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Willem Larsen

Psychopaths in the Village

Sociopathy, Civilization and Rewilding

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natural forces, of storms borne from human psychopathic culture, that we must prepare for, endure, grieve, and learn from, celebrating the continuance of a people sufficiently magnificent and wise to justify their survival.

What do we do when our culture itself seems propped up by sheeple in psychopath-skins, wherever we look? In this culture that has digested the values of a psychopath – the lust to win, the lust for power, for control, the hunger to know “how to win friends and influence people”, what can we possibly do?

If we pick up the lance to defend our families, does that cause us to don the skin of a psychopath?

I suspect that the problem lies with the urge to “win”, an abstraction and part of the matrix of psychopathic values that civilization perpetuates. Humans don’t want to win – like all living things, they want to live, love, and fight well. In a worthy way that justifies the food they must kill to maintain their own life, to justify their own body.

Perhaps we can defend our families safely, sanely, if we just say “Today is a good day to die”, and fight whether or not we can possibly win.

Perhaps we best defend our people regardless of whether any of us will survive – to show our love and the greatness of our hearts by sacrificing our bodies, “winning” whether we win or lose.

I continue to carry these questions. I don’t believe in one answer; how will you live in a world where a roll of the dice means the death of your children? Where lone predators parasitize your friends, and where Presidents justify the murder of distant villages while they cry crocodile tears over the tragedies in our backyard?

Whatever else, I know we must all endeavor to improve ourselves as clear-eyed adults, make ourselves stronger and wiser, and our families and communities too. Most of the living community adores a natural human being just as they adore each other; they adore our tears, our songs, our gifts. They feel affection when, to eat, we kill them with respect and compassion; they bring us our stories and dreams, they raise our children when lost in the woods.

But the Lords of Death don’t care about our tears; they only care about turning our bodies into mud, the substrate of all life. A dirty job; but someone has to do it.

“psychopathic” behavior, a lack of conscience, a willingness to lie and manipulate to get their way, no matter what the context?

The Cooper’s Hawk plucking one chirping Robin chick after another out of the nest, only leaving the one that finally learns to stop loudly begging for food (read Jon Young’s *What the Robin Knows* for more on these dramas of the bird world), while the rest of the terrified bird community weeps silently in terror.

In interacting with those playing with rewilding, or reconnecting with indigenous ways of thinking, I’ve often run into the “I’m a coyote, love me or hate me baby” gambit – where an individual defends a cruel streak by painting themselves in the holy colors of the Coyote. Depending on the native tradition that they want to use as a “call to authority” to excuse their behavior (native peoples have many diverse stories about coyotes, some more noble, some less so), this also then means we can consider them a ridiculous shit-eating son of a bitch. Literally, according to the stories of the NW trickster Coyote. Which they themselves might feel okay with – but it reminds us that though Holy, we don’t want to embody the manipulative cruelty and helplessly self-defeating ways of the trickster Coyote. We want to learn from him, walk through the world as clear-eyed adults ready for the appearance of this teacher. Ready for Èṣù.

What do you do before a storm comes? You prepare.

What do you do while a storm rages? You endure, using all the wisdom you can muster.

What do you do after a storm passes? You pick up the pieces – grieve what you’ve lost and praise what you still have. And perhaps most importantly, you reflect deeply on the lessons you’ve learned to prepare you for the next storm.

These answers all work just as well for human psychopaths, for Storms-in-human-shape, as it does for these natural forces.

These answers all work just as well for humans wearing the skin of a psychopath, such as the psychopath-skin uniforms of soldiers and police officers, or bureaucrats.

Anytime someone says, “It’s nothing personal”, you know you’ve met someone wearing the skin of a psychopath. A storm doesn’t mean it personally either. If we think of the civilized world as an array of toxic

Dedication

to my friend Thaddeus for first suggesting I begin perceiving the presence of psychopathy, and for forgiving me for my blindness to psychopathic behaviors in my own community

This article springs from several urges; to fully own my own responsibility for thinking critically (with a Tracker's eye) about the issues of my life, and to create a deeply safe community space for my extended family and friends to flourish as human beings and rewilders. Upfront, let me make it totally clear: I have no credentials or academic expertise in this area. I write as just another adult human being.

