

Zoroastrian Metaphysics

An Explanation of Some Terms

Metaphysics is one of the more abstruse of the philosophical sciences through which the workings of the cosmos may be examined. This philosophical study leads one to a better understanding of one's self and the relationship that this self has with the outside world.

In metaphysics one deals with questions like the origin of the world, the principles that govern it and indeed the nature of that which exists in the relative world. A study of metaphysics enables one to comprehend the paradoxes in life through an existential perspective of the world.

Existentialism "...is a 20th century philosophy centred upon the way man finds himself in the world. In existentialism, one regards human existence as not exhaustibly describable or understandable in mere scientific terms. Existentialism stresses upon the freedom and responsibility of the individual and the irreducible uniqueness of an ethical or religious framework." (Webster's Dictionary p 401)

Antithesis is the rhetorical contrast of ideas by means of parallel arrangement of words. It is something in direct and unequivocal (leaving no doubt) opposition.

Axiom is a principle widely accepted on its intrinsic merit. It is a proposition regarded as a self-evident truth from which one can postulate.

Hypothesis is a tentative assumption made in order to draw out its logical or empirical consequences. It is the formulation of a natural principle based on an inference from observable data.

Empirical is relying on experience or observation alone, often without considering a system or a theory.

Infinite is subject to no limitation or external determination.

Essence is the permanent, ultimate intrinsic nature of matter as contrasted with the accidental element of being.

Existence is that which exists and within which a reality is affirmed.

Miscreation is the apparent existence of that which on its own cannot exist. It is parasitic to that which is existent.

Some Basic Metaphysical Axioms in Zoroastrianism

God

God Is The First Principle:

"...when I saw Thee to be the First One at the creation of the world...." (Y.43.5).

If we say that God is the first one or the first principle, then no thing can exist before God; for if something existed before God, then something other than God would have had to create Him (i.e. God), in which case God would not be the first one. This of course is untenable as Zarathushtra proclaimed God to be the "First One" in his hymns.

God Is Uncreated:

If we take the axiom that God is the "First One", then there can be no thing before God which could have created Him. Hence God is the Uncreated First One whose task it is to create. God's creations are a reality observable by man; hence God is seen as the source of creation in all the major religious systems of the world.

God Is Eternal:

"Thou who dost guard truth and the good mind for eternity...." (Y.28.11).

If God is deemed to be uncreated, then there can be no beginning and no end to God and hence He remains eternal. God, in other words, is the existent and permanent as contrasted with the temporary element in matter. Thus,

God is the source and essence of the irreducible and intrinsic nature of matter.

God Is Ever-Present, All-Knowing and Wise:

God is ever-present because He is the source of existence and therefore a fundamental part of it. The quality of all-knowingness (omniscience) is intrinsic and synonymous with the concept of wisdom.

Wisdom by definition implies a knowledge of all that was, is and will be in the universe. Hence it is the all-knowing, wise God who is the Maker and the material of this world.

Wisdom is the source of all knowledge and the recognition or consciousness of that source is the reality of existence (i.e. wisdom itself). If the existence of that source of all knowledge (i.e. wisdom) is denied, then nothing can exist. If nothing exists, there can be no consciousness; for a consciousness with no thing to be conscious of, is a contradiction in terms. One has to be conscious of something, before one can identify consciousness; that something is the existence of the Uncreated, All-Knowing, First One, who in Zoroastrianism is called Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom.

God Is Totally Good and Perfect:

God in Zoroastrianism is deemed to be totally good and perfect. Hence, that which is imperfect (evil) cannot emerge from God, for if it did, then God would no longer remain totally good and perfect. In Zoroastrianism therefore, God cannot be held to be the bringer of imperfections such as misery, pain, suffering, poverty, disease or death. Here lies the intellectual strength of Zarathushtra's teachings. Whilst others get confused about the tragedies and misfortunes in the world, a Zoroastrian is given a rational and theologically sound conceptual framework through which he may tackle these problems. A Zoroastrian does not need to resort to the theory of reincarnation or believe in a fatalistic divine plan in which man

is relegated to being a mere puppet or a pawn in the drama of cosmic evolution.

How can an all-wise, all-knowing Being who is kind, just and perfect, be in any way responsible for that which is even slightly imperfect or contrary to the inherent nature of His own Being? If, however, God does possess qualities which are contrary to His inherent good nature, then He would undoubtedly be morally responsible for them; and if that was the case, then He would cease to be the perfect good Being worthy of worship. In fact, "by ceasing to be perfectly good, God would cease to be God!" (*The Teachings Of The Magi*, R.C. Zaehner, p 58). Nowhere in the texts is there a shred of evidence to suggest that God in Zoroastrian doctrine is the source and perpetrator of evil.

From this it follows that evil cannot come from God, but is the moving away from the path of God; just as darkness does not come from light, but is the result of the moving away from light. Evil is the antithesis of that which is existent and inherently good. The apparent existence of evil in the relative world reflects the temporary non-omnipotence of God.

