Comment on
Steve Taylor
The Problem of Pathocracy
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I am sure that many of us have, like Steve Taylor, been deeply troubled by the rise of apparently malevolent dictators in recent years and wondered what could be done about it.

But I am extremely uneasy about the suggestion that we resort to psychological assessment.

I fear that such thoughtways perpetuate the very hierarchical structures that are the "cause" of the problem (See eg Raven, 2008)

What is more, I fear that the figures Taylor cites re the prevalence of the problem within organisations greatly underestimate the true situation. I suspect that Hogan's (1990) estimate that 70% of us have found ourselves working for "an impossible boss" provides a better index of the extent of the problem posed by 'snakes in suits'.

Furthermore, I fear that our social services, "educational" services, and police employ a huge number of people who behave in autocratic and destructive fashions which destroy the lives and livelihoods of many of those they are intended to serve (witness the film *'I, Daniel Blake'.*)

Beyond that, our society seems pervaded by a form of fascism wherein many people believe that they have a right to impose, by force if necessary, what they believe to be good on right on others regardless of the wishes of those others or the long-term effects on society.

Conversely, huge numbers of people seem willing, almost instantly, to genuflect to (only partly apocryphal) leaders who ride up on white horses, kick out the king of the castle, and announce that they will now be our leader. Thousands then commit to following that leader to the end of time.

In short. Given the, apparently pervasive, disposition to behave in "dark triad" type ways on the one hand and applaud such behaviour on the other, it does not seem to me that a way forward is to be found via assessment.

Instead, we have to ask ourselves what are the social forces which promote what Bookchin (2005) has called the "inexorable onward march of hierarchy".

Such an enquiry suggests that we need to dismantle our hierarchical management structures and replace them by what are best termed "organic" arrangements. These, as in the internal management of organisms, depend on multiple feedback loops and sensors gaining feedback from the environment (see e.g. Raven, 1995). Such arrangements largely eliminate the need for the cadre of people we currently refer to as politicians.

We would not be the first to have addressed our minds to this question. Adam Smith was appalled by what he viewed as errors (necessarily) committed by the "committees of

ignoramuses" constituting centralised government. He suggested that these could be ameliorated by embracing the self-organising properties of the "marketplace". This way, one could create a society which would innovate and learn without central direction (hierarchy). Smith's solution does not, and cannot, work. Yet his question is vitally important. And it is surely up to organisational psychologists to come up with an alternative answer. It is vital to the survival of our species and it would certainly provide an alternative way of ameliorating the problems highlighted by Taylor.

References

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