

## WARFARE IN THE COSMOS

If one were to arrange the history of the ideas of violence and aggression in periods, the first would be that in which such evils were accepted as an integral part of cosmic history. I refer to what we know of Zoroastrianism. According to this complex of ideas there is a constant battle going on between the forces of evil and those of good, a battle whose ground extended to the limits of the universe. Little if anything is known of the sources of this cosmology but judging from appearances it looks as if they were the frank acceptance of the empirical observation that evil is an active force, autonomous and normally present in all human affairs. History would seem to be the result of an ever-living struggle between evil and the good. That the two sets of contradictory forces are given divine names, Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman, is of no importance here. What is of importance is the acceptance of the evil powers as something inevitable and the relegation of the triumph of goodness to the infinitely remote future.

Zoroaster, or more properly Zarathustra, apparently did not attempt to explain this away nor did the so-called "problem of evil" disturb him. It barely existed. In his prayer to Ahura-Mazda (Yasna 28, verse 12 of the Gâthas) he prays to be told "by what (powers and according to what laws) the primeval

world arose.”<sup>1</sup> Apparently there was some question in his mind of the length of time during which the two spirits, Mazda and Ahriman, had been in conflict, for in Yasna 30, verses 3 and 4, they are both called in the English translation “primeval as to thought, as to word, and as to deed.” In verse 4 in fact we find the sentence, “When the two spirits came together at the first to make life, and life’s absence, and to determine how the world at the last shall be (ordered) for the wicked (Hell) the worst life, for the holy (Heaven) the Best Mental State,” one gathers that they must have been there at the beginning of the cosmos. In any event they immediately began that cosmic battle which will end only at the coming of Ahura Mazda. For Zoroaster says (Yasna 43, verse 6), “Thou shalt come, and with thy bounteous spirit, and thy sovereign power, O Ashura Mazda, by deeds of whom the settlements are furthered through the Righteous Order.” At his coming the righteous shall be rewarded and the unrighteous punished (verse 5). In short at the end of time Ahura Mazda will alone rule the universe and Ahriman will be definitely conquered. Yet in Yasna 44, verse 4, it is clear that Ahura Mazda is the creator of all good and not a god beyond good and evil. We cannot attempt to untangle the inconsistencies of this theology and must simply note that the cosmos is itself a battle, not, so to speak, a static thing. That by the way is probably why fire was chosen as sacred and as an image of the universe. For though fire is destructive, yet it is in a steady state of change which might easily be envisioned as creative.

The battle between Mazda and Ahriman is not for nothing. It is for the possession of human souls. The souls are free to choose between the two opponents and the dice are not loaded. On what basis some acts are called evil and some good does not seem clear. Yasna 44, verses 3 and 4 gives us some hint that the good is a reflection of the laws of nature, the laws exemplified in the moving of the heavenly bodies. For Zoroaster asks of Ahura Mazda the revelation of such matters. But there is no suggestion that following Nature, as in some Greeks, is the universal road to goodness or happiness.

<sup>1</sup> I use the translation of L. H. Mills in the *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller, Oxford 1887, vol. 31.

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It is noticeable that evil is not simply the absence of goodness, as it was in Stoicism and some of the Christian philosophers, for instance Saint Augustine, but a power as real as goodness and one to be fought against without relapse. What man is confronted with is the battle between two powers neither of which can be called "merely apparent" or phenomenal. The world is thus, as I say, a process and since the triumph of goodness is so far off in the future, there is little comfort to the man of piety in the contemplation of that far off event. There is something similar to this in the fragments of Heraclitus, as has been beautifully expounded by Professor Clémence Ramnoux, though she also points out that for Heraclitus the battle in question refers only to the affairs of men. In Burnet's rendering of Heraclitus' fragments, slightly modified, we find (Frg. 43) that "Homer was wrong in saying 'Would that strife might perish from among gods and men!' He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe: for if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away." Again (Frg. 44), "War is the father of all and king of all and some he has shown to be gods and some men: some he has made slaves and some free." Here war or strife clearly is a constructive force, not evil. The action of strife presumably (Frg. 43, 62) like that of the bow and the strings of the lyre, creating a tension between opposing forces, a tension which is probably a harmony, cannot be thought of as evil. The harmony—and here I am guessing—is an ever-living fire which grows and diminishes according to law. Therefore, as in Fragment 62, war and strife are common to all things and strife is justice. Heraclitus is dark enough without my throwing a pall of my own over him and I am not saying that he derives from Zoroaster, nor does Mlle. Ramnoux say so either. But she has pointed out with impressive force the similarities of the two doctrines.<sup>2</sup>