God Is Latently Omnipotent:

A temporarily non-omnipotent God should not be seen to be a weak or powerless Being, for in the Zoroastrian tradition, God is recognized to be the strongest (Y.28.9), the mightiest (Y.45.6) and indeed invincible (Yt.1.8) at the end of time. A distinction should be made, however, between a Being who is all-powerful at all times and a Being who is very powerful as indeed God is in Zoroastrianism, but yet not all-powerful to prevent the onslaught of evil, eventually culminating in death.

If God is all-powerful, then most certainly it would be in His power to prevent all the misfortunes and tragedies that occur in the world. To say that God turns His face away (figur-

atively speaking), or allows misfortune to take place, surely undermines and makes a mockery of the inherent good nature and power attributed to an omnipotent Being. The emphasis in Zoroastrianism is upon the goodness and perfection of God, rather than the brute strength of an omnipotent Being. Thus, the concept of a Being who is held to be perfect as well as totally good and yet concurrently is deemed to be the creator and source of evil, is utterly untenable and a contradiction in terms.

On the other hand, by man recognizing God to be temporarily non-omnipotent, in no way implies that evil is equal to, and therefore as powerful as God. It is empirically verifiable that the will of Ahura Mazdā continues to overwhelm the imperfections and inequalities in this world. The process of "creative evolution" is an ongoing one, for it is within the cumulative power of man to rid the world of disorder, poverty, misery, pain, suffering and eventually death.

Man in Zoroastrianism is the soldier who has been chosen to spearhead this evolution, through the recognition of a strongly contrasted ethical dualism, in order to vanquish the Lie. This ethical dualism in no way lessens the status or greatness of God; nor does it preclude a monotheistic belief in one God whose eventual supremacy at the end of time is unquestionable in Zoroastrianism. The task of man therefore, is to bring about the "Making Wonderful" when God will be made truly omnipotent!¹

1. In the "One Hundred and One Names of God", the second attribute mentioned is *harwisip-tuwān* (*Ph.*) which when translated literally means "all power" or "all might". The concept of omnipotence (all-powerfulness) is philosophically different and therefore should not be confused with the attribute of possessing "all power" in the relative sense. Furthermore, these 101 names have been compiled recently and are quite different to the traditional names found in the earlier texts.

Duality

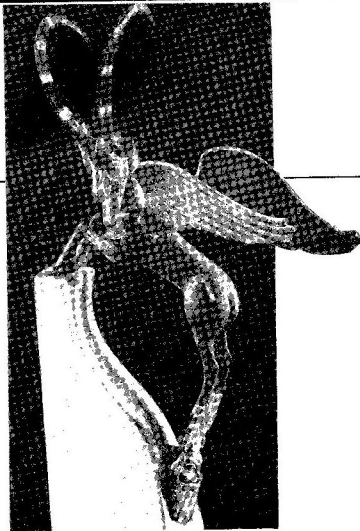
In Zoroastrianism, an absolute distinction is maintained between the origin of good and its antithesis, evil. In other words, the factor of separation results in the relative world in which existence mirrors its antithesis, non-existence. Non-existence on its own, cannot exist; and that which cannot exist on its own cannot create, and that which cannot create knows not how to affirm, and that which cannot affirm is devoid of wisdom, and therefore is deemed to be the postulated nature of evil. Evil therefore clearly cannot come from God, as it is devoid of wisdom. Thus, there is a fundamental duality which absolves God from any taint of evil.

God, as perceived by Zarathushtra, is a rational Being who has ascribed to man a purpose in life, leading to a definite end; this end is when evil will be "put out of action" (*Ph. a-kārēnī*) by man, through the conscious affirmation of good thoughts, words and deeds.

The Inexplicable Paradox of Evil

Evil in Zoroastrianism is not a reality in itself, but it is an existential paradox experienced by man, through the imbalance reflected in the physical world. It is only in the relative world that the states of excess and deficiency are observable and discernable, thereby giving an apparent existence to evil which does not and, in fact, cannot stem from any source.

Evil only mirrors a denial of that which is existent and intrinsically good. Being parasitic, it does not and, in fact, cannot exist on its own. In other words, evil is *ex nihilo*; i.e. it arises from and out of no thing, and therefore has no real existence. Nevertheless, it is observable as the denial of the mean which in turn results in imperfection within the relative world.



Winged Ibex (c 4th century B.C.)

God's World
(God in Action)

Wisdom
Knowledge
Truth
Honesty
Happiness
Joy
Pleasure
Optimism
Good Health
Prosperity
Fragrance
Light
Order
Good thoughts, words and deeds
Charity
Golden mean/Moderation
Life

Thus, a careful appreciation and an understanding of Zoroastrian metaphysics enables one to grapple successfully with the subtleties and complexities of a number of key questions that otherwise would remain unresolved. The

The Antithesis of God's World
(Evil in Action)

Devoid of Wisdom
Ignorance
Falsehood/Lies
Deceit
Unhappiness/Misery
Despair
Pain
Pessimism
Illness
Poverty
Stench
Darkness
Disorder/Chaos
Bad thoughts, words and deeds
Greed
Excess and Deficiency
Death

Zoroastrian viewpoint is based upon a sound rationale and a thorough comprehension of profound objective principles which when integrated in daily living, help man towards the path of God-realization.