

Wojciech Gulin 

Kolegium Jagiellońskie – Toruńska Szkoła Wyższa, Toruń

EMPATHY IN SOCIAL RELATIONS OF THE MODERN WORLD

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Abstract

The present day is characterized by many new technical and scientific solutions. The goal is probably to improve human existence. A computer and any related issues or a mobile phone; they are supposed to make life easier, but they also generate many negative phenomena. One of the most important is communication, increasingly poor in content (sms), “virtual world” at the expense of the real. Negative phenomena have also occurred from the social side. The sense of social exclusion is intensifying, which is a good example of older people. Empathy is the solution and also a way to address the negative tendency. It results in prosocial processes, through which people will look for direct relationships in interpersonal contacts, so there will be a renewal of interpersonal relationships that have characterized humanity for centuries.

Introduction

The modern world from the social side is characterized by many (often extremely different) phenomena. On the one hand, we observe or participate in many atrocities, on the other, there are social phenomena in which people support and help each other. There were many examples of both extreme human behaviors, especially in the twentieth century – war, totalitarianism with their victims, but also numerous examples of altruistic attitude, citing examples can be cited St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Saint. Maximilian Kolbe.

We have entered the current twenty-first century with similar social problems, we also observe wars but also positive behaviors. Helping such an individual aspect of a collective can be illustrated by many behaviors

– an example could be to rescue players who got stuck in a cave in Thailand.

One can draw quite an optimistic conclusion, well, despite many negative events, the world still exists, people in a significant number help each other, helping each other. Good, then, dominates evil. There are probably many reasons for this phenomenon. One of them, if not the most important, is empathy. It is this that largely influences the fact that people release behaviors that are helpful towards others.

It is therefore worth considering what empathy is. In the individual dimension, it is rather well known, although there will probably be supporters of the opposite opinion. In the context of the social functioning of larger or smaller social groups or larger communities, the role of empathy is potentially promising, while

in real terms there are many events or phenomena in which they are even said to be lacking.

The study will attempt to identify aspects in which empathy will probably have a decisive impact on social relations, which should also be reflected in specific areas of human activity, such as work, education and upbringing.

The modern world in a social perspective

Too rapid technological progress dynamically changes the quality of life, but it does not always serve to improve it, we are not able to fully adapt to the pace of new solutions. There are questions about the sense and purpose of faster and faster development of science, technology or economy. During the said development man “got lost”. Confirmation may be the increasing number of suicides.

The current postmodernism has led to the loss of meaning in life. Ethics and morality have become a matter of individual treatment by the individual “of what is good and bad, everyone decides on their own” (Bagrowicz, 2011, p. 123). At the present time, utility categories are assigned to values, not the other way around. Therefore, values less and less often determine and define behavior. Universal values are often obstacles to achieving goals. Therefore, there is a tendency to individualise the value: the mechanism is visible – yesterday the recognized value can be an obstacle today, so it is rejected.

The need to make in-depth reflection on human existence is increasingly signaled. It is necessary to recall again the importance of human dignity and the values he should live by. Reminding about the importance of human dignity is valid in every era, but it takes place in the changed, current for the new era socio-economic conditions. Therefore, interpersonal relationships are also disturbed.

There is another important factor affecting interpersonal relationships. These days are characterized by a slow disruption of the communication process. New technologies, facilitating the communication process, paradoxically impede direct relations and interpersonal communication, which in turn results in the accumulation of interpersonal or international conflicts. Let's take a look at what today's communication looks like?

People use the SMS language (160 characters), instead of emotions they put emoticons, the other person

as the current element of a direct relationship, becomes almost unnecessary in the process of communication. It is similar with social messengers. Resignation from direct contact with another person results in the loss of essential information elements such as facial expression, color of voice, way of speaking, silhouette, situation in which we meet. People are starting to have less and less to say to each other. This situation is conducive to focusing on yourself, the appearance of selfish behavior, which negatively affects the cohesion of societies

Thus, the pace of life lowers the level of functioning of cognitive and emotional processes (various types of equipment eliminate the human being in his activities), too much stress appears. Increasingly, interpersonal relationships are characterized by competition rather than cooperation. Systemic and economic changes cause a feeling of disturbance of stability in societies. There is often a sense of exclusion.

