

Daimon and psyche: Ethical reflections on a numinous marriage

Cécile Rozuel

*****Pre-publication copy*****

Published in 2013 in the *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 5(3), pp.211-225

Abstract: The daimon captures the irresistible attraction and danger of the unconscious. When the daimon calls, we are faced with a choice: to work with it or to refuse its call. Either way, the decision is ours, and so is our responsibility for whatever ensues. In this paper, I discuss the moral dimensions of a daimonic encounter and the implications it has for conscious behaviour. In particular, I contend that the paradoxical qualities of the daimon, and its profound effects on our existence, support the moral imperative of honest psychological work.

Keywords: daimon; soul; imagination; ethical choices; moral responsibility; consciousness

Introduction

Save for a few hard-core defenders of a narrowly rational worldview, most of us would admit that there are only so many certainties we can have as to how the human mind and body function, let alone certainties about how our natural environment functions and how we mutually interact with one another. We have acquired much knowledge but, as Socrates said, we have also discovered how little we actually know about things. We understand better some of the mechanisms that affect the body, the brain, the psyche and living organisms, but the mysteries of life, the magic of the living animate still somewhat escapes us. This magical, uncertain, unbounded, irrational domain is where daimons live.

This paper intends to outline different perceptions and manifestations of daimons, with a view to assessing the state of our moral responsibility when we found ourselves under a daimonic spell. This is no small task because daimons are essentially ambiguous, ambivalent and shape-changers (Harpur, 1994). Further, daimons are not real or factual in the rational sense; rather, they are real imaginatively, and they manifest through the soul and the unconscious. For Patrick Harpur (1994), it would be as ludicrous to believe that daimons are literally real (i.e. exist in the physical reality we rationally apprehend) as it would be to assume they have no existence whatsoever except in the mind of a few lunatics. The best approach, Harpur reckons, is to endorse the view that reality is made up of multiple perspectives, one of which is rational and scientific (Apollonian), whilst another is daimonic, imaginative and otherworldly (Hermetic). In that purview, I will discuss daimons *as if* they are real entities (which they are, of course, in their own reality). Doing so, I do not suggest that daimons are to be found literally next door; rather, I infer that when we experience a daimonic encounter, it feels like the daimon has stepped into the rational world (it is real) but has kept its hermetic essence (it does not belong to objective reality, nor does it obey its rules). In a sense, the daimonic world is the shadow of our rational world – or, perhaps more accurately, our rational world is the shadow of the daimonic world.

Daimons are usually analysed as myths or archetypal soul-images (Harpur, 1994). As myths, daimons manifest externally and take the form of apparitions or otherworldly creatures; as archetypes, daimons cross the threshold between unconscious and consciousness to instil dreams or desires into our personal psyche. Thus, daimons potentially affect human minds and bodies in a significant fashion, but we cannot control them since they are elusive, do not belong to anyone, and do not even reside in our physical reality. The daimon just is – it is simply living, and it ‘simply acts’ (Wilford, 1965, p. 218). This means that we are affected by a force that itself does not obey human rules. Then, what of our moral responsibility? If not all of our decisions and actions are ours, if we are part of a greater scheme that somehow influences our choices in accordance with decisions made before birth, or hailed from impervious unconscious depths, then what are we really responsible and accountable for? If the decisions I think I make myself are in fact suggested by a daimon, am I still to bear responsibility for them? What is the extent of my moral responsibility when the daimonic manifests itself in my life?

The following discussion will propose some answers to these questions. Although the daimonic world has been discussed and explored by authors and artists, and whilst daimons' ambiguity is broadly recognised, the moral implications of daimonic influence on conscious ethical behaviours have not been systematically examined. In what follows, I contend that apprehending the daimonic realm is all the more crucial as the moral turmoil we experience because of (or thanks to?) the daimon shakes the foundations of moral identity. It might be better advised to consciously engage with the daimonic, however scary and dangerous, than to let it possess us without participating consciousness.

In the next section, I will review some of the definitions of the daimonic, before exploring the most recurrent roles attributed to the daimon through times, drawing from a variety of sources. This review, far from exhaustive, aims to outline the various facets of daimons, in literature and academic studies alike. The last two sections examine the moral dimension of the daimon, looking first at daimonic manifestations in general, before turning to the demonic and angelic aspects of the daimon more precisely.

Defining the Elusive Daimon

Daimon (Δαίμων in Greek), also spelt daemon, has a troubled history. Pronounced almost similarly to the feared demon, the word *daimon* has suffered much prejudice since the advent of Christianity and the Church's willingness to supersede pagan or polytheistic beliefs with Christian rituals. Later on, the rise of rationalism further discredited imagination as a source of knowledge, sending daimons back into the shadows, unacknowledged and unrevered (Harpur, 1994). Collected essays, written in the eighteenth century, examining the correlations between daimon and demon are a good example of how the sacred nature of the daimon was slowly discarded to focus solely on its dark side (see Anonymous, 2009). Yet, Lucifer, the fallen angel, is a good representation of a daimon, because its demonic qualities exist in correlation with its angelic nature. He is both, and he could be neither had he not chosen to identify consciously with one end of the spectrum. We could also argue, in a compensatory manner, that human beings needed Lucifer to carry for them their demonic side.

