

discussed in my *Lucifer*.) There is also a second important reason for taking this approach. With their emphasis upon monotheism, these traditions had to cope with the responsibility of God for evil. How is the existence of evil reconcilable with that of a good and omnipotent God? The question has been answered along two radically different lines. One response is that God is fully responsible for the cosmos just as it is, and we live in a determined, "predestined" world. The alternative answer is that some restrictions or limitations exist on God's absolute power. A variety of such restrictions have been proposed by philosophers over the centuries: chaos, matter, free will, quantum randomness, and a principle of evil. This tension between determinism and freedom has always been a source of enormous intellectual and spiritual creativity and power. The tension setting the power of God against the existence of evil is the ultimate source of the concept of the Devil.

Discussing evil means using propositions: where it comes from, how it acts, what limits it, and so on. Discussions of evil are necessarily conceptual. But one must also keep the eye fixed upon the underlying reality of evil, which is the real experience of real suffering.

2 *The Devil around the World*

ALTHOUGH the concept of the Devil—a single personification of evil—does not exist in most religions and philosophies, the problem of evil exists in every world view except that of radical relativism. If the cosmos has any intrinsic meaning, if a moral intelligence of any kind exists, some effort needs to be made to reconcile that intelligence with the existence of evil. Most societies, observing both good and evil in the cosmos, perceive that moral intelligence as ambivalent. Their God has two faces, good and evil: he is a coincidence of opposites.

This ambivalence is expressed differently in different societies. Most polytheist views assume that the many gods are the manifestations of the one God, the one ambivalent principle. Hinduism offers a clear example of the ambiguity of the God. Brahma "creates the harmful and the helpful; the gentle and the cruel; truth and falsehood; life and death." This God manifests himself in a variety of forms. According to the *Brahmanas*, "the gods and demons both spoke truth, and they both spoke untruth. The gods relinquished untruth, and the demons relinquished truth." These demons can now be blamed for at least some of the evil in the world. But since all beings are aspects of the God, evil and good both ultimately stem from him and are integral parts of him.

Why does the God do evil, or cause it to be done, or permit it to be done? Theodicy is the attempt to understand the relationship of the God to a cosmos that suffers. Some theodicies are theological, rational, philosophical efforts to get at an answer; others are mythological, attempts to explain by telling stories.

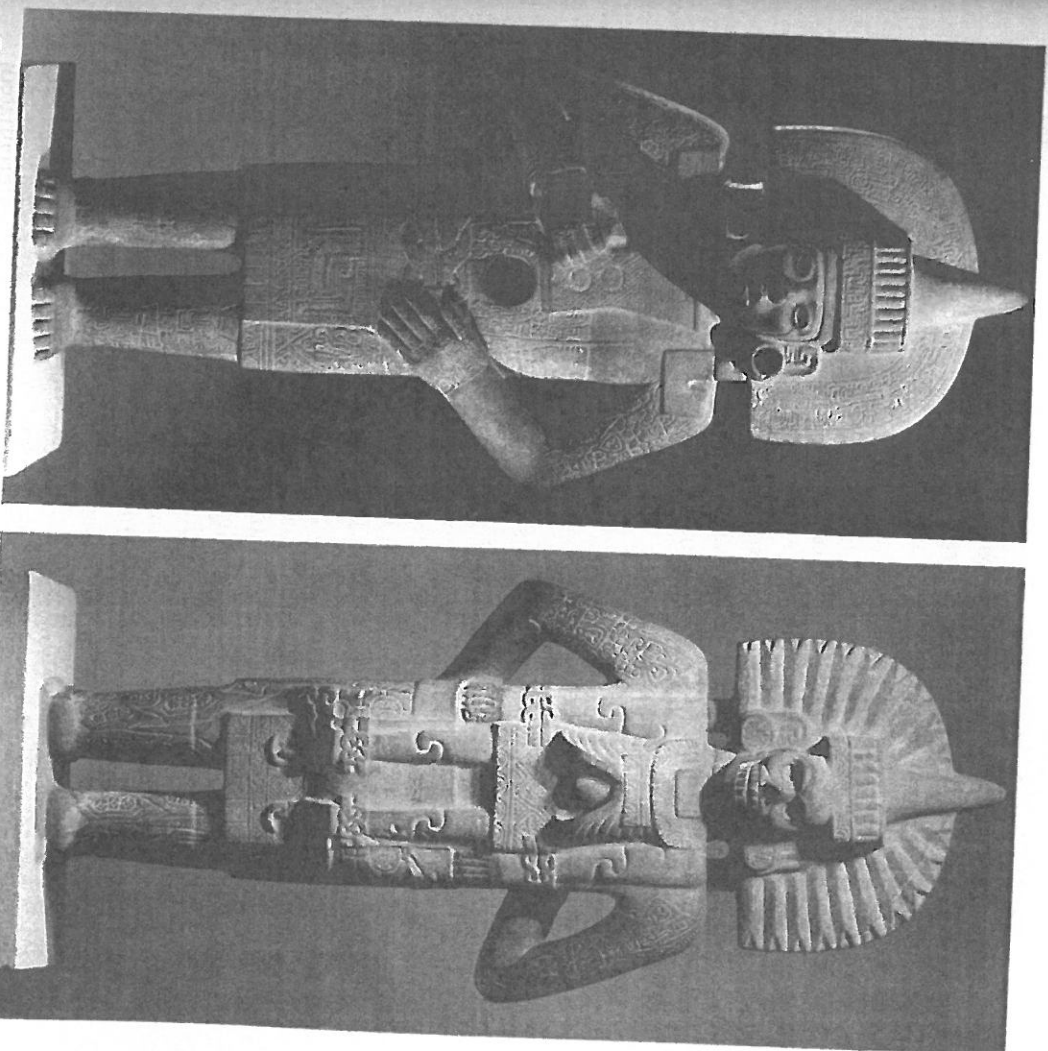
Mythological theodicies often personify the malevolent aspects of the God and construct gods, demons, or other beings somewhat analogous to

the Devil, but on the whole myth tends not to create wholly evil beings. Myth is close to the unconscious, and the unconscious is ambivalent. What comes from the unconscious is basically perception of self, and we sense ambivalence in ourselves. It is usually the conscious that rationalizes and distorts, splitting the natural ambivalence of good and evil into polarities, opposite absolutes. Religions such as Christianity and Islam that emphasize the rational over the mythological are thus more hospitable to the idea of the Devil. Still, myth is not an unformed outpouring of the unconscious; like poetry, art, or music, it arises from a creative tension between unconscious materials and conscious forms. Myth, like theology, often tries to separate the good from the evil in the God.

