscience is not something represented as 'inner' and the everyday capacity for blaming and laying on a 'guilt trip' intra-personally, but displaced inter-personally as relating to the other authentically, clearing the way for a 'concerned being with others,', not in the sense of scolding or blaming, but in the sense of a committed listening to the other.

Empathy as becoming the conscience of the other

Conscience works both ways – for the self and for the other. In empathy one can become the conscience of the other. Now imagine that the one individual is the beneficiary of empathy and that the other is listening empathically. The (empathizing) other provides a clearing for one to listen to oneself, by the other's listening empathically. The other takes a stand for one – is literally being there for one – by listening. One experiences oneself as other to the second person, in reciprocal relation as the target of the other's generous and gracious empathy. In turn, this furthers recovering the authentic possibilities of the one's own self. For

the self is defined by commitment and, as in the next passage, the self is something to be 'won'. This is an account of the self engaged in the world with others as a projected possibility to be attained, not as the metaphysical permanent in inner perception.¹

Heidegger's individualization of the self as the individual's ownmost possibility in the face of death is good as far as it goes, but misses the possibility of authentic being with others. Human beings are predictably inauthentic when conforming to the everyday norms of 'the one', the 'they self' (*das Man*), a feature and manner of human behaviour not expected to change under any interpretation. Heidegger held open the possibility of a logical space of authentic being with others, but it remained undeveloped. Humans are usually distracted and just follow the crowd. Heidegger's explicit argument in *Being and Time* is that humans are called back from lostness in 'the one' in the confrontation with death. Heidegger's position is here developed and amplified to allow that humans are also called back from the distraction in everyday busyness in and by authentic being with the other – other individuals who remind us of our finitude and humanity in fundamental ways, different than but related to death.

The argument is that authentic *Mitsein* – being with others – is precisely the place in which the missing section on authentic being with others through empathy ought to be located in *Being and Time*. Without specifying the nature of this encounter between the one and the other, a logical space is created for authentic being with the other and indeed created as empathy. Into this space one can insert different possibilities extending from a radicalization of ontic *Mitdasein* in the direction of ontological otherness of the ecstatic kind of which (for example) Levinas (1961) writes or simply an openness to the other in the affect of respect that was highlighted above.

Between the other and death: humanization and individualization

Now the parallel and comparison between the individualization of being human through death and humanization through the other's granting of being human is in place. This 'granting of being human' is precisely empathy.

First, consider individualization through the encounter with death. For Heidegger, the self of the human being is individualized in its ownmost possibility of death (no more *Dasein*). The anxiety that results discloses the human being's existence as a whole ontologically. This calls back human being from its distractedness in the superficial *persona*

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that it presents in conforming to the roles of the anonymous others – *das Man*, the one – that forms the everyday fallen ‘they self’. Ontically, death is an advisor, counselling human being to choose wisely and to choose as if its being is at stake. Ontologically, death is a structure of the human being, which is always a moment-by-moment possibility until the individual’s physical demise.

In parallel with this individualization through death is the humanization through empathy. The process of humanization is radicalized in the extreme situation of the loss of the other, for example, in physical death. The encounter with the death of the other is a model for the humanization of the individual self against the other in empathic interrelatedness. The death of the other – whether as physical demise or simply an affective withdrawal – is completely different than the human being’s (*Dasein*’s) own death. The loss of empathy in the withdrawal of the other is the loss of one’s humanness, a kind of death in life, in a sense, worse than one’s own death itself. After all, one’s own death is a demise that is by definition and actuality never completely experienced by the living. Though the suffering of illness or injury leading up to the individual’s demise is a fearful thing, death as a physical demise of human being (*Dasein*) is never completely experienced by the living. The possibility of the latter as a structure of human being is revealed in an ontological anxiety, which, when worked through, discloses the possibility of commitment and engagement with the projects and possibilities in one’s life. In that sense, death as a structure of human being (*Dasein*) is not traumatic the way the loss of a loved one in her or his physical death is traumatic.² Death as a structure of human being surely presents challenges, but then opens out and onto renewed engagement with life. Possibilities are surfaced, identified, created. In contrast, the loss of the other occasions the closing down of possibilities. The loss of the other invokes the dynamics of mourning. A process is engaged of laying to rest – quiescing – the possibilities understood in the other’s being in the world. Thus, the loss of the other is a trauma in the way that my own death as a structure of human being will never be traumatic.

Traumatic loss of the other is a distinct phenomenon in and of itself, not to be confused with one’s own death as an existential structure or even one’s own demise. In the everyday (ontic) encounter of one individual with another and in the ontological relationship between self and other, in which a reciprocal inquiry into being human is engaged in empathy, the loss of empathy provided by the other is dreaded as much as death itself.

Yes, death is formidable and not to be avoided; and, yet, what is also overwhelming is that the other is lost along with oneself. The loss of the other is so devastating as it is the loss of one's own humanness (being human), the loss of emotional vitality, the loss of the advantages and disadvantages of human interrelatedness with the other. If one is still alive physically, then one is a mere shell of oneself. Empty. Nothing happens anymore. From that perspective, the loss of the other is equiprimordial (*'gleich ursprünglich'* as Heidegger says) with the inevitable possibility of death; and it does not make sense to try to say which is more basic. From the perspective of individualization, death has priority; from the perspective of humanization, the other does. According to this approach, empathy is not merely a cognitive function of knowing what is going on with the other (although it is that too); it is a foundational way of being in the world with the other. This is worth repeating – empathy is ontological, and its withdrawal or absence is an ontological crisis ('who am I?') that renders individuals (and communities) vulnerable to breakdowns that are dreaded as much (and sometimes more) than death itself.

Let's look at examples of how the individual is humanized – granted being human in empathy – by the other. In the analysis, the critical path lies in distinguishing everyday, ontic empathy from empathy as ontologically creating the possibility of being human – and what that means.

In addition to the limit situation of one's ownmost possibility of death, the extreme situation of the loss of the other in the other's death radicalizes the process of humanization, but these are not the only paradigm cases. Such humanization also occurs in the examples of engaging the 'chronic emergency' of ministering to a new born; in rescuing or being rescued in a Good Samaritan scenario; or in the uncommon struggle of engaging with an authentic friend about the meaning of friendship.

For example, ontically, the care-taker (parent) uses empathy to satisfy the needs of the infant, gaining access to what the infant feels because the care-taker feels it too in the form of a trace (vicarious) affect, thus, deploying the care-taker's being human to bring into being another human being as a member of the community (family). Ontologically, the infant creates the condition of possibly of empathic parenting by the infant's readiness for becoming human, which may indeed appear as a lack of socialization. The care-taker socializes the infant; the infant humanizes the care-taker, calling it not just to its role as parent (although it does that too), but also to its possibility as a human

being in committed relationship through thick and thin to another emerging human being. The infant by its very being gives the parent his humanness – as it were, making the parent an inquirer, if not an expert, in adulthood, in being a human – so that the parent can give it (becoming human) back to the infant in a hundred-and-one contingent circumstances requiring empathy.

