

Abstract for Civility and its Discontents

Our ancestors lived in small tribes of ~ 150 people for probably millions of years. Even chimpanzees live in bands of ~ 150 individuals. Tribes tend to split apart when their numbers exceed 150. This magic number of 150 is referred to as the Dunbar Number. Why is a tribal population size of 150 so important? For smaller numbers there can be sufficient social interactions for everyone's trustworthiness to be evaluated; for larger tribes there will be strangers whose trustworthiness hasn't been evaluated. Tribal strength is maximum when its population is close to the Dunbar Number.

When the Holocene interglacial began, about 11,700 years ago, mid-latitudes underwent a dramatic increase in plant and animal life. This meant that tribal territory could shrink while maintaining tribal size. Tribes were more closely-spaced, and the old instincts for inter-tribal conflict increased. Tribes that coalesced, to form super-tribes, were victorious over smaller tribes. Eventually, all tribes where the climate was good were super-tribes. But this meant that all members of a super-tribe were in constant contact with strangers. The old instincts dictated that strangers shouldn't be trusted, and since for millions of years strangers were always from a rival tribe the strangers were the enemy, and they should be killed.

The leader of the super-tribe had to maintain order, and social pressure was created for protecting strangers within the same tribe. In other words, tolerance of people's differences was a new requirement for living within a super-tribe. Some people were more inclined to adopt this new tribal culture than others, and they were more likely to pursue new careers in the super-tribe's city center. Those who were less inclined to tolerate strangers preferred to live on rural farms, where they could avoid strangers. This was the beginning of "conservatives" living in rural areas and "liberals" living in urban areas – which has persisted to today. Conservatives who were forced into living in urban centers were especially resentful of the enforcement of tolerance that city life required. This is the beginnings of a discontent with having to be civil.

The super-tribe also represented an opportunity for untrustworthy cheaters to flourish. When they achieved some measure of cheating success in one part of the super-tribe, and were at risk of being discovered, the cheaters could move to a new part of the city, where no one knew them, and cheat all over again. There are two categories of cheaters: sociopaths and psychopaths. These two personality types care about themselves more than the collective, the super-tribe. The incidence of sociopaths and psychopaths may have been increasing during the Holocene, ever since super-tribes began to form. Evidence exists revealing that today there are more psychopaths in urban than rural areas. This makes sense if their strategy is to prevail among a victim class that has little personal knowledge of their untrustworthiness, and this pattern of psychopaths being more commonly found in urban areas must have existed during the entire Holocene.

Even though sociopaths and psychopaths have a strong resemblance, with psychopaths being mostly men and sociopaths mostly women, they have quite different effects upon super-tribe viability. The psychopath is useful to the tribe in ways that chimpanzee society illustrates: a group of 5 of 10 male chimpanzees patrol the chimpanzee tribe's territorial border, and they attack and try to kill any member of a neighboring chimpanzee tribe. This contributes to the preservation of the home tribe's territory, and may even promote its expansion. Human societies during the Holocene had a similar requirement. Farmers and herders needed to be protected from marauding tribes; any loss of food stores would diminish the strength of the entire super-tribe. Psychopath humans, who delight in conflict, are naturals for providing the protective service. Super-tribes also have territories that need to be patrolled and protected from invaders. Again, the psychopaths were attracted to armed defense of the super-tribe. Sociopaths, by contrast, are cowardly cheaters. They would prefer to cash bad checks than to rob a bank with guns. Sociopaths are less brazen, and more difficult to detect. Sociopaths and psychopaths are both "charming," but psychopaths have something on their Y chromosome that makes them prone to violence!

The early Holocene super-tribes required that everyone at least feign tolerance in order to minimize internal discord and continue to be victorious over smaller tribes. This may explain why today's super-tribes, i.e., societies and a civilization, are perhaps too tolerant for their own good! We shouldn't tolerate psychopaths and sociopaths. Psychopaths tend to rise to power and control society, while the sociopaths merely weaken society by being inconspicuous freeloaders. The psychopaths who rise to the top of governance become tyrants, and cruel despots. A society is ill-served by tyrants like Hitler, Stalin and hundreds of historical psychopath scoundrels like Attila the Hun and Genghis Kahn.

Today's hyper-tolerance makes it difficult to even discuss this out-of-control rise to prominence of psychopaths. The increased number of psychopaths are a threat to every democratic society, and possibly the continuance of civilization. Anyone who calls attention to the threat posed by psychopaths, and sociopaths, is inviting retribution. We shouldn't expect change from Washington, D.C., which is infamous for having the highest incidence of psychopaths of any region in the country (Murphy, 2018). America is doomed! Europe is doomed! There is no feasible plan for extricating any of these societies from the controlling grip of psychopaths. We now understand why the historical record shows that among the hundreds of civilizations that rose to greatness, they all collapse with a median time of about 5 centuries. Every civilization requires a high level of tolerance for it to rise, but the same tolerance allows it to be hijacked by psychopaths and bring it to ruin.

Sampling theory predicts that humanity has a 50 % probability of ending between 2150 AD and 2500 AD. The only consolation was expressed by the early-20th Century naturalist, Robinson Jeffers, when he remarked: "Good news, oh beautiful planet, the accursed race of man is not immortal."