

God is a Gambler

I. God's Left Hand

The Dæmonic is the 'left' heart side of God.

Most people, whether Christians or not, indeed whether any religion or not, prefer to stay on God's 'right' side, which is a blend of mind (cosmic order and insight) and soul (cosmic beauty and compassion), but without the dynamic of the heart, divine and human. It is the dynamic of the heart most people do not want to rely on. They do not want to be in the edgy and costly existential position where trusting this dynamic puts them. Religions are built around mind and soul, and the heart is banished.

The heart is a dark secret.

The dark secret is that the way of the heart is a gamble that God is taking with all that exists; and this gamble will not pay off if we human beings do not pick up the heart, which is a heavy weight we think we cannot lift and a deep pain we think we cannot bear. God is gambling we will step up, and carry the weight and endure the pain. The heart has a cost, for God and for us. God is gambling that, like God, we will pay the cost.

I cannot explain these things. Our desire to have them explained is so we can invent yet another excuse for not stepping up. In our own heart we know the score – so we might as well stop lying to ourselves, stop lying to other people, stop lying to God.

Blaspheme against God, spit on God, scream to God, but do not tell me you do not know where the left side of things is. Saying you cannot bear it does not help, because whatever you say, you are bearing it. You know it deep in the heart, as is so for every woman, man, child, who has ever lived or ever will live. We are bearing it even when we cannot bear it.

From an early age I was cursed and blessed to never be able to forget the left side, and I learned that when you try to avert your

gaze from what the heart always must face, the pain in the heart becomes unbearable. When you close your eyes to this escapist gaze, and again stand before what the heart always faces, the pain changes. It does not hurt any less. But the unbearable becomes a forge of grief and flame.

I cannot explain this to those who have thrown their heart away, whether in the name of religion or in the name of worldliness. The heartbreak is in you whatever you do, wherever you go. Moses will not take it from you. Buddha will not take it from you. The profane prayers you utter out of your heartbreak anchor you in the heart, and do not allow you to pretend. These prayers are holy.

II. Buddhist Enlightenment

There was no heart in Buddha's Enlightenment. It took Buddhism one thousand years – through people like the founder of Zen, DOGEN – to start to pick up the weight and embrace the pain. This is because what the heart must face is shocking. It is too great and it is too deep. We will settle for far less. But the Dæmonic God, who inflicts the weight and pain in the heart that we cannot escape, will not settle for less. God is relentless, and unrelenting.

God is gambling we can go deep, and in being deepened, can become great. God is gambling because the heart is free to step up or stand down. It is not a foregone conclusion. It is not guaranteed. If humanity fails, God has failed. A friend said, 'God believes in us'; yes, but that is the gamble.

III. Buddhist Flux

Another friend is a Zen Buddhist, though born a Jew. It is the Jewish element in him that understands, and warms to the absolutely shocking things I say about what it means that God has a heart, and has risked entrusting humanity with a heart that can either respond to God's heart or repudiate it. For all creation has been placed in the hands of the heart, not just divine but also human. Both must stand, act, and come through together – or nothing will get through. In that eventuality, it will all fall, endlessly, into the abyss. Zen has given my friend much. Being a part of something bigger, which is intelligent and philanthropic, rather than living as a separate ego, has been transforming. But the Dæmonic is a different kettle of fish, and my friend knows it. He knows in his bones what I mean when I say to him that God has risked the entire creation to the way of heart, and

that the outcome of this risk remains uncertain until the last breath, until the last sigh, until the last cry and last shout, of all creation, that finds its voice in humanity's anguish and agony of heart. It will go to the wire. It is Federico García LORCA's 'battle on the rim' – and as the options close, one after another like the doors in a room slamming shut until there are no more doors and it is just the room of no exit we confront, the real truth at stake is revealed. We finally end up naked, confronting what is in the heart, and confronting what it asks from each of us.

There is a way to invert Buddha's first noble truth. The real reason why everything is in flux, everything is changing, nothing is fixed, is because the journey and battle of heart that all humanity is making, like a huge caravan crossing a trackless waste, is not over yet. Its outcome is not known to any human being. It was not known to Moses. It was not known to Buddha. No mystical ecstasy, or visionary expansion of awareness, ever did, or ever will, 'see' the outcome, the end. Not even Jesus Christ was given to know this, as he clearly states. The outcome, the end, cannot be foreseen, because we have not arrived there yet, and to arrive there will be the journey and the battle of many generations to come. What will happen and how it will all turn out cannot be guaranteed in advance; no one knows this because it depends on the heart blood, heart sweat and heart tears, not yet shed, not yet given. The story goes on. The edge and the cost continue. It is not over until it is over, and it is not over yet.

