

RelBib

Bibliography of the Study of Religion

<https://relbib.de>

Dear reader,

the article

“Iranian and Greek dualistic concepts of physical and moral evil. Towards the religious historical background of the Septuagint-Theology” by Christoph Elsas

was originally published in

Law and Justice in Jerusalem, Babylon and Hellas by Evangelia G. Dafni (Ed.),
Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021, 3-16.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-161043-1>

This article is used by permission of Publishing House [Mohr Siebeck](#).

Thank you for supporting Green Open Access.

Your RelBib team

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK

Iranian and Greek dualistic concepts of physical and moral evil

Towards the religious historical background
of the Septuagint-Theology

CHRISTOPH ELSAS

In Israel's monotheism, God's justice gets a double face: on the one side, the "law" is concerned about the purity of God's people, and in this respect about particular exclusiveness. On the other side, there is a cosmic universal orientation in the prophetic announcement and in the apocalyptic hope – that the God of the people will reveal himself as the God of the world in powerful judgement (Isa 41:1–4), with king Cyrus of Iran as his instrument.¹ In Zoroastrianism as the religion of the Iranian Empire, the divine world order, called *asha/arta*, is completely an outflow of the order of Ahura Mazda's creation, and realized by this Wise Lord exclusively according goodness and justice. It is the special character of this basic order that is in a dualistic contrast to the Lie (*druj*), being the world order created by the devil (Ahriman). This means that every experience of suffering goes back, if not to the "damaging works" (*vinas*) of humans, then to the penetration of Ahriman's evil world order into the good creation, or to human "partisanship for Ahriman" (*ahrimanakih*).²

1. Western European categories of dualism

It was the specialist in Middle Eastern and oriental studies, Thomas Hyde, who in his *History of the Religion of Ancient Persia*, published in Latin in 1700 at Oxford, coined the term "dualism" for its characteristic juxtaposition of opposite forces, "good" and "evil." From that Persian Zoroastrianism, the term "dualism"

¹ O. Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments 3: Jahwes Gerechtigkeit, Wesen und Wirken* (UTB 2392), Göttingen 2003, 376.

² H.-J. Klimkeit, "Der leidende Gerechte in der Religionsgeschichte. Ein Beitrag zur problemorientierten 'Religionsphänomenologie,'" in: H. Zinser (ed.), *Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 1988, 164–184, esp. 169 and 175 f.

was also applied to the Iranian Gnostic Manichaeism and further on to Christian Gnostic heresies.³

In a more general way in Western Europe today, an attempt is made to understand dualism against the background of psychosocial conditions leading persons to believe in demonic forces and the devil. Sometimes such a belief in demonic forces results in problematic rituals of exorcism. A possible counterpart is the conviction that, for example, God in Christ is looking after the inner realities which lead to possession and obsession, putting an end to the dualistic fight. In secular terminology this means a dialogical deconstruction of the construction to be possessed by evil influences which are an interpretation of dissociative disorder.⁴

Socially, a dualistic worldview may legitimize cultural demonization. This worldview may generally darken the possibilities you can find in plurality with the many possibilities of peace being relational, open in terms of content and in that respect, unconditional for the subject.⁵

So far, Manichean in political discourse had become a negative term for the most radical dualism that readers understood recent journalistic characterizations of George W. Bush as a Manichean president.⁶ Bush was referring – not to conform to the great churches – to a special evangelical interpretation of the Bible when he was calling upon the Western world for his “Crusade” against the “Axis of Evil.”⁷

It is necessary, however, to differentiate between several dualisms to accept some as useful and indispensable, and to criticize others on principle. So ethics takes for granted the dual of “good” in the sense of “useful” – “just” and “responsible” – and “bad” in the sense of “non-good.” On the other side, gender differences are an example of anthropological dualistic thinking, which will be appropriate to deconstruct.⁸ One might want to add the construct character of the saint – witch opposition. The case put forward by Jean d’Arc shows the

³ G. G. Stroumsa, “Dualismus I. Religionswissenschaftlich,” RGG⁴ 2 (1999) 1004f.

⁴ R. Sommer, “‘Jesus ist Sieger!’ Dämonenaustreibung und Krankenheilung aus evangelischer Sicht,” in: C. Schwöbel (ed.), *Gott – Götter – Götzen*, XIV. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie, Leipzig 2013, 866–879.

⁵ W. Dietrich, *Variationen über die vielen Frieden*, Vol. 1: Deutungen, Wiesbaden 2008, 123.

⁶ W. Sundermann, “What has come down to us from Manichaeism?” in: A. Lange, E. M. Meyers, B. H. Reynolds III and R. Styers (eds.), *Light Against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World*, Göttingen 2011, 229.