Good and evil alike come from the God. Because people feel a tension between good and evil in themselves, they feel a comparable tension within the God. Good and evil must be struggling within him. People also wish to feel that the God is good and benevolent, so they dislike attributing evil to him. For these reasons they tend to assume an opposition of forces within the godhead. Often they externalize this opposition, twinning the God into separate good and evil entities. In such divisions, the good side of the God is often identified with the "High God" and the bad side with the adversary of the High God. An additional tension arises: the tension between the unity and the diversity in the God. Since most religions have avoided assuming a plurality of ultimate principles, most have one ultimate God, and that one God remains a coincidence of opposites.

The coincidence of opposites is sometimes expressed as a war in heaven between good and evil gods. Historically, when a culture replaces one set of gods with another, it tends to relegate the losing set to the status of evil spirits. The Christians made demons out of the Olympian deities of Greece and Rome, just as the Olympian religion had earlier transformed the earthbound Titans into evil spirits. Early Indo-Iranian religion had two sets of gods, the *asuras* (*ahuras*) and the *devas* (*daevas*). In Iran, the *ahuras* defeated the *daevas*, and the leader of the *ahuras* became the High God *Ahura Mazda*, the god of light, while the defeated *daevas* were demoted to evil spirits under the rule of the lord of darkness. In India, the *devas* defeated the *asuras*. In one sense, the result in India was opposite to that in Iran, but in a deeper sense the process was the same, in that one group of deities was vanquished by another and relegated to the status of evil spirits.

Polytheists sometimes express the divine coincidence of opposites in individual deities who are ambivalent, with "two souls within their



Quetzalcoatl, 900-1250 C.E., limestone. The benevolent god of life and art is also god of death. The opposite sides of this freestanding sculpture show the two aspects of divinity. Courtesy the Brooklyn Museum, Henry L. Battenman and Frank Sherman Benson funds.

breasts." The great gods of India, including Kali, Shiva, and Durga, manifest opposite poles in a single being: benevolence and malevolence, creativity and destructiveness. Polytheists may also express the two faces of God in myths about closely related but adversary pairs of deities. The gods in each pair are seen as opposites, but always on a deeper level they are the same being. Among the Iroquois the earth's daughter bears twin sons, who quarrel within her womb. One twin is born in the normal way, but the second twin is born through his mother's armpit, killing her. The younger son, called Flint, strives unceasingly to undo the work of his constructive brother. The older son creates animals; Flint tries to imitate him, fails, and in his rage throws up rugged cliffs and mountains to divide tribe from tribe and so frustrate the unity his brother has planned for humanity. Like the yin and yang of Taoism, such twins or doublets are both opposite and united; beneath their conflict they seek integration and centering.

The evil aspects of the God are often associated with the underworld, but the underworld is itself ambivalent. It is good, for it is from beneath the earth that the crops spring forth and from the underground that rich metals can be mined. But it is also evil, for the dead are buried in the earth, and beneath the earth is a dark land where they wander in shadows. The gods of the underworld, such as the Greco-Roman Plouton or Pluto, are lords of both fertility and death. The Devil's association with hell comes from his identification with the malevolent aspects of the subterranean lord. The red glow of hellfire, together with the red tint of land scorched by fire and with the color of blood, led to the association of the Devil with the color red.

Blackness and darkness are almost always associated with evil, in opposition to the whiteness and light associated with good. This is true even in black Africa. Blackness has an immense range of negative and fearful associations: death, the underworld, the void, blindness, night stalked by robbers and ghosts. Psychologically it signifies the fearful, uncontrollable depths of the unconscious. It is also associated with depression, stupidity, sin, despair, dirt, poison, and plague.

The void, nothingness, chaos, is another symbol that myth links with the Devil. Chaos, yawning emptiness, is the formless, undifferentiated state that exists at or before the beginning of the world. "At first," says the Rig Veda, "there was only darkness wrapped in darkness." And Genesis 1.2 says, "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness moved over the face of the abyss." In one sense chaos is good, for it is the creative potency without which nothing could come into being. But in

another sense it is evil, for it must be overcome, formed, and shaped if gods or humans are to exist. Chaos often appears in myth as a monster, such as the Hebrew Leviathan or the Babylonian Tiamat, who must be defeated by god or hero. The Mesoamericans said that primeval chaos was a thing with countless mouths swimming in the formless waters and devouring all that she could seize. She was vanquished by the gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, who rent her body asunder to allow the universe to be formed. Chaos is a prerequisite for cosmos, but cosmos can be formed only by defeating chaos. At the end of time, cosmos may revert to chaos. This has the double effect of destroying the world but also returning to primeval creative power. The Tandava dance of Shiva expresses both joy and sorrow. It annihilates the illusory world (*maya*), but in so doing it integrates the world with Brahma. Many rites were aimed at the re-creation of chaos in order to regain and release creative force. Often connected with fertility, such rites sometimes became unbridled, uncontrolled license and could readily be perceived as threatening and destructive. Thus the Devil came to be linked with orgy, a symbol of the terrifying formlessness of chaos.

Chaos is often represented as a snake, serpent, or dragon. The Dayak of Borneo believed that the world is enclosed in a circle formed by the watersnake biting its tail. The primeval serpent pursuing itself in endless circles is another symbol of the coincidence of opposites, the union of beginning and end. Serpents help and heal; the symbol of the medical profession is the serpent of Aesculapius. Deities wearing snakes as their emblems often bear them in the shape of the crescent moon, symbol of growth and fertility. But through the moon the snake is also associated with night, death, and menstrual blood. Through the serpent the Devil is associated with these terrors and with the dragon of chaos that must be slain so that life and order may be released.

