

Dimensions of Omnipotence

by

Frithjof Schuon

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According to a famous argument, one of two things is true: either God wishes to destroy evil but cannot, in which case He is not omnipotent; or else He can abolish evil but does not wish to do so, in which case He is not good. Our readers know our answer: God can abolish a “given evil”, but not “evil as such”; any evil, but not the very possibility of evil. For the possibility of evil is contained within All-Possibility, over which God—the creative Personal God—has no power, since All-Possibility belongs to the Divine Essence itself, and the Essence comes “before” the Person; Beyond-Being—or Non-Being—comes “before” Being; the Supra-personal Divinity determines the Personal God, and not the other way round.

We have quoted elsewhere the Augustinian postulate that it is in the nature of the good to communicate itself. Beyond-Being, the essence of all good—and thus the Sovereign Good itself—possesses the intrinsic quality of radiation; but to radiate is, on the one hand, to communicate a good and, on the other, to move away from its source; every good that the world offers us comes from radiation and every evil, from remoteness. But the good of radiation compensates for the evil of remoteness, and this is proved by the Apocatastasis which brings every evil back to the initial Good; in the total Universe and in the procession of the cosmic cycles, evil is reduced to an almost fleeting accident, no matter how important it may be to those beings who undergo it or witness it.

This may also be expressed as follows, and as we have done on more than one occasion: the Absolute by definition comprises the “energy” or “*shakti*” that is Infinity, and, as All-Possibility, it projects Relativity, *Māyā*. Now, the Personal God is the center or the very summit of this extrinsic dimension; far from being able to determine the Absolute-Infinite, His function is to operate and govern existential projection; it is with regard to this projection that God as Creator, Legislator and Retributor is omnipotent and appears as the Absolute itself. And God is “good” by virtue of His Essence whose potentialities He manifests, and in so doing He manifests His own; every good that we meet with in the world bears witness both to the Divine Essence and to its “personification”, whereas evil only bears witness to it by opposition and privation.

In other words: the Supreme Principle, being absolute, and thereby infinite, is essentially what—by analogy with every conceivable good—we may call the “Sovereign Good.” This

Good, as we have said, has to communicate itself by reason of the inner logic of its nature; it must “radiate” and, as a consequence, must project a reflection which moves away from its source and proceeds in the direction of “nothingness.” In reality, “nothingness” does not exist, except as a possibility of direction or tendency; as a “possibility of the impossible,” one might say. The Supreme Principle contains All-Possibility, and thus cannot exclude the possibility of its own impossibility, to put it very paradoxically; but since this purely abstract possibility can never exist in or of itself, it is manifested—and is nothing other than this manifestation—in the mode of a tendency towards an obscure pole which is non-existent in itself. To be sure, this formulation is not intended to be exhaustive—no formulation could be—but it does nonetheless provide an adequate reference point; in metaphysics, that is all one can ask of human thought.¹

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The use of the term “*Māyā*” in the above passage—in reference to Relativity—gives us the opportunity to make the following points. There is no question of identifying *Māyā* with evil, although the opposition between good and evil is not entirely unrelated to the reciprocity *Ātmā-Māyā*; without *Māyā* there would be neither privation nor perversion, since evil is nothing but the extreme and obscure reflection of *Māyā*, the *shakti* of *Ātmā*.² In any event—and this is crucial—an essential distinction must be made between the *Māyā* that is divine (= *Ishvara*),³ another that is celestial (= *Buddhi* and *Svarga*), and a third that humanly speaking is “earthly” but which, in reality, encompasses the whole domain of transmigration (*Samsāra*), namely the round of births and deaths. One can likewise distinguish in *Māyā* an objective mode, which refers to the universe surrounding us and partly transcending us, and a subjective mode which refers to the experiences of our ego;⁴ in principle, man can act upon the magic of the world by dominating the magic of his soul.

Some near synonyms of the term *Māyā*—which roughly signifies “magic power”—are *līlā* “play,” and *moha* “illusion”; *Mahā-Moha* is the “Great Illusion,” namely Manifestation in its full extension, metacosmic as well as cosmic.

1. This is what anti-metaphysical philosophers are fundamentally ignorant of, and that is why the ancient doctrines appear to them to be “dogmatic” or “naive” whereas they are all that doctrines can be: namely, “signs” that are conducive to actualizing immanent and latent intellections. It is at the very least paradoxical that those “thinkers” who are most unaware of their limitations and most duped by the products of their minds—as well the most avid in producing them—should not even know what thought is or what purpose it serves.