⁷ Y. Ariel, “You must choose! The Prince of Peace or the Prince of Darkness: Evangelical Beliefs and American Dualism at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century,” in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), *Light Against Darkness*, 316; introduction of the editors, 16.

⁸ H. Kuhlmann, “Dualismen im Verhältnis von Gott und dem Bösen – eine gendertheologische Frage?” in: H. Kuhlmann and S. Schäfer-Bossert (eds.), *Hat das Böse ein Geschlecht? Theologische und religionswissenschaftliche Verhältnisbestimmungen*, Stuttgart 2006, 31–42.

ambivalence to interpret the same unusual behavior as works by God, or to the contrary, by the devil.⁹

Peace and conflict studies can refer to the dangers, if a definition of peace – which is first interpreted in an undualistic energetic way as a relatively satisfying life – gets a binary fighting either-or of justice and injustice.¹⁰ But ideas of two antagonistic principles forming the basis of existence is important for the reflection of existential experiences (e. g. individual inability and suffering as well as social irrationalities affecting a group of people).¹¹

In comparative religion, Ugo Bianchi defines “dualism” in religion “as a doctrine that posits the existence of two fundamental causal principles underlying the existence (or, as in the case of the Indian notion of *māyā* as opposed to *ātman*, the painful appearance of existence) of the world. In addition, dualistic doctrines, worldviews, or myths represent the basic components of the world and of man as participating in the ontological opposition and disparity of value.”¹²

According to this definition, we speak of an ethical dualism in the strict sense only, if “good” and “evil” are understood as antithetical ontological principles, as in Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Moreover, that dualism of Zoroaster can be classified as radical and cosmic, but the dualism of Mani as radical and anti-cosmic.

2. The eschatological monotheistic tendency of dualism in Iranian tradition

The Iranians reached the Mediterranean region with their Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BCE. The message of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster that there is only one god – with his companions – to be venerated, Ahura Mazda, seems to have seized upon a basic distinction in Old Iranian religion between truth and falsehood. He developed it into a dualistic cosmology. Good and evil supernatural powers are conceptualized in the frame of a particular society or group defining their functions as useful or harmful. This definition depends on historical developments.¹³ In the conflicts of Iranian society before the Achaemenid Empire, Zoroaster’s starting point was the worship of Ahura Mazda, “the Wise Lord.” Ahura Mazda knew in his wisdom that if he became Creator and fashion-

⁹ A. Berlis, “Historische Konstruktionen der Bösen,” in: Kuhlmann and Schäfer-Bossert (eds.), *Hat das Böse ein Geschlecht?* 140–150, here 143.

¹⁰ Dietrich, *Variationen*, 214.

¹¹ H. G. Kippenberg, “Dualismus,” *EKL*³ I (1986) 948–950.

¹² U. Bianchi, “Dualism,” *RE* 4 (1987) 506–512, here 506; cf. *idem*, “Il dualismo come categoria storico-religiosa,” in: *idem*, *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy*, Leiden 1978, 49–62.

¹³ C. Colpe, “Geister (Dämonen), d. Iran,” *RAC* IX (1976) 585–599, here 586, 590.

ed this world, then the Hostile Spirit, Angra Mainyu, would attack it, because it was good.¹⁴ With Zoroaster's own words we hear in Yasna 30:5 of the Avestan collection: "Of these two spirits the evil one preferred to do evil, the good was chosen by the good spirit." In this process of choice, the until then most divine Daevas became synonymous with idols as well as with devils and confounded with demons as known from the pagan background. Therefore, religious practice involved the greater bountiful beneficent powers against the lesser harmful evil ones, and also sought to appease the latter.¹⁵ But as Yasht 3:17 and 19:96 of the Avestan collection state: "Drug (Falseness, Lie) will disappear ... shall not be able to destroy the corporeal world of Asha (Order, Truth)" and "Truth will triumph over Bad Lie, over the obscure one from whom all darkness comes."¹⁶

But even in the present time, the good Ahurian principles and concepts represent cosmic powers pervading both the spiritual (*menok*) and the material (*getik*) worlds. Therefore, *asha*, or "truth", denotes its realization as a moral quality of Ahura Mazda, his truthful worshippers, and also its materialisation in the good things of the world, called "material truth" (*astvat ashem*). So the picture of the end of this material world drawn by Zoroaster is purely monotheistic in restoring paradise on earth and securing Ahura Mazda's rule forever. But becoming a physical separation of good and evil, the dualistic picture of world's present time opposes the corresponding Daevic concepts such as Falsehood (*Druj*), Evil Spirit (*Angra Mainyu*) or Wrath (*Aeshma*).