The daimon is very difficult to define for it belongs to the liminal world (Wilford, 1965; Sánchez, 2007). Daimons are 'intermediate beings' connecting inferior human beings with the higher Gods or Spirits. They are mythical and archetypal, not merely psychological. They are 'capricious and whimsical' (Harpur, 1994, p. 62). They are ethereal beings, both personal companions and impersonal energy. They can merge with the universal as well as influence the individual. Daimons are thus essentially hermetic: they act as messengers between worlds. They are also essentially numinous, but rarely in a deified or personified manner. Yet, daimons often appear to us as personified (though not anthropomorphised) living entities with distinguished characteristics – some of which make sense, some of which do not (Harpur, 1994). They are not just what we picture them to be, but that is how the rational ego perceives them.

We encounter the daimonic most commonly in our dreams and in our lived experiences. Poets William Blake or W.B. Yeats found manifestations of the daimon in Nature. Daimons trigger images, physically sensitive reactions, emotional outbursts or spiritual transformations. Eros is called a daimon by Diotima, Socrates's teacher in the *Symposium*, hence the erotic flavour of many daimonic images. Since Freud links Eros with Thanatos, it is not surprising that the erotic content of the daimonic is often accompanied by disturbing images of violence and cruelty that leave us profoundly shaken (Dennis, 2001). Daimons thus escape easy definitions and classifications. As F.A. Wilford said – they just live. They just are.

Daimons are closely related to the soul. They are not souls, for instance the souls of the departed. Daimons are of another essence – they are ethereal beings that may be attached to one incarnated (human beings) but are not defined by that incarnated attachment. For James Hillman, a daimon is an 'individualized soul-image' (1996, p. 10). It seems the daimon connects with us best through the soul, perhaps reflects the soul as carrier of archetypes in Jung's tradition. The daimon is also 'chthonic', that is a spirit of the earth with dual qualities: creation and animation of the human, or evil deeds and ruthless destruction (Jung, 1953/1968, par. 539).

Hillman (1996) views the daimon as that which calls us, that which manifests as vocational commitment and further shapes the character of a person. He describes that call – and the daimon – as follow:

The Romans named it your *genius*; the Greeks, your *daimon*; and the Christians your guardian angel. The Romantics, like Keats, said the call came from the heart, and Michelangelo's intuitive eye saw an image in the heart of the person he was sculpting. The Neoplatonists referred to an imaginal body, the *ochema*, that carried you like a vehicle. It was your personal bearer or support. For some it is Lady Luck or Fortuna; for others a genie or jinn, a bad seed or evil genius. In Egypt, it might have been the *ka*, or the *ba* with whom you could converse. Among the people we refer to as Eskimos and others who follow shamanistic practices, it is your spirit, your free-soul, your animal-soul, your breath-soul. (p. 9)

Hillman further explains the presence and influence of the daimon in a human life:

Each life is formed by its unique image, an image that is the essence of that life and calls it to a destiny. As the force of fate, this image acts as a personal daimon, an accompanying guide who remembers your calling.... The daimon motivates. It protects. It invents and persists with stubborn fidelity. It resists compromising reasonableness and often forces deviance and oddity upon its keeper, especially when it is neglected or opposed. It offers comfort and can pull you into its shell, but cannot abide innocence. It can make the body ill. It is out of step with time, finding all sorts of faults, gaps, and knots in the flow of life – and it prefers them. It has affinities with myth, since it is itself a mythical being and thinks in mythical patterns. (p. 39)

Hillman suggests what Susan Lee Dennis (2001) affirms: the daimon is embodied, just as our soul is embodied and makes us who we are, the 'I' who thinks and the 'self' that reflects. It is worth pointing out that these two writers differ in their respective project: Hillman's focus is on the archetypal dimension of the daimon, and its subsequent influence on an individual life; whereas Dennis discusses the physical or psychological 'traces' left by the daimon. Nevertheless, both suggest that the daimon can establish an intimate connection with the individual psyche, which is often felt intensely, and may affect the physical body or the physical environment.

Since my purpose is to investigate the moral implications of such intimate connections, it is relevant to rely primarily on accounts of personal daimonic experiences (such as vocation, as discussed by Hillman, or images that affect the body, as discussed by Dennis). Harpur's overview of daimons (1994) is more comprehensive, and states that daimons do not necessarily attach themselves to individual human souls. Some daimonic encounters are brief and occasional (such as an encounter with fairies, UFOs or other mythical creatures). Other daimons become personal daimons, guides, guardians or trouble-makers (probably all at once), just like Jung's Philemon. Harpur comments on Yeats' recalling of his own personal daimon: 'It is a hard taskmaster, instilling in us the desire to perform the most difficult deeds possible for us, stretching us to the limit. The relationship is thus ambivalent: we feel both enmity and love for our daimon who, we notice, both "delivers and deceives us."' (1994, p. 40).

This ambiguity or ambivalence is the most noticeable characteristic of the daimon. Daimonic images often stir up the repressed, the ugly, the violent, the brutally sexual, all that which the conscious mind rejects out of social conformity and fear of its own destruction (Dennis, 2001). Here is the trick: in our disgust also lies fascination, envy for the darkest. For Dennis, this ambivalence of the daimon enables real soul work that changes us deeply, if we let it change us. Dennis believes our fear of the daimon comes from our one-sided attitude towards the unconscious: all that is dark and painful is rejected; all that is bright and sweet is celebrated. This rejection of the shadow is also characteristic of the 'old ethic' discussed by Erich Neumann (1969/1990). The ego seemingly wants *coniunctio* without *nigredo*, aspiring to union without initial tension and dissolution, aspiring to life without accepting the necessarily counterpart that is death. That is not possible, for then we, as conscious human beings, fail to live. This is when engaging with the daimon may bring forth a deeper appreciation of the natural cycle of life: the daimon knows the inherent duality of all living things because it belongs to the liminal world: it understands living means dying, and death means life. It understands no life is devoid of pain, for in pain one finds the essence of life. Rather, it seeks meaning in life and death. The daimon asks us to confront life as it is, to live fully. But that is no easy task.

