

On Satan, Demons, and Daimons: An Archetypal Exploration

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Satan—or the Devil, as he is alternatively known—has remained among the most popular of archetypal figures of Western civilization for more than two millennia. Evidence of strong ongoing popular interest in this imaginal figure—to say nothing of Satan’s horde of demons—can easily be seen in the results of even the most cursory ad-hoc research on the World Wide Web. For example, a simple recent search for the terms “demonology” and “satanism” using the AltaVista web browser located over 8,000 citations for the former and more than 25,000 for the latter. Even more amazingly, searching for “Satan” yielded nearly 180,000 citations to web sites, while searching for the simple terms “demon” or “demons” collectively yielded more than one million citations!

An equally significant indication of the viability of Satan and the demonic as topics for popular discourse can be found by browsing the subject listings for book titles currently available for sale in the United States. Searching the subject catalog of online retailer Amazon.com, for example, indicates that as of June 1, 2000 American publishers were producing a whopping 475 in-print works on “demonology,” while a search under the heading of “satanism” yielded a list of 152 current book titles. Whether looking at web sites or bibliographic listings, these citations to the satanic ranged widely, from scholarly works in theology and religious studies to sites featuring either terrifying fundamentalist tirades against “the work of Satan” or ecstatic neopagan paeans to the worship of “the Dark Side.”

A third indicator of the continuing hold the Satanic archetype retains over the popular imagination is the continuing stream of motion pictures featuring demonic beings and even, on occasion, the Devil himself. Whether this archetype takes on the form of a libidinous Jack Nicholson, conjured by a pack of modern day female necromancers in *The Witches of Eastwick*, or the more subtle – and therefore more sinister – machinations of Al Pacino as the diabolical head of a major law firm in *The Devil’s Advocate*, clearly Satan has far from exhausted his allure. Of course, equal billing is given to Satan’s offspring as well, with classics like *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Omen* still renting well at video outlets.

While the idea of divine entities who are essentially destructive in nature is as old as myth, the particular figure of Satan as he appears within Christian theology is not much older than Christianity itself. The emergence of the Christian Satan and his fallen host was the result of a complex theological and mythological process and one with very eclectic prototypes, ranging from the Sumerian Huwawa, the Assyrian Humbaba, and the Babylonian Tiamat to the Zoroastrian Ahirman, the Egyptian Set, and the Canaanite Mot. However, while the *Book of Numbers* refers to a mysterious demonic figure called “Azazel”—the entity to whom the infamous “scapegoat” of atonement was supposed dedicated and sent out into the desert to meet—the Christian version of Satan appears nowhere in the canon of the Old Testament. Indeed, the original version of this figure as he appears in the *Book of Job* is simply called “*ha-Satan*,” a Hebrew descriptive title simply meaning “the adversary.” The nature of this term as it is used in the *Book of Job*, observes Harold Bloom, reflects a sort of “court title, akin to our ‘prosecuting attorney’ ” (67). The Greek term for an “adversary” or “accuser,” as it turns out, is *diabolos*, the root term from which Satan derived his other name, the Devil.

Within the Judaic tradition, this figure in the story of Job is actually one angelic servant among many and, as Bloom writes, a divine figure “in good standing, and in no way evil” (63). (In support of that interpretation, I myself remember once hearing a rabbi describe Satan in a sermon as nothing more than “God’s Bad-News Angel,” the one he’d send when he had some chastening message to deliver or some destructive act to carry out.) In the Jewish tradition, Bloom further observes, the original figure of Satan was thought to be one of the “*b’ne Elohim*,” or “sons of God,” and was considered to be a fully angelic being, a diplomatic representative of the Divine on earth. His role, however, was that of a sort of “blocking agent,” writes Bloom, making him “an authorized adversary of human beings.”