That is Zoroaster's cosmogonic dualism. In the Zoroastrian tradition of the Achaemenid Empire, especially Young Avestan Yasna 57:17 = Yasht 13:76, we also have references to the two spirits as setting in place their "creations." Here, evil takes the form of pollution by various kinds of dead matter like blood and corpses, which must be cleansed following strict rituals. The Light shining in the material world and the darkness are created by God, according to Zoroaster's ninth Gatha in Yasna 44:5. But in the Videvdat (old: Vendidad) – "Law against the Demons," another Zoroastrian tradition of Achaemenid era – there is on the one side, a "good," paradisiac light, and on the other side, a "bad" light, both shining in this created world, with "bad" light in need of purification.¹⁷ For the world of thought, like Ahura Mazda's creation of the world of corporeal existence, was subsequently infiltrated by evil. This does not mean that spirit is necessarily good and body necessarily bad. In this Iranian concept of primarily not physical, but moral evil, the domain of the prophet and his pious adherents is

¹⁴ M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London 1979, 20 f.

¹⁵ M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism, Vol 1: The Early Period (HdO 1.8.1)*, Leiden 1989, 85–88.

¹⁶ P. F. M. Fontaine, *The Light and the Dark, Vol. 4: Dualism in the Ancient Middle East*, Amsterdam 1989, 286–295.

¹⁷ C. Colpe, *Iranier – Aramäer – Hebräer – Hellenen: Iranische Religionen und ihre Westbeziehungen. Einzelstudien und Versuch einer Zusammenschau (WUNT 154)*, Tübingen 2003, 82, 93.

good in this world, combined with the opposition between “life” and “death.” In the prophet’s opinion, a living body is good, but after death it becomes a corpse. As a corpse the body is bad, the property of the devil, and profaning everything that comes in contact with it.¹⁸ Polluted, even the elements are ambivalent, and the evil powers (e. g. water) have to be fought by the heroes and in daily life by support of the Zoroastrian cult (e. g. by invoking the goddess of water, Anahita, as a power to achieve).¹⁹ From that fear, the Median Magi, becoming the Zoroastrian priests, develop a comprehensive dualistic concept of pure and impure.²⁰

A gradual transformation occurred from the dynamic asymmetry of ethics in the Gathas to the rigid cosmic dualism first visible in the Videvdāt. That meant a growing importance of physical purity and the preoccupation with purification rites: Ahura Mazda created the spiritual and material worlds completely pure, but the afflictions produced by Angra Mainyu were believed to pollute the creation. As a result, matter is said to be in a state of mixture (*gumezishn*) of good and evil. According to the 9th century Bundahishn (Book of Primal Creation 3:23 f.) Ahura Mazda taught all humankind: “Which seems more useful to you, that I should create you into corporeal form, so that incarnate you will battle the Lie and vanquish it, and that I should resurrect you perfect and immortal in the end, and re-create you in corporeal form ... without enemies forever.”²¹ That struggle between good and evil, purity and pollution, and life and death is fundamentally a spiritual conflict. According to the medieval tradition (Denkard 383,22 ff.), the attack of the “evil spirit” through impurity in the material world “is upon an individual’s essence, which is the soul, and upon the soul’s weapon and garment: the body.”²²

In offering the hope of heaven to everyone who would follow him and seek righteousness, Zoroaster was diverting from an aristocratic and priestly tradition which consigned all lesser mortals to a subterranean life after death. Moreover, for the first time in history, he threatened the mighty with hell and ultimate extinction if they acted unjustly.²³ Zoroastrians believe a dying person’s soul (*urvan*) leaves the body and sets out on a journey into the world of thought, accompanied by the person’s vision-soul (*daena*). Besides the Fravashi, the ancestor spirits in the air, the vision-soul helps the person’s soul “see” in the

¹⁸ Fontaine, Light, 295f.; H. Koch, “Leben, Tod und Jenseitsvorstellungen in Iran,” in: C. Elsas (ed.), *Sterben, Tod und Trauer in den Religionen und Kulturen der Welt*, Vol. 1: *Gemeinsamkeiten und Besonderheiten in Theorie und Praxis*, Berlin, 32010, 169–187.

¹⁹ A. Piras, “Serse e la flagellazione dell’Ellesponto,” in: A. Panaino and A. Piras (eds.), *Studi Iranici Ravennati*, Milano 2011, 118–133.

²⁰ *Colpe*, Iranier, 528; J. K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism. Triumph over Evil*, Austin, TX 1989.

²¹ Choksy, *Purity*, 3–5.

²² Choksy, *Purity*, 126.