Role(s) of the Daimon

As mentioned earlier, the imaginative realm is vast and encompasses many different sorts of daimons. Some of them are helpful spirits, some of them are demonic, most of them are equally capable of harm and support. My aim in this paper is merely to examine the moral effect of daimons onto our conscious choices and subsequent responsibility. I will therefore focus on those daimons that interact directly and deliberately with human beings, and explore the moral dimension of those interactions. In what follows, I outline four major roles of the daimon in relation to conscious development and human achievements, building upon and contrasting various relevant reflections on daimonic dynamics (see Table 1).

Daimon as Projection

Looking at Homeric tales, Wilford identifies three main roles ascribed to the daimon: it can possess an individual psyche, i.e. take over the ego of the human being who no longer is 'his normal self, and is said to resemble some supernatural power – and is indeed fully in the grip of that power'; it can shape events, make things happen or not happen by intervening or interfering with external circumstances; or it can pervade the human psyche, operating 'internally upon the individual's thoughts or feelings' (1965, p. 221). Either way, the daimon is powerful and not to be trusted entirely: it has its own daimonic agenda, whilst mortals are often depicted as means to its ends. Wilford suggests, like Carolina Sanabria Sing (1995), that daimons traditionally served as external projections of psychic content (either literally as being outside of self, or as acting as 'other' within self). Darkness or viciousness (for instance, the enjoyment of evil-doing) and moral responsibility (through socially desirable traits such as courage, resilience, commitment) are both projected onto an external agent, the daimon, who is viewed as the instigator of perversion and moral flaws in human beings. So we say: it is not I who delights in violence; it is the daimon who makes me do, feel, think so. It is not our fault we came unprepared for the battle; it was the daimon who blocked the roads, made the seas roar and blurred the mind of our leaders.

Wilford (1965, p. 227) argues that the internalisation of the daimonic and its subsequent disappearance in mythical tales illustrates a natural process of psychic development. This is not unlike what the 'early Jung' would have argued: Jung initially assimilated daimons with complexes, although he later adopted a broader understanding of daimons as manifestations of an external reality as substantial as the collective unconscious (Harpur, 1994). In Wilford's analysis, though, human beings needed daimons onto which they could project their unconscious thoughts; as consciousness grew, however, they reintegrated what was always theirs and the daimon lost its place in epic writings: 'In its day, the concept of δαίμων had had great usefulness, as it enabled the speaker to account for the unaccountable without much thought, but at the same time it was an uncomfortable neighbour. Its action was always sporadic, mysterious and irrational, and since it was neither circumscribed by cult nor accessible to prayer, no one ever made sacrifice to it or gave it a myth.' Anthropomorphised gods and goddesses seemed more approachable than daimons,

who nevertheless remained in the liminal world and carried the shadow of the bright Olympians.

Wilford (1965, p. 229) notes that from a moral perspective, accepting the daimon as an inner reality is harder than ascribing power to Olympian deities, for in the latter case ‘a great burden of self-responsibility was thus avoided. The gods were still ultimately responsible.’ On the other hand, when the daimon is called home and reintegrates the psyche, we become aware of the shadow aspects of our personality, and have to face accountability for *all that we are* – not just the praised qualities of character, but also the ugly and repressed, what makes us human (that is, individuate in a Jungian sense). Harpur (1994, pp. 87-90) somewhat disagrees with Wilford’s conclusion, arguing that interpreting daimons as mere psychological projections is too narrow. Instead, he advocates that we learn to grasp the ‘daimonic order of reality which lies behind the merely literal’ (p. 89). Daimons may act as mirrors for our repressed unconscious, but they also have a reality of their own.

Daimon as Creative Principle

Abel Posse’s novel *Daimon* (1992), inspired by real-life character Lope de Aguirre during the Spanish Conquest of South America, provides an interesting illustration of the ambiguous social and psychological function of the daimon. Through their analysis of the novel, Alejandro Hermosilla Sánchez (2007) and Carolina Sanabria Sing (1995) both examine the place of the daimon in the Church’s endeavour to promote social conformity. In Christian orthodoxy, the daimon became demon in an attempt to exonerate human beings from natural evilness. A political as well as liturgical move from part of a Church in need of popular support, the birth of the daimon as demon also changed our relationship to Nature and to ourselves (which has led to a greater split in the psyche of ‘modern man’ – Neumann, 1969/1990, p. 97). Beliefs, behaviours, feelings that differed from the exegesis were condemned as heretical and demonic thereafter. The daimon was split into two: the inspiring, creative aspect was simplified and projected onto angels, whilst the equally creative but scary darkness was literalised and demonised (see also Harpur, 1994, pp.51-56; Jong, 2004). Furthermore, the daimon became source of abnormality, in the sense of deviance from prevalent social norms. Sanabria Sing (1995, p. 54) makes a convincing argument that the demonic label of daimonic manifestations merely purported to maintain cohesion and control within the community. To follow the daimon meant to act as an individual outside the bounds of normal community behaviour. The liminal daimon has no problem with marginalisation; the authority, however, sees it as a threat. This, of course, echoes Jung’s concern about the numbing power of the masses, and his insistence on distinguishing moral conscience from ethical conscience (Jung, 1964/1970). Sanabria Sing explains further:

