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Culture as Protection against Pathological Elites

An understanding of human psychology is fundamental to the analysis of culture, politics and international relations. An emerging body of knowledge in the field of personality disorders is now set to revolutionise our understanding of the role of abnormal psychology in human affairs. This paper argues that a small proportion of people who suffer from certain personality disorders have, throughout history, had an immeasurable detrimental impact on our world. Enabled by their ruthlessness to acquire positions of power readily, they have long dominated the psychologically normal majority of the world's population.

However a historical change of fundamental importance is underway, in which the psychologically normal majority have begun to wrestle power from this pathological minority. This change has gathered pace over the last three centuries as the majority have devised various means to protect themselves, namely democracy, the rule of law, and protection for individual human rights. Three dangerous personality disorders are of particular relevance when it comes to the acquisition and abuse of power. The first of these is the psychopathic personality. Psychopaths have a terrifying ability to treat others not as human beings but as things to be exploited, tortured or killed, as they see fit. A second dangerous personality disorder is narcissistic personality disorder. People

with this disorder are psychologically incapable of seeing others as their equal. A third personality disorder is paranoid personality disorder. Just as narcissists are only capable of perceiving others as inferior, people with paranoid personality disorder are only capable of seeing others as a threat.

People with these disorders make up around five per cent of the population. Their ruthlessness, self-assurance, and often charm, mean that they more readily acquire positions of authority than people with normal psychologies.

The influence of people with dangerous personality disorders can be seen in the persistence of authoritarian governments across the globe. It can be seen in the model of capitalism which has been developed over recent decades by the nations of the rich world. And it can be seen in the persistence of extreme poverty, particularly in those regions where the poorest billion people are concentrated.

The rule of law, social democracy, and human rights legislation, are the principle mechanisms that humanity has devised over recent centuries to protect against pathological elites.

Alongside this 'hardware', culture can act as 'software' that either encourages the emergence of such elites, or hastens their decline.

Of particular interest is the role of racism, sexism, and homophobia. As Inglehart and Welzel¹ have shown, as societies develop economically, cultural values undergo profound change, with greater demands for tolerance and individual freedoms. This evolution of values makes it more difficult for people with dangerous personality disorders to remain in power. A society's attitudes towards race, gender and homosexuality can therefore be used to gauge the demise of pathological elites and the rise to power of the psychologically normal majority.

¹ Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernisation, Cultural Change and Democracy: The human development sequence*, Cambridge University Press, 2010