This means no one can know the outcome, and that means we are all suspended in the risk. Its suspense rises and falls, ebbs and flows, but is never to be overcome in some state of consciousness where we discover we are ontologically secured. If the heart succeeds, all things will be ontologically secured in the end; if the heart fails, all things will be ontologically lost in the end. When we take up the burden of heart, we take up this suspense about the story we are still living, about the edge we will venture out onto farther and farther, about the cost we will pay and pay. When we assume the heart, humanly, we enter God's gamble of heart, and by entering this, we enter the risk.

It is not secured. It is in risk. It will be in risk to the very end, and knowing God, it will finally seem lost before it can win through.



IV. Human Becoming

But this means, then, that Buddha's first noble truth is true for an existential reason he missed entirely. Everything is in fundamental flux, everything is inherently changing, there is nothing eternal reflected from above and fixed here below, because God's risk and our risking of it is a story not finished yet, a story still being travelled and fought for, a story still in the making over generations, a story still suspended between break-down and break-through, and a story whose deepest tears, sweat and blood, are still being shed, and whose greatest deeds of sacrifice are still being enacted.

It does not just depend on what you will or will not do. It depends on what others will or will not do. It depends on all of us.

This means – and with all due respect to the superb theology of 'personhood' created by the Greek Fathers of Eastern Christianity – we do not know yet what the human being 'is', because the human is still in fundamental and radical 'becoming'. What a human being will become is open-ended. It could end up as something small and shrivelled. It could end up as something big and expansive. What the heart will do, finally, when it has got off its back where it has fallen down in the dirt, and gets to its feet, no one knows, and no one can know. These are the secrets hidden in God. God sees the heart. For us, the heart is dark while we are still evading it, and even when we return to it, it is black in depth; we cannot see, because we must live and act, a red fire of love glowering deeper down, and ready to come forth.

What the human 'is', as of any 'now', cannot be defined, or set in stone by any description, because as my friend said – catching my meaning without further prompting – humanity is "a work in progress". You and I, and everybody, are inherently unfinished. It is all unfinished. And the change, the flux, that is basic in everything and in everyone is because we are all moving toward what we will become, but we have not yet by any measure arrived. Buddha's first noble truth, rendered existential rather than ontological, is saying it is all on the move, and has not arrived yet, because the gamble is still 'ongoing'. The game is on. All things will continue in movement until the gamble God is taking with the ontological through the existential is resolved.

Now you know why Fyodor DOSTOYEVSKY, the greatest novelist of the human heart struggling with the divine heart in the history of the world, was a gambler. Now I know why so many of my Lakota

friends love gambling; I comprehend now the hours I have spent in 'Hand Games' with Wilmer MESTETH, and many other Oglala people. There is a cosmic order, there is a cosmic beauty, there is a way to be part of it, and there is a way to be made insightful and compassionate by it. But this is, in itself, one-sided. It is right-sided. It evades the left side. The left side knows the heart is a gamble. All heart-rooted people, whether Russian or Indigenous, know the human heart is a gambler, and that this heart is God's gamble.

The left heart side is gambling that the heart can, through lifting the weight and bearing the pain, redeem the world, and by this, save the sacred origins of the ontological. The dark secret is, only the existential, where this sacredness can be lost, can save it. The existential is the hell where heaven has to be tested to prove itself.

Something in our heart says no to the gamble. Something in the heart has faith in the gamble, and foolishly, vulnerably, bravely, generously, dives in. This is the heart's no and yes; and that too is part of the existential suspense that never ceases in the way of heart. For we never know if we are up to it until we dive in, and once we have dived in, we never know if we will reach the far shore. But something in the heart already is up for it, even as the other part faints away. We recover, and we go anyway, also assuming our doubts and weaknesses and flaws and failures to hit the mark. We do not shed any of this. We carry and bear it, even as we really commit to and go into and undergo the real extremity of the risk. There is an innocence of heart that will have a go, even without knowing the price. This is the pathos of the heart, so touching, so moving, in young people. Later, the price bites, and we still go on. We get ragged and strained, and ugly, but there is an even greater nobility and glory in that. When the chips are really down, we bet our all.