Strife as an integral part of cosmic history is also, as everyone knows, emphasized in the poem of Empedocles. But in him the god of war is given a period to himself in which to dominate the universe. His opponent, Love, is given her period as well. But, whether Empedocles thought of this or not, we have here

<sup>2</sup> See her "Un Episode de la rencontre Est-Ouest, Zoroastre et Héraclite," in *Etudes Présocratiques*, Paris, 1970.

again a harmony of opposites in the sense that each is given its due. To see what later philosophers have made of this, one must skip several centuries and read the *Dialogues on Love* of Leone Ebreo. Leone in typical Neoplatonic fashion merges the basic metaphor of Empedocles with the Homeric myth of Aphrodite and Ares (*Odyssey* VIII), which might also have been in Empedocles' mind, for all we know. Certainly the story was well known, as everything else in Homer was, and the copulation of Love and Strife was appropriate to one who thought of the cosmos as a battle between the two. For just as Catullus could invent the phrase, *odi et amo*, so Empedocles could see in history the interplay of two antagonistic forces. Although there are periods when Love and Strife have each the upper hand, we men are apparently living in periods when the two forces are both at work and there exist elements of both war and peace.

The remaining Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, seem to accept war as normal and give no cosmic position to Ares. Neither uses warfare as a figure of speech for the tensions in the universe. Neither glorifies the military man or the military mind and the most one can say is that both give the army a part to play in protecting the city. They differ profoundly in what they say of the final cause of war, Aristotle maintaining that it is peace (*Politics* 1333a 35, 1334a), whereas Plato (*Laws* VII, 803D) had already denied this. As he says in the *Laws* (VII 803D), we "do not find in war, either as existing or likely to exist, either real play or education worthy of the name, which is what we assert to be in our eyes the most serious thing."<sup>3</sup> Warfare on the ethical plane in Plato is something which was to recur emphatically in Christian writers, a battle between what were called the lower and the higher parts of the soul. The two horses in the myth of *Phaedrus* are pulling in opposite directions, but fortunately there is something, the Reason, to control them. This obviously is repeated in the *Republic* in the anatomy of the city. But in the Christian psychomachia it is the body versus the soul or the virtues versus the vices which are at war.

It is clear that if one believes in the eternity of the world, one will not transfer to the superhuman plane those characteris-

<sup>3</sup> Translation of R. G. Bury, in the Loeb Classical Library, 1952, p. 55.

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tics which are peculiar to humanity. Violence and aggression will be conceived as essentially human or as ingredients of the human psyche. The tripartite analysis of the soul in Plato, as in Aristotle, gives us an ethics of control, not of denial. Neither urges his pupils to turn away from the body or from the senses but to govern them. In Christianity the situation is different. As early as St. Paul the Zoroastrian conflict is transferred to the human individual. The flesh is inherently evil and the physical or corporeal man must be conquered by the spiritual or pneumatic man. The metaphor is clearly that of a battle with the opposing forces ready to strike. One side must be defeated, not appeased, whereas in Plato and Aristotle the terms are not those of warfare but of politics. I hope I am not too fanciful if I suggest that as the Roman Empire became the dominant political force in the ancient world, the notion of struggle and battle and victory became the normal metaphors when dealing with history. After all the Romans were constantly at war, except for a few years under Augustus Caesar, and whatever they had gained in their long history had been gained in war. The proto-Nietzschean philosophy of Thrasymachus, that justice is the rule of the stronger, was realized in post-Hellenic histories as it had been on a smaller scale before the *pax Romana* became the norm. In fact as early as our records go we find Thrasymachus to have been substantiated. Consequently, I suggest, it was easy to see cosmic history as warfare and indeed it was not until Karl Marx made his influence felt that historiographers included in their works more than violence. Yet even in Marxist histories the relation of class to class is envisioned in terms of war. Small wonder then that early Christianity split on the subject of theology and whereas some attempted to see the world as governed by a paternal, infinitely wise, good, and just God, some saw the God of the Old Testament as evil personified. Such heresies as Marcionism reverted to something like Zoroastrianism and we find in other heresies two Gods living in an unending clash. And, as if to exemplify such a theology on earth, the Church and the Heretics fought it out with genuine, not figurative, warfare.

