

ECOPSYCHOSIS

What We Are Up Against

Introduction

A question often asked within any group, not just environmental, attempting to improve the world around is why nothing ever really seems to change. Like the proverbial linoleum, you get one area flat and smooth, only for another to bubble up uncontrollably elsewhere. This essay is an, admittedly ambitious, attempt to get to the roots of that phenomenon.

Specialists sometimes focus on their particular area of expertise, advocating their solutions as panacea – e.g. economists saying that poverty or over-population are the only real problems. In contrast, it is common practice in non-scientific circles to attribute relentless manifestations of war, disaster and sickness etc. to a supernatural agency, a root of all evil.

I would suggest that the truth is both more prosaic than the latter and more disturbing than the former of these approaches. Whilst not wishing to fall into the trap of specialist thinking, that The Solution is one thing and one thing only, I do feel that by addressing the problem outlined below we will have made an unprecedented leap.

Ecopsychoses

Imagine a world where environmentalists are in absolute control, they have created an eco-fascistic society where the Environmental Police drive around in zero-emissions SUVs, acting with draconian severity; for example, shooting people who smoke in public areas, removing their clothes to be recycled, the bodies to be fed to one of the few remaining pig farms, their funds confiscated by the Department of Carbon Trading and their families forced to work in local recycling plants.

Complete science fiction or a possible scenario?

Despite environmentalists being prone to the dark sides of human nature as much as anyone else - jealousy, rage, insecurity, paranoia etc. - nearly all would be appalled that their noble motives could crystallise into such a nightmare, but there have already been indications:

In 1995, under pressure from Greenpeace and an at-times violent boycott, Shell agreed to tow the Brent Spar oil platform to a Norwegian fjord despite their insistence that dumping it in the deep Atlantic would prove the least harmful to the environment. Shell were later proved right. (Howarth, 1997) Thus, despite

transparency and co-operation from Shell, subjectivity and poor science won the day.

Other examples of questionable tactics and motives could include the physical assault on a politician by members of the Green Party in Germany in April 1999, or mink devastating indigenous wildlife after being released by animal activists, as is happening where I live.

The more informed know that, with complete sustainability, the social factor would be considered as much as the ecological and, it would be assumed, the various personal issues we all face would be looked at intelligently.

However, there is one mental state that may be irreparable: that of the psychopath.

The Reign of the Psychopath

A psychopath is somebody who is totally lacking in conscience. They do not experience emotions such as love and fear. 'Friendship does not mean the same thing to them. They'll use the word love a lot, but they really don't know what love means. They've never properly experienced it.' (Raine, 2004)

The popular assumption is that all psychopaths are serial killers but most are not in fact overt or actual killers at all. 'In Britain it is estimated that 1 in every 200 of the population is psychopathic, and the vast majority are neither criminal nor in prison.' (Equinox, 2000) Furthermore, in Professor Raine's research he differentiated from 'successful' psychopaths (those who had not been caught) and 'unsuccessful' (those who had been caught). He discovered that 94% of those unsuccessful had abnormal growth on the right side of their hippocampuses, the part of the brain connected with aggression regulation and fear conditioning. (Raine, Ibid)

Raine also showed that psychopaths generally had a larger but thinner corpus callosum, the nerve fibres that connect the two hemispheres of the brain, leading to 'less remorse, fewer emotions and less social connectedness.' (Ibid.)

I am not aware of any work having been done on the evolutionary advantages of psychopathic behaviour, but a total lack of fear and other emotions has obvious survival advantages. The psychopath may be completely selfish in their motivations, but their instincts could prove invaluable to others in times of crisis, especially war. The trouble is, they cannot 'switch off' their behaviour-impulses. After the crisis, they are still around. More than that, it seems they are likely to create crisis scenarios in order to flourish. They don't understand love, but they do understand power.

Politics and the corporate world are ideal feeding grounds for psychopaths. Dr Robert Hare, whose Psychopathy Checklist (Appendix 1) is now internationally renowned, has perhaps done the most to highlight their ubiquitous presence. Even the title of his latest book, 'Snakes in Suits', reflects this succinctly.

Psychopaths are exceptionally brilliant at adapting to, and manipulating, the world

around them. While I would theorise that in the past they may have been leading us into battle, it is highly likely that they became more and more the people in the shadows e.g. the advisor whispering advice to the king. Othello could not possibly be psychopathic, he is far too emotional, but, arguably, Iago could be.

However, Iago needs Othello, a psychopath needs a victim or, preferably, victims. For this to work a certain degree of collusion is required. They cannot operate in isolation.