Empathy – definition problems

Empathy, being an individual process, affects relationships with another person. Actually, it can be said that without this relationship to other people, empathy makes no sense. It is therefore a link between aspects; individual and social life of man. It affects the increase of individual experience through possible assistance activities. It is worth noting here that empathy affects behavior towards another person but this behavior is not.

The relational character of human life was well reflected in M. Buber (1992) describing the relationship between “I” and “You”, while pointing to the increase of individual experience.

Using the philosopher's thoughts, S. Baron-Cohen (2015) also included the meaning of relationships in empathy. Every aspect of human functioning – from development, after all upbringing and everyday interpersonal contacts marked by empathy, will give grounds for positive prediction of their further course. Empathetic parents will raise their own child with a sense of dignity and respect for other people. Here comes another aspect that links empathy with values. Empathy is not a value, but it leads to them through the educational process. Showing parents the subjectivity of another person can probably only be done by empathy.

So what is empathy? We come across a lot of difficulty. There is no universal definition of empathy. The

most frequently cited term is showing empathy as “empathizing with someone else’s mental state” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, Makiełło-Jarża, 1989, p. 363).

Differences of views on empathy divide scientists so much that they speak of two somewhat separate types of empathy: cognitive and emotional. Proponents of cognitive empathy go a long way in their agonizing, ascribing it to, for example, psychopaths. P. Bloom (2017) stated that there is insufficient empirical evidence on the relationship between aggression and low level of empathy. The manipulative nature of psychopaths is therefore replaced by cognitive empathy. Other studies have found, however, that there is a relationship between high levels of empathy and low (or no) aggression (Eisenberg, 2008). As you can see, then, it would seem quite obvious in the light of research does not seem so indisputable.

Recently, there has also been a different view of empathy associated with mirror neurons, the authors of this approach see the sole cause of empathy in brain processes (Rizzolatti, Craighero, 2004).

Therefore, it is difficult to find a common denominator for reflection on empathy, especially its definition. However, some term should be recalled, according to which it will be presented in this study.

An interesting proposal for determining empathy was proposed by S. Barbara-Cohen (2015, p. 32), according to him “empathy is the ability to recognize the thoughts or feelings of another person and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with the right emotion.” The definition cited is quite general, but one can indicate the meaning of two spheres on its basis; cognitive and emotional – because there is the ability to recognize thoughts (cognitive sphere) or feelings (emotional sphere). The only caveat to the above-mentioned term empathy is the word “or” used by S. Baron-Cohen, because in relation to empathy it is more justified to use the conjunction “and”.

In this study, I would like to propose a slightly different distribution of emphasis in determining empathy, so it is an individual process that affects the reactions and social relationships in which the subject participates (directly or indirectly). It is made by positive; cognitive and emotional approach to the mental state of the perceived object. Empathy, in fact, complements the context of social life and influences the appearance of an assistance response to another person. I don’t value the size and scope of the subject helping others. They can be altruistic reactions or have a small range of help.

It is important because empathy arises and affects the subject’s behavior towards the object.

Empathy and social relations

Empathy by feeling in someone else’s mental state affects our behavior. Inclusion in the described process of the cognitive sphere indicates the participation of processes within it, such as: thinking, making decisions, gathering information, memory and imagination. Their involvement results in the fact that the subject collects information about the observed other person, on this basis, through a series of activities in the cognitive sphere, decides to empathize with the state of another person or does not undertake any emptification, which is connected with the occurrence of emotions.

Empathy plays a significant role in positive interpersonal relationships. It is one of several processes affecting them, let’s add – necessary. So if there is such a meaning, then what can be done to ensure that its level is satisfactory for social integration?

