

## Political Cosmogony: Three Matrices of Political Theology

DANIEL NUNES PEREIRA<sup>1</sup>, *Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brasil*

### Abstract

**T**his essay intends to draw parallels between theories concerning the origins of the State and religion. The similarities are evident in three different matrices, namely, the Myth, the Domination and the Unconscious, studied, respectively, by Phenomenology, Sociology and Psychoanalysis, whereupon, from the perspective of Political Philosophy, the importance of rituals and signs is investigated. Furthermore, this essay undertakes to understand to what extent State and political organization can be parallelized to various cosmogonic and theogonic myths.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Daniel Nunes Pereira**, 26, is M.A candidate in Political Science and LL.M. candidate in Sociology & Jurisprudence, both at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) in Brazil. He received his Bachelor in Jurisprudence at Universidade Federal Fluminense in 2010, and on the same year attended at CPE in European History at the Universiteit Utrecht (UU) in Netherlands. His interests and fields of research include Political Theology, Philosophy of Law, Political Philosophy and Psychoanalysis.

## Introduction

Religion and politics seem to be inextricably jointed since the dawn of humanity, with occasional moments in which this relationship has been deepened or weakened, but never nonexistent. Even in a heightened Modernity<sup>2</sup> (eventually identified as Post modernity) although perceived as autonomous spheres of human action (Bourdieu, 2004), politics and religion are mixed and still permeate the main conflicts of the contemporary world. There is an accumulation of evidence regarding the religious reference in "civilian life." For interpreters of social and political life, and also for groups involved in policy-making, the overlapping of religion and politics seems to be an insurmountable obstacle nowadays, given its factual indeterminacy and inexorable controversies tied to the subjects involved.

In order to analyze the origins of such relation, regarded at the very dawn of social organization, the present essay shall perform a mapping of discussions in political

---

<sup>2</sup> At the Academy commonplace there is much concerning upon the so called "Crisis of Modernity", but one can wonder if there really ever was a single monolithic period named so, or if many scattered geographically and temporally across the globe – so, addressing the present essay, one has to ask, 'Which Modernity ?' (Berman, 2010, 15-37). Nevertheless, taking for granted the so-called " Crisis of Modernity ", there is a large discrediting upon the great metanarratives anchored in values such as the primacy of Reason and Universal Progress. Attached to this argument there is the understanding that the ancient symbolic forms, under which society organized its collection of interpretation standards, are now eroded. Moreover, it is understood that, according to Giddens (1991), despite, despite the existence of the mentioned crisis, there is some radicalization of the trends and ambivalences always present in modern design.

philosophy with other disciplines in the humanities field on the subject of religion. The purpose is to overview politics as a field of action of religious thought and also the metaphysical belief. It is proposed, therefore, treading the analytical framework of a deep history of political knowledge as an area of various beliefs, which are some kinds of disruptions in society and its epiphenomena, religion being the midst or purpose (or maybe both) of this activity. This analytical perspective stems from a multidisciplinary concept about the object of the proposed study, whose subject matter allows us to carry out a theoretical-methodological approach that combines political sciences three spheres of understanding inscribed on the study of religion, the Myth, the Domination and the Unconscious.

Given this transversality of religion, and the reverberations in other spheres of human life, it proposed, on this essay, that these three instances are not mutually exclusive, but can accumulate each other to form a holistic understanding of the issues arising from the relations between religion and politics. They are, respectively, versions of Phenomenology, Sociology and Psychoanalysis.

## Myth

The first possible way to understand the intersection between politics and religion is through phenomenology, in order to see parallels in the constitution of both phenomena. As a method derived from philosophy, phenomenology has its epistemological justification under the acknowledgement of its object of research, the phenomenon, or its emersion on the world of experience. The phenomenon, regardless of its nature, is therefore the

research field of phenomenology. It is understood thus not being exclusive for philosophy, since the phenomenological method has its use towards other objects of research.