I believe that over time I've unconsciously sought out and built relationships with folks exhibiting psychopathic behaviors (see below). This sounds like I've consorted with axe murderers, but as you'll see, psychopathy doesn't necessarily involve violence at all – it all depends on the individual.

I've wondered, "why have I done this to myself?", and indeed the books I've read on psychopathy have exhorted readers to learn about themselves, learn about their own flaws and foibles, because psychopaths will certainly see them right away and begin pushing your buttons and pulling levers to get you to behave the way they want.

I have no need to hide from you all, my readers, what I believe drove me to seek out these folks; I sought their willingness to "play on the edge", to break society's rules, to act impulsively and come up with "out of the box" solutions. I did this on purpose, wanting more inspiration and energy in my own life, thinking I couldn't provide this for myself.

I've grown up and realized that, firstly, that I can indeed do this for myself, and secondly, as you'll see, those of us with a healthy conscience don't need more edgy drama in our lives. We have plenty already, thank you.

Though modern people tend to view humans as "specially special", and at the same time, curiously broken (darn those naturally war-like humans!), humans came into this world (and will go out of

Psychopaths test us, they test our individuality and the strength of our village, and unfortunately in the modern era, they find the strengths of our souls and villages severely lacking. We ourselves give them the language to abuse us, the anonymous landscape in which to hide, the needy codependence that prevents us from holding strong boundaries like adults.

I mentioned before that wisdom in this arena would lie somewhere in the natural world, and said I couldn't find it. Well, I actually did have a trail to follow, a glimmer of a suspicion. Inside me a story has begun to spun out, another way to rewild our relationship with an oft-times terrifying, and always beautiful world.

I strongly believe in a loving, life-affirming universe. And yet, that doesn't mean the suffocating love, security and comfort promised by civilized lips. That means the brutal, testing, beautiful life-affirming forces of a fully alive world. Burning cold and heat, carnivores hungry for the children of all species.

The storms of life don't judge your degree of naughty or nice before they blow your house down – Hurricane Sandy killed and injured, and rendered homeless, anyone in her way. The storms of life prune trees, churn landscapes, roll the dice to create more fertility and possibility growing out of a completely rearranged ecosystem.

Do we consider this psychopathic behavior? I deeply believe in the loving force of a storm, and yet the storm will take your children if you don't pay attention. Doesn't a psychopath do the same thing?

Within the body of these people-without-a-conscience, their cells and organs take care of each other, celebrate and feast each other, and yet at the human-to-human level this consideration and conscience disappears. Perhaps it appears again at the village-to-village level, where the psychopath acted as an original trickster force pruning and testing human communities to continually grow themselves into more aware, wise people, readying them for the greater storms of the world, for the larger tricksters that range and predate across ecosystems?

The Christmas-time whip-wielding Krampus in Austria, the Sacred Clowns of Pueblo Indians, Coyote in the Northwest US native culture, the dice-playing Lords of Death of the Tzutujil, don't these all display

<http://www.mythic-cartography.org/2012/12/24/beauty-and-horror/>

This essay is a part of the Animist Blog Carnival of October 2013. To read other animist perspectives on death, please visit the Earth Animist Blog.

To read works from previous Animist Blog Carnival or join us, visit headquarters here: The Animist Blog Carnival at Eearth Animist.

A short story about a psychopath, from Wikipedia:

Èṣù is a spirit of Chaos and Trickery, the deity with the power over fortune and misfortune, and the personification of death. . . and plays frequently by leading mortals to temptation and possible tribulation in the hopes that the experience will lead ultimately to their maturation.

In this way he is certainly a difficult teacher, but in the end is usually found to be a good one. As an example of this, let us look at one of his “patakis” or stories of the faith. Èṣù was walking down a road one day, wearing a hat that was red on one side and black on the other. Sometime after he entered a village which the road went through, the villagers who had seen him began arguing about whether the stranger’s hat was black or red.

