

"My Mercy is prior to My Wrath." For Rumi, this is the same as saying "My Gentle Names are prior to and take precedence over My Severe Names." The mercy, joy, and beauty which Rumi sees inherent in all of creation and dominating in all of its forms may be said to derive from this way of looking at God's Names and Attributes. All creation is a manifestation of God's Severe and Gentle Names, but the latter always take precedence ontologically over the former. Whenever we may see the manifestation of Wrath and Severity, e.g., in suffering and evil, we should know that God's Mercy and Gentleness will soon manifest themselves. Or rather, all suffering and evil exist only to manifest a greater joy and good. However bleak the form may be, the meaning is always Mercy, which is eternally prior to Wrath.

God has two Attributes: Severity and Gentleness. The prophets are the locus of manifestation for both Attributes, while the believers manifest His Gentleness, and the unbelievers manifest His Severity. (F 222/227)

Laughter tells of Thy Gentleness, lamentation complains of Thy Severity.

In the world these two conflicting messages tell of a single Beloved.

Table I
Some of the Divine Names

Names of the Essence	Names of the Acts	
	Severe Names	Gentle Names
King	Severe	Gentle
Holy	Abaser	Exalter
Just	Humiliator	Honoror
Protector	Slayer	Life-Giver
Light	Avenger	Pardoner
Creator	Depriver	Enricher
Living	Harmor	Benefiter
Powerful	Straitener	Expander
Knowing		
Hearing		
Seeing		
Speaking		
Willing		

Gentleness deceives a forgetful person: He thinks not of Severity and commits a sin.

Severity deprives another of hope: He turns to total despair.

Love, like a kindly mediator, comes to the protection of these two lost souls. (D 8571-75)

When you look at His Gentleness, stones and boulders become wax; when you look at His Severity, even your wax becomes granite. (D 5795)

His Mercy is prior to His Wrath. If you want spiritual priority, go, seek the prior Attribute! (M IV 3205)
Hell's fire is but a mote of God's Severity, a whip to threaten the base.

Although He has such a mighty and overpowering Severity, look at the coolness of His Gentleness, which is prior to it!

It is an ineffable and inscrutable priority in the realm of meaning: Have you ever seen a prior and a posterior without duality? . . .

Severity is truly awesome, but once you begin to tremble, that awesomeness becomes soft and smooth;

For the awesome shape is aimed at the denier—once you become helpless, it turns into Gentleness and Kindness. (M IV 3742-44, 53-54)

3. THE REASON FOR CREATION

Creation—or the universe and the infinite forms that fill it—is another name for God's Acts, and His Acts are the manifestation of His Attributes. Having understood this, if we are asked, "Why did God create the world?" the answer is clear: in order to manifest His own Names and Attributes. The very nature of Divinity requires some sort of activity. For if we say that God is the "Creator," what meaning can that term have if there is no creation? God created the world to display His Attributes. Hence the Prophet reported that God said, "I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted to be known. Therefore I created the world that I might be known." The goal of creation is "making manifest" (*izhār*).

If the exposition of meanings were sufficient, the creation of the world would be vain and useless.

If love for God were only thought and meaning, the form of fasting and prayer would not exist.

The gifts that lovers exchange are naught in relation to love except forms.

So that the gifts may give witness to the love hidden within. (M I 2624-27)

God says, "I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted to be known." In other words, "I created the whole of the universe, and the goal in all of it is to make Myself manifest, sometimes through Gentleness and sometimes through Severity." God is not the kind of king for whom a single herald would be sufficient. If all the atoms of the universe were His heralds, they would be incapable of making Him known adequately.

Therefore all creatures make God manifest, day and night. However, some of them know this and are aware of their making Him manifest, while others are heedless. Whatever the case may be, their making God manifest is certain. For example, a prince commands that someone should be beaten and punished, and that person screams and shouts. Nevertheless, both beater and beaten are making the prince's commands manifest. (F 176-177/184-185)

God did not increase by bringing the universe into existence; He did not become what He had not been formerly.

But effects increased when He brought the creatures into existence: between these two increases there is a difference.

The increase of effects is His making Himself manifest, so that His Attributes and Acts may become visible. But the increase of an essence would be proof that it is of temporal origin and subject to causes. (M IV 166-69)

The universe was created for the sake of manifestation, in order that the Treasure of Wisdom might not remain hidden.