The search for the deeper meaning of the religious event presumes the existence of expressed meanings in these experiences. The phenomenological method, applied to the analysis of religion<sup>3</sup>, seeks to achieve its original purpose, to promote the phenomenological reduction, because, through this procedure, it is possible to capture the symbolic structures of the universal religious phenomenon, *id est*, it returns to the primal phenomenology of Husserl (1976).

The phenomenology of religion is concerned invariably and essentially in unveiling the structures of religious phenomena and their meanings. To undertake this task phenomenology applies a morphological-synchronic method (Eliade, 2010), not excusing, however, to use historical and diachronic perspective. Through this endeavor, some similarities between the phenomena of State and religion are unraveled.

The religious thought is the result of a sense of transcendence and power that is in the human being, and this generates, in turn, the mythological narratives. So, the question is 'how transcendence is born'? According to Peter Sloterdijk (2009, 20-24) there is, amongst the genesis of transcendence, some kind of unfamiliarity with some transgenerationally slow happenings, and also the lack of awareness of violent events,

the inability to reach the other, and, perhaps most important, the fact of human consciousness holding the ability to submit an intelligence beyond itself. Moreover, even in such understanding, there is also depth of human beings, which reportedly remains in its religious dimension, tuned when something touches the individual unconditionally. This depth of the human being actually lies in the absurdity of his existence, and his inability to deal with it gives vent to alleged manifestations of the sacred, the exercise of imagination and the consequent creation of so-called myths. The "sacred" is therefore meant towards endurance and resignation in the face of an existence that has the power to annihilate us, and manifest itself not only in everyday things, but through these everyday things, according to Eliade (2010: 17). This condition, hereby called *hierophany* (irruption of the sacred), begets some kind of (alleged) religious whiff, in which all nature can manifest itself as a cosmic sacrality.

Under the event of *hierophany*, myths are generated and structured by spatio-temporal ruptures. Religions generally understand the time and space as heterogeneous categories, since there is a sacred and a profane temporality. On it lies the passage of Chaos for Cosmo, *ie*, the rupture of time and space is intended to explain the organization of the world. This temporal and spatial marking relates inseparably with the rite, which repeats and theatricalizes the cosmogonic myth.

According to Mircea Eliade, Cosmogony manifest itself in two ways: the first inserts the cosmos in a cycle, with endless creations and destructions of existence, which is related to the first farming communities and their observations of the seasons and the cyclical crops; the second considers the existence of the

<sup>3</sup> The pioneers in the use of the phenomenological method to analyze religion were Rudolf Otto (1917) and Gerardus van der Leeuw (1933). Husserl himself, although hinted about the use of phenomenology to study religion, not developed his studies in this direction (Sheehan, 1979, 312-334).

cosmos as linear, with a sole beginning and end. This second way of understanding the Cosmogony is particularly interesting to this essay, being typical of monotheistic and millenarian religions.

The moment of creation is considered a "strong, pure and sacred time" (Eliade, 2010, 71), and is dramatized through repeated rites, serving to explain the world, but also to justify and illustrate the entire social structure. This mythical moment is usually preceded by chaos, or some figure that represents it, and the power to win or a sacred being is embodied in the very Cosmogony. For example, in Babylonian mythology the god Marduk, after defeating the dragon Tiamat<sup>4</sup>, gives rise to the Cosmos with the dismembered body of the monster, and creates the man with the blood of the demon Kingu. In the Judeo-Christian tradition there is less literary wealth, but the meaning is the same as Elohim / Yahweh exercises his supposedly unlimited power to create the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*. In general, the relation 'Monster of the deep facing the divine force ordinator', is similar to what Schmitt wrote about the State sovereignly always ready to face the real possibility of the enemy. For the author, an 'optimistic' reasoning of human nature tends to lead to the abolition of political logic. There is actually a link between political theories and theological tenets about sin (Schmitt 2005, 43). Sin assumes a benevolent creator, as well as the 'enemy' presupposes the Sovereign. Under a Schmittian proposition "All significant

concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 2005, 36).

