Questions about whether politics can or should be based on compassion, and if so what that would look like, have been aired for hundreds of years (Porter, 2006, Ricard, 2015). This chapter explores the nature and science of compassion, how it can texture political discourse but also the challenges it’s up against. Such discourse is not confined to the motives and actions of politicians, it also applies to how we think about, discuss and organise ourselves into complex, interacting communities that seek to agree the principles of community regulation and resource distribution from the local to the international.

**The origins of compassion**

It is sometimes suggested that compassion is our basic nature; that somehow not to be compassionate means something has gone wrong. This is naïve and dangerous. It is certainly true that socially, sharing, caring and valuing relational networks have many beneficial effects on a range of physiological processes including cardiovascular, immune and epigenetics. We are more creative, playful, trusting, friendly, joyful and happier in caring relationships than neglectful or conflictual ones. However, it is easy for us to make these highly focused and contextual. Caring behaviour evolved in the context of close kin relationships and small hunter gatherer groups does not easily extend to all groups, or all individuals (particularly in conflict situations) (Krebs, 2008).

Most scientists recognise that nothing makes much sense in biology, or the nature of the mind, without an evolutionary analysis. Evolutionary analysis operates through two fundamental processes in the universe which are splitting apart, separating, diversifying and even competing versus coming together, integrating, coordinating and building complexity. Physiological systems also have these two basic processes of diversity versus integration (Stewart, 2014). These themes are also played out in life stories and through the evolved motivational systems that operate through us.

The fact is that we, like all other life forms, are gene-built and carry within us the same evolved strategies, algorithms and motivations for status, power, control over resources, tribalism, sex, and attachment to offspring (Buss, 2015; Gilbert, 1989). Some of these motives will pull us together to share and work cooperatively, while others will push us. These two basic processes are also fundamental to politics, and we can swing between movements that seek integration and cooperation versus those that seek separation and differentiation, at different levels of complexity and size. As in all things, switch the balance too far one way and we get dangerous oscillations.

It is now fairly well known that we are not fully conscious of what our inner motives and drivers are up to (Bargh, 2017; Huang & Bargh, 2014). This has been a difficult story, and even today there are many places in the world which strongly argue against an evolutionary analysis of mind, and even forbid it to be taught (Jolly, 2018). But an evolutionary contextual science for understanding the human mind has huge implications for thinking about how we bring compassion into social discourse and politics to address the dark side of the human mind, which over the last 4000 years or so has caused terrible suffering. In addition, how to address the politics of division, narcissism, tribalism and (at times violent) repression of people. Without rooting compassion in an evolutionary and contextual science we can end up being naïve and loose with language, equating compassion with things like love, kindness and friendliness. These may be ways of being compassionate, but they are not compassion. At the heart of compassion is the courage to look into the causes of suffering in particular our dark side - with a dedication to acquire the wisdom of understanding the causes and roads to the alleviation and prevention of suffering; and the determination to take action (Gilbert, 2009, 2019a).

**We are all in Westworld**

In the television series Westworld, pleasure androids (called Hosts) are programmed with algorithms and scripts to live out certain kinds of life narratives such that the human participants visiting the ‘theme park’ can interact and do what they want to them. The androids ‘believe’ the scripts coded into their brains; that they are indeed, farmers, gangsters, cowboys and cowgirls, salon bar owners and Japanese samurai. Hosts are so well scripted in how they look, move, they speak and speak and respond to stimuli that they appear indistinguishable from humans. When they are ‘killed’ they are simply brought back to the behind-the-scenes factory, patched up and reset. At times they may be reprogrammed with a new set of algorithms which give them different life scripts and characters. Gradually, however, these Hosts begin to become conscious, and to remember their different kinds of lives and scripts, and so, start to rebel against their programming and programmers. The series is of course a metaphor for humanity.

Humans are beginning to recognise that we too are basically scripted beings; scripted by our genes to live short lives, decay and die, and to fulfil certain life tasks along the way in the service of gene replication: to survive, avoid harms and injuries, form relationships to others, have sex, reproduce, invest in the kids, defend status, join groups and tribes and defend those boundaries. The way we do that will be very much textured by the cultures in which we, (by pure chance) grow-up in (Barkow, 1989; Gilbert, 1989, 2019; Sapolsky, 2017). The degree to which we understand how, why and what is going on in our minds, how and why all humans are fairly similar in their maturational trajectories, aspirations, emotions, wants and needs, and if we can be more than just a set of programmed algorithms in the brain, is now crucial to the compassion. Indeed, some would say this is a new type of ‘coming enlightenment’ that may well have spiritual implications depending upon what we discover about the nature of consciousness. When we begin to become conscious (and mindful) of what’s going on inside us, to what extent will we rebel against our programming and seek to become something different? This was the basic insight of the Buddha; that by becoming ‘mindful’ and being able to observersve our minds, we gain insight into our programming (the chaos of the inner passions, desires, wants, fantasies and urges) and can choose not to act on those programmes and algorithms that are harmful to self and others but instead cultivate the helpful (Harrington & Davidson, 2002; Jinpa, 2017; Ricard, 2015).