Defining the mental state of someone else is associated with several conditions that should be characterized by the empathizing subject, they are: “awareness of one’s own identity and a sense of individuality and uniqueness” (Gulin, 1994, p. 50). An important aspect is insight related to experience. It is also important to perceive these conditions in the perceived object through similarity. The basic condition, however, is the subjectivity of each person, resulting from the dignity of each person.

Referring to our own experience, it can be emphasized that we relate to someone else’s situation. However, if the other person finds himself in a situation unknown to the subject, then it can be assumed that even a high level of empathy will not cause behavior adequate to the observed conditions of another person. Assistance directed to another person may have the opposite effect. In empathy we embrace a second person through the prism of our own subjectivity (Gulin, 1994), hence the signaled importance of individual experience, its lack (in a specific situation) despite empathy prevents effective help from the subject. An example may be the results of research indicating the image of the older generation in terms of young people (Gulin, 2013).

Jeremy Rifkin (after Bloom, 2017) suggests changing the name from “homo sapiens” to “homo emphati-

cus". So this is a signal that shows the need for greater empathy in interpersonal relationships. Rifkin's idea is global empathy, dominating around the world, which he believes is necessary for everyday empathic interaction between people. Let's try to follow the idea of J. Rifkin and look for the prospect of empathy in our everyday lives. The obstacle is the above mentioned problem with the lack of a fairly widely accepted definition of empathy. Based on the current state of defining, the prospect of fulfilling the postulate of global empathy is difficult. Nevertheless, we will try to find a solution in this situation by searching for common elements in the authors' views in relation to the issue of empathizing with someone else's mental state. I would like to focus on these elements or aspects, which are not questioned in individual views.

The first common aspect is the agreement that empathy occurs through relationships between people, without empathy. Causes specific behavior of the subject towards another human being. It is the relationship of subject and object, and more precisely the relationship of subject to object. The subject empathizes, while the subject is the object of empathy. The subject and object in the process of empathy must have certain characteristics.

I mentioned the subjective conditions above. The features of the subject include: "behavior, appearance, position in space, time, relationship, situation" (Gulin, 1994, p. 51). They, in turn, will significantly affect the appearance of feeling, causing helpful behavior that the subject directs towards the object. Let us add here that empathy is not behavior but influences it. Here, there is a very important aspect, which is also consistent among the authors of individual empathy theories, namely altruism or egoism in connection with the level of empathy (or lack thereof).

It is worth focusing on the proposal to include the concept of "zero empathy", used and explained by S. Baron-Cohen (2015), associated with selfish behavior in the context of empathy. This term is associated with not only selfish behavior but also harmful to other people.

At this point, I think the important thing is the digression associated with this proposal. This psychologist focuses on selfishness, which results in a lack of reaction towards other people. It should be added, however, that the author of the presented concept is not a supporter of the term "lack of empathy" but "erosion of empathy". Since altruistic behavior is aimed at improving

the situation of another human being through action appropriate to the situation of the object, according to the cited psychologist, egoistic behavior may result in harm to him.

Let's take a closer look at S. Baron's-Cohen (2015) proposal regarding zero empathy. The quoted author also introduces an additional indication of this level of empathy, namely, he defines it as "plus" or "minus". Human behavior, marked by zero empathy, which aims to harm another person is marked with a "minus" sign – such behavior includes psychopaths and patients with bipolar disorder. On the other hand, zero empathy with a plus sign refers to those behaviors that can result in harm to another person, but it is not a deliberate act, which characterizes people with Asperger syndrome and autism, due to the features of these diseases they are not able to feel in someone else's mental state, therefore they cannot take pro-social actions. Possible harm to someone is the result of their ignorance of the rules of social life than deliberate action.