Ontically, the Good Samaritan uses empathy to grasp who is his neighbour prior to taking altruistic action as he experiences the distress of the injured traveller. Ontologically, the traveller who had fallen among thieves and was left for dead creates the possibility of empathic community by his loss of being human in the sense of being reduced to a suffering lump of broken flesh. The Samaritan rescues the traveller; the traveller humanizes the Samaritan, calling him not just to the role of an altruist performing a good deed (although that too occurs), but to his possibility as a human being in relation to another finite, fragile, dependent human being. The stricken Jewish traveller by his very being gives the Samaritan his humanness – precisely making the Samaritan a fellow inquirer in saying who is the neighbour – so that the Samaritan can give it (humanness) back to the distressed traveller in an act of rescue that defines them as part of the same community of fellow travellers – neighbours – on the road of life.

Ontically, the friend wordlessly embraces the other in his empathically felt joy and sorrow with the friend's joy and sorrow. Ontologically, the other creates the possibility of friendship by his shared humanness. The other by his very being gives the friend his humanness – making the friend an inquirer into what it means for friends to share human experiences empathically as friends – so that the friend can give it (humanness) back to the friend in an act of friendship that makes them a part of the same community of friends.

Empathy as foundational being with

The next step to complete the hermeneutic of empathy requires linking the analysis of the self as care with empathy as foundational being with. As noted previously, taking a stand on one's being in the face of death is what gives individuality, constancy and continuity to the self. Heidegger does not distinguish taking a stand for oneself versus taking a stand for another, as in empathic listening, since Heidegger's interest is to undercut the discussions of the 'I' as the persisting subject, the permanent in inner perception or continuous 'I think' that accompanies all one's representations (especially in Kant). However, Heidegger would usefully have made such a distinction (between taking a stand for oneself and

the other) from the perspective of founding authentic inter-relations; and it is readily available based on the work he has already done. The self is solidified through care as ‘taking a stand’ (*Ständigkeit*):

In terms of care, the ‘taking a stand’ [*Ständigkeit*] of the self, as the supposed persistence of the subject, gets its clarification. The phenomenon of this authentic ability-to-be, however, also opens our eyes to the constancy of the self in the sense of its having gained a stand [*Standgewonnenhaben*]. The *constancy of the self* in the double sense of constancy and steadfastness is the *authentic* counter-possibility to the lack of constancy [*Unselbst-ständigkeit*] of irresolute falling... Its ontological structure reveals the existentiality of the selfhood of the self.

(Heidegger 1927a: 296–297; H322; translation modified)

Taking a stand is what gives the self constancy and continuity; and taking a stand is understood as taking a stand for something or someone who requires or merits standing for. A simple, although not necessarily obvious, next step is to amplify ‘taking a stand’ into an empathic taking a stand for another, that is, literally *being there* for the other. This is precisely taking a stand for the other – in empathy as an individual human being takes a stand for the other human being.

The missing special hermeneutic of empathy, for which Heidegger called but ‘forgot’ to provide – was outlined as the argument of the previous chapter worked through the fundamental design distinctions of affectivity, understanding, and speech, applying these to a Heideggerian account of authentic being-with, that is, empathy. This result slides nicely into the structure of the self as it maps precisely to that of care. Human beings are designed such that ‘who am I?’ is an issue for us. Care is the requirement that humans have to answer this question based on being thrown into a situation with others not of our own choosing, living with others into a future that we have the power to choose and implement (although only imperfectly), on the basis of entanglements with others in everyday distractions such as conforming to implicit norms and conventions. In this context, the unavoidable inevitability of death shows up like a cold shower – and leaves one shivering, too, though with anxiety (like the youth in the folktale who wanted to shudder), not physical cold. The unavoidable inevitability of the other also shows up in a confronting and sometimes surprising way – the loss of the other is also a kind of death – not physical but of one’s being human.

In a play on words that parallels Heidegger's 'unavoidable inevitability of death' that we might call the 'unavoidable inevitability of the other', the other shows up in empathy in both positive and privative modes – in attachment and separation, in relatedness and detachment, in understanding and misunderstanding. In all these instances, empathy arrives like a bestowal of life giving humanness and its loss a descent into emptiness and lack of vitality. It goes beyond what Heidegger explicitly says, to ask about the extreme situation of the loss of the other, but in the context of authentic being with others, it makes sense to do so. The loss of the other is different than the anxiety occasioned by fear of death. The loss of the other is the loss of one's being human – ontological, not physical, death – the loss of one's human self. Without others to whom to relate in and through empathy, one is reduced to the level of an emotionless zombie. Life becomes empty and meaningless in the face of which even negative emotions – hostility, anger, hatred – can seem better than the hollow lethargy and apathy of emptiness – a kind of spiritual death – that is, depression. Nothing happens. Yes, the sun rises and sets; yet nothing matters. All is empty. Ultimately, the loss of the other is the loss of the other's empathy for one, expressed in the first person, for me. One's empathy for the other renders him accessible; the other's empathy for the one (for example, me) makes one human and fills one with satisfaction and life itself. Of course, as with the individualizing experience of anxiety in the face of death, the experience of the other seems to focus on the extreme situations of loss and trauma. The poet John Donne says, 'Send not to ask for whom the bell tolls'. We already know the answer – the loss of every other diminishes one's own humanness by the loss of the other's empathy. The other makes possible the mutual inquiry in empathy into being human, what it means to be a human being and be inter-humanly related. The other is as crucial in humanizing individuals, calling them back from lostness in the 'they self' ('the one') to the being human of authentic selfhood, as is the experience of anticipating death in individualizing selfhood.

Empathy as taking a stand for the other

The other individual shows up in empathy in diverse ways and according to a common pattern. The other appears as the parent taking care of the infant, ministering to the chronic emergency of early infancy, and then creating the possibility of an empathic inquiry into what it means to be human in the process of growing up, maturing, becoming an adult human being. The other individual shows up as an unavoidable

inevitability of demands of the other to be responsible (for example, according to Levinas, 1961). The other shows up as another mind that one finds endlessly perplexing (as in John Wisdom or Edmund Husserl in certain phases). The other shows up as suffering that requires a response and support, according to the parable of the Good Samaritan where, for the unfortunate traveller, who was attacked by thieves and left for dead, the other is precisely the life-giving Samaritan, whose empathy grasps the stricken traveller as his neighbour (not his Jewish adversary) and compels him to acts of altruism (however, the altruism is not reducible to empathy or vice versa). The other shows up as the friend in the empathic relationship of friendship as the two individuals, by their conversation and interactions, undertake an inquiry into what it means to be friends. The other shows up the moral law exemplified by the other (as in Kant). The other shows up as a gracious and generous (empathic) listening in so many situations, including formal therapy. All of these, according to pattern, amplify the 'taking a stand' (Heidegger 1927a: 296–297; H322) into an empathic taking a stand for another, that is, literally *being there* for the other – in empathy as an individual human being takes a stand for the other.