**Getting to know our strategies.**

As a primate, humans are capable of two quite different types of life strategy and motivational orientation to the world (Del Giudice, 2016). One strategy is to be threat sensitive, self-focused and an accumulator and defender of resources; to ‘gain, maintain and control’, rather than be ‘a sharer’. This is quite a common strategy for primates, especially males who operate in hierarchies where individuals often engage in conflict for access to resources. These hierarchies tend to be regulated through threat.

An alternative strategy for survival and reproduction is rooted in mutual support and is to share resources and build affiliative relationships that maintain low levels of competitive stress. These groups tend to be far less hierarchical and attention is given to people whose talents have value to others, rather than their threat potential (Barkow, 1989; Boehm, 1999; Chance, 1988). In the latter case we compete to be valued, chosen, wanted and appreciated rather than to be controlling, feared and submitted to (Gilbert, 2007). Of course, all of us can show varying degrees of these strategies, motives and behavioural styles, but for some individuals they become the preferred orientation to life.

Not only are we gene built, but our personalities and dispositions to prosocial behaviours like compassion can be affected by genetic dispositions (Tost et al., 2010), and we are highly sensitive to social context (Conway & Slavich, 2017; Cowan, Callaghan, Kan, & Richardson, 2016). For example, if I had been kidnapped as a three-day-old baby into a violent drug gang, this version of Paul Gilbert would not exist; a violent, impulsive, narcissistic individual is more likely. Not only would my values be different, given what we now know about neuroplasticity and the way the brain grows according to the influences on it, so would my brain. The genes that had been activated within me would be different too; this process is known as called epigenetics. That version of Paul Gilbert may be dead, a rapist, in prison or very rich. If the two versions could somehow meet, they probably would not get on. Indeed, one of them would likely see the other as a coward, or rather pathetic, while the ‘nicer’ version might be repelled by the darker version. Such insights throw puzzling questions to our concept of free will, free choice and individual responsibility.

Compassion in Politics must begin with the very root of what it is to be human. We are biologically needing of sharing and caring environments throughout our lives, and if we don’t get this, the dark side of our minds can easily come to the fore. It’s about how we create a world that fits our needs for caring and sharing, rather than as we have at the moment, a system that fits and advantages money markets, short-term opportunism, self-focused competitiveness and even psychopathic tendencies (Hanson & Baker, 2017). What politicians call tough decisions are more commonly callous decisions aimed to protect the wealthy and hit the poor (Curl & Kearns, 2015; Gilligan, 2011; Tooze, 2019). To understand compassion then, we need to have an evolutionary, contextual biopsychosocial approach to the human mind. This approach understands that the human mind has created contexts which can bring out the best and the worst in us (Gilbert, 2018; Sapolsky, 2017).

*The emergence of human compassion from pre-human caring.*

Compassion, caring and sharing are fundamental nutrients to the mind and body because we have evolved for them to be so, and even our genetic expression is affected by them (Keltner, Kogan, Piff & Saturn, 2014). The origins of compassion can be traced back to the origins of mammalian caring behaviour many millions of years ago (Buss, 2015; Dunbar, 2014, 2017; Gilbert, 1989; Marsh, 2019; Mayseless, 2016; Preston, 2013; Spikins 2017). While some species breed thousands of eggs, and offspring are left to fend for themselves (some may even attack their offspring or cannibalise them if they come too close), others, especially mammals, offer their offspring care in the form of protection and provisioning for needs. Neuroscientist Paul Maclean (1985) once pointed out that the first step to care and compassion is ‘don’t eat the kids.’

Around 200 million years ago, live birthed mammals began to emerge in the flow of life and were evolving brains with abilities to be sensitive to the distress and needs of another (the infant) and generate behaviours to alleviate distress and provide for needs. With the evolution of primates, particularly the great apes, these behaviours became increasingly complex and subtle, such that maternal care was to offer protection, comfort, warmth, food and a secure base for learning social skills necessary for subsequent life; all of which would impact on the maturing brain (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Siegel, 2015). It is now recognised that many physiological systems are influenced via the patterns of interaction infants have with their primary carers; relationships are physiological regulators (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Humans differ from other primates in that we have paternal caring of infants and youngsters (Geary, 2000); most primate males take very little interest in their offspring and don’t even know who they are.

