

METHODICAL EMPATHY

Part 1: Background and Origin of Empathy

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Published in Slovakia as:

Zákulisie a pôvod empatie – Yehuda Tagar

Vitalita magazine, Bratislava Slovakia. Yehuda Tagar, April 2014 (pp.54-55)

Empathy is the greatest challenge of humanity today. Everyone needs it. It is in huge and growing demand. Empathy is the capacity to know the other from the other's own point of view, to understand the other from inside. It is not Sympathy - loving the other, nor Antipathy - hating the other. Empathy is the capacity to see, to hear and to know from the inside. We need empathy in our human interactions, yet we can't claim to have mastered it. Why?

Empathy is a baby in human evolution. Most people believe it was always there and are disappointed by the lack of empathy in their lives, because during the past fifty years, we now need it. How has that imbalance happened? Empathy was not always there. Even the word itself is new. Empathy is a new word for a new phenomenon.

Most people I meet in my journey across fifteen countries over twenty-four years believe the word empathy has existed for thousands of years. However, empathy is a new word for a new capacity, and is naming a new step in human evolution. Evolution is now taking place inside human nature, as we are the ones who are evolving further, not in our outer physical nature, but in our inner, soul and spiritual nature. The evolution of human empathy, can only take place consciously, as a practical outcome of the individual, free initiative to evolve personally. Empathy was coined as a term in 1909, and was first put to use in 1951. In the 1940 Oxford dictionary of philosophy and psychology – the word empathy does not exist.

A short history of empathy

Robert Vischer (1847-1933) was the first to put this word in print, in his doctoral thesis on the optical sense of form in 1873, and is considered its inventor. Theodor Lipps (1851-1914), an important philosopher of aesthetics, psychology and phenomenology, an inspirer of Sigmund Freud in regards to the notion of the unconscious, adopted the term from Robert Vischer and transformed it into 'Einfühlungsvermögen', the capacity for Einfühlung, in his aesthetic philosophical writings.

Edward Titchener (1867-1927), a British-American psychologist and founder of Structuralism, came across the words Einfühlung and Einfühlungsvermögen while he was studying in Germany under Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of experimental psychology. He liked the term and upon his appointment as a professor of psychology at Cornell University, New York, he tried to introduce the term Einfühlungsvermögen to America. Apparently the Americans did not take to this complicated German term. So, in 1909, Titchener coined afresh the term Empathy as a translation of Einfühlungsvermögen and he is known for doing this more than for his theoretical work.

In 1951, Carl Rogers (1902-1987), the co-founder of Humanistic Psychology, made Empathy into a scientific, cultural, usable term in his Person Centered Psychology. Rogers is the founder of Empathy as a psychological term. From there, it took off to designate the most important step in human evolution we are taking right now in order to understand each other in a new way; but only with freely chosen, conscious effort. The term returned to Europe in the form of *Empathi* and *Empatia*, and Europeans are convinced that it is an ancient Greek word.

How did we survive before empathy was created?

We used to understand each other instinctively through our common group soul in tribes, blood ties, traditions, religion, and nationality. As long as we were identified as inseparable components of a group organism – we did not need empathy as an individual attribute. And, there was no empathy between tribes. Tribes fought for thousands of years against each other with empires rising and falling.

Only with the rise of the sense of individual identity, consciousness, and thinking as a cultural force since the 16th century – that the power of the tribe started to fade, and the power of individuality grew stronger. By the middle of the 20th century the process of individuation became a normal attribute for human beings. The instinctive understanding between tribes of people no longer served interpersonal understanding. We became isolated through the growing awareness of the human 'I'. Only the human 'I' can take us out of that isolation, through the conscious act of Empathy.

Long before the term was coined, a theoretical foundation and a potential practical path of creating the new, futuristic capacity of Empathy, was founded by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). In 'The Philosophy of Freedom' (1894), the philosophical-epistemological groundwork for empathy was laid. In 'Knowledge of the Higher Worlds' (1904) a practical path of self development for everyone was outlined. In the 1910 'Psychosophy' lectures a framework was given for the development of an objective process of Self-Empathy, as a foundation for the future development of Empathy for others.

Applied Psychosophy and Psychophonetics were created in the 1980s and '90s in Australia and became a path of personal-spiritual development. Methodical Empathy was developed in Australia and South Africa between 2000 and 2005 and has now been taught in six countries, as part of the Psychophonetics Institute programs.

See me - Hear me - Know me are the three calls of the deepest human need, the three ideals for the future of humanity, and the three new competencies of Empathy. Part 2 will outline the process and application of Methodical Empathy. We can all take a step each day in creating empathy. This is the highest duty each of us can undertake for the future of humanity.

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