The villagers on one side of the road had only been capable of seeing the black side, and the villagers on the other side had only been capable of seeing the red one. They soon came to blows over the disagreement – [. . .] the two halves of the village were not stopped short of extreme violence; they actually annihilated each other, and Èṣù laughed at the result, saying “Bringing strife is my greatest joy”.

Èṣù is involved within the Orisha-Ifá system of Yorùbá religion as well as in African diasporic faiths like Santería/Lukumí and Candomblé, developed by the descendants of enslaved West Africans in the Americas.

What do you think?

As you read this blog post, remember, I definitely don’t intend that you consider psychopathic behavior harmless, or something we can blithely tolerate, or anything of the sort.

it) as just yet another beautiful animal nation. Not needed for the world to continue, and yet a wonderful addition to it (in spite of the recent problems with one segment of this vast human family – the “civilizing” one).

Part 4: Beauty and Horror

of others, without much explaining or discussion. How do you feel? How do they feel? Why? What can you do to make it better?

Again, we still have more to talk about, perhaps one more blog post, on what we can do about it if we run across these individuals. From a rewilding/tracker's point of view, how can we possibly respond to psychopathic behavior?

This entry was posted on Saturday, December 22nd, 2012 at 6:24 pm and is filed under Philosophy of Tracking.

Part 1

I'd like to begin this rumination on psychopaths by talking about the wonderful diversity of human beings, a diversity taken for granted by traditional indigenous minds, yet feared and resisted by modern peoples.

What kind of diversity? We have genderqueer diversity (how many genders are there – two, three, four, five, can we even number them?), we have diversity of cognition (autism, dyslexia, and more), diversity of perception (the blind, the Deaf, and more), handedness (right-hand dominant, left-hand dominant, cross-dominance, situational-dominance, etc.), and diversity of conscience (empaths, psycho/socio-paths, “sheeple”).

No, I can't list them all here, but I think that makes for a good beginning. Keep in mind every one of these lines of diversity expresses in degrees and dimensions. For example, we don't experience blindness and the lack of it just as an either/or state. You can have more or less blindness, and experience blindness in different ways (color-blindness, night-blindness, face-blindness, etc.)

All of these diversities have been with us as long as we've been human. I don't doubt this in the least. I don't see anything broken or handicapped or accidental about any of these peoples. I mean, humans don't fall into two categories – “fully human” humans, and “less-than-human/unnatural” humans. Right handed dominant folks don't necessarily behave more gracefully (latin: more “dexter”-ous) and left-handed preferring folks don't necessarily behave more evilly (again, latin: more “sinister”).

And yet . . .

Yet, if you allow your eye truly to scan the list, you'll see one curious member of our tribe standing out – the Psychopath (aka sociopath). Mustn't we see them as especially broken? Especially wrong?

Even after allowing for the curious variances amongst all the others – the Deaf, the transgender, the autistic, and on and on – even after allowing and respecting the dignity and fresh perspectives of all these peoples, and breathing deep, allowing that they too have helped make human cultures work for countless millenia, not as unnatural humans, but as fully natural ones . . .

. . . mustn't we still sharpen our tongues (and knives!) against the Sociopath?

seem to experience pleasurable stimuli twice as intensely as non-psychopaths. Imagine the behavior of someone completely driven by their own pleasure, with little or no experience of fear or anxiety.

Their predatory focus may act like tunnel-vision, damping their awareness of surrounding context. Does this imply a bias towards the focused-manipulation hemisphere of the brain, over the expanded-awareness hemisphere, even more so than already exists in Western culture? Would a psychopath struggle with using “owl-eyes” (wide-angle vision)?

They lie consistently, even in minor situations that may defeat their purpose. This odd compulsion means that it doesn't take much to discover the trail of lies; just start double-checking, out of habit, what most folks say, and if you run across a trail of consistent lying it will instantly become obvious.

I don't claim this as a complete list – certainly I've left out the violent behaviors and criminality that the most extreme psychopaths exhibit – but I think this works great as a starting point for those of us wanting to have a rough sense of what to look for.

Again, these behaviors and symptoms will all happen to a degree, not in an all-or-nothing manner. It depends on the extent of the particular individual's emotional damping. I assume, as with all things, that a whole range of emotional perception must exist, from almost zero emotions (full-blown psychopath) all the way to an inability to distinguish between one's own emotions and others (full-blown empath). Perhaps other dimensions too – could humans who mostly experience anxiety, or only love, exist?

