

BOOK REVIEW

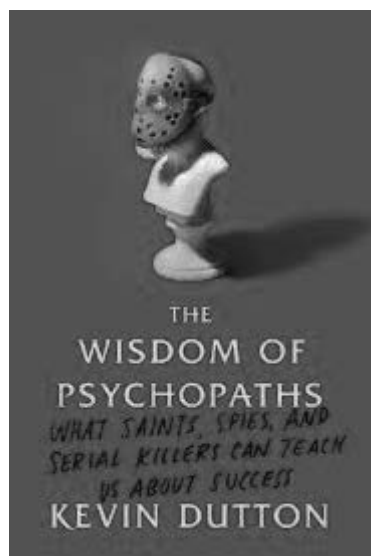
***The Wisdom of Psychopaths – What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers can teach us about Success* by Kevin Dutton**

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An absolute gem of a book came to me by way of a suggestion made by my neurosurgeon one morning very early before I went into theatre for a back procedure. If you think that a book about the brilliance of psychopathy being suggested to you by a suave and highly intelligent medical specialist shortly before that same specialist and his team ‘put you under’ and take complete control of your mortality would cause you just a tad bit of discomfort, you would be thinking correctly! Never

before was I so happy to see an anaesthesiologist stick a needle in me as the ample amounts of anaesthetics pumping through my veins would certainly subdue any unease I felt at the time. Following the procedure I was surprised that I could recall the name of the book and the author despite the Deprivan. On the other hand, as a clinician who specialises in neuro- and forensic psychology, I should have known that my recall abilities would be intact, especially as an area of special interest to me was triggered, or rather tickled so to say, by the conversation with the brilliant surgeon in question. Following my recovery I duly ordered the book online and when I received it I started reading the book in earnest.

From page one onward the author succeeds in grabbing your attention, and this ability is an absolute must for me when reading any material, whether academic or popular writings. Dutton includes you as the reader in his 'journey' into the depths and intricacies of psychopathy and his style of writing leaves one feeling as though you are having a personal conversation with him. Dutton also makes good use of wit and humour in an almost theatrical presentation of a very sticky subject. *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* is jam-packed with fascinating research results, prominent academic writings and theories on the topic of psychopathy. This in my opinion adds a lot of credibility to Dutton's book. This is not to say that an experienced and renowned clinician and academic like Dutton would not be able to put forth his own exclusive literary tryst on the topic of psychopathy without the help of prominent scholars and significant research findings. In the text the author engages successfully with other scholars, researchers, research findings and theories, in addition to providing the reader with the most relevant and up to date information on the topic of psychopathy.

Of special interest to me is the depth in which Dutton explores the innermost neurological workings and mechanisms of a psychopath's brain. It is an intriguing aspect to ponder that the qualities of a true psychopath can in essence be matched with the qualities of highly functional surgeons, business executives, powerful and successful politicians, world-leaders and the like. It would appear that what sets these individuals apart from their more maladaptive and criminal counterparts is the fact that they are able to apply and manoeuvre their essential personality qualities in a more adaptive manner, although these qualities still seem only to serve these individuals' personal interests and agendas. It would further seem that all humans 'sit' somewhere on a scale of madness and that society as a whole has become more 'psychopathic' in recent times than ever before, especially when one takes into consideration that it takes traits such as fearlessness, confidence, charm, ruthlessness and extraordinary levels of focus in order to be a 'successful' person in the 21st century, all so-called 'psychopathic' personality traits. During the conversation that introduced me to the book and the journey into exploring psychopathy, I can remember that I told my neurosurgeon that as a clinician I can 'spot' a psychopath coming a mile away, and this fact is also alluded to in Dutton's book – the fact that well-trained professionals can spot or even 'smell' a psychopath when they encounter one.

Dutton divided his book into seven distinct chapters, each with its own theme surrounding the exploration of psychopathy. Without divulging too much information I will provide the following brief overview of each of the chapters:

Chapter One: *Scorpio Rising* – explores the true nature and make-up of a psychopath. Dutton includes, amongst others, the case of John Wayne Gacy, the role of emotion in the life of a psychopath (or rather the lack thereof), the psychopath's apparent unique ability to identify and target certain individuals, how psychopaths face and deal with moral dilemmas and what makes business leaders and bomb-disposal experts 'tick'.

Chapter Two: *Will The Real Psychopath Please Stand Up?* – explores the history of personality measurement, the work of Eysenck and Cattell in assessing personality types, what happens when personality goes wrong in addition to providing an overview of *The Mask of Sanity* by Harvey Cleckley. The challenges of establishing a precise classification for psychopathy are also highlighted.

Chapter Three: *Carpe Noctem* (seize the night) – explores psychopathic decision-making and the notion that psychopathy is a much needed societal and personality phenomenon to ensure survival of the species. The 'mathematics of madness' is provided as well as who the first historical psychopaths were that came to the fore in society. An overview and explication of the work and research of political scientist Robert Axelrod is provided.

