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# **Towards a Utopian Society: From Disconnection and Disorder to Empathy and Harmony**

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**Abstract:** The essence of any psychologically healthy society – and the basis of the utopian or eupsychian society envisaged by Abraham Maslow – is an individual state of empathic connection which gives rise to qualities such as compassion, responsibility, justice, fairness and equality. Opposed to this, is a psychological state of hyper-individuation and psychological disconnection, which generates traits of selfishness and a lack of empathy, compassion and conscience. In turn, such traits give rise to social injustice, inequality, brutality and oppression. In its most extreme form, hyper-individuation is associated with “disorders of disconnection” such as psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder. I discuss the concept of “pathocracy” which explains why individuals with personality disorders are likely to rise into positions of power, both in politics and business. Any attempt to develop a eupsychian society has to deal with the issue, including possible measures to prevent individuals with personality disorders attaining power, and other measures to encourage empathic and conscientious individuals to take up leadership roles. This would help to realize Maslow’s concept of enlightened management. At the same time, as Maslow emphasized, we need to take account of the social and institutional structures and circumstances which encourage authoritarianism relationships and pathocracy.

**Keywords:** connection, disconnection, empathy, psychopathy, pathocracy, Maslow,

In July 1939, Mahatma Gandhi was growing increasingly concerned about events in Europe. After Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and it looked like a new world war was imminent, Gandhi wrote to the German dictator, imploring him to desist from his aggressive actions. Addressing Hitler as “Dear Friend,” Gandhi wrote, “It is quite clear that you are today the one person in the world who can prevent a war which may reduce humanity to a savage state. Must you pay that price for an object however worthy it may appear to you to be? Will you listen to the appeal of one who has deliberately shunned the method of war not without considerable success?” (Gandhi, 2021a)

Gandhi’s appeal was perhaps not as far-fetched as it at first might seem. Several years earlier, Gandhi had had a friendly private meeting with Mussolini in Rome. The Italian dictator was impressed with Gandhi – mainly because of his opposition to the British Empire – calling him “genius and a saint.” Perhaps Gandhi hoped that Hitler was aware of his activities too, and felt similarly well-disposed towards him.

A year into the war, Gandhi tried again. This time he wrote a more detailed and reasoned letter to Hitler, imploring him to ‘stop the war. As he wrote, “I appeal to you in the name of humanity to stop the war...If you attain success in the war, it will not prove that you were in the right. It will only prove that your power of destruction was greater” (Gandhi, 2021b).

It is not known whether either of the letters reached Hitler. However, the interaction between Gandhi and Hitler is significant because they stood at opposite extremes on the continuum of human nature, and exemplified two opposing extremes of leadership. Maslow (1970) saw Gandhi as an example of a “self-actualized” person. He represented an ideal of goodness, and was revered as a saint like figure. He represented the selflessness of pure spirituality, in his willingness to sacrifice his own interests (and even his own life) for universal principles of justice and peace.

In contrast, Hitler was a man with a severely disordered personality. Even during Hitler’s lifetime, the psychoanalyst Langer (1943/1972) described him as a neurotic-psychotic, with masochistic and schizophrenic tendencies. More recently, Glad (2002) suggested a combination of psychopathic, narcissistic and paranoid tendencies. (She reached a similar conclusion about Stalin.) Similarly, Redlich (1998) reviewed the records of Hitler’s doctors and collected first hand accounts of his behaviour and concluded that Hitler suffered from severe paranoia and narcissism.

In reverse to Gandhi, Hitler was monomaniacally obsessed with the pursuit of his goals of conquest and domination, which by extension became the goals of the Third Reich. Lacking any sense of empathy and conscience, Hitler viewed other human beings as objects who could be brutally eliminated. He was completely indifferent to the pain and suffering his actions caused. (In fact, because of his sadistic tendencies, he actually relished causing and witnessing the pain of others.) As a result, he and his coterie of similarly disordered Nazis (such as Himmler and Goering) were capable of limitless brutality.

### **Connection Vs. Disconnection**

In my view, the essential difference between Hitler and Gandhi – or between such severely disordered personalities and spiritually developed or self-actualized people in general – can be viewed in terms psychological connection and separation. What is normally viewed as human goodness can be seen as the result of a strongly labile or “connective” sense of self, which experiences a high level of empathy and compassion towards others. People with this type of self are able take other people’s perspectives, to sense other people’s suffering, and to subsume their own desires and goals for the sake of other people’s wellbeing. Their ability to sense other people’s suffering generates an altruistic impulse to try to alleviate that suffering. This is captured well by the German term *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* which Maslow (1954) used to describe one of the characteristics of self-actualizers. In Maslow’s use of the term, it refers to a “deep feeling of identification, sympathy and affection... Because of this [self-actualizers] have a genuine desire to help the human race. It is as if they were all members of a single family” (1954, p. 217). Maslow also states that the “problem-centering” trait of self-actualizers is not about internal gain, but about a desire to help others, grounded in empathy, and their internal sense of right and wrong (Maslow, 1954).