We really do not and cannot know what God is doing with the world. We do not know how it works, all we know is we have a place in it and we have a hand in it either working out or ending badly, in ruin and dereliction. This ruin and dereliction in which it really can, and might yet, end is already prefigured: it is the mean streets all around us, in the poverty, the brutishness, the aimlessness, the hollowness. William BLAKE's apocalyptic poem *London*, where he sees on every face he meets "marks of weakness, marks of woe", is all around us, showing us what failure of the heart will mean if it becomes the final word on the project that God ventured with us. Satan the Accuser is before God day and night, telling God we have already failed and are entirely worthless, but God does not relent

towards this moral accusation of the Evil One any more than he will relent to our cowardly and lazy plea for an easier life. God reserves his judgement. He carries on. Because God does not relent to the devil's judgementalism or to our desire for a quick fix and an easy path, it goes on. The relentlessness of God is Dæmonic, and we register this in the heart as a pressure on its action that does not, and will not, ease off.

Our life is what we 'do' with our life; the gamble is in how we live, and how we act. This is not religion. It is life. It is the life and death of the heart.

The heart is the only hero this world has. The heart is the one who loves to the absolute max, and that means the heart lives and dies by sacrifice. The heart is a warrior.

Another friend, who is Greek and an Orthodox Christian, sent me one of those quasi-Jungian accounts of the warrior as an *inner archetype*, similar to the *inner child*, and the *inner goddess*, and all that sort of spin about the psyche's images. Though the thumbnail sketch of the warrior's activity and energy was all right as far as it went, a much deeper way of reading the warrior is needed. The warrior is not a preformed archetype in the soul – he is what the heart does or does not do in the situation where it is called to Act, but is on the edge, and must pay a cost. An archetype is an impersonal force. The heart action that makes a warrior is *heavy carrying* and very costly in *deep suffering* for the heart. It is personal, but with pain and with weight. No Jungians – or their new age derivatives – understand the warrior truly because they are just not into heart. They are into soul, but you cannot become a warrior through soul. You must risk the heart. And it is a risk – for God and for us.

God is gambling with existence—and the only card up his sleeve is the heart.

V. Psychological and Spiritual Evil

My Zen friend, who is Jewish, understands the contrast and balance of the Dæmonic (left side) and the Eros (right side) of God – or put another way, the *existential* and the *ontological* – through the two sides of life he names as *beauty* and *horror*. Horror is part of the Dæmonic, because God does things with existence, given the risk to which God subjects it, that to us are horrifying, horrible, horrendous. We mutter 'that is the way it is', or even, 'it has to be like that', yet the bitterness in our resignation is obvious; and the pious mouth their pretend acceptance in an all-too-easy 'Thy will be done.' But we

all find the gamble not to our taste, and no one would choose it, or arrange it like that. As Søren KIERKEGAARD rightly claimed, the way the gamble works, works out, works through, is absurd. It does not add up. It does not make sense. A young student of mine, originally of a fundamentalist orientation, but drawn beyond this by wrestling with existentialism, once said of *existence's wound* that it is like a text where key lines have been removed, where key words have been rubbed out. Horror is a thing of gaps where you get stuck, a thing of rims from which you fall, a thing of crossroads where you are forced to choose though not knowing what will happen as a consequence, but paying for it either way.

My friend is honest: he prefers life's beauty to life's horror. It was meaningful to him to discover this beauty as a cosmic and objective pattern that is visible and invisible, that includes matter but reaches into spirit. The ego thinks it is separate from this marvellous whole, and pays for this sense of separateness with worry about itself. To discover that there is something bigger than our distinct ego and its concerns for itself, and that each of us is "a part of it", as Indigenous peoples put it, is liberating. Such is Buddha's enlightenment, which is liberation from a false sense of apartness, and a rejoining of the pattern that nourishes and sustains each in the circle of living made by all. Eros declares that goodness inheres life.

The Buddhist approach to evil reflects the fact that its focus is mainly confined to the realm of Eros, but does not enter upon the realm of the Dæmonic. Buddhist evil is all about the limitation we put upon ourselves in trying to be a separate ego, with a discursive mind and self-preserving impulses. This cuts us off from the real source of what is inherently good. Buddhism is optimistic, because it is within humanity's effort to take these self-created limitations off the self. When this happens, we still must live in a world of limits and deal with them, but we are free of what we ourselves generate out of our own misperception and misdirected desires, and so we can be happy. Yes, we can find happiness living in connection with Eros. The Eros of God grants direct perception and intensified philanthropy. But I find this kind of optimism bland.