²³ Fontaine, Light, 30; cf. M. Stausberg, “Hell in Zoroastrian History,” *Numen* 56 (2009) 217–253.

world of thought, but also represents the totality of the person's thoughts, words and deeds – good and evil – in corporeal life. These are weighed on a balance and then the soul will pass the bridge to the Best Existence in the light of paradise, or fall down into the Worst Existence of hell.²⁴

According to tradition (Bundahishn 14,30 f.), at the end of the ongoing battle on earth, Zoroastrian eschatology expects the final savior to separate the righteous individuals from the evil ones. Each Zoroastrian sinner, having already suffered in hell after death, will be purified by means of an ordeal with molten metal and be granted immortality of body and soul by consuming an mythical elixir. Hell will then be sealed shut with molten metal, saving the spiritual and corporeal worlds forever.²⁵

Truth, justice, practice of the prescribed ritual behavior, and attendance at the Zoroastrian feasts belong to an ethical life. But matrimony and descendants also belong to this in spite of the many rules for purity. The male priests represent purity, while women, until 19th century, have been perceived as more susceptible to evil through their sexuality, menstruation, and birth. Also until 19th century, there were practices entailing bloody animal sacrifices to ward off evil influences – otherwise regarded as belonging to the “evil spirit.”²⁶ But in the philosophical discourse found in the 9th century's Zoroastrian treatise *Skand-Gumanik Vizar*, there is a clear distinction for Zoroastrian dualism: males and females, though they have separate functions, are of one essence because in their common humanity they are substantially the same. But the “Lie” representing the principle of evil – first moral and then also physical – is not merely functionally different from “wisdom,” the “good,” but is substantially opposite, incompatible, antagonistic, and destructive.²⁷

According to the ethnological studies of Mary Douglas, purity and pollution in a religious system are usually not based on physical cleanliness, but on ritual purity and the loss of this purity through transgressions. Reflections on pollution involve a reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to nonbeing, form to formlessness, and life to death. If pollution is severe enough, it usually is equated with moral disorder caused by the forces of evil.²⁸ Because an act of pollution breaks the relationship with the divine, and furthers the cause of evil, it becomes a sin. According to Zoroastrian belief, in the cosmic struggle

²⁴ P. O. Skjaervo, “Zoroastrian Dualism,” in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), *Light against Darkness*, 55–89, here 74; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 117–119.

²⁵ Choksy, *Purity*, 130 f.

²⁶ M. Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras: Geschichte – Gegenwart – Rituale*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart 2002, 841.

²⁷ J. W. Boyd and R. G. Williams, “Nature and Problem of Evil in Zoroastrianism: Some Theological, Philosophical and Ritual Perspectives,” in: J. K. Choksy and J. Dubeansky (eds.), *Gifts to a Magus. Indo-Iranian Studies Honoring Firoze Kotwal (TST 23)*, New York 2013, 77–97, here 83.

²⁸ Choksy, *Purity*, XXIV.

between good and evil in the material world, purity and purification can be used to negate impurity and defilement. Zoroastrian rites of purification do not serve to expiate personal sins, but rather function as a means of ensuring personal and communal purity.²⁹

Truthful worshippers have to seek the presence of the “fire of victory” in the fire temples, understood as epiphanies of the “Lord of Wisdom,” and exemplifies the cosmic principle of “righteousness” that counters the darkness of the abode of “Lie.” The officiating priests invoke the entire Avestan Yasna and perform the ritual actions as material exemplification of aspects of the invisible spiritual order which are conceived as weapons of purification against the “evil one.” In this time of cosmic mixture (*gumezishn*) of good and bad powers, the reality of evil in both the material (*getik*) and spiritual (*menok*) worlds affords such rituals in the morning hours each and every day. The fire commands one’s attention to its animating movement and light, the metal implements used in the ritual reflect points of light. The pure wood burning in the fire emits a good scent, and the ringing of the *haoma mortar* with pestle produces a bell-like rhythmic sound – with symbolic blows against Ahriman’s forces in all directions.³⁰

3. Imperialistic dualism and religious anti-imperialistic dualism in Mesopotamia, Iran, Israel

Regarding the Babylonian Empire the first sentences of Codex Hammurabi proclaimed against moral evil: “At that time (the great Sumerian gods) Anum and Illil for the prosperity of the people called me by my name Hammurabi, the reverent god-fearing prince, to make justice to appear in the land, to destroy the evil and the wicked that the strong may not oppose the weak, to rise indeed like (the sungod) Shamash over the darkheaded folk to give light to the land.”³¹

In the neighbouring Old Hittite Empire of Anatolia, the king by victory in Syria was equal to the Pharaoh and could proclaim: “The goddess, my lady, always held me by the hand; and since I was a divinely favoured man, and walked in the favour of the gods, I never committed the evil deeds of mankind.” This dualistic attitude, with regard to the king’s subjects, was strengthened by an elaborate ritual, for the king, as the intermediary between god and humankind, which had to be pure, as shown by Mary Douglas’ ethnological studies.³²

Zoroaster’s Gatha in Yasna 44 on the creative powers of the Godhead in fathering justice and right thought, ordering heaven and earth and forming light and darkness seems to be adapted to the biblical version in Isaiah 40 and 45 of Cyrus’

²⁹ Choksy, Purity, XXVII.