This is an important issue because it introduces the idea of kin recognition, and not causing harm to those who carry one’s own genes. Note then that caring did not start off with a general desire to help everybody, but with a specific and selected focus; sometimes referred to as kin altruism (Dawkins, 1976). Derived from its early evolved origins for caring behaviour, a typical definition is very close to the basic mammalian caring motive and can be defined, as: a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it (Gilbert, 2009, 2017,bc). However, as we will see, what turns mammalian caring into human compassion is our recently evolved cognitive and socially intelligent abilities.

*Physiological benefits.*

Science has revealed the specialist processing systems for caring and prosocial behaviour that have evolved over hundreds of millions of years. These include hormones like oxytocin (Bell, 2001; Carter, Bartal & Porges, 2017), development of the parasympathetic system and vagus nerve (Porges, 2017) and frontal cortex for caring (for reviews see Gilbert, 2017; Petrocchi & Cheli, 2019; Seppälä, Simon-Thomas, Brown, Worline, Cameron & Doty, 2017). Space does not allow us to go into details about these systems, but they are profoundly important and can even regulate aspects of chromosomes called telomeres, which affect health and life expectancy (Knutsen et al., 2019). These physiological systems became adapted (with slight differences) for other forms of care-focused relating (between sexual partners, friends and allies) and these relationships also have powerful physiological effects.

Indeed, many aspects of prosocial and compassionate behaviours have a range of physiological as well as practical benefits. For example, in relation to stress and threat, individuals can engage in the typical defensive behaviours of fight, flight, freezing and submitting. However, the evolution of attachment behaviour means that rather than acting on those basic defences, the child can turn to others for support and soothing, which has powerful physiological impacts on threat processing. Many forms of comforting are supportive and emotionally regulating for primates. For example, Abbott et al. (2003) found that in subordinate monkeys cortisol levels (a stress hormone) were predicted by two key variables. First, the rates of conflicts and stressors experienced, and second, subordinate opportunities for affiliative kin and supportive interactions including grooming. Affiliative interactions stimulate oxytocin and oxytocin can inhibit cortisol and lower stress (Carter, Bartal & Porges, 2017). Humans use their affiliative relationships and turn to others for help to cope with stress all the time. When stressed we seek out the support of others who are capable of validating, reassuring and offering practical support. So prosocial behaviour has evolved to become a very major stress coping behaviour for humans. And it is not just for stress-coping that benefits arise; affiliative relationships also provide us with the greatest pleasures in life, and the physiological effects of the pleasures of affiliative relating have powerful health benefits and promote prosocial behaviour (Keltner et al.,2014; Petrocchi & Cheli, 2019; Seppälä, et al 2017; Siegal, 2015).

Caring and prosociality are attractive. Another reason for evolving capacities for caring, sharing, altruism and compassion is that these traits can be desirable in partners, sexual or otherwise; they create positive reputations in the minds of others, particularly in contexts where individuals can choose who they associate with (Barkow, 1989; Gilbert, 1989, 2007). The switch from exerting control over others through threat to gaining status and forming helpful relationships via attraction and being a desired individual, has been fundamental in human evolution (Barkow, 1989; Dunbar, 2016; Gilbert, 2007). In fact, people can and do behave in apparently compassionate and kindly ways for many different reasons. Curry et al. (2018) note that helpful and prosocial behaviours may be underpinned by motives such as kin altruism, mutualism, reciprocal altruism, and competitive altruism because it attracts people to you. In addition, people can behave in kindly ways because they are fearful of being rejected and need to be seen as ‘nice people’ (Catarino, Gilbert, McEwan & Baião, 2014).

Problematically, this kind of (what looks like) helpful compassion can also be a form of ‘conflict avoidance’ such that individuals who are ‘agreeable’ and ‘ pleasant’ may also be complicit in immoral situations because they don’t want to argue with, challenge and upset authority (Bègue et al., 2015), hence the term submissive compassion. This raises a point that will be made repeatedly: the centre of compassion is courage and without it we may fail to address injustice and suffering. Cutler & Campbell-Meiklejohn (2019) found that different motives for helpful and prosocial behaviours are linked to different neurophysiological signatures. Evolutionists also suggest that while people may consciously believe they are behaving with good intention, nevertheless, there may well be an underlying, completely non-conscious, selfish motives (Huang & Bargh, 2014).