In itself, the daimon is paradoxical, holding a conflict, a tension between the principle of pain, that is, sacrifice, duty, sin, guilt – residual from Christianity – and the principle of pleasure, want, rebellion against order: those principles co-exist, since we cannot explain the presence of one without the other, since for pleasure to be (pleasure of

treason, pleasure to oppose or transgress any norms), it is necessary to overcome a state of ill-being, an anxiety. (1995, p. 55)¹

Thus, the daimon acts as a mirror image of our terrible human potential – terrible because of its violence and thirst for destruction; terrible because it is inescapable. It is us, if only we chose to look at our self closely. Of course, just because the daimon is demonic does not condemn us to act demonically. Rather, in its own strange way, the daimon offers us ways to live fully here and now. For Sanabria Sing (1995, p. 57), ‘the daimon is the impulse that encourages man to know himself, that pushes towards a wisdom of the human’². The daimon remains, in its demonic form, a ‘creative principle’, both a divine-like life-force and an ethical conscience informing our subjectivity on how to be individuals transcending traditional boundaries of Good and Evil. In other words, confrontation with the destructive powers that lay in ourselves enables us to become fully human and truly alive. It can be added that it also paves the way for moral growth, for what can be named and understood can then be integrated and transformed both alchemically and psychologically.

The creative spark that reveals individuality and meaning is better represented by a daimon who is ‘instinctive, Dionysian, rejuvenating’ (Hermosilla Sánchez, 2007, p. 57). In that purview, finding ourselves means looking past the chaos, and engaging with the daimon to expand consciousness of the soul. Hermasilla Sánchez captures the role of the daimonic:

Unstable, individual, subjective, fleeting, dark, nocturne, disorganised, irrational, incomprehensible, anti-psychological, thus is the daimon of each person....Thus is each life if we look at it through the lies of the many human perspectives. Incomprehensible. Unthinkable. Life is a miracle. And only forces that can trigger a deep, grounded belief movement towards the magical, a re-creation of the divine power breaking through the rusted layers of human territory, are able to assist us through our suffocating and scary life journey³ (2007, p. 59-60).

In other words, the daimon demands that we know ourselves, that we find our individual truth in the cosmic order and thus live fully, humanely. To get what it wants (that is, that each person affirms herself in her individuality), the daimon becomes Trickster: a

¹ In the original text: ‘Por ello, el daimón es paradójico, encierra una pugna, una tensión entre el principio del dolor, es decir, del sacrificio, del deber, del pecado, de la culpabilidad – residuo del Cristianismo – y entre el principio del placer, del querer, de la rebelión al orden : principios que coexisten, sin que se pueda explicar la presencia del uno sin el otro, porque para que exista placer (de traicionar, de oponerse, de toda transgresión a la norma), es necesario que haya un malestar, una angustia que sean superados.’

² In the original text: ‘...el daimón es la pulsión que empuja al hombre a un conocimiento de sí, a una sabiduría de lo humano.’

³ In the original text: ‘Inestable, individual, subjetivo, fugaz, oscuro, nocturne, desordenado, irracional, incomprendible, antipsicológico, así es el daimón de cada persona....Así es cada una de nuestras vidas si la miramos bajo la mentira de las diversas perspectivas humanas. Incomprendible. Impensable. La vida es un milagro. Y sólo las fuerzas que pueden generar un movimiento subterráneo de creencia en lo maravilloso, de recreación del poder divino tras la capa de herrumbre del territorio del hombre, pueden auxiliar a éste en su afixiante y temeroso recorrido por la vida.’

player, a seducer, a tyrant, all at once in service of psychic awareness, recognition and integration.

Daimon as Destiny

Hillman's daimon shares much with the ambiguously creative and liberating daimon of Abel Posse analysed by Sanabria Sing and Hermosilla Sánchez. Yet, for Hillman, the daimon possesses a prescience which does not transpire in the above accounts. The daimon does not create the specifics of our destiny, but only ensures that the essence of the life is duly incarnated. Hillman discards fatalism to offer a daimon which is there to remind us *what* and *how* we are meant to be. The rest is up to us, and we are accountable to ourselves first and foremost when engaging with the daimon's call.

Although Hillman adopts an archetypal view, he appears to suggest that the daimon becomes personified when it encounters the conscious ego, although it remains a shape-shifter. Hillman explains that the daimon helps us reveal what the acorn contains. Each of us, at birth, in the soul, carries an acorn which is nurtured into maturity by our conscious choices (more or less informed, more or less enlightened) and by the daimon's disturbance. Our life is the result of an underlying, occasionally erratic but meaningful force, mixed with our conscious quest for purpose and directions. Children intuitively engage with the daimon, claims Hillman, before most become too socialised to perceive it clearly. Whatever the daimon is, though, it always 'stands in dignity' (1996, p. 27). The daimon stimulates, it 'disturbs the heart, it bursts out in a temper...it excites, calls, demands – but rarely does it offer a grand purpose' (Hillman, 1996, p. 197). The purpose probably unfolds as we make choices and forge our character. For Hillman, it is the gift of Ananke, the goddess of Necessity (p. 208). The meaning of life and the essence of our daimon become what they are as Necessity arises.