As the above suggests, a labile, connective sense of self can be seen as the root of positive human attributes such as altruism and justice. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists have argued that altruism is rooted in unconscious egoism or Neo-Darwinian principles such as reciprocal altruism or kin selection (Dawkins, 1998: Iredal & van Vugt, 2011). As Dawkins has written, “altruism at the level of the individual organism can be a means by which the underlying genes maximise their self-interest” (1998, p.6).

However, I have elsewhere argued (Taylor, 2019) that this cannot account for the full extent of human altruism. As Batson’s “empathy-altruism hypothesis” (1991) suggests, pure altruism is rooted in empathy. Empathy has been conventionally seen as an ability to see the

world from another person's perspective, in terms of "reading the emotional atmosphere" and "tuning into the other person's thoughts and feelings" (Baron-Cohen, 2003, p.23). This is certainly an aspect of empathy, but it can also be seen - in a deeper sense - as the ability to *feel*—not just to imagine—what others are experiencing. Empathy includes the ability to actually enter the mind space of another person (or being) so that one can sense their feelings and emotions.

In this way, empathy can be seen as the source of compassion and altruism. It creates a connection that enables human beings to feel compassion. The ability to sense the suffering of others gives rise to an impulse to alleviate their suffering, to encourage their development or enhance their wellbeing - which in turn gives rise to altruistic acts. Because we can *feel with* other people, we are motivated to help them when they are in need. As Batson and Shaw have suggested, "Feeling empathy for [a] person in need evokes motivation to help [that person] in which these benefits to self are not the ultimate goal of helping; they are unintended consequences" (1991, p.14).

Justice is linked to empathy in a less immediate way. It also stems from the empathic ability to take the perspective of others and to sense the suffering they may be experiencing, together with the moral awareness that they are entitled to the same rights and equal opportunity and treatment as others. Justice means taking action to – or establishing principles which - ensure equality and fair treatment. It therefore arises naturally from a labile and connective sense of self.

Conversely, human cruelty and brutality can be seen as largely the consequence of disconnection, due to a hyper-individuated sense of self that has little or no capacity for empathy, that is enclosed within itself and unable to take the perspective of others, and to look beyond its own desires and ambitions (Taylor, 2018). A lack of empathy is the perhaps most significant aspect. If an individual lacks empathy, they are "walled off" from other human beings. They cannot sense the pain or suffering of others, and their own desires and ambitions take precedence over the welfare of others. Without empathy, they are prepared - and even eager - to inflict pain and suffering on others, and to exploit and oppress others in order to attain their own goals. Other people only have value to the extent they can help him them achieve their desires and goals. If other people cannot help in this way or do not support them in their ambitions, they are perceived as obstacles. Then they can be persecuted and mistreated - and in extreme cases, even killed - without remorse. Notions of justice and morality are immaterial, because the rights of others are irrelevant.

Another important factor is that a disconnected or hyper-individuated sense of self normally has very strong desires to accumulate wealth and status (Taylor, 2018). This is because the hyper-individuated self features (even if only unconsciously) a sense of lack and vulnerability, and has an impulse to add things to itself, to try to complete or strengthen itself. As a result, people with a highly individuated sense of self tend to be extremely materialistic and success-oriented. The combination of this strong desire of power and status and a lack of empathy is devastating, as in the case of Hitler and his acolytes.

Collective forms of human brutality such as warfare and the oppression of different castes and classes can be explained in these terms (Taylor, 2018). Warfare can be seen as the attempt of one group (usually led by a group of hyper-individuated people who completely lack empathy, such as the Nazis) to conquer and subjugate other groups, to gain territory, wealth and status. A lack of empathy makes it possible for a group to inflict the massive suffering of warfare on whole populations in order to try to satiate their (actually insatiable) drive for more territory, prestige, power and wealth.

Conversely, people with a labile and connective sense of self generally do not feel a particularly strong impulse to accumulate power or wealth, because they do not experience a sense of lack and vulnerability. Because of their labile sense of self, they feel a sense of connection – not just to other people, but to other living beings, and to nature, and even to the whole cosmos. As a result, they tend to follow a more simple and non-materialistic way of life (Taylor, 2017).

## **Disorders of Disconnection**

In an extreme form, the disconnected and hyper-individuated sense of self may be described in terms of personality disorders such as psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder.

In *The Mask of Sanity* (1941), one of the first investigators of psychopathy, Hervey Cleckley, described psychopaths as highly efficient emotionless machines, who suffer from a severe and incurable affective deficit and are unrestrained by normal human self-regulatory mechanisms such as guilt, shame and embarrassment. More recently, the “Tri-archic conceptualisation of psychopathy” (Fowles & Krueger, 2009) suggests three main aspects of the disorder: boldness (including low fear, high self-confidence and assertiveness), disinhibition (including poor impulse control and behavioural restraint and demand for immediate gratification) and meanness (including a lack of empathy and emotional attachment to

others, use of cruelty and exploitation to gain empowerment and destructive excitement seeking).