The clash in opinion, as far as such problems go, rests on the solutions given to the so-called problem of evil. The existence of evil is a problem only if one has some reason to believe that

the universe ought to be good. That belief in turn is based on the theorem that the universe was created and governed by a god who is not only all wise and omnipotent and also all good. The first chapter of Genesis makes it clear that God was satisfied with what He had created and consequently if men find it evil, it must be either that they are mistaken or that what looks like evil is really good, being necessary or part of the divine scheme. Evil does not arise as a problem in what is left of early Greek philosophy; it is accepted as a fact. Nor does it appear even in writers like Plato and Aristotle whose works remain in quantity. The problem takes on importance only in Hellenistic, Patristic, and Post-Patristic philosophy.

One solution of the problem was, as I have suggested, that of Marcion. Here one accepts evil as real and as the activity of a god who is in conflict with another god who is good. The good god, who plays the same role as Ahura Mazda, created the spiritual world. The earthly representative of the evil god is Satan, of the good god, Jesus. History is a battle between the two and strictly speaking any concession made to the body or the material world, such as sexual intercourse, is to be condemned. In similar systems, such as that of Basilides, the two gods resemble even more closely the two principles of Zoroaster, since the good god is light and the evil one darkness. Such doctrines developed throughout the Middle Ages with emendations and elaborations. One need only mention the Manicheans, the Priscillianisti, the Bogomils, and the Cathari to see how the movement extended into the thirteenth century. The spread of their tenets was very wide for even in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* the condemnation of intercourse even between married couples is extreme. This idea that chastity must be preserved even in the marriage bed is not Christian, if by that we mean the religion approved by the heads and Councils of the Church. It derives from some Gnostic sect in all probability. In the United States the same idea was held by the first generation of Shakers.

In orthodox Christianity the Devil took the place of the evil god and he remained powerful enough throughout history to tempt and succeed in misleading human beings. It would be appropriate at this point to introduce the story of the fallen angels and the survival of Satan or Lucifer as a force in history. Unfortunately angelology is not within my province. I shall have

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to be satisfied with pointing out that the angels fell as a result of a revolt. They were of course worsted in this revolt, but Satan retained enough power to tempt God in Job and ever since he seems to have been present in full panoply and with cohorts of minor fiends to assist him. If he may be said to represent evil in person, and, I think that this cannot be denied, he resembles Ahriman, except to the best of my knowledge he is never in actual battle with God. However, Satan, as well as his lieutenants, appear frequently in the New Testament, if not in the Old, and even after the Redemption they seem to have the power to tempt and to effectuate their evil plans. As instruments of evil they are on a plane above that of humanity and cannot be interpreted simply as symbolic presentations of human behaviour. They play the same role as Ahriman. But for our purposes it is enough to recall that they are active powers and have been presented as interfering in the course of history. In short, if we can call them merely the force of evil, they will be seen as powerful agents determining the behavior of men and women. At the same time human beings are called upon to extirpate them from human affairs, though the task would seem to be futile.

