



Empathizing With the Stranger: Rereading Heidegger

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The notion of empathy as feeling one's way into the other is criticized in the works of Heidegger for its Cartesian assumption of the ontological gulf between self and other. The anti-Cartesian counterposition of a self, embedded in a world prereflectively shared with familiar others, however, raises questions regarding understanding the stranger, as the self is absorbed in her prejudgments. Yet, the self in the works of Heidegger is more originally constituted by unhomeliness. As essentially a stranger to itself, the self already signals hospitality to the stranger and questioning of its own familiar categories. Reconceived from this perspective, this article argues, originary empathy is the inherent power of human existence to affectively bring near the stranger concealed in familiar and unfamiliar others. Thus, the ethical meaning of modernity, the age of radical unhomeliness or homelessness, could be rethought as openness to the stranger, brought to our doorsteps by unjust modern systems themselves.

Keywords: originary empathy, familiarity, unhomeliness, homelessness, modernity

The critique of the problem of empathy in the Heidegger Corpus (HC)¹ is found in a few scattered remarks in *Being and Time* (1927/1962) and associated texts and is repeated in the *Zollikon Seminars* (1959–69/2001). In line with these indications, Lou Agosta (2010, 2014) has spelled out the special hermeneutic of empathy, specifying several authentic modes of empathic relation to the other. In a different vein, Lawrence Hatab (2001) has argued for an ecstatic notion of originary empathy, conceived as the opening for ethical meaning.

My aim in this article is to make an advance on Hatab's interpretation of originary empathy in relation to the HC. The first section discusses HC's critique of self-other dichotomy in the traditional and early phenomenological views of empathy as feeling one's way *into* the other. The second section deals with an exposition of the anti-Cartesian counterposition advanced by Hatab with reference to the HC: originary empathy as a nondichotomous notion

This article was published Online First November 8, 2021.

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¹ In what follows, my interest is not in the authorial intentions of the man Heidegger—his inexcusable Nazi sympathies and provincialist sentiments, for example—but in the Heidegger Corpus (henceforth HC), considered as text or a sphere of meaning, open to rereading, in the broad Derridean sense. I concur with Derrida that the name “Heidegger” is a metaphor for the manifoldness of the meaning of being (*différance*), which alone is the non-metaphor (Derrida 1964–65/2016, p. 223). Thus, insistence on fixed meaning and authorial intentions contradict the spirit of the text bearing the name “Heidegger.”

of affective nearness to the other, rooted in the prereflectively shared meaning-totality or world of familiarity. The focus of the third section is on the conception of familiarity in the HC in relation to affective nearness. The fourth section raises the following Levinasian critique: if originary empathy is affective nearness to the other, wouldn't the presuppositions and prejudices circulating in that which makes this nearness possible—the shared world of familiarity—be a hindrance to our encounter with the truly other, the stranger? Using the conceptual resources of the HC, such as breakdown of familiarity, unhomeliness, and homelessness, the fifth section argues for the ontologico-ethical primacy of unfamiliarity/uncanniness/unhomeness. Grounded in this, the concluding section dwells on the ethic of empathizing with the stranger, the need for which is intensified by our radical encounter with strangers in the modern world.

A nondichotomous theory of empathic self-other relation, based on a space of meaning (world) shared with familiar others, is tenable only if it allows for empathizing with the unfamiliar other, and does not lead to a reductive understanding of the stranger in terms of the self's familiar categories and presuppositions. My broad purpose in this paper is to argue the case for such a theory in the HC and its significance for any nondichotomous theory of empathy.

Critique of the Problem of Empathy

My concern, to begin with, is the response in the HC to the problematization of empathy in German phenomenology.²

According to the mainstream simulationist notion of empathy as self-projection or mirroring of minds, found in Theodor Lipps and in the earlier conceptions of sympathy in Adam Smith and David Hume, our intimate familiarity with our own experiential life is the inferential basis of empathy. Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein, in their attempt to differentiate between the way we experience the experiential life of others in distinction from ours, criticized the simulationist view of empathy as untrue and unethical (Debes, 2015, p. 301, p. 317). For them, the phenomenon of empathy is about experiencing the other person's affective conditions without the self being really in that condition.

Husserl, Scheler, and Stein are united in their antisimulationist stance, but there is an important difference between the views of Husserl/Stein and Scheler. For Scheler, we can access the other person's experience just as originally as we can access our own: "everyone can apprehend the experience of his fellow-men just as directly (or indirectly) as he can his own" (Scheler, 1913/2017, p. 256). While my experience of my own joy and another's are only

² According to the current terminological distinction, the term "empathy" stands for our capacity to understand vicarious experience in general, and "sympathy" to understand a particular kind of vicarious experience—the other's suffering, accompanied by the desire to help ease her situation (Chismar, 1988). However, it must be borne in mind that *sum-patheia* (feeling *with*; *Sympathie*/*Mitfühlung*) is the older Greek term for the phenomena discussed under the new locution "empathy" (feeling *into*; *Einfühlung*/*Empathie*). The original Greek term had the wide meaning of both cosmic natural affinities between beings, and affective sharing of another's psychic condition on account of such affinities. The term empathy was invented by the German aesthetician Theodor Lipps at the turn of the twentieth century, mainly to deemphasize the sense of affective commitment in the older term. But he made no sharp distinction between the two terms, which happened later in North America. Remy Debes observes that in current scholarship sympathy and empathy are "eclectic concepts, which only the most dogmatic or ignorant pretend to separate objectively and without stipulation" (Debes, 2015, p. 287). In this article, without alluding to any definitive distinction between the two terms, I will be using "empathy" because of its currency in German phenomenology, though not in Scheler. The critique of the problem of empathy in the HC has to be placed in the context of the early twentieth century *Einfühlungs*-discussions in the German academia, in which Husserl, Scheler, and Stein participated.

