

BOOK REVIEW

Jeffrey L. Metzner,¹ M.D.

A Review of *The Psychopathic Mind: Origins, Dynamics, and Treatment*

REFERENCE: Meloy, J. R., *The Psychopathic Mind: Origins, Dynamics, and Treatment*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ, 474 pp., 1988.

Psychopathy, as defined by Dr. Meloy, is "a deviant developmental disturbance characterized by an inordinate amount of instinctual aggression in the absence of an object relational capacity to bond." The author initially provides a psychobiological foundation for understanding psychopathy and later uses object relations theory to conceptualize this disorder further. Four sections, consisting of eight chapters which can be read independently, comprise this book.

Part I, which focuses on the origins of the psychopathic mind, includes a very useful summary of historical approaches to this disorder. The author conceptualizes the psychopathic personality organization as a variant of a narcissistic personality disorder. A positive correlation existing among psychopathy, criminality, and aggression is assumed, based on empirical data. Relevant studies concerning neuroanatomical structure, genetic predispositions, neurochemical set, hormonal influences, and autonomic reactivity are reviewed. Dr. Meloy concludes that "a necessary, but not sufficient, biological substrate must exist for the development of a psychopathic character disorder."

Chapter 3, "Developmental Origins," is a very difficult chapter to read because of the heavy use of psychoanalytic jargon. The author hypothesizes that the psychopathic process is fundamentally a virtual failure of internalization. The section on attachment is more clearly written and clinically useful to the reader.

Part II focuses on the structure and dynamics of the psychopathic mind. Chapter 4, "Affective Life and Death," is again difficult to read for similar reasons. Clinical vignettes, which frequently involve notorious criminals, such as David Berkowitz and Theodore Bundy, provide welcome clarity. Chapter 5, "Unconscious Defense and Conscious Choice," is more consistently clearly written. The author's discussion concerning the psychopath's use of imitation, simulation, and a process described as malignant pseudoidentification is well summarized. Clinical cases provide good illustrations of the psychopath's use of depersonalization and derealization.

Violence, psychosis, and related states are covered in Part III. A useful, very detailed conceptualization of human aggression as either affective or predatory is presented by the author. Dr. Meloy theorizes that the psychopathic process predisposes, precipitates,

¹Associate clinical professor of psychiatry, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 3300 East First Ave., #590, Denver, CO 80206.

and perpetuates predatory violence. Mania and paranoia are viewed as the chief avenues of expression of psychosis in psychopathic individuals. The relationships between psychopathy and malingering, drug-induced psychosis, and mental retardation are also covered. An appendix describes four methods of analyzing and interpreting the Rorschach response process, which illustrates pertinent structural and dynamic characteristics of psychopathy.

Psychotherapeutic issues are reviewed in Part IV. Despite the author's acknowledged bias that long-term, intensive psychodynamic psychotherapy is the treatment of choice for pre-oedipal disturbances, a concise chapter has been written which is useful to clinicians regardless of orientation. Guidelines for assessing treatability and the potential danger the individual poses to the treating professional are suggested. Countertransference issues and predictable resistances during treatment are thoughtfully presented.

Psychotherapists who are not well versed in psychoanalytic theory will find this book to be very difficult to read. As promised in the foreword, the author does present the reader with an extensive and in-depth survey of a broad range of psychosocial and psychoanalytic formulations, which include comprehensive references. Unfortunately, the author frequently does not write in a clear and concise fashion, which significantly limits the usefulness of this book.