The crescent moon also suggests horns. Horns derived additional symbolic power from their connection with the phallus and with the procreative power of bull animals. Shiva may take the form of both bull and phallus; Vishnu and Krishna are also portrayed as bulls. Horns are also identified with the rays of the sun: horns or rays emanated from the brow of Moses coming down from his encounter with God. Hats in the shape of horns, such as medieval crowns or bishops' mitres, indicated the power of the wearer. The sign of horns (such as the upturned horseshoe) brings good luck, fertility, and power.

The Devil's horns therefore symbolize his princely power, but they also carry a powerful negative connotation. Horns bring to mind the

danger of wild beasts and the bull that gores; they suggest the mysterious, frightening otherness of animals; and their association with the moon recalls not only fertility but also night, darkness, and death.

Legions of lesser spirits around the world manifest the terrors of nature. Wild and disruptive, they exhibit the strange, numinous quality that provokes the undirected terror that the Greeks named "panic" after the god Pan. They possess body or mind, causing disease or insanity. They appear as male incubi or female succubi, seducing sleepers. Their ugliness and deformity are outward and visible signs of their distorted natures. They may act as moral tempters, but more frequently they attack individuals directly and crudely. In traditional Japan, where the natural and supernatural worlds were closely intertwined, not only humans, but animals, plants, and even inanimate objects had ghosts. These ghosts were usually hostile, particularly the *oni*, whose horns and three hideous eyes signified both power and malevolence.

Demons both East and West frequently serve as executioners of the God's justice by tormenting the damned souls in hell. In Japan, twenty-four thousand demon servants worked unceasingly to drag the unfortunate souls before the divine tribunal of Emma-O. Grotesque and horrifying in appearance, the demons also use hideous tools of torture. In China and Japan as well as in the West, it is not always clear whether the demons are employees or inmates of hell—whether they suffer as well as meting out pain to others.

The evil spirit of temptation appears in some cultures. The nearest thing to the Devil in Buddhism is Mara, whose name means "death" or "thirst," and whose attributes are blindness, murkiness, death, and darkness. With his daughters Desire, Unrest, and Pleasure, he attempts to obstruct the lord Gautama's progress toward enlightenment, but the Buddha, knowing that the only true good lies in transcending the world, drives him away. The Mesoamericans believed that the man-god Quetzalcoatl was tempted by many demons who offered him wine and other enticements to lure him from the path of duty.

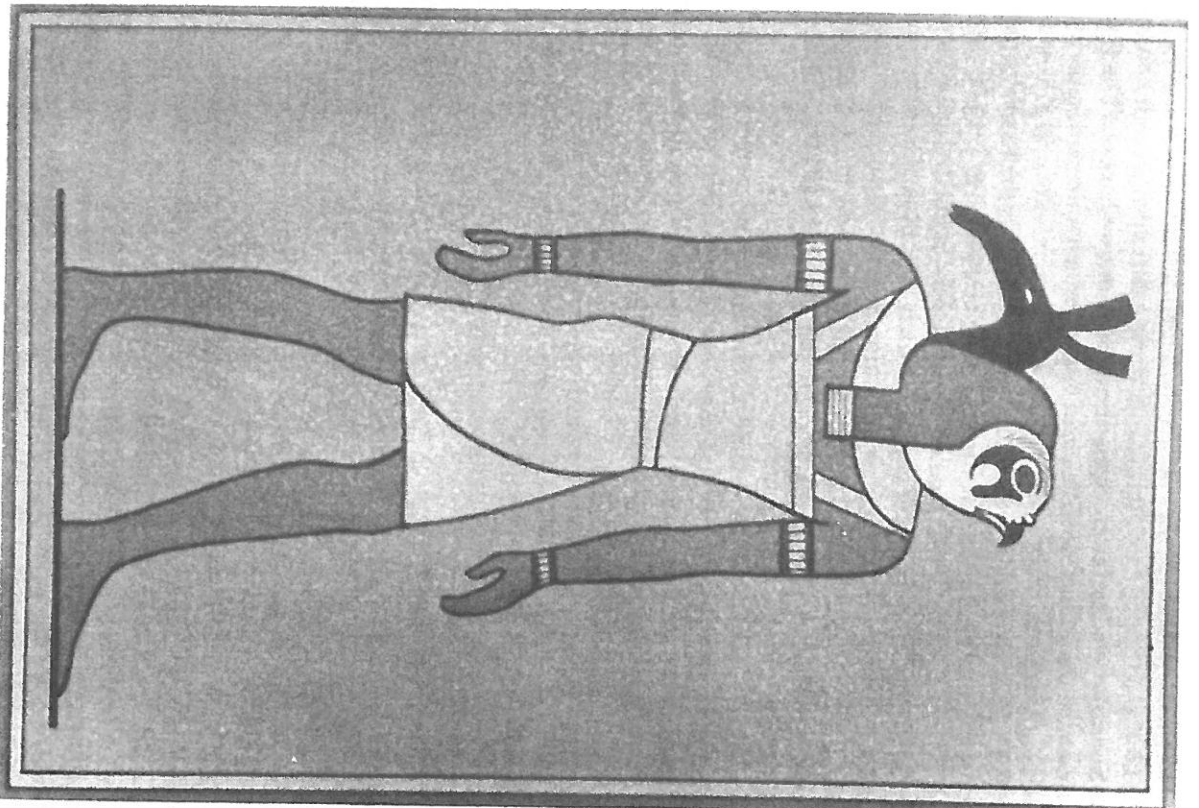
The similarities among the worldwide representations of evil are remarkable. Since many of these societies are not connected historically, the similarities suggest a common, inherent psychological response to common perceptions of evil. Certain civilizations, however, stood directly in the historical background of the Judeo-Christian concept of the Devil. Here the cultural connections are clear and pronounced. The most important of these civilizations were the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Greece.