It also happens that children, with fully felt emotions, with poor parenting and/or a toxic culture, can grow up ill-equipped to connect with others' emotional experience. Psychiatrists call these people “narcissists”, and they may resemble psychopaths in every way (grandiosity, aggression, charm, tantrums, etc.) except one: they feel ongoing pain over their inability to create and maintain healthy relationships, losing contact with friends, spouses, children. They experience emotions; but they never had the chance to develop empathy.

For my own children, to keep their empathic capacities healthy and intact, and out of common-sense good parenting, I don't ever “punish” them. I constantly redirect their minds to their feelings and the feelings

They have a poor sense of smell. Yes, as recent research suggests, due to their poor ability to use the front part of their brain, a region involved in planning and impulse control, other capacities governed by this area, such as distinguishing between different smells, also seem to fall victim to their handicap.

Gestures (while talking) increase when describing emotional states or using emotional words. As you may know from my work with endangered languages, the use of hand gestures increases “fluency”, even in our mother tongue. When we struggle to use a word, or with language that we haven’t mastered, hand gestures can help us “pull it out” more fluently. Psychopaths seem to need gestural support when talking about subjects that they really can never understand; emotions and empathy.

They seek thrills and edgy experiences, often seeming “more alive” than other people. They may seek physical thrills, along with creating crises so that they can then solve them. Drama seems to follow them wherever they go, whether or not it affects them.

Grandiosity. They value themselves and their own abilities quite highly; they have a very healthy self-esteem.

They use tantrums and crocodile tears to get what they want. Because they’ve mimed these emotions, they can shake them off as if nothing happened.

They seem glib and charming, using language oddly; they go on more tangents, more often than others, connect sentences oddly, contradict themselves. Like the psychopath who replied, when asked if he had ever committed a violent crime, “No, I never have, but once I had to kill someone.” This may derive from a combination of the unusual structure of their brain, and an innate desire to manipulate. In any case, their cobbled-together syntax reveals the strangely scrambled cognition (even if brilliant!)

Their behavior doesn’t change with the application of consequences, punishments, or pain. This may connect with their impulsivity and shallowness, but psychopaths don’t seem to care about any future pain; they don’t experience fear or anxiety. You can’t threaten or intimidate them. They only respond to rewards, not punishments, and in fact they

Well, perhaps. Certainly, we can’t do “nothing” about them. As it turns out, the anonymity and individual-glorifying nature of the modern world has created the richest predatory habitat ever conceived for these human beings without a conscience, without any need for human connection.

Others have written eloquently about this – Peter Bauer from a rewilder’s point of view, Clinton Callahan from an anti-civ point of view, Joe Brewer from a policy and politics point of view, Dr. Martha Stout from a popular science point of view, Dr. Robert Hare from research and clinical point of view.

Most people react to the word “psychopath”, as used in everyday life (as in, “that guy/gal is a psychopath [sic]”), from either a colloquial angle (understanding that the speaker doesn’t intend the clinical definition), or the true crime novel angle (treated as a phenomenon that happens to other folks, but not us). Calling someone, right here, right now, a “psychopath” just perpetuates melodrama, doesn’t it. . . ? The individual in question – “they can’t possibly be all that bad.”

But for psychopaths – who may appear in our culture at a rate somewhere between 1–5% (yes, that means in a room of 20 people, a psychopath could easily stand in plain sight, unrecognized), and for folks with some degree of, but not full-blown, psychopathic behavior this rate increases up to a possible 15%, or 3 out of 20 – as commonly as they might appear in our company, we seem awfully unprepared to deal with them.

Yet almost every indigenous culture in the world has a human role, often called a “witch” by modern observers (meaning a practitioner of black, rather than white magic, assuming you define those squishy concepts as most seem to do), filled by a community member with predatory behavior and a lack of a conscience.

The modern eye has long mocked the ignorance of the village “witch-hunt”; and certainly in the modern age (medieval modernity included!) witch-hunts provide just another horrific opportunity for sociopaths to predate on human communities.