Hare (1999) has emphasised the significance of a lack of empathy in psychopathy. He has described psychopathy as “characterized by an abnormal lack of empathy combined with strongly amoral conduct, masked by an ability to appear outwardly normal.” He has described how psychopaths use “charisma, manipulation, intimidation, sexual intercourse and violence ’to control others and are ’lacking in conscience and empathy. They take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without guilt or remorse” (1999, p.xi).

Hare has also suggested that individuals with psychopathic traits are liable to attain high status positions in society, particularly in corporate settings. Research has indicated that around 1% of the general population exhibit psychopathic traits (Neumann and Hare, 2008; Coid *et al.*, 2009). However, Babiak and Hare (2006) have claimed that the figure rises to 3-4% in senior business positions. Other estimates are slightly higher. For example, in a survey of the work experiences of Australian white-collar workers, Boddy (2011) found that 5.75% were presently working under supervisors with psychopathic traits, while around a third had experienced this at least once during their working life.

Individuals with psychopathic traits appear to be attracted to the corporate world. They see it as a congenial environment where they can satisfy their desire for money, power and status. Studies have suggested that students with psychopathic tendencies are highly concentrated in business and commerce degrees (Wilson and McCarthy, 2011; Hassall *et al.*, 2015). Boddy (2005, 2006) has explained the ease with which psychopaths rise through the corporate hierarchy in terms of their manipulative charm, ruthlessness (which may be misinterpreted as a decisiveness) and their mastery of deception.

The success and high status of individuals with psychopathic traits suggests that the values and structures of modern capitalist-individualistic societies seem to *favor* psychopathy. In hierarchical societies where ruthless competition and even exploitation are condoned, psychopaths are bound to thrive, since they tend to be more ruthless and exploitative than others, and are not constrained by feelings of guilt or conscience. (This is an area I will touch on in more detail later.)

However, as Boddy (2011, 2014) also notes, the prevalence of psychopaths in high positions almost always has a destructive effect on businesses, leaving a trail of bullying, conflict, mistrust and chaos. He has claimed that between a third and a quarter of the bullying in corporations is linked to psychopaths (Boddy, 2014). Overall, the presence of people with

psychopathic traits in high level positions results in low levels of job satisfaction, reduced productivity, high staff turnover and reputational damage (Mathieu *et al.*, 2014; Boddy, 2010; Boddy, 2012).

Narcissistic personality disorder has some similarities with psychopathy, also featuring a lack of empathy, grandiose self-importance, exploitation and manipulation of others, shallow relationships and a sense of entitlement (APA, 2013). Research suggests that both conditions correlate with traits such as aggression, racism, bullying and criminality (Hodson *et al.*, 2009; Chabrol *et al.*, 2009; Jones & Paulhus, 2010). However, the main difference between psychopathy and NPD is that narcissists have a strong need for admiration and attention, whereas psychopaths are usually more indifferent to this. Narcissists are also less likely to be aggressive and deceitful, and their need for admiration means that they have some capacity for guilt and shame (although not in terms of personal regret, but because they fear the judgement of others).

Nevertheless, many researchers (such as Hart & Hare, 1998; Kernberg, 1998; Kernberg & Caligor, 2005) have suggested that the psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder have such strong similarities that they should be seen as lying along a continuum or spectrum. The overlap between the two disorders is also expressed in the concept of a “dark triad” of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Although the traits are distinct constructs, they overlap to such an extent that - according to Paulhus and Williams - they should always be studied in combination. Research suggests that the “dark triad” is strongly associated with a desire for dominance and power, and is significantly more common than normal at the level of upper-level management and CEOs - psychopathy and machiavellianism in particular (Hodson *et al.*, 2009; Jones and Figueredo 2013; Lee *et al.* 2013).

I agree that these disorders are indistinct. In fact, the fundamental commonality between psychopaths and narcissistic personality disorder is that they are essentially *disorders of disconnection*. Individuals with psychopathy or narcissistic personality disorder may even be described under the umbrella term of “disconnection disorder.” As indicated by the characteristics of a lack of empathy, self-centredness and inability to form authentic relationships, these disorders feature a highly individuated sense of self. People with disorders of disconnection exist in a state of extreme separation from other human beings, and the world in general. This extreme sense of separation is the basis of the ruthlessness, exploitation and cruelty of the disorders.



In this sense, disorders of disconnection are the polar opposite of what Maslow (1954, 1970) described as self-actualization. In terms of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, individuals with disorders of disconnection do not move beyond the "self-esteem" level. Their whole existence is devoted to a constant effort to gain attention and attain more power and success. At the level of self-actualization, there is a much more global, unselfish and empathic orientation, with a desire to serve the world. Whereas psychopathy and narcissist personality disorder represent a state of extreme disconnection, self-actualization is a state of intense connection - and therefore also a state from which empathy, altruism and justice naturally arise.

