

THE PARADOX OF DUALISM

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While Judeo-Christian tradition along with Islam has much in common with Zoroastrian beliefs, outright dualism is an apparent exception in the case of Islam which favors absolute monotheism. Similarly, although Hinduism and Zoroastrianism shared a common past or origin its dualism has little in common with Hindu beliefs in theistic dualism. While comparing the Hindu and Muslim mystical tradition as an evolution from monism to theistic dualism, R.C. Zaehner sees sharp contrast between them and traces the gradual development in Hindu consciousness of the awareness of a personal God who is truly Other. But he regards dualism in Sufis as belonging to an opposite level: “The God of the Qur'an is the transcendent Other, the compassionate and the Merciful; therefore the roots of the Muslim mystical experience are found in the lover – Beloved relationship, not in the *Atman Brahman* identity” although he may have exaggerated this evolution from theistic dualism to monism since he sees Vedic metaphysics in Sufism.

As Peter J. Awn reveals, “Strands of the Iblis tradition have much in common with pre-Islamic Gnosticism”, and Arabic sources even describe the counterpart of the satan in the gnostic Manicheism as “The Ancient Iblis (*Satan's Tragedy and redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, E. J. Brill, 1983 (p. 22).

Mircea Eliade explains the paradox of dualism paradigm either as the conflict between opposing poles, generating a “third term”, or as the polarities coexisting in a state of eternal tension that brooks no mediation between opposing poles: *The Quest*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 175).

However, what struck me as very noteworthy is the co-existence of benevolence as well as malevolence in Hindu Gods which is well expounded by Mircea Eliade in *The Two and the One*, pp. 82, 113-114, 122-124, and 91-94 London, Harvill.

Zarathushtra seems to have moved away from this Indo-Aryan tradition and established his own brand of dualism as is apparent in Yasna 30, 45, etc., in order to resolve the problem of evil.

R.C. Zaehner notes that the idea of transcendence of all opposites in the Hinduism is not shared by Judaism, Christianity or Islam, where the God of revelation is Himself a paradoxical tension of opposites. He is full of bliss and peace, but He is also the savage God of terrible might. (*Our Savage God*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974 p. 16).

Zaehner attributes these differences to both groups' conception of evil with matter which is constantly at bay with the inner spirit. Zaehner points out the inconsistencies and actual violence demonstrated by the God of revelation, who, as Yahweh, rejoices in the carnage and destruction wrought upon Israel's enemies, the inhabitants of Jericho. Zaehner also sees Allah the God of revelation in Islam as frighteningly ambivalent. Allah creates the healing light (*nur*) as well as wrathful fire (*nar*); while he is the God of Compassion and Mercy (Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim), he is also the Subduer (Al-Qahhar), the Tyrant (Al-Jabbar) who fiercely avenges wrongs. Allah does not refrain from deceitful ruses; in fact He surpasses all those who would vie with Him in wiliness: "And they were wily and God was wily, but God was the best of the wily ones!" (Qur'an 3:54).

Zaehner also finds a problem with the idea of God in Christianity in *Our Savage God*: "The modern intellectual refuses to accept the frenzied God of the Old Testament, whose criminal lunacy seems to be one and for all confirmed in the New; for it is he who tortured his son to death in order to 'save' first the Jews and then the Gentiles." (p. 278).

The crucifixion of Jesus means that "God demonstrates to man that he is so utterly unfair and crazy as to crucify himself. What he asks us to do is precisely this.... This certainly is sheer 'stupidity' and 'silliness' to the intellectuals." (p. 229).

Despite the theatrical quality of Zaehner's observations, Zaehner along with Eliade help us in understanding the Iblis motif. Since responsibility for Satan's deeds resides ultimately with God, Zaehner holds God as clearly responsible for man's suffering and affliction. But why does God allow Satan to carry out his evil designs?

"Because it would appear there is evil in the very heart of God. You cannot put the blame on man or even on Satan; you have to blame, if blame you must, him who is alone responsible, God." (Ibid, p. 237).

R.C. Zaehner maintains that this idea of an ambivalent God is more apparent in Islam than in Christianity since Makr, wiliness or deceit, is ascribed to Allah who can lead any one astray whenever He so chooses. Christianity, on the other hand, "shies away from associating such a characteristic too closely to God; the power of deception, therefore, must be relegated to Satan alone." (*Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, London, Clarendon Press, 1957; Oxford University Press, reprint edition, 1967, p. 101).