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# Masculine Madness

The normality of evil in the Western cultural  
imaginary

Ross Honeywill



Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Doctor of Philosophy

September 2014

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

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Date: 30 September 2014

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Dr Greer Honeywill whom I married in 1977. Since that time, on every day, she inspires me and reminds me how a fully agentic woman gives hope and optimism not only to other women, but also to men who are prepared to recognise and acknowledge the unearned privilege they enjoy. She teaches me constantly to see and hear the world in new ways. Given that it is important for men to feel unimportant – in her presence that is a blessed and welcome condition.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am deeply grateful to Dr Lucy Tatman whose guidance and inspiration have in challenging my thinking, taken me down rich paths that would otherwise have remained empty country lanes. The process of undertaking a doctoral thesis by research is rightly filled with anxieties and uncertainties, but Lucy made this project a rewarding pleasure, a self-discovering, self-defining experience. I am now a different person, dare I say, a better person, and I have Lucy Tatman to thank for that.

Thanks also to Dr Richard Corry who provided sage advice along the way.

## ABSTRACT

All men – ordinary and exceptional men – have a potential for evil. What is it? Where does it originate? How does it impact society? Can it be overcome? This thesis explores the masculine potential for evil, and traces its various manifestations in cultural texts, social systems and everyday life practices, from the birth of modernity to the present. ‘Masculine madness’ is shown to be, not a pathological or psychiatric condition, but a potential for evil in the normality of the everyday, a potential inherent to all men. Combining psychic mechanisms with critical theory, and using an interdisciplinary or bricolage research framework, the thesis examines the origins and impacts of masculine madness from the Enlightenment and modernity, through postmodernity, and into the present; and exposes the violent suppression of Woman and women in the creative and symbolic dimension of the social that forms the Western cultural imaginary. Modernity is shown to be an epoch of institutionalised androcentrism, in which the Enlightenment narrative of plurality was rejected in favour of the script of male mastery, control and domination. A major effect of this was the incorporation of ‘madness’ as a feature of ‘ordinary’ masculinity and the ensuing normalisation of evil. Referencing the work of critical theorists, philosophers, feminists and scientists, the thesis describes how the ‘banality’ and ‘ordinariness’ of evil points to the Second World War, the Holocaust and the social death of Woman, as explicit outcomes of masculine madness. It reveals an ‘Oedipal schism’ as the origin of masculine madness, a rupture that negotiates between the extremes of social constructionism and biological determinism, and draws analogies between individual lives and social processes. Masculine madness in postmodernity is shown to be a period of rebellion against the constraints and certitudes of modernity, and an attempt to continue the liberal and pluralising legacy of the Enlightenment. The thesis shows, however, that postmodernity failed to reverse the genocide of Woman or to renounce the self-deception of masculine madness. A continuing process of re-masculinisation after the end of postmodernity is exposed, in a period which, referencing Bauman, is called the ‘liquid present’: a time in which masculine madness lives on, as evidenced by inequality in the workplace, growing gender conservatism, and constant eruptions of male violence. The consumer culture of the liquid present is identified as a culture in the making, where the shallow consumer monoculture exists alongside the deep knowledge culture. While the consumer monoculture melancholically nurtures masculine madness, the knowledge culture embodies the conditions for surpassing it by, for example, individualised choices by men. This thesis not only diagnoses masculine madness, but also identifies a possible, and feasible, way forward – a prognosis for society to surpass the annihilative potential of masculine madness.

Abstract classification: ANZRC 220319 (Social Philosophy)

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