In empathy, an individual human being takes a stand for the other. Such a stand can look like 'tough love', as in intervening with an addict. Or the stand may well be to let the other struggle to come to grips with her or his possibilities rather than leaping in and taking them away from the other. Or it may be that the other is reminded in a calm (*gelassen*) but resolute way about living up to what is possible for her or him, but of which the individual is temporarily unaware. All these possibilities – and more – occur.

The 'taking a stand' by which the issue is engaged is informed by the respect for the other. It is informed by empathic receptivity, the interpreted possibilities of empathic understanding, and the committed falling silent and rich stillness of empathic listening. Only if one listens, can one hear the call of the self, including the other's self calling the other one back to its own authentic possibilities. If one listens, then one can release the other into hearing his own call to himself. In unpacking affectedness in possibilities of understanding as an interpretation that articulates possibilities of the other, taking a stand as listening is precisely the kind of distinction that is required by a full, rich way of being with human being that is empathy.

Human beings are the beings for whom their being is at issue. The structure of that issue is designated by 'care'. *Dasein* – both the word and the phenomenon of human being – does *not* distinguish between

one human being or many human beings. This is a fine point. Here it is crucial, and one of the reasons that Heidegger chose it. Here it might be best to translate *Dasein* as 'human existence', since the latter does *not* distinguish the individual and the other. *Dasein* is a form of life – a way that a human being engages in being human.³ 'Care' indicates that humans are the kind of beings for whom their own being is an issue. This includes the distinction between oneself and the other. Therefore, the structure of care maps directly to empathy as being an entity for whom being is an issue for oneself *and* for the other.

Empathy and trauma

The relation between one's own death and the death of the other invites further inquiry. One's own death must be distinguished as a structure of being human (*Dasein*) that is a moment-by-moment possibility and one's physical demise as one's body wears out or is otherwise physically destroyed. Unless otherwise noted, 'one's own death' refers to death as a moment-by-moment possibility for humans.

The loss of the other ruptures the structure of authentic care in a way completely different than fleeing into the inauthentic distractions and diversions of the busy conformity of 'the they self', 'the one'. The death of the other – the other's demise – is an event that leaves me bereft of the authentic ministering, solicitude and humanization of the other – in short, results in a loss of empathy. In contrast, the possibility of my own death (as a structure of being human) is an authentic wake-up call, individualizing me in the face of emerging possibilities to be positively implemented in my life. The former closes off the other as possibility; the latter opens up possibility for oneself. These two results are significantly different. Yet some researchers have tended to conflate these two events as parallel – even interchangeable – kinds of trauma.

For example, Robert Stolorow draws a powerful parallel between the experience of the traumatic loss of a loved one as other and experience of anxiety in the encounter with one's own death as an existential structure (1992; 2007).⁴ As narrated in the just cited references, after the sudden and traumatic loss of Stolorow's wife and professional collaborator, Dede, to cancer, his experience was that nothing mattered; the world of the everyday was shattered and empty. At the time, Stolorow had not yet read Heidegger and was literally at a loss for words to describe his experience of loss. He then engaged Heidegger's account of the way anxiety discloses death to human existence, precisely as a shattering experience of the everyday, in which nothing matters any longer to

the individual. It is not just that Stolorow's inquiry enabled him to express his loss and, thus, work through the processing of mourning; but it also put him in touch with a dimension of Heidegger's thinking that Stolorow and others (for example, Olafson (1998), Hatab (2000) and Agosta (1977)) assert was not fully developed, *Mitsein*.

While there is a large body of research engaging with *Mitsein* – either with or without empathy – introducing the distinction trauma raises an additional point that is usefully engaged. As we shall see, several areas open up for a productive conversation.

First, Dr Stolorow's courage in using his own searing personal experience as a source for his reflections and research on trauma should be acknowledged (Stolorow 2002; 2007). It cannot have been easy to expose such personal material to the not always empathic inquiries and speculations of others. It is worth respecting the integrity and completeness of his experience – he gets to say what counts as working through, soothing and healing for him in these matters. At the same time, terms such as 'trauma', 'neurosis', '*Mitsein*' and 'authentic being-with' have to be respected in reading Heidegger and, as applicable, Freud (and Kohut).

The analysis of trauma is a critical path; and a concise summary of Freud's position will be useful. The trauma of the emotional loss of a loved individual is distinct from the physical trauma encoded in post traumatic stress disorder or the double trauma that leads to neurotic symptoms. For Freud and for students of the modern name for it – 'post traumatic stress disorder' – in Freud's time 'shell shock' was named 'current' (*aktuell*) neurosis – the experience of physical traumas such as occur in repeated physical abuse or in the experiences of soldiers in constant danger at war is burned into the neural circuitry – encoded there – such that the experience is spontaneously repeated by the organism in dreams and symptoms in order to master the experience. In order to have the development of a neurotic symptom in classical psychoanalysis – where there is somatic compliance but not a somatic lesion – something more than physical traumatic experience of the kind at issue must occur. Thus, in Freud's famous case history on Dora (1905), Dora did not fall sick with hysterical symptoms the first time that Herr K. – her father's paedophilic friend – made sexual advances towards her when she was eight years old. However, the second time this occurred, when she was 14, the result was a hysterical episode as a result of which the good doctor (Freud) was called in to see if he could help keep the lid on this highly dysfunctional, even

'abusive', family situation (to use a term not available to Freud (Freud 1905; Hacking 1999)).

How does this map to Heidegger formally? Though no obvious analogue to 'trauma' is available in Heidegger, implicitly 'breakdown' is a superset of traumas of various kinds. Likewise, no obvious analogue of 'neurosis' is available. The human being lives into the future on the basis of its thrownness and facticity. But in ontical ('everyday') breakdown, what happens is that individual keeps putting a pattern from the past into its future, arguably in an inauthentic ('pseudo-neurotic') attempt to master it. When that pattern includes hidden and unacknowledged commitments deeply entangled in forgetfulness, then it starts to resemble neurotic behaviour in its grosser aspects. (Those readers who would like a further translation of psychotherapeutic terms into Heideggerian ones, see Letteri (2009) and Goldberg (2004).)⁵