similar and not identical, Scheler argues, we still can directly acquaint ourselves with “another person’s joy in his laughter” (Scheler, 1913/2017, p. 260). Husserl, instead, maintains that if what belongs specifically to the experiential life of another were originally accessible just as self-experience, “it would be merely a moment of my own essence” (1929/1960, p. 109). Stein has a detailed critique of Scheler’s view (1917/1964, pp. 26–33); she writes: “while I am living in the other’s joy, I do not feel primordial joy. It does not issue live from my ‘I’” (Stein, 1917/1964, p. 11). That is, although we experience the experiences of others directly without any inferential mediation and simulationist self-duplication, such experience does not achieve the fullest originary force reserved for our experience of our own experiential life. Hence, Husserl/Stein argues that self-experience, other-experience, and world-experience are to be differentiated without privileging any, although self-experience is the precondition—and not the privileged model—for empathy and world-experience. Empathy precisely means noninferentially accessing a nonoriginary or foreign experience, asymmetric to and separated from self-experience (Zahavi, 2010, pp. 294–95).

In *Being and Time* (§26),³ conceiving empathy as a kind of ontological bridge from a deworled, solipsistic self to the separated other or feeling one’s way *into* her (*Ein-führung*) is criticized as an ontologically mistaken view with dichotomous Cartesian underpinnings. Self-transposing *into* the other is “not a possible question in the first place” (Heidegger, 1929/1995, p. 205) because *Mitsein* (being-with)—originary sociality constitutive of being a self—is the basic ontological phenomenon, underlying the derivative phenomenon of empathy. The Husserl/Stein view is rejected because it mistakenly “starts by imagining an Ego in a purely Cartesian sense—an Ego given by itself in the first instance who then feels his way into the other—thus discovering that the other is a human being as well in the sense of an *alter Ego*” (Heidegger, 1959–69/2001, p. 111; see also Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 243). Instead, I can live the other’s joy as originally as I can live my own without losing the important distinction between mine and another’s joy because I am most originally—that is, before reflective self-understanding takes shape—caught up in a web of shared meaning (being-in-the-world), which gives sense to the other’s joy just as mine. Distinctions of self, other and world are themselves preconditioned on being-in-the-world-with-others. The others with whom humans inhabit the world are intimately woven into their sense of being, sedimented over their span of life since infancy. Without the shared sense of the world, empathic projection *into* the other “would be projecting something into the void” (Heidegger, 1959–69/2001, p. 162). Self, other, and world are three equally originary and distinct, but inextricably intertwined dimensions of our being, preconditioned equally on a prereflective sense of phenomena as a whole (being).

In contrast, Scheler’s conception of originary access to the experiences of others or his “perceptual theory of other minds” (Scheler, 1913/2017, p. 220) is grounded in the view that immediate perceptions of the experiences of self or other are always perceptions of undifferentiated “integral wholes” (Scheler, 1913/2017, p. 261) or expressive unities (see Zahavi, 2010, p. 292). Differentiation occurs in the second, conscious stage of perception. However, this ontologically undifferentiated monistic theory of originary consciousness without the differentiated ontological unity provided by the prereflective structure of being-in-the-world cannot explain self-other differentiation. In the HC, the presupposition that Dasein’s “Being toward an Other is its Being toward itself” is a misconception (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 162), and so differentiating between the two experiences from the start is an originary aspect of Dasein.

³ In *History of the Concept of Time*, the section on *Mitsein* itself is titled “Dasein as Being-With: The Being of Others as Co-Dasein (Critique of the Thematic of Empathy)” (Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 237).

Mitsein is the inextricable, though always differentiated, entwinement of self and other in discursive responsiveness, received in prereflective attunement and understanding without opposition or questioning since the moment of our coming into being. It is the basis of all our conscious self-other distinctions. Jacques Derrida characterizes Heidegger's conception of *Mitsein* in its nonindifferent and nonnegative character as a nonsubjectivistic "minimal community," which has not yet become oppositional. *Mitsein*, in this sense, is "a friendship prior to friendships, an ineffaceable friendship, fundamental and groundless, one that breathes in a shared language" (Derrida, 1994/1997, p. 236). In other words, an originary sharing of sense without questioning and opposition, a precognitive understanding and feeling-with-one-another in discursive responsiveness, precedes even our sense of singular identity and the ability to question. The originary friendship of the minimal community (*Mitsein*) is a relational space of familiarity without opposition that makes possible our originary access to vicarious experience.

The upshot of the above analysis of the problem of empathy in the HC is twofold: (a) the unbridgeable ontological divide between self and other, arising from conceiving empathy as feeling one's way *into* the other, can be overcome by conceiving Dasein's originary structure in terms of the unitary phenomenon being-in-the-world-with-others or sharing with others a world of familiarity (*Mitwelt*/with-world); and (b) the experiences of self and other do not thereby become indistinct because being-in-the-world-with-others is an inextricable unity of our differentiated ways of being toward self, other, and world.

Originary Empathy as Affective Nearness

There is the suggestion in *Being and Time* (§26) that a special hermeneutic of empathy or interpretation of various ethical modes of being-with-one-another (*Mitandersein*) can be developed if empathy is taken as a derivative phenomenon, founded on *Mitsein*. Although such a project is considered superfluous to the ontological project of *Being and Time*, it is nevertheless deemed important because of "the unsociability of the dominant [everyday] modes of Being-with" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 162). That is, understanding and nurturing the empathic modes of relating to others is important because, as Alexander Duff notes, humans are "genuinely capable of much fuller interactions with others" (Duff, 2015, p. 96). Going by the suggestion concerning the special hermeneutic of empathy, Agosta (2014) has fleshed out several authentically empathic modes of *Mitandersein*, such as empathic disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*), interpretation (*Auslegung*), and listening silently to others as an authentic mode of speech (*Rede*). Delving deeper into the ontological possibilities of the authentically empathic mode of *Mitsein* (*Fürsorge*/solicitude), Agosta argues that it constitutes the clearing (*Lichtung*) "for respect, integrity, altruism, and a recognition of who is one's neighbor that expands one's humanness" (Agosta, 2014, p. 290). That is, empathic *Mitsein* is the clearing for the possibilities of ethically relating to others. Let me now turn to this possibility of conceiving originary empathy as the clearing for ethical phenomena, going beyond the claims of the HC, but remaining within its argumentative orbit, as done more explicitly by Hatab (2001).

