

6.1 EVIL, THE DEVIL AND THE NEGATIVE POWER

NO ONE CAN DENY THE EXISTENCE of good and bad in this world. To a greater or lesser extent, it confronts everyone at every step – both within oneself as well as in the outside world. The origin of this interplay, however, is not so easy to determine. Most religions assert that God is the supreme Creator and controller of all things. Many teach that He is also a God of love and compassion. Consequently, there is a fundamental dichotomy in all attempts to explain God and the world in logically satisfying terms. For how can a loving, compassionate and merciful God, who appears to demand such a high standard of behaviour from His created souls, have created such things as evil and suffering?

Religion, theology, mysticism and philosophy have put forward many different myths, explanations, theories, opinions and dogmas to account for this paradox. But since, necessarily, these accounts have all been expressed in intellectual and conceptual terms, there is no external visible proof of any of them, and therefore none of them are entirely satisfying.

Most religions speak in terms of a devil, in one form or another, but the way in which this power is understood varies between and within the many religious and spiritual traditions. Common elements are present between them, however, and perhaps the broadest-based scenario has been put forward by a number of mystics, gnostics and mystical schools throughout the ages. This school of thought sees the good and bad of this world as two sides of the same coin. Some mystics have also added that this world, and a vast area of the heavenly realms as well, are under the administration of an *archon* (ruler) or ‘super-devil’ who has a divinely appointed role to keep all souls within his domain through the interplay of good and bad, happiness and suffering, bliss and misery. But since the truth or otherwise of this scenario can only be determined by mystical experience of the whole affair, for the majority of people, this too remains only another possibility.

In popular thought, the devil is the supreme spirit of evil, the rival or enemy of God and, therefore, in ordinary usage, the concept has an exclusively negative connotation. The ‘super-devil’, on the other hand, is a servant of God, even an exalted entity, and compared to man, is “full of light, goodness, wisdom and power”.¹ Everything he does is by divine command, and ultimately has a divine and loving purpose; for it

is the discomfort of separation from God which finally drives the soul to seek union with Him. Intellectually, this is somehow a more satisfying idea than a devil who – to one extent or another – is forever outside the dominion of the Divine, with powers of his own, and acting as His eternal enemy.

The negative aspect of this power is that he is the origin of the mind, the body and the senses and through these agents, acting in the realm of duality, he keeps souls enmeshed in the lower realms of creation – the physical, astral and causal worlds. The law by which this ‘super-devil’ keeps souls in these lower realms is one of pure justice, of pure cause and effect. The souls themselves are thus responsible for their own suffering. Understood in this manner, this devil is clearly of a different character from the all-evil being of traditional religious conception.

Terms for this ‘super-devil’, for the devil as he is commonly understood, and also for lesser devils and demons are the subject of this section. Since terms such as Satan, *Shayṭān*, *Kāl*, the Demiurge and so on have a spread of meaning in their normal religious settings, it has been necessary to choose a neutral English term specifically for the ‘super-devil’. Though not ideal, largely because it was first used only recently, during the early twentieth century, and is also unfamiliar to the majority of people, the term chosen for this purpose is the ‘negative power’. This term does have the advantage of being largely free from the connotations of other possible contenders.

KEY ENTRIES: devil, devils, Kāl, negative power, Satan.

1. Julian Johnson, *The Path of the Masters*, POM p.260.

Those “that are in the graves” are the people of this world. But those who hear the Voice of the Son of God “shall come forth” from their graves. When they hear the divine Music or the mystic Voice within, they will be able to leave their bodies. This is the only resurrection that mystics teach.

Likewise, in the *Books of the Saviour*, Matthew interprets a line from one of the *Odes of Solomon* to mean:

You have freed them from the graves,
and have removed them from the midst of the corpses.

Pistis Sophia 158:71; cf. PS pp.316–17, PSGG p.131

The soul who is so raised is “removed” from the company of “corpses”, the spiritually dead people in the graveyard of the world.