### **Pathocracy**

Another arena besides the corporate world that appears to be attractive to people with disorders of disconnection is politics. A recent study of 157 leaders (from 81 worldwide relations from 2016 to 2019) found 14 "strongman" leaders who scored significantly highly on the "dark triad" traits- particularly on psycho (Nai & Toros, 2020). The British ex-politician and medical doctor David Owen - working with the psychiatrist Jonathan Davidson - developed a construct of a personal disorder called the "hubris syndrome" that he believed is especially prevalent amongst heads of government. Owen and Davidson posited 14 characteristics of the hubris syndrome, most of which overlap with psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder, with others that specifically apply to politicians, such as "conflates self with nation or organisation," "displays the unshakable belief that he will be vindicated in that court" and "displays incompetence with disregard for the nuts and bolts of policy-making" (Owen & Davidson, 2009). (In fact, Dr. Owen suggested that the syndrome could be seen as a sub-type of narcissistic personality disorder.) According to Owen and Davidson (2009) these personality traits attract people to attain political power, but once power is gained, the traits became intensified and distorted. They claim that seven US presidents between 1906 and 2006 — including Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon - suffered from the "hubris syndrome."

Lobaczewski (2006) specifically investigated personality disorders in the context of politics. His motivation to study this area came from his own experiences, since he spent his early life in Poland suffering under the Nazis and then Stalin. Lobaczewski concluded that individuals with psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder are strongly attracted to political power and often constitute the governments of nations. He used the term "pathocracy" to describe governments made up of people with these disorders. In the same way

that psychopathic corporate leaders cause chaos and suffering through organisations, pathological leaders cause chaos and suffering through whole societies. (1)

According to Lobaczewski (2006), the transition to pathocracy begins when a disordered individual emerges as a leader figure. While some members of the ruling class are appalled by the brutality and irresponsibility of the leader and his acolytes, his personality appeals to some psychologically normal individuals. They find him charismatic and offer him their support. His impulsiveness is mistaken for decisiveness; his narcissism is mistaken for confidence; his recklessness is mistaken for fearlessness. Other psychologically normal (although selfish and ruthless) people may not be taken in by the leader, but may still support him out of opportunism, hoping to enhance their own prospects of popularity and power. Gradually, responsible and moral people leave the government, either resigning or being ruthlessly ejected.

At the same time, other people with disorders of disconnection emerge and attach themselves to the pathocracy, sensing the opportunity to gain power and influence. In an inevitable process, soon the whole government is filled with people with a pathological lack of empathy and conscience. It has been infiltrated by members of the minority of people with personality disorders, who assume power over the majority of psychological normal people. Inevitably, the nature of this power becomes totalitarian.

Soon the pathology of the pathocratic government spreads amongst the general population. As Lobaczewski wrote, "If an individual in a position of political power is a psychopath, he or she can create an epidemic of psychopathology in people who are not, essentially, psychopathic" (2006, p. 25). The pathocratic government presents a compelling simplistic ideology, promoting notions of future greatness and the defeat or elimination of alleged enemies who stand in the way of this great future. The government uses propaganda to stoke hatred towards enemies, and to create a cult of personality around the leader. There is an intoxicating sense of belonging to a mass movement, inspiring loyalty and self-sacrifice. Present sacrifices become immaterial in the movement towards a glorious future. In addition, the mass movement inspires acts of individual cruelty, including torture and mass murder. As Erich Fromm wrote in his study of mass movements, *The True Believer*, "When we lose our individual independence in the corporateness of a mass movement, we find a new freedom - freedom to hate, bully, lie, torture, murder and betray without shame and remorse" (2009, p. 80).

Once they possess power, pathocrats usually devote themselves to entrenching, increasing and protecting their power, with scant regard for the welfare of others. It may be true that power corrupts, but it is just as pertinent to state that power attracts people who already

corrupt (and who become even more corrupt once in power). A large proportion of the brutality and suffering which has filled human history – including warfare, oppression, injustice and even modern-day environmental destruction – is due to the actions and influence of these powerful disordered individuals, existing in a state of hyper-individuation and extreme disconnection. However, Lobaczewski (2006) also notes that pathocracies rarely - if ever - become permanent. At some point, they are destined to fail, because their brutality and lack of moral principles is not shared by the great majority of the population, who are psychologically normal.

### **Other Types of Leaders**

Obviously, this does not mean that all leaders - both in political and corporate settings - have disorders of disconnection. Some leaders may be altruistic-idealistic individuals motivated by a desire to initiate positive changes, to improve social conditions, or to alleviate suffering. They feel a passionate attachment to their particular field—perhaps education, law, environmental issues or race relations—and their passion and idealism give them a great deal of motivation that propels them to the higher positions within their hierarchy. And once they attain power, they become (or at least try to become) instruments of change, often battling with more conservative forces who are reluctant to shift. Well known examples of such figures include Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela. A lesser known example is the ex-president of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, who led the country to reconciliation and recovery in the 1990s after a brutal civil war.

