

STATUS OF AHRIMAN IN THE PAHLAVI DUALISM

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Madan's *Denkard* 534.56¹ maintains that Ahriman (or *Ahremen*) "has never been and will never be," which at first sight may not seem to be logical, but Shaul Shaked has tried to prove its validity by discovering the structural connection which makes it comprehensible.² He quotes *Dadestane Dini* XVIII, 2-3, which declares that Ahriman has no material being, whereas Ohrmazd is present in the material world through his creation. For this reason, as Shaked points out, one sees in vain any list of Ahriman's creations except demons, who ultimately will be "smashed and annihilated" along with "materiality" or material camouflage they have crookedly adopted in order to look real but it is "not wearing its own substance but an alien one." Thus, material existence is here made out to be a matter of actuality which, however, demons, being by definition a negative concept, are completely unable to attain. But then the question arises as to where does the human wickedness come from if the wicked cannot in any way be juxtaposed with Ahriman. Fortunately, the answer is provided by *Denkard* VI, 264: "It is possible to put Ahriman out of this world if every person for his part should chase him out of his body, for Ahriman's habitation in the world is in the human body", thereby, one can surmise letting the gods occupy the whole world. Shaked quotes *Greater Bundahishn*, p. 6, which depicts Ohrmazd fixing a time-table for the battle against Ahriman in order to restrict the time, and therefore the opportunity for mischief by Ahriman which Shaked rightly regards as confirming the tradition depicted in the *Denkard* passage cited above. Thus the presence of Ahriman in the world "is not an ontological fact, but merely an anthropological or psychological phenomenon." (I wonder if it is reminiscent of Freudian psychology where Super Ego is battling Id and Ego?). Shaked does not deny the reality of Ahriman which he sees confirmed by the *Greater Bundahishn*, p. 4, which acknowledges that Ohrmazd in His omniscience knew that Ahriman is present in the world and would attack Him. But Ahriman being "totally negative, hence also non-material character," does not pose a serious threat (but only serves Ohrmazd's purpose for creating and protecting the world).

Shaked also quotes *Greater Bundahishn*, p. 11, which declares that

1 Madan, Dhanjishah Meherjibhai. *The complete text of the Pahlavi Dinkard*. 1911.

2 "Some Notes on Ahremen the Evil Spirit, and His Creation," *Studies in Mysticism and Religion*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967, pp. 227-234)

Ohrmazd created fire/light “from his own selfness” and Ahriman created material darkness, but it does not indicate from what substance which suggests “material darkness is regarded as a purely negative concept lacking substance, and thus not an evidence of material creation, unlike light.” *Greater Bundahishn*, p. 11f, states that “Ahriman” created that creature through which he made his own body worse, that is, that it will become powerless,” thus unwillingly working against him and ultimately jeopardizing and endangering his own existence.

Shaked posits that the statement that Ohrmazd exists (in *Getig*) whereas Ahriman does not, “completes the symmetry between the two powers,” it also reveals “the radical impossibility of attaining a real equality of parallelism in such a dualistic religion.” In the Gathas the opposition is between Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, Ahura Mazda essentially not having a rival, thus tilting the balance heavily in favor of the good forces. This does not change the dualistic structure, as W.D. Henning pointed out in the Ratanbai Katrak lectures. However, even though dualism in the Pahlavi texts somehow shifted to a straight forward dualism between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, the dichotomy between the two is clearly not complete as there is “inherent lack of balance between the two powers,” because Ahriman is a negative force, creating nothing but destroying everything good on his path. “It is thus essentially secondary in the cosmic order and it implies the priority as well as superiority of Ohrmazd. Making of the material world out of the spiritual or conceptual *Menog* world was thus made possible mainly through the negative nature and agency of the evil principle.” I for one wonder therefore if this theme really falls under the category of dualism strictly speaking or calls for a more appropriate classification or categorization, since a power such as the Ahriman who does not exist, who is all evil and cannot create anything but evil which in turn will only “make his own body” working worse, who is not even aware of future happenings, who is even “not wearing its own substance but an alien one,” who will be ultimately “smashed and annihilated, is apparently no match for the omniscient, omnipresent Ahuramazda who is indeed also omnipotent but who in his loving act for mankind wants to make it perfect and free of all evil so it can reside with Him in Garothman in a blessed higher spiritual state (*Bundahishn* 3:23-24).

This may explain why Ohrmazd created Ahriman – for men “to put Ahriman out of this world” and “to chase him out of his body” for Ahriman’s habitation in the world is in the human body,” as *Denkard* VI, 264 declares.

That is why Yasna 31.11 declares so vividly that God granted (Free Will to mankind, (although it compromised His own omnipotence), even before (*Paourvim*) creating “creatures and conceptions” and “body

and breath so as to make mankind responsible for their own salvation by always choosing right and driving out the evil (Gathic *Angra*), Ahrimanic element confronting them and merging with God (Yasna 60.12). Nay, “one who shall defeat deceit by truth” “shall increase God's own glory per Yasna 31.6, 34.1, 48.1, etc. Laying utmost emphasis on the role humans play in eradicating evil by exercising their Free Will the prehistoric Gathic monotheism as well as the later Pahlavi monotheism stand unique among other forms of monotheism that followed it a millennia or so later insofar as it tries its best to solve the age old puzzle of why a good God creates evil or even lets it exist. It is not therefore surprising that even Christian thinkers today tend to account in some way for Free Will in explaining the existence of evil in the world though not without creating theoretical problems for them.