

EMPATHY BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND EUROCENTRISM IN HISTORICAL THEORY (Empatia poza antropocentryzmem i eurocentryzmem w teorii historii)

SUMMARY

This doctoral dissertation addresses the problem of empathy in the theory of history, offering a thorough reinterpretation of the concept in the context of contemporary political, social, and environmental crises. Its point of departure is the diagnosis that dominant Western approaches to empathy have remained narrowly focused on interhuman relations, neglecting the role of affect, imagination, and interspecies relations, while remaining embedded in Eurocentric patterns of thinking about the past.

The aim of the dissertation is to reposition empathy within historical theory by expanding its conceptual scope, embracing its inherent ambiguities, and exploring its potential for a more responsible and sustainable practice of history. Empathy is presented not merely as a cognitive tool but as an epistemic and ethical capacity that enables historians to engage responsibly with a variety of Others – human, nonhuman, and future generations. The dissertation argues that empathy, when rethought beyond its intellectualist, anthropocentric, and Eurocentric formulations, opens new possibilities for ethical reflection in history, providing historians with a vital ethical and epistemological tool to engage with a world in a state of permanent crisis. Rather than adopting conventional, sometimes even commonsense definitions of empathy, the thesis proposes to understand it as a historically situated capacity and an ethical imperative that makes it possible to transcend cultural, species, and temporal boundaries.

The dissertation is guided by key research questions: What does it mean to empathize with beings radically different from us? How can historians cultivate empathy toward nonhumans and toward those not yet born? In what ways does empathy disrupt linear time, binary modes of thought, and colonial hierarchies of knowledge? Can empathy contribute to shaping a post-anthropocentric ethics of responsibility, and if so, how?

The most innovative contribution of the dissertation is its triadic model of empathy: transcultural (enabling dialogue between Western and Indigenous systems of knowledge), transspecies (crossing boundaries between humans and nonhumans, such as animals), and transgenerational (opening history to responsibility toward future generations). These theoretical proposals are grounded in nuanced analyses of the works of Dominick LaCapra, Ailton Krenak, Éric Baratay, and Vinciane Despret, as well as in critical reflection on Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Ministry for the Future*.

The dissertation is characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinarity, bringing together philosophy and theory of history, animal studies, environmental humanities, and Indigenous knowledges. Methodologically, the candidate draws on conceptual analysis, comparative approaches, and inspirations from grounded theory. Her research aligns with cutting-edge trends in the humanities, engaging critically with post-anthropocentric and decolonial approaches.

The thesis is concluded with the proposition that empathy can serve as the foundation of a future-oriented historical reflection capable of responding to social, political, and ecological crises. Empathy emerges here as both an ethical imperative and a scholarly tool that equips historians with new capacities for interpretation and engagement, moving beyond anthropocentric and Eurocentric frameworks. This dissertation is an original and pioneering achievement that not only enriches historical theory but also offers a practical contribution to building a more responsible, sustainable, inclusive, and more-than-human humanities.

Keywords: empathy, theory of history, anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, more-than-human history, ethics of history, responsibility