2. This is what is expressed by the myth of the fall and the paradoxical name Lucifer (light-bearer) given to the genius of evil.

3. The supreme prefiguration of this already relative divine element being the potentially “overflowing” Infinitude of the Absolute.

4. This is Shakespeare’s “stuff as dreams are made on,” and coincides with that of the world.

An observation is called for here: despite what the over-confident pseudo-Vedantist simplifiers may think, it is not possible to go beyond Relativity—in any relevant context—without the acquiescence and help of the Divine Relative, both of which are far from being given gratuitously, but on the contrary involve and demand all that we are.

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Much could be said about the operations and modalities of Divine Omnipotence. In the case of miracles, God projects something of Himself into the world, He modifies the natural course of things by His Presence; in other cases, which properly speaking do not fall outside the natural course of things, the Divine Presence is less direct or, if one prefers, more indirect, for the entry of God into the world cannot mean that the Divine Presence enters the world with Its very substance, which would reduce the Universe to ashes. This amounts to saying that in the sphere of the manifestations of Divine Power, one has to distinguish between “horizontal” and “vertical” dimensions, the vertical being supernatural and the horizontal natural; for the materialists, only the horizontal dimension exists, and that is why they cannot conceive of causes which operate vertically and for that reason are non-existent for them, like the vertical dimension itself.⁵

Instead of the notions of horizontality and verticality, one could also use the images of the circle and the cross, or of concentric circles and radii: on the one hand, causality is confined to the circles, and this is the natural order of things devoid of mystery; on the other hand, causality emanates from the central point, and this is the supernatural order, miraculous and divine. “For men that is impossible; but for God, all things are possible.”

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If God were good, argue the atheists and even certain deists, He would abolish evil. There are two answers to that, and the first has been given already: God cannot abolish evil as such because it results from All-Possibility, which is ontologically “prior” to the personal God; consequently, God can only abolish a particular evil to the extent that, in so doing, He takes account of the metaphysical necessity of evil in itself.⁶ The second answer in a way goes beyond the first, to the point of appearing to contradict it: God, being good, in fact abolishes not only particular evils but also evil as such; particular evils because everything has an ending, and evil as such because—being subject in the last analysis to the same rule—it disappears as a result of

5. It may be pointed out here that the evolutionist error has its roots in this prejudice. Instead of conceiving that creatures are archetypes “incarnated” in matter, starting from the Divine Intellect and passing through a subtle or animic plane, they restrict all causality to the material world, deliberately ignoring the flagrant contradictions implied by this conceptual “planimetry.”

6. What is ontologically necessary is, in Semitic parlance, “What is written.”

the cosmic cycles and the effect of the Apocatastasis.⁷ Thus the formula *vincit omnia Veritas* applies not only to Truth but also to the Good in all its aspects. And this means likewise that there can never be any symmetry between Good and evil;⁸ evil has no being in itself, whereas the Good is the being of all things. The Good is That which is; Being and Good coincide.

Our second answer could incur the objection that its bearing is only relative since the cyclic limits do not abolish the possibility of evil which, in fact, has to reappear in some degree or another in the course of each cycle. That is true—while not being really an objection—and it leads us once more to the problem of the very nature of the Infinite, which implies that All-Possibility must by definition include the possibility of its own negation, to the extent, precisely, that this negation is possible; and it is possible, not, of course, at the actual level of the Principle, but in an already very relative modality of contingency, thus at the lower extremity of *Māyā* and consequently in an “illusory” manner; that is to say unreal at the level of the Absolute.

The Divine Quality of Goodness⁹ can be envisaged in different connections and at various levels: first of all, there is the Absolute as the “Sovereign Good” and, in consequence, as the supreme—but indirect—source of every possible good; next there is the “Sovereign Good” inasmuch as it is “personified” at the level of Being and within Being; more relatively there is the divine radiation, the cosmogonic function of Good, the creative projection of the world; and lastly there is the final reintegration, the Apocatastasis. And we could likewise mention all the aspects of good which the Universe contains and which, either as a whole or separately, also constitute a manifestation of Good as such; in this sense, every good is indirectly a theophany.