An important aspect of researching empathy is its developmental aspect. So if it is subject to development, then what conditions does it depend on? Can the level of empathy increase? Is it always permanent? You should look for answers to these and similar questions. Let's start, however, by determining the nature of empathy, whether it is innate or acquired only. There is no clear answer to this dilemma. Studies have been undertaken whose results could suggest the innate nature of empathy. An example would be the results of M. Simner's research (after Rembowski, 1989), in which he obtained the primary circular reaction of newborns (the experiment simulated the crying of an infant who caused the crying of newborns in the room).

Research is also being undertaken in which the authors focus on determining the innate nature of empathy. Difficulties in conducting research (age of the respondents) mean that with the help of currently available methods it is impossible to explicitly opt for one of the solutions. Indirectly, however, one can get an affirmative answer to the above problem. The results of G. Rizzolatti's research (Rizzolatti, Craighero, 2004), in which the brain structure responsible for empathy was found to be mirror neurons, seems to be very likely that these neurons indicate the inherent nature of empathy.

Therefore, it can be concluded that a person does not acquire empathy in the course of development, through external actions, and is born with it. We as-

sume, therefore, that it presents an innate readiness for empathy, how it develops, however, will depend on external factors, mainly on parents, and in later years of life also on teachers.

In presenting the importance of the mentioned context of the social environment in the development of empathy, I would like to use a rather detailed analysis made by J. Rembowski (1989). The Polish psychologist focused on the results of research indicating the importance of child contact with parents in the development of empathy. It is a truism to say that parents are the first teachers to bring their own child into life. There would be no need to recall this wording if they were teachers in the full sense of the word. Observation of family functioning, however, often provides other data. Raising a child for empathy will also result in the development of the moral sphere, M.L Hoffman (2006) is a supporter of this relationship.

J. Rembowski (1989, p. 73), recalling the results of research, emphasizes that empathy is the basis for undertaking and implementing interpersonal relations. Without it, the child cannot cope with different people or situations. It should be added that the child will meet not only friendly people but also those with negative qualities, “when a child develops and uses empathic skill, the range of successful contacts expands, and the possibility of future success in interpersonal relations increases” (Rembowski, 1989, p. 73). Therefore, since the closest social environment influences the development of a child’s empathy, it can be concluded that it is treatable.

M. Barnett (1980) defined this relationship well, according to him, the basis of child empathy is parents’ empathy. The child observes their behavior in specific situations, including pro-social ones, in this way they learn empathy-developing behaviors. Then, by interiorising, he develops his own empathy. However, there is also an opposite relationship.

Lack of parental empathy may cause a child to have antisocial behavior, as demonstrated by S. Baron-Cohen (2017), describing empathy in people with anti-social features. Returning to the perspective of learning empathy, however, modeling is an important mechanism involved in empathy learning. A. Bandura (2007) in the theory of social learning pointed out the importance of modeling. According to him, learning is done through the interaction of personal characteristics (internal factor) and social environment (external factor). It is a way of gaining new experience, learning

how to react to new situations, “by observing others, the individual develops the view on how new behaviors are performed” (Bandura. 2007, p. 37). An information function is performed by observation. In relation to learning empathy, we find similar reflections in M. Barnett. As J. Rembowski (1989) reports, research and experiments that include the perspective of teaching empathy were already carried out in the 1930s.

After showing some selected aspects related to the process of empathy, I would like to refer it to the work of a teacher. Similarly to the fragment of the study presented above, I will use the analyzes presented by J. Rembowski. However, I would like to precede the brief description of the teacher’s work. R. Kretschmann and colleagues (2003) conducted a study on the stress of a German teacher. He stated that from the social perception side the teaching profession is received quite similarly to a Polish educator. The most common allegations are that teachers have too many holidays, too few working hours, comfortable work. However, the cited author indicates that “the working time of teachers in a normal school week significantly exceeds the weekly business hours of other employees of the budgetary sphere” (Kretschmann et al., 2003, p. 12).

