



THE
Compassionate Mind
FOUNDATION

Mission statement: To promote wellbeing through the scientific understanding and application of compassion

www.compassionatemind.co.uk

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THE COMPASSIONATE MIND FOUNDATION

President Prof Paul Gilbert OBE

Professor Gilbert has been a clinical psychology for over 40 years and researcher in compassion for over 30 years. With colleagues he has been exploring how the evolved biopsychosocial processes of compassion can be a central focus for psychotherapy. We therefore study compassion as a motive powerful biopsychosocial properties that evolved from caring behaviour but was also modified by more recent human social and cognitive competencies that emerged in hunter gatherer epochs.

All motives are rooted in basic stimulus response 'If A then do B' algorithms that have two elements to them:

1. the ability to detect information relevant to the motive called stimulus sensitivity (engagement) and
2. the ability to work out what to do to achieve the intention of the motive and do it, called response.

It is essential that these two processes are clearly distinguished in motivation processes like compassion because they involve very different psychologies and physiologies This study by Di Bello et., (2021) offers clear research data on how they differ. Sensitivity without the ability to perform appropriate responses, no matter how small, can create problems of burnout or feeling powerless or overwhelmed. Therefore, sensitivity and response need to be matched.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2021.617443/full>

Human compassion differs from the caring observable in other species because we are able to utilise a range of unique, complex cognitive and social contextual processes e.g., forms of reasoning, empathy and mentalizing, and the ability to be aware of being aware which gives rise to consciousness of consciousness and potentials for mindfulness and mind observation. These have profound impacts on our disposition to be harmful or helpful. These enable us to have insight into the causes of suffering and its relief and prevention. We are also very plastic in our maturation from the epi-genetic level to the cultural and ecological. Some cultures, like the Romans and early Vikings were far more cruel than exist today. Many societies have supported slavery, genocide holocausts, and many religions have used terror to control belief systems. There is still much to do to root cultural progress in compassion motivation.

Compassion then is the ability to detect and understand the nature and causes of suffering coupled with the motivation to respond by working out how to (wisely) alleviate suffering *and* prevent it. Since compassion is also about the prevention of suffering it must address needs because unaddressed needs lead to suffering. Both need courage and wisdom. Courage without wisdom can be reckless and wisdom without courage can be ineffective. This approach overlaps but differs in focus from approaches that try to identify specific elements of compassion. Compassion is different

to love which has physiologies, evolutions. We do not need to love or to like people in order to try to be helpful rather than harmful to them. Research on forgiveness shows this clearly.

Compassion is the courage and wisdom to engage with suffering/distress/needs, explore their origins and commit to courageous and wise ways of action. Compassion is not one process. The courage and wisdom of a firefighter might be very different to that of a counsellor or caring parent. People may be excellent at one but not the other. What unites different acts of compassion is the motivation to address suffering. CFT promotes both the concept of a compassionate identity (the principles and values to guide one and aspire to) and that of a cultivating a compassionate mind (training the mind and body such that it can deliver on compassionate intention). CFT highlights how early life experiences and subsequent cultural embeddedness can have profound impacts on our dispositions to be harmful or helpful

WEBSITE

The Foundation website has a range of useful sources of information of what the foundation as an international organisation is doing --in pursuing its mission statement which is: To promote wellbeing through the scientific understanding and application of compassion.

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>

The website carries information about many of our sister foundations and affiliated groups in other parts of the world who can be contacted directly, plus the special interest groups that are applying CFT principles in different domains.

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resource/network-landing-page>

The foundation has created a forum with a set of interviews around the theme of 'creating a more compassionate world.' These interviews are with individuals who bring experience in scientific understanding to the challenges of compassion implementation in different domains of human activity.

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/creating-a-compassionate-world>

We have a members area which contains a lot of therapy training materials and post conference talks etc.

The foundation also has a communication list for those interested in participating in this approach to compassion

RESEARCH WORK -THERAPY FOCUSED

Below are a number of Open Access papers that covers some of the key themes the foundation explores. Important is that our first major meta-analysis from 7,875 participants is now available

Petrocchi, N., Ottaviani, C., Cheli, S., Matos, M., Baldi, B., Basran, J. K., & Gilbert, P. (2023). The impact of compassion focused therapy on positive and negative mental health outcomes: Results of a series of meta-analyses. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*.

[APA PsycNet FullTextHTML page](#)

and we would direct your attention to an interview that Stan Steindl conducted with the lead investigator that explains the data clearly

Examining the effectiveness of compassion focused therapy, with Niki Petrocchi
https://youtu.be/_q2qaoTzGm8

Here are some other resources relating to CFT

Evolution and compassion focused therapy

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586161/full>

Bipolar paper

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.841932/full>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.841932/full#supplementary-material>

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Our new therapy book

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Compassion-Focused-Therapy-Clinical-Applications/dp/0367476908/ref=sr_1_4?crid=A1A43M873V72&keywords=compassion+focused+therapy&qid=1640885583&s=books&sprefix=compassion+foc%2Cstripbooks%2C37&sr=1-4

USA

https://www.amazon.com/Compassion-Focused-Therapy-University-Counseling-ebook/dp/B09DTD5B3F/ref=sr_1_2?crid=3111XHTJWH8Q2&keywords=compassion+focused+burlingame&qid=1674577296&sprefix=compassion+focused+burlingame%2Caps%2C111&sr=8-2

https://www.amazon.com/Compassion-Focused-Therapy-University-Counseling-ebook/dp/B09DTD5B3F/ref=sr_1_2?crid=3111XHTJWH8Q2&keywords=compassion+focused+burlingame&qid=1674577335&sprefix=compassion+focused+burlingame%2Caps%2C111&sr=8-2

Energising compassion

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1150592/full>

The foundation is currently rebuilding its research page which will give information on a range of international research projects exploring CFT.