That life 'can be foreordained yet not foretold' captures well the nature of the daimon (Hillman, 1996, p. 210). It makes sense of the paradoxical, extreme and unreliable interventions of the daimon – the daimon knows but we do not, at least not right away. Only after pondering on events can we see the pattern emerge, though there is no guarantee that the pattern will stay the same in the future. To let the pattern emerge as it is meant to, without influencing our choices constantly, is the daimon's challenge. This may be why the daimonic realm is so extreme: it must rely on profoundly disturbing images or events to kick our goal-oriented ego-consciousness. In other words, we are generally so absorbed by our pragmatic aspirations that we would miss the hints if the daimon did not use persuasive means to catch our attention, or more radically to push us onto another path entirely. The daimon does not have to be violent; indeed, its interventions can be ever so subtle. The constant is that the daimon acts out of its own accord, not to please ours. The daimon surprises, and what it brings forth ranges from a minor disruption of our plans to a major shift in our life circumstances. We cannot know ahead of time, and that is what life is made of. We may still make plans, influencing what we can indeed influence and control ourselves; however, the daimon warns that not everything is in our control – 'Touch wood'.

Daimon as Guiding Conscience

Socrates's daimon differs in important ways from Hillman's. Famously mentioned in Socrates's *Apology*, this daimon epitomises a benevolent spiritual guide (Plato, 2002). Socrates explains to the jury of Athenian citizens, who will condemn him to death, that the gods have gifted him with a daimon who provides him with moral guidance. If the daimon does not manifest itself, Socrates explains, it is that whatever he does is good from the daimon's viewpoint. If Socrates were to take some ill-advised action, then the daimon would say 'No'. The daimon of Socrates, in contrast with the previous daimons, is both more morally involved and less interfering. It only acts to prevent wrong-doing, but otherwise lets the individual make choices as to what good conduct consists in. The Socratic daimon is concerned with mindfulness of the virtuous life, although the inner work required to develop such mindfulness is akin to the purpose of life, to a lived virtuousness within the specifics of our individuality.

In his *Tale of Er* provided at the end of *The Republic* (1987), Plato offers yet another story about daimons. He describes daimons being allocated to human souls before each soul chooses a life. The daimon's role thereafter is to remember the content of the chosen life because the soul would have forgotten it all when it incarnates. The daimon is a guide, but not necessarily a guardian to the extent suggested by Socrates (even though it is debatable what the daimon guards: our moral integrity, our spiritual direction, our good character?). What matters, apparently, is that we live through what we have chosen to experience, for some wisely, for others too rashly. The daimon assists us in living life fully, perhaps so that the soul becomes wiser and more virtuous with each incarnation. We can suspect that Plato's idea of Fate is somewhat more directive than Hillman's reading of Necessity; nevertheless, the daimon acts upon human life because it knows what we do not know, or what we do not recall. It knows the essence of our life and its mission is to see that this individual essence emerges as it should.

Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* plays with the idea of daimons (spelt daemons) as incarnated soul companions. Contrary to Abel Posse's novel or many other literary accounts of daimonic manifestations, where the latter are mostly implied or metaphorical, Pullman chose to literally personify and incarnate the daimons. By bringing the daimons into the real, rational world, Pullman provides us with interesting material to reflect on the degree of intimacy between ego-consciousness, human soul and personal daimon. Daimons here more obviously display characteristics of conscience, although they remain ambiguous characters. In the imaginary, alternative world in which Lyra (the heroine) lives, people see, touch and talk aloud with their daimons, which take the shape of animals. During childhood, the daimon is shape-shifting, but adolescence and coming-of-age make the daimon choose a shape for life. The daimon displays both similar and complementary qualities to its human counterpart, and is of the opposite gender: for instance, Lyra's mother, Mrs Coulter, is an extremely beautiful but cold-hearted woman. Her daimon is a beautiful but extremely cruel male golden-coloured monkey. The daimon reveals more about the true

nature of someone’s character than first impressions. It goes beyond role-play for it knows all that the person is.

The novels suggest that we each possess a daimon, though in some worlds (notably our ‘real’ world) the daimon lies inside rather than outside of the human body. The characters discover their daimon when they step into the imaginative world. Furthermore, the connection between human being and his or her daimon/soul is itself source of energy, sufficient, for Pullman, to open windows to other worlds. Over the course of the novels, the daimons mature, develop as their human companions discover inner strengths, make mistakes and become adults. The daimon’s transition from shape-shifter to fixed form symbolises the development of individuality, in the sense of learning to discover who you actually are. Robert Sardello (2004, p. 67) believes we learn thanks to the daimon, and in turn, that we are able to teach what we are when we live in harmony with the daimon: ‘Those who more fully allow themselves to be inhabited by their daemon, who no longer seek to control and keep it repressed but take on the vocation of developing it, are true teachers.’ So the daimon is a teacher in self-exploration, who demands we engage with what lies deep within ourselves in our own individual way, unrestrained by limitative social norms. No wonder we view the daimon as subversively demonic: it unashamedly calls for a different order of life, one that is more meaningful but less conservative.

Table 1. Various roles of the daimon

	Role/Nature	Origin/Interpretation	Moral Facets
Daimon as...	Projection	Psychological	Potentially negative and destructive, impersonal and unattached, compensatory
	Creative principle (generating life)	Psychological, social	Morally ambiguous, mostly impersonal, liberating, excessive and transforming
	Destiny, Fate	Archetypal, mythological	Quasi-amoral, individually meaningful and expressive, imperious
	Conscience, guiding principle	Psychological, spiritual/soul	Morally grounded, reflective, soul-incarnated, mirror of the self

Manifestations of Daimons and the Daimonic

I have reviewed in the preceding paragraphs several manifestations of the daimonic. I now wish to discuss more specifically the inner experience of being confronted with daimonic demands, before analysing our moral responses towards it. Usually, the experience is scary and leaves us shaken. It is possibly as difficult an experience as a confrontation with our shadow, for both shadow and daimon unveil aspects of the self we’d rather ignore (Neumann, 1969/1990). With work, patience and compassion, we can nevertheless engage with the

daimon in a more constructive manner. Jung praised meditation and imaginative works as tools to enable a better relationship with the daimon.