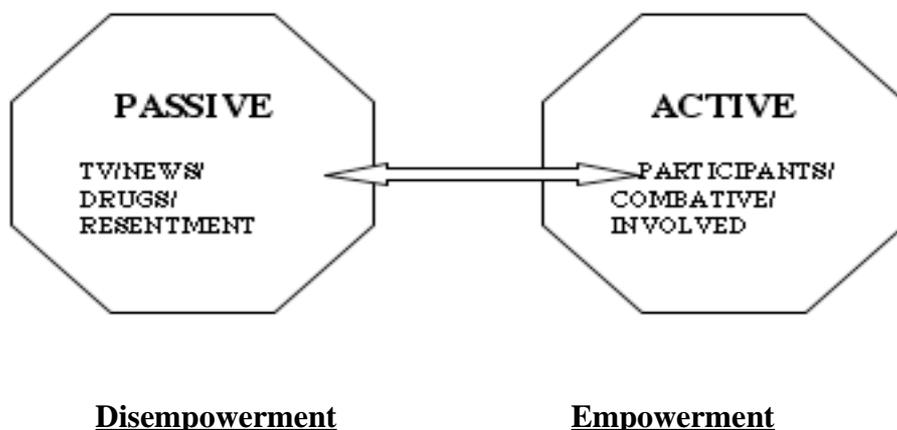
How the Psychopathic Infrastructure (PI) Functions

*'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor,
is the mind of the oppressed.'*

- Steve Biko

In order to control people you need a means of binding them in order to manipulate them *en masse*. Anything that grants a sense of collective cohesion will do, be it religion, nationalism, financial status or something else. I would add that television is probably the most potent tool available today, surpassing all previous methods of control. People tend to believe what they read but, more so, they believe what they see.

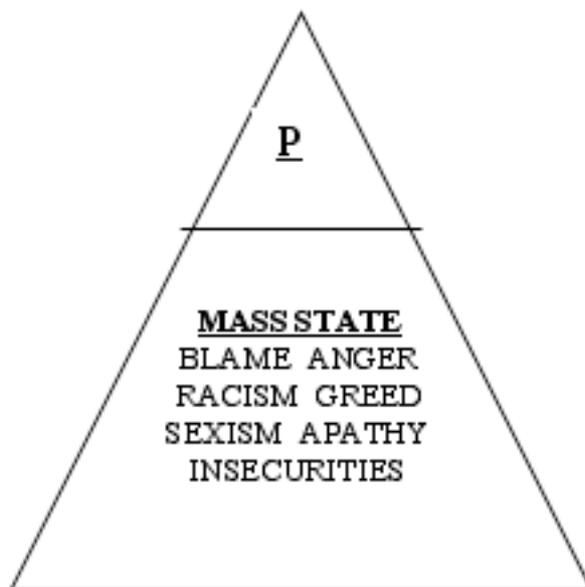
Those who question this kind of mass belief are likely to become active in the world, eager to alter it for the better. The relationship between passive acceptance/mass belief and active questioning can be illustrated thus:



Environmentalists would consider themselves in the Active category, though we all probably have both sides to us in varying ratios. The problem is that once you move into the Active category you are in a field of combat, with psychopaths initiating most

of the shots; indeed, they are likely to be admired, respected and receiving your wholehearted support.

The relationship between the majority of people and a powerful minority can be shown as a pyramid structure:



P for Power, P for Psychopath

All the base emotions and insecurities of the collective can be manipulated, channelled and utilised by those who wish to do so and, as has been mentioned earlier, environmentalists are no more immune to base emotions than anyone else. From the list above, I would highlight 'insecurities' which we all have to some extent; thus, we are likely to hand over our power to someone who is charming and believable or even simply authoritative. The reader may be reminded of the famous Millgram experiment, where volunteers subjected 'victims' (actually actors) to electric shocks to the point of supposed death, simply because a figure in a white coat told them to do so.

The makers of 'The Corporation' documentary (Achbar et al, 2003) took the innovative approach of subjecting corporations to FBI profiling, and proved that a corporate structure – which by a bizarre manipulation of law is an individual with individual rights (Bruges, 2000) – is actually psychopathic in essence. I would argue that this is only the latest, unusually obvious, manifestation of a PI.

Noble Thoughts, Brutal Truth

‘Once I understand intellectually that my relationship to the earth is that of a leaf to a tree, it’s obvious that the needs of the tree have priority over the needs of the leaf.’

