

# I Don't Trust Anyone

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This commentary is a personal confession. What I'm confessing to is something about which I'm not pleased or proud. On the other hand, I'm not horribly ashamed of it, either. I used to feel considerable shame about what I'll discuss here, but I've mostly gotten over that. Not completely, but significantly. Like so many of us, I'm a work in progress. Because of the inner disciplines I've pursued to examine my psyche and my reactions to experience that have shaped who I am, I've changed at least some over my lifetime. I understand a lot more about myself than I did at the beginning of my life. That said, the more things change, the more they stay the same, of course. All in all, though, I feel generally accepting now about the way things are for me.

Here's the confession: *I don't trust any human being.* No one. Not now, and not in the past. I've never trusted anyone, and I never will.

What I mean when I say that I don't trust anyone is that I don't feel safe around other people. I don't relax or let down my guard. I don't really let them in. Ever. There are parts of myself that I keep hidden. I may refer to those facets of my psyche, like someone giving a press release ("*The President would like you to know that...*"), but I never invite or allow anyone to share my actual experience.

Oh, I like many people and love some. My heart works just fine. I discovered early on in my life that my heart can and does open to people. It's a little mysterious to me about who this happens with and why, but the deeper mystery is that it doesn't happen with everyone, only with selected individuals. Anyway, love is not an issue, nor is it a problem.

But trust and safety with others? No way. In a superficial manner, maybe, but not deeply. At the professional level, my interactions with others are clean as a whistle — respectful, engaging, competent, non-judgmental, incisive, etc. I'm trustworthy professionally, and I extend that courtesy back to my clients. Professional interactions work very well for me. But professional is different from personal. Personally, I don't trust anyone. Period. End of story.

*Why don't I trust anyone? Why don't I feel safe with other human beings?* Because humans are capable of anything — especially if we're talking about what they're willing to do to other human beings. In terms of interaction, there

is literally nothing you can imagine happening from one human being to another — no matter how horrible, awful, or even seemingly inconceivable — that hasn't actually occurred. Right now, in the real world, every demented fantasy of harm to another is being played out by someone, somewhere. Nothing is forbidden. However despicable, nothing is finally out of bounds.

Human beings are capable of killing you. Not all of them would — most wouldn't — but some might. And we have no way of discerning who could or would and who couldn't and wouldn't. It's a crap shoot. In the right situation, at the right moment, anyone can do harm, and a lot of people might even kill you.

I am not immune from this horror. Although I took a vow in my adolescence that I would do everything I could to get through this life without killing anyone (and so far, after 72 years, the vow has held), I know I'm capable of it. Hell, my own murderous nature is as plain as day to me. Every crazy killer who ever existed is inside me — Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Lizzie Borden, Jack the Ripper, Dick Cheney — they're all in me. I understand killers. I get the sadistic impulse to make other human beings suffer for one reason or another, even though no reason is ever proper justification for doing so. Over my lifetime, I've done my share of causing others to suffer in relatively small but meaningful ways. I've been heartless and cruel. I am definitely another flawed human being. In one sense, that's the metaphysical problem — everyone is flawed.

Still, I'm not a sociopath, nor a psychopath. I can and do recognize the difference between fantasy and reality. I don't need or wish to act out every demented, violent, and cruel fantasy I have. In fact, that's why I took my vow to not kill anyone, because I knew all too well that I could. All that's keeping me from doing so is my sanity, the clear and obvious line that says certain actions are delusional, part of the realm of unacceptable dreams, and so need to be kept out of reality.

I was very young when I realized that I was a killer and that I could enjoy the fantasy of causing others grievous suffering. Not everyone, and not all the time, but some people on certain occasions. Interestingly, those proclivities in my psyche were limited only to human beings. My cruelty didn't extend at all to other animals. Somehow, animals — dogs, cats, horses, cows, birds, not to mention lions, tigers, and bears (oh my) — were innocent in my judgment. Human beings weren't. Growing up, I encountered people who were cruel to animals. As far as I was concerned, that was a capital offense worthy of death as punishment. I still feel that way today. I'd like all animal abusers to be, if not killed, at least made to suffer in the ways they caused. To feel that punitive toward other human beings may be an illness, but in my book, cruelty to animals is a cardinal sin.

My discovery in very early childhood that I was a cold, sadistic killer made my life as a child not very enjoyable. Sure, engaging in the fantasy experience of

being a killer was very hot. In itself, it was the most enjoyable thing I knew, full of passionate stimulation, and I wanted as much of it as I could get. But the aftermath of such fantasy was always shameful, so I had to keep it secret. Afterwards I felt bad, wrong, and evil. In my childish way, I made the mistake of thinking that this inner killer was who I truly was. I believed that if the surface veneer of socialization were to be stripped away, that's who I would be — a demented murderer and cruel sadist.

Along the journey of my life, though, I learned that this wasn't true. Who I was in actuality turned out to be much more complex and positive than I had feared. I discovered, quite to my surprise, that deep facets of my psyche were completely and authentically kind and loving. In many ways, these positive qualities were, in fact, more real inside me than the killer was. That came as a surprise and a profound relief. As a result, I had to redefine my inner killer. I began to think of that part of me as a demon. That's a common device in many religions for understanding or at least explaining human evil. Although I wasn't religious and didn't need to believe literally in "demonic possession," the idea served me well metaphorically.

For awhile, I entertained the possibility that the love and kindness I'd discovered inside myself might eventually reduce or eliminate the demon killer — maybe I could get rid of my inward cruelty and violence. I pursued that hope for quite awhile, but in my 40s, I realized that my "demons" weren't going away. Not ever. So, I built them a zoo inside my psyche (metaphorically, of course), a place they could call their own in which I could contain them safely. I let them live there. I feed them regularly and visit the zoo periodically.