And yet I begin to understand that the feared “witches” of old – again, not conscience-burdened wisdom keepers and medicine people that we call “witches”, but those without any such burden – perhaps once isolated

and easily ferreted out in close-knit village communities, have become so well-fed on human misery, and have acquired so much power, that whole societies have bowed to the pressure to glorify what these predators glorify. Which, as I mentioned above, might explain some things about the present state of civilization.

We find ourselves several thousand years into a culture seemingly born to serve these predators.

Before we go farther, let's describe psychopathy. At this point, most folks researching psychopaths agree that "psychopathy" (or "sociopathy", which gives it more of a social-context coloring) labels a syndrome of behaviors that appears to different degrees, in different dimensions. According to the book, *Almost a Psychopath* (published by Harvard Medical School for those dealing with the still terrible, but not "full-blown", instances of subcriminal psychopathy), you can look for 10 indicators of less-than-the-full-nightmare psychopathy:

1. Charming and glib, with an answer for everything.
2. Lack of empathy, difficulty to understand and/or appreciate the emotions of others.
3. Opportunities for moral choices result in decisions made for their own self-interest.
4. Repeated lying, even when unnecessary or for minor reasons.
5. Conning and manipulative.
6. When criticized, they always place fault and blame on others.
7. Lack of true remorse when they have caused harm to others.
8. Limited ability to express feelings for others, or maintain relationships.
9. They find it easy to ignore responsibilities.
10. People and situations seem to exist solely for satisfying their needs and wants.

This is a pretty awful list, as embodied by a person standing in front of you and exhibiting these behaviors, even keeping in mind that this list represents a non-violent, non-"criminal" expression or degree of psychopathic behaviors.

Dr. Hare's research on the brains of fully psychopathic individuals shows that they literally do not have the same emotional experiences

Except the psychopath, who of course, seems to only have the ability to feel emotions very shallowly – frustration and pleasure, for example, rather than anger, fear, and joy.

I alternate between talking about "people who exhibit psychopathic behaviors" and simply using the label "psychopaths". Honestly, the word "psychopath" gets in the way of what we need to talk about here, because it implies, no matter how many disclaimers I write, an on/off, either/or extreme neurobiological state. Until I can come up with a better way of talking about them – not only does "psychopath" imply an all-or-nothing condition, but it also causes an instant hot-button emotional reaction trained from media across countless movies, true crime novels, and decades of television – perhaps we at least need a new word, like "disempath", that connotes the true issue at hand: the inability of certain individuals to experience or empathize with emotions. I'm not sure. Creating a new label still perpetuates the innate problem of labeling, still leaves unaddressed the degrees and dimensions in which you can express the extent of the individual's undeveloped emotions and empathy. We'll just have to exercise our e-prime I suppose!

Now let's start tracking. I want to review some of the behaviors psychopaths exhibit that act as "warning colors" to their biological inability to feel deep emotion or remorse, and thus crave thrills that require predation on other human beings.

Psychopaths live in the moment, immersed in an impulsive Now, and if you meet them on those terms, you will surely fall prey. You must look at their tracks, their trails, their history, in order to recognize them.

You'll notice first that psychopaths don't really seem to grow or change over time. Because of their inability to feel remorse, they don't and can't focus their learning on how to "get along" and build more satisfying relationships. Therefore they leave a trail of drama and bitter ex-friends, ex-business associates, and family members. And they continue on in the present moment, just like they always have, in a kind of perpetual adolescence, using the same tactics to get their needs and wants met at the cost of developing a healthier community around them. They can't even see this trade-off, because they don't have the emotional eyes to see it (or the lack of it).

<http://www.mythic-cartography.org/2012/12/22/rewilding-shame/>

I ended the last post with the question, “where else do we see psychopathic behaviors in nature?”

I still want to explore this, but not today. Today let’s talk about remorse.

Shame and guilt has done tremendous emotional damage to many rewilders. In the modern world, we use shame and guilt as a whip to motivate the enslaved and the colonized. We embed emotional violence in our very language (see the excellent writings of Marshall Rosenberg on Nonviolent Communication). We condemn, in order to compel others to behave as we want, and praise for the same reasons.

