Psychopaths and Cancer Cells

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ABSTRACT

A person with cancer, and a society that tolerates psychopaths, have the same ending: death. In both cases a fault at a lower level of organization undermines performance and survival at the higher level. The immune system does an amazing job of identifying and disposing of cancer cells. A civilized society, however, was so dependent upon the embrace of tolerance for its rise (requiring the coalescence of tribes, and eventually civilization), that the culture of a civilization is incapable of the requisite intolerance of psychopaths needed for its survival. Psychopaths pose the same threat to a civilizations that cancer cells pose to the multi-cellular organism. It is ironic that sometimes the prerequisite for something's rise is also a flaw that leads to its collapse.

Key words: eusociality, psychopathology, sociopathy, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology

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1. INTRODUCTION

Most academic publications are focused on tiny issues of proximate causation; only the sociobiologists (and their timid imitators, the "evolutionary psychologists") are concerned with "ultimate causation." Anyone seeking an ultimate cause for animal behavior, and especially that of humans, faces the challenge of arousing angry resistance from established experts. They act as if they are living in the "ancestral environment" where enforcing conformance on all matters was needed for preserving tribal cohesion, which in turn determined the fate of the tribe and all its members. This accounts for a fundamental flaw in all the "soft" academic disciplines, such as the humanities: they are undisciplined.

The following was written by someone with experience adhering to higher standards of truth-seeking, i.e., the "hard" academic disciplines of astronomy and the atmospheric sciences. My approach therefore ignores the shackles of political correctness, and it will surely annoy anyone who is accustomed to innocuous discourse.

1. GAME THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Any game theorist would regard the following to be self-evident: whenever living elements come together to form groups that compete with each other, and when the losing group is devastated, the elements will behave as if only the group's welfare matters. In other words, for the elements forming a group the element's welfare only matters to the extent that they can serve the group. Thus, when the evolution of single cells brought them together to form multi-cellular life, single cell behavior evolved to be devoted exclusively to the welfare of the multi-cellular entities they formed. One could say that "whereas the genes of single cells had been enslaved to the cell, the genes of multi-cell life are enslaved to multi-cell entities."

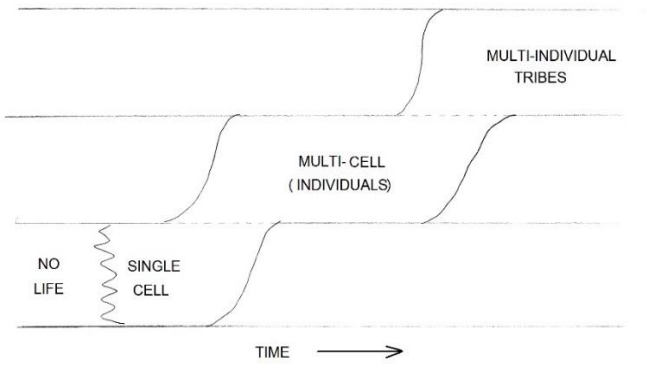

Figure 1. Stages of complexity for living things.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the next evolutionary step was for the coming together of multi-cell individuals to form a group, or tribe. These tribes compete with each other in such a manner that the individuals of the losing tribe had the shared fate of extinction. According to the game theory pattern identified by the previous coming together, single cell to multi-cell organism, we should expect that the behavior of individuals in a tribe to be devoted to tribal welfare, with regard to individual welfare limited to whatever served the tribe, i.e., "Individuals of a tribe should be enslaved to the tribe."

2. EUSOCIALITY AND A DILEMMA

This last stage has a name: "eusociality." E. O. Wilson lists four species that have made the eusocialty transition: ants, termites, honey bees and bumble bees (Wilson, 2012). Ants have been perfecting their eusocial lifestyle for over 100 million years, so when an ant attacks an intruder it does so without hesitation or any thought to its personal demise.