The path of Eros remains, from the Dæmonic perspective, incomplete. At worst it is fool's paradise. At best, it is a fleeting taste of what once was, in the beginning, and might be again, in the end, but which in the middle is not secured, and is not securable, unless the heart intervenes. The middle of the story is where heart steps up and takes it on, or refuses it and falls down.

Consequently, evil has a different face in the Dæmonic, because the Evil One named in Hebrew as the Adversary, and given the title of the Accuser, wants God's venturing of heart with humanity to fail. This guy is playing for keeps. Evil in Buddhism can be reduced to the psychological, virtually identified with our human delusive manoeuvres and rigmarole, but the evil that confronts the Dæmonic is a real Other, a spirit, not a piece of human psychology projected out in a symbolic form. This Satanic spirit wants the risk God is taking with humanity, in existence, to come to nothing, and thus Satan is really out to get us, and Satan is not messing around. Satan is the killer of the heart. Satan is behind everything that kicks the wind out of our sails, that kicks the stuffing out of us, so that we either distort or give up on the heart. Satan starts his attack when we are young. Satan is the killer of the child, and what Satan engineers to happen to children causes them to give up on the heart for the rest of their time on this Earth. Satan will break your spirit, intimidate your passion, and extinguish the flame in your heart. Satan will lead you out of the heart's wilderness prematurely, and then become the judge and jury, condemning your laxity, your transgression, your *sin*. The whole false notion of sin, with its belittling of the human and its aim of murdering the spark in the human, is Satanic in origin. 'Mankind the miserable sinner' is Satan's view on the human heart.

I met this spirit in my early twenties in a great vision that has marked, scarred, driven, my whole life. I had dragged a figure on a raised dais, surrounded by twelve disciples seated at a long table, off his perch, and forced him to the ground. He was Satan, being worshipped as Christ, and in my heart I had known this and obeyed some wave of divine wrath that directed me to drag this phoney impostor from off the high perch, and expose him. As I held Satan on the floor, his face changed and revealed who he was. His red eyes burnt into me with their fury, a ravening fury, a raging fury, a fury against us all that is never satisfied, however much it gorges on the tears and blood of our human failures. His look said it all. He said to me in silent words, 'you naïve little shit, you have no idea what you have taken on. I am going to fuck with your life in a way you cannot even imagine.' Satan spoke like a street thug, trying to impose his will by force, and the profanity of the words was an expression of utter contempt for me or anyone else who stood up to the Satanic Accuser.



The vision ended, though those red eyes of pure hatred remain with me. But I am still here. I have had some very bad times, when I backed down and backed away, and even lied to myself about doing so, before I pulled myself back into the fray. But I can honestly say from my heart, I do not fear the contest with this Satanic bully. I relish it. But I have learned that Satan is like a street thug in another sense: he will not take you head on, but fights dirty. It is this devil that Christ fully faced and fully overcame on the Cross. No one understands this, but it is what has sustained me in my heart way. Christ, the wolf spirit, and my Lakota allies, and a few other sisters and brothers, have helped me stand up. As a warrior, it is my love to help others, any others, who feel tempted to give in and give up when the intimidation against them is at its most fierce. I experienced in that vision of my innocent youth the Dæmonic Wrath that will not let Satan win by cheating. If he wants the human heart, then he is going to have to come on the killing ground and take it.

The killing ground is the place in the world where the two roads, Eros and the Dæmonic, intersect and *cross*. This place is horrendous, but it is also holy.

This is where it will be decided, finally.

This place is not on the mountain with Moses. This place is not in the meditation hall with Buddha. This place is terrible, and yet it is also wonderful for those of us prepared to see the story to the end, and go all the way. For here is where the devil of pure hate is going to be flushed out of hiding, and is going to have to really take it on. God's gaze is upon this arena, and remains relentlessly fixed on this "contest of love", as Christos YANNARAS once called it. This is where the human heart will finally be tested and proved. This place is where the devil is going to be brought down. There is no guarantee. But if it is going to happen, it happens here.

VI. Love beyond Love

My Serbian friend, profoundly given to Eros, though with a relation to the Dæmonic through being an accomplished martial artist in Okinawa karate, understands love primarily, and almost exclusively, through the right side of God's Eros. This love gives light. This love gives beauty. This love gives each human being, as every creature and thing, a place in a bigger whole, a whole so marvellous no one can encompass it, though all benefit from it.

This light beautifies and enlivens and sanctifies what it illumines. It takes joy in what it loves, even as the Beloved knows a joy beyond all images and beyond all words in the Lover. Lover and Beloved unite in Eros. Everything is well. All manner of things are and will be well.