Bloom goes on to add concerning the Judaic image of Satan, that during the Hellenistic period, popular Jewish culture appears to have shared something of the grander Christian image of Satan. After the retrenchment of Jewish theological thought following the advent of Christianity as a separate religion, however, Satan appears to have become more ambiguous figure open to multiple interpretations. Moreover, given that the Jews became intimately connected in Christian consciousness with their version of Satan—to the point where, from the Middle Ages onward, Satan was frequently depicted with a Semitic face—the Jewish imagination of this archetypal figure was bound to become somewhat paradoxical in nature. In fact, Jewish folklore and literature often feature this ambiguous vision of Satan, the most modern examples of which are many of the stories and novels of Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer. In these works, Satan or his representatives typically destroy people by using their own passions against them, passions for sex, love, money and even—in case of his short story, "A Crown of Feathers"—the passion to know God.

Though the Christian vision of Satan makes minor appearances in the non-canonical books of the Jewish apocrypha, he appears dozens of times in the New Testament, culminating in the grand demonic vision of the Anti-Christ in the *Book of Revelation*. Several centuries later, this basic biblical mythology was enormously enhanced by Saint Augustine in his *The City of God*. It is here that the idea is first suggested, notes Bloom, that Satan's rebellion and fall from grace actually preceded the creation of Adam and Eve and that it was really Satan, in the form of the serpent, who seduced Adam and Eve into *their* fall from grace. Then Augustine introduces the truly radical and profoundly influential notion that, "by their own fall, Adam and Eve and their progeny are eternally guilty and predisposed to sin" through the urging of Satan and his minions. As Bloom writes, "Satan and his subordinates were thus permanently stationed at the heart of the Christian story" (65).

As Peter Stanford observes, unfortunately, the "Christianity that begat the Devil has not killed off its creation." Instead, Stanford observes, Satan "retains a place in the popular soul of Christianity, the catchall character to blame for actions too terrible to ascribe to a loving God and too frightening to put down to the dark urges in the human psyche" (233). Some of the worst instances of these dark urges are documented in Elaine Pagels' *The Origins of Satan*, a scholarly treatment of the history of this figure as he has been employed in Christian theology and practice. As she carefully documents, the figure of Satan has been used repeatedly by Christians throughout western history, initially to explain both their own persecution by the Romans and the resistance of the mass of Jews to Christian evangelizing. Later, Satan was equally effectively employed to justify Christian persecution of both pagans and Jews after Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. In the same way, Satan was trucked out repeatedly to justify the most bloody of persecutions of fellow-Christians who chose to adhere to theological tenets deemed heretical by the church. Later, Satan would be used to validate both centuries of crusade from without against Islam and centuries of crusade from within against women engaging in those ancient forms of magical and medical practice called witchcraft by the church.

One of those magical practices, divination using the Tarot deck, still contains a paradoxical reminder of an older, more polytheistic vision of Satan, in the form of the eighteenth card of the major arcana of the Tarot, the card called "The Devil." Juliet Sharman-Burke and Liz Greene, for example, link the tarot card of the Devil with the Greek god Pan. "Because the god was worshipped in caves and grottoes, attended by fear," they write, "his image within us suggests something that we both fear and are fascinated by – the raw, goatish, uncivilized sexual impulses which we experience as evil because of their compulsive nature" (64).

This image of Pan as god of dark impulses is one which James Hillman has also written on at length. "Pan is the goat-God and this configuration of animal-nature distinguishes nature by personifying it as something hairy, phallic, roaming and goatish" ("Pan" xx). Ever since the beginning of the Christian era, note Sharman-Burke and Greene, Pan has been subsumed into the image of the Devil, "complete with horns and leering grin." The notion that Pan died, in keeping with Plutarch's famous story, is psychologically untrue both they and Hillman contend. "Rather," Sharman-Burke and Greene observe, "he has been relegated to the nethermost recesses of the unconscious, representing that which we fear, loathe, and despise in ourselves, yet which holds us in bondage through our very fear and disgust." These two writers further observe that "although he is ugly, he is the Great All—the raw life of the body itself, amoral and crude, but nevertheless a god." Moreover, they conclude, "the energy which is expended in keeping the Devil in his

cave, shameful and hidden, is energy which is lost to the personality, but which can be released with immensely powerful effect if one is willing to look Pan in the face” (64-65).