Has that been a perfect solution? No, I still feel compelled to maintain a certain secrecy around the continuing presence of demons inside me. I can tell selected people about my demons — in a limited sense, that's what I'm doing in this commentary — but I can't let anyone see me "dancing with my demons." That tells me that I still have shame about them. I probably always will. But, as a way of living with myself and getting along with the world, that compromise works pretty well.

So, if I've come through all this with a fair amount of self-acceptance, and if I haven't killed anyone and limited the harm and suffering I cause others to a minimum, then why don't I trust any other human beings? Surely others are working on themselves the same way I am. Well, there are two obvious reasons. One reason is my job as the zookeeper. If I allow other human beings to get too close to me, they may want to go visit my demon zoo with me. Maybe out of curiosity, or perhaps because they have demons of their own. But that's simply not acceptable. Not now, not ever. No one but me and God get to visit my demon zoo.

I'm OK with that first reason. Loving people from a little bit of a distance and having some parts of my psyche kept off-limits to others is not a problem for me. The second reason, however, is more important and also more worrisome.

My perception is that the journey I've been on — going from believing early on that I was an evil monster to gradually realizing that I'm a multi-faceted being who is quite worthwhile — is not universal or even common. I've come to believe that such a journey is fairly rare. Not that it's unique to me (it's obviously not), but it's not standard, either. A significant reason for my becoming an astrologer was that it gave me a vehicle for learning about other people's inward history. Over 50 years and 13,000 sessions, it seems obvious to me that my early childhood experiences are not reflected in most people's lives. I assume that a few people might be living a similar story, but most people aren't.

Maybe I'm wrong about the rarity of my early life — I certainly could be. In spite of the 25,000 hours I've logged talking with clients about their lives, my work as an astrologer never really took me where I wanted to go. In fact, I don't truly know much about what goes on inside the inner consciousness of the thousands of people I've met and interacted with, not to mention the rest of the eight billion humans currently drawing breath. What goes on inside other human beings remains a profound mystery to me. That said, however, the history of civilization over my lifetime is very revealing, and not in a good way.

The objective evidence I see in the real world — meaning the sheer amount of violence, cruelty, and killing that humans have done and continue to do through wars, pogroms, purges, and more routine and banal daily cruelties in damn near every human culture on earth and at every level of social experience — points me toward the disconcerting idea that many human beings, perhaps even most, don't know much about their dark side. The tendencies to harm and murder that I know for damn sure are hard-wired into my inner nature are just as obviously present in the psyches of most (maybe all) other people. If that weren't true, the human worlds — family, society, and civilization — would all be a much gentler places than they are.

Here's what scares me. Billions of human beings are seemingly unaware of their own cruelty. How completely unaware I don't know, but they give no indication of conscience or remorse. For these people, any cruelty in which they're involved, even to the point of killing others, is apparently necessary, justified, and OK. At least that's what they must tell themselves, because so many of them seem to take pleasure in willful cruelty to others. Some of them are mean-spirited in overt behavior damn near every chance they get. The slightest provocation or frustration causes them to manifest their dark side.

This is where the Us-versus-Them dynamic comes into play. Anyone a given human being regards as "Us" is worthy of respect, generosity, kindness, care, and love. When one sees other human beings as "Us," being good to them is

easy. It goes without thinking, like rolling off a log. And that's terrific — life the way it should be.

However, "Them" do not deserve any consideration at all. Whoever is not "Us" (and therefore "Them") is fair game to be disregarded, lied to, taken advantage of, abused, treated badly, or even killed. In short, "Them" doesn't matter. Their suffering is unseen and unimportant.

That dynamic seems to be part of human nature. It's basically "blood is thicker than water" played out beyond biological family and into the collective. I'm hesitant to assert this, since so much of what humans believe turns out to be false. Heck, I'm as vulnerable to believing falsehoods as anyone else, but that's the current state-of-the-art of my understanding.

And here's the problem I'm grappling with: Membership in someone else's clubs of "Us" or "Them" doesn't seem to be permanent. It's not "*once Us, always Us*" and "*once Them, always Them*." If it were, then we could relax and completely open to anyone for whom we are in the "Us" club. Conversely, we would then know to not open and protect ourselves from anyone for whom we are "Them." The trust issue would be clear and settled.

Unfortunately, my experience tells me that who's "Us" and who's "Them" for a given person can change, sometimes slowly over a long period of time, but sometimes suddenly, in the blinking of an eye. That's what happens when parents beat their spouses or children, or when lovers fall out of love and into hate. It's why marriages fall apart and families undergo torment from within. It's why friends sometimes become enemies. It's why mean drunks act like they do, and why so many people act that way even when they're not drunk.

Betrayal happens. People exact revenge on innocents. Love can end or be interrupted. Loyalty is great until it fails. Us and Them can change suddenly, even second-to-second. All because people can't handle their own dark sides.

Discerning for a given person which club I'm in — Us or Them — is not always easy or straightforward. I may not know the individual at all, or not well enough, to tell for sure. And too much rides on that for me to take a chance. Beyond obvious cruelty, too many people routinely make promises they can't keep. They screw up in ways that we end up paying for.

Now, I'm not paranoid, and I don't feel like a victim, but I have suffered enough at the hands of others to last me a lifetime. It leaves scar tissue, and I want no more of that. For me, it's better to forego the possible love, kindness, and connection in order to avoid being harmed.

I can interact with others from a safe distance just fine, thank you.