An out and out statement of the supernatural character of evil is, as we have indicated, found in Marcionism. There is very little that can be said about this heresy and that little comes from its adversaries. But it is certain that it held to the belief in two gods, one good and one evil and they are in conflict. On the level of human life these divinities would be envisioned as the body and the soul, the flesh and the spirit, inherently opposed to each other. In Judaism and Christianity they are paralleled by Satan and God. What is more they seem at times to have given birth to good people and to bad. In John 8:44 Jesus is represented as saying to the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lists of your father ye will do." The Greek text hereabouts presents problems that have been eliminated in the Vulgate and there is some dispute about just what is meant. But some commentators find that this is an echo of Gnosticism in that it seems to say that the Devil and God have each their own

descendants or followers, But it will profit us nothing to engage in speculation.<sup>4</sup>

There seems to be little if anything in the Old Testament to suggest that there is any source of evil in the universe except man's overt disobedience to the command of God. The idea that there is a supernatural agent of evil at war with God is not openly expressed in Scripture, but it may be nevertheless "understood," as the grammarians say when they are trying to fill out incomplete phrases and sentences. It appears, as everyone knows, in the third chapter of Genesis. But the idea that evil is actually at war with good could not have escaped the notice of any man who lived in society and the attribution of evil to a supernatural agent was perhaps normal. No one knows now or is likely to know how these primitive ideas arose and it is useless trying to guess. What is of more interest is to see how what began as a cosmic event was introjected into the human soul and, just as matter and spirit or heaven and hell could be at war, so now the various parts of the human being could be at war.

Throughout the Middle Ages the belief obtained that conflict was a natural event, whether it appeared among human individuals and groups or in the soul itself. Sometimes versions of this appear in folklore, sometimes in philosophical or pseudo-philosophical writings. We cannot go into all this in the time at our disposal, but it may not be out of place to suggest one or two details.

I invite your attention then to the fact of martyrdom, the first example of which, as there is no need for me to emphasize, is in the New Testament, Acts VII, the stoning of St. Stephen. The martyr by definition bears witness to his faith and the witness consists in undergoing torture of various kinds without

<sup>4</sup> Satan appears by name only three times in the O.T., his most impressive appearance being in the prologue to the Book of Job where he is a tempter. So in I Chronicles 21, 1 we read, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." His third appearance is in Zechariah 3, 1, "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Hence it is fair to say that a supernatural agent of evil did exist in the popular mind. Compare this with the speech of Dragon in the *Acts of Thomas*, 32. W.F. Barnett in his article on Satan in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, "Contact with Persian demonology probably influenced Judaism to solidify its concept of Satan; human



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flinching. The torture like the crucifixion is unmerited punishment and thus the martyr reproduces the martyrdom of Christ. On the human level men try to force other men to agree with them and the force is literal not metaphorical. Presumably God approves of martyrdom and rewards it. He obviously does not approve of the torture but he does encourage the faithful to undergo it and does not prevent the Pagans from inflicting it. In short sanctity is acquired by accepting evil as an opponent and conquering it by cheerfully submitting to it. There would be no point in depreciating the strength of the horror. It is real and it has to be conquered. So in chivalry we have the dominant idea of vengeance. If a knight suffers what he believes to be wrong from another knight, he must inflict upon that other as great a wrong in order to prove his dignity (*dignitas*) or position in the hierarchy of society. Once this is done there are no more hard feelings. Evil then is not integrated into the personality of man, at least of a knight, but is thought of as a force existentially independent of human beings. Here the way to conquer it is to perform on another man the same act which one is engaged in punishing. The extraordinary efficacy of this in society is beautifully illustrated in Froissart's account of the capture of King Jean II of France after the battle of Poitiers. The king was responsible for his own defeat and was brought before his conqueror, the Black Prince. One might have thought that the Prince would inflict punishment upon the King equivalent to the suffering that the English troops had undergone, though as a matter of cold fact that had not been so very great. But on the contrary, a supper was given in honor of Jean and Prince Edward served the King as humbly as he could and would not sit "at the king's board for any desire the king could make, but he said he was not sufficient to sit at the table with so great a prince as the king was." And he proceeded to congratulate him on his valor in the battle. It is clear that the two evils were found to be commensurate and once measured and found to be equal, they became irrelevant to friendship or peaceful relations. Once the *lex talionis* had been applied, in this case not after the

life and history with their conflicts became the battleground between good and evil, between God and Satan. A transcendental dualism was thereby introduced into Judaism for the first time."

