



'The Wisdom of Psychopaths': A psychologist looks into the minds of psychopaths like Christian Bale's serial-killer character in *American Psycho*

# Why business rewards psychopaths

Plus, a biography of the Book of Genesis, the story behind one of the most controversial films ever made, and the rise of the global uber-wealthy



## THE WISDOM OF PSYCHOPATHS: WHAT SAINTS, SPIES AND SERIAL KILLERS CAN TEACH US ABOUT SUCCESS

Kevin Dutton

There is no hotter topic in evolutionary psychology than the continuing presence among us of psychopaths. They're often confused in popular perception with violently irrational psychotics like Norman Bates of *Psycho* fame, but Dutton's focus is on men (mostly) more often considered "evil" than "crazy"—characters like cold and calculating Patrick Bateman, the serial killer and Wall Street banker of *American Psycho*, who are unencumbered by fear, guilt or empathy, and ruthless (if not necessarily violent) in pursuit of their goals. Dutton, an Oxford research psychologist, throws himself with zeal into the question of psychopathy's persistence—that is, what evolutionary advantages it confers—for reasons both professional and personal: his father, he writes in the book's first sentence, was a psychopath.

Fear evolved as a survival mechanism during our predator-rich distant past—monkeys with damage to their amygdalas (the brain's emotional sorting centre) do some very stupid things indeed, including trying to pick up cobras—but too much of a good thing has its problems too. Modern humans are more risk-averse than reckless. Those who score high in tests on psychopathy's "positive" aspects

(fearlessness, stress immunity, focus, social dominance) can flourish—some to our gratitude, like first responders (police, firefighters, military); others (high-octane CEOs, coldly precise surgeons) to a more muted admiration. The disorder's negative aspects—anti-social behaviour, narcissism, impulsivity—are what fill prisons with psychopaths.

Modern capitalism, Dutton believes, rewards psychopathic attributes in a social sense—useful in saving a child from a burning building (not to mention killing Osama bin Laden)—and economically. A famous 2005 study found psychopathic traits as present in the wealthiest boardroom as in the padded cell, while male employees who scored below average on the "agreeable" index of psychological tests earned about 18 per cent more than their more pleasant peers. Women had less of a monetary split, but the tougher ones still had incomes five per cent higher than those of their softer sisters. The lesson Dutton draws from this is that we should all let our inner psychos shine—just a little. **BRIAN BETHUNE**



## THE BOOK OF GENESIS: A BIOGRAPHY

Ronald Hendel

There is no other book that looms over Western culture in quite the same way as the Bible's opening act. Its con-

tinuing life among observant Jews and Christians, and its equally vibrant afterlife among everyone else, means its stories, tropes and characters—Adam and Eve, the great flood, Joseph's coat of many colours—still resonate with meaning. They are familiar sources of metaphor, proverbial wisdom and even of branding. Adam and Eve is now the name of a sex-toy company, Hendel notes, while a research group working to extend human lifespans calls itself the Methuselah Foundation.

More importantly, Genesis has not lost the political bite it first developed two centuries ago (rather late in its 2,500-year-old life). The battle over slavery in the U.S. once saw both sides appealing to Genesis's authority; now, in the contemporary American debate over same-sex marriage, some proponents and the great majority of opponents also find their justification within its pages.

And all this discourse turns on a book so interpreted and reinterpreted that it's nearly impossible to read what Biblical literalists call the "plain sense" of the text: try understanding the story of Adam and Eve without paying attention to the idea of original sin or the identification of the serpent with Satan, both concepts far newer than the text itself. All our readings of Genesis, asserts Hendel, a University of California at Berkeley professor of Bible studies, resemble "a Shakespeare play set on a rocket ship"—however