Here is the objection to Dr Stolorow's position from a Heideggerian perspective: the loss of a loved one is a trauma different in kind from the 'trauma' of the loss of one's own *Dasein* in death, whether as actual demise or an existential possibility. The loss of a loved one – whether sudden or agonizingly slowly – is traumatic. In contrast, one's own death is an existential possibility and disruptive without being traumatic. In short, the 'trauma of death' in a Heideggerian perspective is a misnomer. The 'trauma of death' within a Heideggerian paradigm – where 'death' refers to one's own (not the other's) – is refuted by two counter-examples. (1) As an existential possibility, one's own death in bed after a fulfilling life, surrounded by family and friends, is a meaningful completion. It is not traumatic to the individual, though, from the perspective of the other, the loss to friends and relatives is a traumatic loss. To be sure, the disease and stress leading up to physical death are a source of trauma (assuming one does not die in one's sleep). Yet, such physical sufferings and pain are distinct from the death itself as an event ending one's life. As Wittgenstein says, 'Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death' (1921: §6.4311). It sounds at least a tad paradoxical to say that death is not traumatic. Yet it is not. The trauma accrues to those who survive and suffer due to the loss of the deceased's empathy (and affinity of diverse kinds). (2) As an ontic breakdown, being in an aeroplane crash is traumatic even if one survives it. This is especially obvious to those who survive a crash and experience nightmares, reliving the event in dreams, and triggering events that cause flashbacks, interfering with the person's everyday functioning. However, once again the trauma is in the pain and suffering leading up to one's

death, assuming that one does not survive the crash. In short, death is not inherently traumatic, although certain kinds of trauma can cause the individual's demise (that is, physical death). Physical pain is (or can be) traumatic. Loss of the other (and the other's humanizing empathy) is traumatic. However, death is not traumatic, either as an end point of life or as a moment-by-moment possibility that humans carry with them at all times.⁶

Thus, there is a positive sense in Heidegger in which ontological anxiety – disclosing the possibility of no possibility – no human being (*Dasein*) as a whole – calls one back from one's lostness in inauthenticity, providing a clearing for authentic commitments and engagements. Such anxiety is allegedly 'traumatic' in that it is an upset. Yet once again not every upset is a trauma. Here trauma goes into quotes – 'trauma'. Such Heideggerian anxiety in the face of death is 'traumatic', but in a positive ('healthy') sense of a breakdown that creates a clearing for new possibilities – and, thus, in quotations – in that it (anxiety) breaks up and shatters conformity. It disrupts the everyday without sending the individual into the closed loop of a pure traumatic stress disorder where the events of the trauma are repeated in dreams, fantasies, triggering flashbacks as the organism tries to master the stress. In a positive sense, the encounter with the ownmost possibility of no possibility causes the collapse of inauthentic lostness in the lonely crowd. In turn, this results in the collapse and clearing away of inauthentic distractedness, leading to the possibility of possibilities that call humans powerfully into engagement with meaningful projects of their own formulation. If this be trauma, we need more of it!

The relationship with the other and loss of the other is a central issue. What is the paradigm affect in which the other is disclosed? In short, the ownmost possibility of death is disclosed in the paradigm of anxiety just as Heidegger suggests; but the loss of the other does not so much result in anxiety as in apathy, lethargy, melancholy, depression. This also echoes remarks of Heinz Kohut about the loss of empathy that is functionally equivalent to – the loss of the other (see Kohut 1971, 1977; 1984 on selfobject in the section 'Empathy, the Self and the Selfobject'). While anxiety is a fundamental affect through which many other affects are transformed even in Freud (see 1926), still the phenomenologies of anxiety and melancholy (depression) are distinct. It is a minor oversight that Stolorow has side-stepped this. Stolorow's invocation of 'being towards loss' – a phrase based in Heidegger but not used by Heidegger – captures much of this traumatic loss of the other (and in that we are in agreement).

However, without trying to second-guess Stolorow's own interpretation of his own painful loss, there is a fundamental distinction between anxiety and depression. A basic distinction exists between the disclosing of the individuality of human beings through anxiety and the depressive, lethargic disclosing of the loss of the other and, closely related, the other's humanity bestowing vitality and feeling of being alive. Granted, anxiety and depression have many diverse forms. The relevant forms here include both global, free floating anxiety and melancholy that inspires apathy, lethargy, felt lack of energy, emptiness. Both of these forms disclose and correlate to an everyday world that has become meaningless and in which nothing matters. The analogy between the loss of meaning in the encounter with existential death and the loss of meaning in the death of the other is perfect; yet the significance and quality of the experience(s) are divergent. As usual, what is phenomenologically the same symptom has two different significations. In the one case, the human being is individualized in his or her authentic aloneness, in the other, the individual is humanized in his or her authentic being with the other, albeit in a privative mode of the other (loss). When the traumatic experience is engaged and provided with a gathering context in which it is held as a parent might hold and comfort a baby (to invoke Stolorow's analysis), then the repetitive grip of the trauma slackens. When the traumatic experience is recreated in a conversation with the other and the other's gracious and generous listening (to use a Heideggerian idiom) and is then integrated with the self through an empathic immersion in the life of the other (to invoke Heinz Kohut's approach (1977)), then the grip which the trauma has on the experience of the individual is broken and the experience begins to fade, even if it never completely disappears.

It is hardly a 'show stopper' that some readers of Heidegger object to Stolorow's using the term 'intersubjectivity' as implying relations between consciousnesses that recruits the subject-object distinction, which, of course, is the bad, Cartesian paradigm of Being. For Stolorow, 'intersubjectivity' refers to the context of inter-human relations, human inter-relations, in short, *Mitsein*. Still, a less charitable reading of 'intersubjectivity' could find ammunition for controversy since 'subjectivity' is a major target of Heidegger's debunking.

Empathy and altruism

The process of humanization is radicalized in the extreme situation of the loss of the other and the loss of the other's empathy. However, this

is not the only paradigm in which the individual and other undertake an empathic inquiry into being human in which humanness emerges and blossoms forth. In the above section, we considered how the Good Samaritan and the rescued individual undertake an inquiry into what it means to be a neighbour as the one individual humanizes the other through empathy and, in turn, becomes the target of empathic receptivity. Empathic receptivity discloses the affects and experiences of the other as vicarious experiences of mine. Empathic understanding discloses the other in an interpretation of her or his possibilities that are prior to any particular moral or immoral pattern of behaviour on the part of the other or of oneself. Empathy indicates what the other is experiencing; morality, what the individual ought to do about it. Thus, as a way of disclosing possibilities, empathy can be used for good or for harm. Empathy tells me vicariously what the other is experiencing, what is possible for the other, and how that all can be articulated in listening and speaking with the other. Once again, empathy tells me what the other is experiencing; morality tells me what one must (or may) do about it.

Note that the following examples of the atrocities of Nazis and other torturers are not morally permissible according to any intuition or standard of which I am aware. In addition, such uses of empathy point in the direction of multiple empathic phenomena such as emotional contagion, gut reactions and primal pity that are *not* empathy yet overlap with and rely on some of the same somatic and semantic functions.