battle but during it, all was well. The evil was detached from him who had committed it and then had been annihilated.<sup>5</sup>

It would look then as if violence were transferred from the cosmic to the human plane as something having an independent existence of its own. Evil then becomes something like a ball of matter which comes and goes, passing through human existence like a planet going round the sun. And just as the martyr and the knight welcome evil and know how to overcome it, so in the early nineteenth century evil was accepted as an opportunity to assert oneself and “realize” oneself. I am thinking, as is probably obvious, of Fichte. To Fichte the world was to be interpreted as in terms of morality, not in terms of sensory observation. The historical source of this is doubtless Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*. In Kant those beliefs which are necessary for a moral life were believed to be true. According to Fichte the Ego, after positing itself, posits the Non-Ego or the world of nature. It does this not only because a term obtains meaning by contrast or opposition with its contradictory—*omnis determinatio / est negatio*—but also in order to have an antagonist to overcome. It would seem to me, if not to others, that this is a sort of dialectical rationalization of what lay behind the *Sturm und Drang*. A worthy antagonist, as Royce used to point out to his classes, must be capable of beating you, and the objective world is such a one. Just as a saint must be victorious over his torturers, so must he be victorious over his tempters, be that tempter his body or some diabolical agent. We might add that in so far as saints perform miracles, they show a Fichtean streak in conquering the laws of nature. But a saint who does not have to struggle against moral opponents is hardly worthy of canonization. Thus aggression turns into a good in that it furnishes the occasion to rise above one’s normal humanity. The Ego in Fichte becomes more of an Ego by first creating and then combatting the Non-Ego. Similarly a nation gains a national soul by fighting against aggressors, as Fichte urged his compatriots to do in his *Reden* or as the knights in the *Morte d’Arthur* do when they ride forth in search of

<sup>5</sup> Froissart may not have been a reliable historian of economics and politics but he does represent the feelings of chivalric society. Cf. the idea of vengeance in Greece in E. Rohde, *Psyche*, pp. 178 ff., English translation, N. Y. 1925.

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adventure. Is all this much more than the love of *Streben*? Just as the angel of the Lord discovered, when he gave Lessing the choice of the truth or the search for truth and Lessing preferred the latter, so people have been told that the doing, not the accomplishment, the striving not the attainment, the fight not the victory, was the goal. This seems to be the moral equivalent of art for art's sake.

There emerged out of this the notion of the heroic life. The Great Man in history, though not Carlyle's, always seemed to be a fighter. He devastated countries, slaughtered populations, tyrannized over his fellowmen, and achieved greatness because he fought. If, like Frederick the Great, he also played the flute, that was of little moment as far as his greatness was concerned. His heroism lay in his military adventures. Carlyle at least included men of letters, statesmen, and religious leaders in his list of heroes, though he seemed to be more interested in men like Frederick, Cromwell, and Napoleon. It would look as if the Great Man need produce nothing of lasting value but merely to fight something and win. Thus Luther was a hero in spite of the diversity of Protestant sects.

To object, however, to the Hero as ideal on the ground which I have intimated would be like objecting to Nietzsche's Superman on the ground that he was cruel, capricious, arrogant, wilful, unscrupulous, and so on. The Superman was modeled on Cesare Borgia, not on John the Baptist. Good and evil were obviously redefined by him and, like Machiavelli's Prince, or for that matter the Byzantine Emperor, *jus est quod principi placet*. This when generalized would of course result in anarchy, but it would also result in strong men not frightened by novelty. To such men fighting is virtue and violence is not to be deprecated. If what I say is right, evil is that which threatens me and may frustrate me. In short there exists no authority above me. In a revalued system of values, some eulogistic word would have to be found for "violence."<sup>6</sup>

At this point we are induced to insert a word on suffering as a romantic ideal. Suffering is the obverse of doing and whereas to do was the kernel of the heroic life, to be done unto was that

<sup>6</sup> Though this is a commonplace, it may be just as well to refer to Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, par. 200 and 260.

