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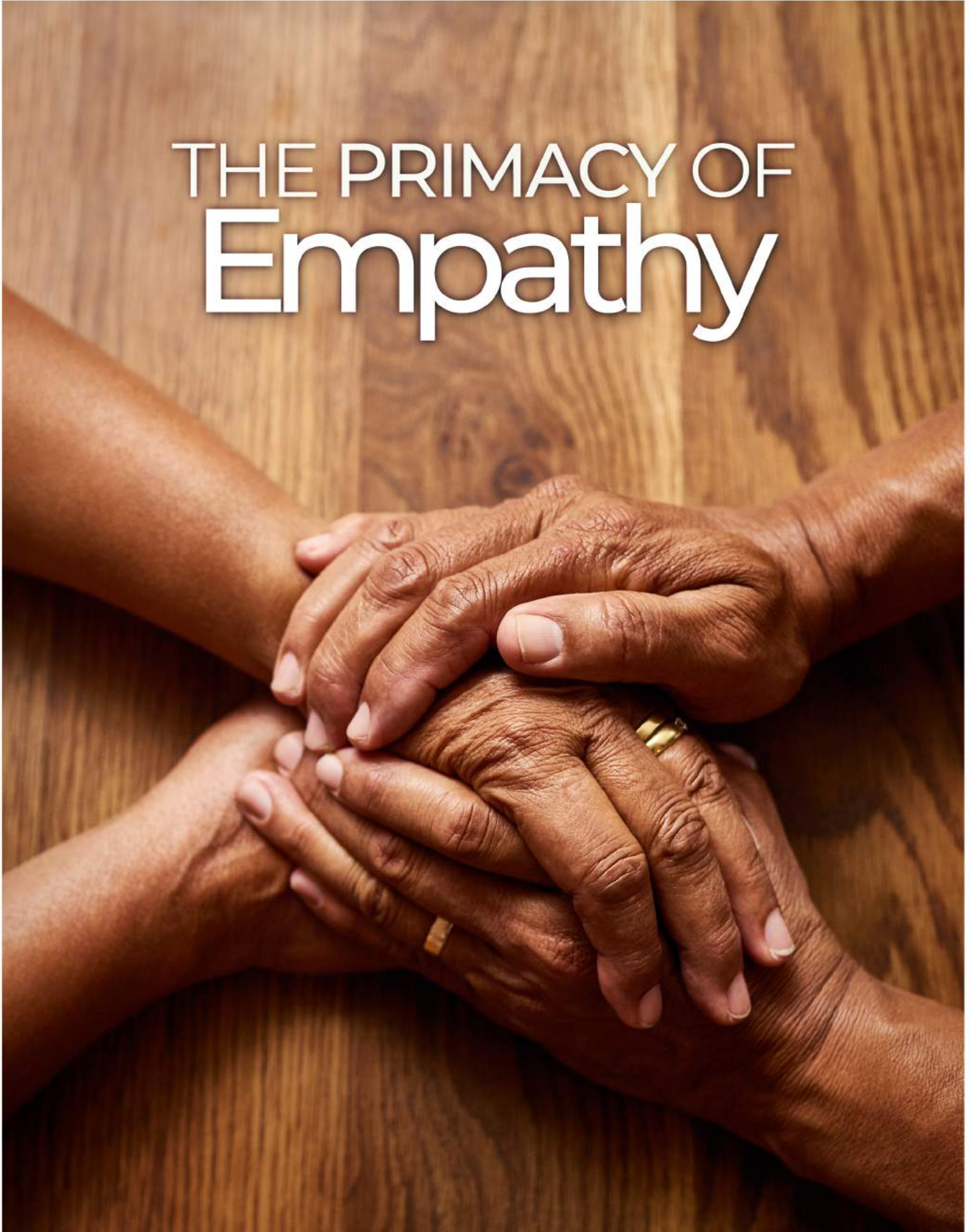
# Pax Lumina



Vol. 04 | No. 06 | November 2023

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

## THE PRIMACY OF Empathy



# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

**Empathy is the greatest virtue.  
From it, all virtues flow.  
Without it, all virtues are an act.**

– Eric Zorn



Vol. 04 | No. 06 | November 2023

# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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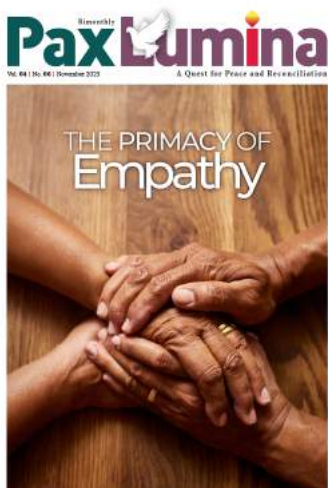
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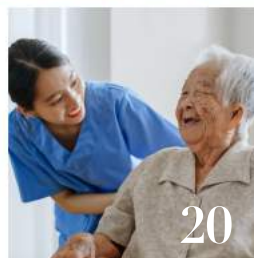
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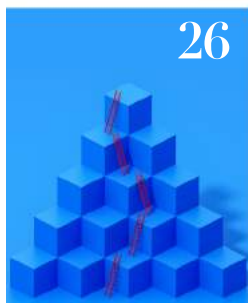


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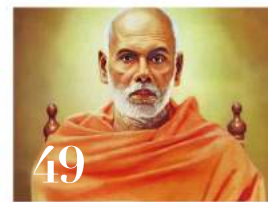
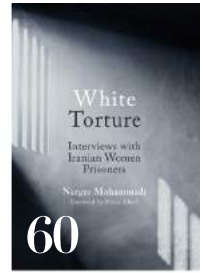
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## Editorial

# Why Empathy?

**D**ifferent countries in the world have different political systems of governance. Many may profess to adhere to the same or similar ideologies, such as capitalism, socialism, or democracy, but the nature of the State as a governing agency may differ from country to country depending on the historical, cultural, and social ethos of that country. But despite these variations, all countries claim to represent the true 'will' of the people of that country, even the most despotic of them.

One important fact to keep in mind is that the people of any country do not consist of a uniform set of individuals. We can find a great deal of variation among people, groups of people, their classes, castes, cultures, and many other categories that account for the granularity of the identity of the country or the nation. This fact is generally ignored by the rulers of every country, resulting in a large number of individuals and groups remaining without entitlement, access, and empowerment vis-à-vis the mainstream of society. This is a systemic problem of governance, and the extent of the lack of democracy in a country is reflected in the severity of this problem.

It is facile to imagine that the efficiency of this system of governance will ensure the holistic well-being of each of the citizens belonging to the nation. There are many reasons for this lack of optimism. The primary one is that a system, economic or social, which appears to be an ideal one in theory becomes imperfect and inefficient in practice. All revolutions and utopian castles bear testimony to this grim reality.

The other important reason for the lack of realisation of any ideal is the infinite complexity of the human being, which is often forgotten – and callously so – by those who arrogate to themselves positions of power and influence over others. Most leaders belong to this arrogant class, propelled by vanity and self-righteousness.

An important question arises: if every economic, social, and political system of each country leaves some individuals and groups of individuals abandoned and uncared for, what can be a human solution to this human problem? The sophistication of systems or refinement of technology may not provide an answer to this problem of human suffering created by the avarice of human beings themselves and their creations, viz. institutions and technologies.

*Pax Lumina* considers caring for the other an option that has to be explored in this context. This issue focuses on this question. Not really the rationality of this question, but its relevance to the meaning of one's existence, as demonstrated by the varied narratives and stories of caring for the abandoned and the unentitled in different parts of this planet by people of goodwill.

So, the answer to the question, 'Why empathy?' is a simple one: because we are human. Why do we care for the other? Because everyone needs care, including you and me.

*Jacob Thomas*



**Learning to stand in somebody else's shoes,  
to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins.  
And it's up to you to make that happen.  
Empathy is a quality of character that can  
change the world.**

Barack Obama

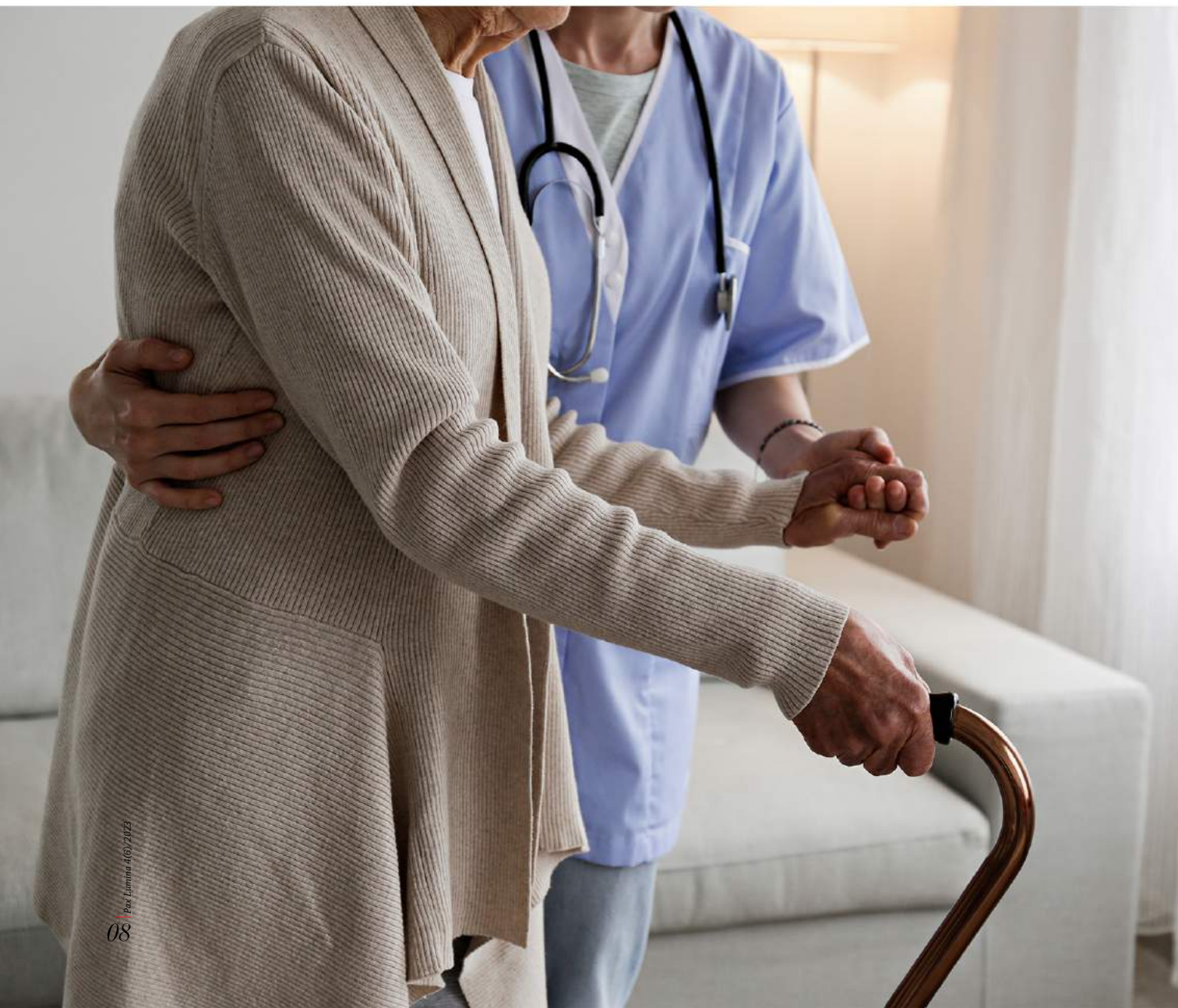




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*Pax Lumina 4(6) / 2023 / 08-12*

# THE PRIMACY OF **EMPATHY** & **ETHICS OF CARE** FOR **PwDs**





**T**oday, care for the elderly and seriously-ill persons of all age groups is emerging as an important challenge. Many home care agencies and professional courses are evolving. **Yet, family-based support from parents, siblings, friends, and relatives remains an important and integral part of these developments, the lockdown experience we all have.**



**S**ince the years of the pandemic of 2019, we have become more conscious of what it implies to need mutual support, a reality of life. I recall my introduction to the sector of disability about 33 years ago. As a young mother and at the base of my professional career in teacher education, I got an opportunity to take our trainees to Asha Niketan in Bhopal as part of the course on working with the community.

I met service providers like teachers, helpers, and many others who were supporting children and young people with various types of disabling conditions. It was a new experience that no textbook/training/reading had prepared us for.

We met very young learners with hearing challenges, a 14-plus girl with a mental age of less than one year, a child with cerebral palsy learning to walk, and young persons in wheelchairs doing track races for an audience of donors in the sunlight.

All these experiences motivated me to learn more about these brave children and their support providers. I also witnessed how these children felt after spending a few days with families, and then returning to their residential and daycare centres.

I am narrating this to make a specific point about the topic of the 'Primacy of Empathy and Ethics for Care Providers for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)'.

We all need care and support at all stages of life. Today, care for the elderly and seriously-ill persons of all age groups is emerging as an important challenge. Many home care agencies and professional courses are evolving. Yet, family-based support from parents, siblings, friends, and relatives remains an important and integral part of these developments, the lockdown experience we all have.

### **The Caregivers**

We need to appreciate the role of caregivers across these two categories: Family/ Familial and professionally trained persons. While the socially expected role as a family can be easily understood through the interactive process of sets of emotions and logic such as being a mother/gender-oriented role of concern, sympathy, financial and other related issues, empathy may be something that may need to be acquired.

On the other hand, as a trained professional, it is a choice made, and at times we may perceive them to have only monetary/extrinsic motivation. In both situations, we also need to understand the needs, appropriateness, and well-being of the recipients.

Hence the fine lines of empathy and ethics as the predominant aspects/primacy are of maintaining the dignity of the recipient as well as the caregivers. Both are human beings with each one having his/her trajectory, as neither disability is neutral to gender and other social constructs and the same is true for the caregivers.

## Ethics in Caregiving

Ethics in care giving with specific reference to professionals can be defined as the moral code of conduct that defines the relationship between the caregiver and the recipient [2] and the therapist and other healthcare professionals based on mutual respect and trust.