In ontologizing empathy, consistent with the argumentative logic of the HC, Hatab conceives empathy as affective sharing of vicarious experience. He argues that *Being and Time* criticizes only the projective notion of empathy as feeling one's way *into* another subject. He, therefore, maintains that, if understood correctly, empathic sharing of the other's experience can be considered as authentic *Mitsein* because the caring-liberating kind of *Fürsorge*, which is originary empathy, is ontologically primary in the HC. This is so because in the HC indifferent and dominating modes of *Fürsorge* are respectively deficient and negative with respect

to caring-liberating *Fürsorge*. In this interpretation, however, empathy must be understood not as a subjective feeling/sentiment, but as prerational affectedness of the self by the experiences of others, insofar as Dasein is ecstatically standing outside itself toward the other. For Hatab, thus, the caring-liberating-empathizing *Miteinandersein* is originary in its ontological significance, and indifferent disengagement and unethical engagement with others are its deficient and negative forms. Thus, originary empathy is the condition for the possibility of any mode of ethical social relation that lets free possibilities that matter to the self. “Empathy, then, is not simply a feeling, it is a mode of *disclosure* that generates ethical import . . . [,] the prereflective condition for the possibility of, and openness to, important ethical forces such as responsibility, obligation, conscience, and guilt” (Hatab, 2001, p. 370).

The above analysis implies that it is in empathic company with the other—distant and different—that the self “can surrender its I-ness so as to attain itself as an authentic self” (Heidegger, 1929/1998b, p. 135). That is: empathic affectedness and understanding is the originary friendship, to return to Derrida’s expression, that amounts to Dasein’s standing aside always already from the ego-sphere, and ecstatically approaching the other in nonantagonistic, hospitable welcome. In a Levinasian sense, this originary friendship is the basis of any possible ethical relation in the concrete world, dominated by unsociability. Empathy in the originary sense for Hatab is already the “atmosphere of affective nearness” (Hatab, 2001, p. 370) that makes concrete acts of empathic compassion possible. And so, despite the overt rejection of originary empathy and the proposal of the special hermeneutic of empathy in the HC, empathy is conceivable originally as affective nearness without deviating from the argumentative logic of the HC.

The Question of Familiarity

The naturalness of originary empathy, understood as affective nearness, is accentuated by Hatab, thus unintentionally foregrounding a recurrent theme in the HC: familiarity.

Hatab emphasizes that “it is natural for human beings to care about each other and feel for each other” (Hatab, 2001, p. 369). He argues that originary empathy must be understood in relation to the HC as natural in the way Aristotle understood virtue as natural. Thus, habit-formation is important for the development of originary empathy. Although sympathy is an involuntary physiological reaction in the classical Greek account, passions in general always depend also on interpretation for the Greeks: “all the ancient philosophical schools, and Aristotle in particular, viewed the emotions in this way” (Konstan & Kiritsi, 2010). The natural is already historical in the HC, and this means for Hatab that nature and nurture are coconstituents of human development. Agosta similarly argues that human beings are natural in the sense that they are a bundle of neurons, but “these neurons generate meaning, possibility, and conscious experiences; and these latter are what arouse, invite, and call forth the process of empathy” (Agosta, 2014, p. 283). The conception of affect in the HC is generally considered not naturalistic/physicalist because it is always expressed in a historical and discursive fashion. But affects (*pathē*) are understood in the 1924 lecture course on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as characterizing “the entire human being in its *disposition in the world*” (Heidegger, 1924/2009, p. 129). Accordingly, originary empathy must mean that humans are always already disclosed as affected by or feeling with (*sum-pathos*) others. Hence, as Hatab argues, the propensity for originary empathy is natural or latent in the human being, but habitual or familiar ways of interpreting and expressing empathy must be appropriately cultivated and nurtured.

The nurtured/interpretive naturalness concerning originary empathy, thus, is grounded in *doxa*—the prevailing average and familiar meaning of everything in the sociocultural sphere. As soon as we are, we enter into this sphere in order to make sense of the world.

“Being-with-one-another is thoroughly governed by *doxa*. All speaking is oriented toward bringing the questionable, the unintelligible, into a *definite familiarity*” (Heidegger, 1924/2009, p. 185). Therefore, originary empathy is natural because it is an inherent potency of human beings, but a potency that can take shape only through habituation in the familiar. Naturalness, therefore, has the meaning of preconscious habituation in the familiar.

Hence, a strong accent on prereflective familiarity is central to the anti-Cartesian project of rejecting the projective notion of empathy in the HC. The web of meanings that constitute the human world we inhabit with others is disclosed in advance as something familiar, and this world of familiarity is the basis of all our understanding, our notions of truth and falsity, and our basic dispositions (Heidegger, 1923/1999, pp. 76–77). The world as the total web of intricately connected meanings “is grounded precisely in familiarity, and this familiarity implies that the referential relations are *well-known*” (Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 187). The prevailing basic understanding of beings as a whole (*doxa*) is the essence of *Mitsein*: “Living in a *doxa* means having it *with others*” (Heidegger, 1924/2009, p. 101). This prereflectively shared familiar frame of meaning with “the characteristic trust in that which shows itself initially” (Heidegger, 1924/2009, p. 103) is the abyssal ground of originary empathy as affective nearness. Being-in-the-world-with-others means being accustomed and familiar without deliberately conscious skeptical questioning.

