

***A PROBLEM OF CONTEXT IN DEFINING PSYCHOPATHY: A FLAW OF REASON  
OR A FLAW OF WILL?***

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*Abstract: The paper argues that a mental disorder, namely psychopathy, may be understood from a philosophical point of view as a disorder of the reason or as a problem of the will. By analyzing the historical context in which this disorder is to be found, one may notice that it has been considered, in the majority of the cases, a problem concerning a flaw of reason, but actually one may observe that the main issue regards the will of the person suffering from a such considered psychological disorder. The problem of psychopathy or why does a person with a normal and functional intellect tends to act morally and socially wrong by deliberately hurting other people as members of the society is to be discussed by following the arguments of authors like Michel Foucault and Kevin Dutton. Although evil is defined in many terms, such as metaphysical, natural, moral, the problem of defining evil in psychopathy tends to oscillate between natural and moral, therefore the border between a right and a wrong act from an ethical or a clinical point of view may be regulated only by the means of an ethical contextualism.*

***Keywords: reason, will, psychopathy, evil, ethical contextualism***

The problem that occurs when discussing a mental disorder is to establish if the person is really ill and has no contact with reason or if the case represents just a problem of bad will when one tries and acts against moral principles, just because that is what one wants, driven by a form of will obstinately oriented towards evil acting. In common terms, in the first case we may speak about what is widely known as mental illness, in the second one, when the bad will and normal intellect work together, one may define the situation as psychopathy. A context in which all five fundamental emotions lack and the person in case does not ever feel fear, sadness, anger, happiness or disgust<sup>1</sup>.

The thing that psychopaths and normal human beings have in common is the incredible ability of the first class to pass through different situations and be defined as mentally normal human beings. But in the meantime, behind the mask of normality or sometimes the mask of geniality and extraordinary capacities lies a cold blooded predator. The similarity between a killer and a surgeon is exactly this cold blooded behavior impregnated with an absolute lack of emotions or exquisite control over them. The difference has not yet been completely discovered, but specialists say that it is to be found by researching aspects as genetic material, education, family, intelligence, opportunities and the way in which all these factors interact.

Kent Bailey argues that psychopathy does not reflect a form of personality disorder or a mental illness, but a biological legit consequence, a life strategy if we understand the problem from a game theory point of view; a strategy that has offered significant reproductive advantages in the primitive times<sup>2</sup>. The violent competitions and various forms of war had a direct impact on the human behavior and facilitated a sort of "annihilating your emotions"

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Dutton, *Înțelepciunea psihopaților*, tr. Anne-Marie Păcurar, București, Editura Globo, 2013, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Kent G. Bailey, "The Sociopath: Cheater or Warrior Hawk?", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18(3), no. 3/1995, pp. 542-543.

training camp, cultivating a certain dose of violence necessary at first in searching, hunting and killing large animals that insured food for the entire community and after that, in ensuring the peace when other tribes or communities attacked. The problem is how you control these groups when the food is sufficient and nobody attacks, because they will have the tendency to discard their violent and aggressive behavior on something else. How does one may orientate such a tendency toward something good, productive and efficient from a social point of view?

Professor Dutton explains that the problem of psychopathy or differentiating the fine border between social and antisocial behavior reflects a perspective similar to the image of a double-edged sword; that means: a person with the same personality features may be a serial killer or a spiritual leader<sup>3</sup>. If one has a certain kit of abilities, the efficiency of those abilities lies in knowing how to apply them to a certain context or how to oscillate between bigger or a smaller dose of cruelty, concentration, action, mental power. The difference between a despot and an efficient leader is given by a bigger or a smaller quantity of lack of empathy and of determination in reaching a goal.

According to the game theory<sup>4</sup> adapted to the problem of psychopathy, if we take the example of two drivers riding two different cars towards each other we may find three types of behavior: they both act rationally and avoid the accident, one tries to avoid the accident and the other accelerates, they both act irrationally and accelerate towards each other. The stake is always higher if we introduce a reward in the situation, like if the one who resists and continues to accelerate will be considered brave or will receive an amount of money. But this aspect, the fact that one of the two players will receive a reward depends very much on the possibility that the other will act rationally. The chances for a person to win when taking a risk depends on assuming or knowing the fact that the other person playing the same game or acting in the same real life situation will take none. An aggressor will take advantage and win over his victim only when the victim acts like one, in such a context becoming vulnerable, but if the victim acts irrationally, showing no sign of fear and attacking the aggressor, then the last one will suffer a loss.

Another case of contextualism appears when one discusses the trolley dilemma<sup>5</sup> and asks different people, normal ones and with psychopathic tendencies, to respond and find an answer to this situation. They seem to react identical when they are confronted with the classical form of the dilemma, the impersonal one that asks them just to use a mechanism as a switcher in order to save or to kill, but things become different when the dilemma is presented in its complicated form, the one in which the people responding to it have to throw an unknown fat person off the bridge in order to stop the train and save the other five persons<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Dutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43. The features are: cruelty or lack of empathy, charm, concentration, mental power, daring, attention focused on the present time, action.

<sup>4</sup> See Andrew M. Colman, J. Clare Wilson, "Antisocial Personality Disorder: An Evolutionary Game Theory Analysis", *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 2, no. 1/1997, pp. 23-34.