Even for those of us who want to create a richer life, unless we spend regular time examining our language, we unknowingly injure those we love with “shoulds” and “oughts” and “you’re so wonderful!”

For these reasons, I don’t speak of shame and guilt lightly. However, in order to talk about conscience (or the lack thereof), we must talk about the empathic experience of our hearts hurting because we “feel how others feel about us” – their anger, sadness, whether imagined or real. On this blog, and in the research on psychopaths, we mean the term “conscience” in this way. And though our culture uses guilt and shame as a weapon, I also know that human communities stick together partly because of this capacity to feel shame and guilt over actions that have hurt the group, and therefore drive action to repair damage and heal communal bonds.

Remorse, shame, guilt, all of these words describe painful feelings that cause us to want to grow, want to change, to improve ourselves. Painful feelings of shame, in a healthy conscience, happen on their own without any blaming or coercion, and help us to point our learning towards growing as a community and strengthen bonds. Maintaining these bonds feel deeply nourishing to human beings. We pursue them because of how they make us feel.

We work on our ability to “get along” and connect with each other precisely because of the twin phenomena of a hunger for the deep pleasure of familial ties and friendships, and the experience of remorse when we fail at obtaining or maintaining these well.

as us. They feel happiness, frustration, thrills, but don’t seem capable of truly felt rage, joy, sadness, love, or other feelings, though they may commonly use false displays of these (tantrums, crocodile tears, etc.) feelings to influence others.

Because they don’t have the same deep feelings, or don’t have them to the same degree, for psychopaths, describing “love” or “terror” to psychopaths compares to describing colors (“cornflower blue, not teal”) to the blind.

In addition, researches like Hare do not consider psychopaths “insane”, and psychopaths see themselves as perfectly healthy (often more healthy!) and reasonable. We live in a dog eat dog world, after all. . . ?

So says the psychopath, anyway.

Psychopaths, due to how they use their brains, also seem less aware of surrounding context – they have a predatory focus, and when they do get “caught” it happens because they didn’t see the surrounding warning signs, even though we may consider them otherwise brilliant.

This connects with the modern conception that we don’t have a left brain/right brain (i.e., math/art) split, but rather a focused manipulation of the defined/expanded awareness of the undefined split.

This has caused me to wonder about the psychopath’s ability to perceive with “owl-eyes”/wide-angle vision. I wonder if this could offer another way to track the presence of a psychopath. Certainly when I have been with people who, in my estimation, showed some psychopathic behaviors, they seemed in a kind of perpetual tunnel-vision, unaware of their surroundings in odd ways.

The other symptom of psychopathology – for some reason not on the checklist for subcriminal psychopathy, but certainly present on the “full-blown” criminal checklist – a hunger for thrills and excitement, comes from the total lack of drama in the psychopath’s inner life, that the rest of us experience on a daily basis.

Can you imagine all of that emotional pull and push just disappearing? How would it feel?

The psychopath will tell you how it feels – a never-ending battle with intense boredom. Suffocating, agonizing boredom.

What would you do with all that free time, absent of all that drama? Well, again, in the right context, a psychopath will happily tell you –

seek thrills, manipulate people, turn the social landscape into a game that you can win or lose.

It occurs to me, that though this in fact describes deep social disconnection, this sounds like mainstream American marketing/media/business culture. It may not surprise you that American/Western culture seems to produce psychopaths at a couple orders of magnitude greater than, say, Asian (Chinese/Japanese) culture. The statistics: 1–5% in Western culture, as opposed to .03% in Asian cultures (according to Dr. Stout's book). Say what you like about Asian culture (Confucianism terrifies me), we really have brought the horrors of civilization to a pinnacle in the U.S.

I'll bring this to a close for now; I have lots more to share though!

Have you had experiences with people exhibiting psychopathic behaviors? What did you learn from them? Do you feel uncomfortable even thinking in terms of such a "hot-button", inflammatory label? I'd love to hear your thoughts – I may address some of your responses in the next post in this series (yes, more to come!)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, December 19th, 2012 at 11:17 pm and is filed under Philosophy of Tracking.