The many gods of the Egyptians were manifestations of the one God. The God and the gods are ambivalent: they both help and hinder humanity. Since the God never changes, the cosmos never changes. The Egyptian cosmos is a stable coincidence of opposites, a manifestation of divine order and harmony. The universe is not a thing; it is alive; it pulses with godness. It is not merely the creation of the God; it is the God's outward and visible manifestation. In such a divine cosmos absolute evil cannot exist. Individual evil exists, but it is limited; it is an isolated act for which the individual is accountable and for which he will be punished in the afterlife. It produces a limited perturbation of *maat*, the ordered, harmonious justice of the cosmos, but *maat* quickly adjusts itself through the inevitable punishment of the wicked, and the serenity of the divine cosmos continues.

All Egyptian deities are manifestations of the whole cosmos and so reflect both the constructive and the destructive aspects of cosmic harmony. Even the merciful god Osiris is sometimes an adversary of the noble sun god Re, whereas a frequently destructive deity such as Seth is gracious to his own worshippers. The pharaoh, who is the human incarnation of the God on earth, shares the divine ambivalence: "that beneficent Sekhmet in a year of plague. . . . He fights without end, he spares not. . . . He is a master of graciousness, rich in sweetness, and he conquers by love."

No Egyptian deity ever became the principle of evil, but one god, Seth, displays the destructive element more than the others. From an early time in the development of Egyptian religion, Seth was an enemy of the sky god Horus. Horus was a god of northern Egypt, the low country where the Nile spread out in black, fertile, tillable plains. Seth was a god of the dry, arid south, where the red deserts stretched lifeless to the rocky, burning mountains on the horizon. Because of Seth's association with the desert, he was usually portrayed as a reddish animal of unknown identity, and redhaired people were considered in some special way his own. As Egyptian religion developed, Seth came to be identified more and more with the power of death and locked in endless struggle with Horus or Osiris, gods of goodness and life.

Still, the Egyptians did not lose the sense that the gods represented one divine principle. The deadly enemies Seth and Horus were also perceived as brothers, twins, doublets, sometimes even as one god with two heads. The conflict between them was a violation of *maat* and had to be resolved. The Egyptians were torn between two solutions. In one, they



The Horus-Seth god, Egypt. Horus and Seth are a doublet, representing two sides of the divine principle. The followers of the two gods were often antagonistic, but in some places Seth, who looks here toward our left, was worshiped together with Horus as one god.

united Seth and Horus as one god, but this answer left the persistence of dissension in the cosmos unexplained. So they also considered another solution, one in which Seth seeks to restore the cosmic unity, but in all the wrong ways. Here Seth's role approaches that of Satan.

Seth seeks to resolve the conflict by destroying his adversary, whether Horus or Osiris. He tricks Osiris into getting into a large chest, locks it up, and sinks it into the Nile. Isis bears her dead husband a son, Horus the Younger, who takes his father's place as Seth's adversary. Seth tries unsuccessfully to murder the baby Horus, and when Horus grows up Seth marshals a huge army to crush his ancient enemy. Always thinking wrong, Seth tries to restore the divine union by an act of grotesque force: he attempts to sodomize the divine Horus. Horus, resisting, castrates Seth and so deprives him of his power, but Seth in turn tears out one of death and life, south and north, the underworld and the earth, had begun to prefigure the Judeo-Christian struggle of good against evil. From the Egyptian point of view, the cosmos could not be resolved by bloody conflicts but only by peaceful centering and integration. True to the actual state of the world, the myth relates no such reconciliation.

The civilizations that arose in Mesopotamia, where both human conflicts and natural disasters were far more frequent than in Egypt, saw the cosmos as far more fundamentally unsettled. The Egyptians had to explain a world in which evil intruded into divine harmony, the Sumerians and Babylonians one in which harmony was barely visible at all. The world had been fundamentally alienated from the divine plan, and the inscrutable gods might help, abandon, or simply ignore a nation, a city, or an individual. A Babylonian poem similar to the Book of Job presents a dialogue between a just man who is suffering and his friend. The sufferer inquires why those who worship the gods suffer and those who ignore them prosper. His friend entreats him to submit to his lot with good grace, but the sufferer complains that nowhere do the gods seem to block evil men or evil spirits. "How have I profited," he inquires, "that I have bowed down to my God?" He receives no satisfactory reply. The cosmos of the Mesopotamians was sorely out of joint, and they were deeply troubled that neither they nor the gods could set it right.

In consequence, the Mesopotamian world was filled with hostile demons. These were generally spirits of lesser dignity and power than gods. The terrible *annunaki* were the jailers of the dead in hell. The *etinnu* were the ghosts of the many who had died unhappy. The *utukku* lived in desert places or graveyards. There were demons of plagues,

nightmares, windstorms, drought, warfare, and every human ill. One of the most frightful was Pazuzu, god of the howling north winds that leached the soil of moisture and withered the crops. Another was Lilith, the ancestral prototype of the Lilith of Isaiah 34. Lilith was a frigid, barren "maid of desolation," part human and part bird of prey, who roamed the night draining men of their bodily fluids. Such demons were everywhere, and people had to protect themselves by enlisting the aid of a more powerful spirit. "The man who has no god as he walks in the street, the demon covers him as a garment."

Canaanite or Phoenician religion influenced Hebrew thought even more directly. The high God of Canaan was El, the god of sky and sun, often portrayed as a bull. His son was Baal, whose name means "the lord." Baal was god of vegetation and fertility; his symbols were the bull and the crescent horns. The central Canaanite myth was the conflict of Baal, aided by his sister Anath, against the god Mot, prince of sterility and death.