He said, "I was a Hidden Treasure." Listen! Do not lose touch with your own substance, make yourself manifest! (M IV 3028-29)

God says, "We are the Unveiler of the Mystery and Our work is just this: We bring forth these concealed things from their hiding places.

Although the thief remains silent in denial, the magistrate forces him to confess.

All these earths have stolen Our bounties so that We may bring them to confess through affliction." (M IV 1014-16)

God tells us, "Just as I wanted to manifest My Treasure, so I wanted to manifest your ability to recognize that

Treasure. Just as I wanted to display the Purity and Gentleness of this Ocean, so I wanted to display the high aspirations and the growth through Gentleness of the fish and the creatures of the Sea. Hence they may behold their own fidelity and display their aspirations. Do people think they will be left to say "We believe" and that they will not be tried? (XXIX, 2). Hundreds of thousands of snakes claim to be fish. Their forms are the forms of fish, but their meanings are the meanings of snakes." (MS 29)

4. OPPOSITES

Rūmī often refers to or quotes the proverbial expression, "Things become clear through their opposites." Everyday experience confirms this truth, for the existence of the myriad things of the world only becomes possible through differentiation and opposition. If two things were not different, and therefore "opposed" in some respect, they would be one and the same. Each individual of a pair of opposites makes the existence of the other individual possible; day and night, perfection and imperfection, wholeness and brokenness, happiness and sadness, newness and oldness, spirit and body. Each of these correlative terms can only exist and be known because of its opposite. And so it is with all things, except God. He alone has no opposite, but transcends all opposition. He alone is the true "coincidence of opposites" (*jam-i addād*), where all opposition is effaced in the Ocean of Unity. For the same reason, we cannot know Him, since He has no opposite to "make Him clear."

God created suffering and heartache so that joyful-heartedness might appear through its opposite.

Hence hidden things become manifest through opposites. But since God has no opposite, He remains hidden.

For the sight falls first upon light, then upon color; Opposites are made manifest through opposites, like white and black.

So you have come to know light through light's opposite; Opposites display opposites within the breast.

God's light has no opposite within existence, that through its opposite it might be made manifest.

Therefore our eyes comprehend Him not, but He comprehends the eyes (VI 104); Learn this from Moses at Mount Sinai.¹⁴

Know that form springs from meaning as the lion from the thicket, or as voice and speech from thought.

Form was born from speech and then died. It took its wave back to the sea.

Form comes out from Formlessness. Then it returns, for unto Him we are returning (II 156). (M I 1130-38, 40-41)

So the locus of manifestation for a thing is its opposite, and each opposite aids its own opposite.

If you write upon a black page, your script will be hidden, since both are the color of tar. (D 3761-62)

He who has not seen the constancy of Moses' serpent imagines that the sorcerers' cords are alive.¹⁵

A bird which has never drunk limpid water washes its feathers and wings in a salt pond.

No opposite can be known without its opposite. Having suffered a blow, you will know a caress. (M V 597-599)

You will not know evil until you know the good: You can discern an opposite through its opposite, oh youth! (M IV 1345)

Every light has a fire, every rose a thorn; a serpent watches over every treasure hidden in the ruins.

Oh, Thy Rosegarden has no thorns! Thy pure Light has no fire! Around Thy Treasure is no serpent, no blow, no teeth! (D 25634-35)

His description is not contained within the intellect, for He is the Coincidence of Opposites. Wonderful Composition without composition! Wonderful freely acting Compelled One! (D 26832)

The Creator is the Abaser and the Exalter. Without these two Attributes, no Act could be performed.

Look at the abasement of the earth and the exaltation of the heavens. Without these two Attributes, the heavens could not revolve, oh friend!

The abasement and exaltation of the land is of another kind: Half the year it is desolate, half green and fresh.

The abasement and exaltation of this distressed! Time is of another sort: half day and half night.

The abasement and exaltation of this compounded bodily constitution is that sometimes it is well and sometimes it suffers illness.

Know that all the states of the world are like this: famine and drought, peace and war—all for our tribulation. (M VI 1847-52)

Divine Wisdom has tied these opposites together. Oh Butcher, You have given neck with the fillet!

The spirit cannot act without the body. Without the spirit, the body is withered and cold.

Your body is manifest and your spirit hidden: These two put all the business of the world in order.

If you strike someone's head with earth, his head will not break. If you strike it with water, it still will not break.

If you want to break his head, mix the dirt with water. (M V 3422-26)

Life is peace among opposites, death the appearance of strife among them.

