

How About Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World. Felicitas D. Goodman. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, 142 pages.

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Dr. Goodman says of Andrew Jackson Davis, the main provider of the theological underpinnings of the American spiritualist movement, that he "fitted in with the urgent desire of the age (mid-1800s) to be able to find so-called scientific proof for the existence of the world of spirits" (p. 32). Dr. Goodman must feel a kinship with that same age because she labors under a similar motivation. The thread running through most of her work, and especially this latest offering, is an attempt to challenge the "paradigm concerning the nature of reality" (p. 125). Her central hypothesis is that extra-human entities, such as spirits and demons, are operative in some instances of non-ordinary reality or altered states of consciousness (ASCs).

This book takes issue with those anthropologists and psychologists studying religious trance phenomena who explain such behavior as reactions to, or means of coping with, psychological, social, or economic stress or crises. Goodman does not feel that these ASCs or religious trances are pathological or aberrant, but are rather universal expressions of human needs and capacities. She suggests a universal human capacity for ecstatic religious trance due to the similarities in trance behavior and its occurrence in so many societies. It is assumed to be biological, and genetically controlled. However, universality does not always equate with a pan-human biological trait. Cultural diffusion might explain cross-cultural similarities in possession trance equally as well. And, if there is a genetic component, we must begin seeking its adaptive advantage. Goodman berates anthropologists, who are supposedly champions of cultural relativity, for their ethnocentricity in assuming pathology must underlie ecstatic religious behavior. Such assumptions would not be necessary if the religious participant's experience were taken at face value, i.e., as a visitation of spirits.

This is good advice if behavioral scientists are to content themselves with description, but if analysis is also desired, it is not scientifically possible when spirits and demons, inaccessible to scientific measurement, are postulated. We are up against the venerable but moot problem of co-joining science and religion, separate epistemologies whose mixture results more in an obfuscation than a productive synthesis. Dr. Goodman herself admits this in the conclusion of her book: "We should remember that whether these changes (physical alterations brought by the religious trance) are internally generated or created by external agencies is not discoverable" (p. 126). Yet she argues as if they were easily amenable to scientific investigation.

There are many forms of ASCs, and Goodman limits herself to religious ASCs, more specifically to ecstatic religious experiences. These include possession trances and their subsidiary expressions in glossolalia and religious healing. Because the study of ASCs is often subject to charges of vagueness and sloppy thinking, a clear-cut taxonomy of its various manifestations would be useful. Unfortunately, Dr. Goodman's

taxonomy is not sharply defined, nor is it exclusive of other behaviors. Actual lists or diagrams would be more helpful than generalized descriptive constellations such as faces drawn and flushed, heavy perspiration, saliva and tears, muscles tensing or ticing. Descriptors such as these do not distinguish ecstatic trance from other ASCs, illnesses, emotional or psychological states, or drug reactions. Indeed, the one list she does make pertaining to demonic possession looks remarkably like a PCP reaction.

It is admittedly very difficult to draw an accurate typology of possession states, but without a guideline of distinguishing inclusive and exclusive features we are left essentially with "I know it when I see it." When the taxonomic components are not rigorous enough we can fall into traps of assuming relationships where they do not exist, and concluding that similarities mean sameness.

For instance, Dr. Goodman finds similarities between possession trances and multiple personalities. The attempt at synthetic explanation of these two phenomena is admirable, and her discussion of the ritual control of trance might very well provide valuable insight into alternative therapies for the victims of multiple personality. However, the similarities between the two are merged to a greater extent than the data would warrant. As an example, her comparison of one of the "Eves" of *Three Faces of Eve* to trance is weak: (1) Eve had heightened muscle tension; (2) Eve produced an induction trance in another patient she danced with (an ex-alcoholic who claimed that Eve made him dizzy, and that he had unusual perceptions); (3) the various Eves saw the world differently. These, as well as similar examples throughout the book, seem to be "grasping for straws" to make a case. There is nothing wrong with arguing a case by analogy, but even more examples, with more non-coincidental similarities, would be additionally convincing.

Nevertheless, arguing that multiple personality has not only similarities to, but components of, possession trance (the devil) in it, Goodman states that some of the characteristics of multiple personality are therefore present in possession trance. Specifically, she is alluding to variant brain wave patterns in the case of multiple personality. She postulates that just as separate patterns, or brain maps, surface as the various personalities emerge, a different brain map would also appear when a person is possessed. This is a provocative idea which needs to be tested (although to do so in situ is extraordinarily difficult). Unfortunately, in this book, an hypothesis that needs testing is treated suddenly as a fact that has been proven.

It is understandable that differential brain maps in a single individual would be eagerly embraced as a means of establishing the biological basis of possession. Students of ASCs are avid for such methods. But we cannot wish that proof into existence. We cannot allow analogy to replace experimentation—even though adequate experimentation is very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the field anthropologist or psychologist. I am afraid, however, Dr. Goodman has let herself do just that in this interesting and provocative book. Over and over again, she lets theory become fact. A statement such as, "While the ability to go into trance is genetically transmitted . . ." (p. 10) is a case in point. The mistake made in this instance of simply substituting *is* for *may* follows an insidious pattern repeated throughout the book.

The irony of it is that the book works hard to be empirically correct, yet its basic premise—that spirits and demons are behind possessions and multiple personalities—is beyond empiricism. Dr. Goodman says, the "Need for religious experience is deeply and indelibly embedded in our humanness" (p. 63). I doubt if anyone who is a student of human nature could gainsay that, but to force science to fit into religion, or vice versa, can be a futile activity. Dr. Goodman is an undeniably able scholar and writer in both fields. I hope the next time she confines herself to one domain of gnosis or another.