For alchemists, says Jung, '[t]he word *meditatio* is used when a man has an inner dialogue with someone unseen. It may be with God, when He is invoked, or with himself, or with his good angel'; as for imagination, it is 'a concentrated extract of the life forces, both physical and psychic' that allows the alchemist to relate to the essence of life and nature for true transformation (Jung, 1953/1968, par. 394). Alchemical work is psychological work, and must go beyond 'mere cogitation', instead establishing 'explicitly an inner dialogue and hence a living relationship to the answering voice of the "other" in ourselves, i.e., of the unconscious' (Jung, 1953/1968, par. 394). The daimon is that voice we hear when we turn inwards. Jung then urges us to establish a dialogue with it, even if the task is difficult. The daimon, as we have seen, does not concern itself with social conventions or normality – it just is. Thus, the demands it makes are potentially life-changing. This, understandably, generates anxiety. Nevertheless, the daimon, as seducer or tyrant, is a creative force unravelling our life and our death.

The daimon manifests itself in surprising ways. Hillman (1996) suggests that lack of adaptation to traditional institutions (especially school), fantasy writings or rewritings of one's life, disguise and double-lives, nicknames, are all instances of the daimonic, of something striving for expression beyond the social identity of the individual. In practice, the daimonic energy has deep physical or physiological implications, which in turn affect our emotions. The daimon stirs our passions and makes us live with intensity. When we feel a surge of enthusiasm for something, that's probably the daimon. When we hate someone passionately, that's also the daimon. When we feel cravings or urges of appetites (for food, for alcohol or drugs, for sex, for violence, for learning), that's very likely the daimon. Hillman states: '[The daimon] has much to do with feelings of uniqueness, of grandeur and with the restlessness of the heart, its impatience, its dissatisfaction, its yearning' (1996, p. 40).

This does not imply we are all destined for an exceptional life. Hillman suggests the daimon does not think in terms of star-quality, exemplarity or mediocrity. Rather, it is concerned with *how* we embrace its energy. In fact: 'For many the call is to keep the light under a bushel, to be in service to the middle way, to join the rank-and-file. It is the call to human harmony. It refuses to identify individuality with eccentricity.' (Hillman, 1996, p. 253). Thus, a life lived in a daimonic way is in no way demonic. It is more intensely real, individual and meaningful, providing our psyche participates in the process. This is a fine balancing act between unconscious surges and conscious surrendering, which Dennis grounds in body awareness. The *unio mentalis* (that is, the psychological work towards integration) must be supported by '*unio corporalis*' (that is, an emphasis on the embodied integration of the daimonic images). For Dennis (2001, p. 78) this means 'we must immerse ourselves in the very irrationality of sensation and feeling....This deep acceptance of the validity of the daimonic promptings toward the feelings and the body is the necessary precondition for bodily integration.'

The daimon prompts us with images and feelings we often reject out of disgust and fear. It may act like the shadow (especially when it uses the channel of the ‘Voice’ to suggest the ego to do things that are judged reprehensible – Neumann, 1969/1990, p. 105), but it is more complex and autonomous than the shadow archetype. In darkness lies the numinous potential of the daimon, transcending the social boundaries of goodness and acceptability. The process of integrating the daimon is transformational in many ways, not least in terms of moral behaviour. Our intuitive and perceptive moral knowledge can develop if we learn to accept images as they are for what they are – instead of either succumbing to and identifying with them; or rejecting and censoring them. For Dennis: ‘if we can allow ourselves to feel the beauty in the beast; that is, if we can locate the daimon’s libidinous pull – that pleasure amid the tension – it offers a key to unlocking its potential and can serve as a hook that draws us to the frightening, strange sensations and their images’, at which point the daimon can be redeemed (2001, p. 118).

The work cannot be done unless ego-consciousness relaxes its grips on the psyche. But then, of course, we make ourselves vulnerable to daimonic, and possibly demonic, impulses. We may destroy and be destroyed. Working with the daimon usually means we accord with our soul, but couldn’t we lose our soul in the process instead? How can we know? When is the daimon a demon? Are we predestined for a morally virtuous life or a viciously destructive existence? What can we learn from the daimon in moral terms? In the last section, I will reflect on how we can maintain moral integrity when working with the daimonic.

Daimonic and Demonic: Ethics and Life

Daimons do not fall into rigid categories of ‘good’ or ‘evil’. Hillman stresses the amorality of daimons in the Roman tradition. Citing the work of Jane Chance Nietzsche on the Roman genius, Hillman explains that the genius or daimon ‘held no moral sanction over the individual... [but] was merely an agent of personal luck or fortune’ (1996, p. 9). And yet, the daimon is a moral character. The Greek virtue of *eudaimonia* (‘happiness’ in most modern translations) implies that a happy life is a life that pleases the daimon, says Hillman (1996, p. 83). He goes further: ‘The man who has lost his angel becomes demonic; and the absence, the anger, and the paralysis on the couch are all symptoms of the soul in search of a lost call to something other and beyond’ (p. 82). And more: ‘Demonism arises, not because of supposed or actual sexual dysfunction, but because of the dysfunctional relation with the daimon. We strive to fulfil its vision fully, refusing to be restrained by our human limitations – in other words, we develop megalomania’ (p. 240).