Nowadays, in the context of PwDs, we use the terms Rehabilitation Professionals (Rehabilitation Council of India) and Allied Health Professionals (The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021[3]).

These professionals are expected to follow values such as choice, altruism, empowerment, equality, and person-focused principles of service such as adapting as per need and resources, building on abilities, and person-centred care.

Simply stated, ethics refers to standards of behaviour that tell us how human beings ought to act in the many situations in which they find themselves as friends, parents, children, citizens, businesspeople, teachers, professionals, and so on.

## The Primacy of Empathy<sup>[4]</sup> for Caregivers

Caregiving can be a challenging and demanding role. Empathy is a fundamental quality that can greatly enhance the quality of care provided.

Here are some key reasons why empathy is so important for caregivers of persons with disabilities; points 6 and 10 are equally important for the recipient of the care and the caregiver (familial as well as professional):

### 1. Understanding and Connection:

Empathy allows caregivers to better understand the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of the individuals they care for. It enables them to form a deeper emotional connection, which is essential for building trust and rapport.

### 2. Quality of Care:

Empathetic caregivers are more likely to provide high-quality care. They can better anticipate and address the needs of the individuals they care for because they can perceive and respond to non-verbal cues and emotional states.



**T**he fine lines of empathy and ethics as the predominant aspects/primacy are of maintaining the dignity of the recipient as well as the caregivers. **Both are human beings with each one having his/her trajectory, as neither disability is neutral to gender and other social constructs and the same is true for the caregivers.**



**3. Reducing Isolation:** Many individuals with disabilities may feel isolated or misunderstood. Empathetic caregivers can provide emotional support, reduce feelings of loneliness, and help individuals feel valued and respected.

**4. Advocacy:** Caregivers often need to advocate on behalf of the individuals they care for, whether it's with healthcare professionals, educational institutions, or social services. Empathy allows caregivers to be more effective advocates, understanding and expressing the needs and desires of those they care for.

**5. Enhancing Communication:** Empathy is crucial for effective communication. Caregivers who practise empathy can communicate more clearly and sensitively, which can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts.

**6. Emotional Well-being:** Caregivers can experience emotional and mental stress. Having empathy for themselves, as well as for the individuals they care for, can help in managing the emotional toll of caregiving and preventing burnout.

**7. Promoting Dignity and Autonomy:** Empathetic caregivers respect the autonomy and dignity of the individuals they care for. They recognise that individuals with disabilities have their preferences, desires, and dreams, and they support them in achieving their goals.

**8. Reducing Stigma:** Empathy can also help reduce the stigma associated with disabilities. Caregivers who understand and empathise with the experiences of those they care for can contribute to changing societal attitudes and perceptions about disabilities.

**9. Enhancing Problem-Solving:** Empathy can improve a caregiver's ability to identify and address problems effectively. By putting themselves in the shoes of the individuals they care for, caregivers can come up with more tailored and holistic solutions.

**10. Building Resilience:** Empathy can build resilience in caregivers. By empathising with the challenges and triumphs of those they care for, caregivers can find strength and motivation to continue their caregiving journey.

## **Ethics<sup>[5]</sup> & Care Giving**

The moral theory known as 'the ethics of care' implies that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life. Normatively, care ethics seeks to maintain relationships by contextualising and promoting the well-being of caregivers and care receivers in a network of social relations.

Most often defined as a practice or virtue rather than a theory as such, 'care' involves maintaining the world of, and meeting the needs of, ourselves and others. It builds on the motivation to care for those who are dependent and vulnerable, and it is inspired by both memories of being cared for and the idealisations of self."<sup>[6]</sup>

Bio-medical sciences have been following ethics for a long time, but in other sectors ethics in research, practice, and dealing with living beings are still in the evolving process. We need to be conscious and have greater awareness to prevent all types of abuse (e.g. psychological,

**T**he moral theory known as 'the ethics of care' implies that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life. **Normatively, care ethics seeks to maintain relationships by contextualising and promoting the well-being of caregivers and care receivers in a network of social relations.**



physical, etc.) as every person who needs care, especially persons with disabilities that can be sensory, intellectual, and emotional (Rights of Person with Disability Act, 2016 [7])

### Summing-Up

In summary, empathy is not just a valuable trait for caregivers of persons with disabilities; it is an essential component of providing compassionate, effective, and person-centred care.

It is important for caregivers to continually develop their empathetic skills and recognise the significance of their role in the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Empathy is a powerful force that can improve the well-being and quality of life for both caregivers and those they care for. Empathy is the cornerstone of quality caregiving for persons with disabilities. It goes beyond the mere task of completion and involves a deep understanding of the unique challenges, emotions, and aspirations of the individuals being cared for. Through empathy, caregivers can create a more compassionate and supportive environment that enhances the overall well-being of both the caregiver and the person with a disability.

[2] Please note the word recipient as an alternative to patient/client etc. as disability is not a disease that can be cured, PwD's needs are addressed and PwDs are not 'handled' (choice of the words reflect our inner feeling, and perceptions and attitudes, important both for caregiving as well as protocols of ethics).

[3] <https://main.mohfw.gov.in/?q=newshighlights-46>

[4] Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place. Essentially, it is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling.

22-Feb-2023. <https://www.google.com/search?--accessed 15 Oct. 2023>

[5] [https://icmr.nic.in/guidelines/ICMR\\_Ethical\\_Guidelines\\_2017.pdf](https://icmr.nic.in/guidelines/ICMR_Ethical_Guidelines_2017.pdf)

Indian Council of Medical Research(ICMR)

[6] Care Ethics "The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (IEP) (ISSN 2161-0002) was founded in 1995 to provide open access to detailed, scholarly, peer-reviewed information on key topics and philosophers in all areas of philosophy <https://iep.utm.edu/care-ethics/> accessed 10 Oct 2023

[7] <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/acts.php>

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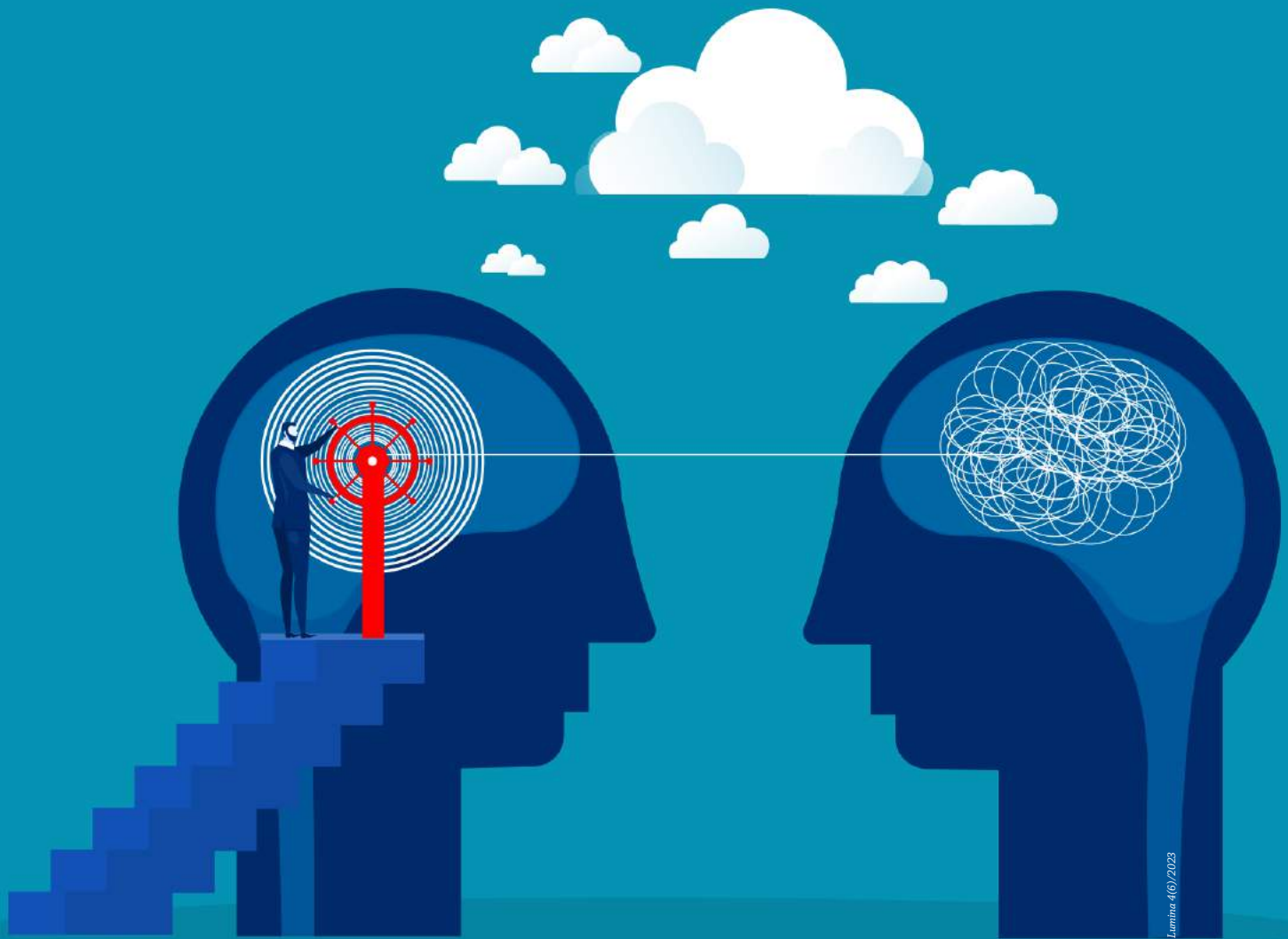
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# EMPATHY AND INTELLIGENCE

## NURTURING A BALANCED HUMAN EXPERIENCE



**P** psychologically, the relationship between empathy and intelligence is multifaceted. While high intelligence can sometimes lead to emotional detachment, studies reveal that empathy is not solely a product of emotional responsiveness but can also be cultivated through cognitive processes.



**E**mpathy and intelligence are two pillars of the human experience. Each has a unique significance. These qualities shape our interactions, decisions, and relationships, enriching our lives profoundly. The interplay between empathy and intelligence is a complex and delicate balance. The harmonious integration of these attributes can lead to a more compassionate and intellectually vibrant society.

To achieve such a utopian goal, we need to explore the meanings and etymologies of both empathy and intelligence, examine their individual psychological and philosophical aspects as well as touch upon the neurobiology of both qualities and consider the contributions of religion.

Empathy, derived from the Greek word 'empathia', signifies the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is the cornerstone of compassionate human interactions. Intelligence, rooted in the Latin term 'intelligentia', refers to the capacity for understanding, reasoning

and learning. These definitions provide the foundations for understanding the dynamic interplay between empathy and intelligence.

The 20th century witnessed a remarkable phenomenon known as the Flynn Effect, characterised by a consistent rise in average IQ scores over generations. This phenomenon indicated a substantial increase in cognitive abilities over time. However, in recent years, the Flynn Effect seems to have plateaued, prompting researchers to examine potential reasons for this.

The stagnation could be attributed to changes in the educational systems, environmental influences, and the saturation of specific cognitive abilities. This slowdown has instigated discussions about the necessity of balancing cognitive growth with other qualities, such as empathy.

Psychologically, the relationship between empathy and intelligence is multifaceted. While high intelligence can sometimes lead to emotional detachment, studies reveal that empathy is not solely a product of emotional responsiveness but can also be cultivated through cognitive processes.

Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen suggests that empathy can be considered an information-processing system involving cognitive, emotional, and compassionate empathy. This viewpoint aligns with the idea that intelligence can enhance the different dimensions of empathy.

The philosophical underpinning of empathy and intelligence illuminates their intricate coexistence. Ancient Greek philosophers recognised the value of both attributes, with Aristotle emphasising the importance of practical wisdom and Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative demanding empathetic considerations.

These philosophical foundations underscore the idea that intelligence and empathy are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary aspects of ethical decision-making. While intelligence undoubtedly aids in comprehending complex situations and solving intricate problems, empathy enriches our social bonds and fosters cooperation.



Philosopher Martha Nussbaum emphasises the interconnectedness by stating, “Empathy makes us see the others’ situation more vividly, feel more accurately, and share more fully.” This sentiment makes empathy an essential counterpart to intelligence, enabling a holistic approach to understanding human experiences.

Neuroscientifically, empathy and intelligence manifest through intricate neural networks. Empathy involves the activation of mirror neurons and the anterior insula, facilitating emotional resonance and understanding the feelings of others. Intelligence engages various brain regions linked to problem-solving, critical thinking, and memory. Neuroscientist Tania Singer explains that empathy is about resonating with the feelings of others, while compassion is about acting to alleviate their sufferings. This distinction highlights how intelligence can drive compassionate action by enabling effective problem-solving in the context of the emotions of others.

Religion has significantly shaped human values, beliefs, and behaviours, including cultivating empathy and intelligence. Hinduism and Christianity, two prominent world religions, highlight the significance of understanding, compassion and cognitive engagement. Hinduism’s emphasis on interconnectedness and Christianity’s call to treat others with love and forgiveness contribute to the interwoven nature of empathy and intelligence.

Prophet Mohammad said, “The All-Merciful shows merciful mercy. Show mercy to those on earth, and the One in the heavens will show mercy to you.”

This teaching underscores the reciprocal relationship between empathy and divine benevolence. The Islamic scholar Al-Ghazali said, “Knowledge without action is wastefulness. And action without knowledge is foolishness.” He was emphasising the importance of combining intelligence with practical wisdom rooted in empathy that can lead a balanced, purposeful life.

The question of whether empathy with intelligence or intelligence with empathy is better is a complex one. Empathy and intelligence are not mutually exclusive. They complement and enrich each other. The ideal scenario is not a stark choice between one attribute over the other but a harmonious integration of empathy and intelligence.

As we navigate the intricate web of human existence, it becomes evident that nurturing emotional attunement while harnessing cognitive prowess creates a dynamic synergy that enriches our interactions, decisions, and contributions to the world. In this delicate balance lies the true essence of human potential – where empathy and intelligence coalesce to create a more compassionate and intellectually vibrant society.

