

Women's Climate Conversations online 2021 #4

'First Tuesday' 1 June, 12-1 pm AEST

Finding compassion in public discourse and policy making

In this online conversation, Dr Lynne Reeder (National Director of the Australian Compassion Council) and Reverend Dr Sarah Bachelard (founder of Benedictus Contemplative Church based in Canberra) were in conversation with Congress founding members, Kirsten Anker and Dr Janet Salisbury about how we can tap into our capacity for compassion to overcome our currently adversarial public discourse and set humanity on a safer path.

COMMENTS FROM ZOOM CHAT

(Thanks to Joanne Ede for adding all the relevant links)

Green text is added by guest speakers/hosts after the event

From Joanne Ede : Link to Janet Salisbury's Paper that was catalyst for Women's Climate Congress
http://womenscongress.weebly.com/uploads/3/0/2/0/30206683/independent_mediation_to_stabilise_the_climate-discussion_paper_7jan20_updated_18sept20.pdf

From Joanne Ede : Lynne Reeder - Link To Aust Compassion Council
<https://www.charterforcompassion.com.au/charter/about/>

From Joanne Ede : Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard - Link <https://benedictus.com.au/> - Link to Benedictus Contemplative Church, Canberra

From Joanne Ede : Paul Gilbert - <https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/>

From Joanne Ede : Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science -
<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190464684.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190464684>

From Gillian King (she/her) : We are seeing in our federal government a lot of lack of that courage to descend into the reality of human experience, even as recently as the responses to the problems with COVID-19 vaccine rollouts

[Lynne's response] Paul Gilbert in his book *Living Like Crazy* (2019) writes that - 'Moral behaviour grows from moral institutions, and moral social structures that promote social fairness and the recognition of the needs of others, not just self-interest.

From Joanne Ede : <https://www.shechangesclimate.org/>

From deb: Starting from early childhood what are the implications and opportunities for teaching compassion , and to be a part of teaching of the language of climate change science. A new book and curriculum program have just been released for early childhood and primary schools
https://www.petaa.edu.au/w/Publications/PETAA_book_extras/Teaching-the-language-of-climate-change-science.aspx?WebsiteKey=23011635-8260-4fec-aa27-927df5da6e68

[Lynne,s response] Think Equal www.thinkequal.org www.thinkequal.com.au

Think Equal is a world-wide initiative for children in the early years that teaches gender, racial, and religious equality, social and emotional health and wellbeing, and global citizenship. Through simple narratives and lesson plans, the Think Equal program aims to enhance children's learning experiences

at their earliest start, while attitudes and behaviour are taking root. Pilots are running in 13 countries in 5 continents, and are being evaluated by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence.

From Jade Gently : I think the question behind the aim of compassion is about grief. perhaps grief and outrage. i have watched this with the west oz prescribed burning infernos.. grief and outrage and outrage appear to be the right response, especially with a new female minister making no changes, and the issues clearly NOT about patriarchy. in this region we have the bureaucracy of a compassionate council. but weekly we have massive deliberate burns and a homeless crisis. the talk grows ever more sophisticated, but the avalanche of deliberate harm continues. the issue here is that there is already compassion, but a debilitating backstory of crushing and perhaps bitter grief? any thoughts?

[Janet's response] I totally agree about unresolved grief creating a debilitating backstory. Not least in Australia is the crushing, unresolved intergenerational trauma imposed on First Peoples. Lament can be the first step to something new emerging. Also a rebalancing of policy priorities towards caring, nurture of life and other matters of the heart. In relation to my use of the term patriarchy (which I do feel quite cautious about) — I hear you, including in relation to the women who currently occupy positions of power. But in western culture our policy making, legal and other institutions were totally inhabited by men until around 100 years ago and women have had to 'fit in' to these existing systems so we don't really know what a gender collaborative system would look like in our culture.

See https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/oct/18/privilege-power-patriarchy-are-these-the-reasons-for-the-mess-were-in?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other for an interesting discussion.

From Joanne Ede : <https://www.stephenporges.com/> I think this is the Poly Vagal theory reference mentioned by Lynne.

From Annabel Wyndham : Yes, he has written lots

From Joanne Ede : Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM - Australian of the Year 2021

From Joanne Ede : <https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/recipient/miriam-rose-ungunmerr%20baumann/2322/>

From Gillian King (she/her) : There is a lot of grief associated with experiencing the damage to our climate and the missed opportunities for stopping it. Churches and other faith communities have traditionally supported people in times of grief. We see the need for such ritual in the way most people hold funerals, whether they be in a faith setting or not. I have felt for a long time that this is where faith communities can help communities deal with climate change - and build compassion and thus appropriate effective action.

From Suzie Don Leonard : Government needs to get over our culture of competition and rhetoric to be able to show cooperation to then understand and act compassionately

[Lynne's Response] In the book *Civilised to Death* Christopher Ryan makes a similar point. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28596619-civilized-to-death>

From Honey Nelson : Jade's grief and outrage is surely within us all. Can I ask Lynne and Sarah what they think about compassionate action not necessarily being a 'human' characteristic, but a product of several millennia of male-determined CULTURAL characteristics? - which we can change? Perhaps we may find our collective compassion through raising up the Family - our descendants and children - as our greatest focus of risk and crisis? We may not relate to large numbers in crisis - but we may relate to a whole generation in crisis, because we are all parents/grandparents/aunties etc.