Some could reproach us for giving the notion of “evil” a metaphysical connotation, whereas as in their eyes it has only a moral or sentimental one; with which we disagree, because we think we are right in calling “evil” something that opposes—or believes it is opposing—the Real. We are right in calling it evil insofar as it opposes the Real and consequently opposes our ultimate interests, but not necessarily in other respects; not in respect of its existence, in any case, nor again in respect of some function that is necessary for the equilibrium of the world.

7. In Hindu doctrine, the “night of *Brahmā*” follows the “day of *Brahmā*”: after projection comes reintegration.

8. It is by virtue of this principle that beauty, for example, is ontologically more real than ugliness—which is denied with typical passion by the modern mind, a mind that relativizes, subjectivizes and inverts everything—and it is again for this reason that the “golden age” lasts far longer than the other ages, not least the “iron age.”

9. What we mean here by “Quality” is not simply an attribute depending on relativity, but an intrinsic characteristic of the Absolute; thus a reality inseparable from the Essence. It is to absolute “Goodness” that the Sanskrit term *Ānanda* refers, as do the Arabic words *Rahmah* and *Rahmān*, which contain the nuances of “Beatitude,” “Goodness,” “Beauty” as well as of boundless Potentiality. “God is Love” say the Scriptures, which refers to these various aspects.

The antagonism between Good and evil is in a way the combat between Being and nothingness, which is waged to the extent that Being lends to nothingness a certain existence, although always in the context of the necessary radiation of the Divine Self, which is, as stated by the Sufis, a “Message from Himself to Himself.”

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According to Saint Paul, the Divine Wrath—or the Divine quality of Justice—must be able to manifest itself, and, consequently, there must be something that provokes it, which is expressed moreover by the saying: “Scandal must needs come...” From a somewhat different viewpoint one may say that the specific—and contrasting—good that is the victory over evil, or the deliverance from an evil, obviously presupposes some evil against which it exerts itself and which it can abolish; the dilating and liberating sense of relief experienced by a man who drinks when he is thirsty would not exist without the torment of thirst. We have sometimes heard it said that the boundless happiness of Paradise is impossible since, for lack of contrast, it would end in boredom; that in order to appreciate happiness, it is alleged, there must be points of comparison and reference, and thus suffering. This view is erroneous for several reasons: in the first place, a man who is morally and intellectually unimpaired satisfies the need for contrasts or change by his discernment, detachment and discipline, and that is why he is never bored, unless someone bores him; in the second place, a superior man has the intuition of archetypes or essences and is kept in a state of supernatural equilibrium by the fact that his vision opens out onto the Infinite. In Paradise, nothing can fade, either objectively or subjectively, since things and perceptions are ceaselessly renewed through their contact with the Divine Infinity; man thus finds himself freed, doubtless not from a certain need for compensatory alternations or for rhythms, but from the psychological or moral necessity of contrasting changes. The metaphysical proof of this is the Divine Felicity itself, which does not suffer in the least from being without shadows, but which necessarily contains “dimensions” to the extent that it projects itself into the realm of *Māyā*, or to the extent that our way of envisaging the Divine Order is linked to this realm.

It is said that habit dulls the feelings, and this is true *de facto* but not *de jure*, for the psychological phenomenon of habit attests by itself to a lack of gratitude and also of depth, at least on the plane of things that are supposed to bring happiness, but not on the plane of things we have to endure or that are a matter of indifference. From another angle, the stability of happiness depends—quite apart from any question of destiny—not only on the beauty and wisdom of our attitude but also, and above all, on an opening towards Heaven—as we have said—which confers upon the experience of happiness a life continually renewed. One must realize in earthly mode that which will be realized in heavenly mode; this is the very definition of nobility of character.

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There are two kinds of antinomy, one “vertical” and the other “horizontal,” according to whether there is opposition or reciprocity: the relationship between positive and negative, real and illusory, good and evil pertains to vertical antinomy, and that between active and passive, dynamic and static, masculine and feminine to horizontal antinomy; that is to say, the positive pole is “above” and the negative pole is “below,” whereas the active pole is “on the right” and the passive pole is “on the left.” The opposition between a good and an evil, which is found in the peripheral regions of the cosmos, is excluded from the central region; the paradisaical world contains only qualitative, “horizontal” reciprocities, and its contraries are situated outside and beneath its domain.

