

**GOOD
AND
EVIL**

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GOOD AND EVIL

Two Interpretations

I.

RIGHT AND WRONG

II.

IMAGES OF GOOD AND EVIL



by

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...

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to get rid of the difficulty. We can reach a clear understanding of the point only if we realise that the original meaning of the Hebrew verb 'to recognise, to know', in distinction from Western languages, belongs not to the sphere of reflection but to that of contact. The decisive event for 'knowing' in biblical Hebrew is not that one looks at an object, but that one comes into touch with it. This basic difference is developed in the realm of a relation of the soul to other beings, where the fact of mutuality changes everything. At the centre is not a perceiving of one another, but the contact of being, intercourse. This theme of 'knowing' intercourse rises to a remarkable and incomparable height in the relation of God to those He has chosen—to the prophets whom He will send out (Ex. 33, 12; Jer 1, 5), to Israel which He is preparing for its commission (Amos 3, 2; Hos. 13, 5), or simply to the simple and loyal men who trust in His protection alone (Nahum 1, 7; Ps. 31, 8; 37, 18). Through His contact with them God draws them out of the abundance of living creatures in order to communicate with them. This 'knowing' of His, this reaching out to touch and to grasp, means that the man is lifted out, and it is as those who have been lifted out that they have intercourse with

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of their heart, whereas they do not feel themselves strong enough, or rather fancy they are not strong enough, to enter upon it. Is the way, then, closed to the wicked? It is not closed from God's side—so we may continue the reflection of the Psalm—but it is closed from the side of the wicked themselves. For in distinction from the sinners they do not wish to be able to turn. That is why their way peters out.

Here, it is true, there arises for us modern interpreters of the Psalms the question to which neither this nor any other Psalm nor any human word knows the answer: how can an evil will exist, when God exists? The abyss which is opened by this question stretches, even more uncannily than the abyss of Job's question, into the darkness of the divine mystery. Before this abyss the interpreter of the Psalms stands silent.

This was the point at which, several hundred years later, the Talmudic doctrine of the two urges started. It found the word *yetser*, which I have rendered by 'imagery', already transformed in meaning; as early as Jesus Sirach it signifies the own impulse, into whose hand created man is given by God, but with liberty to keep commandment and faith in order to do the will of God. In the Talmud, the concept, under the influence of increasing reflection, is partly split up into a 'good' and a 'evil' urge and partly used, without any attribute, to designate the second of these as the elemental one.

In the creation of man, the two urges are set in opposition to each other. The Creator gives them to man as his two servants which, however, can only accomplish their service in genuine collaboration. The 'evil urge' is no less necessary than its companion, indeed even more necessary than it, for without it man would woo no woman and beget no children, build no house and engage in no economic activity, for it is true that 'all travail and all skill in work is the rivalry of a man with his neighbour' (Ecclesiastes 4, 4). Hence this urge is called 'the yeast in the dough,' the ferment placed in the soul by God, without which the human dough does not rise.

Thus, a man's status is necessarily bound up with the volume of 'yeast' within him; 'whoever is greater than another, his urge is greater than the other's.' The high value of the 'evil urge' finds its strongest expression in an interpretation of the scriptural verse (Genesis 1, 31) which asserts that God, on the evening of the day on which he had created man, looked upon all he had made and found it 'very good': this 'very good' applies to the evil urge, whereas the good one only earns the predicate 'good'; of the two, it is the evil urge which is fundamental. But that it is called the evil urge derives from man's having made it so. Thus Kain (as is said in the Midrash) might indeed respond to the God who was calling him to account that it was He, God, Himself who had implanted in him the evil urge; but the rejoinder would be untrue, since only through him, man, did it become evil. It became so, and continually becomes so, because man separates it from its companion and in this condition of independence makes an idol of precisely that which was intended to serve him. Man's task, therefore, is not to extirpate the evil urge, but to reunite it with the good. David, who did not dare to stand up to it and therefore 'slew' it in himself—as it runs in one of his Psalms