Pathological leaders sometimes espouse an ideology - such as communism or nationalistic fascism - but, on close inspection, their ideology is usually just an extension of their own personality, or a means of further satisfying their own endless need for attention and power. Pathocrats are usually too impulsive to follow moral principles or ideological tenets, even if (like Stalin or Chairman Mao) they pay lip service to them. They simply identify themselves with their nation (or party) and channel their own personal need for prestige and power into a struggle for national prestige and power, frequently involving war and conquest. Their scapegoating of ethnic or marginalized groups is simply an expression of their innate cruelty and lack of empathy.

Across society, it is likely that there are also a large number of *involuntary leaders*, who have gained power without a large degree of conscious intention on their part, but due to merit or privilege (and frequently a combination of the two). I would suggest two different

categories of involuntary leaders. “Metricious” involuntary leaders - as they might be called - slowly work their way up their organisation’s hierarchy through talent and diligence, without being propelled by particularly strong ambition. These are usually quite agreeable as leaders, with a sense of responsibility towards other workers (partly because they used to belong to their ranks) and some degree of empathy.

Secondly, “privileged” involuntary leaders become leaders largely due to advantages of wealth, education, connection and influence. In the pre-industrial era, monarchs were an obvious example of privileged involuntary leaders. In modern times, such leaders often emerge from a background of elite private schools and universities, and from families with connections to other powerful or influential individuals. In the UK, where I live, for example, a 2019 report found that, while only 7% of British people attend private fee-paying schools, 29% of members of parliament and 65% of judges and 52% of diplomats were from such a background. Overall, people from private schools occupied 39% of high status positions. Even more extremely, the report found that, although only 1% of the population had a background of private schools followed by Oxford or Cambridge University, 52% of leaders in some professions came from this exclusive background, including 39% of cabinet ministers (Elitism in Britain, 2019).

The individuals I have described as “altruistic-idealistic leaders” are highly likely to be self-actualizers, practising the enlightened or euphyician management envisaged by Maslow (1965). This may also be true of some involuntary leaders. For example, according to Maslow, enlightened managers create a group spirit and harmony, and a sense of belonging, trusting and respecting their employees. Enlightened managers recognize that employees need to feel that they are doing meaningful work, that they are unique or autonomous to some degree, and also have a need to respect and even love their boss (Maslow, 1965). Maslow emphasized that such this style of management was not only good for the wellbeing of employees, but also led to increasing success for the organisation, and for society in general.

There are also some more recent theories and different models of leadership that describe altruistic-leaders, and overlap with Maslow’s concept of enlightened management. One example is Greenleaf’s (1977) concept of “servant leadership” (Greenleaf, 1977). In this model, it the leader’s role not to control or command their followers, but to serve them, to meet their needs and encourage them to develop their full potential. Additionally, the “servant leader” builds consensus, encouraging followers to reach decisions democratically, and feels a sense of responsibility to wider society beyond their own institution, helping the disadvantaged and reducing inequality and oppression.

A similar mode of leadership that altruistic-idealistic (or self-actualized) leaders in particular may embody is “authentic leadership” (Gardner et al., 2011; Peus et al., 2012). This shares many characteristics with Maslow’s “enlightened management,” since it is, as Wade (2019) notes, “the result of high levels of adult development” (p. 28) with attributes such as self-awareness, self-regulation, humility, interpersonal transparency and a strong ethical compass. Authentic leaders are empathically aware of the emotions and the abilities of others, and can adapt their own behaviour in response. They inspire trust by behaving with integrity and by refusing to compromise moral principles under pressure. They encourage collaboration and consensus, valuing the views of others and giving due credit (Wade, 2019). (2)

Lastly, another relevant leadership model is “ethical leadership” (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005). This overlaps with the two previous models but emphasizes aspects of honesty, trustworthiness and fairness. Ethical leaders establish moral frameworks and encourage others to follow them, partly by acting as role models. Employees are sanctioned negatively or positively according to whether they meet ethical standards. In a review of the literature on ethical leadership Resick et al. (2006) highlighted six attributes that occurred general across various cultures. Overlapping significantly with the qualities that Maslow (1965) saw as constituting enlightened management, these are: character and integrity, ethical awareness, people-orientation, motivating, encouraging and empowering; and managing ethical accountability.

## **Towards a Euphsycian Society**

If we are to move towards a utopian or eupsychian society - and if what Maslow (1965) described as eupsychian management is to become a prevalent model of management - we therefore need to try to ensure that high level political, institutional and corporate roles are (at least largely) occupied by empathic and responsible individuals with a labile and connective sense of self. We need fewer disconnected and disordered leaders, and more leaders who embody the leadership qualities described above - more servant leaders, authentic leaders and ethical leaders. Or as Maslow (1970) would put it, we need more self-actualized leaders.

In the remainder of this essay, I will suggest three main areas in which action could be taken to help achieve this.