SOCIALLY FOCUSED WORK

Care and share vs control and hold are two of the most important strategies for resource distribution that operate across many different species. There are a range of brain systems that support each. The most dominant strategy is *control and hold* where individuals compete, usually aggressively, to gain control over resources and then hold on to them. Avian species and many mammals, especially primates (although Bonobos are slight different) tend to be organised around dominant subordinate hierarchies and dominant threat. There are many societies but still utilise this strategy where dominant (mostly) males control resources and persecute subordinates and protestors. The vast inequalities between 'haves, have nots, and have lots' is partly due to the encouragement and poor regulation of control and hold strategies in capitalist societies.

Some species however do show a different way of distributing resources which is for those that have resources or skills to share with those who don't. Bats are a good example. There is considerable evidence that part of our evolution and part of the reason we became socially intelligent was

because subordinates ganged up against dominant males and also began to share resources. This then became a strategy that was successful and flourished particularly in low resource environments. Humans are highly orientated to care and share and there is a lot of evidence now that we are physiologically, psychologically and socially at our best (most flourishing) when we are part of caring sharing communities.

Rather than seeing the conflicts of the world as between individuals, it is (also) essential we see them as between two very different types of, millions of years old, resource distribution strategies that are operating through populations. All systems can move between equilibrium and chaos according to the regulators of that system. This is true for strategies that operate within populations too. The emergence of agriculture and the rapid advancement of individually owned wealth destabilised social contexts for care and share into control and hold. As of today political and social science hasn't worked out how to better regulate these control and hold strategies. Unregulated they have given rise to dominant often aggressive elites who have maintained their power and influence on the minds of the many through mixtures of threat and deception. Although individuals believe they are in control of their minds in reality it is the strategies that are context sensitive that ripple through populations that texture mind the values and aspirations. Strategies as much as individuals are units of competition.

Hence, mindfulness and compassion help us begin to understand how evolution has created a mind that is capable of the most extraordinary sacrifices for the benefit of others but also one of the most vicious, sadistic and nasty minds that have ever existed. Compassion therefore is not just to create happiness but to address the dark side and in particular the ways in which the control and hold strategies have a powerful influence on the minds of the many in certain contexts.

Care and share vs control and hold

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.582090/full>

Anti social and prosocial behaviour and leadership

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00610/full>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02460/full>

Comment on Ukraine

<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/callousness-compassion-and-ukrainian-crisis>

On the problem of modern living

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Living-Like-Crazy-Paul-Gilbert/dp/1999868307/ref=sr_1_1?crid=6RKYIKQTMOOP&keywords=living+like+crazy&qid=1672818548&srefix=living+like+crazy%2Caps%2C59&sr=8-1

Creating a compassionate world interviews

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/creating-a-compassionate-world>

Other useful open access

Voices video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRqI4lxuXAw>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00152/full>

Evolution informed and Buddhist informed approaches to compassion are explored in recent papers comparing and contrasting different approaches to compassion

Gilbert, P., Basran, J., Plowright, P., Matos, M., Kirby, J., & Petrocchi, N. (2023). Fears and Resistances to Mindfulness: Development of a Self-Report Scale. *Mindfulness*, 1-15. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-023-02171-y>

Gilbert, P., & Van Gordon, W. (2023). Compassion as a Skill: A Comparison of Contemplative and Evolution-Based Approaches. *Mindfulness*, 1-22. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-023-02173-w>

Gilbert, P., Huxter, M. & Choden (2023). Exploration of Evolution-Informed Compassion-Focused Therapy and Buddhist Approaches to Insight Meditation: A Three-Way Exploration. *Mindfulness*, 1-24. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-023-02141-4>

Talks

AD4E

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ufp2FxoFhYQ&feature=youtu.be>

Here is a talk I did for the Royal College of Psychiatry evolutionary section --it goes into the evolutionary underpinnings of CFT in a bit more detail than we usually do --and I'm sorry about the hands which can be a bit distracting

<https://youtu.be/swwFEKWoxHg>

The Problem. Science is still puzzled by why something (the universe, time and space) exists rather than nothing. In this universe the emergence of DNA enabled the emergence of life and the evolutionary process that generates variation of form. Many acknowledge that evolution is a harsh and callous process that facilitates immense suffering but is indifferent to it. Whether or not consciousness is the ground of all being or whether we are simply conscious beings by virtue of complex neurochemistry, the reality of suffering stimulates a response

As humans we recognise we are a complex species that has evolved many extraordinary abilities. Modern medicine helped us to cope with a virus like COVID-19 and all over the world people are working for the benefit of others. Our problems are not so much that we lack compassion in certain contexts, our problems are that we also have many other evolved motives that are much darker. The history of the last few thousand years has also been a history of the human creation of suffering for humans and others species. A glance around the world today shows it riddled with mental health problems, tribal violence, oppression, inequalities and harmful cruel belief systems. Anyone who thinks

that compassion is simply about being kind or loving each other has seriously misunderstood compassion. Compassion arises when we are sensitive to the suffering of self and others and its causes and make a commitment to try to do something about them and prevent them. We don't turn our backs on need of suffering; we are not callous in the face of suffering, nor do we seek to create it for self benefit or power. Turning toward suffering and working out what to do, including at times, putting ourselves at risk or at a loss, means that courage, wisdom and commitment are at the centre of compassion. Today the science of compassion is focused on how to build courageous wisdom and how to use that not only to promote flourishing but also to stand against the harmful side of our nature, that can so be easily experienced when we have mental health difficulties, become callous in the pursuit of self-interest, and when it is manipulated in tribal and political contexts.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Galt." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, rounded initial 'P' and a period at the end.