(109, 22): 'My heart is pierced through within me'—did not fulfil it, but Abraham, whose *whole* heart was found faithful before God, who now made a covenant with him (Nehemiah 9, 8),¹ did. Man is bidden (Deuteronomy 6, 5): 'Love the Lord with all thine heart,' and that means, with thy two united urges. The evil urge must also be included in the love of God thus and thus only does it become perfect, and thus and thus only does man become once more as he was created: 'very good.' To achieve this, however, man must begin by harnessing both urges together in the service of God. As when a peasant possesses two oxen, one that has already ploughed and one that has not yet ploughed, and now a new field is to be cultivated: he brings both of them together beneath the yoke. But how is the evil urge to be prevailed upon to permit this to happen to it? Why, it is nothing but a crude ore, which must be placed in the fire in order to be moulded: so let it be totally immersed in the great fire of the Tora. And that also man cannot do of his own strength; we must pray to God to aid us to do His will with all our hearts.

¹That the reduplicated form of the word for heart (*lebab* instead of *leb*) stands in the Scriptural verse, is explained by the unity of the heart, re-established by the unification of the urges.

Therefore the Psalmist beseeches (86, 11): 'Unite my heart to fear thy name'; for fear is the gateway to love.

This important doctrine cannot be understood as long as good and evil are conceived, as they usually are, as two diametrically opposite forces or directions. Its meaning is not revealed to us until we recognize them as similar in nature, the evil 'urge' as passion, that is, the power peculiar to man, without which he can neither beget nor bring forth, but which, left to itself, remains without direction and leads astray, and the 'good urge' as pure direction, in other words, as an unconditional direction, that towards God. To unite the two urges implies: to equip the absolute potency of passion with the one direction that renders it capable of great love and of great service. Thus and not otherwise can man become whole.

PART TWO

I. THE PRIMAL PRINCIPLES

IN the most ancient part of the Avesta, the hymnlike speeches and discourses of Zarathustra, we read of the two primal moving spirits: the good, good in disposition, in word and in work, and the evil, evil in disposition, in word and in work. 'Twins through sleep' they were, 'as was heard', that is, erstwhile sleeping companions in the womb of their origin. But then they were in opposition to one another, and the benignant spirit spoke to the wicked one: 'Neither our sentiments nor our judgments, neither our inclinations nor our intentions, neither our words nor our works, neither our selves nor our souls are in concord'. And they further established, confronting each other, life and death together, and that ultimately for the adherents of deception there exists the most evil, but for the adherents of truth the best disposition. So the two spirits then chose: the deceitful one chose

vously a bisexual deity. Evil arises in him through his Fall. He does not choose, he doubts. Doubt is unchoice, indecision. Out of it arises evil.

We must note that the Wicked Spirit, Angra Mainyu, the well-known Ahriman, is here not the son of Ahura Mazda, but his brother; Ahura Mazda, Ormuzd, is, however, no longer a primal god, he enters at the beginning into being, and now precisely as the Only-good One. Thus here too the twins stand in radical antithesis to one another, but here, in contradistinction to the twin-myth of the Avesta, the antithesis of the one to the other is not explicitly stated, nor is the coming world-process between the two of them announced; we hear nothing of good and evil and their mutual relationship; we merely watch the appearance of the protagonists in the nascent cosmic conflict. Yet by what is recounted of the primal god himself we are led not less deep than there, and perhaps deeper, into the sphere of the question what good and evil are. There it was deception and truth, deception in the sense of being deceptive, truth in the sense of being true, which confronted one another; here doubt of being is the evil, the good is 'knowledge', belief in being, against which Zurvan transgresses. Here

it is ultimately a question of fidelity and infidelity to being.