Loss of the other through the transformation of the other into someone who says 'you should not be' – an actively hostile force – results in 'world collapse' and a kind of death in life – zombie behaviour. Events still occur in space and time as physical changes; but nothing matters emotionally and affectively. If one survives the immediate shock, the path to a new possibility is a steep one, lying through what is sometimes called radical hope (Lear 2008), and arguably requires the creation of possibility in the face of no possibility (hopelessness). There is no hope, where 'hope' means 'possibility' until hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates.⁷

Empathy can be used for good or harm

Like any powerful method and interpersonal technology, empathy can be used for good as well as harm. During the invasions of Poland and the Netherlands in 1939 and 1940, the Nazis attached sirens to the Stuka dive bombers creating an uncanny noise that seemed to get inside the heads and hearts of the civilian population causing empathic distress.

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Although it may sound strange, even diabolical, to say it, this was based on Nazi empathy with the intended victims. Likewise, the web of lies with which the intended victims of the gas chambers were deported, greeted and executed were based on a sensitivity and access to the experience of the intended victims that makes the deeds all the more chilling and execrable. Second only to this web of lies were the self-deceptions, linguistic contortions, euphemisms and bureaucratic distantiation with which the Nazis had to surround the entire process, which in no way excuses the atrocities and crimes. First, the victims were told they were being relocated to live. Then they were told they were being relocated to work. Then they were greeted with slogans. Then they were told it was time to take a shower. Then they were gassed. The brevity of this account is in no way intended to dishonour the many who suffered innocently and whose memory should always be cherished. The brevity is intended to highlight the exquisite empathy with which the barbarians prepared for the demise of the victims.

Likewise, the attendance of doctors at sessions in which subjects are being interrogated using torture, not restricted to Nazi atrocities, is done out of ontic empathy, although not out of ontological empathy for the individual being interrogated, thus indicating the latent contradiction. 'If the subject dies, you are doing it wrong' is said of the methods of interrogation, which are clearly not caring. On the contrary, they are violent, humiliating and designed to cause the person to insert the pain and humiliation into the realm of 'mineness' – to make the pain 'mine' – owned – in such a way that she or he cannot live with her- or himself even after the physical pain ends. The empathic torturer, who embodies a combination of words outrageous, tragic and diabolical, creates agony in such a way that even after the agony and the screams of agony are finished, the victims cannot put themselves back together. The victims are made complicitious in their own dishonouring so that the fragmentation seems irreversible; the dishonour takes on the air of 'mineness', even if one escapes from the dungeon. Thus, for example, in the climatic torture scene in George Orwell's *1984*, Winston is credibly threatened with an awful fate – having rats eat his face – shades of Freud's *Ratman* are here displaced upwards – and Winston spontaneously invents the possibility that he should be spared and O'Brien (the torturer) should do that to the woman Winston loves, Julia, rather than to him. In his mental and automatic flight into survival, Winston invents this idea spontaneously. The confession is accepted and he eventually returns to life in the negative fantasy of the future. Whereas before Winston (and the reader) enjoyed an island

of emotional wholeness amidst the desolation of life where Big Brother was always watching, the alien other invaded the island and has broke it up. Big Brother got inside his sphere of mineness (ownness) and dishonoured his love for Julia. The integrity is gone. Even though the betrayal occurred under the most extreme duress – and it should never be represented any other way nor should those who confess be blamed in any way – something dear was lost and something alien substituted for it. Even after much therapy and many reconstitutive experiences and emotionally corrective interactions – something that cannot happen to Winston or Julia but could occur for a victim of a Russian, North Korean or Iranian dictatorship who escapes – something like the integrity of oneself will still have been damaged. Empathy discloses an ontological kernel of otherness in the other that is eminently worthy of respect – and, in that sense, has a core of integrity that points towards morality. However, such a kernel of empathic respect does not prevent an individual ontically misusing the empathy to control, dominate, manipulate, the other as victim. A long recovery is contemplated (and should be undertaken). The (mis)use of empathy in such ontic context challenges the ontological stand that relations with others are an inquiry into humanization. The fact that human interactions can be turned towards domination and control does not diminish the possibility of choosing inclusion, fellowship, and expanding horizons of empathic neighbourliness.

The evidence gathered by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* support the conclusion that Himmler used empathy in order to take good care of his men, Nazi soldiers. Arendt does not use the word 'empathy', although she describes a mechanism that provides input to empathy – emotional contagion and 'animal pity'. The parallel with empathy is striking, though, once again, empathy is not reducible to it.

Grasping these ideas requires putting one's thoughts and sensibility in a place where they usually do not venture. In the early days of World War II and prior to the automation of killing in the death factories such as Auschwitz, it was difficult for soldiers and paramilitaries to kill people for eight hours a day by shooting them. However, continuous killing is what was required of the Nazis soldiers when there are so many people to kill. That was what the so-called special intervention groups (*Einsatzgruppen*) had to do. In addition, it is difficult to watch people suffering over so long a period of time, especially if you have insufficient bullets to shoot or gas them all immediately. This is a challenge for any approach to genocide, even after the intended victims have been marked with a yellow star or otherwise 'branded', equated with vermin,

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insects, and dehumanized. On the street, people still look like humans when we confront them face-to-face or even face-to-back. The misuse of the Nazi concept of duty, which only superficially resembles a deontological one, has been often noted. It occurs again here and should never be mentioned without being challenged. Briefly, the fallacy consists in making an exception for a subset of humans, thus contradicting one's own humanness. Even formally, the good Nazi morally contradicts himself – a consistency in shooting only one or a few types of persons (in addition to Jews – gypsies, communists, Catholic converts, gays, mentally retarded, physically disabled – the list grows tellingly) – is inconsistency pure-and-simple. Arendt is worth quoting at length:

The murders were not sadists or killers by nature; on the contrary, a systematic effort was made to weed out all those who derived physical pleasure from what they did. The troops of the *Einsatzgruppen* [responsible for shooting] had been drafted from the Armed S.S., a military unit with hardly more crimes in its record than any ordinary unit of the German Army, and their commanders had been chosen by [Chief Commander] Heydrich from the S.S. elite with academic degrees. Hence the problem was how to overcome not so much their conscience as the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick used by Himmler – who apparently was rather strongly afflicted with these instinctive reasons himself – was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people! the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders.

(Arendt 1971: 105–106)⁸

While life is filled with moral ambiguities and difficult ethical choices, this is hardly one of them. What was done was wrong and to be condemned in the strongest terms. Nor is lack of empathy what represents the moral problem. It is the killing.

