

Nietzsche and Religious Conflict

Talibanism in the Abrahamic Religions

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When religious restraints are removed, how does rage become the preferred method for dealing with anguish? What are the movements in the various aspects of the 'soul,' as Nietzsche configures it, that ignite in us emotions of fear and anxiety, anger and rage, and their psychic and cultural elaborations in envy and pettiness, pride and arrogance? It is in these partially negative but very powerful and frequently ignored motions of the 'soul' that we may find the key to an understanding of the origins of many political conflicts and wars.

Talibanism emerges when the metaphysics of religions lose their ability to calm anxieties. It involves visions about the end of the world, the last days, the apocalypse and the "rapture" associated with it. In Nietzsche's words, it is "a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will!* . . . man would rather will *nothingness* than not will."

My focus will be a comparison of the psycho-politics and various models of 'soul regimes' that can be found in Plato and how they relate to problems of political order. I will trace these teachings in their influence on Nietzsche's very subtle deconstruction of Enlightenment psychology, including and especially Freud, with its libidinal emphasis. Nietzsche, I argue, redirects the focus from erotics to thumotics. I concur with both Freud's and Nietzsche's understanding that human conduct in most is largely determined by what occurs in the unconscious and the subconscious parts of the soul and that reason and the intellect play at best a facilitating and never a governing role in the shaping of conduct. On this point both Freud and Nietzsche subvert the ideology of the Enlightenment. In opposition to Freud's emphasis on sex and the libido I invoke the art of thumotics. With this, I will discuss the problems of war, civil war and psychic conflict and the forging of personal and political identities out of these modes of human strife.

In my argument I will develop an understanding of two kinds of myths, assuming that myths are indispensable in shaping conduct. Accordingly, I shall distinguish “true” myths from “false” myths, with the one being rooted in the nature of things and the other being rooted in ignoble lies. The focus here will be particularly on the ability of myths to either enhance or contain rage and thereby contribute to either war or peace.

How are we to conceive the reversal of the tradition of Western thinking initiated by Nietzsche in a sense that is meaningful to our contemporary situation plagued by war, religious strife, psychic conflict and the incapacity to manage the resources of the planet, both human and non-human? How does a rethinking of Nietzsche’s reversal of Platonism help us to critically confront the psycho-politics of various soul-regimes: Enlightenment psychology, political ideologies and monotheistic religions?