



Book Review: Without Conscience

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The Writers'
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Without Conscience: The Disturbing World Of The Psychopaths Among Us, by Robert D Hare. Simon and Schuster, New York. (1993)

Robert D Hare is respected by his colleagues worldwide as an expert on psychopathy. He gained much of his insights as a Psychologist employed with CSC (Correctional Service of Canada) starting in the early 60's. At the present time he is a Professor of Psychology at the University of British Columbia. He and his students have interviewed hundreds of psychopathic offenders. This book is rich with transcripts of those interviews, giving gripping insights into what makes them "tick."

This IS NOT a shallow pop psychology, "self help" book. It's no gory thriller with lurid prose either. It's a GENUINE self help book. It will verify suspicions you may have acquired from life experiences, that some few people who cross your path truly "have no real feelings or conscience" and are "relentless users," employing endless ways to manipulate others. They are driven to always be "in control". I know the kind. I've positively identified about five or ten of them in my 41 years and seen many others who "lean that way."

Just as this book states and/or implies -- even if they live their whole lives never actually committing any horrible crime, you never "trust" them. You somehow "know" what they COULD do. Your gut instincts warn you they are opportunistic, "social predators" whose outward "normalcy" is only a "slick facade." You detest and/or mourn the gullibility and trusting attitude of too many who are consistently "used" by them.

Most of them during their entire lives never BREAK the law, but they are second to none at knowing how to

BEND and TWIST it to suit their purposes. You find out eventually by observing them long enough or by being victimized yourself, how crafty they are at maneuvering others to "fit into their plans." You come to the horrible conclusion that if they were allowed free rein, they would prove that they only feel "truly alive" if they can tell everyone who touches their lives what to do, when to do it, what to think and when to think it? I believe they're profoundly fearful cowards, literally "too scared" to ever discover love or respect. Their social relations only have one goal and one choice if they can't meet it -- "In some way, shape or form, I MUST dominate you, if I can't, we have NOTHING to do with each other". I swear these attitudes enable them to think clearer and faster than most of us because they strip life down to such simplicity.

If you've known anyone whose life consistently leaves a trail of most or all the above mentioned effects, this solidly researched book will vindicate you as not being "paranoid" or "judgmental" as some may have accused you. Chances are, you were only guilty of being discerning enough to spot a psychopath in action. Dr. Hare is convinced that only a tiny minority are in prisons. Most lead outwardly normal lives. They can be well respected school board superintendents, businesspeople, or even clergy. You could argue that being "respectable" enough to avoid a criminal record, makes them infinitely more dangerous to society in the long run. A good analogy is how one man really is a soccer teams most valuable player in spite of consistently having the least goals per game, because he is by far the best at PREVENTING opposition goals from ever happening. How many spectators would be perceptive enough to see the effect he really has on the game? In a destructive way, so it is with psychopaths in the game of life.

This book touched a chord in me that I'm sure it will in many readers. My educated guess is that about one in every 25 acquaintances I meet fit the psychopathic profile, to some degree. I'm no longer hurt emotionally, financially or physically by them but their actions/attitudes always force me to painfully "expand my borders of thought." (If there was no law, he'd have killed him right there!)

Theirs is a cold blooded "casual" cruelty. It comes out in the book's interview transcripts -- "nothing personal, he was just asking to get knifed for getting in my way." "Crimes of passion" are not their trademark. Alistair MacClean portrayed this "coldness" well as Scrooge in the 1951 version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" -- "are there no prisons, are there no workhouses?" He spoke to Kratchett quietly, devoid of emotion, not for a split second lifting his eyes from the balance sheet spread out before him.

Dr. Hare methodically destroys other stereotypes that come to mind when we hear the word "psychopath." They usually make a good impression. A neutral one at worst. They can "charm," knowing what "buttons to push" and what we "like to see or hear." Scrutinize the articulation and handsome features of American serial killer Ted Bundy on video while defending himself in court. I've experienced what Dr. Hare describes about this "charm" soon wearing thin if you are an astute observer. They seem too slick and smooth, mechanically "reading their

lines." Unlike my first impression, I now see the brilliant smile of one strikingly beautiful female specimen as gruesomely ugly, nothing but "damn good facial muscle control."

As excellent a "self help book" as this is, there is another easily matching and arguably exceeding it for providing insight into human behavior. It's been around "quite a few years" longer. I mean the Bible. Many Old Testament passages in particular, delve into the thoughts/actions of "the wicked" or "the ungodly." If you collect all these descriptive verses and combine them to construct a "personality profile," what you come up with essentially matches that of the psychopath in Robert Hare's book. A few of the many characteristics common to both groups in each book are self aggrandizement, craftiness at appearing "good," exercising no capacity to feel for others, lying with charm and a straight face, and feeling a twisted "delight" in "pulling one over on someone else."

Try these Bible verses on for size and see what I mean. PSALMS 5:9, 9:16, 10:2-11, 12:2-4, 58:3, and the entire 73rd PSALM. PROVERBS 4:16-19, 12:10, 17:10-11, 23:6-8, 24:1-2, 24:24-25, 25:28, 28:15, 28:28, 30:20. ISAIAH 5:20-23, 30:9-10, JEREMIAH 17:9 and 5:30-31.

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes is right in Chapter 1 verse 9. "There is no new thing under the sun." I wonder if he knew he was contributing to a future "self help book"?