What Hillman suggests, it seems, is that the daimon turns demonic only when ego-consciousness fails to engage with it properly. Harpur (1994) agrees: when ignored, the daimon turns demon; when let loose, the daimon turns demon. It is part of its nature, for it demands to be acknowledged as it judges appropriate. But when engaged with in a conscious,

open-minded manner, then the daimon is wonderfully daimonic. It is the door to a soulful life. Thus, says Hillman, it is best to adapt our behaviour to the daimon, because everything we do relates to the daimon (1996, p. 260). The daimon, thus, is neither amoral, nor immoral. It has moral potential, but it must be matched with a right behaviour and a right psychological attitude. Socrates’s daimon was not demonic because Socrates had worked through his own behaviour and his own psyche to receive the wisdom of his ethereal guide. Had Socrates scorned or doubted this voice that spoke to him when he was about to do wrong, he might have felt his wise daimon turn demonic for want of being heard properly. And yet, either way, only Socrates bore the full responsibility for his actions. The daimon cannot be blamed for what it makes us do, because it does not make us do anything. We always choose to listen to the daimon or to ignore it. The daimon simply reminds us, in all sorts of ways, what individuals we are.

Table 2. A typology of encounters with the daimon.

		Human	
		Good/Strong/Grounded Psyche	Bad/Weak/Ungrounded Psyche
Daimon	Good/Engaging Essence	‘Genius’ – great achievements for humankind (e.g. in arts, politics) or non-extraordinary life well and fully lived (<i>eudaimonia</i>) **guardian angel**	Missed opportunities, sense of being unfulfilled, conscious undermining, disruptive incidents as attempts by the daimon to curb the path
	Bad/Detached Essence	Torturous episodes, struggle with invisible forces (in dreams, in visions, in instincts), potential for redemption when the daimon is channelled and tamed	Pure evil, destruction, soulless life, inhuman characters, death appeal (both inward and outward) **demon**

Table 2 shows the possible outcomes depending on the nature of the daimon, and the nature or state of the human psyche. The daimon is a creative force whose direction can occasionally be changed. Most daimons call to engage with individuality and life (albeit, in their own terms); some daimons aspire to death and detachment. The latter are the ‘bad apples’ or what Hillman describes as the ‘bad seeds’. Their potential is less appealing, less life-inducing than that of other daimons. They are detached from life-energy, closer to the demonic, whereas their engaged counterparts carry potential for extraordinary lives.

When the daimon is matched with a human soul, the state of the human psyche is likely to determine the moral content of the daimonic relationship. If the human psyche is strong, prepared and grounded, ego-consciousness will be able to cope with the daimonic energy, occasionally creating an exceptional or exemplary destiny. For others, a *eudaimon* life is a simple, truly happy, well-lived life. In this instance, our daimon may be perceived as

an actual guardian angel, although this label is perhaps too limitative to capture the daimonic essence.

Psychologically strong people who have the misfortune to connect with a detached daimon will struggle to maintain psychic integrity and not identify with the unconscious images thrown at them. In this case, there is more than ever potential for redemption: fostering daimonically creative energies rather than demonically destructive behaviours. Inner work is key, for the sake of one's soul.

A psychologically weak or fragile person, on the other hand, will encounter problems even when the daimon calls for greatness. This will be a life filled with missed opportunities, always yearning for what could have been '*if only...*'. The reasons for the unfulfilled potential may be various: the ego holding on too strongly to consciousness; the daimon asking for too much too soon, scaring the ego away for good; or external circumstances that somehow corrupt the psyche in spite of the daimon. The result, though, is a 'mis-lived' existence.

Finally, cases of a weak psyche meeting a detached daimon are recipes for 'evil incarnated'. We often feel or sense something missing in those people, as if they were inhuman. Examining Hitler's life as a specific example of a bad seed bursting out evil, Hillman concludes that the psyche had completely surrendered to the demon: 'Even if there is no remorse about vicious acts, there can be increased awareness about the demon that prompted them. Hitler only followed the demon, never questioned it, his mind enslaved by its imagination rather than applied to its investigation' (1996, pp. 245-246). Here stands our moral responsibility: it implies that we engage with the daimon consciously rather than blindly obeying it. Inner work involves preparing the psyche for what's coming, or rather, for *whatever* is coming. Whichever daimon we connect with, a grounded, reflective psyche is a core ingredient for *eudaimonia*. If we then have to fight off a demon, at least we will do so earnestly, consciously, earning from such fight the right to our individuality.

This exposition of the daimonic offers three main moral challenges: the task of making choices and being accountable for all of them; the challenge of facing hardships with dignity; and the necessity to act with humility and avoid ego-inflation. Each of these challenges reflects the numinous dimension of a daimonic encounter.

We will have to make critical choices both in terms of following the impulse of the daimon (with an open, engaged mind), and in terms of developing enough perceptiveness and awareness to make the most of opportunities and not miss the point of life experiences. Once choices are made, we have no choice but to accept full responsibility for them. We cannot blame fate for what we do, for who we are and how we are, since we participate in our own existence. We are accountable to ourselves for deep inner work, and accountable to the archetypal self for working with the liminal daimon. Decisions and choices bring actions and consequences that are not always to our liking. A major hardship is our death, cause of great anxiety despite its obvious marriage to life. As I have highlighted, the daimon does not try to be nice or kind, it just is. What the daimon requires from us may lie in the hardest and most

painful experiences, and we must face them with dignity. To face life with dignity implies to never relinquish soul awareness and moral responsibility to self and life.