Arendt's use of 'self' is not intended by her in any technical sense, but is simply the soldier himself. What made it easier for the soldiers to do their 'duty' – commit genocide – was the manipulation by the leaders to deflect the individual soldier's natural empathy for the prisoner and to increase the soldier's empathy for himself, deflecting the natural trajectory towards the other. The 'animal pity' and 'instinctive

reasons' against killing creatures that look like humans are an incomplete form of empathy, based in a mechanism like emotional contagion. In *Emile*, Rousseau refers to a pre-reflective sentiment of pity. 'I am, so to speak, in him, it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer. I am more interested in him for love of myself, and the reason for the precept is in nature itself, which inspires in me the desire of my well-being in whatever place I feel my existence' (cited in Birmingham 2006: 42). Himmler was afflicted with what Martin L. Hoffman (2000) describes as 'empathic distress'. This condition is not limited to killers. Recall the dentist in *Buddenbrooks*, Dr Brecht, who, after a difficult tooth extraction, had to sit down, wipe the sweat from his brow and take a drink of water to relieve the stress. Dr Brecht experienced the pain and suffering of his patients to a nearly debilitating degree.⁹ Yet if developed with a robust concept of the other, taking the point of view of others, such emotional contagion or instinctive pity towards suffering becomes the basis of vicarious experiences, which, in turn, are essential input to the capability of full blown, adult, mature empathy.

Of course, let's not be dismissive about the challenge that existed in a high degree for those soldiers ordered to do the shooting. They often came down with psychiatric symptoms such as insomnia, loss of appetite, apathy, impotence and disinterest in returning home to the family on leave or furlough. Obviously in comparison with a bullet in the back of the head, such symptoms pale. Yet they were not trivial and provide evidence that much was amiss and, most tellingly, show that people knew things were amiss from the inside. Soldiers and guards lived with much that was amiss and unsaid. That is the point – the assertion of ignorance on the part of the participants is (was) a sham. This is reported extensively by Bruno Bettelheim in his essays 'Individual and mass behavior in extreme situations' (1943) anthologized in *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (1960). These symptoms seem like a triviality in comparison with mass murder, yet, again, the telling point is that these individuals' symptoms were common, which, of course, in no way excuses the conduct. Those who refused or found excuses were told to pack up and were sent into combat on the Eastern Front against Russia. So choices existed, albeit tough ones. I will not be so presumptuous to say what I would have done – no one can – although I hope it would have been the right thing, packing extra wool socks.

One more point is worth noting about Arendt's quotation, namely, that a systematic effort was made to screen out sadists and those who gave evidence of deriving pleasure from killing. Presumably these

individuals did not make efficient or effective killers over the long term; whereas those who performed their acts out of mechanical obedience ('duty'), which is what the Nazis valued most, did. In contrast with the soldiers experiencing empathic distress who Himmler was 'counselling', the sadist is so isolated and deadened against all affect that the infliction of pain becomes a way of recovering affect. In a truly awful scenario, the sadist becomes caught up in watching the victim writhe in agony, feeling enlivened and, literally in a perverse way, 'humanized', and does not follow orders efficiently. This position has a name – 'isolism' – and attempts to re-establish an empathic connection with the other individual through the arousal of an entire spectrum of feelings extending from play-acting to excruciating forms of pain (Goldberg 1995: 139, 144).¹⁰

One might try to turn these examples in the direction of an ethics of caring based on empathy by saying in effect, 'Look at how fundamental empathy is'. Empathy is indeed fundamental. Yet what is missing from such a turning is a use of empathy that always supplies its own ethically informed application. Empathy does *not* supply its own ethical application. Empathy does indeed supply the otherness of the other – simply stated, the other. It is a separate step to minister to the other, say altruistically, or not minister to the other. The empathy provides access to the suffering of the other. It is a further step to take action to reduce that suffering in line with other ethical conditions and qualifications or run away in empathic distress.

The idea is not that this is a pathological instance of empathy which is otherwise a solid foundation for an ethics of caring. Rather this is a pathological, distorted, immoral use of empathy. The morality is separate from the empathy and neither necessarily grounds the other, although arguably both point to a common root in human beings as the source of possibility. It will not be practical to argue at this late point whether humans are intrinsically good or evil. Human beings are intrinsically human. This means intrinsic possibility. Human possibilities include both good and evil, as well as empathy. The evidence provided by the history of the 20th century is not encouraging, yet it is not too late to turn it around. Humans are also capable of great good works as demonstrated in the agricultural revolution of high yield grains that ended hunger for decades and medical 'miracles' such as the eradication of small pox and other diseases, which saved many, many millions of lives. The election of Barack Obama as President resulted in Michelle Obama, the great-great-granddaughter of a slave, becoming the First Lady of the United States (*The Washington Post* 2008). The latter was not possible even 50 years ago, given 'legal' segregation. No doubt,

cynics will find a flaw in every accomplishment and assure that no good deed goes unquestioned. Indeed the consequences of our actions often escape us; and the propagation of forgiveness is an innovation and recommendation well counselled (Arendt 1926/65, 1971; Tutu 1999). Likewise, it is a part of the possibility of empathy to be so used and abused, although humans with integrity and character will undertake the positive development of empathy so that the misuse does not occur or is made less likely.

The upshot is that the core of empathy that discloses the other as the target of respect occurs in a context in which human beings are capable of committing radically immoral actions such as the planning, implementation and denial of genocide. As an everyday, ontic tool for understanding others, empathy is easily used for good or evil. As an ontological capability that positions the other as granting humanization to the one individual, empathy is no better (or worse) than the possibilities of humanness bestowed in the inter-human granting by the other. Empathy can both humanize and victimize without pain of contradiction because being human includes the possibility of victimization. Without in any way blaming the victims of crimes, the other as victim rarely succeeds in humanizing the perpetrator. Rarely, but not never: civil disobedience of the kind advocated by Martin Luther King in his celebrated 'Letter from a Birmingham jail' (1963) documents the appeal to the conscience of the other – the racist sheriff as well as the local African American business people – in paying the fine or serving the jail time (two weeks for disturbing the peace). These people were not behaving like neighbours. King's appeal to their consciences through civil disobedience created the possibility of neighbourliness for the first time, literally out of indifference and animosity. There is no guarantee of humanization. Empathy comes down ontologically on the side of human flourishing and well-being as exemplified in the liberal tradition. Yet empathy is weak. Humanization is and remains a task. One has to be aroused out of one's cynicism, pessimism and resignation upon looking at human history to engage the task of creating a community that works and inspires the possibility of empathy for all humans, expanding the boundary of neighbourliness, as did the Good Samaritan, to encompass someone who might have been an enemy, the radically other. This is not a given, but a point on the horizon towards which we lurch forward empathically, and all-too-often backward, in a dynamic movement. At times it seems we are going in a circle. At other times, we go forward on hands and knees, face in the dust, but advancing nonetheless.

Empathy: brought to language as narrative

A full, rich silence in which listening is in the foreground, is not the only way empathy is brought into language. As Heidegger notes, assertion (statement) is a derivative mode of interpretation. Our affect-ness is storied and empathy is required and useful to distinguish the narrative with which human beings surround their affectedness from what actually happened. A wealth of narrative is constellated around affectedness – or emotions, moods, sensation, affects, feelings – and it will exhaust all the narrative that we humans bring to affectedness and take as a source for narrative elaboration and still have more to say (as in the above quotation about the one who ‘is never short for words’).