From Christine Larkin - Ngunnawal country: There have been a group of Quakers in SW WA who have been walking along the Swan River over several years, listening to the land/water and the locals. They have been our Australian Quaker earthcare group. It includes Jo Valentine, and Elizabeth Po.

From Barbara Nettelbeck : Welcome to country has become familiar at the beginning of all sorts of events. Perhaps the Buddhist practice of loving kindness has a place in setting the intention in meetings and events in the community.

From Annabel Wyndham : I prefer to think of compassion and empathy in a secular way and to see its scientific base, as discussed and not to have it associated with faith. Faith/belief are negative terms for me. Can you comment?

[Sarah's response] I wonder if a helpful way to frame this, as Lynne did, is to say that compassion and empathy are essentially human traits – they are there potentially in people whether or not they practice a religion or 'believe'. And there are also other essentially human traits (like aggression, fear, threatenedness, self-preservation) that can lessen our exercise of compassion in particular contexts. If we think (as I do) that, by and large, compassionate action is more effective and more connected to the reality of things in the long term, then the question becomes how do we foster and enhance our innate capacities for compassion, empathy and so on? What are practices, systems, cultural habits that deepen our compassion and what are those that deaden us or inhibit our connectedness? One tried and true way for deepening compassion and a live sense of interconnection seems to be the way of paying attention to the other – attending to the natural world, attending to the reality of another person, attending to the suffering of another. And this requires a certain spaciousness and unthreatenedness in the self. Something like meditation or contemplation (and mindfulness) is a practice for nurturing this spaciousness and deepening our attention, enabling us to be less self-focused and self-defended, more genuinely other-directed and open. That's the connection I see between spiritual practice and compassion. Which is not to say that compassion belongs exclusively to those who identify as spiritual or religious – and obviously it has sometimes been conspicuously lacking in those who identify that way.

From Jade Gently : if we wait for politics to fix this we will clearly run out of time. it's the same with academics.. there are times in culture where direct action needs to be ignited beyond the cumbersome mechanics of institutions. i fear your approach may be too logical and reasonable for the swiftness and urgency of the issues at hand. the point is that the entire economy and culture is progressing away from quality and care, towards bull behaviour and buyer beware as our rapidly escalating normal.

[Sarah] I think there are forces moving us away, and other forces working towards the good. Huge cultural shifts must take place at a whole range of levels ... do you think systemic change is part of it?

[Lynne's Response] We need to be developing our responses in parallel – both short and long term approaches and we certainly need to move from a scenario where the only lesson learned in climate change policy, is that evolution has led our behaviour and societal institutions in directions that are unsustainable.

From Joanne Ede : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altered_Traits Book

From Honey Nelson: I think Jade's sense of urgency is likely true and confronting. Women and Family need to rise, with all the emotions and kindnesses entailed in these simple, loving and responsible relationships.

From yvonnecoburn@bigpond.com : Thank you very much deeply insightful

Sorry poor connection so could not have video on

From Kirsten on Ngunnawal country : Thanks for joining us, Yvonne. :)

From Gillian King (she/her) : Rebecca and Jonica were on a Big Ideas program recently - highly recommended listening <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/changing-minds-on-climate-change/13310250>

Further resources from Lynne Reeder:

Allen, S. *The Science of Awe* - https://qgsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Awe_FINAL.pdf

Biglan, A., Hayes, S., Sloan Wilson, (2015) *The Nurture Effect: How the Science of Human Behaviour Can Improve Our Lives and Our World*, New Harbinger Publications, UK

Goleman, D. Davidson, R (2019) *The Science of Meditation: How to Change your Brain, Mind and Body*, Random House, UK

Gilbert, P. (2018) *Living Like Crazy*, Annwyn House, UK

Gilbert, P. (2010) *Compassion Focused Therapy. Distinctive Features*. London: Routledge.

Klienberg, E. (2019) *Palaces For the People: How to Build A More Equal United Society*, NY

Krzrnaric, R. (2020) *The Good Ancestor How to Think Long Term in a Sort Term World*, Random House, UK

MacKay, H. (2018) *Australia Reimagined; Towards a More Compassionate Less Anxious Society*, McMillian, Sydney

Reeder, Lynne (2018) Foreword, in Lemon, N. McDonough, S, *Mindfulness in the Academy: Practices and Perspectives from Scholars*, Springer, Singapore

Reeder, Lynne (2016) *Empathy Conversations: Testing their effectiveness as a policymaking instrument*, A Pilot Study, Australia21, Canberra

Rifkin, J. (2010) *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness In A World In Crisis*, Polity Press; Cambridge

Siegel, D. (2012) *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, Guilford Press, New York.

Spikins, P. (2015) *How Compassion Made Us Human - The Evolutionary Origins of Tenderness, Trust and Morality*, Pen & Sword Books Ltd, UK

Van der Kolk, B. (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score. Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*, Penguin Random House, UK

Wamsler, C., Reeder, L., Crowweller, M. (2020), 'The being of urban resilience' in: Burayidi, M. Allen, A., Twigg, J., Wamsler, C. (eds), *Handbook of Urban Resilience*, Routledge, NY.

Yunkaporta, Tyson. (2019) *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, Text Publishing, Melbourne