In *Being and Time*, *Mitsein* as the familiar space of meaning is that “into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all rediscovering and appropriating anew, are performed” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 213). The they-self (*das Man*), from whom one does not, for the most part, distinguish oneself, refers to the same familiar sphere of average intelligibility. The average understanding of being has this very *doxic*, familiar character. Ethical and unethical self-other encounters are, again, grounded in the world of familiarity, and so Martin Buber’s I-thou distinction is considered imprecise in the HC as long as the meaning of concrete existence in terms of the world of familiarity is not taken into consideration. Sharing the world of familiarity as the constitutive essence of the self is “the ontological presupposition for the selflessness in which every Dasein comports itself toward the other in the existent I-thou relationship” (Heidegger, 1927/1982, p. 298). In this sense, the stranger cannot be encountered in complete otherness and unfamiliarity. “The strangest man whom we encounter is with me in my world and is experienced as such in avoiding and passing each other by” (Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 240). To be available for disclosure, the other has to be profiled in terms of the self’s world of familiarity.

Thus, originary empathy, brought to light by Hatab in relation to the HC, has its basis in the abyssal ground of a relational network of familiarity, nearness, and naturalness.

Familiars Vis-à-vis Strangers

The ground of originary empathy—the world of familiarity—raises a problematic question: does the salutary attempt to overcome ontological dichotomy in the conception of empathy as feeling one’s way *into* the other, based on the world of familiarity, preclude empathic encounter with the truly other, the stranger? This question is crucial to any theorization of originary empathy, grounded on the notion of a nondichotomous and prereflectively received meaning-totality. If all our encounters arise out of the world of familiarity, which is trapped in its own categories and prejudices, it could be that a genuinely ethical, unprejudiced encounter between the autochthonous self and the nonautochthonous stranger in her otherness is never possible. If the primordial community is the ground of all our understanding, the

ontological force of this ground could weigh down every attempt to feel with the stranger. Let me start with a word on the notion of the other.

First, the other need not be literally the stranger. Emmanuel Levinas writes: “the Other is what I myself am not” (Levinas, 1946–47/1987, p. 83). In this sense, the other is (what/who) that which is not the self. The other person could be one’s sibling, child, spouse, or friend just as an enemy or a foreigner. With varying degrees of understanding, transactions among familiar others, whether empathic or hostile, transpire because they share the same familiar world. “Self and world belong together in the unity of the basic constitution of the Dasein, the unity of being-in-the-world. This is the condition of possibility for understanding the other” (Heidegger, 1927/1982, p. 298). Without difficulty, we can see that originary empathy can play a concretely ethical role among familiars, coattuned to the ethos of an accustomed world, at the appropriate moment when the self projects commonly recognized liberating possibilities in favor of the other.

Second, the other could be the stranger, distanced from the self’s acquainted world in a conspicuous way. But the stranger in this sense need not be literally the unknown one or foreigner, but someone far removed from the self by an unmistakable affective, existential distance. The nearness of familiarity or affectivity or both between the self and the stranger is already a distance difficult to bridge. The person next door in the urban apartment can be a stranger because I am distanced from her world of unfamiliar or affectively distanced linguistic, cultural, religious, racial, and such other markers. However, the phenomenology of the stranger in the HC consistently maintains that it is impossible to understand the stranger *as* a stranger without the reference-frame of the world of familiarity, which is, thus, the very condition for the possibility of strangeness. “It is in this comprehensibility of a world that incomprehensibility and distance is first of all possible” (Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 243).

The critique of familiarity in the HC is thematized intricately by Levinas. He points out in the essay “Meaning and Sense” that the world, the locus of all meaning, is conceived in the HC as a horizon constituted by language, culture, and history. Therefore, the Other (*Autrui*)—the other person—also must be illuminated by the world of familiarity alone as “a text by a context.” For Levinas, on the other hand, “the epiphany of the Other involves a signifyingness of its own, independent of this meaning received from the world” (Levinas, 1964/1996, p. 53). He likens the culturalization of philosophy to the journey of Ulysses, “whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island—a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the Other” (Levinas, 1964/1996, p. 48). Such philosophy conceives meaning in terms of being at home with oneself by way of domesticating, possessing, and making what is other the familiar site and home of the self. Instead, Levinas argues, philosophy must be a conversation in which “the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an ‘I’, as a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself” (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 39). Levinas is concerned about the geopolitics of the HC, stemming purportedly from a sense of rootedness in the soil, which makes such thinking “absolutely not a philosophy of the émigré” (Levinas, 1983/2001, p. 178).

There is a notion of community in the HC: “our Being with one another in the same world” (Heidegger, 1927/1962; 436). When we consider the earliest statements on empathy in 1920, the emphasis on shared commonality and familiarity is unmistakable: “Every word, every act is only understood in that the person expressing them shares a common ground with the one who understands (what we now call ‘empathy’)” (Heidegger, 1920/2010, p. 120). In another statement of 1920, empathy is said to be impossible without the factual context of “an original-historical phenomenon that cannot be resolved without the phenomenon of tradition in its original sense” (Heidegger, 1920–21/2004, p. 59). Tradition in this sense is “historical-factual life experience” that constitutes the world of familiarity. In this

regard, Levinas insists that *Miteinandersein* is a social ideal of fusion and communion: “the collectivity of the ‘with’ . . . a collectivity around something common” (Levinas, 1946–47/1987, p. 93). Instead, Levinas’s claim is not only that ethics is the disruption of the self’s familiar world by the other, but that the ethical disruption is originary because the other has always already pervaded the self’s identity as “other in the same” before freedom, will and consciousness originate, and has constituted the self as responsibility for or responsiveness to the other: “I exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation” (Levinas, 1974/1981, p. 114).

