

BELIEF & AUTHORITY: *as Above, so Below*

Authority

How do beliefs regarding a spiritual authority (whether God, Spirit or Force) influence one's beliefs about political authority? With many religions, the relationship between humans and God is written into the doctrinal texts. Is God described as being-oriented or essence-based? Is God described as transcendent or immanent? Is God an authority, one who reasons and judges? If the assumption is one of a monotheistic patriarch or an anthropomorphic God, would this create the paradigm of the acceptance of a political ruler as natural? How then would the theology relate to messages about individual agency and freedom?

I've decided to focus primarily on Christianity as a directly counter-revolutionary theology, although there are others. I grew up in a mixed-Christian household and attended a Catholic grade school, so I have some direct experience with the religion. Here I will use the structure of Christian theology to dissect the political implications of these spiritual convictions in relation to the material governance or the state.

Transcendence & Order Enforced from Above

Transcendence is the notion that divinity transcends the natural world. Transcendent theologies, like the major monotheistic religions, describe a separation between divine and material reality. Christianity is understood as a dualistic religion because it conceives of God as distinct and independent from the earth and materiality. A supernatural force that governs the world translates into a narrative about a higher authority removed from the individual: human powerlessness, passivity and submissiveness rather than active participation and creation of one's own future and the society we wish to see. This translates into a narrative of human dormancy rather than active creation. It parallels laws that make us passive toward our own morality.

The construction of a spiritual authority that resides outside of the realm of the governed resembles the external authority structure that dominates our existence, politically, economically and socially. Monotheistic beliefs reinforce an ideology of the necessity of primary authority. The role of God mimics the role of the state. Both present desires and demands, at times exclusive relations, and both present rewards for obedience, either heaven or wealth and security. Monotheistic belief in a transcendental God can reinforce belief in the necessity of authority, lending itself more to hierarchical models of governance than immanent-based beliefs.

According to Christian theology, the world is ordered by an external force. This belief is replicated in convictions about the legitimacy of the state to enforce order. The state becomes an external force that determines material reality and is often deemed necessary for order to exist in society. The state mechanisms replicate the function of the God established in Christian foundational texts. Because theology reinforces it, state control seems natural or at least inevitable. But anarchists seek to disprove this myth.

In contrast, immanence is the notion that divinity exists in everything, including oneself. Immanence corresponds more to a horizontal view of authority and power, assigning divinity to the entirety of existence.

If everything is deemed divine, the hierarchy dissolves.

Christianity is one of the only theologies that describe God as both transcendent and immanent. The figure of Jesus, when interpreted as a metaphor, translates into divine immanence - the belief that God exists within this universe. Alternatively, the dominant Christian interpretation of the myth of Jesus takes the metaphor of immanence and treats it as literal historical fact. Divine immanence is discussed through the mythology of Jesus, though the myth is often interpreted as literal, which dissolves the lesson about immanence.

It was my belief (as the 3rd grade heretic) that we are all God and if there was a man named Jesus, he knew felt this and



proclaimed it. Several heresies throughout history have treated Jesus' divinity as an example of the divinity of all humans. This could be why Nietzsche is quoted to have said, "Jesus was an anarchist." A severely subversive proclamation, as it challenges the moral authority of the Church, most of these heretics met a grotesque end.

Jesus & Human Inferiority

Most Christians believe in Jesus as the literal son of God. Jesus, even to non-Christians, is regarded as a humanitarian, good-natured, giving and healing man. But the dominant Christian worldview establishes Jesus as more-than-human, whereas the rest of us are deemed fully human. This means to the rest of the world that no human can be as perfect as Jesus. This sets an ideal that can be approached, but never attained. In reality, we all have the ability to dedicate our lives to healing others while talking about and living love. The notion of Jesus' supernaturalism can teach people that Jesus did that work because he was divine and that normal human beings are not capable of such acts. This sets up a hierarchy of spiritual status based on limited access to the divine, and connects it to one's ability to act graciously.