³⁰ Boyd and Williams, “Nature,” 81 f., 89 f.

³¹ Cf. Fontaine, Light, 204 f., 209–215.

³² Cf. Fontaine, Light, 220 f., 235.

new Iranian kingdom. Israel's god was angry with his people because of their past covenant misdeeds and therefore gave them over to the neo-Babylonians as punishment. The neo-Babylonians, however, went too far, and Israel's god became angry with them, hence, appointed a just ruler to punish them and set the Israelites free. Such new interpretation of the dualism of the universal state will be an argument for the Zoroastrian religion of Cyrus and his followers, as well as the Achaemenid Darius the Great placed at the head of four inscriptions: "A great god is the Wise Lord, who created this earth, who created that sky, who created mankind, who created happiness for mankind, who made Darius king: one king over many, one commander over many." Unity and harmony were essential to the "happiness" God created for mankind. This original state of perfection got lost. Other inscriptions are telling, how "the Lie" (*drauga*, Old Persian for *druj*) – source of all confusion, conflict, and evil – entered existence, shattered unity, and spread rapidly in the years before Darius became king. But the Wise Lord made Darius king in response to this crisis, charging him to restore tranquillity, harmony, and happiness by overcoming the Lie.³³

Therefore, in his Behistun Inscription (IV:62–65) Darius declares to live according to "Truth" (*arta*, Old Persian for *asha*): "Ahura Mazda bore me aid, and the other gods who are ... Neither to the weak nor to the powerful I did wrong." There could be no tolerance for further opposition of Lie against Truth, as shown by the so called Daivadana Inscription (Persepolis H, 35–41) of Darius' son Xerxes who followed the Zoroastrian demonisation of the Daevas for his politics, degrading the divinities of rebellious people to demons and destroyed a sanctuary of the "Bad Gods" (*daiva*, Old Persian for *daeva*).³⁴

Zoroaster's very original concept of an end of history was embodied in the doctrine of the Three times – Creation, Mixture and Separation. The sacerdotal Median Magi had also become familiar with Babylonian speculations about history being divided in cycles of time. Contrasting them with Zarathustra's teachings, they developed, it seems, in the late Achaemenid period. Zurvanism interpreting Zurvan, Eternal Time, as father of the twins in Zarathustra's famous Gathic verse Y 30.3, the good twin spirit, the Beneficent Spenta Mainyu, now identified with Ahura Mazda himself in opposition to the bad spirit, Angra Mainyu.³⁵

Another interpretation of the twin myth is discussed for Iranian influences on dualism in the Jewish community of Qumran near Jerusalem. According to the *Treatise on the Two Spirits* (1QS III 13–IV 26) in the Qumran Library, evil is not the beginning of creation but is only secondary to mankind. The two spirits appear only after man has been set to rule over the world. But the psychological

³³ B. Lincoln, "The One and the Many in Iranian Creation Myths: Rethinking 'Nostalgia for Paradise,'" ARG 13 (2011) 15–30, here 17f.

³⁴ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 54–65.

³⁵ Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 67–70; cf. *Skjaervo*, *Zoroastrian Dualism*, 67–70.

and the ethical levels are only symptoms of the working of the spirit of lie, also extending to the powers of light and darkness. Furthermore, according to this cosmological aspect of evil, evil people are summed up as the “sons of deceit,” which indicates a social type of evil. In the present, their power is felt so great that they can pose a threat to the “sons of light.”

But even the evil spirit of deceit was created by the God of knowledge. This name, taken from the wisdom terminology, places the emphasis on God’s fore-knowledge and the conclusive end to all evil from the beginning. This transcendent God first sets out a plan; and those who seek to adjust themselves to that plan are the sons of light, who are in addition to ethics, also defined by wisdom. Under the influence of the “angel of darkness,” even the “sons of righteousness” are fallible, but at the end the “sons of lie” are destroyed, and those people who are not wholly corrupt are cleansed from all “lie” and “unclean spirit.” A more thorough examination of the dualistic texts in the Qumran shows that the community used dualistic material concerning the entrance or expulsion from the community.³⁶ The War Scroll of Qumran even contains a malediction of the bad spirits – Belial, the Angel of Malevolence, and his company, the Angels of Destruction – who stay in opposition to the Prince of Light by the High Priest – they are cursed as destined for “the Pit,” for utter destruction (1QM XIII:4–16).³⁷

