

# A touch of evil

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## *Aeon:*

Malevolent personalities come in flavours, says Del Paulhus, the University of British Columbia psychologist who coined the term ‘dark triad’ to describe a trifecta of human evil: the Machiavellian plotter strategising the downfall of others, smiling all the while; the impulsive psychopath, pouncing to steal a friends’ last penny; the self-entitled narcissist, seizing the corner office and the choicest cut of steak. These nasty personalities have remained entrenched in the gene pool because they sometimes confer advantage.

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According to Robert Biswas-Diener, a psychologist at Portland State University, we all need ‘permission to engage in acts of dominance, aggression, strategic manipulation, and selfishness’. Go ahead and put yourself first every so often. Cheat a little. Lie a little. Aggrandise yourself like a narcissist and, from time to time, throw humility out the door. The slightly evil among us could be more creative, more accomplished and contribute a decent dollop of good to the human race.

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There might be no better example of a dash of evil incarnate used for good than leaders of the free world. The psychologist Scott Lilienfeld at Emory University conducted a fascinating study on the prevalence of psychopathy among 42 United States presidents up to and including George W Bush. To do the work, Lilienfeld and his team reached out to historians studying each president to tease out both the negative and positive traits associated with personality. They also looked at independent assessments of presidential performance, correlating leadership and psychopathy scores.

Read the whole story: [Aeon](#)