But...

But the Dæmonic throws that wild card in the dance of Eros. Why does it interrupt the love that Eros bestows? For all those for whom Eros is love, and that means many Christians, especially in the East but also in the West, as well as many Buddhists and many of no religion who nevertheless are connected to the Goodness of Life, like a fountain overflowing in a parched desert refreshing and renewing everyone, the Dæmonic seems strange, alien, threatening. So it is.

When Black Elk spoke of the *beauty and strangeness of the Earth*, he was experiencing, he was beholding, the beauty of Eros and the strangeness of the Dæmonic.

But what I said to my Serbian friend I will say here, to end.

The Dæmonic is not simply what spoils love, as we would all like love to be: the ever-growing tree, the ever-overflowing fountain, the unending flowering. The Dæmonic is in fact, as I said to Alex, the *love beyond love*.

This love, by risking more, gives more.

In Eros, things are good for God and for the creation that breathes, and lives, in God. The Dæmonic calls us out of this Eternal Dance, and throws each of us back on our unique personal stand, or lack of stand. Why? Because this is the way of the love beyond love.

This is the way of the love supreme.

The Dæmonic is hard, even harsh, on us. But it is harder and harsher on God. I forgive God for the unutterable wound that God has inflicted upon me and upon every creature, thing and person in this world because I know God has picked up the heaviest weight and God has borne the deepest suffering. This is not at all evident to us

until we go far deeper into the pain and despair and outrage deep in the heart; this is a descent most people do not make. But if you own what is in your heart, you will pass through the most abysmal loss of God and the most abysmal rejection of God to a place that an Eastern Orthodox Christian saint called the “new land of heart.” It was to this new land the Jews were travelling in leaving Egypt. They never arrived. This place remains the true *promised land*. In this land, we forgive God and are forgiven by God: the forgiveness is mutual. But it is more than that. There is much more to it than that.

It ends the old tears and despair of our heartbreak, and reforges our heart.

It is our heartbreak that is forged in fire.

VII. The Ultimate Love

The love beyond love is the love that risks everything and then goes beyond all limit to retrieve, to carry, to pay for, what can be lost, what already is lost and what could be in the final end forever lost. Eros is natural. The Dæmonic is hard, strained, naked, ugly and extreme. But the Dæmonic loves deeper, and the Dæmonic makes us greater.

I am one of those who stood up to the devil while still just a naïve little runt, way out of his depth, because already in childhood, in the midst of its desolation and destruction, my heart understood the love beyond love. The weight and the pain is a summons. Even as a child, even as just a wrecked little bastard with no idea what he was taking on, the love beyond love became a wound worthy of the journey and the battle.

Do you understand what I am telling you?

When you, in the deep heart, break down and then break through to the depth of what God’s heart is doing, your tears will change, your screaming agony will find peace, and in the fathomlessness of the abyss beneath your heart and in your heart will rise the flame that loves God without reserve. And when that day comes you will do more than forgive God, you will trust and have faith in the gamble, you will exult in it, you will laugh and cry about it, released from all your fear of it, and you will dance like a drunken person, and more than this, you will step up, and ready yourself to fight.

Do you understand this?

Naturally we fall in love with God’s Eros.

But when we love the Dæmonic heart of God, which is going all

the way, which is carrying the heaviest weight, which is bearing the deepest suffering, which is paying the most costly price, then our heart is moved, and we burn with love for the love beyond love, and in that burning, we gladly take it on and step up, thankful for the divine faith in us that dignifies us with our portion of carrying the weight, our portion of bearing the suffering, our portion of paying the price.

The devil came to break me, then the devil tried to distract me, but something in my heart reveres the love beyond love, the strange love, the violent love, the irrational love, the love that gambles and by virtue of that gives more and does more. Already as a child, I loved that extremity of God.

This love that most people do not want to face, do not want to carry and bear and pay for, do not stand before and stand up for, is love at its most absolute extreme.

It is the love no one wants, it is the love no one recognises, that is the love supreme.

Only this love beyond love is deep and great.

This is the love that goes with us, and stands with us, and will never abandon those it has risked. For, in risking us, it has risked itself.

If the human heart ends in hell, then the heart of God will remain forever in hell with us.

Alex, my perceptive and beautiful friend, understood the love beyond love. I spoke a few words, only a few words, and we both lapsed into silence.

Yes, he said.

We have to venture the losing of love really to find how deep and great love is.