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Title

Encountering the Phenomenon of Evil in Existential Depth Psychology

Abstract for

Keynote

Abstract

This presentation provides a brief description of what I call “existential depth psychology” (Diamond, 1996, 2024) and how it can be clinically helpful in comprehending and dealing with the devastating phenomena of both human and natural evil. I consider confronting the existential problem of evil an unmet need in both the education and training of most current psychotherapists, including existential therapists. The ubiquitous problem of evil has always been an ultimate concern for religion, theology, and philosophy; but, until recently, was deliberately circumvented by contemporary psychiatry and psychology. Evil, however, is far more than a theological or philosophical concern: it is an archetypal or universal inescapable existential fact of life. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) grappled, albeit obliquely, with the psychology of evil in his controversial theories of the unconscious, id, and Thanatos (the death instinct). Alfred Adler (1870-1937), whose prescient pre-Freudian focus on power and aggression (see Diamond, 1996)--combined with the seminal writings of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) on the shadow (1961, 1968) and those of Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Rank (1884-1939) regarding the central role of “will” in human evil—eventually inspired Rollo May to become a psychologist and psychoanalyst and to more existentially and deeply explore the reality of evil, culminating in his revolutionary conception of the "daimonic" (see May, 1969; Diamond, 1996, 2021, 2024). Evil is an inescapable existential fact of life. We avoid consciously acknowledging, naming, and confronting the terrifying facticity of evil and its catastrophic consequences at our own peril. Ways of conceptualizing and therapeutically addressing the all-too-pervasive existential reality of evil in therapy will be described and discussed.

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