Hillman recognizes that Christianity, in its obstinate denial of the gifts of both Pan and the Devil, leaves no other recourse for both archetypal figures other than to hide with psyche’s shadow. “Humans cast no shadow only at noon, only at the dazzle and zenith of his pride,” he observes, “but noon is also Pan’s hour, so that at our greatest height we are in danger of the greatest fall.” In this manner, he tells us, “Pan drives out civilized morality in rebellious panic, intoxication, and goatiness.” As such Pan is very much alive, “but appears now as Lucifer’s heir, from below and within, as the ambivalent ‘prince of this world,’ bringing a confusion of vitality and darkness together, a monstrous mixture in the name of Dionysian renewal” (*InSearch* 92).

Another writer who considers the archetypal significance of the Devil card in the Tarot deck is Sallie Nichols. “Through the activities of Satan, it seems,” she writes, “we were cast out of the Eden of Instinctual obedience and animal nature in order that we might fulfill the destiny of our specifically human nature.” Very much in keeping with the Judaic vision of Satan, Nichols sees the Devil as a figure necessary to the evolution of humankind. “As long as our obedience to a moral code is automatic,” she observes, “we are not free. As long as we refuse to turn and confront our inner devils—whatever form these may take—we are not human.” In this vision, rather than a figure obsessed with the corruption of human beings, the Devil is a bringer of consciousness. “To be slavishly and unconsciously bound to even the most altruistic code,” writes Nichols, “as surely marks one a creature of the Devil as to be victimized by one’s own appetites” (266-7).

While the Judaic *ha-Shatan* remained in the Yahweh’s angelic service, albeit at his left hand, Christianity after Saint Augustine effectively amputated that left hand – the hand referred to in medieval Latin as the “sinister” one—relegating Satan to the lower world and thus leaving an entirely beneficent God to reign alone in heaven. In his *Answer to Job*, Jung writes of Satan, “although he was banished from the heavenly court, he has kept his dominion over the sublunary world. He is not cast directly into hell, but upon earth” (48). One effect of this split between the goodness of God and the evil of the Devil, remarks Nichols, is that “today we have become so enamored of the light, bright aspect of creative power that we have lost sight of the Devil altogether, apparently thinking that when he fell from heaven he was no longer active anywhere, least of all in ourselves.” Echoing both the more paradoxical Judaic vision of the godhead, as well as Jung’s vision of the *imago dei* of Christianity, Nichols comments wryly that “the idea that the godhead might embrace all opposites, including an area of dark unconsciousness, and that the Devil, for his part, might possess some bright, redeeming qualities, seems shocking” (269-70).

As Hillman ironically observes, Satan’s power is actually fed from our own exalted sense psychological and spiritual light. “He gains when we lose touch with our own darkness,” he writes, “when we lose sight of our own destructiveness and self-deceptions.” With even greater irony, Hillman reminds us that, according to orthodox Christian theology, it is the sin of pride that most directly leads one into Satan’s grip. He observes that psychology can confirm the truth of this particular theological notion, “since, analytically seen, pride is a denial of the personal shadow and a blind fascination with the dazzle of one’s own light.” His advice for dealing with this situation, however, is most un-theological: “Therefore the best prevention is not the reinforcement of the good and the light, but familiarity with one’s own shadow, one’s devil-likeness” (*InSearch* 91). What is the result of integrating the shadow, asks Hillman, and of recognizing “that you are the Devil?” He responds to his own question, observing that one becomes “a darkened person, yet one more chastened, rounded, and complete—if not eschatologically saved, at least psychologically improved” (*InSearch* 135).

In alchemically commenting on Jung’s sense of the effect of the banishment of Satan from heaven, Edward Edinger notes that this theological development resulted in a complete “*separatio* within the godhead” and “represents a decisive separation of the opposites [. . .] of good from evil and of heaven from earth.” As a result, Edinger writes, “Yahweh now becomes identified with heaven and spirit, and Satan becomes identified with earth and matter” (73).