Human Latency & the Afterlife

Christianity is an eschatological religion, which means that its concern with suffering and salvation involves the "Kingdom of God to come." Christian theology speaks of a time when followers, believers and repenters will be granted access to the blissful and righteous kingdom. Work on this earth is conceived of as done to meet the desires and standards of God so that when you meet him at the gates of heaven and he judges you, then your "true" life begins. This translates into a sense of human latency on earth, that suffering at the hands of an illegitimate authority will be rewarded. Disciples are taught to accept political authority, even if unjust, because it only exists in this world and true justice arrives in the Kingdom to Come. This theology proves antithetical for improving or shaping the world according to our needs and desires.

This could also relate to one's willingness to fight and die for the Christian army - whether it be in Medieval Europe or the contemporary Iraq War - because if, following Christian logic,

the battle is God's fight then you're doing his will and therefore will be accepted into heaven. Death is perceived as a crucial step toward salvation.

Duality

The strict dualistic logic in Christian theology encourages the formulation of an either/or, black/white simplified logic. Ultimately, this limits choice, reduces complexity and contains the scope of any debate, usually between two poor choices - which actually end up becoming more similar than dissimilar if one expands the scope more broadly. Also, dualisms contain an inherent hierarchy. When one is set up against the other, a value judgment gets laid.

Existentialism can help here. If existence precedes essence like John Paul Sartre claims, dualisms unravel into social constructs rather than universal truths. Good and Evil are essences, qualitative attributes prescribed by human reasoning. They do not precede the existence of what is being described.

Sin & Human Nature

Christian theology creates a grand narrative about human nature. According to the myth of Original Sin, ever since the crime of Adam and Eve, man has been born into a corrupt existence and must struggle constantly to correct the path. The experiential world, material existence, is equated with sin.

Alienation

According to the theory of alienation by Karl Marx, a worker, under industrial capitalism, gives up a part of himself - his creative energy - to create a product - an object or commodity - that is then appropriated and taken away from him and sold back to him. Thus, when a worker becomes disconnected from his creative power, Marx calls this alienation. Marx derived this argument from an argument made by Ludwig Feuerbach in 1824 regarding religion and self-alienation. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach declares that belief in God comes from a sense our own divinity projected outward onto an external object. He says:

"Man transposes his essential being outside himself before he finds it within himself....From the standpoint of a later religion, the earlier religion turns out to be idolatry: Man is seen to have worshiped his own essence. Man has objectified himself, but he has not yet recognized the object as his own essential being - a step taken by later religion. Every progress in religion means therefore, a deepening of man's knowledge of himself."

Belief in absolute transcendence is an act of objectification. We turn our feelings of divinity and project them out onto a being separate from our own being.

The parallels of alienation are as follows: In economic terms, we sell our labor and then buy back the object of our labor from the marketplace. In terms of spirituality, we sell our own divinity and then buy back the object of our projection in the form of a deity. Through alienation, the state, the workplace and the church (though we do it to ourselves as well) have all convinced humanity of its own worthlessness.

Control over the narrative about life equates to the power to control the range of human behavior.

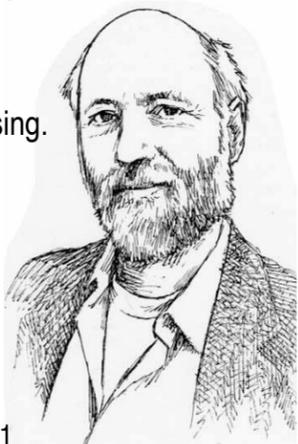
Kirsten Brydum
From Her Paper: Spiritual Anarchism



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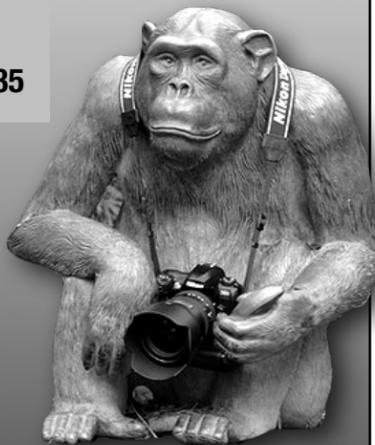
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