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*George John is a retired British psychiatrist from London who now lives with his wife in Kochi, India.*



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# EMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIP

## THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

**Developing critical thinking in rural government schools in Nepal for sustaining humanity**

*Education Help Rural Schools*







Digital Class Training Rural School Teachers

**U**ntyng the shoes of those who have, to make them feel equal to the ‘have nots ‘and sit with them at their table requires more than just social work tools, but transforming principles that originate from the consciousness of true human identity, and the purpose of human existence.



**I** am reminded of an incident. I was in Jhapa district, Nepal, a decade ago, working at Moran Memorial School.

In Jhapa, we have two schools.

St. Xaviers at Deonia is a normal public school, while Moran Memorial School is meant for the children of tea garden workers who are very poor. We had St. Xavier’s inviting the Moran School children for the Xavier Day celebration. And we were about to play a friendly football match.

There was an issue I was called to solve. The Moran students had no shoes and found it impossible to play against St. Xavier’s students who had good shoes. I did not know how to solve it. All I remember is picking up the microphone and saying, “Dear children, you call us Fathers, and both of you, Moranites and Xavierians, are our children. So, we are of the same family and whoever wins, our family wins. Today, St. Xavier’s is welcoming your brothers and sisters from Moran School, so how are you going to take care of your relatives today?”

I put the microphone down. All the Xavierians without a word, removed their shoes and played the game. Of course, the Xavierians were defeated as they were not used to playing without shoes. But they won something else. They won the hearts of everybody in that field. It was the ‘relationship’ with the children from the tea gardens that was more important than winning the game.

A typical social worker would analyse the lack of shoes of the tea garden students. Then he or she will conduct a campaign, try to collect shoes for the children and make a poster of the distribution. They may even do data collection and prepare paper presentations about the shoeless situation. People will also contribute to improving the situation of the tea gardens. But untyng the shoes of those who have, to make them feel equal to the ‘have nots ‘and sit with them at their table requires more than just social work tools, but transforming principles that originate from the consciousness of true human identity, and the purpose of human existence.

**B**uilding human relationships requires personal sacrifices and love. It is not dealing with a set of rules and human rights declarations, but genuine concern and care for one another to the level of one is equal to the other.



If relationships were not the purpose of human existence, we would have been created to be self-sustainable autonomous machines with no faculty for communication and sensitivity to the surroundings and other beings.

On the contrary, human existence is not an individual existence. It is a society that we belong to. It is a community that is being created and sustained by Mother Nature. Only from the

perspective of relationships can one make sense of the plurality and multiplicity of the human species with different cultures, colours and languages. This is translated into the beauty of complementarity of each to the other.

If relationships are the purpose of human existence and society, the goal of humanity, then social workers should prioritise building human relationships. They should not just analyse social problems and campaign rights and laws. Building human relationships requires personal sacrifices and love. It is not dealing with a set of rules and human rights declarations, but genuine concern and care for one another to the level of one is equal to the other.

The Nepal Jesuit Social Institute (NJSI) - Fe y Alegria Nepal stands for the transformation of humanity not by preaching ideology and publishing documents on social justice, but by being the change itself. We are the change. We are humans with a new consciousness knowing the true identity and purpose of human existence.

The institute is set to bringing transformation in the society through education. It is not just skills training but the spiritual, psychological and social formation of children to become true, responsible and humane human beings. This is where the NJSI finds its focus of action. While building nearly 40 schools damaged by the earthquake in remote locations, the NJSI

*Students orientation*



**A** great instrument in the hands of a non-discerning mind is very dangerous too. So, the hope to sustain humanity is to bring critical thinking into the minds of young people through a kind of education that upholds truth, justice, peace, harmony and other social values. **Then they will be able to evaluate and use proper judgement before decision-making without the influence of myths.**



realised the need to improve the education system in those places.

Along with a lack of infrastructure and a limited number of skilled teachers, we also see a community of people ridden with superstition and cultural myths that help the politicians and religious leaders to control the innocent and take benefit. Unless education fosters critical thinking in the minds of the youngsters, it becomes only a training for skills to get a job.

A great instrument in the hands of a non-discerning mind is very dangerous too. So, the hope to sustain humanity is to bring critical thinking into the minds of young people through a kind of education that upholds truth, justice, peace, harmony and other social values. Then they will be able to evaluate and use proper judgement before decision-making without the influence of myths.



We don't want to construct schools and the community nearby without bringing positive social transformation. The ground is an appropriate frontier as Nepal is becoming a new democratic nation. It will be integral to the development of social consciousness in this young country. Unlike the developed communities in the city, rural communities can be formed in the right way.

I believe that 'the right to education is also the right to truth.'

It means, the development of critical consciousness and critical thinking are the duty of education. This will enable the students to search for the truths of life and not to be bullied by misleading religious, political and business myths. This is the goal and purpose of the Rural Education Improvement Nepal programme of NJSI.

---

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*Pax Lumina 4(6) / 2023 / 20-23*

# EMPATHY AND MEDICAL CARE



**H**ealthcare is not only technology but also combination of technology with emotional support. **All health situations are challenges to the individual/caregivers at the physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual levels. Empathy can be the binding force of medical care.**

**E**mpathy is the ability to emotionally understand what another person feels, see things, and imagine being in their place. Essentially, it is putting oneself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling.

Healthcare is not only technology but also combination of technology with emotional support. All health situations are challenges to the individual/caregivers at the physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual levels. Empathy can be the binding force of medical care.

### Advances in Healthcare

During the last century, there has been dramatic progress in the understanding of health and illnesses and the interventions to restore health. The longevity of life has moved from 40 to over 70 years. Health indices like maternal and infant mortality have come down dramatically. There is new understanding of the human body through genetics in general and cellular functioning in particular. Investigatory facilities and pharmaceutical interventions have expanded.

### Emotional Support in Healthcare

Throughout the history of mankind, the emotional aspects of healthcare have been well recognised as expressed by Hippocrates, 'cure sometimes, treat often, comfort always'.

There is growing evidence of the value of empathy in healthcare.

Here are a few examples:



1. The physician's demonstrations of empathy toward their patients can decrease the sensation of pain, reports a study from University Hospital in Norway in 2023. Patients who were alone during the examination reported greater pain than those who were in the presence of a physician, even though they were subjected to stimuli of the same intensity.

2. Social support has a significant association between higher levels of pain and decreased levels of social activities and social support.

3. Married patients and those receiving higher

hospital support took less pain medication and recovered more quickly than their low-support counterparts.

4. In a study, the night before the operation, an anaesthetist visited each patient to explain the surgery and anaesthesia. For half the patients the anaesthetists added in a twenty-minute discussion about post-op pain. The group with the extra discussion needed half the amount of pain medication that the control group needed. Further, these patients were discharged from the hospital three days earlier than those in the control group.

### **Empathy in Healthcare**

Empathy is an essential component of all healthcare activities and interactions. The range of healthcare interactions can be considered under four broad groups with varying empathic needs.

The first group includes acute illnesses like heart attack, infection, and a fracture where the care needed is largely dependent on health interventions. In this situation, the caring team should give full information to the ill individuals to help make sense of the changes and master the challenges of recovery.

The second group includes chronic illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and arthritis where the interventions are over a long period and there is a possibility of progression of illness and increasing restriction on life activities. Empathetic relationships are vital for making lifestyle changes throughout a lifetime. Information should be shared in the personal, social, and cultural context of the sick person/family to enable them to make the choices.

The third group of illnesses are those in which the outcome is uncertain in conditions like cancer, HIV/AIDS, and Parkinsonism. Besides the challenges of care programmes, there is the fear of recurrence and death. This is aggravated by uncertainties of life, pain, body image changes, stigma impact and health interactions.

Empathetic interactions should individualise the care taking into consideration what the illness/treatment means to the individual and the family. The initial questions should focus on, 'What has been the impact of the illness?'; 'What have been the ways of coping?' and only then shift to needs and problems. There is a need to recognise caregivers and use of cultural resources including spiritual resources.

The fourth group comprises illnesses where there is a significant loss of the individuality of



**E**mpathetic relationships are vital for making lifestyle changes throughout a lifetime. Information should be shared in the personal, social, and cultural context of the sick person/family to enable them to make the choices.



the person. An example of this is dementia and other chronic brain conditions. The challenge for the individual is to recognise the gradual loss of self. This need should be addressed with correct information about the illness, helping to maintain independence as much and as long as possible and to help prioritise life goals.

The caregivers need special empathetic support. The care team has to be available to the individual and family, to periodically reassess the needs and optimise the needs of the ill person and caregivers.

### **Value of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

American scientist Eric Topol has focussed on the positive aspects of AI.

AI could generate more time with patients in various ways. Large language models (LLMs) of clinic visit conversations could offload many data clerk functions. The emergence of deep learning apps to screen for certain medical conditions could free up clinician time. Patient autonomy can be extended via chat bots that answer medical questions, decompressing the need for direct contact with doctors and nurses. LLMs also can coach physicians. However, the challenge is that the machine promotion of empathy is pseudo-empathy

### **Being Empathetic in Healthcare**

This involves:

- i) Recognising the personal dimensions.
- ii) Asking the needs of the person.
- iii) Focussing on the strengths.
- iv) Active listening.

- v) Use of appropriate body language and touch.
- vi) Non-judgemental approach.
- vii) Expressing commitment to caring.

### **Implications for Care**

Firstly, there is a need to document the different ways health conditions impact individuals in their personal, family, social, economic and spiritual aspects of life. These should be specific to gender, age, education, income, and religion. Such 'live-in' experiences should guide the healthcare teams.

Secondly, dissemination of health information in an accessible, understandable and acceptable form should be part of all health contacts.

Thirdly, the training of healthcare professionals should include lessons on the importance of empathy in healthcare, sharing skills for empathetic interactions, and working conditions to facilitate empathy to be a vital part of all health interactions.

Fourthly, innovations in using AI.

Fifthly, research into the impact of integrating empathy in healthcare in terms of medical, economic and human benefits.

In the march of progress in medicine, there is a need to make empathy a central part of healthcare.

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# EMPATHY IS UNDERSTANDING THE PATIENT



A large majority of empathic responses in an interview are nonverbal. An essential ingredient in empathy is retaining objectivity.

**Maintaining objectivity is crucial in a therapeutic relationship. It differentiates empathy from identification.**



Respect for and consideration of the patient will contribute to the development of rapport. In the clinical setting, rapport can be defined as the harmonious responsiveness of the physician to the patient, and vice versa.

It is important that patients increasingly feel that the evaluation is a joint effort and that the psychiatrist is truly interested in their story. Empathetic intervention ('That must have been very difficult for you' or 'I am beginning to understand how awful you felt that') further increases the rapport.

Frequently, a non-verbal response like raised eyebrows or leaning toward the patient or a very brief response like 'Wow' will be similarly effective.

Empathy is understanding what the patient is thinking and feeling. This occurs when the psychiatrist can put himself or herself in the patient's place while at the same time maintaining objectivity.

For the psychiatrist to truly understand what the patient is thinking and feeling requires an appreciation of many issues in the patient's life. As the interview progresses, the patient's story unfolds, patterns of behaviour become evident, and it becomes clear what the patient may have experienced.

Early in the interview, the psychiatrist may not be as fully confident of where the patient is or was. It is often better not to guess the probable reasons but to encourage the patient

to continue. Head nodding, putting down one's pen, leaning towards the patient, or brief comments like 'I see', can accomplish this objective and simultaneously indicate that this is important material.

A large majority of empathic responses in an interview are nonverbal. An essential ingredient in empathy is retaining objectivity. Maintaining objectivity is crucial in a therapeutic relationship. It differentiates empathy from identification.

With identification, psychiatrists not only understands the emotion but also experiences it to the extent that he or she loses the ability to be objective. This blurring of boundaries between the patient and psychiatrist can be confusing and distressing to many patients, especially to those who, as part of their illness, already have significant boundary problems e.g., individuals with a borderline personality disorder.

Identification can also be draining to the psychiatrist and could lead to disengagement and ultimately burnout.

A patient often experiences considerable pain or other distress and frequently feels vulnerable and uncertain of what may happen. Because of the stigma of mental illness and misconceptions about psychiatry, the patient may be especially concerned or even frightened about seeing a psychiatrist. A skilled psychiatrist is aware of these potential issues and interacts in a manner to decrease the distress.