The critique of the theme of familiarity in the HC in its relation to originary empathy, therefore, reveals an apparent problem: From the perspective of the ontological conception of being-in-the-world-with-others a genuinely empathic encounter with the other, the stranger, is seemingly impossible due to the self’s constitutive embeddedness in the world of familiarity.

Unfamiliarity, Unhomeliness, Homelessness

A constructive interpretation in response to the apparent problem of the impossibility of empathizing with the stranger is conceivable, I shall now argue, by having recourse to certain conceptual resources of the HC, such as the breakdown of familiarity, unhomeliness, and homelessness.

The persuasive proposition of the HC is that the accessibility and deployability of strangeness, and the very distinction between familiarity and strangeness are possible only with reference to the world of familiarity. Strangeness can make sense only as distanced from the familiar. While the other signifies ethical meaning independently of the context for Levinas, the other also is manifested “from the first in conformity with the way every meaning is produced” in terms of “a cultural whole” or the world of familiarity (Levinas, 1964/1996, p. 53). The question that remains is whether empathizing with “the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself” (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 39) is possible in a theory of originary empathy, conditioned on a prereflectively received world of familiarity.

Breakdown of familiarity is a theme that consistently goes with the descriptions of the familiar world in the HC. It is “broken familiarity” (Heidegger, 1925/1985, p. 289) that disrupts the inconspicuous handiness of the useful things (*Zeug*) of the familiar world, and makes them conspicuous in their objective presence. Strangeness entails that familiarity “has been shaken up and awakened and is now being encountered in the character of unfamiliarity.” Such disruption of familiarity is not something infrequent, but “rather belongs to the very temporality of the world’s being-encountered” (Heidegger, 1923/1999, p. 77). Even the most familiar things remain familiar only by concealing, refusing, and obstructing the manifestation of their unfamiliar possibilities. “Fundamentally, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary, uncanny [*ungeheuer*]” (Heidegger, 1935/2002, p. 31). Naturalness is “merely the familiarity of a long-established habit which has forgotten the unfamiliarity from which it arose” (Heidegger, 1935/2002, p. 7). Strangeness is, therefore, central to the HC as that which teaches humans to wonder and to think.

Hatab helpfully extends the breakdown of familiarity in the world of things to the world of others.⁴ Just as the breakdown of the world of useful things disrupts and reveals the meaning of our prereflective involvement with them, he argues, the breakdown of the familiar social world reveals the meaning of our involvement with others—namely, empathic regard.

⁴ In the HC, discussions on human relation to things are richer than discussions on social relation (Hatab, 2001, p. 362, n.4). However, as Greisch contends, “nothing in the existential analytic allows us to envisage *Dasein* as a subjectivity solidly ensconced in its certainties that refuse to be troubled by others” (Greisch, 2011, p. 223).

Indicators of the breakdown of the social world (*Miteinandersein*) in *Being and Time* are indifferent and unempathic social relations, which are qualified respectively as deficient and negative (harmful) modes of *Fürsorge*. For Hatab, this qualification is the “phenomenological evidence for the primacy of empathic concern” (Hatab, 2001, p. 367). Hence, the breakdown of familiar social relations brings to light the meaning of sociality as such—namely, the primacy of empathic concern for others.

The strangeness of the stranger, made intelligible on the basis of the self’s world of familiarity, disrupts to a certain extent the naïve trust in the accustomed categories of the world and calls them into question.⁵ This ontological disruption often paves the way for othering and ethical breakdown, manifested as indifferent, unempathic, and harmful forms of relating to strangers. The social scale of such ontologico-ethical breakdown can be seen in the treatment of immigrants and refugees in the contemporary world. However, it is an inaccurate view that originary empathy is a relation of fusion and communion rather than a relation of difference, as we shall see later in more detail. The meaning of the hermeneutical placement of the stranger within the ensemble of the self’s world is merely this: “as *my* felt concern for others, mineness displays an existential ‘mattering’, in that the fate of others matters to me” (Hatab, 2001, pp. 369–370).⁶ Besides humane treatment, empathically relating to the stranger would mean that her mattering to me involves my readiness to understand her world on its own terms, and to reconsider my familiar categories. Although much depends on the contingencies of the situation and the categories of the world of familiarity for the concrete unfolding of the encounter, the stranger is a genuine site of the disruption of familiarity and consequently a site for self-questioning.

Unhomeliness (*Unheimlichkeit*/uncanniness) or not being at home amid beings that humans undergo despite their everyday absorption in the familiar world, according to the HC, “*must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon*” (1927/1962, p. 234). That is: unhomeliness is ontologically primary as the discloser of the unfamiliar, strange, and unexplored possibilities of one’s being that are clear to her as her own (authentic). The breakdown of familiarity can be ontologically disclosive only because it can trigger unhomeliness. Generally, unhomeliness remains concealed because everyday sociality “suppresses everything unfamiliar” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 237). But it is “the fundamental kind of essence belonging to human beings” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, pp. 72–73). That the human being is not yet self and never fully at home in the familiar world “expresses itself in existence’s flight in the face of itself as the flight into familiarity and tranquilization” (Heidegger, 1923/1994, p. 221). But, being homely has to be “a passage through the foreign” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, p. 49), and “the homely always remains related to the unhomely in such a way that the latter is present in the former” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, p. 69). The nothingness/groundlessness of their origin, end, and existence in the world, the abyssal horizon of meaning, makes humans essentially unhomely (Critchley, 2011, p. 148). In the inherent existential search for home, the homely always remains “precisely not attained” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, p. 73), and so the ontological unhomeliness of humans consists in persistently “seeking and searching out the homely, a seeking that at times does not know itself” (p. 74). Thus, the meaning of unhomeliness, Katherine Withy argues, is finitude. That is, as the finite self-disclosure, the human being is the relentless, incomplete, infinite openness for meaningful possibilities; this being can seek

⁵ The categories of the world are called into question by familiars as well when they reflectively reject or challenge them. But here, what first of all calls the world into question is the very presence of the stranger.