### *Limiting the Access to Power of Disconnected Individuals*

The present state of affairs, in which disconnected individuals are strongly attracted to high level roles and find it relatively easy to attain them, is completely inimical to a eupsychian society. It is surely necessary therefore to take some measures to try to prevent such individuals attaining and abusing power. As Lobaczewski (2006) noted, pathocracies only emerge because we not take sufficient measures to protect ourselves from a pathological minority with an intense desire for power.

To some extent, this has always been the goal of democracy. As Hughes (2017) has pointed out, part of the aim of democracy is to try to protect the mass of people from pathological leaders. This is why, as Hughes (2017) also points out, pathological leaders hate democracy. Once they attain power, they do their utmost to dismantle or discredit democratic institutions, including the independence of institutions and the freedom and legitimacy of the press. Moreover, pathological leaders are completely unable to comprehend the principles of democracy, since they regard themselves as superior, and see life as a competitive struggle in which the most ruthless deserve to dominate others.

However, even countries with the most developed democratic processes (such as the United States or the UK) are presently unable to prevent disconnected and disordered individuals gaining high level political positions. The problem is that, while democratic systems provide checks and balances that limit the power of potential tyrants, they do little to prevent pathological individuals from attaining power in the first place.

Maslow (1968) implied one approach when he alluded to “exiling or assimilating disruptive individuals if you do have a selected Utopian group” (p.145). Such measures have actually been routinely taken by some of the world’s hunter-gatherer groups. Although there is still a tendency amongst uninformed observers to view indigenous or prehistoric peoples as primitive and savage, most tribal hunter-gatherer groups are (or at least have been, since very few remain, and most of those who have suffered cultural disruption) democratic to a sophisticated and highly rational degree.

Anthropological reports of hunter-gatherer groups who live the same “immediate return” way of life as our ancestors—meaning that they consume their food almost straight away, without storing surpluses—have typically shown them to be extremely egalitarian and democratic. As the anthropologist Knauff has remarked, hunter gatherer groups are characterized by “extreme political and sexual egalitarianism” (1991, p. 391). They do not hoard goods or collect possessions and have very strongly developed practices of sharing. Another anthropologist, James Woodburn, has spoken of the “profound egalitarianism” of hunter-

gatherer groups, describing how they “are not entitled to accumulate movable property beyond what they need for their immediate use. They are morally obliged to share it” (1982, p.432). A study of contemporary hunter-gatherer groups showed that men and women tend to have equal status and influence, leading to the suggestion that sexual inequality was also a relatively recent social development (Dyble et al, 2015).

Most groups have leaders of some form, but their power is usually very limited and they can easily be deposed if the rest of the group is dissatisfied with their leadership. Decisions are reached by consensus (Briggs, 1970, 1988; Boehm, 1999). As Lenski (1978) wrote of simple hunter-gatherer groups, political decisions are not taken by the chief alone, but are usually “arrived at through informal discussions among the more respected and influential members, typically the heads of families” (p.125). Some nomadic hunter-gatherer groups have methods of preserving egalitarianism by ensuring that status differences do not arise. This is done by sharing credit and putting down or ridiculing anybody who becomes too boastful. The !Kung of Africa swop arrows before going hunting, and when an animal is killed, the credit does not go to the person who fired the arrow, but to the person whom the arrow belongs to (Boehm, 1999).

But most importantly for my argument, there are many tribal hunter-gatherer societies where great care is taken to ensure that unsuitable individuals do not attain power. Any person who shows signs of a desire for power and wealth is usually barred from consideration as a leader. As Boehm has described it (1999), present day foraging groups “apply techniques of social control in suppressing both dominant leadership and undue competitiveness” (p. 64). If a dominant male tries to take control of the group, the group practise “egalitarian sanctioning.” They gang up against the domineering person, ostracise him, desert him, or even – in extreme circumstances, when they feel that their own lives may be in danger due to his tyrannical behaviour – assassinate him. As Boehm has noted, “This egalitarian approach seems to be universal for foragers who live in small bands that remain nomadic” (1999, p.69).

We obviously require some measures of “egalitarian sanctioning” too - most importantly, I believe we should follow the example of hunter-gatherer groups of trying to bar disordered and disconnected individuals from attaining positions of power. This could involve psychologists and psychiatrists, whose role would be to assess the behavior and personality of potential leaders. In my view, every government (and indeed every organisation) should employ psychologists to assess potential leaders and determine their levels of empa-

thy, narcissism or psychopathy - and hence determine their suitability for power. At the simplest level, potential leaders should be assessed for empathy. If they are found to lack empathy, they should be barred from positions of power.

Of course, there are a variety of instruments to assess for psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder (for example The Psychopathic Personality Inventory, Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996, and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory, Pincus et al., 2009) as well as broader personality tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. However, since individuals with such traits are manipulative and dishonest, it is unlikely that self-report inventories will be reliable. But a wide variety of assessments could be implemented. There could be observer ratings from a variety of sources, including previous supervisors and co-workers. Beyond inventories, psychologists could examine the candidate's life history, looking for evidence of empathy and compassion (or their reverse). They could interview past acquaintances, former school teachers or university tutors, and so on.

