



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 6, 2024

Many Environmentalists Have Dark Personality Traits, Study Finds

A new study has found that the old conservative-embraced stereotype of the well-meaning but naive liberal may not be correct.

That is, the “well-meaning” part.

This latest research was conducted in Germany and, focusing on environmental activists in particular, sought to discover if there was an association between their activism and the negative personality traits constituting the “dark triad” as well as those linked to left-wing authoritarianism. Published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, [the study](#) was released almost exactly a year after [similar research](#) found that devoted leftists are often narcissists and sociopaths.

PsyPost [reports](#) on the story:



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The motivation behind this study stemmed from an observation of the increasingly controversial tactics of environmental movements and a curiosity about the personalities driving these actions. It aimed to explore the potential “dark side” of environmental activism by examining the roles played by certain negative personality traits.

“I’m a professor of psychology and in my research program I investigate predictors of individual behavior related to environmental sustainability, especially in an organizational context,” explained study author [Hannes Zacher](#), a professor of work and organizational psychology at Leipzig University.

“Most previous research had looked at so-called ‘bright side’ personality traits, such as conscientiousness or openness to experience, in relation to environmental activism. Given controversial activities of environmental activists like ‘Just Stop Oil’ or, in Germany, ‘Last Generation,’ such as blocking roads or throwing paint at famous paintings, I wondered if there may also be a ‘dark side’ of environmental activism.”

The dark triad of personality encompasses three distinct but interrelated traits known for their malevolent qualities: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Each of these traits contributes to behaviors often deemed malicious.

Machiavellianism is identified by a cunning approach to social interactions, prioritizing self-advantage through deceit if necessary and harboring a cynical view of society. *Narcissism* is characterized by an excessive self-regard and a craving for admiration, often leading to entitlement and insensitivity towards others’ feelings. *Psychopathy* is distinguished by an



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absence of empathy and remorse, impulsiveness, and antisocial conduct.

As for left-wing authoritarianism (LWA), it's marked by "'anticonventionalism (i.e., the absolute endorsement of progressive moral values), top-down censorship (i.e., the preference for the use of governmental and institutional authority to suppress any speech that is considered as offensive and intolerant), and antihierarchical aggression (i.e., the motivation to use force and aggression to overthrow established hierarchies)," PsyPost [wrote](#) last year, quoting two researchers.

So what did Zacher's research find? As he [related](#) in his abstract:

Data came from 839 employed individuals in Germany. Results showed positive associations between environmental activism and Machiavellianism, narcissism, antihierarchical aggression, and anticonventionalism. Most of these associations remained significant after controlling for Big Five characteristics, demographic characteristics, political orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism. These findings suggest that environmental activism, in addition to its potential positive outcomes, may also have a dark side in terms of activists' personality.

Put simply, this means that environmental activists are more likely than average to be Machiavellian and narcissistic and to exhibit aggression directed against the hierarchies they despise (as they often want to construct their own hierarchy — with themselves at or near the top).

On the other hand, psychopathy — whose clinical name is "antisocial personality disorder" — was not significantly related to environmental activism, according to the research.

This was not true, however, of people exhibiting LWA in general, according to the [aforementioned 2023 study](#). Also conducted in Germany, at the University of Bern, the research suggested "that people with dark personality traits, like narcissism and psychopathy, are drawn to certain antagonistic ideologies and political activities," [wrote](#) PsyPost at the time.

Moreover, these researchers found that neither altruism nor social justice concerns were associated with left-wing anti-hierarchical aggression. "Considering these results, we assume that some leftist political activists do not actually strive for social justice and equality but rather use political activism to endorse or exercise violence against others to satisfy their own ego-focused needs," the study authors [wrote](#).

Unfortunately, many of these psychologically and spiritually twisted people enter politics, too, which is why studies have also found that narcissism and psychopathy are prevalent in that arena as well.

Explaining the former, *Psychology Today* [wrote](#) in 2011, "Consider that two of the things narcissists most desire are money (i.e., lots of money) and power (the more the better)." But most people who make a run at political office already have the money, so what typically motivates them is a lust for what they crave but don't yet have: "power, prestige, status, and authority," the site writes.

"These (let's call them) 'objects of admiration' not only gratify their need for self-aggrandizement by feeding their oversized ego," *Psychology Today* adds. "They also provide them with compelling evidence to confirm their sense of superiority to others — probably their most coveted need of all."

But such people are dangerous, the site reminds us: "Narcissist politicians don't serve the people; they serve themselves."



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Politicians are also more likely than average to have psychopathic tendencies, *The Atlantic* [informed](#) in 2012. This is significant because a *true* psychopath is like a demonic alien, a creature with no conscience. This said, *The Atlantic* also points out that there's a "continuum" here: There "are those who fall into the grey area between 'normal' people and true psychopaths."

This accords with my philosophy-oriented explanation for psychopathy: Since most people have incomplete moral compasses, with respect to these missing pieces (moral components), could they not be said to be "psychopathic"? And then, of course, if they're missing *all* the "pieces," they're what we call true psychopaths.

All this said, this psychological verbiage can make us lose sight of the most basic distinctions here: good and evil. These "dark" personality traits reflect dark angels, and only God's grace and grasping the virtues He has bestowed can cast them out.

As to this, it appears that the Left, which loves all things collective, needs one of them badly: a collective exorcism.



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