⁶ Even for the later Levinas, subjectivity is ‘other in the same’, and so it is “impossible to ‘escape’ from being to get a clear moral point of view that transcends the plane of history and the evil of mere being” (Fagenblat, 2010, p. 101).

to make itself at home with its unhomely/uncanny possibilities. “This is its expulsion from the essence, its deprivation of the homely, and its seeking but failing to attain the homely” (Withy, 2015, p. 141). To be is to be pulled between existential familiarity and existential unhomeliness.

In other words, the human being is essentially the never satisfied search for self and home, always exposed in the process to the strangeness at the core of the self, others, and world. This is why perfect self-understanding and other-understanding can never be. According to the argumentative logic of *Being and Time*, then, human existence has two coinciding aspects: falling into the world of familiarity, which could make humans unempathic toward strangers, and uncanny anxiety about this fallen condition, which could enable humans to encounter authentically the stranger within, the stranger next door and the strangeness hidden in familiar things and people. Hence, in the HC, as Jean Greisch argues, “the ontological condition of possibility for the recognition of others as strangers is to accept the primary fact that existence itself is not reassuring” (Greisch, 2011, p. 225). This inherent association of humans with unhomeliness, therefore, must be considered as the welcome offered always already to the stranger. In this sense, the meaning of originary empathy as affective nearness is welcoming the stranger. But uncritical absorption in the world of familiarity could lead to a possibly prejudiced, unempathic encounter with the stranger. However, if fallen familiarity is a way of turning away from the unsettling questions posed by the stranger and the strangeness hidden in the self and familiar things and people, the uncanny disposition of anxiety about such a condition is a way of turning toward the genuine but unfamiliar possibilities of relating to strangers, others, world, and self. Human flight into the familiar cannot foreclose a genuinely ethical encounter with the stranger. Home and self are always already called into question by originary unhomeliness. The inherent unhomeliness of humans necessarily disrupts the received and familiar historical formations of meaning in the singular and communal worlds. Hence, the encounter with the stranger can only concretely strengthen and radicalize this continuing project of questioning the self and home. Levinas reminds: “The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us” (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 73). Nonetheless, one’s empathic response to the stranger can never be completely deworled and free of care about what matters to one-self—namely, one’s ethical approach to the stranger and the way that approach must call one’s world into question.

Originary empathy must be, thus, conceived as our power to bring affectively near (*Entfernung*/dedistancing) familiars, strangers, and the strangeness hidden in the familiar. Derrida argues that the harmonious originary accord of “friendship prior to friendships . . . ‘prior to’ enmity,” preserved in the most general symbolic-expressive structure of language, is itself the basis of unhomeliness, questioning, disagreement, and disquiet, just as it is of homeliness, acceptance, agreement, and harmony (Derrida, 1994/1997, p. 244). As we have seen, originary empathy (affective nearness) is this very originary friendship. It is now clear that originary empathy in this sense is also a friendship that makes itself at home with uncanny strangers because unhomeliness is essential to the originary friendship of the affective-discursive *Miteinandersein*. Derrida remarks that the spectral, unhomely/uncanny ontological voice of the call of conscience (*Gewissen*) in *Being and Time*—“the friend whom every Dasein carries with it” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 206)—“would be sufficient to uproot all mere domesticity . . . The voice of the call is always felt to be a *foreign* voice, a nonintimate one by the ‘One’ of the everyday” (Derrida, 1994/1997, p. 241). In other words, originary empathy, understood as affectively bringing near the stranger hidden in both familiar and unfamiliar others, is that which makes possible our concrete acts of ethically relating to others. Human existence is always already openness to otherness. As finite, historical, and situated beings, humans incline toward proximate others and produce communities of familiars,

but this is a necessary accident of their finite fate. Their inclining toward others is potentially boundless, and they *can* bring the stranger affectively near because being human is already shot through with the uncanny sense of strangeness. Hence, Derrida calls for denaturalization of the notion of friendship, as all political discourses of birth, nation, familiarity, and naturalness are themselves fictitious mechanisms of othering (Derrida, 1994/1997, p. 93).

Going by the above analysis of *Unheimlichkeit*, a fitting description of human existence in general is perhaps “unhomeliness with the familiar.” As the interruption lodged within existence that dislodges the human proclivity to attain home, the human being is essentially unhomely with homely familiarities. Unhomeliness makes humans “what they are and who they can be” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, p. 103) because it is the springboard for unfamiliar, radical, authentic possibilities of being. The authentic encounter with death is “a becoming homely within and from out of such being unhomely” (Heidegger, 1942/1996, p. 104) because making peace with unhomeliness is the only nondeceptive approach to the uncanniest possibility of death. Commenting on such passages in the HC, Miguel de Beistegui writes that the human being “can truly be at home in the world, and thus create his own abode, only when he is faced with his fundamental not-at-homeness” (De Beistegui, 1998, p. 143).

Homelessness (*Heimatslosigkeit*) is another term we find in the HC. As the symptom of the oblivion of being, homelessness “is coming to be the destiny of the world” (Heidegger, 1946/1998a, p. 258). This term articulates a sense of the loss of home and forgetfulness of being and deep meaning, wrought by the calculative, rationalistic, instrumentalist logic of technocapitalistic modernity. As the forgetfulness of the historical home/world, wherein meaning comes to pass and being is contingently yet stably understood, homelessness is nihilism (meaninglessness), propelled by the modern systems of efficiency and uniformity. Modern existence has, thus, radicalized and stretched the essential human unhomeliness with the familiar to its extreme limits. This radicalization has taken the shape of homelessness or meaninglessness. If so, what is problematic is not homelessness as such, but the dangerous amnesia regarding homelessness. In this sense, homelessness is the dangerously oblivious unhomeliness with the familiar, afforded by the certainties of the technocapitalistic world. A false sense of security originates from technological efficiency, which mutes our experiences and expressions of the meaninglessness concerning our finite and fragile existence. This paradox of the uncanny incapacity to even experience and express homelessness, which is the inauthentic and dangerous extreme of homelessness itself, is spoken of in the HC as “*the plight [Not/distress] of the lack of a sense of plight*” (Heidegger, 1936–38/2012, p. 87). In our encounter with modern homelessness, the central figure is undoubtedly the stranger, who herself has left or was forced to leave home and who has called the world of the self into question.