Fatalism is a tempting philosophy when we feel like Job, but fatalists no longer participate in their own life. The daimon does not work for us and will not make things happen on our behalf. Instead, we learn to work with the daimon actively and consciously, for that is the right thing to do. We therefore have to accept with humility that the daimon has elusive power over the body and mind, and is meaning-making beyond the control of the ego. The recommended attitude when stepping into the daimonic world is that of the wise fool (Harpur, 1994, p. 246). Identification with the daimonic content does happen, and it usually ends badly for the human psyche. We must watch for ego-inflation which not only blocks healthy psychic development, but also prevents a creative dynamic from emerging between psyche and daimon. Each of these moral challenges can be addressed first and foremost, unsurprisingly, by conscious work on the psyche.

The inner work called for by the daimon is numinous in so far as it transcends ego-consciousness to seek meaning in the unconscious or imaginative reality. Psyche meets daimon, and daimon meets psyche: the encounter results in a conscious developmental opportunity that is truly and deeply meaningful for the conscious ego as well as for the daimon. Harpur (1994, p. 239) states that daimons need us ‘to give shape to their dynamic shape-shifting; to order and discriminate their chaos; to body forth their ethereal volatility; to express *their*, not the ego’s perspectives. ...It presupposes that we recognize, accommodate, and even revere them; for, if they can only know themselves through us, it is only through them that we can know our own deepest selves.’ As Jung warned (1953/1966), neglected archetypes (god-like figures, daimonic energies) have a tendency to re-emerge as psychological disorders. A healthier, and more ethically sustainable approach, would be to recognise and honour the daimons for what they are (that is, morally complex entities with Trickster qualities), and to open up to imagination so as to learn how to work with them, carefully but earnestly. Then, wholeness, autonomy and integrity pave the way for creativity and ethical transformation (Neumann, 1969/1990, p. 103).

A Hopeful Conclusion

As we bear full moral responsibility for actions at times inspired by or disturbed by the daimon, our accountability extends beyond ego-consciousness to the whole self. The daimon is what makes our life meaningful and ethically challenging. Its powers are tremendous, yet it never makes us do anything against our conscious participation. We decide to listen to that voice, or to ignore it. We make choices about how to enact what the daimon whispers. The daimon suggests, we act. The daimon is, we live. It is therefore good advice to become better acquainted with the daimon.

Hillman says we must start by acknowledging the daimon in its entirety, ‘admitting that the acorn, even as Bad Seed, is the most deeply driving motivation in life, especially in a

young life' (1996, p. 243). Then starts the process of 'growing down', that is exploring the daimon, familiarising oneself with hints and patterns of life that might express something else, something beyond the human. It means inserting time into what is a timeless realm: slowing things down, taking time to truly understand what the daimon is all about, if we ever reach that level of understanding. At least, our primary responsibility is to engage with the daimon, rather than let it enslave us. Dennis (2001) recommends we work closely with the body to unleash the daimonic potential. It is a rough exercise, one we are most tempted to shy away from, but it can only be avoided for so long. There lies the hope: welcome the daimon, and the daimon might surprise you. You may even surprise yourself.

References

Anonymous (Ed.). (2009). *A Critical Dissertation Concerning the Words Daímon and Daimónion [and other essays]*. Milton Keynes: Bibliolife.

Dennis, S.L. (2001). *Embrace of the Daimon*. York-Beach, Maine: Nicholas-Hays.

Harpur, P. (1994). *Daimonic Reality*. Ravensdale, WA: Pine Winds Press.

Hillman, J. (1996). *The Soul's Code*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishings.

Hermosilla Sánchez, A.H. (2007). El "Daimón" del Lope de Aguirre de Abel Posse [The "Daimon" of Lope de Aguirre by Abel Posse], *Cartaphilus*, Vol.1, pp. 55-61.

Jong, E. (2004) *Witches* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harry N. Adams.

Jung, C.G. (1953/1966). *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Works Vol. 7* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1953/1968). *Psychology and Alchemy, Collected Works Vol. 12* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1964/1970). *Civilization in Transition, Collected works Vol. 10* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Neumann, E. (1969/1990). *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Plato (2002) *Five Dialogues*. [translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by J.M. Cooper]. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

Plato (1987) *The Republic* (2nd ed.). [translated by D. Lee]. London: Penguin.

Posse, A. (1992) *Daimon*. [translated by S. Arvio]. New York, NY: Atheneum (originally published in Spanish in 1978).

Pullman, P. (2001) *His Dark Materials: Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife, The Amber Spyglass*. London: Scholastic.

Sanabria Sing, C. (1995) Entre el Daimon Griego y el Demonio del Cristianismo: Daimon, Tránsito Hacia el Culto a lo Humano [Between the Greek Daimon and the Demon of Christianity: The Journey of the Daimon from Cult to the Human Domain], *Káñina – Revista Artes y Letras*, Universidad de Costa Rica, Vol.XIX (1), pp. 51-61.

Sardello, R. (2004) *Facing the World with Soul* (2nd ed.), Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press.

Wilford, F.A. (1965) ΔΑΙΜΩΝ in Homer, *Numen*, Vol.12(3), pp. 217-232.