- John Seed (Millen, 2006, p.97)

The quotation above is absolutely antithetical to the psychopath. Furthermore, while almost certainly every environmentalist would be able to empathise with the commitments of the Earth Charter (Ibid, p.109), it is interesting to see how they contrast with psychopathic motivations.

| EARTH CHARTER | PSYCHOPATHIC RESPONSE |
|---|--|
| Respect Earth and life in all its diversity. | Respect power of the self. |
| Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love. | Think of oneself. Understand only to manipulate. Learn to imitate compassion and love in order to advance. |
| Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful. | Democratic societies are ripe for the picking. Camouflage oneself and move, unsuspected, amongst the masses. |
| Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations. | Claim Earth’s bounty for oneself. Think only of the present and one’s own needs. |

All similar suggestions for a healthy and sustainable society will be matched point for point by opposite needs of the psychopathic mind. The impressive ‘wish list’ in ‘Limits for Growth’ (Meadows et al, 2004, pp.273-4) would be another example e.g. ‘Decentralisation of economic power, political influence and scientific expertise’. This cannot happen as long as the PI remains intact.

In the same book it is stated that ‘it is not easy to practice love, friendship, generosity, understanding, or solidarity within a system whose rules, goals and information streams are geared for lesser human qualities.’ (Ibid, p.282) Precisely.

How This Plays Out

Having understood this hitherto largely-unrecognised social infrastructure - and having realised that *all* social systems, be they capitalism, socialism or any other -ism, are simply hunting grounds in which the psychopath needs to adapt and camouflage themselves - it should be easy to recognise that there are only two likely courses for the environmental movement:

1. Environmentalists continually find themselves blocked and thwarted at every turn. Every success somewhere is marred by a new problem elsewhere.
2. Given the global state of emergency and public pressure worldwide, governments and corporations go totally green. However, the PI only has to adapt slightly and it's a case of 'meet the new boss, same as the old boss'.

Currently we seem to be following both courses, Option 1 being fairly obvious to most in the environmental movement and Option 2 manifesting in such phenomena as 'greenwashing'. (The recent adoption of Fair Trade lines by Nestlé and healthy eating options by McDonalds springs to mind.) Although I depicted a nightmare eco-fascist state earlier, the situation is likely to be far more subtle.

What We Can Do

'Logically, our best chance of reducing the impact of adult psychopathy on society is to tackle the problem early.' (Hare, 1993)

Advice as to how to deal with psychopaths is disconcertingly thin. (See Appendix 2.) 'Learn to recognise psychopaths', is amongst the advice given at the end of 'The Corporation' (Achbar, Ibid) but even that is not easy. Dr Hare - wisely, I believe - refused initially to disclose his checklist. Though it has by now made its way into the public domain, the potential for its misuse by the unqualified is disconcerting. "The false positive rate would be horrific," Dr Hare responded to suggestions of definitive tests to catch serial killers before they start killing. (Goldberg, 2003)

While I would be cautiously supportive of both genetic and psychological screening in the workplace at the very least, the potential for misuse - especially by the very people promoting this concern - is so large I would, until we are certain of the efficacy of such a strategy, suggest both a more immediate and softer approach. Supporting this tactic further is the fact that those considered clinically psychopathic score over 30 in the Checklist while those with lower scores, but still well above the norm, are also vigorous proponents of the PI, with the 'normal' majority

unconsciously feeding the conflict.

It is therefore overall group awareness more than anything else that needs to change, thus:

- Start educating people, bring the situation to light
- Focus on boosting self-esteem in *individuals* - empowerment
- Ensure that no-one ever feels isolated

These steps seem simple but they are, if you consider carefully, uncommon and if followed correctly should make a profound difference. Once they are in place, we can then start looking at the bigger picture and consider additional strategies such as screening.

Limitations and Implications

I am often asked why Scandinavian countries do so well with social equity, the proliferation of renewables etc., if my theory of a PI is to be believed. I have no data or easy answers to that, except that we may be looking at the Linoleum Effect again, where the psychopathic bubble will have to blow up elsewhere, probably camouflaged within those countries themselves, with some of the higher status successful psychopaths having to move abroad to more favourable circumstances.

However, most of the research referred to here has been in America and the UK. Whether the phenomenon is equally applicable to all countries and races is not yet known, though the distribution of serial killers – as one of the most overt types of psychopath – would suggest that it is indeed a global phenomenon. (Wikipedia, 2006)

Also, while a lot of work has been done in separate disciplines, such as criminal profiling, brain physiognomy and corporative structures, nobody has managed so far to join the dots, to get the full picture of this problem. Even the growing awareness of white collar psychopathy is heavily influenced by its roots in criminology, resulting in hyperbole and expectation of extreme behaviour e.g.: ‘They are often individuals who, by their very profession and position within it, we are supposed to trust implicitly, but they shatter that trust with their cold-bloodedness and deceit.’ (Clarke, John and Andy Shea, 2003) Nor is the phenomenon limited to the white collar world, it’s just that corporations have the money needed to invest in research when (non-psychopathic) directors become concerned; and it should be noted that the psychopaths who are discovered are the *unsuccessful* ones.