Another aspect worth citing about health is worth quoting. In terms of the risk of heart disease, German teachers rank second among other professions. R. Kretschmann et al. (2003) citing other research results emphasize that a teacher makes about two hundred decisions and resolves fifteen conflicts between students in one lesson. I assume that Polish teachers would present similar conditions for their own work. So this is a difficult profession with a high degree of responsibility.

Currently there are no major obstacles to undertaking pedagogical studies. However, not all graduates show a predisposition to work with a kindergarten child or student in further stages of education. It is therefore worth referring to the view expressed by A. Aichorn in 1925 (after Rembowski, 1989, pp. 96–97). He stated that “one cannot become a teacher on the basis of every personality.” It turns out that the knowledge or skills learned is not enough, the personality of the teacher is necessary. This provides the prospect of proper practice.

Based on the research results from J. Rembowski’s study, I will try to suggest a model figure of an empathic teacher. In his daily work (of course, knowledge and skills based on it should not be overlooked). A teacher teaching in specific classes or kindergarten is not only

obliged to have a good knowledge of the methodology of conducting individual classes, proper selection and planning of issues, he must know the psychophysical conditions of his pupils.

Let me now show some features of an empathic teacher. An important condition for the empathy of every person, including the teacher, is the above-mentioned insight. It is cognitive and emotional recognition of one's experience in terms of advantages and disadvantages and possibilities, related to a specific situation. Insight is a starting point for relationships with other people, it affects the adequate adaptation of behavior to the situation. So how does an empathic teacher work?

I mentioned above that empathy takes place in an interpersonal relationship, it has the nature of mutual contact between the subject and the subject – teacher and student. With regard to teaching on both sides, activity is necessary. The teacher cannot be active and the student cannot be passive or vice versa. Let us add, however, that student activity is also a derivative of the work of a teacher. This, in turn, is related to the student's focus on the student and not on the lectured subject.

J. Rembowski (1989) presenting the results of psychological research stated that an empathic teacher has an adequate sense of value, so he is spontaneous, does not hide his feelings. It can be assumed that this type of behavior through modeling will become the part of students, since the teacher's authority will probably also play a role. The above-mentioned author also pointed out the nature of the contacts between the empathetic teacher and student, their main feature is closeness. Therefore, it will take into account the needs of students. An important issue is accepting them as they are.

Of the research results presented by J. Rembowski, it is worth considering one of them, it refers to the result concerning altruism. It can be assumed that empathic teachers should show a high level of altruism, research results indicate its average level. This is quite important information. From it it follows that empathic teachers who practice their profession do not give up their own good. In this way, pedagogues are effective in the process of education and upbringing with just such determinants of their own personality. A high level of altruism would indicate rapid burnout, which would not be desirable.

Summary

In the modern world, actions are taken to better understand the process of empathy. From the theoretical side, the mechanism or components are determined in scientific research. However, we are still moving towards its definition, which would have a universal dimension. Definition difficulties result in researchers traveling in different ways talking about the same process. So we are "doomed" to its colloquial term, so it will still be empathizing in other people's mental states.

Theoretical research is one plane for learning empathy, while the other is its importance and role in human life and society. Empathy, being an individual process of a person, is closely related to the social aspect of its functioning. The demands of global empathy, which are an opportunity for positive changes in the global community, are increasingly being undertaken. However, this is not a new position.

T. Lipps (1903) wrote about the importance of empathy for civilization, claiming at the beginning of the 20th century that it is the only explanation for the development of civilization from its original forms to the present. The invocation of global empathy by J. Rifkin may signal a return to mechanisms and processes positively constructing the world community. The way to achieve this result is to learn empathy. An attempt was made to present the current civilization conditions in which the reality is replaced by virtual reality, direct communication gives way to cellular conversations and text messages.

We are all responsible for human empathy – parents, teachers, politicians, media, etc. It is necessary to learn empathy so that the next growing generations will be guided by empathy in interpersonal relationships.

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