The myth of the creation of the State is not far from religious narratives, the core narrative, an ineffable power that brings order to chaos, is repeated. Within the state of Nature, *Bellum Omnia Contra Omnes* (Hobbes, 2005, 610), exudes the creative power of the cosmos. Just as the universe emerges from the corpse of Tiamat, the state emerges from chaos in the State of Nature. Marduk, Allah or Elohim arises from the human volition to end the chaos, to end the state of war. Therefore, it is clear such comparison between the beginning of everything, narrated by the myths and the beginning of the state itself. There is, wherefore, under a semiotic analysis, some congruence between the Mythos of the State signs and religious rites (Cassirer, 1976, 53).

The emergence of the Myth of the state is an attempt to explain the origin and meaning of political space in which we live. This phenomenon may be natural, sometimes oral or sometimes present in traditional historiography (as in the Scandinavian countries and its references to Viking sagas) or, in other cases, is officially originated in ideological state apparatus itself or some relevant social group (as in the case of the Aeneid). In both cases, the Myth of the State, as well as religious cosmogony, serves to instill in citizens a sense of awe before something unspeakable, a "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*". The State, therefore, through its creation of myths and its consequent ritualization exudes an overwhelming potency before the individuals under a *quasi* numinous experience. Therefore the importance of the symbolism of the state is clear, since it approximates citizens towards the

<sup>4</sup> This primordial Dragon tends to be referred to also as Sea Snake (Fotenrose 1980, 153), the same symbolizes cosmic dark waters reported in Genesis, which, in turn, symbolizes the amorphous, what is yet to be shaped. The very primordial abyss faced by Yahweh is named Rahab, which is mentioned as a sea dragon the Book of Isaiah and in Jewish folklore.

ontological foundations of political space where they live.

### **Domination**

The Weberian theory, in general, deals with the possible logic of human action in some spheres of social life, specifically, science, politics and religion, the latter two of which we will consider for the present study. In this context it is understood that human phenomena can be understood if there is comprehension of the meanings that individuals employ their actions. For this purpose is used a method different from that used for understanding the explanation of natural phenomena, its goal is to understand the meaning of actions. In this conception external actions of the agent are not the sources of normative judgments, since the rules occur "through codes that free human agents, as individuals or collectivities, enact for themselves." (Levine, 1997, 170).

When trying to understand the sources of rationality, Weber identifies the magical-religious thought as the oldest producer of meaning to life. Magic and religion give meaning to *weltanschauungen*<sup>5</sup> and thus guiding human action. Weber notes a development process in rationality, which takes place along the complexification of religion. Weber focuses on religion as one of the driving forces of rationalization axes. The religious evolution<sup>6</sup> consists in a transformation of worldviews that imply

specific modes of action at each stage and religion (Weber, 2004, 279).

The notion of supernatural powers strengthens its abstraction when the separation between concept and object, symbol and object meaning occurs. This progress consists in a new phase of evolutionary conceptions of the world, the symbolism. Thus, there is an increase of rationalization of worldviews. Advances systematization because it creates a notion of causality through magical acts being that for certain actions is an expected effect, good or bad. Furthermore, the separation between the physical body (material) and soul (or spirit) is already a step in the hierarchy of Idea of the world (Weber, 2004, 357).

The rationalization of religious life increased ethical demands and increased the political power of religion, the church became the sole producer of meaning to life and was endowed with the ability to regulate social life and establish norms and collective values. The predominant role of religion in social life grows justified on the argument that priests represent the divine will (Weber, 2004, 294).

Pierre Bourdieu (2004, 87-89), commenting on the work of Weber, points towards the capacity of religion for domination by promoting privilege of certain classes over others. Such domination is through the ethical premises of religion filled with ideological content. Thought this understanding, for the privileged classes religion gives a sense of dignity that attaches to the conviction of its own excellence and perfection on the conduct of its life.

On Weber, the state consists of a political group that submits a human community under its domination within some territory, there remains the possibility of its exercise of physical coercion. The

<sup>5</sup> Plural for *Weltanschauung*, a comprehensive world view (or worldview), a cognitive orientation of an individual or society.