In the Zervanite interpretation of dualism the power of evil is parallel to the good deity, the differentiation between them taking place within a pre-existent and neutral deity of time.³⁸ In opposition to this official Zoroastrian interpretation in the Sasanian state of the 3rd century, the Mesopotamian Mani set his religious anti-imperialistic and anticosmic dualistic interpretation in a Gnostic system. He was combining the Zoroastrian dualism of his country with his personal background in Jewish Christian and Greek dualistic tradition to the most radical dualistic religion of antiquity. Manicheism has its characteristic way of viewing the world as an enemy and as a prison for the demons, as well as for the Light World Soul and, consequently, for the souls of all human beings. Zoroastrianism never went so far. Following the revelation of the wholly transcendent good God to Mani, they take part on the passion of the divine light in the world, fighting its evil not with material arms but only with the spiritual ones of living a life of knowledge, Gnosis.³⁹

³⁶ *Fontaine*, *Light*, 272 f.; *J. Leonhardt-Balzer*, “Evil, Dualism and Community: who/what did the Yachad not want to be?” in: G. G. Xeravits (ed.), *Dualism in Qumran*, *Library of the Second Temple Studies* 76, London – New York 2010, 121–147, here 140–143; cf. also the introduction of the editor.

³⁷ *P. K. McCarter Jr.*, “Dualism in Antiquity,” in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), *Light Against Darkness*, 32.

³⁸ *S. Shaked*, *Dualism in Transformation. Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (*Jordan Lectures* 1991), London 1994, 21 f.

³⁹ *Sundermann*, *Manichaeism*, 228, n. 4; *K.-W. Tröger*, *Die Gnosis: Heilslehre und Ketzerglaube* (Herder spectrum 4953), Herder – Freiburg 2001.

4. The dialectical polytheistic tendency of dualism in Greek tradition and its Christian and Gnostic modifications

In the 8th century BCE the cosmogony of the Greek poet Hesiod displays a dualistic conception like the Babylonian one: an opposition between older causal principles of a semi-personal character and a new race of youthful and energetic gods. Here and there in a dialectical polytheistic balance the new gods and goddesses stand for the wise order of the world, but the ancient chthonic entities of the subjugated countryside, though deprived of power, do not completely lose their sacredness. This dialectical cyclical interpretation of the world remains basically for the special evolution of dualism in Greece which then combined, like in India philosophy, with ascetism. In a concept of physical evil, humans are conceived as hybrids of stable reason above and the body with its motions below, and the cosmos, as known by reasoning, is distinguished from the cosmos as perceived through human senses. The philosopher should strive to purify divine reason from its association with human and mortal limitations. Like the human microcosmos, the macrocosmos of the world must be divided in order to preserve the pure thought of divinity.⁴⁰

The tendency of Greek dualism is not monotheistic, but monistic; it is dialectical with only an interest in individual eschatology instead of a universal eschatology. The dualism of Zoroaster and the Achaemenids has its starting point in the opposition of good and bad community – moral evil. The dualism of Greek philosophy has its starting point in the opposition of higher and lower parts in the individual – physical evil.

But after the Iranian capture of the Greek Sardis in Asia Minor (547 BCE), one third of the Greek world was part of the Achaemenid Empire. Since then Greeks met Zoroastrianism. There were the followers of Pythagoras who was born, it seems, in the middle of the 6th century BCE on Samos – near the then Iranian Ionian coast. As in their musical investigations by limiting the unlimited for a harmony of human music according to the harmony of the spheres, the Pythagoreans not only posited two sets of physical principles. They moralized them, evil belonging for them to the unlimited – like plurality, female, darkness – and good to the limited – like one, male, light. Here we find nothing of the ethics of the eschatological monotheistic tendency of Iranian dualism, but Light and Darkness in an dualism with dialectical polytheistic tendency according the physical male-female complementarities. A belief in transmigration links the cosmological dualism of the Pythagoreans with their psychological dualism. By alining one's soul in a moral decision with the good side of the cosmic divide,

⁴⁰ P.L. Miller, "Greek Philosophical Dualism," in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), *Light Against Darkness*, 107–144.

and by practicing purification (*katharsis*), one could ensure a better incarnation in one's next life.⁴¹