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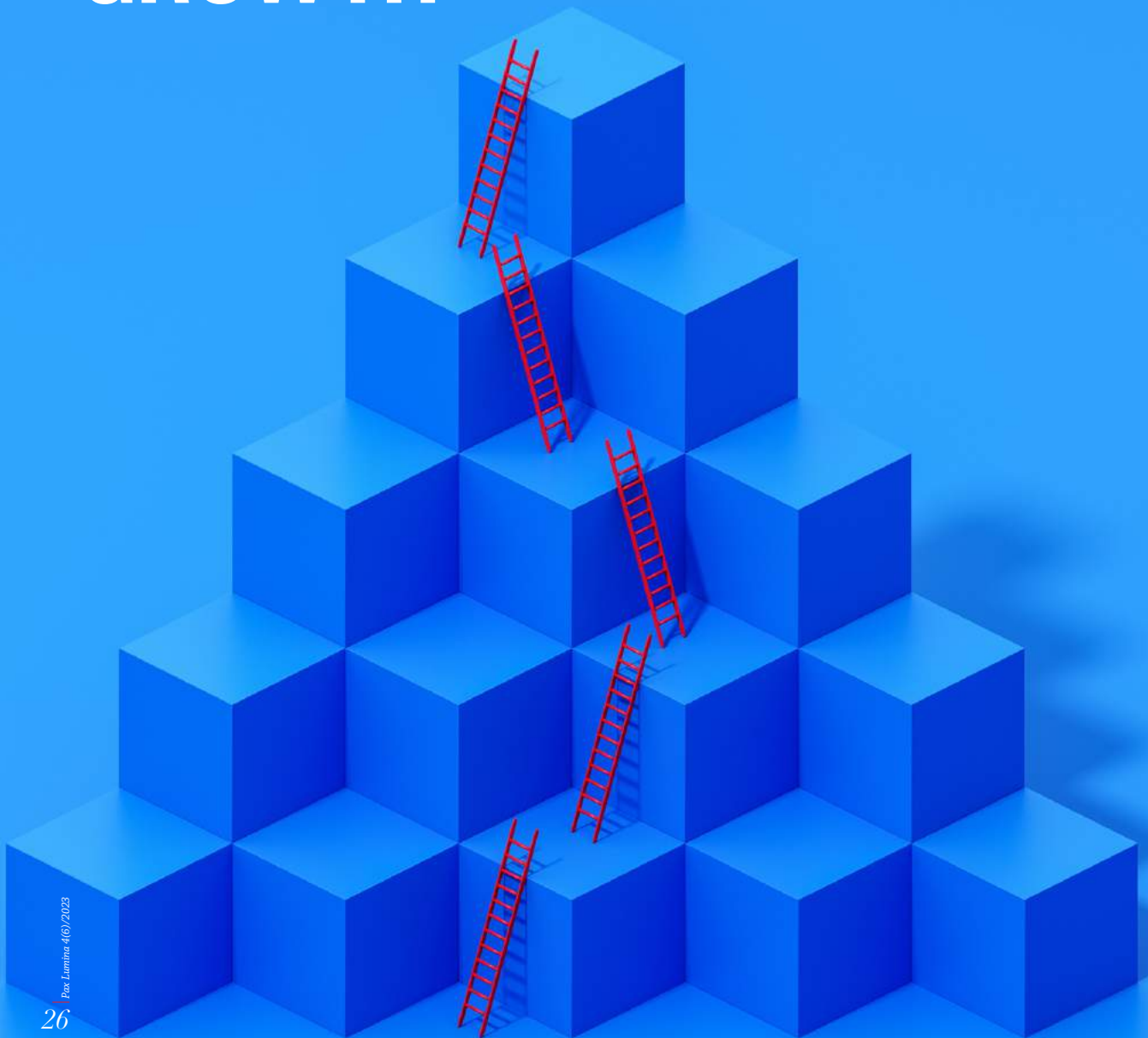
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# EMPATHY, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS & ECONOMIC GROWTH



**E**ither in the role of a business owner or a worker, meaning is an integral aspect of one's experience, bridging one's connection to the professional world and offering opportunities for adaptation and growth.

**This perspective underscores the role different stakeholders play in fostering a dynamic and ever-evolving industrial landscape that drives progress and prosperity.**



**I**n the diverse world of work, organisations represent a melting pot of individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems coming together. Industrial organisations bring together people leading to a convergence of, among other things, religions, cultures, and political ideologies. Industrial relations can be reconceptualised to understand how these ideas compete, collaborate, or converge together to develop an understanding of how people create and share meaning when they engage with one another.

In the contemporary landscape of work and business, a multitude of stakeholders hailing from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems find themselves in a shared professional environment. Within the realm of industrial organisations, this confluence of individuals leads to a rich tapestry of diversity, encompassing differences in religions, cultures, and political ideologies.

It invites us to reframe our understanding and explore how these contrasting or complementary ideas, rooted in diverse belief systems, cultures, and political stances, intersect, cooperate, or compete with one another.

By delving into these dynamics, we aspire for a comprehensive understanding of how people within these industrial organisations construct and exchange meaning as they interact with

one another. This exploration sheds light on the intricate web of interactions and shared values that underpin the processes of meaning-making, ultimately shaping the character of the workplace and its ability to encourage collaboration and understanding among all.

### **Stakeholders in Industrial Relations**

Industrial relations represent a context with multiple stakeholders each pursuing their agenda. In this multifaceted context, both personal and shared meanings play a pivotal role in shaping the continuous evolution of social reality. We view this evolution as an ever-changing and dynamic process where people construct meaning within the sphere of work-related activities. Either in the role of a business owner or a worker, meaning is an integral aspect of one's experience, bridging one's connection to the professional world and offering opportunities for adaptation and growth. This perspective underscores the role different stakeholders play in fostering a dynamic and ever-evolving industrial landscape that drives progress and prosperity.

This evolution is not static; it's a constant, ever-changing process where individuals come together to create significance in their work-related activities. The context of mainstream stakeholders and marginal stakeholders, many of them voiceless and powerless, is common in all industrial growth stories.



It raises the question as to how can the marginalised be brought into the mainstream, and empowered to raise their concerns and engage with the existing political system to benefit from the opportunities that are being created. It is pertinent to remember the words of Adam Smith regarding the need to include everyone in the development process (Wealth of Nations, I: VIII, p.96.).

‘No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members is poor and miserable.’

### **The Challenges and Possibilities**

It is a harsh reality that whatever the systems of governance in every country, there are marginalised, unentitled groups that are cut off from the mainstream. Moreover, the world of industry is in a perpetual state of change and evolution, shaped by an interplay of global and local economic influences and the dynamic force of political ideologies.

Within this ever-shifting landscape, the rate of obsolescence of business models ensures unsuccessful businesses will fall by the side, along with the people who depend on them.

The challenge for society and the government becomes two-fold:

- 1) to ensure the marginalised are brought to the mainstream
- 2) preventing the consequences of failed businesses to add to the numbers who need support.

This perspective recognises that the industrial environment is subject to multifaceted and often unpredictable influences, ranging from economic trends to shifts in political ideologies. As a result, it places a premium on adaptability and responsiveness. It also underscores the shared values that serve as the bedrock of peaceful and cooperative work environments.

Moreover, it seeks to enhance the ethic of care in today's organisations, reflecting the recognition that diverse human beings coexist and thrive in this dynamic and ever-evolving industrial landscape. In doing so, it underlines the importance of fostering an environment that values both individual and collective well-being, a critical aspect of contemporary organisations' success.

In the realm of industrial organisations, the dynamics between stakeholders play a crucial role in determining the overall success and prosperity of the organisation. How stakeholders interact with one another can be broadly categorised into two contrasting perspectives: the pluralistic

**R**ecognising the importance of a pluralistic perspective, valuing diverse interests, and engaging in open and constructive dialogue is the path to a more harmonious **and prosperous industrial organisation where violence, in all its forms, is less likely to be the language of the unheard**



perspective and the unitarist perspective. The choice to embrace or disregard these perspectives can have profound consequences for all parties involved.

The pluralistic perspective acknowledges and embraces the diversity of interests among stakeholders. It recognises that different stakeholders may have conflicting interests and seeks to find common ground and cooperative solutions.

In contrast, the unitarist perspective downplays the diversity of interests and promotes a more one-sided approach, often emphasising the

interests of management or a dominant group within the organisation. When stakeholders adopt a unitarist perspective and ignore the concerns of others, it often leads to a lose-lose situation for all parties involved.

In adopting a unitarist perspective, stakeholders risk pushing others to use these forms of 'violence' to protect their interests. The resulting lose-lose situation can manifest as a decrease in productivity, increased labour unrest, legal battles, or damage to the organisation's brand and financial standing, ultimately harming all stakeholders, including the group that initially sought to assert dominance.

In conclusion, the industrial organisation is a complex web of interconnected interests, and the actions of one stakeholder group can have far-reaching consequences. Ignoring the concerns of other stakeholders, whether through a unitarist perspective or otherwise, can lead to a lose-lose situation where all parties suffer.

Recognising the importance of a pluralistic perspective, valuing diverse interests, and engaging in open and constructive dialogue is the path to a more harmonious and prosperous industrial organisation where violence, in all its forms, is less likely to be the language of the unheard.



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# What is Fundamental Human Nature? **WAR** or **PEACE?**



**K**onrad Lorenz, regarded as one of the founders of modern ethology, the study of animal behaviour, has found that inter-species killing occurs in the animal kingdom, but intra-species killing is rare.



**I**s it in human nature to kill another human being, even on a battlefield?

Battlefields are places where one is expected to shoot down the enemy. But the book, 'Men Against Fire' by Brigadier General S L A Marshall, published in 1947, changed the existing beliefs about battlefield behaviour.

His study found that in World War II only 15-20 % of soldiers fired their weapons at the enemy, even if their own lives were endangered. This was the first significant study that showed that it is not easy for a normal human being to kill another person, even in war. These findings questioned the foundation of the existence of the armed forces. Why is it that a member of the armed forces is not willing to kill his enemy, even when he knows that the enemy is going to overrun his position? Does it have to do with our evolutionary roots?

Konrad Lorenz, regarded as one of the founders of modern ethology, the study of animal behaviour, has found that inter-species killing occurs in the animal kingdom, but intra-species killing is rare.

Lorenz emphasised that much animal aggression is ritualised, i.e., stops short of serious injury, and functions to establish who would win if fighting were to escalate to serious levels. Many times when animals with antlers and horns fight one another, they head-butt harmlessly. But when they fight any other species, they go to the side to gut and gore.

There are thousands of cave paintings from ancient times about hunting bison, horses and gazelles, but there is not a single depiction of war. To date, some three thousand human skeletons have been unearthed from around four hundred sites. Scientists who have studied these sites see no convincing evidence of prehistoric warfare.

So if warfare is recent, when did it begin?

French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said, "The first man who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say 'this is mine' – that's where it all started to go wrong." The advent of settlements and private property ushered in a new age in human behaviour.

Just as we humans started to settle down in one place, archaeological research has determined that humans built the first military fortifications. This is also when the first cave paintings appeared that depicted archers going at each other and legions of skeletons from these times bearing clear traces of violent injury. So, it is not surprising that even the present conflict in Gaza is all about ownership of land.

If it is not in human nature to kill another human being, how were human beings trained to kill other humans?

When experts across the world realised that there is a mental block in humans to fire at another human being, military establishments made fundamental changes to their training programmes. Many initiatives were taken to make the experiences mirror what the soldier will face on the battlefield. Bulls-eye targets were replaced by human-shaped targets that appeared without warning and which fell back on being hit.

Armies realised that it was important to increase the emotional distance between the soldier and the enemy. The less the soldier sees his enemy as a human being, the higher the chances of pumping a bullet into him. Therefore, several initiatives were taken to dehumanise the enemy. During the Rwanda genocide (1994), the murderers were told that the other community were not humans but cockroaches that should be crushed.

According to Dave Grossman, author of the book, 'On Killing – The Psychological Cost Of Learning To Kill In War And Society', the new training programmes did bear fruit. The firing rate of soldiers during the Korean War was 55 %. It rose to 90 % in the Vietnam War. But this came at a huge cost. The high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among the millions of Vietnam veterans showed that even the new training programmes have failed to make a soldier accept and rationalise the act of killing another human being.

**P**oliticians anywhere in the world view the world around them with only the next election in mind.

**These leaders use conflicts to consolidate their position among their followers, their in-groups, before an election. Conflicts are also an excellent opportunity for them to display their 'decisiveness' in taking on the out-groups.**



It is also clear about who will directly bear the consequences of the war, the fighters on both sides, their family members, and the civilians who will be caught in the crossfire, are not interested in war. But then who is interested in making a war happen? Who gains when a war happens?







Some of the conflicts around the world are along the faultiness of our personal conflicts. So, when such conflicts happen, many mentally participate in them and get into an emotional state called *schadenfreude* - a state of deriving vicarious pleasure from the suffering of others.



Political leadership on both sides can drive huge advantages from a conflict. Politicians anywhere in the world view the world around them with only the next election in mind. These leaders use conflicts to consolidate their position among their followers, their in-groups, before an election. Conflicts are also an excellent opportunity for them to display their 'decisiveness' in taking on the out-groups.

The second party who is very keen that conflicts happen regularly around the world are the arms manufacturers. It is a multi-billion-dollar industry. So, if there is peace in the world for too long, the machines in their factories will lie idle. But every time a gun is fired, or a rocket is launched, the production lines of the arms manufacturers become operational. So, as much as a fast-food manufacturer develops appealing marketing strategies to sell their products, the arm manufacturers too will do all they can to incite as many conflicts as possible, as regularly as possible, around the world.

The third group are those who use these conflicts as a proxy for their mental conflicts. Some of the conflicts around the world are along the faultiness of our personal conflicts. So, when

such conflicts happen, many mentally participate in them and get into an emotional state called *schadenfreude* - a state of deriving vicarious pleasure from the suffering of others.

So, every time a rocket hits a house in Israel or a Gaza household is razed to the ground, many around the world find a vicarious pleasure from watching those scenes, depending on which side they are supporting. This is much like watching a war movie in their living room, with popcorn in hand.

So, the reality is that humans are not born to kill other humans. But unfortunately, there are several groups of people who benefit when wars happen. They will do all they can to keep these conflicts alive. This conflict in Gaza is no different.

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# FROM **ATHEISM** TO **BELIEF**

## THE EMPATHETIC EXPERIENCE OF **DR. FRANCIS S. COLLINS**



**D**uring his contact with patients, he experienced the power of empathetic love. He was moved to tears and started to raise questions related to this. **He searched for an answer and this led him to the realisation of the existence of moral law which was the guiding principle for this kind of feeling.**



**D**r. Francis S. Collins (1950-), is a world-renowned geneticist and a medical doctor. He was an agnostic in the beginning and later an atheist. During his contact with patients, he experienced the power of empathetic love. He was moved to tears and started to raise questions related to this. He searched for an answer and this led him to the realisation of the existence of moral law which was the guiding principle for this kind of feeling.

He also realised that these kinds of feelings were present in every human being. From here, he went on to find out the link between faith and moral law. His involvement in the historical Human Genome Project and the marvels he experienced in the many facets of DNA compelled him to admire the principle behind all these with awe and wonder. He understood the meaning of human life and its relation to this principle, which he identified as God. His search led him to be a believer. This article will elaborate on these aspects.

Dr Francis S. Collins was the leader of the historic Human Genome Project <sup>1</sup>. He has discovered genes associated with many diseases. He is the recipient of numerous awards. He was formerly the director of the National Institute of Health, USA. He has written several books on science, medicine and religion.

Pope Benedict XVI appointed him to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2009. He is the acting science advisor to the American President Joe Biden. He established the BioLogos Foundation to contribute to the public voice that represents the harmony of science and faith.

Collins, even though born to Christian parents, grew up as an agnostic, then turned into a committed atheist, and later became a true believer. This was made possible through various experiences he had with people, science and literature (books).

