Chapter 3: What Is Empathy?

1. The English word *empathy* was used for the first time in the early twentieth century to translate *Einfühlung*, by the psychologist Edward Titchener.


5. It is interesting to note that the Greek word *sumpatheia* also means “mutual interdependence.”


8. In our day, the abundance and repetition of similar images in the media have ended up eroding empathic reaction and have given rise to


14. Batson, C. D. (2011), *op. cit.* The many scientific references corresponding to these various definitions of empathy can be found in his book.

15. See Preston, S. D., Waal, F. B. M. de, *et al.* (2002), Empathy: Its ultimate and proximate bases, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 25* (1), pp. 1–20. The “Perception-action model” (PAM) was partly inspired by research into mirror neurons, which are present in some sections of the brain and are activated when one sees, for example, someone else making a gesture that interests us (see Chapter 5, sub-heading: “When two brains agree”). Mirror neurons can provide an elementary basis for imitation and intersubjective resonance, but the phenomenon of empathy is much more complex and involves numerous areas of the brain. Rizzolatti, G., & Sinigaglia, C., *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions, Emotions, and Experience*, Oxford University Press, 2008.


20. According to the various authors, this kind of empathy is called:


21. Revault d’Allonnes, M., *L’Homme compassionnel*, Seuil, 2008, p. 22. This confusion is understandable if one holds to the Latin etymology of *compassion*, a term derived from the words *compatior*, “to suffer with,” and *compassio*, “shared suffering.”


23. Spinoza does not use the terms “pity” and “compassion,” but, according to Alexandre Jollien, in the language of the time, he explains that in pity, sadness comes first, and in compassion, love. In his *Ethics*, Book 3, Number 28, he says: “Commiseration is a sadness brought on by the idea of pain experienced by another whom we imagine to be similar to us.” And in Number 24, Spinoza writes: “Pity is love as it affects man in such a way that he rejoices at another’s happiness and is on the contrary saddened by another’s misfortune.” Conversation with A. Jollien, January 29, 2012.


25. If pain is at stake, the sections of the brain involved will include the anterior insular cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). If disgust is at issue, it will also be the anterior insular cortex. If you
experience a neutral tactile sensation, the secondary somatosensory cortex will be activated. If you experience pleasant emotions and agreeable sensations, the insula, the striatum, and the median orbitofrontal cortex can be involved. Cognitive apprehension rests on the medial prefrontal cortex, the temporal parietal junction (TPJ), and the superior temporal sulcus (STS), a network that is activated when one asks people to reflect on their thoughts and beliefs.

26. Which specialists call “theory of mind.”
27. See Vignemont, F. de, & Singer, T. The empathic brain: how, when and why? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 10*(10), 2006, pp. 435–441. Aside from this article, this chapter is chiefly based on explanations given by Tania Singer, with whom I have collaborated for several years, during the course of conversations in January 2012.
30. For more details on these different points quoted above, see de Vignemont, F., & Singer, T. (2006), *op. cit.*
34. In various pathologies—narcissism, psychopathy, and personality disorders—different components of the chain of affective reactions
involved in social interactions do not function normally, and empathy is inhibited. See Chapter 27, “The Deficiencies of Empathy.”