Edinger goes on to suggest that a second alchemical process was set in motion by this splitting of God from Satan, namely that of *coagulatio*. “The idea of a decent from one level to another belongs to the symbol of the *coagulatio*,” he observes, “another word for which is incarnation.” Implicit in this stage of the alchemical process is the taking on of material density, for “when something descends from an upper spiritual level to a lower realm, it takes on body as it descends.” Noting that the Jungian interpretation of the *coagulatio* stage within the individuation process relates to the process of ego development, Edinger writes, “in this symbolism, that which pertains to earth and body and matter refers to the ego.” During the *coagulatio* stage, Edinger writes, “it is the ego which is incarnating agent that realizes or gives body or real fleshly existence to psychic stuff that is just abstract until it’s lived out concretely in the personal life of a particular ego” (74). So from this perspective, the decent of Satan into the mortal realm, far from hindering humankind, becomes the single mythic event that actually makes embodied consciousness possible.

Very much related to this paradoxical vision of Satan is the question of the relationship between the demonic and daimonic. In both Jewish folklore and Christian dogma, Satan is said to control a band of minions, called demons, who largely accomplish his work in the world. This term was borrowed by Jews and Christians – and, as it turns out, perverted in the process – from the Greek and Hellenistic notion of daimons. While demons were uniformly viewed by Judeo-Christian monotheists as forces of malevolence and destruction, much to be feared, the Greek notion of the daimon was both more subtle and complex in nature. Hillman, who has written extensively on daimons, observes regarding them:

Who indeed are these figures what they should be so menacing? If we look into the world before and parallel with the rise of Christianity – first to Homer, then to Plato and the dramatists, then to Plutarch, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and then to the Renaissance – the daimons were figures of the middle realm, neither quite transcendent Gods nor quite physical humans, and there were many sorts of them, beneficial, terrifying, message-bringing, mediators, voices of guidance and caution. (*Healing Fiction* 56)

Most importantly, however, for both the ancient Greeks and Hillman, the daimon has an essential role to play in the life of the soul. For the daimon is also the carrier of the unique image or pattern, which Hillman also calls the “acorn,” that each soul is meant to live out in life. While we forget that pattern at birth as we arrive into material form, “the daimon remembers what is in your image and belongs to your pattern, and therefore the daimon is the carrier of your destiny” (*Soul’s Code* 8).

Where the daimonic and the demonic do come together in Hillman’s view is in the instance of the “Bad Seed.” This situation is results from the fact that, unlike the conscious personality, which only dimly perceives the intended outcome of his or her soul’s destiny in life, “to the pattern in the seed, all is present at once, and it pushes toward simultaneous articulation.” This quality of the daimon, when most acutely manifested, leads the person to want his or her destined fulfillment “all at once,” because they “feel and see it all at once.” Unfortunately, writes Hillman, “this is a transcendent kind of perception, appropriate to an omnipresent God.” As a consequence, he observe, “this timelessness of the acorn and its push to make everything happen at once indicates possession by a daimon, daimon becoming demonic” (225-6).

In the case of the “Bad Seed,” the gap between the limited comprehension of the human personality and the divine potentiality of the daimonic acorn is so disproportionate that, as Hillman writes, “it is as if the human world were drained to feed the seed.” As a result, he adds, the human being possessed by such a daimon becomes more and more detached from the human realm. “The Bad Seed—perhaps, to a lesser degree, any acorn—acts as a parasite on the life of the person it has chosen to inhabit,” Hillman writes, “often leaving the person disorganized, symptomized, boring, emptied of eros, and unable to connect.” Though we call such people “loners,” he notes, they are not alone. “He or she is in communion with the daimon, drawn apart from the human by the invisibly inhuman, and attempting to create a world modeled upon the grandeur and glamour of world unseen but envisioned.”

Returning once again to the notion of the inevitable interrelationship between God and Satan, Hillman observes that the human haunted by the call of a Bad Seed “commingles with a solitary, transcendent God, monomania and monotheism indistinguishable” (241-2). Recognizing the archetypal purpose lurking behind orthodox Christianity’s notion of exorcising demons, Hillman warns that society truly needs to have rituals of exorcism for protecting itself against the influence of the bad seed. Nevertheless, he concludes, “it

must also have rituals of recognitions that give the demonic a place—other than prisons—as Athena found an honored place for the destructive, blood-angered Furies in the midst of civilized Athens” (246).

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