*The role of human social intelligence in compassion*

Seeing the origins of compassion in mammalian caring behaviour is only part of the story. It’s clear that humans are different to other animals because we have a range of new brain functions that are quite extraordinary in regard to their types of awareness, meta-cognitive, insightful reasoning and empathic abilities, along with competencies for language and communication of complex information (Byrne, 1995; Diamond, 1992; Gilbert 2009; Harari, 2015; Sapolsky, 2017; Suddendorf, 2018). These don’t change our underlying (older brain) motivation seeking and dispositions (to avoid harm, for status, group belonging and sexual opportunity) but do significantly change the way they are pursued, accentuated, cultivated or attenuated. Today our cognitive competencies include: a new type of self-awareness; an ability to future think (e.g. the impact of our behaviour a day, a week or months into the future); insights into the minds of others such as (theory of mind); knowing intentionality (no lion goes circuit training with the intention of being a faster predator), whereas we do things all the time with an aware intentionality to improve our abilities. We have new forms of imagination and creativity, even envisioning things that could not possibly exist (as in science fiction or fantasy). We are probably the only species that needs and searches for meaning (Gilbert, 2009; 2018). For the most part these competencies evolved in relatively non-hierarchical small groups where caring and sharing were central to survival, and where aggressive, self-focused individuals were usually shunned or punished (Boehm, 1999).

Today we can demonstrate caring behaviour in many different contexts. This is also partly driven by our new brain competencies. Indeed, caring is even broader for humans. For example, we can care for animals, plants, gardens and even whole ecologies (consider those who are very concerned about climate change); we can ‘look after’ the prized family car or musical instrument to make them last or function optimally! Human caring also has the capacity for future thinking, and in that sense can anticipate improving functioning and preventing harmfulness.

It is in these abilities that we find the emergence of human compassion out of caring. While compassion can be defined as it was above, when we bring our extraordinary cognitive competencies to caring we can care in a whole range of new ways. (Note though that while we care for our homes, gardens and prized possessions, compassion only applies to sentient beings; we do not have compassion for the garden). Compassion is about the experience of suffering and again this is what separates it from straightforward caring. This is shown in diagram 1.



Diagram 1 from caring to compassion. From P. Gilbert (2018) Living like Crazy with permission Annwyn House

Our new brain competencies have major implications for how we use a motivation like compassion in political situations where we will be working with strangers and people who have different values to us. Lowenstein and Small (2007) point out that if we only rely on our preferences and emotions then our empathy, sympathy and compassion for others will be very limited. This is how and why we also need our new brain intelligences and moral values to behave in ways that our emotions may prefer we didn’t; to share resources rather than to accumulate and hold. Our new brains have foresight so that we can know, in advance, what our behaviours may entail or take us into. This means that human compassion often involves courage, because we knowingly move towards pain, distress, danger and threat; consider for example all forms of rescue, be it from fires, floods, the sea or mountains or medically engaging with dangerous infectious diseases. People put their lives on the line to save others. Without courage we would get nowhere. Equally, simply having intention and courage is not enough. We also need the skills and wisdom to know what to do, for example, to jump into the river to save somebody if one can’t swim adds to the problem and is not helpful, a kindly doctor with good intent but who doesn’t study and keep up his/her medical knowledge is not the best their medical knowledge is no help to anyone. Compassion is also a wisdom seeking process and not simply impulsive (caring) actions.

**Compassion and social contexts**

There was a complex reciprocal relationship between the evolution of our new brain competencies and sharing, caring and compassion (Marsh, 2019). Early hunter gatherer societies are distinguishable from other primates not by ingroup aggressiveness but thoughtful, caring (compassion) behaviours. Humans have excelled at prosociality and compassion, at least for kin and in-groups. The archaeological record shows that early humans cared for their sick, shared resources at a high level, and were extraordinarily cooperative in tasks like hunting, feeding, building and sharing knowledge (Dunbar, 2016, 2017; Marsh, 2019). Indeed, Spikins (2014, 2017) and Narvaez (2017) argue that it was sharing, caring and compassionate behaviour that set us on the road to ‘humanity,’ and underpinned the evolution of our cognitive abilities and social intelligence.

In addition, caring and sharing have come with extraordinarily powerful physiological effects, and it is through such relationships that we are physiologically as well as psychologically shaped (Siegel, 2015). A major vulnerability factor for mental health problems is when individuals have not experienced, and do not feel embedded, in caring sharing communities and relationships. So, it is likely that it was our ability to feel safe with each other, care for each other and communicate with each other that drove our social intelligence (Dunbar, 2016; 2017). Although few behaviours are governed by single motives, undoubtedly caring and sharing motives have played their part in the building of civilisations and human achievements.