Chapter Four: *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* – explores the psychopath's power of persuasion and charm. The personality of the fictional secret service agent James Bond is analysed and the key personality traits of psychopathy are explored (the so-called 'Dark Triad') in addition to its applicability when it comes to looking at the personality functioning of top business men, lawyers and the like. Personal gain, motivation and focus as key features of psychopathy are also explored and the link between psychopathy and dopaminergic activity is discussed. The psychopath's talent for emotion-recognition in others and related brain structure involvement is also explored.

Chapter Five: *Make Me A Psychopath* – explores the current societal processes and generations that according to Dutton are becoming more psychopathic and less violent. In addition, highlights of conversations and discourses between Dutton and Robert Hare (the developer of the Psychopathy Check List -R) are provided. The possibility of creating a psychopath out of oneself by means of electro-chemical 'sorcery' is also explored.

Chapter Six: *The Seven Deadly Wins* – explores the United Kingdom's most psychopathic profession (company CEOs, go figure, with surgeons trailing not far behind at number 5!) and psychopathy as a 'medicine for modern times'. Dutton's conversations in Broadmoor Prison and his 'SOS mentality' / skill set ('Strive, Overcome, Succeed') are also discussed. Dutton provides seven deadly [and essential] 'wins' or core principles needed for success: *ruthlessness, charm, focus, mental*

toughness, fearlessness, mindfulness and action. From this Dutton proposes a model of optimal daily functioning and behaviour through the appropriate application and moderation of the seven core principles.

Chapter Seven: *Supersanity* – in the final chapter of the book Dutton highlights the work of Allan Harrington, explores the [fundamentally psychopathic] personality of Saint Paul the Apostle, the value of focus and concentration in the performance of sport stars, the value of having a psychopathic individual with you ‘when the stakes are high’ and your ‘back is against the wall’, and the difference in brain area activation in psychopathic and non-psychopathic individuals. The notion of ‘mindfulness-based’ therapeutic intervention and the link between some psychopathic traits and related cognitive processes and Buddhism / Eastern meditation and spiritualism are also explicated.

The Wisdom of Psychopaths – What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers can teach us about Success is a book that comes highly recommended, especially for those with a keen interest in the field of psychopathy and human behaviour. The array of research studies contained in Dutton’s book makes it a very valuable reference source in any research endeavour on the topic of psychopathy. It is this very same fact that might exclude a wide population group in the public arena as potential readers, as it would seem that a certain degree of knowledge and experience is needed in the fields of the medical and social sciences if one is to fully understand and appreciate Dutton’s work. The vast amount of literature and research studies also make the book read more like a textbook than a piece of popular literature, although these aspects do not for one moment detract anything from a book that was a truly worthwhile and interesting read. I would encourage those of you who are interested in the topic of psychopathy to get yourself a copy of the book, or at the very least to visit Dutton’s website (kevindutton.co.uk) which in itself is fascinating to explore. On his website you are able to undertake the ‘Psychopath Challenge’ or complete other personality measures to see if you are a psychopath yourself. It is very clear that Kevin Dutton is a dedicated psychologist and researcher and his passion for the topic of psychopathy is admirable. Now, if I can only put my finger on my neurosurgeon’s personality type . . . As if I even need to think twice!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

On their website The Calleva Centre for research into Evolution and Human Sciences of the Magdalen College at the University of Oxford provide the following information about the renowned author:

. . . Professor Kevin Dutton has recently moved to the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford, from the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, St Edmund’s College, University of Cambridge, where he was based for ten years.

Professor Dutton is an expert on the science of social influence, and a best-selling author. His first book, *Flipnosis - The Art of Split Second Persuasion*, published in the UK by William Heinemann in 2010, and since translated into 18 languages, documents his quest - from the political genius of Winston Churchill to the malign influence of some of the world's top con artists - for the psychological 'DNA' of persuasion.

His second book, *The Wisdom of Psychopaths - Lessons in Life from Saints, Spies and Serial Killers* is published worldwide in October 2012. In it, Professor Dutton explores the positive side of being a psychopath, and discovers, first hand, in a groundbreaking 'How to make a psychopath' experiment, what it's like to be one!

Professor Dutton is a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, and also of the Society for the Scientific Study of Psychopathy. The multi-disciplinary nature of the Calleva Centre affords him a unique opportunity to continue his research into the evolutionary origins of both highly effective persuasion techniques and strategies, and some of the fiendishly adaptive characteristics of the psychopathic personality . . . (www.callevaresearch.com)

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Franco is currently a lecturer in Clinical Psychology with specialisation in Forensic and Neuropsychology, in the Department of Psychology at Unisa. He is regarded as one of the foremost forensic psychology experts in South Africa and he has successfully dealt with a number of high profile matters in both the civil and criminal arenas. Franco has also appeared on television several times as a result of his work. His passions include nature, travel, gemmology, art and political and world history.