

How Did We Get Here?: Empathy

Readings and Resources

Julianna E. Breit

Merlin CCC – November 2022

A Rumor of Empathy by Lou Agosta (2012).

Agosta introduces the four categories of empathy which provided the overarching framework for the “How Did We Get Here?” event.

This book is a great first source for those wanting more details on historical approaches to empathy. Each chapter is dedicated to a different thinker, and Agosta skillfully balances historical background with philosophical content. Not only does he summarize each thinker’s claims, but he also explains their importance in relation to preceding and succeeding thinkers. Moreover, he references philosophical terms and phrases from the primary texts while also providing thorough explanations on their specific application to empathy.

“Empathy, Embodiment, and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz” by Dan Zahavi, *Inquiry* 53(3) (2020).

For something shorter than the Agosta book but a clear description of empathy’s history, this article is an excellent resource. It starts by introducing psychology’s various approaches to “Theory of Mind” and skillfully explains philosophy’s foundational contributions in the empathy debate. A highlight of this article is its defense of phenomenology’s usefulness without becoming entrenched in the technicalities of Kant’s Aesthetics. He references Schutz’s relatable examples and defends the importance of understanding empathy within complex social contexts.

“Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality” by Dan Zahavi, *Topoi* 33 (2013).

This article provides a more detailed critique of Lipps’s “Instinct of Empathy,” with specific reference to intersubjectivity and aesthetics. It engages more technical language,” such as “emotional contagion” and “imaginative projection,” but Zahavi does an excellent job of defining and contextualizing these terms. Perhaps intriguing language lovers or curious readers, this article introduces and explains many of the German words used by Lipps, Scheler, Husserl, and Stein in their original arguments of empathy, thereby providing some informative nuances that may get in translation.

“Edith Stein” by Thomas Szanto, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2020). [Article link](#).

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is an excellent quick-guide to many philosophical topics or thinkers. Following the abstract, a detailed outline of Edith Stein’s life and works makes it simple and efficient to reference either biographical or argument-

related summaries. The outline section detailing her early phenomenology is subdivided into Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Emotions, followed by a section on empathy. Consequently, readers can understand the context surrounding her writings on empathy as well as the arguments themselves.

“Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity” by Vittorio Gallese, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 369 (2014).

Written by one of the most prolific mirror-neuron researchers, this essay explores the current use and future possibilities of mirror neurons as empirical evidence for phenomenological explanations of empathy. His clear and approachable writing stimulates reflections on the intersection between philosophy and neuroscience. It is also a non-technical but reliable reference for the capabilities as well as the limitations of mirror neurons.