<sup>5</sup> The trolley dilemma speaks of a case in which five men are tied up to the railway tracks and a very fast train will kill them if someone doesn't press the switch in order to save them. But the switch will move the train on another railway, where a single man is tied up. In this case, what is there to be done, save five and kill one or save one and kill five? The author of the dilemma is Philippa Foot in "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect", *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> The complicated form of the dilemma was proposed by Judith J. Thomson in "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem", *The Monist* 59/1976, pp. 204-217.

In this case, the problem is no longer an impersonal one and the respondent has to decide whether he kills a person with his bare hands or lets other five die as well. Normal people cannot respond easily to this form of the dilemma and they tend to become nervous and elude the answer, but the ones with psychopathic tendencies will answer with the same cold calculated reason as in the impersonal context that they will kill a person in order to save the other five and that this is the correct thing to do, without any trace of remorse or empathy for the one that has to die<sup>7</sup>.

In general, one may observe *a type of sensibility to unreason, there appeared to be a special modulation which concerned madness proper, and was addressed to those called, without exact semantic distinction, insane, alienated, deranged, demented and extravagant*<sup>8</sup>.

This form of sensibility to unreason has represented the first step in blaming a mental or a personality disorder without trying to understand the mechanisms behind it, whether it may be cured or not, not only through pills or confinement, but through a special form of education. Confinement was created, as Foucault observes, as a form of avoiding the scandal that occurs when such an insane or alienated person acts. This form of avoidance represents an important change in the consciousness of evil, because until the seventeenth century, *evil in all its most violent and most inhuman forms could not be dealt with and punished unless it was brought into the open*<sup>9</sup>, the fact that evil is public and everyone may judge and be aware of the consequences of acting morally wrong may consist in a form of annulling a non-moral behavior.

The evolution of this idea had an important shift in the contemporary world: thinking that morally blamable actions may cause a general contagion if they are made public, in other words, give ideas to people on how to act morally wrong determined the fact that the persons suffering from personality and mental disorders should be considered dangerous and locked away without even considering the idea or trying to reintegrate them into society after a proper treatment or education. In this manner, reason has exercised domination on every other forms of unreason. It is very easy to recognize what is different, but not what determines the difference; the structures of reason evolve in a certain ethical space, a domain of what is reasonable<sup>10</sup>.

Another important observation is made by Foucault<sup>11</sup>, when he considers the fact that mad men are enslaved to their own savage will, using their liberty without any social restraint. Morality and liberty are founded on the exercise of free will; the self is the causal agent and only master of ones actions.

In the case of psychopaths the exercise of the will takes into consideration only the side of liberty, morality is completely annulled because they have no capacity to align themselves to social principles or to understand that another person is a human being that has the same right to exercise its liberty and free will<sup>12</sup>. For them, the other, a totally different

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Dutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, tr. Richard Howard, New York, Vintage Books Publisher, 1965, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 215.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Dutton, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

thing from what he represents, becomes a mere object that satisfies his personal need of liberty and free will. Maybe it is wrong to think that they lack every sign of cognitive and emotional empathy, in fact they do feel the pain and suffering of their victims in an objective and subjective way, but they convert an objective pain in a subjective pleasure<sup>13</sup>.

One may affirm that psychopaths have no reason, but that is false, they are perfectly aware of what they are doing. The ones with a lower IQ have a lower form of empathy; the ones with a higher IQ have a stronger and higher empathy followed by a sadistic motivation in experiencing the pain and suffering of the victims converted into a certain form of pleasure through their own distillatory vessel that remains unknown for the rest of the human beings. Causing pain and acting violently represents an intentional act of which they are perfectly aware and conscious about what they are doing: acting as an evil agent in an obstinately and intentionally way.

If consciousness defines a faculty that refers to moral principles and the way in which a person applies these principles to different contexts, it is faulty to accept that a psychopath lacks consciousness. He is perfectly aware of the fact that moral principles exist, he knows them like the rest of the human beings, but chooses through an exacerbate and perfectly conscious exercise of free will not to apply them at all in any specific context. One cannot say that the psychopath does not know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, because the evil applied to their victims represents the good captured for themselves. In other terms, in the case of psychopathy one may speak of a *conscious confusion* between evil and good. The own will and pleasure of a psychopath legitimate and authorize any other annulment of the will and pleasure of other people. And this sentiment of exacerbated will and liberty annulling others will and liberty drives him and “authorizes” him to act.

From an opposite point of view, there is another form of exercising the will in an exacerbate way, but in this case with the help of education and self-education, this exercise is oriented to the perfection and good evolution of a human being. This is the case of any spiritual leader<sup>14</sup> or any person practicing determination, concentration, empathy, charm, mental power, daring, action and attention focused on the present time in helping others evolve and experience their own free exercise of the will and liberty according to social norms and moral principles. It is just a question of willing and choosing to act right according to yourself reunited to the self of others or just to your own self.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Dutton offers the example of Tibetan monks that practice a form of meditation that allows them to experience the eternal present as a permanent and continuous flux. I dare to assert that any person practicing a form of spiritual exercise and assumed meditation has the ability to control their will and experience a special state of mind, therefore any form of spiritual exercise may offer a solution in educating the will in any possible context.

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