Humans started on a transition to eusociality thousands of generations ago, but our evolution of individual enslavement to the group has just barely begun. When a human attacks an intruder, or joins his tribe in waging war on a neighboring tribe, he may think about personal consequences. (This is because of a rapid evolution of left brain capability, with insufficient control by the right brain: but that's another story.)

Humans are an imperfect eusocial species, but we are eusocial enough to dominate the world. We are imperfect in a way so profound that we have trouble acknowledging the imperfection. Our flaws are twofold: on the one hand we have too many "rogue" individuals who victimize the majority of eusocialized individuals in each tribe, and in present-day society. On the other hand, all of the others (the non-rogues, who are dutifully enslaved to the group) suppress intellectual inquiry into any matter that might reveal how enslaved most of us good ones are and how un-enslaved the bad ones are!

To understand how this dilemma might be resolved, maybe we can learn something from how the analogous problem was solved by single-cell life when it transitioned to multi-cell life.

3. IMMUNE SYSTEM TO THE RESCUE

The early life forms that were multi-cellular must have had to deal with old-style cells that remained loyal to their single cell destinies. The transition in progress needed a way for the organism to identify the old-style "selfish" cells that threatened the organism by stealing resources and interfering with how the new cells were trying to serve the organism.

Their solution was the creation of an "immune system" whose task was to identify the old-style rogue cells and mark them for destruction. Every cell had a program for self-destruction, called "apoptosis," and when an immune system killer T-cell marked another cell, this internal program for apoptosis was activated and the DNA inside the cell was chopped-up into tiny, non-functional pieces.

4. TRIBAL IMMUNE SYSTEM

Could something similar have evolved for a species of multi-cellular organisms on a path to eusociality? Yes, in the case of humans it takes the form of "intolerance for non-conformance." Each tribe has a customary way to dress, a manner of speech, rituals to perform, mythologies to believe and patriotic behaviors to perform. Any individual who is detected to depart in the smallest way from conformance is under suspicion. When such an individual has been identified, he is either shunned, banished from the tribe or murdered.

These instinct-driven cultures play a role for tribes that is analogous to the immune system's role for the multi-cell organism. Rogue individuals are therefore analogous to a cancer cell, and at both levels mechanisms are in place for identifying and getting rid of the rogues.

5. PSYCHOPATHS AND SOCIOPATHS

The person who poses a threat to the tribe for his disloyalty and self-centered behavior has a modern name: "psychopath"! Psychopaths are the un-enslaved rogues who victimize their enslaved and eusocialized fellow-tribesmen; they are social parasites. Today, 4% of Americans are psychopaths (according to the original 40-question version of the Hare Psychopatholgy Checklist). Another 6 % of Americans are sociopaths,

also referred to technically, and somewhat euphemistically, as having a "borderline personality disorder." (I view BPD as a milder form of psychopathology, as if caused by fewer psychopath genes; thus scoring in the range 15 to 29 on the Hare test instead of the 30 and above for psychopaths). Sociopathy (a catch-all term for sociopath and psychopath behavior) threatens societies by victimizing cooperators (stealing resources) and usurping control of societal functions (despots).

6. TRIBAL SIZE, THE DUNBAR NUMBER

Did the tribal counterparts to modern societies have the same 10 % of internal enemies of the social order? I claim "no." Consider the fact that tribes were essentially always smaller than the Dunbar Number of ~ 150 adults. For this number of adults it was possible, even necessary, for each adult to know every other adult in the tribe. A tribe requires mutual trust for survival in its competition with other tribes. If a fellow tribesman can't be trusted to serve the tribe in many ways, such as in defense when attacked by a neighbor tribe, that tribesman is a liability instead of an asset to everyone in the tribe. This is why "patriotism" is such an important measure of men, even in modern societies.

This may be why tribes that became large nurtured a charismatic leader who would create a following of fellow tribesmen that he could lead to a "promised land." In this way all tribes would be small enough for cheaters to be identified and dealt with.