Therefore, homelessness in the HC need not be seen as an expression of nostalgia for the premodern lifeworld. Understanding homelessness as the radicalized modern version of fundamental human unhomeliness, Susanna Lindberg argues that it is an invitation for us “to abandon familiar certainties in order to let things appear as they are in themselves, secret and unfamiliar to us . . . to rethink our way of inhabiting the world” (Lindberg, 2014, p. 110). As far as the import of this interpretation and the advice in the HC go, rather than struggling against nihilism, we must “turn in toward its *essence*” and experience its truth (Heidegger, 1955/1998c, p. 319); rather than refusing technological modernity, we must “learn to live in its homelessness and give it a full expression” (Lindberg, 2014, p. 109). Lindberg maintains that homelessness invites us to refuse the expectation to find absolute grounds and complete answers that could put an end to questioning, which alone is the stable anchor in the times of extreme unhomeliness with the familiar. Similarly, Greisch’s commentary on nihilism in the

HC is revealing: “Forgetfulness of Being is the increasing inability to conceive of Being as home” (Greisch, 2011, p. 228).

It is, thus, clear that embeddedness in the world of familiarity is not an impediment to empathizing with the stranger. Originary empathy can take concrete forms of affectively bringing the stranger near because human existence is fundamentally grounded in the unhomeliness with the familiar. While concrete forms of empathy must struggle against the everyday unsociability of indifference and domination, empathizing with the stranger is a genuine site for self-questioning and self-development.

Conclusion: The Ethics of Empathizing with the Stranger

Drawing from the above analysis, I now want to dwell on the ethics of empathic receptiveness to the stranger in the context of the contemporary world.

First of all, the stranger is an opening for self-disclosure and self-development. If fallen everyday existence involves concealment of fundamental human unhomeliness, the encounter with the stranger could unsettle, undeceive the fallen self and engender breakdown of the familiar world. The stranger has the disclosive power to illuminate the meaning of the self’s world, and thus to help reassess, reform, and revolutionize it. Thus, empathizing with and opening oneself to the meaning of the stranger’s world, rather than resenting it, enables self-development. That is, self-other/stranger encounter announces an ethical project that is at once a project of self-discovery just as it is a project of empathic regard. The ground of the ontologico-ethical proposition of empathizing with the stranger is the strangeness concealed in human existence as such that in the presence of the stranger could evoke—to use Levinas’s words—“this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world” (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 76).

Encounter with others, whether familiars or strangers, is an ethically open situation on account of human freedom. The response of the self is often unethical simply because the other is a stranger. I have been arguing that this is unjustifiable. However, what if the response of the stranger-other toward the self is traumatizing? How might one stave off the degeneration of empathy in the face of repeated and cruel mistreatment? If the disruption wrought by the stranger is the condition for concrete expressions of empathy, in this instance it becomes the condition for diminishment of empathic expressions. However, the disruption of mistreatment can never foreclose the ontological disclosures of originary empathy, which is the very condition for the possibility of the disclosure of diminishment of empathic expressions. In the disruption of mistreatment, strangeness discloses affective closeness capable of discerning the unethical, the unjust. There’s no denying that disturbing historical and personal memories of imperialism, colonization, subjection, and mistreatment by dominant foreigners/others threaten the ethics of empathizing with the stranger. But the moral antidote to your abuse of my empathic regard is not antipathy, but justice. In such instances, the disclosive power of strangeness leads to a self-development that is capable of discerning what is just, what is unjust, and how to encounter mistreatment justly and empathically. As Levinas writes: “There must be a justice among incomparable ones” (Levinas, 1974/1981, p. 16). In such instances, the very justice that demands empathic/ethical regard for the stranger, demands empathic/ethical examination of the mistreatment meted out to the self. The measure and reasonableness of such examination, again, depends on the self’s ethical decision to achieve empathic, affective closeness with the offending stranger.

The purpose of this ontologico-ethical interpretation has been to theorize originary empathy without falling into the problem of the Cartesian disconnect between self and other. First, the implication of this approach is that the world as the prereflectively shared meaning-totality

is not only finite and whole, but also supple, open, and extendable even to the strangest other by means of discursive, affective, moral, and material transactions. There simply is no radically separated self, trying to grok or feel her way *into* the other, however strange she is in relation to the self. Strangeness/unfamiliarity is the more essential aspect of existence. Consequently, strangeness cannot be discovered as the excuse for unempathic treatment of others; rather, it must signify, as we have seen, empathic and hospitable welcome offered to the stranger. If so, meaningful possibilities can always be found in the shared search for understanding, focused on concrete activities, experiences, and significant events, irrespective of whether such projects meet with success. The ethical and practical side of the shared search for understanding is central to empathizing with the stranger, although possibilities of fundamental disagreements cannot be naively denied. Second, a nondichotomous theory of originary empathy—which does not conceive the mind as separated from and superior to the body, affect, world, and others—implies ontologico-ethical distancing from the extravagant techno-rationalistic ramifications of the Cartesian worldview prevalent in the contemporary world. Instead, an empathic and caring relation to the other/stranger is the more significant ontologico-ethical possibility because human existence means embodied, precognitive sharing of the world with others/strangers.