See also: **death, resurrection (<2), tomb.**

habāʾ, al- (A/P) *Lit.* the dust; an Arabic term used for matter, the substance of the physical universe. The term predates its synonym *al-hayūlá*, derived from the Greek *hylē*. As terms for matter, and even for the body, ‘dust’, ‘clay’ and ‘earth’ have been commonly used by mystics in a variety of languages. *Al-habāʾ* is also used for primordial ‘matter’, the subtle essence of matter out of which the physical universe is created.

See also: **al-hayūlá.**

harlots See **publicans and harlots.**

hayūlá, al- (A/P) *Lit.* matter, substance; an Arabic term derived from the Greek *hylē*, which originally meant ‘wood’, and came to be the common mystical term for matter:

Hayūlá comes from a Greek word meaning origin and matter. In philosophy, it denotes that essence in the body which accepts whatever happens to the body in the form of attachment or detachment. It is where the various categories of physical form appear.

Jurjānī, Kitāb al-Taʾrīfāt, in FLTM9 p.336

With scholars, it is that which accepts forms in an absolute way, without being designated to a specific form; it is also called matter.

Tahānawī, Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn, in FLTM9 p.336

Habā', dust, was also used as a generic term for the stuff out of which the material universe is made. *Hayūlá* was adopted into Arabic as philosophy and metaphysics developed as a branch of Islamic learning.

See also: **al-habā'**, **hylē**.

ḥijāb, al- (A/P) *Lit.* the veil, the curtain, the partition; the traditional veil worn by Muslim women; also used as the plural form; mystically, anything that hides the inner reality; that which makes the Unseen (*al-Ghayb*) to be unseen; any obstruction in the spiritual path; anything which obscures mystical perception; whatever causes the heart to turn away from contemplation and knowledge of God.

In one of the *ḥadīth* (traditional sayings) of Muḥammad, *Allāh* is said to hide Himself behind a veil of lesser light or fire, since the sight of Him would bring the creation to an end:

Abū Mūsá, may *Allāh* be pleased with him, reported: *Allāh's* Messenger (may peace be upon him) was standing among us and he told us five things. He said: "Verily, the Exalted and Mighty *Allāh* does not sleep, and it does not befit Him to sleep. He lowers the scale and lifts it. The deeds in the night are taken up to Him before the deeds of the day, and the deeds of the day before the deeds of the night. His veil (*ḥijāb*) is the light (*nūr*).... If He withdraws it (the veil), the splendour of His countenance would consume His creation so far as His sight reaches."

Ḥadīth Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, HIC 103 (263), SM1 79:179

Sufis have been common users of the metaphor. In *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (*Unveiling the Veiled*), Hujwārī writes of eleven veils on the path to God, saying that the *nafs*, the sensual part of man's being, is the centre of "veiling (*ḥijāb*)".¹ Likewise, Rūmī points to "self-interest" as the origin of a "hundred veils":

When self-interest appears, virtue becomes hidden:
a hundred veils (*ḥijāb*) rise from the heart to the eye.

Rūmī, Maṣnavī I:334, MJR2 p.21

Ḥijāb also appears in a number of expressions such as *ḥijāb-i zalmānī* (veil of obscurity or darkness), *ḥijāb-i raynī* (veil of covering), *ḥijāb-i abr* (veil of cloud), *ḥijāb-i ghaynī* (veil of clouding), *ḥijāb al-izzah* (purblindness, perplexity). As Rūmī points out, "selflessness is cloudlessness"; for as long as an individual lives within the limitations of the self, he remains under

the veil of clouding, a veil that blocks the divine light. This veil or “cloud” of the self and body “has caused” the mind “to conceive fantasies”:

Selflessness is cloudlessness, O well-disposed one:
 in selflessness, you will be like the orb of the moon.
 Again, when a cloud comes, driven along, the light goes:
 of the moon, there remains but a phantom.
 Its light is made feeble by the veil of cloud (*ḥijāb-i abr*):
 that noble full moon becomes less than the new moon.
 The moon is made to appear a phantom by clouds and dust:
 the cloud, the body, has caused us to conceive fantasies.