The lord Baal goes out to do battle with Mot, but after a long struggle the prince of death defeats him, and the lord is forced to humiliate himself before his fierce foe, promising to be his slave. Mot kills him, sending him to the underworld. Baal is gone from the face of the earth for seven years, during which the crops wither and the world is barren. Death would have ruled forever, but Baal's sister Anath, the terrible maiden goddess of love and war, wanders the world, seeks out Mot, and, "Death, thou shalt die." She seizes Mot, and "with sword she cleaves him. With fan she winnows him—with fire she burns him. With hand-mill she grinds him—in the field she sows him." In one and the same deed, Anath kills Mot and refertilizes the earth, and indeed Death's death revives her brother Baal, who returns triumphant from the underworld while the earth bursts into bloom. Mot too revives, however, and Baal and Mot are locked in eternal combat. This eternal warfare is the struggle of a doublet—Baal and Mot, life and death—both the God, both representing the cosmos, a universe in which good and evil are forever entwined.

The apparently contradictory ethical qualities of the Greek gods, which the Christians so disdained, derived in part from the fact that each god of the classical period is a synthesis of diverse elements from ancient local cults. More important, the ambiguities display the coincidence of opposites. Both good and evil proceed from the God, of whom the individual gods are manifestations. Ethical ambivalence was expressed

either within the personality of a single deity or in twin or doublet deities.

A few Greco-Roman deities had direct influence on the Devil. The Christians associated all the pagan deities with demons, but Pan more than others. Pan was feared for his association with the wilderness, the favorite haunt of hostile spirits, and for his sexuality. Sexual passion, which suspends reason, was suspect to both Greek rationalism and Christian asceticism; a god of sexuality could easily be identified as evil, and to death. Pan, hairy and goatlike, with horns and cloven hooves, was the son of Hermes. A phallic deity like his father, he represented sexual desire in both its creative and its threatening aspects. Pan's horns, hooves, shaggy fur, and outsized phallus became part of the Christian image of Satan.

The curious, deep association between fertility and death marked Hades, the ruler of the underworld, who presided over the dark and dreadful kingdom of dead souls and who brought death to crops, animals, and humans. Hades' other name was Pluto, god of wealth, for the underworld yields the tender crops and offers hope of renewed life. The ambivalence of Hades was reflected in that of his spouse, the gentle Persephone, lady of springtime, whose cruel husband ravished her from the face of the earth every autumn. Emerging from her underground prison every year, Persephone caused the earth to green. But it was also she who led the Erinyes, the spirits of vengeance, in their pitiless search for revenge.

Charon, the Etruscan god of death, made his own contribution to the shape of the Evil One. Charon derived his name from the Greek Charon, the boatman of the dead, but the Etruscan god was far more horrible than the grizzled old ferryman. Charon had a huge, hooked nose similar to a bird's beak, a shaggy beard and hair, long, pointed, bestial ears, grinding teeth, and grinning lips. Sometimes he is shown with wings or with serpents growing from his blue-colored body. He commonly wielded a huge mallet with which he struck the head of a person about to die. Most of these characteristics, except the mallet, appeared in medieval and modern pictures of the Devil.

Each of the religions so far discussed has been monist, assuming a single divine principle underlying the diversity of the cosmos. About 1200 B.C. the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra laid the basis for the first



Pan, sixth century Coptic ivory preserved in the ambo of Henry II at Aachen. Here the iconography of Pan coalesces with that of the Devil: cloven hooves, goat's legs, horns, beast's ears, saturnine face, and goatee. The context and the pan pipes identify the figure as Pan rather than Satan. Courtesy Schwann Pädagogischer Verlag, Dusseldorf.

tra's revelation was that evil is not an aspect of the good God but a completely separate principle.

Monism and dualism are not separated by an unbridgeable gap. Rather, religions form a spectrum between extreme dualism and absolute monism; almost all lie somewhere between the poles. Extreme monism, which asserts the absolute unity and absolute power of the one divine principle, is represented most strongly by prophetic and rabbinic Judaism and by Islam. The monist polytheisms of Egypt, Greece, and India are in their own way near the same pole. To the extent that religions limit the power of God—by randomness, chaos, matter, free will, or evil—they move away from this pole. The opposite pole, extreme dualism, represented by Zoroastrianism, posits two absolutely independent principles. Christian theologies lie between the two extremes, their positions on the spectrum varying according to the degree to which they allow limitations to God's sovereignty, from Luther and Calvin near one pole through Augustine and Aquinas to the Manicheans and Process theology nearer to the other.

The dualism found in Christianity differs from the extreme dualism of Iran, however, not only in degree but also in kind. Iranian dualism is a division between a good principle and an evil principle, both of them spiritual in nature. Christian dualism draws on Greek Orphism as well as on Mazdaist dualism. Orphism supposed an opposition, not between two principles, but between spirit (which is basically good) and matter (which is basically evil). The Christian Devil was an evil spirit, but he was also linked to matter in opposition to spirit.

Zarathushtra's dualism was a radical innovation in the history of religion. It denied the unity and omnipotence of God in order to preserve his perfect goodness. Zarathushtra was the first person to put forward the idea of an absolute principle of evil, whose personification, Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, is the first real Devil in world religion. Although the two principles are entirely independent, they clash, and in the fullness of time the good spirit will inevitably prevail over the evil one.

Zarathushtra's original ideas were modified and transformed over the centuries. In the third century of the Christian era the Pahlavi books provided a full account of the cosmic struggle. In the beginning there were two spirits, Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and they were separated by the void. Ohrmazd is goodness and light. He is eternal, unlimited in time. In space, however, he is limited by the void, and also by Ahriman, who lies on the other side of the void. Only by engaging and defeating