But some within the Zurvan community could not tolerate the notion of a divine Fall. Of these, some supposed that the time-god had gone astray as to being at a particular moment, but that from the beginning something bad, either bad thinking or a corruption of essence, had been admixed into him, and from this evil made its start; these are evidently reverting to the Avestic doctrine, though in a modified form. But others said Zurvan brought forth both, in order to mingle good with evil, from which it is clearly inferred that only through the gradated abundance of such inter-mixtures can the full manifoldness of things arise; here the fundament of the Iranian tradition is abandoned: good and evil are no longer irreconcilable principia, but utilisable qualities, before whose utilisability the question of an absolute worth and worthlessness vanishes. The fundament of another tradition is adopted, when in the opinion of a third of these sects Ahriman 'is an outcast angel who was cursed for his disobedience'. 'About that', so ends the report in this connection, 'much can be said'.

But there is a fragment of the Avesta which

THE LIE AGAINST BEING

the ground. Then Yima is instructed to erect a mighty pen, like a citadel, and to secure therein the seed of the best and most beautiful of all living and growing things. It is done. Then, however, Yima vouchsafes the access of demonry, which he had hitherto held in coercion, and takes the lie into his mind by lauding and blessing himself. Immediately the regal glory, the lustre of good-fortune, which has till then irradiated his brow, leaves him in the shape of a raven, and he becomes mortal. He must wander without peace over the earth and time and again go into hiding. He joins forces with the demons and espouses a witch, with whom he begets all kinds of monsters. His sister disguises herself as the witch and lies with him. We do not learn what now takes place, but apparently the demons treat him as a rebel, for in the end he is sawn in pieces by them with a thousand-toothed saw. He is (as also in the early Indian songs, where he appears as the king of the dead) the first of those who have died; only after him do the rest die.

Many investigators find it incomprehensible, and hence unauthentic, that Yima's fault, which brought about his downfall, should have consisted in a lie. His *hubris* and self-adoration are taken to be a late motive, which, moreover, do not provide an ade-

quate explanation of that lie. In fact we only find them in later and late texts; but their linking up with the lie goes back to very ancient associations, as when, in the great inscription of Darius, the arrogant rebel is designated a 'liar'. That the primeval king begins to laud and bless himself is not merely correctly designated a lie: it refers in fact to the primal lie of him who has been set over mankind, indeed to that of humanity as a whole, which ascribes the conquest of the powers of nature to its own superpower. It is no verbal lie confronting a verbal truth; it is an existential lie against being. Yima had entreated the Godhead that he should become immortal and to make every living thing immortal; he had prayed that he might become the master of the demons, and that he became. But now he avers that what was only vouchsafed to him he had done himself; he sees himself as a self-creator, through himself immortal and immortalizing, sees it as self-established self-grandeur that he held sway over the demons; he now lives and acts according to this viewpoint; he thus commits, as it has been put,¹ 'the inner untruth against God and himself', more exactly: he

¹Lommel: *Zarathustra's Religion* (1930) 46.

commits with his existence the lie against being.

To become adequately aware of the existential profundity of the transition of a primordial being from truth to lie recounted here, we must look at it within the world-conflict between the two principles. For truth and lie are the two basic attitudes, or rather basic qualities, in whose opposition the opposition of the principles, good and evil, is represented. Only account must be taken of the fact that here truth implies something other than conscious concordance, and lie something other than conscious non-concordance between a thing asseverated and a real thing. The identical term lie is used in the Vedas, at times, to designate the uncanny game of hide-and-seek in the obscurity of the soul, in which it, the single human soul, evades itself, avoids itself, hides from itself. This lie in the own being now breaks out into the relationship to other souls, in that to worldly reality, in that to the divine. In the Avesta it is initially a breach of faith (lying to the contract-protecting deity Mithra means breaking the contract), then the falsification of a situation by the attitude, indeed the quality, of the person placed in it. The attitude refers back to the quality, but this latter is in no way a final,

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