Rūmī, Maṣnavī V:684–87; cf. MJR6 p.43

Al-ḥijāb also refers to the creation. That is, all the levels of creation below that which is permanent and unchanging are veils over God’s face. In fact, according to a Sufī tradition, there are “seventy thousand veils” separating *Allāh* from the “world of matter and of sense”. W.H.T. Gairdner is paraphrasing al-Ghazālī, when he writes:

Seventy thousand veils separate *Allāh*, the one Reality, from the world of matter and of sense. And every soul passes before his birth through these seventy thousand. The inner half of these are veils of light: the outer half, veils of darkness. For every one of the veils of light passed through, in this journey towards birth, the soul puts off a divine quality: and for every one of the dark veils, it puts on an earthly quality. Thus the child is born weeping, for the soul knows its separation from *Allāh*, the one Reality. And when the child cries in its sleep, it is because the soul remembers something of what it has lost. Otherwise, the passage through the veils has brought with it forgetfulness (*nisyān*): and for this reason man is called *insān*.² He is now, as it were, in prison in his body, separated by these thick curtains from *Allāh*.

But the whole purpose of Sufism, the way of the dervish, is to give him an escape from this prison, an apocalypse of the seventy thousand veils, a recovery of the original unity with the One, while still in this body. The body is not to be put off; it is to be refined and made spiritual – a help and not a hindrance to the spirit. It is like a metal that has to be refined by fire and transmuted. And the *Shaykh* tells the aspirant that he has the secret of this transmutation. “We shall throw you into the fire of spiritual passion,” he says, “and you will emerge refined.”

W.H.T. Gairdner, WMM p.9ff., in MOI pp.15–16

Al-Ghazālī speaks again of these “seventy thousand veils” in his *Mishkāṭ al-Anwār* (*Niche for Lights*) when explaining the *ḥadīth* concerning *Allāh*’s veil:

Allāh has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness: “Were He to withdraw their curtain, then would the splendours of His face surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight.”²³

Al-Ghazālī, Mishkāṭ al-Anwār 3, MRG4 p.27, MAG p.47; cf. FSC (3.2) p.149

Seventy times something is commonly used in Arabic to denote a large number, and al-Ghazālī also points out that some variants of the *ḥadīth* speak of seven hundred (ten times seventy).

See also: **al-Ghayb** (4.1).

1. Hujwārī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* XI:52, *KM* p.149.
2. Al-Ghazālī is relating the phonetic similarity of *nisyān* (forgetfulness) to *insān* (man); *nisyān* is not the etymological root of *insān*.
3. *Ḥadīth Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, SMI* 79:179.

huàn hsiàng (huàn xiàng), huàn mèng (huàn mèng) (C) *Lit.* illusory (*huàn*) appearance, image or shape (*hsiàng*) or dream (*mèng*); thus, mirage, phantom, illusion; Taoist terms expressing a fundamental Taoist doctrine that the physical world as experienced through the senses does not represent reality as it really is, but is more like an illusion or a dream.

See also: **dream, illusion (in Taoism)**.

huntress A woman who seeks out other creatures with the intention of killing or capturing, either for sport or food, or both. The Indian mystic, Kabīr, likens *māyā* (illusion), the ‘companion’ of the negative power, to a huntress. She is, even so, doing the will of the Divine; she is a “servant of the Lord”:

This crazy *māyā*, a servant of the Lord,
has set out on a chase,
keen on the scent of her prey.
One by one she picks out the clever, the wise,
and the sophisticated;
She slays them all, she spares not one.

She slays the *munis* (sages), she slays the brave;
 She even slays those who make
 the earth and sky their dress (*digambara*s, naked ascetics).
 She slays the *yogīs* even while they sit in meditation,
 she slays the *jangams* (ascetics)
 who have made the jungles their home.
 No one can subjugate *māyā*.

She slays the erudite who pore over the pages
 of the *Vedas* and holy books;
 She slays the priest while he performs his worship,
 she slays the *paṇḍit* while he expounds the scriptures.
 She has tamed one and all:
 she keeps them under bit and reins....

In the home of the worldly man, she wields the sceptre;
 But at the doorstep of true devotees,
 she stands an abject slave.
 Says Kabīr: listen, O friends,
 the moment she approached me, I drove her away.