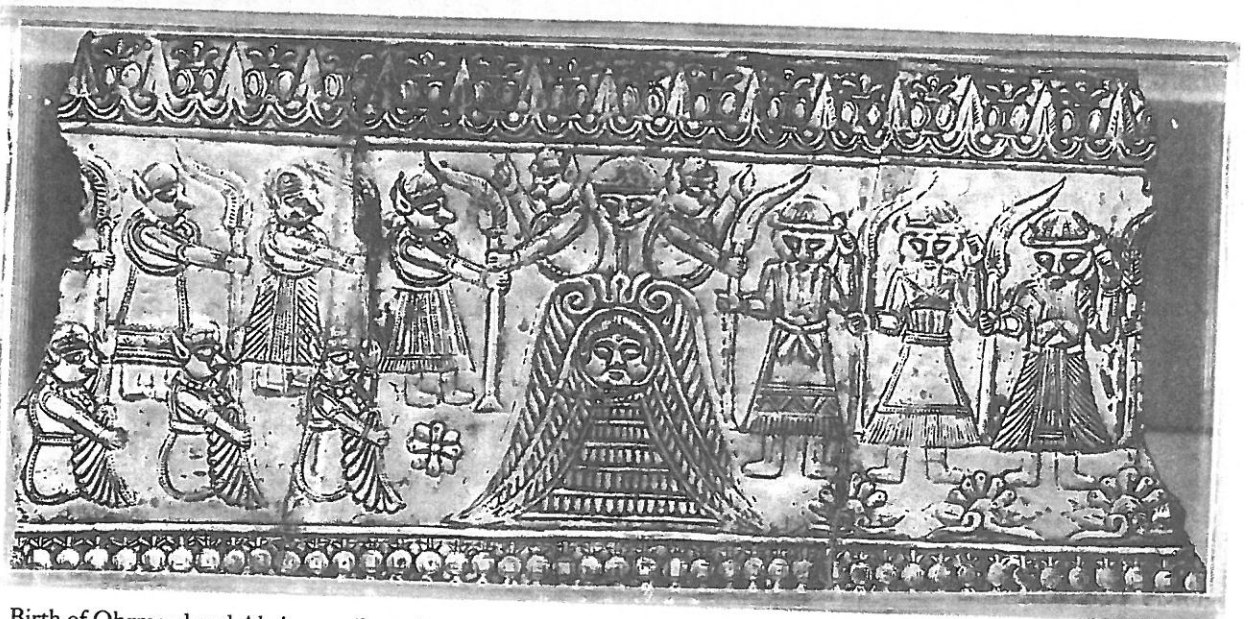
Ahriman can Ohrmazd overcome these limitations and become infinite as well as eternal. But since Ohrmazd is free of both ambition and hostility, he provokes no struggle with his opposite.

Ahriman is darkness and evil. He is limited in space by the void and by Ohrmazd. His existence is precarious: Ahriman "is not," or "he once was not and again will not be," or "he was and is, yet will not be." The texts are thus ambiguous about Ahriman's origin: he is from the beginning, like Ohrmazd, yet essentially he does not exist, and he will certainly perish. On the one hand, Mazdaism asserted that the two principles are both absolute, yet on the other hand it implied the inferiority of the darkness to the light. This ambiguity in Mazdaism was never resolved; some theologians stressed the equality of the principles, others the contingency of Ahriman's existence. The latter view fitted both Greek philosophy and Hebrew-Christian revelation better, and influence between these and Mazdaism was mutual. Though Zarathushtra lived long before Christianity, the Pahlavi books are post-Christian and may show Christian influence.

Ahriman is the essence of destruction. He is "the Destroyer. . . , the accursed destructive Spirit who is all wickedness and full of death." Ahriman is evil both by nature and by choice. In the eternal beginning, Ohrmazd knows of the existence of Ahriman on the other side of the void, but Ahriman is ignorant of the light. He is bound by darkness, ignorance, and hatred. In the course of the first three thousand years, Ahriman gradually discerns a point of light across the gulf and, seeing that light, covets it, longs for it, lusts for it, and determines to possess it. Ohrmazd, ever loving and peaceful, tries to avert a struggle by offering Ahriman peace. Ahriman, blinded by his evil nature, takes Ohrmazd's loving offer as a sign of weakness and refuses it, preferring to press his advantage. Ohrmazd reveals to him the terrible fate that awaits him in eternity, and Ahriman, stunned, falls into the void, where he remains imprisoned for another three thousand years.

Having bound Ahriman in the darkness, Ohrmazd now creates the cosmos by thinking it. All things bright and beautiful come from Ohrmazd. He creates matter, and it is good. He then goes on to place in the cosmos four manifestations of life: vegetation, fire, the primal bull (or ox), and the ideal man. The man, Gayomart, is shining, complete, and in all ways a perfect microcosm. Ohrmazd looks on what he has made, and sees that it is good.

But Ahriman, who has lain bound in the outer darkness for three thousand years, is revived by the ministrations of Jeh, the Liar Whore,



Birth of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, silver plaque, eighth century B.C. The large central figure is Zurvan; emerging from him are his twin sons, the doublet Ohrmazd and Ahriman, the light and dark sides of the divine principle. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum and Photographie Giraudon, Paris.

and he renews his assault upon Ohrmazd and the world. Ohrmazd has created. In his envy and lust, Ahriman determines to lay hold of the beautiful cosmos and shape it to his own ends, using his weapons of darkness, lust, and disorder. For yet another three thousand years the warfare rages with the forces almost evenly matched. Almost, but not quite, for the defeat of evil, though postponed, is inevitable. Despairing, yet still enormously powerful, Ahriman bursts forth from the outer darkness and attacks the sky, rending it apart, and plunges down through the atmosphere toward the earth. Reaching the earth in his plummeting descent, he tunnels a vast hole through it and, emerging on the other side, enters the primal waters beneath. Violence and disorder have entered the created cosmos for the first time. Ahriman causes darkness to cover the earth; he creates ugly and loathsome creatures such as vipers and scorpions, and he unleashes the destructive powers of drought, disease, and death. He creates a whole host of demons and, turning the fury of his destructive force against the jewel of Ohrmazd's creation, he destroys life, killing the fire, the plants, the primal ox, and Gayomart, the perfect man. Of the orderly and benevolent cosmos Ahriman has made a disorderly, noxious ruin.

He prepares to return to the outer darkness to celebrate his revenge. But Ohrmazd will not allow his creation to perish. He creates the *fravashis*, the souls of men yet to be born. These freely enlist in Ohrmazd's service against the ancient foe, and they prevent Ahriman from making his escape into the void. They bind him within the cosmos and within time, so that Ohrmazd may repair his ruined world and resurrect his beloved creation. The corpse of the great ox fertilizes the sterile land, and a gentle rain wets the dry earth, so that plants again may green the world. The fire is rekindled. The seed of the dead Gayomart enters the womb of the earth, and from that union spring the ancestors of all humankind, Mashye and Mashyane.