God's Gentleness has paired this lion and sheep, these two far distant opposites. (M I 1293-94)

In a few of the above verses, Rūmī alludes to the opposition within the fundamental structure of the natural world, i.e., the four elements earth, air, fire, and water. These four elements, which never become manifest themselves, represent the basic ontological tendencies within the outward world. The four outward substances which bear their names are only their most direct reflections. But everything which exists in the physical world, including the outward earth, air, fire, and water, is a mixture of the four elements. Hence the domain of the pure elements is said to be four spheres lying between the heavens, or the spiritual world, and the earth, or the material world.

In the last analysis, the elements, which are often referred to as the "pillars" (arkān) of the material world, are the fundamental ontological directions given to this world by the divine Attributes. Certain Sūfis speak of the four "pillars" of Divinity, meaning the four most fundamental divine Attributes, and describe the elements as the outward manifestation of these four Names.¹⁶

Each element represents a double quality, as shown in the accompanying table. Each is the opposite of every other element in respect of one or both of these qualities. The mixture of the elements brings about the existence of the physical world.

When you look carefully, this world is all war.

Mote fights with mote, like belief with unbelief. . . .

But in the light of the spiritual eye, our war and our peace are not from ourselves: They are "between His two fingers."¹⁷

The war of nature, the war of acts, the war of words—in the midst of the individual parts a frightful war.

The world subsists through this war. Look at the four elements and resolve this difficulty.

Table II
The Opposition among the Elements

AIR			
	hot	wet	
FIRE	hot	wet	WATER
	dry	cold	
		cold	dry
			EARTH

The four elements are four sturdy pillars, through which the roof of the heavens is kept in place.

But each pillar destroys the other: Water's pillar destroys that of fire.

So creation is built upon opposites: Inevitably we are warring over profit and loss. . . .

But that world is naught but everlasting and flourishing, since it is not compounded of opposites.

Each opposite inflicts reciprocal annihilation upon its opposite; when opposition disappears, substance alone remains. . . .

Colorlessness is the root of all colors, peace the root of all wars.

That world is the root of this abode full of heartaches; union is the root of every parting and separation.

Why are we in such opposition, oh friend? Why does Unity give birth to this multiplicity?

Because we are the branch, and the four opposite elements the root. The root has engendered its qualities in the branch.

Since the substance of the spirit is beyond separation, it does not partake of these qualities. Its qualities

are those of the divine Majesty. (M VI 36, 45-50, 56-57, 59-63)

5. GOOD AND EVIL

Opposition within creation is always relative, in the sense that there can be no absolute distinctions. Absolute knowledge, absolute life, absolute power—these are all God's Attributes. But when they become manifested within the world, they are weakened and sullied through their distance from their Source. Hence the "knowledge" and "power" found in this world are only a dim reflection of the pure and transcendent Attributes of God Himself.

For many people, the most troubling opposition found in the world is that between "good" and "evil." From what was said above, it becomes obvious that absolute goodness can be found only in God. Various degrees of evil derive from the dimming of goodness as it becomes distant from the Source. In the world, things are relatively good and evil, not absolutely so, since there can be no absolute qualities within creation. From another point of view, things are good and evil only in relation to us, not in relation to God, for in His eyes all things are performing but one task: making the Hidden Treasure manifest. Moreover, if there were no evil in the world, there would be no means whereby many of God's Attributes could manifest themselves, e.g., Forgiveness and Vengefulness. What sins could He forgive, and for what would He take vengeance? In any case, the perfection of the Painter's infinite creativity demands that He paint both beautiful and ugly pictures.

So there is no absolute evil in the world, for evil is relative—know this also.

In the whole of Time there is no poison or candy that is not a foot for one and a shackle for another.

For one it is a foot, for another the foot's chain. For one it is poison, for another candy.

The snake's poison is life for the snake, but death in relation to man.

Creatures of water see the ocean as a garden, creatures of earth see it as death and torment. (M IV 65-69)

Nothing God has created is in vain, whether wrath or forbearance, sincere counsel or guile.

None of these things is absolutely good, none absolutely evil.

The benefit and harm of each depends upon the situation. For this reason knowledge is necessary and useful. (M VI 2597-99)

If all knowledge and no ignorance were in man, he would be consumed and cease to be. Therefore ignorance is desirable, for through it man remains in existence; and knowledge is desirable, for it leads to the direct knowledge of God. So each of them aids the other. All opposites are similar. Although night is the opposite of day, it is day's helper, and the two perform one task. . . .