It is widely accepted that there are early life predictors of psychopathy, such as callous-unemotional traits, a lack of empathy and guilt, and shallow or deficient emotions (Salakin, 2006, Frick, 2009, Glenn, 2019). Early teachers and childhood friends or relatives of political candidates could be interviewed to examine evidence for these traits. Of course, all of the above types of assessments could be manipulated to an extent too, but a range and variety of assessments would provide a broad and detailed picture of the candidate's personality, and their suitability for a political position.

It is important to note that, as awareness of the problem of "corporate psychopathy" has grown, psychologists (for example, Hare & Babiak, 2006; Boddy, 2017) have recommend that corporations take measures to screen for psychopathic candidates. As Boddy has suggested, "if professionals within human resources want the opportunity to play a greater role in contributing to organisational success, then they may have to start to screen leadership candidates for psychopathy because organisational success and psychopathy are inimical" (2017, p. 156). So it is surely essential for screening measures to applied in politics. To paraphrase Boddy, we need to screen leadership candidates for psychopathic traits because societal success and psychopathy are inimical.

It is also worth noting that assessments were routinely used by psychologists after the Second World War as a part of the "denazification" initiative undertaken by the allies. Although most assessments were by necessity rudimentary (since there were so many ex-members of the Nazi party and other Nazi affiliates still at large in Germany after the war) there were some more rigorous assessments of high level Nazis, such as Rudolph Hess (Pick,



2014). These were mostly undertaken from a psychoanalytical perspective, with assessments such as the Rorschach test. There were also attempts to understand the mass psychology of Hitler's and the Nazis' appeal, in the hope of ensuring that mass fascist movements would not reoccur. In addition, there were also attempts to study individuals who were opposed to Nazism, in order to understand the psychological factors that made some people resistant to fascist ideology and authoritarian leaders. As one psychologist who undertook such assessments, David M. Levy, noted, "If it is possible, by the present means at our disposal, to determine those factors in the personality which are resistant to the influences that make for aggressive wars in Germany, we shall be in possession of a weapon of prevention" (1946, p. 507).

I believe the field of psychology should routinely have such a high level of engagement in the political sphere. I admit that the proposals I have suggested above may seem problematic and even naive. There might also be a complaint that these measures give too much power to psychologists, who would effectively become kingmakers, and perhaps themselves become vulnerable to narcissism and corruption. However, the present lack of psychological regulation on the attainment of political power is completely inadequate. It should not be the case that people with severely disordered personalities who live in a state of extreme disconnection are completely free to push themselves into position of political power.

One might argue that, in a democracy, voters are free to choose who they would like to represent them. However, choices of potential leaders are severely limited, and as we have seen, many people are easily taken in by the manipulation and charisma of pathocrats. Many people are unaware of the existence of personality disorders and their prevalence in the political and corporate worlds. Mental health professionals surely have a responsibility to share their knowledge and use their expertise.

#### *Encouraging empathic and conscientious individuals to take up leadership roles*

One very pertinent issue is that individuals with a labile or connective sense of self are often disinclined to attain positions of power, or leadership roles. Empathic individuals often prefer to remain on the ground, interacting with others, rather than elevating themselves. They have no interest in control or authority, preferring to connect with other people. They are also reluctant to manipulate and exploit other people. So the reluctance of empathic and responsible individuals to occupy positions of power leaves the positions open to people with disorders of disconnection, who gladly clamber up towards them. In other words, the highly developed (or

self-actualized) individuals who could potentially embody servant, authentic or ethical leadership may rarely actually become leaders. Perhaps there are some measures we can take to counter this?

Again, here we can take some guidance from hunter-gatherer groups. In many groups, power is assigned to people, rather than being sought by them. People do not choose to become leaders - other members of the group choose them, because they are experienced and wise, or because their abilities and their wisdom suits particular situations (Power, 1991). In some societies, the role of leader is not fixed, but rotates according to different circumstances. As Power (1991) has noted of simple hunter-gatherer groups in general, "The leadership role is spontaneously assigned by the group, conferred on some members in some particular situation...One leader replaces another as needed" (p. 47).

In modern societies, political processes such as *sortition* and *nomination* could work in a similar way. In ancient Athens, the cradle of modern democracy, the practice of sortition was common. Officials and assembly members were chosen by lot, as a means of ensuring that ordinary people were represented in government, and also of safeguarding against corruption and bribery. Sortition is still used in the US and the UK nowadays, most notably in jury service, but it needs to be much more widespread. For example, it could be used for local councils, and also to create citizens' assemblies which should work together with elected government ministers. In conjunction, local communities should nominate altruistic and empathic individuals, to lead the citizens' assemblies, and to form national panels who adjudicate over a government's decisions. This should be seen as a mandatory public duty, like jury service.