The first human couple have free will, and initially they choose to love and serve Ohrmazd. But Ahriman tempts them to sin by using against them the essence of sin itself: the lie. The lie is that Ahriman, not Ohrmazd, has created the world, and Mashye and Mashyane believe it. Beguiled by falsehood, they sin again, offering an ox in sacrifice. To the Mazdaists cattle were holy manifestations of the primal ox. The result of the first couple's sin is ambivalent. On the one hand, they gain knowledge and the arts of civilization. But at the same time, strife, hatred, disease, poverty, and death intrude into a world hitherto perfect. The human couple's behavior becomes bent. Though Ohrmazd wishes them

to produce children, they refrain from intercourse for fifty years, and when at last they come together and engender twins, their alienation from the original cosmic harmony has become so great that they devour their own children.

Later children survive to become the ancestors of the human race, but the effects of the original alienation remain with us, and we live in a world distorted by Ahriman and by the defection of the first parents. Humanity incorporates three natures: the divine, derived from Ohrmazd, the brutal and sinful, derived from Mashye and Mashyane, and the demonic, derived from Ahriman. Our hope lies in suppressing the evil and bringing the divine elements forward.

Ahriman meanwhile continues his efforts to disfigure the world by tempting us to embrace disharmony. Prince of evil, he commands a vast host of demons led by seven archfiends who aid him in his struggle against the light. The demons can change their forms and attributes unceasingly. Ahriman himself can adopt any form he wishes, often appearing as a lion, a snake, a lizard, or even a handsome youth. His countless disguises are a sign of his inner nature, that of liar and deceiver.

The end of the cosmos occurs after eons of warfare in which Ahriman seeks to distort creation and Ohrmazd to protect it. Ohrmazd presses the forces of evil on every side. Sensing their imminent defeat, they turn their destructive powers against one another, causing disruption in their own ranks. All the more frenzied by the impending doom, they rack the world in one last spasm of hatred. The sun and moon pale in the heavens, and the stars are shaken from the sky. At last the prince of darkness and his minions are exhausted, and Ahriman falls, this time utterly and finally. Opinion was divided as to whether he was annihilated or forever imprisoned, but in both versions evil is forever removed from the cosmos, and Ohrmazd reigns, infinite, eternal, and omnipotent.

The victory of Ohrmazd brings about the *frashkart*, the end of the corrupted world and the restoration of the cosmos to its primal perfection, or better, for there is no longer any potential for spoiling the shining world. A savior named Soshyans, the last of three beneficent beings born in the endtimes to virgins, appears and resurrects the dead, and all are eventually admitted to eternal bliss. Thus evil, though it may have no origin, does have an end.

This powerful spiritual dualism left a number of difficulties unresolved. If the two spirits are equal, why should the good one necessarily prevail? If they are not equal, what limits the initial power of the evil spirit? And why does it take so long for the good spirit to overwhelm the

evil one? If in eternity the power of one spirit wins the destruction of the other and is capable of destroying it, why does it not win its battle in that eternal, timeless moment?

Quite a different kind of dualism arose in Greece under the name of Orphism. A tradition originating about the sixth century B.C., it posited a cosmic struggle not between two spirits, but between spirit and matter. The myth of Dionysos and the Titans lies at the center of Orphism. At the beginning of the world was Phanes, a being combining both sexes. Phanes produces Ouranos, who sires Kronos, the father of Zeus. Kronos castrates Ouranos, from whose blood the evil Titans arise. The Titans plot to take control of the cosmos, and Zeus, leader of the heavenly gods, struggles to prevent them. After defeating the Titans, Zeus swallows Phanes, thus taking the original principle into himself, becoming a creator god, and producing all things anew, including even the Titans. He also fathers a son, Dionysos. Hating Zeus and envious of the happiness of the infant Dionysos, the Titans approach the child, distract him with a glittering mirror, and seize him. They tear him apart and devour him. But Athene, heavenly goddess of wisdom, rescues the boy's heart and brings it to Zeus, who consumes it himself. Zeus now has intercourse with the mortal girl Semele, who gives birth anew to Dionysos. Pleased with the resurrection of his son, Zeus proceeds to punish his murderers by blasting them to ashes with thunderbolts. From the ashes of the Titans springs the human race.

This myth proposes a dual nature for humanity, both material and spiritual. The material part of our nature derives from the evil Titans, the spiritual part from the god Dionysos whom they devoured. The divine soul is in eternal conflict with the evil, Titanic body that imprisons it. The soul is immortal, but it is trapped like a prisoner in the mortal body: our task on earth is to escape this bodily prison by means of ritual purification. The view that the soul is good and the body evil encountered the Mazdaist idea of the warfare between two spirits sometime around the fourth century B.C. Gradually the two beliefs combined, with matter and the body placed under the power of the evil spirit and soul under the jurisdiction of the good spirit. The new idea that the body was a product of cosmic evil spread widely and came to influence Jewish, Gnostic, and Christian beliefs.

The pagan Greeks believed in a number of malicious spirits, though none that approached the status of a principle of evil. Still, Greek views on spirits produced a linguistic complication. Our word "demon," which is sometimes (imprecisely) used synonymously with "devil," derives

from the Greek *daemon*, which did not necessarily connote an evil being. Homer frequently used *daemon* as the equivalent of *theos*, "god." In the centuries following Homer's time, a *daemon* (or *daimonion*) was generally held to be a spiritual being inferior to a god. The word was still ambiguous at the time of Socrates, whose guiding spirit was a "demon," but Plato's pupil Xenocrates established the negativity of the term by dividing the good gods from the evil demons and shifting the destructive qualities of the gods onto the demons. The Stoics and Plutarch followed suit. Plutarch argued that if tradition says that Apollo destroyed a city, it must really have been a demon taking the shape of Apollo. The negative meaning was further set in the second century B.C.E. by the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, which used *daimonion* to denote the evil spirits of the Hebrews.

