

Crowther, C. (1998). DIAMOND, STEPHEN A. Anger, Madness and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil and Creativity. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996. Pp. xxv + 402. Hbk. \$ 24. 50.



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Catherine Crowther 

It took me three chapters to appreciate this powerful book, but perseverance was rewarded. Diamond's reach is ambitious: to consider the 'meaning' of human violence and evil as displayed in contemporary social and cultural history, as well as in severe mental disturbance and in the ordinary individual's capacity for rage. He ranges over myth, religion, metapsychology, psychopathology, art and creative genius. Throughout the book he expounds Rollo May's concept of the 'daimonic', derived from the classical Greek idea of a unified life force potentiating both evil and good, which is of course analogous to Jung's concept of the split forces of archetypal potency.

Diamond's exploration opens almost journalistically. He conducts a critical audit of the contemporary American zeitgeist, cataloguing examples of the epidemic of 'senseless' violence and of antagonism between the sexes. He asks what produces serial killers, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Bobbitt castration case, the O. J. Simpson murder trial, and explores more generally the male response to the rise of feminist anger. He links violence with woundedness and fear, and discusses notions of demonization and projection, especially of animus and anima. His argument is that modern America has misunderstood and devalued the daimonic by deeming it solely demonic. He distinguishes subtly between rage, anger and aggression, makes a case for 'good' anger and appeals to Darwinian biology to account for a 'need' for violence. The psychophysiology of rage as a state of possession denotes the presence of the daimonic: 'To feel rage fully, to be totally filled with it, even temporarily overcome or possessed by it, is to know a type of ecstasy - a momentary loss of voluntary control, social inhibition, and self-discipline; a surrender to animal instinct, as occurs during sexual orgasm; a direct - and sometimes purposely sought after - 'participation mystique' in the daimonic powers of nature' (p. 15). These same forces are also found in 'blind love' and in 'raw creative energy, fuelling a furious, frenzied spasm of inspired productivity' (p. 15), and can thus be turned to good or ill.

He is adamant about the universality of evil, specifically today in mental illness and psychopathology. In a strong passage, he refuses to pathologize human evil into narcissism, and insists on its presence in each of us. Because the life force of the 'daimonic' has been damagingly attenuated and distorted in the Western psyche, we are left few means but the hallucinations of insanity for recognizing 'daimonic reality'.

In polemical tone, he discusses the implications of denying the daimonic in ourselves. Social and medical policies, by failing to address themselves to the roots of human nature, 'actually promote mental illness and violence, by supporting the suppression of rage and anger, rather than their conscious sublimation into constructive personal and collective action' (p. 300). This captures his main theme - that personal responsibility for integrating one's own unconscious evil requires wrestling *consciously* with inner

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conflicts and recognizing 'the all-important part played by personal choice in the mitigation and perpetuation of one's own pathological symptoms' (p. 102). This philosophy sounds familiar to Jungian ears, but Diamond distinguishes the paradigm of the daimonic from similar myths which try to account for the presence of evil, (the 'un-conscious', the 'id', the 'shadow'), because he opposes any concept which compartmentalizes and partitions the Self. He claims that the daimonic transcends the 'shadow'.

Perhaps the most interesting chapters for clinicians are chapters six and seven, which deal with severe personality disorders and psychosis, and their psychotherapeutic treatment by unorthodox means. He analyses in fascinating detail the 'iconoclastic' methods of certain practitioners - Reich, Lowen, Zaslow, Rosberg and Peck. These therapists are modern day exorcists, attempting to grapple directly (and sometimes physically) with the daimonic, so that their patients can own, not split off, their madness. Diamond adds a disclaimer about his own endorsement of these methods, although he respects their serious purpose. He then describes his own and May's Existential Depth Psychotherapy with less severely disturbed patients, which involves consciously 'discerning' one's inner daimonic impulses and one's 'intentionality', in order more honestly to make choices which avoid destructiveness. It struck me as a therapy both spiritual and psychological, with a cognitive rather than psychoanalytic underpinning.

Diamond's aim is to form a healing link between destructiveness and creativity. This is only partly convincing, as he is sometimes persuasive more through rhetoric than sound argument. He surveys a number of celebrated creative artists, noting the prevalence of mental anguish or suicides. I am uncertain how much can be divined from the private biographies of great people, but he uses the examples to illustrate the differences between those geniuses who are 'possessed' by their demons (e.g., Van Gogh) and those who have struggled through to a more resolved accommodation with the daimonic (e.g., Beethoven).

The range and scholarship of Diamond's research is impressive and I found the book enjoyable, extremely readable and accessible. It is written in a lively though uneven style, variously 'popular', scholarly and exhortatory. The author obviously has a natural affinity for Jungian ideas and makes a sincere, thought-provoking contribution to an important subject.

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