Hence all opposites appear as opposites to us. But the wise man knows that they perform but one task and are not opposites. Show me an evil in the world without good, and a good without evil. For example, a man is bent upon murder, but he occupies himself with fornication, so he sheds no blood. In respect of being fornication, his act is bad, but in respect of preventing murder, it is good. So good and evil are a single thing and cannot be separated.

This is why we debate with the Zoroastrians. They say that there are two Gods, one the creator of evil and the other the creator of good. All right, you show me good without evil. Then I will admit that there is a God of evil and a God of good. But this is absurd, for good is not separate from evil. Since they are not two things and there is no separation between them, it is impossible for there to be two Creators. (F 213-214/221)

Everything is good and perfect in relation to God, but not in relation to us. Fornication and purity, abandonment of the daily prayers and praying, unbelief and Islam, idolatry and the profession of God's Unity—all are good in relation to God. But in relation to us fornication, theft, unbelief, and idolatry are bad, while the profession of Unity, prayer, and acts of charity are good. But in relation to God, all are good.

For example, in a king's realm there are prisons, gallows, robes of honor, wealth, estates, retinue, banquets, joy, drums, and banners. In relation to the king, all are good, just as robes of honor are the perfection of his kingdom, so also gallows and executions and prisons are all perfections of his kingdom. In relation to him, all are perfection. But in relation to his people, how could the gallows be the same as a robe of honor? (F 31/42-43)

If you say that evils also derive from Him, how does that diminish His bountifulness?

His giving evil is also His Perfection. Let me give you an example, oh honored man!

A painter made two kinds of pictures, some delightful and some without delight.

He painted Joseph and sweet-natured hours; he painted ugly devils and satans.¹⁸

Both kinds of pictures display his mastery. They do not represent his ugliness, they are his munificence.

He makes the ugly of utmost ugliness. All uglinesses swarm about it.

So that the perfection of his knowledge might become manifest and the denier of his mastery disgraced.

If he cannot make ugly pictures, he is imperfect. That is why God creates both unbeliever and sincere servant.

In this respect both unbelief and faith bear witness to Him: Both prostrate themselves before His Lordliness.

However, the believer prostrates himself willingly, for his intention is to seek God's good-pleasure.

Unwillingly, the unbeliever also worships God, but he aims at some other desire. (M II 2535-45)

The Sufi said to the judge, "He whose aid is sought has the ability to make our trading without loss.

He who turns fire into trees and rosegardens can also make this world a place without harm.

He who produces roses from the midst of thorns can make our December into spring.

He from whom every cypress grows straight and free can turn our grief into joy.

He from whom every nonexistent thing has come into existence—how would He be any less if He made that thing everlasting?

He who gives the body a spirit so that it may live—how would He lose if He did not cause it to die?

After all, what would happen if that Generous One gave each servant his soul's desire without toil,

And kept far from His weak creatures the wiles of the ego and the temptations of the devil waiting in ambush?"

The judge replied, "If there were no bitter commands, beauty and ugliness, stones and pearls,

If there were no satan, ego, and self-will, and if there were no blows, battle, and war,

Then by what name would the King call His servants, oh abandoned man?

How could He say, 'Oh patient man! Oh forbearing man!'? How could He say, 'Oh brave man! Oh wise man!'?"

How could there be the patient, the sincere spender (III 17) without a highwayman and accursed devil?

Rustam, Hamzah and a catamite would all be one.¹⁹ Knowledge and wisdom would be useless and abolished. Knowledge and wisdom exist to distinguish the right from the wrong. If everything were the right way, then wisdom would be useless.

Do you consider it permissible to destroy both worlds for the sake of keeping open the shop of your worthless natural disposition?

Of course, I know that you are pure, not unimpure, and that your question is for the sake of the vulgar." (M V 1739-55)

God wills both good and evil, but He only approves of the good. For God said, "I was a Hidden Treasure so I wanted to be known." Without doubt, God wills both command and to prohibit. Commands are only proper if the act which is commanded is disliked by him who is commanded to perform it. One does not say, "Eat sweetmeat and sugar, oh hungry man!" And if one does say it, it is not called a "command," but rather "hospitality." Likewise, it is not proper to prohibit things which man dislikes. You cannot say, "Do not eat stones and thorns", and if you do say it, it is not called a "prohibition."