The reception of these developments in Platon's philosophy bifurcated the human being into good and bad parts. The identification of the self with reason was alienating it from the body – according the statement of Platon's *Phaidon* (67b:2): “it is not permitted to the impure to attain the pure.” The distinction in Platon's *Timaios* (27d–28a) between the being of the pure thought and the becoming of the imagined material reality led to a radical dualistic coeternity of form and matter – though after creating the cosmos participates in the forms' reality. At the same time, this distinction served an individual eschatological monism in assimilating the philosopher's self to the cosmic order – the Form of Forms – that is the Good. In Platon's *Nomoi* (896e–897d) there is even – physical – distinction between a good and a bad soul in the world responsible by rationality for order and by irrationality for disorder. This means a combination of a psychological mind-body dualism with a cosmology that held monism and dualism in ambivalent tension. The material world in Platonic thought can be known only as the shadow of the perfect world of ideas, headed by the Good, for the human intellect participates in its logos – as in the famous allegory of the cave for the way from the darkness into the light in Platon's *Republica* (514a–518b). This means the moral duty to seek the Good by using the logos to flee from everything that removes from it. Platon's *Timaios* (40d–41d), in an monarchian cosmic dualism, opposed the great Demiurge, creator of the immortal part of the soul, and the “generated gods,” whom the Demiurge appoints to create the lower, mortal parts of the soul and the human body.⁴²

This Platonic position is also represented in Jewish thought, for example, by Philo's teaching of the logos and of God's angelic agents who are particularly concerned with the creation of the lower human constituents. Soon afterwards it is clearly represented in Christian thought as in the anthropological dualism of Origen with its duality of causes: the omnipotent will of God and the sin of a created soul, the latter motivating the creation of the human physiological body and the material world.⁴³ According to the New Testament Jesus himself hindered the most important dualistic behaviour, the ethical separation, telling

⁴¹ Miller, “Greek Philosophical Dualism,” 111–133; cf. *W. Burkert*, *Babylon – Memphis – Persepolis. Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture*, Cambridge, MA – London 2004, and *idem*, *Kleine Schriften III: Mystica, Orphica, Pythagorica*, Göttingen 2006.

⁴² Miller, “Greek Philosophical Dualism,” 138–141, together with the introduction of the editors, 12; *P. F. M. Fontaine*, *The Light and the Dark. A Cultural History of Dualism*, Vol. 3: *Dualism in Greek Literature and Philosophy in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.*, Amsterdam 1988, 134f., 147, 172.

⁴³ *P. F. M. Fontaine*, *The Light and the Dark. A Cultural History of Dualism*, Vol. 6: *Dualism in the Hellenistic World*, Amsterdam 1991, 142f.; 1988, 168–170; *P. S. Alexander*, “The Dualism of Heaven and Earth in early Jewish Literature and its Implications,” in: *Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers* (eds.), *Light Against Darkness*, 169–185, here 184; *Bianchi*, *Dualism*, 506–509.

the parable of the weed thrown by “the enemy” among the wheat (Mt 13:24–30). It states that during our life good and bad are in an inseparable interconnection between each other, in the world around us as well as in ourselves, and that there will be a separation only in the end by God seeking the good for humans. It was from the time Christianity was divided from Judaism and persecuted in the name of the Roman Empire, that the beginning of the Gospel of John shows resemblances to Greek dualistic language.⁴⁴

The coming of the Word (*logos*), that is the Light, coming from Heaven into the World causes a division among mankind. Some receive the word readily, thereby becoming “children of God”. Even their human origin is changed through their acceptance of the Word, since they are “born, not of blood nor of the will of man, but of God” – for “that which is born of the Flesh is Flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.” This again is a very distinct opposition, but not really one between matter and spirit. With Spirit (*pneuma*), John means the same human existence but now suffused by the grace of God. Therefore, only Greek dualistic language is used but gets a monotheistic tendency with the presence of the Messiah for Christians – stressing the just present eschatological decision. That way it becomes an anti-imperialistic but cosmic dualism.

A transformed Greek dualism may be seen also in a Jewish and Christian tradition that views heaven as a parallel universe to earth, dividing the sum total of reality into two worlds that are vastly different from each other, allowing movement from one to the other only by way of physical transformation in incarnation and apotheosis. This could be the background for the cognitive dualism existing for the Gospel of Mark between Jesus and the mass of humanity, the experience of the Kingdom of Heaven being fearful even for the disciples. Regarding the necessity of Christ’s revelation that agrees with Mark’s claim that even the plain sense of Scripture is not plain. But as an element transcending the earthly dimension, according Paul’s Letters, the Spirit of God and Christ dwells within the Christian’s own body, and therefore one’s person is not really one’s own.⁴⁵ With these declarations, Greek dualism might be transformed to mysticism in early Christianity, correlating the eschatological hope for the presence of God and his new world in time with the mystical experience of the otherwise hidden presence of God and his Kingdom of Heaven around and in the person of the believer.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Fontaine, Light 6, 135f., 145f., 150–153.

⁴⁵ Alexander, “Dualism of Heaven,” 184, and F. L. Horton, “Dualism in the New Testament: A Surprising Rhetoric and a Rhetoric of Surprise,” in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), Light Against Darkness, 186–208, here 208 together with the introduction of the editors, 13f.