The first experience was when he went to Nigeria as a medical volunteer. After seeing the conditions there he felt he had made a wrong decision. However, he continued his work of helping patients. One day he saved a Nigerian farmer from death due to tuberculosis. The farmer told him, "I get the sense you are wondering why you came here. I have an answer for you. You came here for me."<sup>2</sup>

This stunned Dr Collins. He was moved to tears. As the years went by, this empathetic experience had a tremendous effect on him, and slowly he realised that we are called to reach out to each other.



**H**e was convinced that it was empathetic love that sought no recompense. It pointed at the goodness within ourselves and others. **He opined that this goodness emanated from the moral law that is universally prevalent, and which is the strongest signpost to God.**



Simple acts of kindness from one person to another are examples of this. He says, “The simple act of trying to help one person in a desperate situation turned out to represent the most meaningful of all human experiences.”<sup>3</sup>

He was convinced that it was empathetic love that sought no recompense. It pointed at the goodness within ourselves and others. He opined that this goodness emanated from the moral law that is universally prevalent, and which is the strongest signpost to God.

### Early Life

He was the youngest of four boys. In his early years, he was home-schooled by his mother. “Faith was not an important part of my childhood,”<sup>4</sup> he says. At the age of 14, his eyes were opened to the wonderfully exciting and powerful methods of science. He pursued chemistry at the University of Virginia. During that period, he became an agnostic. He believed that religious faiths had no foundational truth. During his PhD programme at the University of Yale, he became convinced that everything in the universe could be explained based on equations and physical principles. Soon, he shifted from agnosticism to atheism<sup>5</sup>.

When he studied Biochemistry, he realised the glory of DNA, RNA and Protein. Then, he joined medicine at the University of North



*Dr. Francis Collins*

Carolina. During this study, he was astounded by the elegance of the human DNA code and the multiple consequences of those rare careless moments of its copying mechanism.

### Getting New Insights

During his practice, he witnessed numerous cases of individuals whose faith provided them with a strong reassurance of ultimate peace. One day, an old woman asked Collins what he believed<sup>6</sup>. This rattled him and haunted him for many days. This was too pressing to avoid because he found many people like this old woman who were terminally ill, yet very peaceful and serene due to their deep faith in God.

Collins started to study the tenets of major religions. In this, CS Lewis helped him very much through his books<sup>7</sup>. The concept of moral law as described by Lewis attracted him very much. Soon he realised that the existence of moral law (the law of right behaviour; the concept of right and wrong) is universal among all human beings. It is an intrinsic quality of being human.

Moral law is the ‘law of right behaviour’. People can see this being practised all over the world by all sections of people from small things to big things, where they look for what is right and what is not.

It thus seems to be a phenomenon approaching that of a law, like the law of gravitation or special relativity.

This law appears to apply particularly to human beings. It is the awareness of right and wrong, along with the development of language, awareness of self and the ability to imagine the future that contributes to this. Is this sense of right and wrong an intrinsic quality of being human, or a consequence of cultural traditions?

## Implications

Collins understood clearly that this moral law specific to human nature cannot be explained away as a cultural artefact or evolutionary by-product. He started reflecting deeply on all things related to this.

The following thoughts emanated in his mind.

The denunciations of oppression, murder, treachery and falsehood and the injunctions of kindness, alms-giving, impartiality and honesty have been highlighted in the writings of every civilisation from ancient times. A major example of the force we feel from the moral law is the altruistic impulse, the voice of conscience calling us to help others even if nothing is received in return.

Altruism is the truly selfless giving of oneself to others with absolutely no secondary motives. Lewis calls this kind of selfless love 'agape' (Greek word for sacrificial love)<sup>8</sup>. This 'agape'



love can be distinguished from three other forms of love such as affection, friendship and romantic love. 'Agape' cannot be accounted for by the drive of individual selfish genes to perpetuate themselves.

'Agape' urges us to make sacrifices that lead to suffering, injury or death, without any evidence of benefit. Collins says that in years of dreaming of going to Africa, he had felt the gentle stirrings of a desire to do something truly unselfish for others – that calling to serve with no expectation of personal benefit that is common to all human cultures.<sup>9</sup>

The motivation to practise this kind of love exists within all of us. This moral law emanates from a power that is inside of us, influencing us and commanding us to behave in a certain way.

Can this power influence us to be God?

This God is someone who desires some kind of relationship with human beings who are made in his image and hence has instilled a special glimpse of himself into each one of us. Judging by the moral law which demands high standards, this God must be the embodiment of goodness. He must be holy and righteous.

## Sequencing Experience

Collins' involvement in the Human Genome Project gave him many opportunities to reflect deeper into his life. He was in awe of DNA because of its extraordinary qualities and its brilliance. In the DNA, he was able to experience the revelation of the language of God (the human instruction book). He understood how God spoke life into being through DNA language. He was filled with awe and wonder.

Collins says, "For me, the experience of sequencing the human genome, and uncovering the most remarkable of all texts, was both a stunning scientific achievement and an occasion of worship."<sup>10</sup> The DNA sequence alone, even if accompanied by a vast trove of data on biological functions, will never explain certain special human attributes, such as the knowledge of the moral law, and the universal search for God."<sup>11</sup>

If God exists, then He must be outside the natural world, and therefore the tools of science are not the right ones to learn about him. The

**M**oral law is the 'law of right behaviour'. People can see this being practised all over the world by all sections of people from small things to big things, where they look for what is right and what is not.



evidence of God's existence would have to come from other directions. The ultimate decision would be based on faith, not proof.

The feelings of awe and wonder experienced by human beings at various moments of their lives call us to look for something beyond us. This leads to a universal sense of longing for a power beyond our own – God.

The elegance behind life's complexity is indeed the reason for awe and belief in God. There are good reasons to believe in God including the existence of mathematical principles and order in creation. These were the random thoughts that occupied the mind of Collins constantly propelling him to a deeper understanding.

### Greater Realisation

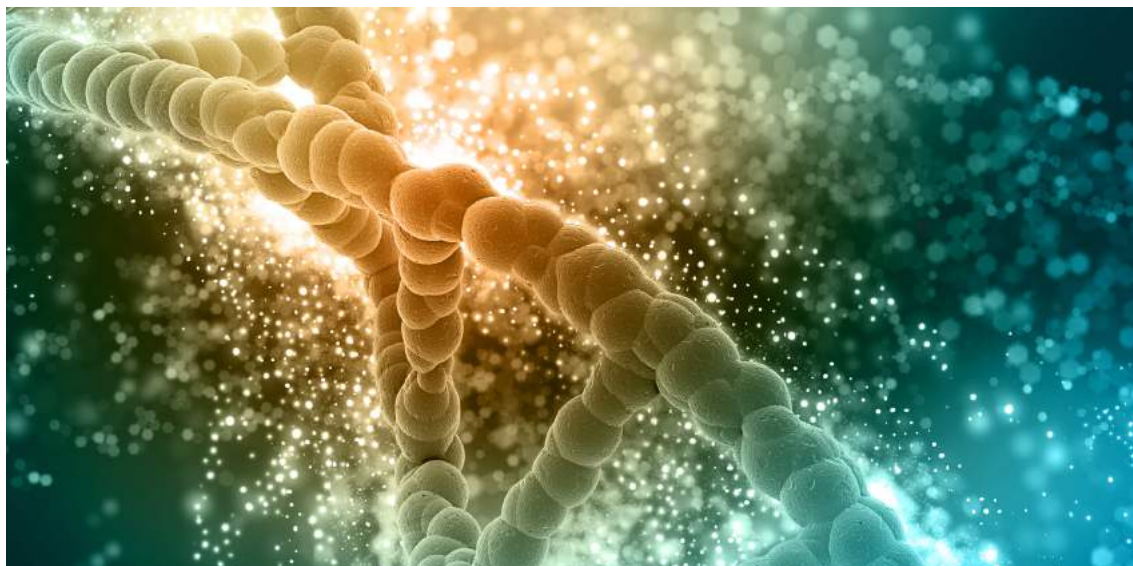
"This moral law shone its bright white light into the recesses of my childish atheism,"<sup>12</sup> says Collins. This revelation worked on Collins steadily, leading him to realise that there must be a connection between the high standards of the moral law and a benevolent God.

Collins says, "I had started this journey of intellectual exploration to confirm my atheism. That now lay in ruins as the argument from the moral law (and many other issues) forced me to admit the plausibility of the God hypothesis."<sup>13</sup>

### Faith in God

After many years of study and reflection, Collins says that he concluded that faith in God was much more compelling than the atheism he had previously embraced. He was beginning for the first time in his life to perceive some of the eternal truths of the Bible.

He writes, "The study of genomes – our own and that of many other organisms on the planet – provided an incredibly rich and detailed view of how descent by modification from a common ancestor has occurred. Rather than finding this unsettling, I found this elegant evidence of the relatedness of all living things an occasion of awe. I came to see this as the master plan of the same Almighty who caused the universe to come into being and set its physical parameters precisely right to allow the creation of stars, planets, heavy elements and life itself."<sup>14</sup>





Dr. Francis Collins receives the National Medal of Science from President Barack Obama at the White House in 2009.

He also states that theistic evolution makes it possible for the scientist-believer to be intellectually fulfilled and spiritually alive, both worshipping God and using the tools of science to uncover some of the awesome mysteries of his creation. It is intellectually rigorous; it provides answers to many otherwise puzzling questions, and it allows science and faith to fortify each other like two unshakable pillars, holding up a building called truth. He says, “The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. He can be worshipped in the cathedral or the laboratory. His creation is majestic, awesome, intricate, and beautiful.”<sup>15</sup>

Collins says, “The moral law stands out for me as the strongest signpost to God. More than that, it points to a God who cares about human beings, and a God who is infinitely good and holy. Christianity has provided for me that special ring to eternal truth.”<sup>16</sup>

He concludes by saying “Science is not threatened by God. It is enhanced. God is most certainly not threatened by science. He made it all possible.”<sup>17</sup>

## A Deep Sense of Awe

My experience in genetics, biodiversity and mentoring students all these years has strengthened my belief in God. A deep sense of awe and wonder at the diversity and intricate relationships that exist in the biological world and at the same time the empathy and altruistic love that motivate me to help my students shine in their lives are indicators of something that drives me from within.

This driving force is certainly the ethical values that are enshrined in my heart based on my deep faith in God who is the author of all goodness.

Innumerable numbers of students have written to me to express their indebtedness because of the selfless and other-oriented service they experienced through me which also made them give something of themselves to others. Many of them informed me that they were able to experience feelings of nobility and esteem as they served others selflessly.

## Conclusion

Dr. Collins’ journey from atheism to belief has been shaped by his empathetic love that motivated him to work for people in Nigeria and many patients in the hospitals where he worked. These experiences made him reflect on his life and its meaning. His search led him to realise the presence of moral law universally and the emanation of this law from God who is the author of all living beings and non-living things.

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# EMPATHETIC FRATERNITY IN POPE FRANCIS' FRATELLI TUTTI







**R**ecent research in psychoanalysis and child development indicates that the experience of empathy is essential for a healthy individual and a healthy society. The absence of empathy in the social sphere can result in the isolation of individuals and their failure to understand or appreciate the experiences of those who come from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Pope Francis has shown the importance of empathy for a healthy individual and healthy society by examining the role of social charity in the economic and political realms in his encyclical, 'Fratelli Tutti' (FT). He extends the role of empathetic fraternity into the social and political structures of society that exhibit the need for reform.

We face today a growing tension among nations, communities, and individuals. It is imperative to build a new understanding and dialogue to inform a new social reality. Political, economic, and cultural activities do not always foster

attitudes toward other people that bring about empathy and solidarity.

Pope Francis has, therefore, proposed a platform for understanding and communication between people that relates to their human and spiritual development fostering the idea of universal fraternity. This term, used by Pope Francis, is understood as the fraternity of men and women, brothers and sisters.

Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers) was signed on October 3, 2020, in Assisi, central Italy. It was the third encyclical since Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio took the name Francis on his election to the papacy in March 2013.

His papacy has made it clear that the needs of the poor, the marginalised and disenfranchised are at the centre of his ministry. The underlying principle of Francis is that the philosophy of human fraternity applies to everyone on planet Earth.

To experience universal fraternity Pope Francis urges us to work together for an open rather than a closed worldview:

'Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails' [64] (Pope Francis, FT. Paragraph 87).

All people of faith are expected by Pope Francis to mobilise and become agents for change in the world. While *Laudato Si'* (Praise to

**W**e face today a growing tension among nations, communities, and individuals. It is imperative to build a new understanding and dialogue to inform a new social reality. **Political, economic, and cultural activities do not always foster attitudes toward other people that bring about empathy and solidarity.**



You, 2015) implored the world to 'care for its common home', Fratelli Tutti offers teaching devoted to the concepts of fraternity and social friendship based upon the example of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Pope Francis calls for a new global vision that allows us to feel empathy for people and issues that may seem distant from us by geography, culture or concern. More and more the local and global issues we face are converging together such as we can experience with the climate crisis.

We cannot isolate ourselves from the environmental, socio-political and moral challenges of our era that could lead to another world war or a collapse of our economic and environmental systems. These are the 'dark clouds' on the horizon to which Pope Francis refers in Fratelli Tutti.

He writes: 'Thanks to regional exchanges, by which poorer countries become open to the wider world, universality does not necessarily water down their distinct features. An appropriate and authentic openness to the world presupposes the capacity to be open to one's neighbour within a family of nations. Cultural, economic and political integration with neighbouring peoples should therefore be accompanied by a process of education that promotes the value of love for one's neighbour, the first indispensable step towards attaining a healthy universal integration' (Pope Francis, FT: Paragraph: 151).

Pope Francis also calls for a new global vision that challenges populist policies and politics

that have led to polarisation, sectarianism and ethnocentrism in many parts of the world. These social fears and biases have become political forces separating and dividing people from one another. He also observes the resurgence of racism which demonstrates the lack of empathy and aggressive nationalism which lies at the heart of the global crisis.

Pope Francis' understanding of charity now includes what he calls 'political charity'. Perhaps for the first time in the history of Catholic social teachings, Francis redefines what 'charity' means within the sphere of politics and public social policy.