<sup>6</sup> The word "evolution" in the analysis of Weber's theory should not be understood as congruent to the one used by Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, since there isn't an ultimate teleological or historical-functional purification sense (Colliot-Thelène, 1990 31).

guarantors grounds of legitimacy of the State are domination, tradition, charisma, legality, fear and hope. Two of these categorical instances concern the relation between religion and politics, namely, Tradition and Charisma. The tradition aims to legitimise the domination by unthinking habit, ie, lies the justification that "things are like they have always been". In the modern West patrimonialism and monarchies fall into the traditional mode of domination. The authority that exercises domination is supported by a traditional loyalty. In the case of the legitimacy of domination through Charisma, there is a plebiscitary leader that gets the democratic direction or influence of the state using his charismatic gifts.

Although Tradition and Charisma are constantly associated with religion and priesthood, most commentators of Weber's work have alleged claimed upon practical incompatibility between religion and politics, especially by understanding that, at least in Christianity, the Church's ethical assumptions clash with the means of legitimation the State.

It is possible, however, to interpret Weber's work differently in this sense, as does Randall Collins (Collins, 1986). This interpreter argues that the Weberian theory concerning the relation between politics and religion is not confined to the tension addressed above, since there are political practice within religious organizations and the use of religion by secular politics as a form of legitimation. "It is, rather, that religion, as an institution, has its own politics. As Weber stress, during much of history, religion was so much better organized for politics than the secular realm (...) that secular power-seekers were necessarily draw into religious orbit" (Collins, 1986, 13). Moreover, in Weber, as Collins argues, religion can be used as a

means of obtaining legitimacy in politics, since religion, even in the secularized world, has the power to exert ideological power over men. Corroborating his argument, Collins argues that in the Weberian theory, concerning the process of rationalization, religion has been a forerunner in the use of symbols that produced emotions and represented it in the community. There was, therefore, an important process of social organization. In parallel we see that politics itself has its ritual aspect and is linked to forms of religiosity. "Politics in an important sense is ritual. If it is too much to say politics is really religion, it is scarcely going too far to say that at the dynamic level they are virtually identical" (Collins, 1986, 213). Moreover, Collins stressed the need to produce a moral policy itself, ie, the idea of social solidarity, for the legitimacy of the leadership of the State, should not depend solely on physical coercion, although this always remains legally and legitimately available. So the policy has always needed to use also tools that produce a favorable ideology to the stability of the existing order.

The Collins' interpretation on Weberian political sociology is, in its fundamental aspect, the evidence that the State, in its own formation, in order to legitimize itself within its borderlands must have the ability to produce emotional meanings to people, with the purpose to internalize some kind of ideological regulation so efficient as the threat of physical coercion.

In conclusion, under this sociological matrix, both religion and politics are a source of rationality, according to Weber. Political ideologies, like religion, generate worldviews and determine modes of action. However, it is possible that a certain rationalization of religion ethics differs from the rationalization of the state policy. Unlike

the religious rationalization can converge with the rationalization of politics, therefore, Church and State aimed the same understanding of the existence and the same ethos of regulation of behaviors. Under this union there is a project of maintenance of the dominant order, which proves, in theory, that the essential phenomena of domination are anchored in the methods of rationalization practiced throughout history.

### The Unconscious

Considering the common genesis of politics and religion in certain perspectives of Phenomenology and Sociology, remains to analyze the contribution of Psychoanalysis, or as the two instances here questioned emerged concurrently as human mental processes.

Politics, in psychoanalytic theory, is something that happens in the psyche of individuals, hence the basic psychology on Freud is both individual and social, "outsourcing" of fantasies and desires. The interest on the social is based on the individual. Freudian psychoanalysis is part of the liberal tradition of defending the individual.

Impacted with the impoverishment of life to the detriment of technological advancements, as World War I had shown him, Freud tries to understand the conventional concept of death and its reverberations in society. There would be at the outbreak of war some evidence that our unconscious acts in homicidal manners, even for insignificant reasons. The father of psychoanalysis would say that men have not descended so down below during the war, actually they were never as high as they thought they were. Thus, Freud argued, man renounces his aggressive instincts replacing

them by some kind of state-owned aggression (Freud, 2010a, 86), vis-à-vis with Weberian theory, the State prohibits the individual infractions, but not aiming to abolish violence, but verily to monopolize it.