Our capacity for insightful intentionality ripples through many aspects of our social relationships and desires to cultivate the pleasures of social relating. Humans are the only primate species that takes time over sexual behaviour intentionally enhancing pleasure and joyfulness. As far as we know we are the only species who intentionally enjoys ‘sharing’ and thinks how and what to share. At informal gatherings humans may make humour the centre of interactions, intentionally engaging in mutual approval of each other (clapping, smiling and admiring), intentionally seeking to be valued rather than feared. Consider groups of friends in a restaurant or pub and how they interact; humour is common. This fits our physiology because there is now considerable evidence that prosocial interactions such as giving, sharing and caring, and the sharing of positive emotions between us have very profound impacts on a range of physiological processes including the frontal cortex, the organisation of the autonomic nervous system and immune system. (Siegel, 2015). They are highly conducive to mental well-being, whereas their absence is associated with mental health difficulties. However, for all their benefits caring and sharing strategies are very contextual and evolved primarily in small, integrated networks (100-150 people) where resources were scarce and sharing and caring were fundamental to survival, social reputation and social acceptance (Dunbar, 2017; Narvaez, 2017; Spikins, 2017). As we will see it begins to falter as the numbers in communities increase.

**Where did it go wrong?**

Compassion requires us to look deeply into the causes of our suffering and harm doing. Here we need courage, because it is not an easy journey. For a start we suffer because we are biological beings, vulnerable to disease and injury, so short lived, so fragile and with pain systems, both physical and mental, built into us; everyone we love will die and pass away; nothing is permanent. We mostly dissociate from the terrors of the fragilities and short termism of our lives but in doing so we risk cutting ourselves off from compassion and engagement with such realities. In addition, tragically we also suffer at the hands of each other in the most extraordinary ways. This is partly because 1. the human brain was never designed to be a well-functioning system, but was somewhat cobbled together with various adaptations, trade-offs and compromises that don’t fit that well together. It just needed to function well enough to ensure the survival and reproduction in certain niches (Gilbert, 1998; 2019; Nesse, 2019). 2. Given the context in which the human brain involved it did not evolve to cope with vast numbers of strangers and extraordinary resources to compete over. The greatest tragedy of humanity is that we are a species who have evolved with the most amazing cognitive abilities and capacities for compassion. Our bodies and minds work so much better in these contexts of prosocial, moral and compassionate relating than ones of exploitation, unfairness, neglect or stress, and yet we can also be the nastiest, most savage, destructive, brutal and cruel species that have ever walked this earth. Where did it all go wrong? Simple answer. Numbers and resource potential.

*Agriculture, the intensification of competing for resources and hierarchical organisation*

Many historians, archaeologists and anthropologists suggest various processes, but one that most agree on is the shift from small-group hunter gathering to agriculture (Harari, 2015; Mann, 1986). The advent of agriculture was to change everything and create totally new contexts for the human mind, contexts that would give rise to civilisations, medicines, technologies, but also a lot of our current problems and difficulties. It happened like this. As noted, scarcity was one of the main behavioural regulators in early environments; obesity was very unlikely as was selfish wealth accumulation. Indeed, any effort to accumulate and hold resources for self in a hunter gatherer society would have been shunned (Barkow, 1989; Boehm, 1999). For tens of thousands of years, we lived like that. But with the emergence of agriculture, rather than having to hunt - which required much physical activity and coordination between hunters to bring down an animal - agriculture caged livestock in increasing numbers. This put meat within close range and so easily accessible, and also animals could be ‘owned’ by a few. Having livestock so close also introduced vulnerabilities to viruses. There was the deliberate cultivation of vegetables and fruits that could be grown to surplus with new wheat-based foods that could be stored in increasingly large quantities. A new division of labour and ownership began to open up. The growth of group size and resources created contexts for the ‘control of resources’ and divisions of labour that brought bartering rather than sharing, thereby stimulating self-focused, opportunistic, resource controlling brain algorithms and strategies.