7. HOLOCENE TRIBAL-COALESCENCE

Now consider what happened 10,000 years ago, when the Holocene climate melted glaciers and created verdant land that could sustain a higher density of game and more food for gathering. Tribal territory could shrink and tribal population could grow at the same time, and this brought competing tribes closer together. Old instincts required that they engage in inter-tribal conflict. However, the coalescence of tribes became more feasible and the rewards for size may have overcome the penalties for not knowing everyone within the home tribe (Gary, 2014, Ch. 19). I argue that the super-tribe that won battles was also a place where sociopaths and psychopaths could flourish.

Could the pre-Holocene incidence of sociopathy (sociopaths and psychopaths) have been much less than today's 10%? If so, is the incidence now rising? And what could be the consequences for civilized societies if the level of internal enemies is 10%, and rising at a time that our cultural tools for dealing with psychopaths has failed to evolve?

8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PSYCHOPATHS

A tribe that has been hijacked by a psychopath creates within itself a new social setting, one in which other sociopaths and psychopaths have greater opportunities. Possibly the most famous psychopath is Genghis Khan. Imagine him taking over a tribe in 12th Century Asia, and inviting like-minded tribesmen for marauding, raping and massacre adventures. It has been estimated that 1 in 200 men throughout the world have Genghis Khan's Y chromosome. From the standpoint of the genes, psychopathology was a winning ticket to a future presence in the human genome.

A reading of history reveals that societies are most often ruled by ruthless tyrants. Adolf Hitler, Attila the Hun, Genghis Kahn, Joseph Stalin, Henry the VIII, Ivan the Terrible, Maximilien Robespierre, Augusto Pinochet, Pol Pot – these are just some of the world's notorious tyrants who gained control of their society and ruled with ruthless, psychopathic zeal.

With this history in mind, can one imagine a civilized society remaining uncorrupted by a psychopathic leader? Those people are present in every society, and they are opportunists. It is common knowledge that the CEOs of most large companies are psychopaths (or at least sociopaths). They climb the management ladder using "sharp elbows," and they discard loyalties that no longer serve them while feigning loyalty to the next level up – the victims in their sights.

9. LESSONS FROM HUNTER-GATHERERS

A famous observation of a hunter gatherer society records what happened to a tribesman who was too big for his britches. On a hunt he was ambushed and

murdered. That's how our small-tribe ancestors, before the Holocene, dealt with psychopaths.

Why are we, today, unable to deal with psychopaths with the same resolute dispatch? Why do we tolerate them?

10. TOLERANCE IS THE PROBLEM

Tolerance! That's what was needed when the early Holocene tribes coalesced into super-tribes. After a joining of tribes there must have been widespread suspicion and resentment of those strangers who the tribal leader decreed had to be trusted. They dressed differently, spoke with a different accent and phrases, practiced different rituals, and believed in different mythologies. Yet, this large and cumbersome tribe was victorious over all smaller tribes. So all tribesmen had to keep their instinctive intolerance in check, and feign tolerance.

Some super-tribes made the transition more smoothly than others, and presumably they were rewarded with more victories. In this awkward manner the Holocene was evolving tolerance, or at least a cultural reluctance to be publicly intolerant of those who were a threat to society.

11. IS INTOLERANCE THE ANSWER?

We cannot be sure of the relative importance of cultural influence versus genetic influence in determining today's hyper-tolerance. Genetic evolution is much slower than culturgen evolution, but the former keeps a flexible "leash" on the latter (Lumsden and Wilson, 1981). Maybe there's a clue in the global distribution of tolerance, which exhibits a peak in Scandinavia and a minimum in the Middle East.

There are many theories for why this global pattern exists (Gary, 2014, Ch. 19), but there is a more important question: Does an intolerant society protect itself from tyranny? The answer is "no," and the evidence is that the Middle East is also the historical center for tyrannies while Scandinavia is the antipode for tyranny.

So the level of a society's tolerance or intolerance, whether achieved by genetics or culture, does not inoculate a modern society from rule by psychopath, i.e., tyranny.