Part 3: Rewilding Shame

So we have talked about the “sheeple”, what about the “wolves in sheep’s clothing”?

My inability to find a wild, nature-based analogy for the predatory behavior of psychopaths disturbs me more than anything else. I feel strongly that we must accept everything in the world as something that happens, that has happened, that may happen again. Meaning, we must accept it as natural. We can’t treat reality as “unnatural”. I feel this as a tracker, a thinker, a human being.

You would think, then, that this psychopathic behavior would pop up other places. Let’s find it together.

What do you think? Where do you believe you see a lack of a conscience in the natural world?

This entry was posted on Friday, December 21st, 2012 at 2:32 pm and is filed under Philosophy of Tracking.

Part 2: A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing

<http://www.mythic-cartography.org/2012/12/21/a-wolf-in-sheeps-clothing/>

Let's reconnect with what this subject offers us; how it can improve our lives as rewilders, human beings, village-creators.

In reading about psychopaths, something hit my consciousness with an almost physical force, that in a certain sense has nothing to do with this terrifying syndrome, but rather the opposite . . .

If psychopaths experience so much success, and in truth (much like no house has an immunity to a fully determined burglar, given enough time) can manipulate almost anyone, then what does this tell us about the rest of the world, the 95% or more of humanity?

It means that the vast majority of people, almost every human you meet, has a deeply feeling heart hungry for human connection, relationship, meaning. It means we share a language of love, joy, rage, sadness. And this commonality makes us vulnerable to the psychopath who can only imagine what this might feel like.

When I realized this, when it hit home, I think I also realized that I had begun to assume that many, many people I met every day didn't care, had stone-hearts, when looking at what we're doing to the world and ourselves.

Now I fully realize, that regardless of any other issues, 95% of the people I meet only feel fully nourished by deep, real connections with other human beings.

Stop and absorb this. Take a moment to do this.

A psychopath abuses this knowledge . . . but this knowledge empowers us as cultural creatives.

So then, accepting that . . . how do we explain the present monstrosity, the devouring of the world?

We feel pretty confident, from American-based research performed after World War II on the nature of "evil" and human morality, that ~65% of a given population have an ability, and a willingness to mute their conscience when influenced to do so by someone they accept as an authority. They still have a conscience; their actions still haunt them (in the form of PTSD, for example), but they will do it in the presence of sufficiently powerful, eloquent authority.

However, ~30% of a given population has a far less developed ability to do so – you might consider these the ones protesting in the streets, arguing with family members, acting out and objecting to the pressure of authority to act against their conscience. They can't ignore it. They can't mute it so easily.

And then, ~5% of that population requires little or no inducement to act in ways contrary to the expected desires of a healthy conscience, and seems to suffer no remorse.

Does this spread accurately represent human communities through out time, back through 200,000 years and beyond? I suppose we may never know. For our purposes, I propose that we treat it as such; that this probably biased, American vision of human behavior in terms of authority and conscience, that we accept it fully.

If nothing else, if you live in the modern Western world, you have to deal with it no matter what you think about its normality.

Again, perhaps surprisingly, I find these statistics inspiring. This means that 30% of the people you meet struggle deeply with muting their conscience, even under authoritative pressure. 1 out of 3 people!

I can also imagine a world where the 60%, whom I sometimes call "sheeple" for their willingness to go along with the herd, contribute deeply needed stability to human communities by a stubborn willingness to perpetuate old wisdom and long held traditions even in the face of questions and uncertainty. I equate the "authoritative" figure in western culture, to the traditions of indigenous culture. What authority exists in an egalitarian, non-hierarchical indigenous village? The authority of tradition, of course.

I don't doubt this makes human beings more successful; if we abandoned every traditional belief or tool just because we started to question it, or it became uncomfortable, then, where would we end up? Nowadays many rewilders probably wish we had fought harder to resist change.

And yet, on the flip-side, now all our modern traditions, values and conservatism seem to drive us towards our doom. So let's start listening to that 30%!

We've arrived at another way to think about Daniel Quinn's notion of needing "another Story to be in" [sic].