Kabīr, Bījak, Kaharā 12, KSB p.77

See also: **hunter** (6.1).

hylē (Gk) *Lit.* wood; esoterically, matter; very commonly used in Greek and gnostic texts for matter, as contrasted with spirit. In the Manichaean psalms, the devotee frequently begs for release from “matter (*hylē*)”:

All the worldly matter (*hylē*) that surrounds me –
 burn it today, I beseech you.
 Cleanse me from all the sins,
 for I too have hung on your hope.

Manichaean Psalm Book CCXLII; cf. MPB p.49

The gifts of matter (*hylē*) I have cast away:
 your sweet yoke I have received in purity.

Manichaean Psalm Book CCXLVII; cf. MPB p.55

The means of this release is also stated: it is the divine *Nous*, the Mind, Intelligence or *Logos* of God “that subdues matter”:

O *Nous* that subdues matter (*hylē*),
 spread your mercy upon my spirit.
 I will anchor in your congregation, I, the new man,
 and receive all the gifts which you have promised me,
 which are victory in your eternal kingdom.

Manichaean Psalm Book CCL; cf. MPB p.59

The term was also used in Jewish and Muslim thought, coming from the Greek through such philosophers as the second-century Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander systematized Aristotle's thought and influenced medieval philosophers such as Arabic-speaking Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), and the Arabic philosopher and physician of Spain, Ibn Rushd (1126–1188), also known as Averroës.

Alexander spoke in terms of a passive, hylic or material intelligence in man which received life and energy from the *Nous* or intelligence of God. The hylic intelligence, being essentially material, was considered to be mortal, while the *Nous*, of divine origin, was immortal.

Hylē was also used, in a more general sense, in Kabbalistic philosophy by the fourteenth-century Rabbi Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi for the eternal divine Essence or Substance that preceded the emanation of the creation and the *sefirot* (divine emanations).

See also: **al-hayūlá.**

ignorance See **spiritual ignorance.**

illness See **sickness.**

illusion A false appearance, a deceptive impression; mystically, the illusion of this world and all the realms lying within the orbit of the greater mind; the dance of diversity and multiplicity created by the mind over the face of the divine oneness; commonly used to translate the Indian, *māyā*. The illusory nature of the world is depicted in the gnostic *Book of Thomas the Contender*:

To the fool ... good and bad are the same....
 For that which guides them ...
 will give them an illusion of truth,
 and will shine on them with a perishable beauty;
 And it will imprison them in a dark sweetness,
 and captivate them with fragrant pleasure.

And it will blind them with insatiable lust,
 and burn their souls and become for them
 like a stake stuck in their heart,
 which they can never dislodge.

And like a bit in the mouth,
 it leads them according to its own desire.

Book of Thomas the Contender 140, NHS21 pp.186–89

The author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* points to the changing nature of things as the source of illusion:

But what am I telling you now?
 Those who are living shall die.
 How do they live in an illusion?
 The rich have become poor,
 and the kings have been overthrown.

Everything is prone to change.
 The world is an illusion! –
 lest, indeed, I rail at things to excess!

Treatise on the Resurrection 48, NHS22 pp.154–55

See also: **Error, forgetfulness, māyā, spiritual ignorance.**

illusion (in Taoism) (C. *mèng huàn, huàn mèng*) The Taoist terms, *mèng huàn* (dreamlike illusion, dreamlike fantasy) and *huàn mèng* (illusory dream) encapsulate a fundamental Taoist doctrine that the physical world as experienced through the senses does not represent the true reality of things. It is more of an illusion or a dream, because things experienced here are transient, and are relative to the person observing them.

To the Taoist, the nature of the physical world is governed by the principle of duality; the polarities that exist in all phenomena. In Chinese thought, these polarities are called *yīn* and *yáng*. *Yīn* represents one pole or extreme and *yáng* represents the opposite, and it is their interrelationships, combinations and fluctuations that determine the qualities and characteristics of all phenomena in the universe. This seesaw motion causes a continual waxing and waning of relative dominance that is the cause of all change in the physical world. Taoists call this constancy of change (*ì*). Further, it is the nature of human beings to discriminate and categorize all things and experiences: one thing is considered superior while another is inferior; one opinion is right, while another is wrong; things are pleasurable and painful; there is light and dark, hot and cold. Therefore, what may appear to be true to one person may be the complete opposite to another. Taoists believe that