

Book Review

Review of Joseph Dodds, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: Complexity Theory, Deleuze/Guattari and Psychoanalysis for a Climate in Crisis*. London: Routledge. 2011.

Occasionally a book is produced that meets the entirety of the mission of this journal. By this I mean it includes the known but generally too little discussed nexus between psychology, the life sciences and nonlinear dynamics. In this case the life science under examination is the essential life science, the earth's ecology. Students of nonlinear dynamics will not be surprised to read Dodds' discussion of the potential climatic chaos resulting from our obvious lack of concern for the survival of human life support systems. Scholars recognize that the human condition, in fact our species' origins, is the result of an inherent uncertainty that negates incurious teleologies and emphasizes risk. This is true whether one is a committed resilience proponent believing that Gaia is mightier than we or a more anxious purveyor of sensitivities that represent continuous, disturbing and incalculable perturbations.

For Dodd, however, the ecological problematique runs deeper than the complex interactions of human civilization's detritus with eco-climatic systems that we do not fully understand. Dodds' effort takes us on a deeper adventure than merely restating what those committed to the standard precautionary principles of science would abide. Dodds asks us to examine our apparently species level suicidal tendencies. Why is it that we engage in a knowing and continuing willingness to foul our own nests at the risk of ending the human experience? This point is most explicitly framed when Dodds quotes the first psychoanalyst to explore environmental degradation change from a psychoanalytic perspective, Harold Searles (1972, p. 366):

Is not the general apathy in the face of pollution a statement that there is something so unfulfilling about the quality of human life that we react, essentially, as though our lives are not worth fighting to save?

As a psychoanalyst Dodds is, as we all are, a victim of his own weltanschauung. Perhaps, unconscious denial and mechanisms of self-defense are not necessary to understand our species' conundrum. A cursory knowledge of cognitive psychology informs us that hedonism and a strong tendency to discount the future may be adequate to explain our suicidal tendencies. But Dodds asks more.

Dodds asks us to examine the intricacies of French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari creations of "ecosophy and "geophilosophy." This attempt

to merge the human with the natural, a classic almost Marxian alienation argument, results in what is labeled “becoming-animal.” This process of “becoming” attempts to imbed humans in a web of organic recognition. This is a recognition of our evolutionary origins that defies naïve beliefs in our civilizing tendencies and instead asks us to accept, “... that true psychological health requires a restoration of our ecological vision, the rediscovery of a joyful connection with the animal less burdened by the weight of Oedipal meaning, and an opening up of the becoming-wild, the becoming-ecological of Freud’s domesticated, discontented civilization” (p. 146).

Dodds’ argument is enriched by an unusual but enjoyable exploration of the horror genre in both film and book. This is a fear of the “other” this “alien” that dark specter of our dreams that is forgotten when the dreamer awakes and the light (in its incandescent form) emerges to once again defend against those unthinkable terrors. Climatic change is just one, but perhaps the critical one of these unthinkable horrors. But we are a consuming and acquisitive animal. We are taken in by the very “civilized” desires of comfort and convenience that resolve the minute but threaten tomorrow.

The result of Dodds’ efforts is a “nonlinear ecops psychoanalysis.” that combines the “scientific apparatus of complexity theory” with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. This “meta-perspective” connects the “various levels of mind, brain, society, ecology and climate” that “allow a joined-up thinking on the topic of climate change and the psychological dimensions of the ecological crisis” (p. 159).

The obvious and natural response to Dodds’ hope must consider the relative evolution of our species. Dodds clearly sees the problem as exacerbated by the emotional immaturity of humanity with its “maturity” in technological development. This is an argument somewhat akin to those of evolutionary psychologists claiming that stone-age brains are unprepared for modern complexity. Yet, people need both challenge and support for psychological sustenance. The challenge of the climate crisis may be apparent even to the less informed among us. The larger question becomes the support people have for coping with a reality that may require changes to the modern project that pacifies the human condition. It is not clear how Dodds’ project becomes democratized such that the great mass of followers sees sacrifice as value.

This book has much to offer scholars from across the many disciplines that constitute the readership of this journal. Dodds’ implied request that we examine our own suicidal tendencies may activate the amygdala but it must lead to more than just emotional excitation. The post excitatory response requires consistency and work that lacks drama. The push and pull of economic models of development, that are environmentally exploitative and appealing to a less comfortable mass of humanity, may too be seen as evolutionary products, if not salubrious adaptations.

Dodds’ book is consistent with a stream of work that asks us to rethink our view that humans are special. Works such as John McGraw’s, *Brain and Belief* (2004) and Simon Critchley’s, *Book of Dead Philosophers* (2009) ask us

to accept our “creatureliness.” Perhaps, this recognition of our evolutionary origins may diminish the desires for wealth, power and status that serve to treat the earth as a vessel for ego gratification rather than as our only residence. Mature students in fields ranging from psychology to ecology to the complexity sciences will find this book of value.

REFERENCES

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