People bring meaning to the reactive (‘imperative’) emotions such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness as well as the ‘narrativized’ emotions such as pride, love, envy, shame, guilt, hate, jealousy, humility. In the latter case, complete assertions, including subjects and predicates, enter into the matter, although not in a reductive way. These assertions are in effect narratives – very short ones in some cases – that we bring to our emotions as we elaborate them (our emotions) into narratives. These narratives extend all the way from confabulation – pure invention about the meaning of what happened – through rationalization – spinning motives in a favourable way, although distorted by self-interest – to nuanced articulation of the ‘reasons of the heart’ of which reason is ignorant as expressed in poetry, literature and authentic conversation. This does not necessarily mean that the emotions are assertions (or judgements) or should be expressed as such. In short, that ‘the emotions are like narratives’ means that a wealth of narrative surrounds them. As noted, the emotions will exhaust all the narrative we bring to them and continue to motivate story-telling. As interpretation, empathy is openness to affectedness ‘from below’ and a search for empathic re-descriptions ‘from above’. In turn, this empathy opens up innovative interpretations, disclosing possibilities, exposing blind spots and calling the other back to authentic human relations. Let’s look further at how the key distinctions of a special hermeneutic of empathy are exemplified in narrative.

Example of the act of empathic receptivity between Thomas and Hanno *Buddenbrooks*

The following narrative exemplifies vicarious experience as an input to empathy. Let’s look at an example from literature that stimulates the reader’s empathic receptivity and provides a segue to empathic

understanding. In Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, the head of the family, also named Thomas, has ignored, even denied, his artistic sensibilities in order to take over and operate the family business upon his father's untimely death. As a substitute fulfilment of his artistic tendencies, Thomas has married the beautiful and musically talented Gerda Arnoldsen, who plays fantastic virtuoso duets with her father. Their son, Hanno (short for Johann), seems to have inherited all the artistic genes from both parents and none of the business acumen from his father's side. Though musically gifted, Hanno is sickly, has an irregular heartbeat and teeth prone to cavities. He is bullied at school by the blonde, strapping Nordic types and tends to draw a mental blank, bursting into tears, as his father (Thomas) asks him to recite his fourth grade school lessons. The relations between father and son are strained. Thomas is loving enough but maintains a stern, north German exterior (appropriate to 1901 when the book was published) in order to toughen his son up and prepare him for the rigors of business. Hanno is fearful and hostile, in turn, just wanting to be left alone to enjoy his rich fantasy life: thus the setting.

Meanwhile, a complication occurs for Thomas. In the absence of her father, Gerda has started playing musical duets with Lieutenant Herr von Throta. 'Musical duets' have the same resonant ambiguity then and now. The Lieutenant has declined invitations from Thomas to come to dinner. In one scene, Gerda and the Lieutenant are in the music salon directly above Thomas's office (the latter located in the back of the grand house in grand 19th century fashion). This is not necessarily going where the modern reader might expect. Mann is masterful in describing the hour long silences between music makings, creating in the reader the agonizing sense of uncertainty from which the husband was also suffering. In the context of north German social mores, circa 1900, what crosses the line of social propriety is the passion in the music making, not necessarily any physical dalliance. Yet like an ambiguous visual illusion, the duck-rabbit or the Necker cube, neither the readers nor the town gossips can be certain. Mann's empathy with the reader enables him to communicate powerfully the *angst* that Thomas, his character, is feeling, which the reader, in turn, directly experiences through empathic identification with Thomas. However, in addition to Mann's use of his language to invoke empathy in the reader, Mann also describes empathic receptivity in the characters in the text itself. It is a two-in-one example, in which empathy is wrapped in empathy. We join the text as Thomas encounters his son Hanno outside the music salon and questions him in his friendly, exaggeratedly manly and 'hail fellow, well

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met' way about Hanno's lessons. Hanno gives his usual, halting, slightly fearful, clumsy answers, wishing to himself he had done better:

But his father did not seem to be listening. He held Hanno's free hand and played with it absently, unconsciously fingering the slim fingers.

And then Hanno heard something that had nothing to do with the lesson at all: his father's voice, in a tone he had never heard before, low, distressed, almost imploring; 'Hanno – the lieutenant has been more than two hours with Mamma.'

Little Hanno opened wide his gold-brown eyes at the sound; and they looked, as never before, clear large, and loving, straight into his father's face, with its reddened eyelids under the light brows, its white puffy cheeks and long stiff moustaches. God knows how much he understood. But one thing they both felt: in the long second when their eyes met, all constraint, coldness, and misunderstanding melted away. Hanno might fail his father in all that demanded vitality, energy and strength. But where fear and suffering were in question, there Thomas Buddenbrooks could count on the intimacy and devotion [*des Vertrauen und Hingabe*] of his son. On that common ground they met as one.

(*Buddenbrooks* 1901: 507; modified to include *Vertrauen* (intimacy based on trust), which was omitted from the translation).

This nicely integrates the two forms of empathic receptivity, voice and face, with a gesture in the direction of touch, since Thomas holds his son's hand. A fine-grained change in the tone of voice – a low and distressed tone that Hanno had never heard from his exaggeratedly manly and strong father before – causes Hanno to turn and look at his father's face, which he had otherwise been avoiding due to the cross examination about the school lessons. As a boy, Hanno does not conceptually understand that his mother, Gerda, has crossed the lines of social propriety (at least in her husband's opinion), that the neighbours are gossiping that Thomas's young wife is making a fool of him; that if he summarily throws the lieutenant out of his house, that will make the brewing scandal even worse – then he (Thomas) will be a laughing stock in the town, since the lieutenant will gossip, and, worse again, then Thomas will look foolish to his wife – the very caricature of a jealous husband.

The empathic receptivity is Hanno's. He senses that his father's strength masks fear. His father's cheerfulness is superficial, masking

suffering. He senses that his father's stern exterior, energy, dynamism and businesslike busyness conceals a sense that matters are not what they seem, not in order as they should be in a good, German, burgher household.

Initially Hanno has access to the suffering because he too has suffered. He does not attribute his own misery over his lessons, being bullied or his sense of failing to live up to his much idealized father's expectations. Hanno does not put himself in the place (shoes) of his father 'as if', neither consciously or unconsciously. As an only child, he has spent his entire life thinking that this is just the way things are – 'Bullied at school, cannot seem to please my father, who is strong and wonderful, my teeth get drilled and extracted by the dentist' (and remember this is 1901 so we are talking extreme physical pain). Life really is a veil of nine year old tears. Hanno does not need to draw any inferences. But he uses his experiences, which are sufficiently broad and deep, to constitute a certain level of expertise in mental anguish and spiritual pain, in order to recognize suffering when he sees it. And this is it: his father's tone of voice is the trigger, and his father's puffy, stressed face, which looks like it has been crying, but actually is just overwork and misery, is further confirming experience. For a brief moment, Hanno is in the same position as the psychoanalyst who finds playfulness concealed behind sadness (mourning). Hanno finds weakness behind strength; suffering behind superficial 'hail fellow, well met' cheerfulness. In that moment, something became possible that was not present previously and Hanno saw an aspect of his father's humanness undisclosed before. His father was vulnerable and could be trusted as a fellow traveller in finitude.

