Suffering in Zoroastrianism and Its Way Out

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There is suffering, pain, death in the world. This is a fact that cannot be denied, but that troubles the human mind, which is not ready to accept such suffering, nor even to find room for it in the conception he has of the "Divine" and of the world. Suffering—which is evil—is and shall continue to be an incongruity, which is in contrast with the perfection of the "Divinity" and with his power of ruling the universe. God, the Sumnum Bonum (the Supreme Good), can by no means be called responsible for the suffering experienced in our daily life, neither could it be limited in its absolute Power by any other force acting in contrast with it. The problem is vital, and its solution essential, because man cannot stand a challenge which remains without an answer, nor can he suffer pain without an adequate explanation. The question, although acutely felt at all times and in all traditions, is especially alive in our days and it is one of the problems most passionately discussed nowadays. 1) What did the ancients think of it? What was their solution in their various traditions? This is the anguished question that modern man asks of his predecessors, trying to solve for himself—not only intellectually, but on the practical side of life—the eternal challenge into which suffering compels him, today as never before.

Various human and religious traditions, although in many different forms, seem to agree in charging man with the responsibility of his own suffering and of the suffering of the world. He has sinned, some say, and now he must bear the consequences of his act until expiation or redemption should be accomplished; it is his own psyche which ima-

gines suffering, say others, and therefore he will continue to suffer until he realizes that pain does not really exist and that it is only a fruit of his own imagination. 2) In both cases man tries to overcome the scandal of evil by netting it in the negative and then by denying it the right of a positive “existence”.

But on both sides the problem remains suspended. After all, pain is too strong a force and it appears to be so strictly woven into the life of the universe that it cannot be oversimplified by assigning it to a human act, even if sinful, or based on ignorance. 3) In the light of a practical experience, it seems to have a consistence which cannot easily be denied. It is, and remains a scandal that cannot disappear and that needs to be taken into consideration. Contrary to many other traditions, Zoroastrianism accepts and meets it, finding for it a place in its own cosmology. Far for being simply the negative result of an act, for such a religion, Evil has its own positive value and has a proper personality. He, known as a Spirit called Angra Mainyu and later on Ahri-man, is a Reality which is deeply rooted in the cosmic order itself. Although, in effect, human beings rejoice in a special position in the economy of salvation and in the cosmic dynamism, 4) nevertheless, for the Parsis, man cannot assume on himself the paternity of such a great and strong power which is Evil (and suffering derived from it). First of all, every paternity is God’s exclusive attribute, so that man can never claim to partake of it, not even in a negative sense; 5) then, in the reality man seems rather to be overwhelmed by that power, therefore it would be more natural that such Evil should dominate him instead of depending on him.

But, if it is so, if Evil claims to have a reality in itself, many questions arise necessarily in respect of its relationship with what generally is called God. In effect, any deep and comprehensive concept of Godhead, or of what man wants to point out by such a word without plural,