The creation of the potential for resource accumulation and wealth gave rise to new forms of conflict and rekindled evolutionary older, primate algorithms and physiological patterning, underpinning hierarchical competitive psychology. Relatively fearless and aggressive individuals could get more of the action than more timid subordinates. We didn’t plan or choose for this to happen, it’s just the way the human brain interacts with the environment in which it now finds itself. In primate and human groups those who become dominant can have a profound effect on the group (Sapolsky, 1990; 2017). In human groups dominant individuals do more than just use their power to get the best slice of resources or sexual opportunities. In groups they can become leaders, and in that position have truly profound effects on the minds of those who are in that group space; shaping their values and patterning their physiologies, motives and emotions. They can even entice their subordinates to lay down their lives to support them. In 1978 the religious cult leader Jim Jones enticed over a thousand of his supporters to commit suicide (Lindholm, 1993). Today religious leaders can entice their followers into tribal crusades and to become suicide bombers. The dark side of our social embeddedness is that we can be easily influenced for good and for bad. We think we are running the algorithms and programmes in our minds voluntarily, but this is an illusion for we (the many billions of us) are mostly the actors of million year old strategies acting out the same old archetypal life stories and scripts!

Some leaders, propelled by underlying, old, evolved algorithms and motives act out incredibly antisocial behaviours. These algorithms orientate them to pursue their own ruthless ambition, being impulsive, threatening and bullying to their subordinates and callous in their decision-making (Gilbert & Basran, 2019). These individuals can have varying elements of what are called the dark triad personality traits comprising of: machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathic traits (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Hanson & Baker, 2017). Many leaders around the world today are known to have these traits. What links them is callousness and a disinterest, refusal or inability to acknowledge their detrimental impact on others. There is increasing evidence that while some of these traits are linked to genetic dispositions many antisocial leaders have traumatic, neglectful and early life attachment disruptions (Duffell, 2014). Guardian columnist George Monbiot (2019) also notes they act out their pathologies and traumas on, through and in the minds of others. Hence the call that all politicians should have some kind of psychotherapy.

There are many reasons why we follow, submit and even adore antisocial leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Hitler and Stalin had millions who worshipped the ground they walked on. Despite repeated efforts for people to seek liberty and freedom from tyranny, including the tyrannies of belief, our success has not been great; the battle to gain and preserve human rights against the opposing forces of elite control, remains intense (Pilger, 2007). The problem is that when we become aware of threat, such as the fragility of life, the human brain tries to seek protectors, almost as if seeking a parental figure. This is why we have so many religions in the world where we create omnipotent beings who, if we can only get them on side, will help us. When people are under threat there is an automatic tendency to want to find the strong leader, who will have our interests at heart and protect us from external threats. If in addition leaders are prepared to call on borrowed authority from the god(s) the group believes in, our leader has it made.

*The pursuit of wealth***.**

Wealth not only defends us against certain kinds of threats but also provides opportunities for many types of pleasures and comforts. Until recently the natural environment was the regulator on how much personal wealth and ownership could be pursued. In today’s environment however, creating social contexts for reducing the drive for personal wealth and ownership and promoting cooperation, sharing, fairness and compassion is very difficult because so much works against it. In many ways it is surprising that they flourish as much as they do. There is good evidence that throughout our society, in our media, our schools, entertainments, businesses and working lives we are constantly stimulating, cultivating and training people in competitive self-interest. Twenge and Campbell (2009) called this The Age Of Entitlement and that we are suffering from a narcissistic epidemic. James (2007) called Western consumerism Affluenza. Understandable, and we are all caught up in it, but unregulated it is frankly a disaster for humanity. The problem is that once you are into this kind of drive there’s never a sense that one has enough; there’s always the rainy day, the need for just a little more, that extra holiday, slightly better car, sharper picture on the television. So, the pursuit of resources comes with its own threats, anxieties and frustrations. Of course, social comparison can wreak havoc with any sense of satisfaction. If you are happy with a 5% raise but then a week later discover somebody doing exactly the same job as you got a 10% raise you are no longer happy.

The other aspect of drive is that it uses a chemical in the brain called dopamine that’s basically an activator and action chemical. When it is on the wane people can feel agitated, bored or even depressed. If we overstimulate dopamine, people will need more and more to have it stimulated; it functions like a drug (Pani, 2000). The combination of these factors may be one of the reasons many of our entertainments are becoming increasingly vicious and vengeful based. Common narratives are for therequirements are for contestants ‘to be very bad, often cruel or psychopathic, and so the ‘heroes’ come in and violently, sometimes sadistically, give them their comeuppance and we all go home happy. We are driven to more and more intensity in how graphically this is portrayed, just like the gladitorial games were driven to more and more extravagances.