We say “qualitative” because evil too has “horizontal” complementarities, since the active and passive poles are neutral in themselves and are asserted at all levels; as for the “vertical” relationship—the confrontation between positive and negative—it is universal in the sense that it represents a priori the gap between the Absolute and the relative; *Māyā* beginning in the Divine Order itself and producing the hypostatic degrees. Moreover, depending on our way of viewing things, “verticality” and “horizontality” are interchangeable, as we observed earlier: from a certain point of view, *Māyā* is the *Shakti* of *Ātmā* just as Infinitude is the complement of the Absolute, or as All-Possibility prolongs Necessary Being; from another point of view, *Māyā* is relativity or illusion, and is not “on the left” but “below.” As the universal archetype of femininity, *Māyā* is both Eve and Mary: “psychic” and seductive woman, and “pneumatic” and liberating woman; descendent or ascendant, alienating or reintegrating genius. *Māyā* projects souls in order to be able to free them, and projects evil in order to be able to overcome it; or again: on the one hand, she projects her veil in order to be able to manifest the potentialities of the Supreme Good; and, on the other, she veils good in order to be able to unveil it, and thus to manifest a further good: that of the prodigal son’s return, or of Deliverance.

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It is worthwhile recalling here that Hindu doctrine accounts for the possibility of evil by means of the concept of the universal triad: *Sattva-Rajas-Tamas*, namely—analogically speaking—“luminosity,” “heat,” “darkness”; this last is not evil as such but the ontological root of this phenomenon. In certain forms of symbolism—occasionally even in the Bible—there is nonetheless a coincidence *de facto* between the punitive and destructive function of God—personified in India as *Shiva*¹⁰—and the genius of evil, the Satan of the Semites; *Shiva* is in fact the Divine summit of *Tamas*, so to speak, but he is not of course “darkness,” “heaviness” or “ignorance”; at most he comprises a negative or dark aspect from the world’s point of view, precisely because he chastises and destroys. The confusion—real or apparent—between Divine

10. This is then the particularized Shiva of the “Triple Manifestation” (*Trimūrti: Brahmā-Vishnu-Shiva*), and not the Supreme *Shiva* who is synonymous with *Parabrahmah* and thus possesses and controls all functions.

Wrath and the genius of evil is an ellipsis which signifies that evil, insofar as it is a necessary phenomenon, is integrated in the final analysis into a celestial function.

On the one hand, God “loves” the world because the world manifests God;¹¹ but from another standpoint, God “punishes” the world because, in this regard, it is not divine manifestation but on the contrary remoteness and “other than God”. There is harmony on the one hand and opposition on the other between “Necessary Being” and “possible being”; all existence is an oscillation, contradictory on the surface but basically homogeneous, between these two magnets that are moreover incommensurable. For this reason, man is the personification of an alternative whose dimensions escape his immediate vision; in other words, the very reason for being of the human condition is to choose, and to make the right choice: to opt for liberating participation in Necessary Being, and not for enslaving wandering through the labyrinth of the possible and in the direction of nothingness. And likewise, this is why every man is priest,¹² *pontifex*, “pontiff”: the builder of the bridge between earth and Heaven, the bridge that leads from the present exile to the other shore; the shore of Peace close to the Immutable.¹³

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As we have said, evil has no being in itself—it possesses it only on loan and in its neutral substance—whereas Good is the being of all things; Being is thus synonymous with Good, as certain Sufis have pointed out. Now every man participates in Being through his existence and his faculties and carries it so to speak within himself; every man has within himself access to the Good and thus to Beatitude; “the Kingdom of God is within you.”

It is true that owing to the “fall,” this access has become dependent upon external conditions: the gateway of the human heart being closed, the gateway of the Celestial Heart has had to open, and has done so by means of Revelation and the Law; “without me ye can do nothing.” But this transfer cannot prevent the Sovereign Good from dwelling in our own heart and retaining all its freedom in relation to us; it is precisely in order to be able to act within us that it acts outside us. Man, marked by evil, bears in his quasi-transpersonal center the miracle of his salvation, whether he knows it or not, and whether he wishes it or not.

The Sovereign Good is both Omnipotence and Mercy; implacable Geometry and liberating Beauty.

11. In creating the world, “God saw that it was good”; and He “made man in His image.”

12. Which Islam intends to emphasize in restoring to man his primordial priestliness.

13. As the *Prājña-Paramita-Hrdaya-Sūtra* enunciates it: “Gone, gone; gone towards the other shore; gone to the other shore; O Enlightenment be blessed!”