Why are we here?

Introduction

What does the World need now?
Social Interest?

Topics for Today
1. Empathy
2. Brain science
3. Systems

Two aspects of Empathy
1. Ability to perceive another’s feelings

1. Empathy
“feel with the heart of another”
Empathy? Yeah, I can see how that would be useful.

“The mask slips and the real Me is out: a predator on the prowl.”
—Sam Vaknin

Two aspects of Empathy

1. Ability to perceive another’s feelings
2. Ability to share what another feels

Most humans do share emotions...

...show compassion...

...lend a helping hand.
Empathy as gateway to altruism

- Emotions move us to action
- Despite skepticism, research shows no alternative but to admit that altruism happens...
- Under the condition of emotional empathy

Empathy enables human relationships.

Our survival requires relationships

How do we develop empathy?

2. Brain Science

Brain development requires social interaction

A healthy human brain...

...has the capacity (mirror neurons) to automatically mimic another’s behavior & feel what we would if we were doing it ourselves.
Brain areas activated in both physical pain & social rejection

Anterior Cingulate Cortex
Ventral Prefrontal Cortex

Why do we have this capacity?
A social species, dependent on others.
- Rejection by others signals social danger to ourselves.
- Feeling the pain of others signals need to protect them.

How to develop empathy?
By engaging in certain interactions:
Collaborative, contingent conversations
(...Dan Siegel)
We “attune” to & with others

Our brain is made for participation. We...
- see ourselves in the other’s eyes.
- automatically mimic, attune to what the other is feeling...about us.
- develop a mental picture of self as well as empathy for the other.
Thus, we grow capacity for empathy.

Empathy requires...
A healthy, integrated
- Physical
- Social &
- Mental System
None of these domains can exist without the other two.

Major Insight of 20th Century Physics:
Relationships are more fundamental than things.
Is this a system?
Many types of systems
- Mechanical
- Social
- Natural
- Complex
We were here

We begin to understand...

From small to large, everything is connected, everything is dependent on everything "sub specie aeternitatis"

However, as with interpersonal empathy, understanding alone is not enough.

Call to action

We know our global system is in crisis but are slow to act
If emotion is...
A neural impulse that moves an organism to action...

What the world needs now is...
Empathy for the Systems that sustain us...
*Systempathy*

Is Systempathy possible?
Can we have feelings for things?

Additional meaning of empathy
“The imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it.”

Empathy Bear feels your pain
The capacity for systempathy

Can be developed with practice in
- “Seeing” & “feeling” connections
- Giving & receiving graciously
- Recognizing context (situational attributions)
- Accentuating the positive
- Engaging in relationships that are...
Safe

Respectful

Nurturing

Hopeful

That is, social interest.

Systempathy

Summary

- We recognize our systemic connectedness, but we don’t yet feel for systems.
- Not as readily as we feel for one another.
- Systempathy—feeling our connectedness—may be part of developing a new brain...
- A brain that has compassion for the systems that sustain us as well as for people...
- A brain required for social interest.
Inquiry

How can the concept of systempathy enrich our understanding of social interest?

Thank you

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