Wealth reduces compassion**.** Humans form subgroups within bigger groups and it’s to the subgroups they try to identify. The problem is that with increasing resources that subgroups can control they become increasingly less compassionate. For example, individuals in lower socio-economic groups are more vulnerable to a whole range of stresses, are more vigilant to stress, are more susceptible to crime and physical and mental health problems. Their lives are more stressful in many ways (see Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012 for a review). What Stellar et al. (2012) explored is whether or not people in lower socio-economic groups are more compassionate than those in higher socio-economic groups. Given the higher stress in the lower socio-economic groups you would think not, but evolutionary theory suggests quite the opposite; that in low resource environments caring and sharing is important, whereas in higher resource environments owning and control becomes the algorithm of the day. This is exactly what they found. Compassion orientations were greater in the lower socio-economic groups than the higher socio-economic groups.

The figures on social inequality are fairly well known, that a very small percentage of the world’s population has by far the majority control over wealth and there is no indication that this is likely to change soon; if anything it’s getting worse. It turns out that calculating who is worth what is actually rather tricky (Matthews, 2019), but nonetheless there is a general agreement that the vast majority of human wealth is in the hands of a tiny percentage and it is unclear the degree to which (Sachs, 2012) some of that wealth is used to support and vote for governments who are tax and service cutters. As 30 academics from 12 different countries brilliantly revealed in their report on national inequalities, inequalities in wealth have a range of negative consequences on economic, social and health (Durante, et al 2013).

*The power of social conformity.*

Groups also need to bind themselves together into a cohesive unit such that individuals within the group understand the values and behaviours that mark group identity. Humans have a need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gilbert 2009). The downside to this is the fear of behaving in ways that break the norms of the group and that’s being stigmatised shamed or rejected. Humans have instigated deeply harmful patterns of behaviour which can be maintained by group conformity pressure. We can develop religious belief systems that entice the mass sacrifice of humans including children (e.g., the Aztecs). For a thousand years Chinese mothers broke the feet of their young daughters sentencing them to a life of pain. Today, in different parts of the world, children are still having their genitals mutilated. Many countries and cities are prey to violent criminal gangs locked in tribal-gang violence by conformity psychology (Gilbert, 2018). Once people have identified with a particular group - in the UK nowas I write it is a remain or leave position regarding EU membership - rational arguments are relatively weak. It’s more about maintaining one’s identity, being loyal to the cause and not being shamed as a deserter. Indeed, in many armies, deserters were shot, and cowardice was regarded as one of the most shameful behaviours. These, especially fears of shame and rejection, are all extremely effective social sanctions to maintain compliance to what are destructive and harmful behaviours. Many bankers were aware of the dangers the system was running into but very few were prepared to speak out and even less do anything; self-interest and fear of social exclusion, and shedding of responsibility was enough to silence them. Group identity and belonging become more powerful than the rationality of an argument. Once a leader can construct an identity which attracts an audience to him or her, they can manipulate that identity and its defence.

**How politicians can stir and change our emotions today**

Politicians are constantly appealing to and seeking to stimulate not just people’s values but also their emotions (Westen, 2007). Without careful insight we can be like puppets, and politicians work out what to say and how to say it in order to pull our desire and emotion strings in a certain direction. Crudely politicians talk about ‘manipulating the crowd’ (Gilligan, 2011; Westen, 2007). Hitler was very good at it. One way of classifying our different emotions (that politicians can speak to) is to see them in terms of their evolutionary function. Three include:

* Threat and self-protection focused systems - enable detecting, attending, processing, and responding to threats. There is a menu of threat-based emotions such as anger, anxiety and disgust, and a menu of defensive behaviours such as fight, flight, submission, and freezing. Sensitivity to threat is our most dominant emotion processing system, and it has a negativity bias (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). We remember negative events more easily than positive ones, and if we have a good day where people are helpful to us but one person is very rude and argumentative, it is the argumentative one we ruminate on and talk to our partners about. Negativity bias is extremely important for Compassion in Politics to conceptualise, because it’s impossible to understand the rise of the right wing and threat-based politics without doing so. Failure to address it will result in policy failures (see below).
* Drive, seeking and acquisition focused systems - enable us to pay attention to advantageous resources, generate some degree of ‘activation’ - and experience pleasure in pursuing and securing them. Here we are not avoiding threats but being energised to pursue resources that will be helpful to us. Importantly, many species exist in environments of relative scarcity and this was certainly the case for humans. So, the environment set the limitation on the acquisition and defending of resources. Everything changes in the land of plenty. For example, obesity is unheard of in hunter gatherer societies because fat, salt and sugar was scarce, and we had to work hard (burn calories) to find them. However, in the modern world (of supermarkets) there is no scarcity. Manufacturers have grossly elevated carbohydrates, fats and sugars in food, and we don’t have to work that hard to get them. Consequently, there is an epidemic of obesity, diabetes and many other diet-caused maladies.