Francis wants us to see that social charity can inform the whole of a society's moral and political life. He is moving beyond the traditional utilitarian view of Western societies. This often bases its political life primarily on what may be the best for those with the most economic power in a society or ethnic cohesion and influence.

Recognising that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity.

Whereas individuals can help others in need when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the 'field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity'. [165] This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity. [166] 'Once more, I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good' [167] (Pope Francis: FT, Paragraph 180).

Pope Francis believes that empathetic fraternity can become a universal political force known as social or political charity. It becomes a force of nature in that it reflects the very ground of what it means to be a human being. We are inextricably linked with all of creation including all our human brothers and sisters. This is not just a pious exhortation. We stand or fall together. No one can be excluded from this family and we need to acknowledge not just by our words but our deeds as well.



**W**e cannot isolate ourselves from the environmental, **socio-political and moral challenges of our era that could lead to another world war or a collapse of our economic and environmental systems.**



‘Social love’[172] makes it possible to advance towards a civilisation of love, to which all of us can feel called. Charity, with its impulse to universality, is capable of building a new world. [173] No mere sentiment, it is the best means of discovering effective paths of development for everyone.

Social love is a ‘force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organisations and legal systems from within’ [174] (Pope Francis: FT, Paragraph 180).

Pope Francis identifies the failure of technological innovations to unite the human community. The growth of the Internet and social media has expanded the possibility for uniting humanity but these technological innovations are often controlled by purely commercial enterprises which are controlled primarily by the profit motive.

Social media have often led to the growth of conspiracy theories that divide rather than unite the human community. Digital campaigns of hatred and destruction, for their part, are not – as some would have us believe – a positive form of mutual support, but simply an association of individuals united against a perceived common enemy.

‘Digital media can also expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation and a gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships’[46] (Pope Francis: FT, Paragraph 43).

To foster a new quality of empathetic fraternity, we need to learn how to listen to each other

across the borders of various kinds of limited identities created by culture, ideologies and ethnocentrism.

The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet ‘today’s world is largely a deaf world... At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through, we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. We must not lose our ability to listen.’

Saint Francis ‘heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many’ [49] (Pope Francis: FT, Paragraph 48).

Pope Francis has established a new horizon for empathetic fraternity which can transform our individualistic and utilitarian social and political structures into those informed by social charity and political love. He challenges both Catholics and those in other faith traditions to realise a common horizon for us all.

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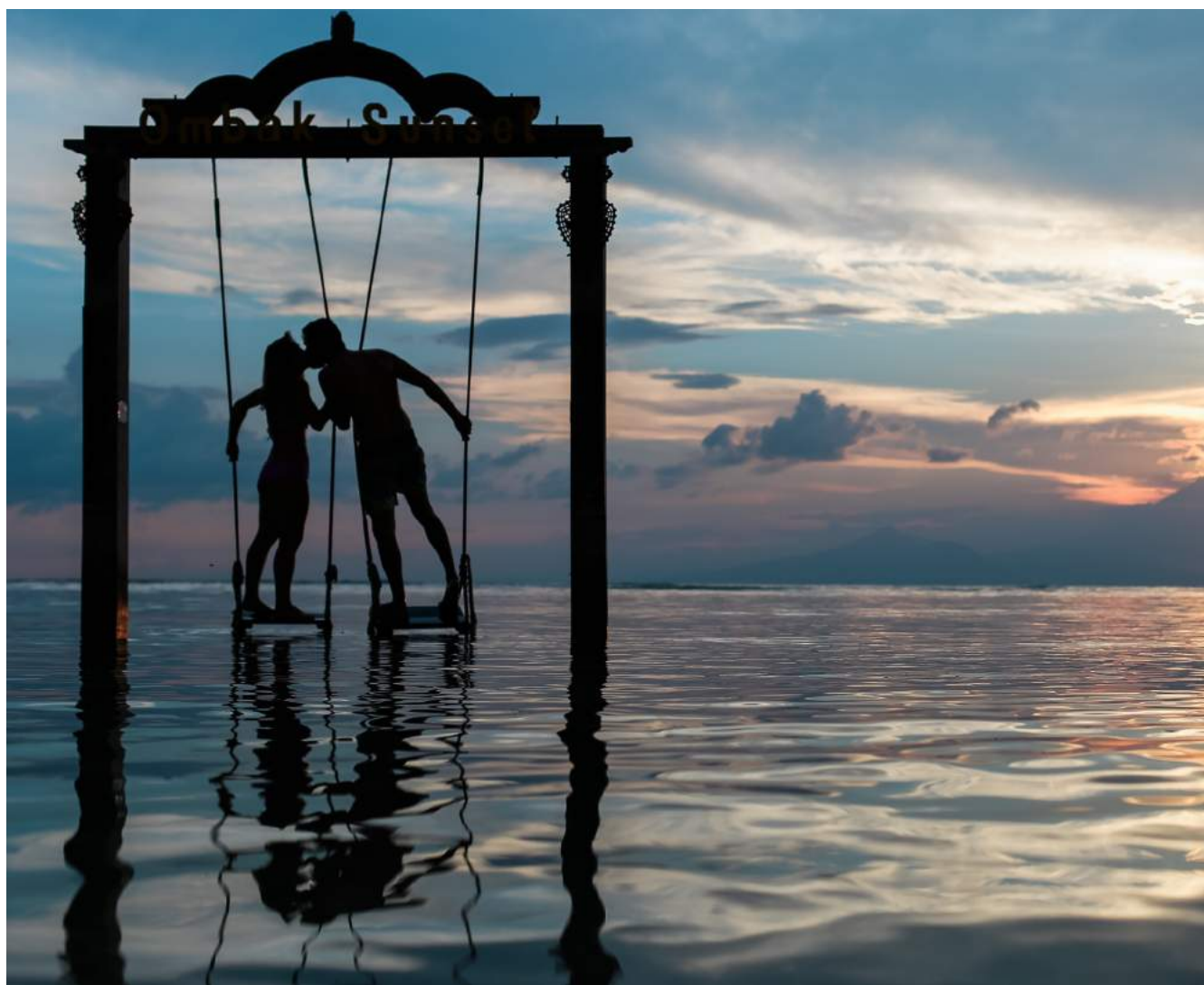




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# EMPATHY ISN'T STRAIGHTFORWARD AND YET NECESSARY



**E**mpathy enables us to recognise the emotions in others, **to understand their perspective on a given situation and facilitates us to use that insight to support them through stressful and challenging situations.**



Cognitive empathy more than feeling the suffering of the other helps me to understand the suffering. For example, understanding sadness is not the same as feeling sad. Empathy enables us to recognise the emotions in others, to understand their perspective on a given situation and facilitates us to use that insight to support them through stressful and challenging situations.

Cognitive empathy may not always be translated into emotive and behavioural empathy in the face of the pain and suffering of others. Cognitive empathy is sometimes called ‘perspective taking’. It refers to our ability to identify and understand other people’s emotions. It enables you to put yourself in someone else’s shoes but not necessarily sense or feel their emotion.

I have looked at empathy more in the context of socio-political research and humanitarian care. Human Development scientists suggest that empathy is not just something we develop through our upbringing and life experiences but it is also partly inherited and innate.

Scientists also say that generally, women tend to be more empathetic than men. Social scientists engaged in research on war and conflict suggest that empathy during fieldwork is difficult and complex. Empathy, therefore, is not as straightforward in intensive fieldwork on violence and war in general for social researchers.

Empathy is not as simple as it sounds. Moved by the suffering and pain of the other seems easy but when you know about the person and discover whether the person was the persecutor or persecuted the feeling of empathy may change.

‘**L**ove is not without its flaws. The stronger the love, the more it tests you. Compassion and empathy will make true love persist’ – Khalil Gibran.

Empathy may be defined as the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference. Empathy is in the realm of ethics of caring.

Empathy facilitates relating in various circumstances. It is not only individual but collective. One feels for the group and community. The root of the word empathy is in the Greek word ‘empathia’ which is also related to ‘pathos’ meaning passion, and suffering. Therefore, we often talk of empathy in the face of suffering, and distress of the other.

It may help us to know the kinds of empathy we experience and therefore empathetic action and behaviour will be clearer. Psychologists have defined three different kinds of empathy: Cognitive, Emotional and Compassionate.

**E**mpathy is a relational, intersubjective process that can affect both the sympathiser and the one who is empathised with.

**This process is delicate and needs to be handled with sensitivity and dignity.**



In the given context of the violence in Manipur in India, between Palestine and Israel, a lot of empathy is evoked across the world. Our empathy is directed based on our perception of who is responsible and whom we side with the violence.

When two countries are in conflict it is not that all are involved in the conflict. Neither is the conflict to safeguard the rights of the ordinary citizens. It is usually the governments, the rich vested interests that support the government in power and whose interests the government usually safeguards, who are the main culprits behind the conflict and violence. Wealth, resources, control over them and power over people and territory are the key components of conflict and violence.

In such conflicts, civilians aligning with the different interests and actors in the conflict may feel empathy for the people they side with.

They might even feel empathy for the others, ‘unloved’, ‘repellent’ groups who suffer. But in some way, we tend to blame the suffering people for siding with the opposition. Such partisan empathy prevents us from being inclusive, empathetic and helpful.

Shesterinina Anastasia, Senior Lecturer in Politics/International Politics at the University of Sheffield, in an article, ‘Ethics, empathy and fear in research on violent conflict’, talks about selective empathy as problematic concerning research ethics, but also how it could shape research results.

As researchers, we may empathise to varying degrees with some participants and fear others. Likewise, the empathy of the civil society members and organisations can influence the action and the assistance made available to people who suffer whether it is in Manipur or Palestine.

Some of us are afraid to voice and act on our sense of empathy because we feel vulnerable, afraid of being harmed by the powerful and our governments. Empathy and ethics of care is much needed in today’s violent world, but it is risky and not easy to come by.

American political scientist Elizabeth Jean Wood, in the context of conflicts and violence, has argued that the protection of human subjects is the paramount ethical concern where repercussions stemming from research can be

severe due to 'political polarisation, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events, and traumatising through violence.'

Not only social research but humanitarian action in these highly politicised conditions can result in traumatising, local retaliation, and state investigations and punishment. Human rights activists at the grassroots face these dangers constantly. Like tribal rights activist Fr Stan Swamy many have faced the brutality of the state.

Empathy is a relational, intersubjective process that can affect both the sympathiser and the one who is empathised with. This process is delicate and needs to be handled with sensitivity and dignity. Pema Chödrön, an American Tibetan-Buddhist, put it well by saying, "Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It is a relationship between equals. Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity."

We need to recognise that there is a dark side to empathy. Caring for one person can trigger unfounded aggression towards another. Psychologist Paul Bloom in 'Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion' (2016), argued that if we rely too heavily on our emotions, especially empathy, to guide our judgments, decisions, and behaviour, our empathic responses to other people can lead us away from the morally good and right course of action.

Our decisions have moral consequences. He argues that decisions made on mere empathy

may not be effective in changing the situation. He proposes that our caregiving decisions be more rational than just based on the feeling of empathy.

There is yet another danger about empathy. In a series of studies in Sweden in 2014, Psychologist Paul Slovic and his colleagues demonstrated that people not only become numb to the significance of increasing numbers, but their compassion can fade or collapse over time as the number of people suffering (wounded, killed, sick) increase. Out of sight is out of mind, we say. The media loses interest. They have no news value for such suffering. People gradually get back to their lives leaving the suffering to their fate.

Empathy might be helpful in situations where the affected groups are conducive or non-threatening. In my own experience, in the Gujarat state-sponsored violence in 2002, I realised that being empathetic when there was a dire need for medical treatment for innocent children and civilians, the empathisers had to face the wrath of the right-wing Hindutva extremists and a threat to their lives.

Empathy in terms of listening to the suffering people and providing them with some assistance in terms of medicine, food and shelter becomes possible when the 'opposite groups' allow it or and when the State machinery is willing to help.

Today, in the face of such crises and suffering of innocent people (Ukraine, Manipur, and Palestine are cases in point) whether they are my loved ones or not, or whether they are in



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**Empathy can also be shown by creating a greater understanding of the situation and thus moving towards justice, peace and reconciliation.**



Paul Slovic

Shesterinina Anastasia

the 'repellent' group, do we want to empathise with these suffering masses?

We need to take recourse to our human ethics of care and go beyond our ethnicity, religion, nationality, political ideology, and vested interests in reaching out. We need to join hands with people of goodwill, those who are committed to justice, and human rights, in ways that are effective and lead to peace and reconciliation. It is more difficult than said but efforts need to be made.

Empathy may be translated into cash and kind. I can express my empathy through my messages, representing my views and empathy to the concerned authority. Empathy can also be shown by creating a greater understanding of the situation and thus moving towards justice, peace and reconciliation.

Often such efforts are more effective collectively than individually. Thus, international organisations including the United Nations can play a greater role in channelling the empathy of people.

In the 2001 earthquake and 2002 genocide in Gujarat I realised that empathy alone is not enough. One needs a sense of history, analysis of the situation and politics to reach out to people more meaningfully. Because justice is at stake, human rights are at stake and the dignity of human beings are on the line.

In the face of such massive violence, several issues affect the people who are victims of violence. When governments are involved in such violence the situation becomes even more complex and polarised.

Some empathetic actions have been taken in the past and are available to human communities. Relief and rehabilitation are the most common and comparatively easy to mobilise. But action leading to legal justice, and holding the perpetrators of violence responsible before the court of law is extremely difficult.

Advocacy at the local, national and international levels for justice, peace and reconciliation is challenging and risky when government/s are non-democratic in their behaviour. Empathy requires rational and strategic responses from various agencies and individuals. Difficult but necessary all the same.