### *Developing more egalitarian social values and structures*

Deeper social and cultural issues also need to be addressed. Maslow recognized that, in modern societies, many people find pathological leaders appealing, and actually choose them over their empathic and responsible counterparts. As Maslow wrote, "In our society there are many groups, e.g., adolescents, that seem often to prefer bad leaders to good ones. That is, they choose people who will lead them to destruction and to defeat losers rather than winners-paranoid characters, psychopathic personalities, blusterers" (Maslow, 1968, p.151).

Certainly, as we have noted, a significant part of the problem is the attraction that many people feel to charismatic demagogues. Psychologically, this is very similar to the at-

traction of some unethical spiritual gurus, who sometimes attract the blind devotion of disciples, despite exploitative behavior. The attraction of such gurus and demagogues perhaps stems from an unconscious impulse to return to a childhood state of worshipping parents who seem omnipotent and infallible and could take complete responsibility for our lives, and magically solve our problems. At the same time, the paranoia of pathological leaders leads them to demonize other groups and creates an intoxicating sense of group identity with a common purpose, as in the mass movements analyzed by Hoffer (2009).

At the same time, Maslow recognised that this is not just an issue about individual psychological traits, but also about our social structures, institutions and values. As Maslow (1968) wrote, "One can set up social institutions which will guarantee that individuals will be at each other's throats; or one can set up social institutions which will encourage individuals to be synergic with each other" (p.144). At present, we clearly have social institutions and values that encourage competition and selfishness, and discourage compassion and empathy. To some extent, selfish and even psychopathic traits are validated, which is one of the reasons why people with disconnection disorders find it easy to rise into positions of power. Dutton (2013) has suggested the notion of a "good psychopath" who possesses valuable leadership qualities such as charisma, charm, coolness under pressure, fearlessness, ruthlessness, impulsivity, and so on. However, I would argue that psychopathy can only possibly be seen as positive in the context of a sick society, in which traits such as ruthlessness and authoritarianism are misguidedly valued.

We need to develop more egalitarian and responsible social values and institutional structures so that the authoritarianism and pathocracy of disconnected minds becomes less socially acceptable and desirable. We need a cultural change, whereby qualities such as empathy and compassion become more valued, in place of recklessness and ruthlessness. This would encourage more altruistic-idealistic or self-actualized individuals to assume positions of power, embodying the principles of server, authentic or ethical management - or in Maslow's terminology (1965, 1968), enlightened or eupsychian management.

We can see an inkling of this in some of the world's less individualistic and more egalitarian cultures e.g. Scandinavia and certain other Western European countries such as Holland. In such cultures, narcissistic and psychopathic leaders are less likely to attain power. Because of their more egalitarian social structures, it is likely that the populations of these countries find authoritarian leaders less appealing. At the same time, disconnected individuals themselves may find political positions less appealing, because of restrictions to their author-

ity. This illustrates that power itself needs to be more democratically distributed and less individually concentrated, so that it becomes less attractive to individuals with psychopathic traits.

## **Conclusion**

Many positive social changes have occurred in the modern era. Since the second half of the 18th century, there have been major advances in democracy, egalitarianism and women's rights. More humane practices of raising children have developed, together with more humane treatment (including less brutal punishment) of criminals, more awareness of cruelty to animals, and so on. These trends could be interpreted as manifestations of a collective movement towards greater empathy, suggesting that individuation and disconnection may be weakening, and human beings in general may be growing more psychologically interconnected (Taylor, 2018).

However, it is clear that authoritarianism and pathocracy - and the cruelty and injustice that they give rise to - are still thriving. Within corporations, institutions and especially governments, we are still a long way away from the eupsychian ideals that Maslow envisaged. Simply put, this is because there are too many hyper-individuated and disconnected individuals holding positions of power, and not enough empathic and responsible, connected individuals. As a result, our societies - at governmental, corporate and institutional levels - are dominated by authoritarian leaders who create great discord and misery, rather than governed by ethical, authentic and self-actualized leaders who could create harmony and encourage others to realize their potential.

The dominance of pathologically disconnected authoritarian leaders is due to three factors: the lack of checks on disconnected and disordered individuals who seek to attain power; the lack of motivation or incentive for empathic and responsible individuals to attain such positions; and finally, underlying social values and structures that favor and condone the behaviour of disconnected individuals, and devalue qualities such as empathy and fairness.

Cultural change happens gradually. At some level, a movement towards increasing empathy and connection may be inevitable (Taylor, 2017, 2018). But cultural and social change also takes place consciously, through the concerted efforts of altruistic and idealistic individuals. Such measures are necessary now, and in my view, the field of psychology has an important role to play, in regulating the attainment of power, in order to help societies

move away from pathocracy and closer towards the utopian, eupsychian model that Maslow envisaged.

## Notes

- (1) Since Lobaczewski was living under a pathocratic regime himself - communist Poland - he took great risks studying this topic. He was arrested and tortured by the Polish authorities, and was unable to publish his life's work, the book *Political Pon-erology*, until he escaped to the United States during the 1980s.
- (2) Note that there has been controversy about the findings of research into authentic leadership, with concerns about statistical anomalies and the reporting of data (Wade, 2019).

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