The age of homelessness is also the age of the stranger. Concrete ethical expression of originary empathy in the contemporary world of homelessness involves being at home with and affectively close to strangers and strangeness, without denying the disquieting angst and loss of self-certainties it involves. Being-with-others (*Miteinandersein*)—especially—in the contemporary world demands being empathically predisposed to strangers, defying all notions of affective nearness or empathic being-at-home only with familiar others. As we have seen, the interpretive-nurtured naturalness/habitation concerning originary empathy, our inherent ontologico-ethical power to be affectively near others, means that excluding stranger-others from the orbit of our power of affective closeness, due to their radical otherness, is artificial and unwarranted. Hence, the meaning of the fraught proclivity of the self to make its home in the world must be understood as making oneself at home with strangeness and strangers. Being with familiar others and things also involves being at home with the inherent strangeness lurking behind their apparent familiarity. However, the ethics of empathizing with the stranger is especially crucial in the age of homelessness that brings the stranger most distanced from us ceaselessly to our doorsteps and on our digital screens. In sum, the ontologico-ethical interdict of empathy (affective nearness) is: do not dishonor the strangeness, distance, respect, and compassion demanded by every self-other relation (see [Saunders, 2011](#)).

The ontologico-ethical meaning of the event of modernity must be construed as the imperative of empathizing with the stranger. In spite of its cruel history of imperialistic domination of peoples, unsympathetic encounter with cultures, and technological instrumentalization of nature, modernity made possible the global encounter with strangers/strangeness. The age of homelessness released to full effect the essential encounter with strangeness inherent to human existence that no other age could amplify as much. The ontologico-ethical import of this event is anxiously feeling at home with strangeness, and hospitable, open, empathic encounter with strangers—in short, learning to live with difference. While the play of power, force, and domination in this history of bringing strangers near cannot be overlooked, what has also come to the fore—a stroke of luck perhaps—is *our unbounded leaning toward the other, whether from near or from afar, familiars or strangers*. It is immaterial whether modernity has as yet fulfilled this meaning or whether it ever will. But one of its essential meanings seems to be the breaking open of the worlds that previously remained closed, and thus bringing near the truly other, the stranger. The ontologico-ethical meaning of modernity, therefore, is self-questioning and respectful openness to the stranger, especially those brought to our doorsteps by unjust modern

systems themselves. If there is the opinion that the strange, poor immigrants are unwelcome, it is also necessary to ask what kind of processes drove them out of their home, and the answer is likely to have something to do with the unjust modern systems themselves.

But the upshot of this analysis is essentially ontologico-ethical not only because modern existence inexorably brings the stranger—migrant, refugee, outsider—to our doorsteps. As I have argued, human existence per se is boundless openness to otherness/strangeness. All normative formulas of ethics must remain necessary but excusable and reasonable restriction of originary empathy, the unbounded ability to bring the other, the stranger, affectively close. Communities of exclusion negate the significance of originary empathy. But nonidentitarian, nonexclusivistic communities of human solidarity are ontologico-ethically meaningful. The import of human finitude is the potentially infinite inclining toward the other, which, at the same time, cannot be vacuously universal.⁷ It is important to acknowledge that the doors of otherness that modernity has forced open can lead to both violent denial of otherness, of which history is full of evidence, and to genuinely hospitable, if anxious and never tranquil, acceptance of the stranger. To the extent that modernity has brought about the unprecedented historical encounter with strangers/strangeness, I have argued that the ontologico-ethical meaning of modernity consists in advancing our essential unhomeliness with the familiar and hospitality to the stranger.

To retrace the argument, my concern in this article has been an ontologico-ethical understanding of empathizing with the stranger, based on the nondichotomous, anti-Cartesian ontology of the HC. The self here is a prereflectively involved, embodied, discursive sharer of the familiar world (meaning-totality) with others. But, empathizing with the stranger is in difficulty if the self is inextricably embedded in an essentially prejudiced world of familiarity. In view of this, in this article, an interpretation of originary empathy is developed with reference to the HC, basing on its conception of the essential rupture within human existence between existential familiarity and existential unhomeliness. The uncanny possibilities that one is clear are one's own (authentic) are illuminated by the unhomeliness of existential angst; unhomeliness, therefore, has ontologico-ethical primacy. It never lets humans fully arrive home and makes them strangers to their own habitual ways of existing. From this perspective, originary empathy can be understood as the inherent power of human existence to affectively bring near the stranger hidden in both familiar and unfamiliar others. I have argued that the HC's concern of modern homelessness must be understood as a further radicalized encounter with existential unhomeliness. Hence, the ontologico-ethical meaning of the event of modernity must be interpreted in terms of empathizing with the stranger: freeing the stranger to reveal herself in her radical otherness, and freeing the self for questioning her familiar world. This involves welcoming and caring for the stranger with openness, and engaging her in reasonable, affective, respectful, and mutually stimulating dialogue, without naively anticipating the happy ending of a perfect resolution of all disagreements. Radical difference is intrinsic to empathizing with the stranger. In this sense, modernity is the event of rediscovery of the unexplored ontologico-ethical human proclivity to be genuinely hospitable to strangers. The extremities of the modern world reveal the unfinished agenda of human ethical development in relation to the unbounded nature of originary empathy.⁸

⁷ In this respect, contemporary philosophy of community without communion, fusion, and completion is significant. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that the human being is never an indivisible, atomistic individual, but a singularity that receives its uniqueness from the outside by way of exposition, expression, ecstasy, and sharing. The human is a *clinamen*, which means "an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other" (Nancy, 1986/1991, p. 3).

⁸ I am grateful to the reviewers of this Journal and to the respondents of the 2018 "Sympathy Symposium" at Jnanapravaha Institute Mumbai, especially to Prof. Brooke Holmes, whose searching comments immensely helped improve this paper and made me rethink some of my central arguments.

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Received April 5, 2021

Revision received July 6, 2021

Accepted July 8, 2021 ■