12. PRESENT PREDICAMENT

What is our present predicament, especially in America or Europe?

Reading the newspaper, or watching the TV news, provides a seemingly endless list of examples of sociopathy at work. Essentially every criminal act is by a sociopath or psychopath. Every white color criminal act, including political scandals, is due to sociopaths and psychopaths. If all sociopaths and psychopaths could by some magic disappear, what a wonderful world this would be!

At some level of conscious thinking, this is the goal that has inspired utopias. The universal failure of all utopias may be rooted in their cluelessness of the root cause of failures of traditional societies: unchecked sociopathy.

Idealists, or at least the progressive idealists, are really aspiring for transforming their American or European society into a utopia. They preach an old sermon, that the road to "a more perfect society" is more tolerance. This, in fact, is not a winning path. Such a path just widens opportunities for rule by psychopaths.

13. HERE'S THE ANSWER

A logical conclusion of my arguments is that there is no path to a winning place! All present societies, like all past ones, are doomed! Among the hundreds of civilizations in recorded history, a median lifetime is approximately 5 centuries. That's how long it takes for the psychopaths to seize control, or hijack a rising civilization, and milk it to death.

14. DEMISE DATE FOR HUMANITY

I've achieved control over my worrying about these matters. It's not because I'm 78 years old, and near my end. It's because the human species is near its end, so things that used to matter will soon not matter.

I am one of the first people to have presented a conjecture (Gary, 1992, Ch. 7) on how to time the end of humanity using something I refer to as the Random

Location Principle, but which has become known as the Anthropic Principle. It goes like this:

Suppose you're asked to guess the length of a finite sequence, and are allowed to fetch a sample at random. If you fetch the number 62 billion (total number of humans who have ever lived) the logical prediction is that there's a 50% chance that another 62 billion will live. (Any mathematician would understand this, subject to the assumption that the sequence has a fixed length, which in this case relies upon the belief that the universe is a gigantic pinball machine, governed by the laws of physics, i.e., F = ma, so that all past and future configurations are inherent in any one configuration.)

Plausible world population scenarios for the future call for another 62 billion people to be born during the next two centuries. In other words, the Anthropic Principle, or my Random Location Principle analysis, predict that there's a 50% chance that humanity will come crashing to an end in a couple centuries, i.e., about 2300 AD.

Things aren't all bad, however. Consider the famous lament by the conservationist Robinson Jeffers: "Good news, oh beautiful planet, the accursed race of man is not immortal." (ca. 1925).

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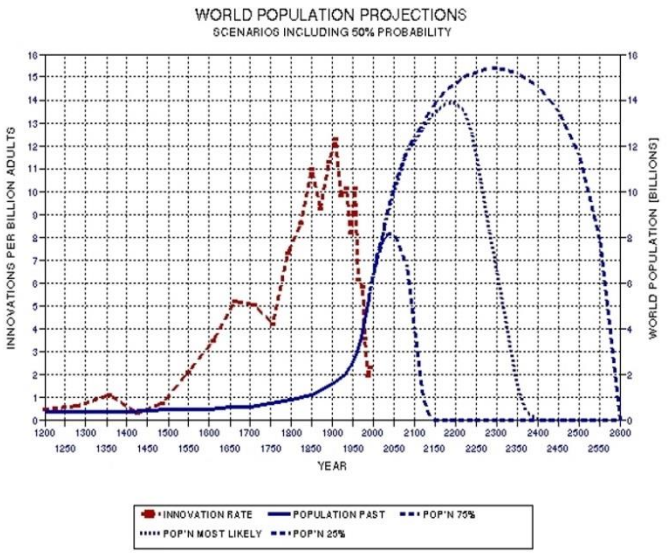

From the cover of Gary, 2014 (described in Ch. 29)

ADDENDUM

OK, it was obvious from the Introduction that this "mock article" was a joke that illustrates how I tease my humanities friends for being afraid of ideas! It was a fun little romp! Ha, ha!