We very much need a multi-disciplinary approach, for the phenomenon goes both deeper into the criminal and corporate worlds and beyond them.

Summary

I have shown how:

- Environmentalists are as prone to irrational and destructive behaviour as anyone else
- A Psychopathic Infrastructure (PI) is firmly in place and has been so for hundreds perhaps thousands of years
- The PI is capable of, and likely to, manipulate the environmental movement to its own ends

In order to safeguard against this, environmentalists need to:

- Be aware of their own shortcomings
- Find ways to deal with them
- Be aware of the PI
- Develop strategies to counter it

The main key seems to be in education. Certainly, educating adults as regards the situation but, more than that, children need to be brought up in a state of individual empowerment. The predominant education system is more concerned with emphasising how 'useful' a child can become, debatably a subtle form of slavery.

This may seem a controversial note on which to end an already-controversial essay, but the global situation is urgent and with recent advances in psychological studies we have a chance now to really get it right.

So let's go to work.

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Appendix 1 - Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)

From http://en.wikipedia.org/Psychopathy_Checklist-Revised_%28PCL-R%29

... Robert Hare's Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) is the psycho-diagnostic tool most commonly used to assess Psychopathy. **Because an individual's scores may have important consequences for his or her future, the potential for harm, if the test is used or administered incorrectly, is considerable, so that the test should only be considered valid if administered by a suitably qualified and experienced clinician under controlled conditions.** (My emphases.)

...This is a clinical rating scale with 20 items. Each of the items in the PCL-R is scored on a three-point (0, 1, 2) scale according to specific criteria through file information and a semi-structured interview. The items are as follows:

Factor 1: Aggressive narcissism

- * Glibness/superficial charm
- * Grandiose sense of self-worth
- * Pathological lying
- * Conning/manipulative
- * Lack of remorse or guilt
- * Shallow affect
- * Callous/lack of empathy
- * Failure to accept responsibility for own actions

Factor 2: Socially deviant lifestyle

- * Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
- * Parasitic lifestyle
- * Poor behavioral controls
- * Early behavioral problems
- * Lack of realistic, long-term goals
- * Impulsivity
- * Irresponsibility
- * Juvenile delinquency
- * Revocation of conditional release

Traits not associated with any factor

- * Promiscuous sexual behavior
- * Many short-term marital relationships
- * Criminal versatility

Score 0 if the trait is absent, 1 if it is possibly or partially present and 2 if it is present. The item scores are summed to yield a total score ranging from 0 to 40 which is then considered to reflect the degree to which they resemble the prototypical psychopath. A score higher than 30 supports a diagnosis of psychopathy. Forensic studies of prison populations have reported average scores of around 22 on PCL-R; control "normal" populations show an average score of around 5.

PCL-R Factor 1 is correlated with narcissistic personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder. PCL-R Factor 2 is particularly strongly correlated to antisocial personality disorder and criminality.

PCL-R Factor 2 is associated with reactive anger, anxiety, increased risk of suicide, criminality, and impulsive violence. PCL-R Factor 1, in contrast, is associated with extroversion and positive affect. Factor 1, the so-called core personality traits of psychopathy, may even be beneficial for the psychopath (in terms of nondeviant social functioning).

Appendix 2 – Survival Guide

The following is a brief summary of suggestions on dealing with psychopaths taken from Dr Hare's 'Without Conscience' (New York, Guilford, Ch.13, 1999 edition.)

Know what you are dealing with.

Try not to be influenced by 'props' e.g. a winning smile, charm.

Don't wear blinkers. If someone seems too good to be true, maybe they are.

Keep your guard up in high-risk situations e.g. group

situations.

Know yourself, especially your weak spots.

Obtain professional advice if dealing with a suspected psychopath.

Don't blame yourself.

Be aware of who the victim is. Psychopaths often make it seem that they are the victims.

Recognise that you are not alone. Discover who else has been targeted.

Be careful about power struggles.

Set firm ground rules.

Don't expect dramatic changes.

Cut your losses. It may well be too late as the psychopath has convinced those around you, including your friends and/or colleagues, that it is you who has the problem. In such a case sometimes all you can do is move on.

Use support groups.