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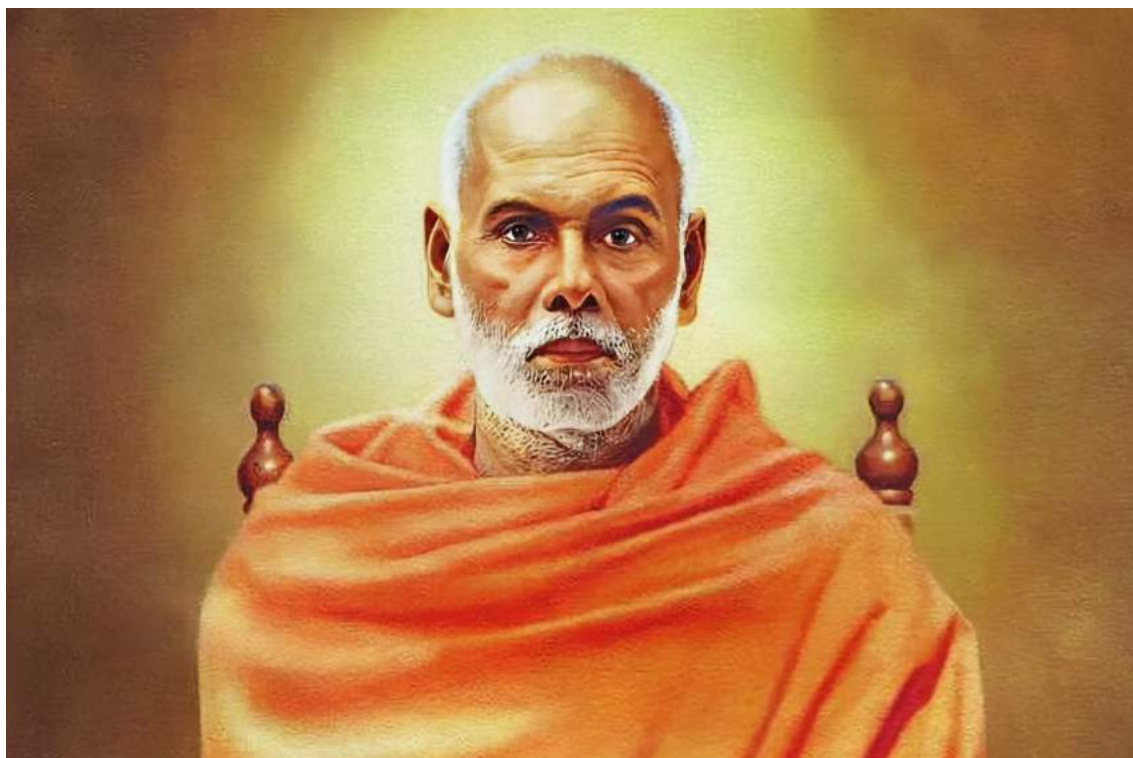


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# EMPATHY IN NARAYANA GURU

**‘O**h Sea of Mercy! Grant us such Compassion that even to an ant no harm be caused and also (grant) within us a mind which never wanders away from your Divine Form. By kindness comes joy. To a heart devoid of love comes all sorrows. Kindness, Love, Compassion – these three in essence are one. It is life’s (guiding) star. “Only those with kindness are (really) living”. May these words be chanted (remembered).’

– Narayana Guru



**T**he Nadar women's struggles became more prominent with the rise of Western colonial modernity and the interventions by the Christian missionaries. **This resurgence of modernist values like liberty, equality and fraternity was given an ethical and compassionate social philosophy and secular accent by Narayana Guru through his historic articulations and writing that established humanity or humanness as the caste of the human.**



**D**uring the raging wars and genocides caused by the caste system, it was Narayana Guru (1856-1928) who wrote and spoke about equality, empathy, fraternity and humanised the State of Kerala a century ago.

When Zionism and fascism are on the rise today and inflicting suffering on humanity the life-affirming values of empathy and fraternity are vital.

Kerala's renaissance struggles began in the early 19th century. Even before the advent of imperial rule, the struggle against the caste system was on. It was led by women like Nangeli of Cherthala and Sakuntaladevi. They defied Brahmanical patriarchy and the Kshatriya-Sudra masculinities and casteist-sexist oppression and hegemony.

In 1806, 200 Ezhava men tried to enter the Vaikom Temple. They were massacred by the Travancore cavalry and thrown into a pond (kulam). This was known as the Dalava Kulam massacre. The Nadar women's struggles became more prominent with the rise of Western colonial modernity and the interventions by the Christian missionaries.

This resurgence of modernist values like liberty, equality and fraternity was given an ethical and compassionate social philosophy and secular accent by Narayana Guru through his historic articulations and writing that established humanity or humanness as the caste of the human (Guru, 2000).

While predecessors like Vaikundhasamy, Tykad Ayya and Chattambisamy operated within the Vaishnavite and Saivite Hindu framework Narayana Guru displayed a polyphonic and secular vision that encompasses the ethical and religious praxes of the world including the rational and agnostic skeptical modes of critical enquiry.

Narayana Guru made it clear that he is not a Hindu sage when he said, "It is the British who gave us Sanyasam and they are our gurus. And if it was in the time of Ram even Sudras were not allowed to become sages (the Sudra sage Sambuka was beheaded by Ram for trying to be a Muni) because the Hindus were ruled by the Smritis" (Balakrishnan 2000: 164).

This statement is the greatest evidence of his rejection of being a Hindu sage. He was talking about the improvement of the human rather than a religious identity and always upheld the choice and freedom of religion unlike Vaikundhar and Chattambisamy who wrote the 'Kristumata Chedanam'.

If we closely follow his teachings we can realise the involvement of the guru in various religious and rational discourses of his time. Social reformer C V Kunjuraman was close to Christianity, and released the 'Yellow Book' on

**W**e closely follow his teachings we can realise the involvement of the guru in various religious and rational discourses of his time. Social reformer C V Kunjuraman was close to Christianity, and released the 'Yellow Book' on conversion.

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Vaikom Temple

conversion. He made a historic speech at the Maraman convention. But it was Sahodaran and Mitavadi who pioneered the Neo Buddhist movement in Kerala between 1910-30. This Neo Buddhism in Kerala was already existing when social reformer B.R. Ambedkar propagated it in the 1950s. Narayana Guru was called the Kerala Buddha by his poet disciples like Mooloor, Karuppan, Asan and Sahodaran.

Guru advised Sahodaran to develop Christ-like patience when he came to meet him at Aluva after the Cherai inter-dining event. Around 200 people from all castes sat for lunch on May 27, 1917, at Cherai in the Cochin State.

Also, he wrote on the prophet, Jesus and the Buddha in his later philosophical works. He indeed wrote about the Hindu gods in his early devotional or Stotra Kritis. But it was part of his traditional Kudipallykoodam education in Sanskrit and Bhasha and part of his early devotional phase in which he was called Nanubhaktan or Nanu Chattambi (Sekher 2016). The guru has also made a statement that the person who composed the Stotra Kritis had long ceased to exist.

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# INCORPORATING VALUES OF COMPASSION INTO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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**This inclusivity promotes a more equitable and just society. Students who understand and value these principles are less likely to engage in aggressive or harmful behaviour, contributing to a safer and more peaceful society. Moreover, these values are critical in addressing issues such as poverty, climate change, and inequality, as they encourage individuals to work together for the common good.**



**H**igher education is associated with positivity and societal goodness. A highly educated person is expected to be enlightened, and peaceful and decide logically what is good for society. These assumptions are, however, rapidly getting frayed.

In an increasingly interconnected world, echoes of wars, communal strife and various other forms of violence are tearing the world apart. This has started to rock institutions of higher education as well. Academic campuses are no longer idyllic peaceful havens, as they are often assumed to be.

Political violence is erupting regularly on educational campuses in India, often over flimsy issues. Academic environments are getting vitiated. The impressionable minds of the students are getting intoxicated by vicious political propaganda designed to widen social faultlines.

There is a pressing need to imbibe student communities with moral values like compassion and empathy to foster responsible citizenship. Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly diverse. Teaching these values can help students appreciate and respect differences in culture, race, gender, and background.

This inclusivity promotes a more equitable and just society. Students who understand and value these principles are less likely to engage in aggressive or harmful behaviour, contributing to a safer and more peaceful society. Moreover, these values are critical in addressing issues such as poverty, climate change, and inequality, as they encourage individuals to work together for the common good.

However, incorporating moral values like compassion and empathy in higher education can be a complex and challenging endeavour due to a variety of factors.

Here are some of the key challenges associated with this process:

1. **Diverse Student Body:** Higher education institutions often have a diverse student body with varying cultural, religious, and ideological backgrounds. What one person considers a morally upright value might differ significantly from another's perspective. Balancing this diversity while teaching values like compassion and empathy can be challenging.
2. **Faculty and Staff Buy-In:** Faculty and staff may not uniformly share the same moral values, making it difficult to ensure consistency in promoting compassion and empathy across the institution. Without the commitment of educators and administrators, it can be challenging to create a culture of empathy and compassion.
3. **Curriculum Integration:** Infusing moral values into the curriculum can be difficult.



**M**any higher education institutions are working to integrate moral values like compassion and empathy into their curricula and campus cultures. **They often do this by fostering open dialogues, providing opportunities for experiential learning, and promoting a value-based approach to education**



Academic programmes tend to focus on knowledge and skills rather than ethics and values. Revising existing courses or creating new ones to incorporate these values requires time, effort, and resources.

4. **Assessment and Measurement:** Evaluating the effectiveness of teaching compassion and empathy is challenging. Measuring the impact of such values on students' attitudes and behaviour can be subjective and qualitative, making it difficult to quantify and assess accurately.

5. **Time Constraints:** The traditional higher education system is often structured around delivering a predetermined curriculum in a limited timeframe. This leaves limited room for activities or discussions related to moral values, and educators might feel pressure to prioritise academic content.

6. **Resistance to 'Indoctrination':** Some individuals may view the incorporation of moral values in higher education as a form of indoctrination or an infringement on academic freedom. Striking a balance between promoting values and respecting diverse viewpoints can be a significant challenge.

7. **Resource Allocation:** Incorporating moral values in higher education may require additional resources, including faculty training, curriculum development, and support services. Limited budgets and other financial constraints can make it difficult for some institutions to allocate resources for this purpose.

8. **Evolution of Values:** Moral values can evolve and vary from one generation to the next. Institutions need to keep up with changing societal norms and adapt their approaches to teaching values like compassion and empathy to remain relevant.

9. **Cultural and Contextual Factors:** What constitutes as compassion and empathy may vary in different cultural and regional



contexts. Recognising and accommodating these variations while maintaining a universal commitment to these values is a challenge.

10. Evaluation of Outcomes: Determining the long-term impact of incorporating moral values in higher education can be difficult. It may take years for the full effect to become apparent, making it challenging to assess the success of these efforts.

Despite these challenges, many higher education institutions are working to integrate moral values like compassion and empathy into their curricula and campus cultures. They often do this by fostering open dialogues, providing opportunities for experiential learning, and promoting a value-based approach to education.

Overcoming these challenges requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach that respects diversity while emphasising the importance of these essential human values.

Being a premier Jesuit university, values of compassion and empathy are deeply cherished by Xavier (XIM) University. The origin of compassion as a core value in XIM University is borne of the compassion for the self which overflows into compassion for others especially the disadvantaged, and the neglected, and compassion for the common home which is under threat.

This compassion as a value is in sync with the core guiding principle of Jesuit Education, the

‘cura personalis’, the care of the entire person. Thus, the care shared with each stakeholder of the XIM University is not institutional, but personal care.

The mentoring that is done with the learning community is primarily about empathy and compassion to be men and women with others for others. In the light of such value and mission, XIM University has a Centre for Humanities and Studies to engage in continuous conversations with like-minded organic intellectuals and groups on our vision to be an institution of higher education which cares for each of its stakeholders – students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and civil society.

Living as we are in one common home and sharing the vicissitudes of life, we find that there is no way to compassion, but rather compassion (to suffer with) is the way. When one feels empathy for one’s fellow pilgrim, compassion is not something that one wishes for. Compassion is something that one makes, something one does, something that one is, and something that gives away gracefully and gratefully.

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# EMPATHY AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR TEACHING





**O**xford dictionary defines empathy as ‘the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.’ **I guess this was my first step towards introducing empathy in the teaching-learning process.**



**G**rowing up as the eldest daughter and a sister to two siblings, I learned to be attentive towards the needs of my family, and made an effort towards helping and understanding their perspectives. Looking back, I never knew that this new outlook and attention to detail would guide me in my journey as an educator.

My journey as a high school teacher started in the early 2000s. During my early teaching days, I began to realise that the generalised teaching approach is severely limited.

My interactions with students in the classroom, in parent-teacher meetings and during various extracurricular activities taught me that each individual is unique and has strengths and weaknesses. Despite that, a bitter truth always remained: a person-centric approach to teaching-learning is extremely challenging with limited resources.

After joining St. Xavier’s College in 2012, I got an opportunity to interact with students from all across Nepal. Despite their strong academics I still saw students struggle in their journey, some with exceptional performances, while some missing their mark.

I felt that a small effort from my side was needed to understand their needs and make a significant impact. Becoming aware of this, I tried my best to adapt my teaching style, introduced a more interactive approach, and focused on discussions.

I wanted all my students to understand the subject and to perform well. I also started taking feedback from students to better understand their views on the classes and coursework which ultimately helped to better their performance. Oxford dictionary defines empathy as ‘the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.’ I guess this was my first step towards introducing empathy in the teaching-learning process.

With time, a need arose for an overall Student Well-Being Department. I was chosen to lead this effort. This new responsibility allowed me to interact with students one-on-one and to share their feelings. I encountered various scenarios which affected the overall performance of the students.

I want to share one such story here.

One of my students suffered from a rare genetic disorder called albinism. A person suffering from this has very light skin, hair, and eyes due to a lack of melanin. Besides having strikingly different physical features, this disease is usually accompanied by vision problems (like near-sightedness) and extreme sensitivity to light.

Because of his near-sightedness, he struggled to make notes written on the whiteboard, and found it difficult to see presentations during class. I noticed him struggling, and tried accommodating him in the class in my way, be it by asking for a helping hand for him from his friends or providing him with slides and notes at the end of the class.

noticed how every time he was struggling with his sight and also having difficulty finding himself among friends. Mostly, he ended up as a loner. **But he never failed to greet me and mention my kind and helpful gesture every time we met. I developed a strong sense of connection with him. In every meeting, I assured him that he had my backing.**



Despite my sincere effort, he was not very comfortable sharing this with his friends and teachers as he didn't want to be treated differently. He felt awkward when someone like me would ask him to take help. Without getting to know much about him, the pandemic hit us hard.

