

# Prey or predator, we're both ... just a little bit

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**O**n her iPad, my horse-crazy daughter showed 45 horses that broke out and galloped at full speed through the centre of a small Dutch village. After about five minutes they returned neatly to their stable. Miraculously, no damage was done. "Instigator" was a big pony who has had a career as a jockey horse and saw a hole in the "defence" when she was brought back into the stable, the rest fled after her. No problem, she also returned them safely.

Prey animals can flee and act as one collective machine. On the other hand, predators behave completely differently. Our dogs, for example, do respond to each other's deviant behaviour, but approach the world from their individual needs. Wolves hunt together while each has its own task. We humans have characteristics of both prey and predators. As mammals, great apes are also roughly in the middle of the food chain, although technology (fire, leverage and language) has enabled us to manoeuvre ourselves upwards on our own.

Immediately after my 11-year-old girl shows me the fleeing horses, she shows a video on TikTok, of Charli d'Amelio, an American 18-year-old girl. Charli has been making videos on TikTok since 2019, in which she "dances" in front of the mirror. She now has 84 million followers, 6.3 billion likes. She only follows 1018 people herself, who turn out to be her most loyal fans. She was apparently in the right place at the right time. The most special thing about her is her number 1 position. This refers to our herd behaviour. Very different from the people who sometimes manage to reach a few million admirers with very exceptional performances, as an artist (I think of Glenn Gould or the two Cellos), or as a genius (for example Elon Musk), or as an aggressor / politician (you can fill in your own choice ...) From our evolutionary middle position we can cherish the ordinary, normal (such as Charli), or the sublime and / or unattainable (David Helfgott, for example, who played Rachmaninov's impossibly difficult piano concertos as one of the first).

## The fleeing herd animal, or the individualized predator

Fortunately, the Dutch housing market and real estate site Funda made it clear that when we put our old home up for sale and were looking for a new home, all home seekers love the same homes and interiors. On closer inspection, the admiration for Charli - who behaves in an average and normal way - is less strange, as for walking almost blindly with the current. Digital (mass) communication technology helps us to strengthen both sides - compliance to the herd and appreciation for the best. On TikTok, Facebook and Instagram, we can get to know and follow fashion to be part of the fold. In addition, we are also occasionally shown tremendous feats or atrocities from individuals who might turn away from the herd, like Jonathan Livingston Seagull in the famous novel. So we see the movement from the middle of the food chain down to the herd and up to the lone wolf. Being biologically in the middle of the food chain means that we can go both ways. Down is identifiable (mass movements, fashion), up is exciting. Sometimes things get mixed up, for example when a peaceful demonstration or competition turns into a riot. Unfortunately, it doesn't always matter if you're a villain, an artist or a genius at the top. Many dictators played their audiences as demagogues.

A leading position in the herd is certainly based on chance. At the top, it is based on predisposition and chance, or on diabolical malice, like for example the perpetrator of a terrorist attack. The top is not for everyone. So let's be happy with our position in the middle, in our grassy meadow of luxury and comfort. There is simply no room for seven billion predators on our planet!