

# PROBLEMS INHERENT IN ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

While Judeo-Christian tradition along with Islam has much in common with Zoroastrian beliefs, outright dualism is an apparent exception. Similarly, although Zoroastrianism shares a common past or origin, its dualism has little in common with Hindu beliefs in theistic dualism. While comparing the Hindu and Muslim mystical traditions described above R.C. Zaehner sees sharp contrasts between them. He posits the Hindu mystical tradition as an evolution from monism to theistic dualism and traces the gradual development in Hindu consciousness of the awareness of a personal God who is truly Other. But he regards dualism in Sufism 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 Vedanic metaphysics in Sufism. (*Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, London: Athlone Press, 1960; reprinted edition, New York: Schocken, 1969).

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

Mircea Eliad 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. However, what struck me as very noteworthy is the coexistence of benevolence as well as malevolence in Hindu gods which is well expounded by *The Quest*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 175). Mircea Eliade *The Two and the One*, pp. 82, 113-114, 122-124, 91-94, (London, Harvill Press, 1965).

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 Hinduism is not shared by Judaism, Christianity or Islam where the God 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. The monotheistic traditions regard sin as an act of disobedience against a transcendent God, whereas Hinduism identifies evil with matter which is constantly at bay with an 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 of 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 view with Him in wiliness: "And they were wily and God was wily, but God was the best of the wily ones!" (Qur'an 354).

Zaehner also finds 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 once 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 Jews 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. 299).

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

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).

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 thus lead any one astray whenever. He so chooses Christianity on the other hand ascribing the power of deception only to Satan.