of the Romantics who like Musset believed that *rien ne nous rend si grand qu'une grande douleur* (*Nuit de mai*).<sup>7</sup> Suffering, it is true, resembled the passion of Christ when it was undeserved or when it could be thought of as such. H. G. Schenck in his *The Mind of the European Romantics* points out (p. 100) this religious context and shows how even a nation, like Poland, could become a paradigm of the Christlike sufferer ennobled by the suffering itself. But to suffer demands that something be done unto you. There must be some active force which is an aggressor. Like the various apologies for Satan that have appeared in European history, beginning with St. Ambrose's *O felix culpa*, the existence of evil is justified as being the occasion for good. Hence it might be concluded that war, aggression, violence, are all in the grand scheme of things as providing men the opportunity to suffer and thus become great. Ahriman becomes acquitted.

The basic model of a battle is peculiarly exemplified in Hegel's dialectical pattern. Here the thesis by emphasizing itself, by self-assertion, turns into its opposite. But the metamorphosis does not annihilate that which is changed, but rather retains it in a new form. So in the synthesis both the thesis and the antithesis are absorbed but not done away with. This has been beautifully illustrated in Marxism both in literary history and in political practice. In contrast to Fichte Hegel maintained that the Non-Ego at any stage was the outgrowth of a historical moment and therefore had to succeed to what had existed before. In the *Phenomenology* the human spirit wills its opposite, as the Ego did in Fichte, but it wills it with the result that it becomes it. The slave wills the existence of the master and then takes on the master's point of view. So the master wills the existence of the slave and it is only by absorbing something of the slave's mentality that he moves up to a higher synthesis. But he does so only by becoming more dependent on his slaves. "Lordship and bondage," as Jacob Loewenberg puts it in his *Hegel's Phenomenology* (p. 88), "are thus shown to be mutually inclusive: the most despotic master, recognizing the inevitable ties

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Lecture III, Everyman edition, p. 324. The Hero in Carlyle is "sent" by God. He sees the essence, super-temporal, in things and thus penetrates through their out husk. But he also, like Dante, *è stato all'Inferno*.

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that bind him to another, comes in the end to be haunted by a consciousness of dependence not dissimilar to that of the slave: and the slave, be he ever so submissive, in becoming gradually aware of the prowess his work exemplifies, develops a stubborn mind of his own and with it a degree of independence cognate in principle with the master's." The supposed fusion of opposites which was common to the thoughts of all post-Kantian idealists constitutes an apology for violence and aggression, since it is only by having an opponent that one becomes oneself. Ahriman and Mazde thus become interdependent.

This formula runs through all spheres of thought in Hegel, appearing in his *Logic* as an abstract pattern and being worked out concretely in his aesthetics, his politics, his philosophy of religion and history. If one is convinced by its eloquence and wealth of example, one finds oneself accepting things as they are on the ground that the negative is necessary for the existence of the affirmative. There is therefore always an enemy confronting one. Life becomes the conquering of this enemy. When stripped of its rhetoric this boils down to the notion that whatever is, is right, a notion that would have horrified Hegel. It is a far cry from the dualism of Zoroaster and amusingly enough a case where the history of an idea illustrates an intellectual obversion. For what began as an acceptance of two realities ends as the absorption of one into the other, or as an English Hegelian, for example Bosanquet would have said, the absorption of the two into a larger whole.

If evil is defined as that which ought to be eliminated, then we find that our history breaks down into several periods. First, both good and evil are deified and seen in conflict with each other. Second, the conflict itself is seen as productive of good and one does not hope to eliminate it but to use it. Third, evil is accepted as inevitable and the very essence of aggression is moral improvement. One no longer is confident of ever eliminating evil but is happy to be in an unending war against it. Evil is still talked about as a thing independent of human nature or human intercourse, but it is always found on the human level when one seeks an example of it. One might even project a fourth stage, a stage in which one creates something to conquer the inherent value of conquering. One would argue that if there were nothing to overcome, there would be no significance in living. Man would become

a mere machine for registering wave lengths. This would seem depressing no doubt but on the other hand, when our perspectives are blinded by the dust of battle, simple observation and calm take on an alluring aspect.