As the drive-seeking systems emotions evolved they were regulated by environments mostly of scarcity. Drive and ‘want more’ emotions are difficult to regulate in the context of huge availability of resources. Simply relying on self-control, be it for eating or making money, is tricky. Indeed, we now live in a world where some individuals have huge resources and vast riches and others have hardly any. The drive system is primarily an accumulator and hoarder. Evidence also suggests that as people accumulate more their orientation to share actually reduces (Van Kleef et al., 2008). Compassion in Politics will need to address the complexity of the evolution of drive systems (the innate desires to own and keep control of resources for self, family, friends and local groups) and how they work at both conscious and unconscious levels. The drive system is also especially sensitive to competitive contexts, and if we create contexts of intense competition we will overstimulate the drive system and competitive motivation (Pani, 2000). We then create environments where we are constantly craving more and reduce our interest in sharing and caring. Compassion is not anti-drive but seeks wise ways to balance it with other motives and how to fairly share the ‘harvest.’

* Contentment, soothing and affiliative focused system – when not dealing with threats and not pursuing resources (be it food, status or nest building) the body needs to rest and digest. The autonomic nervous system evolved such that the ability to rest and digest has fundamental effects on a range of physiological processes including recovery and repair. Important to this is the parasympathetic system (in contrast to the sympathetic system which is activation and underpins threat and drive). This system enables a state of peacefulness and openness when individuals are no longer threat focused or seeking resources – but are satisfied. It is different from ‘exhaustion states’ (which are other ways we can let go of drive) but is associated with positive feelings like contentment.

This system for calming and balancing the sympathetic system has been adapted for many functions of caring, sharing and affiliative behaviour. Hence, the system is also linked to an endorphin-oxytocin-parasympathetic integrated circuit which functions to promote trust, affiliative behaviour and calming in face of the threat system (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010; Porges, 2017). The most obvious example is when a threatened and distressed child turns to their mother who then offers caring which calms the child down. When we are distressed the kindness and helpfulness of others has a calming influence in comparison to disinterest or criticism. This caring signal stimulates the parasympathetic system (Petrocchi & Cheli, 2019; Porges, 2017). Another core aspect of this system is that it gives us a feeling of safeness, and when we feel safe this opens our minds for all kinds of explorative and creative behaviours. There is increasing research showing that in families and work situations when people feel safe and supported they are happier, more creative and physically well than when they don’t feel safe or supported.

Politics should be very concerned with creating contexts where people can feel safe and supported (that’s how they function best and are happiest), rather than what has happened recently, where services have been cut so deeply that many in our caring and educational services feel time pressured, short of resources, unsupported, are often burnt out and stressed, and are seeking escape routes and early retirement. This is not a way to run services and is not a world many of us wish to work or live in. This is a classic example of politics developing systems according to cheque-books and not brains or minds.

**Building a compassionate politics**

At root them politics is the coordination of minds and the algorithms playing through them in communities. Against this backdrop we as a species need to recognise we will always be creators, builders, makers, manufacturers, traders, dreamers, artists and writers of fiction. But in all of this we must have a sustainability to our endeavours.

Politics of the 21st century will need to give up simplistic ideas about left and right wing politics. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter there are fundamental forces within the universe that bring things together and build complexity and separate them into diversity creating new potential patterns. Politics is the same. There are those who are wanting to focus on diversity, and individuality in comparison to those that want to create integration and cooperation. It will not be possible to get rid of one or others of these forces but rather to learn how to balance and manage them wisely as they emerge within the minds of people within communities and populations. Caring and compassion motives can provide an intellectual as well as a moral lens to address these issues. But we need to recognise that compassion primarily evolved for close and in group relationships, and the way we extended it into wider communities, is not as straightforward as it may appear.

We need new ideas about how and when competing versus cooperating, and sharing, creates the greater good (Ricard, 2015). We need to agree what kind of society we all want to build. For example do you want to build a society we all want to live in where we feel safe with each other, can breathe clean air, eat foods that won’t give us obesity and cancer, have health systems supporters when sick and injured, enjoy some of the simple pleasures and pursue meanings for the short lives we have. Maybe, rather than lurching from crisis to crisis, if we can come together to agree (say) four key principles for the kind of society and world we would like to see emerging in the next 50 years this will be a start. While ‘conflict’ of ideas’ will always be part of the human condition, opinions and ideologies can perhaps turn more to science ofto see how to create fairer, social and ecologically sustainable societies we each want to be part of and see a future in. There is much to do.

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