I dropped my classes but, amidst all this, one day he contacted me to share the new web page he had developed after compiling all the notes during and before the pandemic. I never knew he had such a talent for computer coding and design. I was happy to see him make progress, and to find his strengths. I was also delighted that he was open to sharing this with me.

As we moved back to normal life, we started having celebrations in college.

It was our Annual Xavier's Day celebration. All students gathered outdoors in the lawn area for a three-hour programme. I saw this student of mine in the crowd and couldn't help but notice his discomfort. At that moment I wasn't aware of his sensitivity towards sunlight but still approached him discreetly as I was aware he would not like to be singled out in the crowd.

I managed to bring him behind the stage in the shade. I thought he would feel awkward about my approach. However, he expressed his gratitude for noticing his discomfort. For the first time, he spoke to me about his medical condition and sensitivity, towards the sunlight. As we continued talking, he also expressed his discomfort regarding being around people because of their attitude towards his health condition, and how he felt awkward explaining about it to others.

After this conversation something changed within me, too. I became more observant of this student. I noticed how every time he was struggling with his sight and also having difficulty finding himself among friends. Mostly, he ended up as a loner. But he never failed to greet me and mention my kind and helpful gesture every time we met. I developed a strong sense of connection with him. In every meeting, I assured him that he had my backing.

Now this has become a kind of routine for both of us interacting with each other. One day he texted me if he could come and meet me and we had a lot of things to share.

He was grateful for noticing his discomfort, and felt being cared for. He later described this as a pivotal moment during his high school, and made him open up to me and share his problems.

**M**y experiences have taught me that empathy is not just a virtue; it is an essential tool for effective teaching. **By understanding our students' unique perspectives and challenges, we can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment, enabling them to thrive academically and personally.**



His success fills me with immense pride. It reinforced in me the transformative power of empathy that not only paved a path for him but also helped me understand how a small gesture can make a big difference in someone's life. All we need is to embrace it with an open mind and heart.

My experiences have taught me that empathy is not just a virtue; it is an essential tool for effective teaching. By understanding our students' unique perspectives and challenges, we can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment, enabling them to thrive academically and personally.



Soon, after grade 12, he decided to continue his undergraduate studies at St. Xavier's College. I will never forget his kind words where he cited me as one of the primary reasons to continue studying here.

During his Bachelor's degree, I saw him grow academically and become a confident young man. He has taken part in many external competitions related to computer science and managed to bag several awards and cash prizes. He also led a group to develop educational materials for differently abled people via 3D printing technology.

Empathy allows us to connect with students on a deeper level, building trust and rapport that fosters open communication and collaboration. When students feel understood and valued, they are more likely to engage in the learning process, to take risks, and to reach their full potential.

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**BOOK  
REVIEW**

*Pax Lumina 4(6) / 2023 / 60-62*

# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION OF WOMEN PRISONERS

**A REVIEW OF THE 2023 WINNER OF  
THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE NARGES MOHAMMADI'S  
'WHITE TORTURE'**



world where the educated middle classes lead lives that are not so different from that of their peers in the West. The heavily politicised Islam of the clerical regime is merely the background noise to ordinary people's lives.

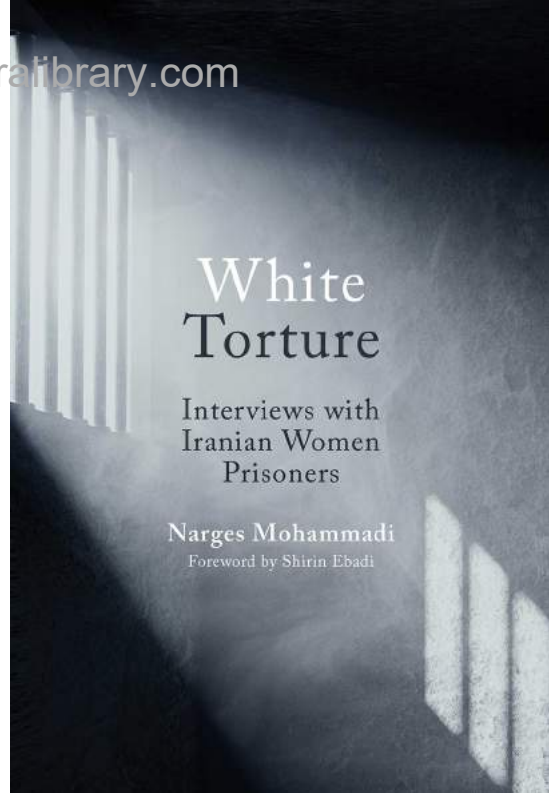
Indeed, pictures from the Teheran of the 1960s and 1970s show women wearing the latest Western fashions, their heads uncovered, walking around the streets of a city not so different from a Southern European capital. This is beyond the living memory of a large part of the Iranian population.

Iran became the object of Orientalist fantasies or nostalgia, except for those periods, such as the last few weeks, when the political situation in the Middle East flares up. The stridently ideological voices of the imams dominated the front pages of the international press.

It is against this diverse and varied background that one should read this work by the Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi, one of Iran's most prominent civil rights campaigners and advocate of women's rights.

**I**n 2012, Asghar Farhadi's movie, 'The Separation' won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Movie. This was the first Iranian movie to garner such high-level recognition. This movie introduced international audiences to the reality of life in Iran. It is a

In the book 'White Torture', Narges conducted 12 interviews with women who were, or continue to be incarcerated because they promote or hold religious or political beliefs that are incompatible with the official teaching of the Islamic Republic of Iran. **These women, at different times and for different periods, have been subject to extreme sensory deprivation.**



2010, she was arrested because of her membership in the Defenders of Human Rights Centre. After a protracted trial and numerous appeals, she was sentenced to six years in prison.

While Narges completed only part of her sentence, this experience marked the beginning of a new phase in her activism. She turned to the condition of other prisoners, especially women, in Iran's high-security prisons. In the aftermath of COVID-19, Narges started a new campaign to support political prisoners, focusing on the impact of solitary confinement – 'white torture' – on the mental and physical well-being of prisoners.

In the book 'White Torture', Narges conducted 12 interviews with women who were, or continue to be incarcerated because they promote or hold religious or political beliefs that are incompatible with the official teaching of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

These women, at different times and for different periods, have been subject to extreme sensory deprivation.

Many of them used to advocate for human rights. Others, such as British-Iranian citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, had sought to pressure other States to negotiate with Iran. The broader purpose of Iran's clerical regime is to exert pressure on the prisoner's family and community, and thereby to force the broader society into submission.

Born on April 21, 1972, in the city of Zanjan in a middle-class family, Narges studied physics at the International Imam Khomeini University in Qazvin. During her student days, she became involved in a student organisation known as the 'Enlightened Student Group', and wrote articles in support of students' rights. Two arrests during her student days were only a prelude to what was yet to come. After graduating, Narges worked as an engineer for the Iran Engineering Corporation, but she continued to work in reformist publications.

In the late 1990s, she published her first collection of political essays 'The Reforms, the Strategy, and the Tactics'. In 1999, she married Taghi Rahmani, a progressive journalist who was deeply interested in the question of reforming the Islamist approach to politics and public life. Shortly after their marriage, Taghi was arrested and ended up spending 14 years in prison. Eventually, he sought political asylum in France.

Narges chose to stay in Iran, even after being dismissed from her engineering post. In April

**T**he complete lack of human contact leads to physiological and psychological degeneration, anxiety attacks, and often a greater degree of susceptibility to propaganda. **Many prisoners who were subject to white torture develop medical conditions that continue to afflict them even after they are released from prison.**



In a way, the story of these women is not something strikingly novel in the history of Iran. Already in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution, the new regime sought to establish itself by persecuting, arresting, and torturing prominent Baha'i, Christians, and members of dissenting Islamic sects like the Dervishes.

The 1980s saw the development of a legislative system where women and ethnic and religious minorities were only allowed limited freedom of education, employment, and movement. In recent years, as resistance to the regime has continued to grow, incarceration, the use of torture, and even public executions have become more and more common.

Since 2020, the number of prisoners held in Iranian prisons has increased by 35 percent, and convictions against freedom of expression have increased by 52.9 percent. Torture techniques, however, have shifted. Psychological torture has largely replaced physical torture. The aim is to break the connection between a person's body and mind to force the individual to reject one's previous beliefs.

The interviewees in this book offer comprehensive descriptions of the 'white torture' they have

been subject to, sometimes for long periods. Prisoners are often unable to distinguish night and day and their sleeping patterns are disrupted. There is never any human touch. The only things prisoners can perceive are the walls and floor of the cell, as well as a toilet that is deliberately kept in a filthy state.

The complete lack of human contact leads to physiological and psychological degeneration, anxiety attacks, and often a greater degree of susceptibility to propaganda. Many prisoners who were subject to white torture develop medical conditions that continue to afflict them even after they are released from prison.

This book is an extraordinary witness to what happens in the prisons in today's Islamic Republic of Iran. It attests to the extraordinary lengths the clerical regime will go to preserve power. These interviews also show the courage of these women prisoners. It also shows Narges' relentless commitment to the cause of human rights and free speech. If regime change ever comes to Tehran, it will also be thanks to the work of dissidents such as the protagonists of these pages.

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*Thomas Cattoi is Associate Professor of Christology and Cultures, Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University and Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.*

**LETTERS  
TO THE  
EDITOR**

*Pax Lumina* 4(6) / 2023 / 63



**D**ear Editor,  
*Thank you for the marvelous issue of Pax Lumina September 2023. Read it full. Excellent work.*

*Kudos to you and all the members of your team.*

**Robin, Delhi**

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**D**ear Editor,  
*Very strong and relevant articles in September 2023 Pax Lumina are appreciated. The illustrations are excellent too. I hope this publication gets more publicity. Thank you so much for your efforts.*

**Jogy George, Trivandrum.**

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**D**ear Editor,  
*Thank you very much for September 2023 Pax Lumina edition – VERY good articles, really to the point!*

**Christian Marte, Innsbruck/Austria.**

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**D**ear Editor,  
*Thanks for the September issue of Pax Lumina. This is an excellent issue with very good and insightful articles by renowned personalities from India and abroad. Happy to see articles from Harsh Mander, Syeda Hameed and the interview with Walter Fernandes.*

*Best wishes,*

**Denzil Fernandes, Delhi**

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**D**ear Editor,  
*As I go through the articles in the September issue of Pax Lumina, I feel helpless about what should be done here and now in our personal and collective spaces to build solidarity. This is especially important considering the ominous consequences of being 'silent spectators', as warned by the late Jesuit social activist, Fr Stan. Though it is extremely painful to read the tragic narratives of all the authors, accepting the agony and suffering through a process of dialogue, as promoted by social activists like Harsh Mander, seems to be the first step towards tackling the issue of 'brutalizing the weak'. Breaking the silence is the second step, which can be achieved through some form of lamentation that gives impetus for the construction of a new world of solidarity and sobriety. The third step involves touching the personal and collective conscience of all perpetrators by creating a social imagination that helps heal the wounded bodies of the victims, including their identities as collective bodies, and the memories that promote a vicious cycle of violence. This healing process involves forgiving all wrongs committed without forgetting any of them. It also includes work similar to that accomplished by Gacaca courts, which were set up to transcend the need for retaliation and retribution after the Rwandan genocide.*

**Jane, Kenya.**

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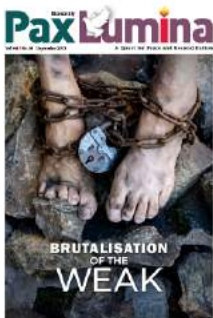
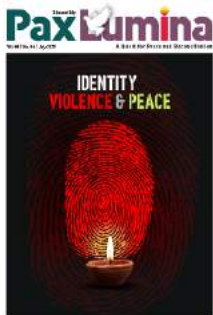
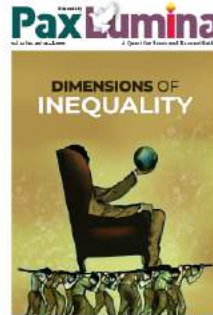
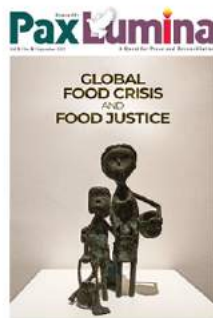
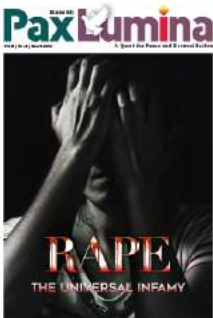
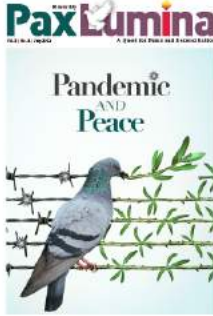
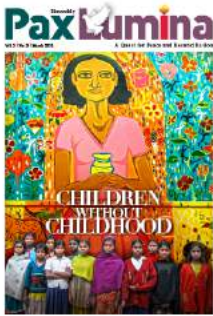
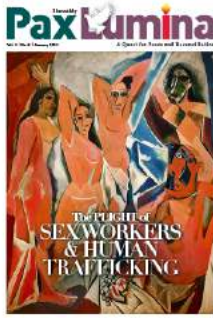
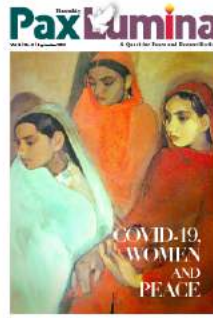
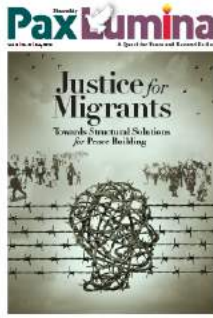


**Have compassion for all beings,  
rich and poor alike; each has their suffering.  
Some suffer too much, others too little.**

Gautama Buddha







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**Empathy is forgetting oneself in the joys and sorrows of another, so much so that you actually feel that the joy or sorrow experienced by another is your own joy and sorrow. Empathy involves complete identification with another.**

Dada Vaswani