Therefore commands to do good and prohibitions against evil are not proper unless there be an ego desiring evil. To will the existence of such an ego is to will evil. But God does not approve of evil, or else He would not have commanded the good. In the same way, when a person wants to teach, he desires the ignorance of the pupil. For there can be no teaching without the pupil's ignorance; and to desire something is also to desire that thing's concomitants. However, the teacher does not approve of the pupil's ignorance, or else he would not teach him. Likewise, the physician desires people to be ill, since he desires to practice medicine. For his skill in medicine cannot be manifested unless people are ill. But he does not approve of their illness, or else he would not treat them and heal them. Again the baker desires men to be hungry so that he can exercise his skill and make a living. For he does not approve of their hunger, or else he would not sell bread. . . .

Hence it is realized that God wills evil in one respect, but in another respect He does not. Our opponents say that God does not will evil in any respect whatsoever. But if

absurd that He should will a thing and not will its concomitants. Now among the concomitants of His commands and prohibitions is this headstrong ego, which desires evil and hates the good by its very nature. Among the concomitants of this ego are all the evils in this world. Had He not willed these evils, He would not have willed the ego. And if He had not willed the ego, then He would not have willed the commands and prohibitions that are directed at the ego. Moreover, had He approved of these evils, He would not have commanded and prohibited the ego. In short, evil is willed, but not for its own sake.

Then our opponents say, "If He wills every good and if the averting of evil is a good, then He wills to avert evil." But it is impossible to avert evil without the existence of evil.

Or they say, "He wills faith." But faith is impossible except after unbelief. So one of the concomitants of faith is unbelief.

In conclusion, to will evil is only reprehensible when it is willed for its own sake. But when it is willed for the sake of a good, then it is not reprehensible. (F 179-180/186-188)

For readers living in the twentieth century and aware of the terrible evil and suffering which man is capable of inflicting upon his fellow men, Rūmī's discussion of good and evil may seem too dry and detached. But Rūmī also looks at this problem from another point of view, which goes to the heart of the "existential dilemma" posed for many people by the existence of evil and suffering. However, in the burning passion in his verses, one has to be thoroughly acquainted with his discussion of man's ultimate Self and the agony and torment which man undergoes because of separation from It. Much of the third part of this work deals with this question. Nevertheless, I must quote a further answer which Rūmī gives to the problem of evil and suggest that its full import cannot be comprehended until the rest of the book has been read.

Look not at Time's events, which come from the spheres and make life so disagreeable!

Look not at this dearth of daily bread and streams of livelihood! Look not at this famine and fear and trembling!

Look at this: In spite of all the world's bitterness, you are passionately and shamelessly attached to it.

Know that bitter tribulation is a Mercy! Know that the empire of Marv and Balikh is a Vengeance! . . . The cruelty of Time and of every suffering that exists is easier than distance from God and heedlessness.

For that cruelty will pass, but distance from Him will not. No one possesses good fortune but he who takes to Him an aware spirit. (M VI 1733-36, 56-57)

6. HEEDLESSNESS AND THE EXISTENCE OF THE WORLD

God created the universe to make the Hidden Treasure manifest. Hence He wants the world to exist in order for it to display the unlimited creative potentialities of His Attributes. But for the world to remain in existence, true knowledge of things as they are must be kept from most of its inhabitants. Otherwise they would cease to occupy themselves with activities necessary for the display of the full range of His Attributes. So God desires the existence of certain things which one might not expect, but of course not in themselves, but rather as the concomitants of His ultimate goal in creating the world. For example, God desires that heedlessness and forgetfulness of Him should exist in the world.

In order to maintain the "reign of heedlessness," God veils the eyes of men from the true reality of things. Rūmī sees allusions to God's maintenance of man's ignorance in such Koranic verses as these: "They worked deception, and God worked deception, and God is the best of deceivers" (III 54), "Do they feel secure against God's deception? None feels secure against God's deception save those people who are lost" (VII 99), "God has set a seal upon their hearts and their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering" (II 7), "God is swifter at deception" (X 22).

This abode is built from heedlessness. Bodies and the world are all maintained through heedlessness. This body has become full grown because of heedlessness.

Heedlessness is unbelief, and religion cannot exist without unbelief, since religion is the abandonment of unbelief.

Therefore an unbelief must exist for us to abandon. So both religion and unbelief are the same thing, since the first does not exist without the second and the second does not exist without the first. They are indivisible. (F 206-207/215)

Man is like a bow held in the hand of God's Power. God employs him in various tasks. In reality, the agent is God, not the bow. The bow is an instrument and a means. But for the sake of the maintenance of the world it is unaware