The Greeks were the first to explore the question of evil rationally as well as mythologically. Plato and his followers wavered between dualism and monism. They were monist in their belief that everything that exists is a product of, or emanation from, one principle. But their monism was limited by their view that there is an element in the cosmos that resists the one principle. Sometimes they saw this element as the lowest emanation of the one principle, sometimes as something entirely independent of the one. This lowest (or independent) element was usually considered to be matter. The more material a thing is, the more removed it is from the one principle, which is ultimate reality.

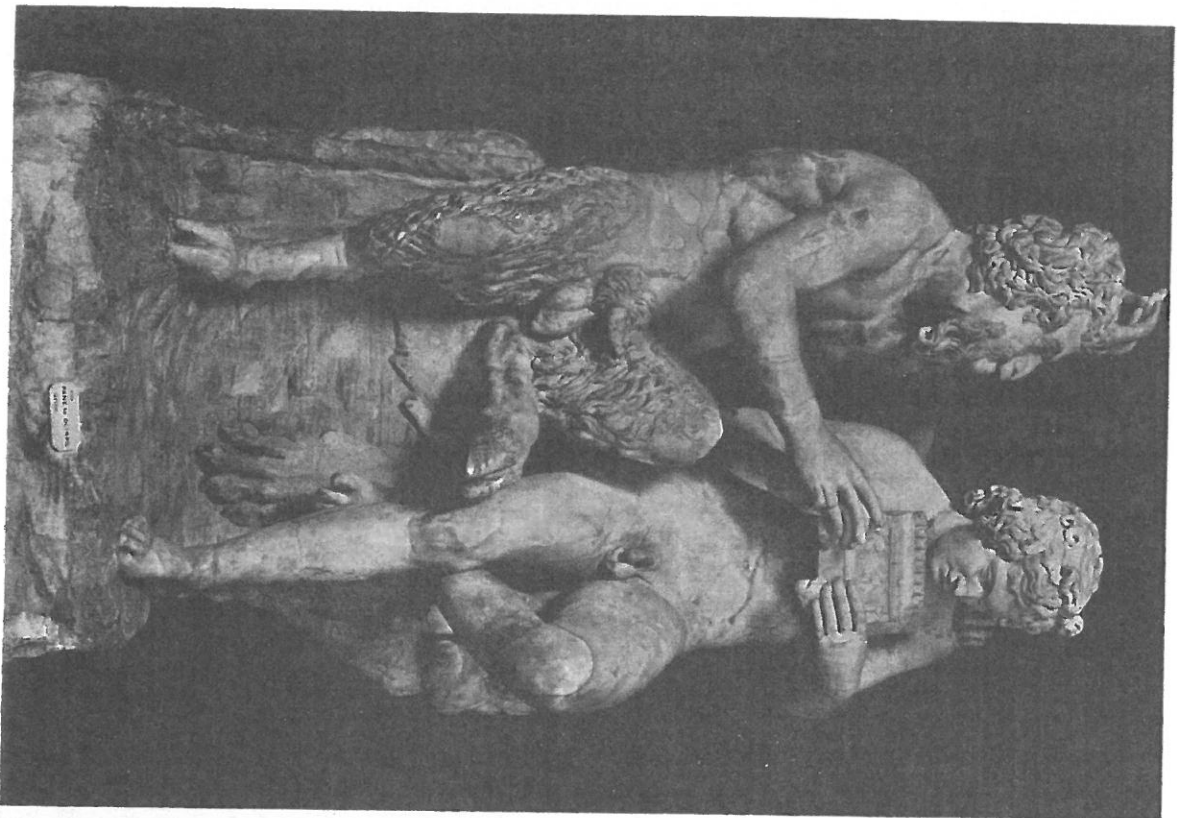
In such a world what are the sources of evil? The Platonists offered a number of suggestions. One was that evil was metaphysically necessary. Since the phenomenal world can never adequately reflect the real world of ideas, it inevitably falls short and is less perfect, real, and good. Metaphysical evil was closely linked in Platonic thought to the idea that evil has no real being at all and consists merely of lack or privation of goodness. A withered cow that gives no milk is an evil, but the evil lies not in the being of the cow but in its *lack* of vitality and health. It is the nonbeing in the cow, not its being, that is at fault. Further, if evil had no real being it could have no principle. On this ground, later philosophers and theologians argued either that the Devil could not exist or that if he did exist he was not a true principle of evil but rather a subordinate spirit or angel whose evil lay not in his angelic being but in his lack of perfection. His enormous power magnified this lack, like a hugely powerful vacuum. The absolute coldness of the Devil is really his complete *lack* of heat.

But the Platonists never argued that evil's lack of ultimate reality

meant that there was no moral evil in the world. Plato was well aware of wars, murders, and lies. Evil exists, but it exists as a lack of good, just as holes in a Swiss cheese exist only as lack of cheese. The evil of a lie is the absence of truth. Plato did not think that the nonbeing of evil removed evil from the world, only that it removed responsibility for evil from the creator. Evil arose not from the God, but from matter.

The invention of philosophy as an alternative to myth as a means of describing and explaining the world was the most influential contribution of Greek and Hellenistic civilization. The Greeks for the first time conducted a rational investigation of the universe—philosophy—and, by applying philosophy to the divine principle, invented theology. Philosophy made theodicy, the effort to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of the God, a problem for rational analysis. Through philosophical and literary reflection, the Greeks obtained generalized divine principle must conform. A thing is not good or evil because the God so names it arbitrarily. Rather, if the God disapproves of something, it is because the thing is intrinsically evil. The divine principle is perfect both morally and ontologically (in its being). Greek philosophy had no room for imperfection in the God, who was an abstract perfection beyond fault, beyond personality.

In Hebrew religion, where the God was truly a person, with intelligence and will, who intervened repeatedly and directly in human affairs, the question of God's responsibility for evil was more than an intellectual question. It was an anguished need to understand a personality with whom one is involved at the deepest levels of one's being.



Pan and Olympus, Pompeii, first century C.E. Pan teaches the young god Olympus to play the syrinx. Courtesy Mansell Collection, London.