

EXTROVERT - INTROVERT

The terms 'introvert' and 'extrovert' were coined by the psychologist C.G. Jung in the early 20th century. I've always been sorry that he chose these words.

When we talk of extroverts and introverts, we refer to the part of human psychology that comes into play during social inter-action. Does my neighbor like me or not like me? Will she/he have sex with me? Should I try to dominate him/her? Should I let him/her dominate me? Will this person hire me/fire me? Promote me/demote me? Do I fit in? Am I an accepted part of the team?

Introverts shy away from all that, extroverts eat it for breakfast, lunch and supper.

To social humans – to the extroverts and the introverts who are trying to be extroverts – human inter-action is what matters. To them the forests and fields, the sky, the mountains, the stars at night and the open sea, are just scenery, props on the stage, backgrounds for the human show.

Charles Darwin, the principal architect of the theory of evolution, was a classic introvert, shy and reclusive all his life. Yet he didn't shy away from the universe around him. He had an unbounded interest in the non-human world. He spent five years sailing around the world on the Beagle, investigating every part of it, land and sea, fascinated by it all. And he never tired of it. He spent his whole adult life investigating and writing about the non-human world. Just before he died he was still carrying on experiments with plants and earthworms in his garden.

The sciences are full of men and women like that. The arts have a lot of them too.

To solitary/shy men and women, the trees, fields, sky and sea, are the real world. From their perspective, the human world is not the universe, but something smaller contained within it.

Do you see what I mean? Most extroverts are too busy communicating with each other to pay much attention to rocks, stars, vegetables or earthworms. They are the ones who are 'turned inward', who are focused on the complexities of life inside the herd, confined to that smaller, more limited world. It's the introvert who is most open to the universe.

If Jung had to use the words 'introvert' and 'extrovert', I think he should have reversed them.