Without empathy, trust (*Vertrauen*) becomes a dicey, unreliable and fragile attitude. Trust is indeed an attitude, an expectation that the other is reliable and will perform as expected, as promised. Prior to this encounter, such a feature was missing from the relationship between father and son. Once it is established, trust is self-sustaining, like the excellence of the virtuous man in Aristotle for whom the practice of the good has become habitual.

One might argue that, 'under the hood', Hanno's human biocomputer and its mirror neurons are simulating the distress in the voice and face of his father, enabling Hanno to 'get it'. And, no doubt, mechanistic processes are being discharged. If Hanno and his father were able to plug miniature functional magnetic resonance imaging machines (say) into their ears and the read outs were captured, then the moment at which their eyes touched would indeed show a spike in the discharge of mirror neurons. Something happened, and it is represented in this

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gigabyte of data. What it would *not* show is the human meaning as 'all constraint, coldness, and misunderstanding melted away.' What it would not show is empathic understanding of the possibility that this big, strong guy suffers too. What it would not show is the possibility of a human relationship between father and son as vulnerable individuals that trust one another intimately. There are many reasons for this. One is that the *f*MRI has the temporal constraint character of a tool being used right now; whereas Hanno and Thomas are open to time across all three temporal dimensions. These temporal dimensions, in turn, enable them to put the past back into the past and create a new possibility, living into the future, a loving, intimate and affectionate relationship instead of a hostile and fearful one.

This document is also a rich witness to empathic understanding. Hanno may not be a top scholar or good at sports, but he is an expert in suffering. His entire life is one conflict between his artistic talent, his rich fantasy life (not depicted in the selected quote) and a Hanseatic League, mercantile trading milieu in northern Germany (Lübeck) and parallel family milieu. In particular the latter, that defines what is possible for males in his social class, a career in business, politics, law or drinking and gambling. Hanno's Uncle Christian, who has artistic talent, an ability to mimic people in a genuinely funny way and a rich sense of irony that might have made him a stellar theatrical actor, pursued the latter – drinking and gambling, because it was simply not imaginable that he would pursue the theatre as a career.

The reader may object that Hanno does not really have empathy with his father. For example, the statement that 'God knows how much he understood' could be read as 'only God knows' and neither Hanno nor his father know. Hanno and his father just share suffering by being immersed in suffering (due to unrelated causes). Such a reading cannot be ruled out totally. However, I would rather give Hanno the benefit of the doubt. The 'God knows' provides emphasis to the assertion that Hanno knows all-too-well. Hanno's experiences are brought to bear on his relationship with his father in a way that, although painful, is basically a breakthrough in understanding the possibility of his father's humanness. That is what makes this episode a positive one for both the participants. The constraints of the past evaporate. This makes possible a new level of intimacy. This contrasts with (say) the over-stimulating flood of affect that creates empathic distress, as when Hanno is cross-examined about his studies by his father in a misguided attempt to relate. We also see an example of the latter in the character of the dentist, Herr Dr Brecht, whose would-be empathy for his patients is such

that he breaks out in a cold sweat and has to sit down exhausted after each dental procedure. In short, Dr Brecht has available the vicarious experiences that would make him a good empathizer if he were able to control them; but, having an especially sensitive delicacy of empathy, instead he falls prey to empathic distress.

The hermeneutic of empathy: a bridge over troubled waters

The bridge is one over troubled waters. Human suffering is vast and deep. The motivation for another analysis of empathy is the intention of relieving suffering. For all the limitations of Heidegger's analysis of human being – and of its all-too-human author – the possibilities are unmistakable. Granted that, according to Heidegger, the modern understanding of being and of being human, that is, history, wandered from the way of truth of Parmenides at about the time that Plato tried to write down the teachings of Socrates and develop a theory of ideas with presence at its core; granted that everyone who touches metaphysics, including Heidegger, seems to be ensnared by it; is there any point in pursuing the possibility of relieving suffering? Life is tough and then one dies; get over it. Is that the only consolation of philosophy? Is this back sliding into humanism?

These are all 'big ideas' and invite an equally grand scale response; yet none is available here. Instead the invitation is to a special hermeneutic of empathy – 'special' because, as an inquiry, it is an example of itself. Humans inquire into what it means to be human, and the inquiry itself humanizes. Thus, a special hermeneutic of empathy in the spirit of Heidegger is not humanism, it is a clearing for the possibility of being human; it is not existentialism, it is the clearing for the possibility of human possibility; it is not morals, it is a clearing for respect, integrity, altruism and a recognition of who is one's neighbour that expands one's humanness; it is not psychotherapy, it is a clearing for human interrelatedness in the context of an inquiry into being human that unmask inauthentic behaviour and relieves emotional distress; it is not aesthetics, it is a clearing for the communicability of affect; it is not rhetoric, it is a clearing for being effective through language; it is not parenting, teaching or leadership, it is a clearing for a commitment to community, making a difference and improving the quality of life. Meanwhile, this hermeneutic of empathy is an attempt to light a single candle in the form of empathy against the darkness of human suffering. This does not require a regression into pity or fear or even an idealization into a sentimental utopia. What it does require is an appreciation of the challenges

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of the human condition – often called ‘difficulty’ – in the face of which empathy is more than a method and an ontic tool to lift ourselves up by our bootstraps, not like a treadmill of infinite progress, but rather like generating a possibility that was not visible before and as a concrete way of being with one another as a particular possibility to be implemented, a challenge to be engaged.

Thus, the result of this hermeneutic of empathy is a complete reworking of empathy based on a fundamental analysis of human being as being in the world. Let us summarize. Empathy is the silent listening to the possibilities of the self and other in affectedness as respect, as an understanding giving the other its own possibilities as an interpretive choosing of authentic selfhood in the face of commitment. Each of the design distinctions of humanness as being in the world is implemented as being with human being (i) in its affectedness in respect – as empathic receptivity, (ii) in understanding and its interpretive fore-structure – as empathic understanding, (iii) as first-, second- and third-person perspectives as empathic perspective taking and (iv) in silent speech where the one becomes the conscience of the other in taking a stand – as empathic listening. Empathy is where being with human being and being human are authentically disclosed as an authentic form of human relatedness. We live in a forgetfulness of the very possibility, of which this hermeneutic serves as a reminder. Empathy is the foundation of authentic inter-human relations. Thus, if, as Heidegger asserts, authentic being with one another (*Mitsein*) is the foundation of the ontological bridge between selves, and empathy is authentic being with one another, then empathy is indeed the ontological foundation of the bridge between selves.