⁴⁶ K. Berger, “Die Bestimmung von Mystik im frühen Christentum als Beispiel interkultureller Übersetzungsprobleme,” in: C. Elsas (a. o. eds.), Tradition and Translation. Zum Problem der interkulturellen Übersetzbarkeit religiöser Phänomene. FS für Carsten Colpe zum 65. Geburtstag, Berlin 1994.

Besides such cosmic forms of a transformed Greek dualism, Gnosticism might be understood as anticosmic as well as anti-imperialistic forms interpreting the traditions of the World by the revealed Logos of the otherwise unknowable and unapproachable good God in his opposition to all physical and moral evil ruling the world. The true God for Gnostics is far transcendent and beyond all contact with matter and Christ, a pneumatic being, with no body of his own, but who used the body of Jesus. Here the divine world (*Pleroma*) is envisaged as strictly different from and lying beyond the heaven of all known traditions. Many Gnostic writers, consistently with their anti-Judaic stance, place the heaven of Israel's God as the creator of heaven and earth within the material world of deficiency. Such forms of dualism could be completed by dualism in Iranian tradition, as known from some Coptic-Gnostic writings from Nag Hamadi and from Manicheism.⁴⁷

Appendix

Examples from the Chaldean Oracles and Numenius of Apamea, Syria in the 2nd century AD (Cf. *R. Majercik*, *The Chaldean Oracles. Text, translation and commentary*, Leiden 1989; *É. des Places*, *Numénius, Fragments. Texte établie et traduit*, Paris 1973; *C. Elsas*, *Mystik in der Globalisierung, Diskurs und Traditionen der Chaldäischen Orakel im Kontext heutiger Religionsbegegnung. Rückfragen an Zarathustra, Gnosis, Platonismus und Augustin mit Übersetzung der Orakelfragmente und erläuternder Texte des Christen Psellos und des Hellenisten Numenius*, Berlin 2017).

I = Iranian; G = Greek; P = physical evil; M = moral evil; CO = Chaldaean Oracles; N = Numenius

- IGP CO 88: Nature *persuades* us to believe that the demons are pure and that the offspring of evil matter are good and useful.
- IGP CO 89: (The race of evil demons draws down souls, a race which is also called) bestial and shameless, since it is turned towards Nature.) * (*) is commentary of Psellos, Byzanz in the 12th century AD.
- IGP CO 90: From the hollows of the earth leap chthonian dogs, who never show a true sign to a mortal. (These demons are called dogs because they are the avengers of souls).
- GM CO 104: Do not defile the pneuma nor deepen the surface (of the soul by material additions).
- IMP CO 134,1: Do not hasten to the light-hating world boisterous of matter, where there is murder, discord, foul odors, squalid illnesses, corruptions, and fluctuating works.

⁴⁷ *Z. Pleshe*, "Gnostic Dualism," in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers (eds.), *Light Against Darkness*, 209–225, here 220 f.; *Alexander*, "Dualism of Heaven," 184; *P. F. M. Fontaine*, "What is Dualism and what is it not?" in: Lange, Meyers, Reynolds III and Styers, *Light Against Darkness*, 266–276, here 274 f.; *Bianchi*, "Dualism," 508–510.

- GM CO 134,2: He who intends to love the Intellect of the Father must flee these things.
- IGMP CO 135: For you must not gaze at these (demons) until you have your body initiated. Being terrestrial, these ill-tempered dogs are shameless. They enchant souls, forever turning them away from the rites.
- IGMP CO 158,1: And you will not leave behind the corporeal dregs of matter on a precipice (in this world).
- IM CO 159 (debatable): That the souls of those who have left the body by force when slain in war are purer than when dying sick.
- IGMP 163: Do not stoop below into the dark-gleaming world beneath which an abyss is spread, forever formless and invisible, dark all around, foul, delighting in images, without reason, precipitous, twisted, forever revolving around its maimed depth, forever wedded to an invisible shape ...
- IGMP CO 164: Do not stoop below. A precipice lies beneath the earth, drawing (the soul) down from the (planetary) staircase of seven steps. Matter is a wild and roaring stream.
- GP N 3,11 f.: That the souls are sitting near the water which has the pneuma of God – that are the words of Numenius who affirms that therefore the prophet (Gen 1:2) said that the pneuma of God was hovering over the waters.
- GP N 30,3–6: ... must have the same eternity as the God by whom it was formed ... (33–39:) Therefore Pythagoras – says Numenius – thinks the matter is flowing and without quality, ... but totally harmful – God being ... origin and reason of all Good, matter of all Evil. (92–95:) ... the soul of matter therefore ... is resisting providence and is longing to fight against its plans with the forces of its malice ... (119:) even in heaven, everywhere ...