Regarding the topic of authority in relation to the monopoly of violence and human nature, Freud seems to be influenced by Edmund Burke (Stanlis, 1993, 42) and Hobbes (2005, 549). In this sense, Freud admits the positivity of the social restrictions that relieve us from slavery of passions. In this mainstay, Freud seeks the origin of political society, especially the idea of the Social Contract. Alongside with Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, the Social Contract for Freud explains the unique legitimacy of political society, which corresponds to the irrational desire of man to restore the father authority. After the death of his primitive father, appears on man a "longing for father"<sup>7</sup> (Freud, 2010b, 18, 23-24). The government does not arise from a social contract, but a counterrevolutionary response that emerges after the fall of the patriarchal primeval government and represents the desire of the majority of citizens, understood as brothers, so it is not a manifestation of prudence of a group. The myths of the social contract, in psychoanalytic universe, can be comprehended as a reaffirmation of the will of the father above the impulses of rebellious children.

The idea that the suppression of our instincts is the backbone of our civilization lies at the intersection between the Freud's analyses on politics and religion. This means

<sup>7</sup> The original term is "*Vatersehnsucht*", the French edition (hereby used) employs the expression "*désirance pour le père*", loosely translated here as "longing for father" in accordance with the standard English editions.

that the individual renounces some of his attributes, namely, his feeling of omnipotence and aggressive tendencies of his personality. The resignations result in the common cultural heritage of material possessions and ideals. The civilisational achievements were sanctioned by religion, so that each individual renunciation of instinctual satisfaction is a sacrificial offering to the deity (Freud, 1907, 173).

The touch point between and the genesis of religion and politics lies in the primordial crime because, unlike the neurotic, whose thoughts can be considered as a substitute for an act, primitive men, devoid of inhibition, transform thought into action. For these reasons, Freud concludes that it is possible to say that in the beginning, before the word was the *Act*. This inaugural act involves at its core the need to explain how the filial guilt remained operative over many generations, both in religious and political narrative, since the hypothesis of archaic heritage ensures the transmission of the effects of father's murder. This phylogenetic hypothesis, whereupon the memory traces were inherited through generations, becomes essential to maintain the link between the murder of the primal father and the universality of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1994, 101). In each individual story it is possible to hearken the echoes of that first and original history of mankind (Freud, 1994, 103).

The primal parricide, the guilt and ambivalence from this act become the prop that enables to elucidate the origin of religion and politics. The religious phenomenon, as well as contractualist comprehension of politics, are deemed on the prospect of neurosis and Oedipus complex. Religion and politics, from the bias of neurosis, provide resources to the

individual that allows the revival of the phantasmatic relationship with his Father (then elevated to the rank of god and king). In this ambivalent relationship affectionate and hostile feelings blend into the individual, perpetuating the Oedipal structure, making the relationship between politics and religion inevitably complicated since it is overlapping other neuroses (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, 433).

## Conclusion

Religion lies inexorably intertwined with politics, such that certain relations generate social and psychological attitudes that may or may not become formally religious. Thus, the underlying religious category is provided by the striking analogy between the behavior of the individual to the deity and behavior towards society. A critically important aspect is the sense of dependency (Simmel, 1997, 110).

The religious individual is not defined solely through the social objects that manifest themselves compact and focused. The religious dimension is a human transversal phenomenon that works in an active or latent way, explicit or implicit dimension, throughout the thickness of the social, cultural and psychological, according to procedures specific to each of the civilizations (Simmel, 1997: 13). The metaphysical dimension, the one that transcends the individual, is contained on human religiosity, however, subjective religiosity does not guarantee the existence of a realm beyond metaphysics (Simmel, 1997: 14).

For all the above, hereby lies an overview of how religion can be identified as a phenomenon that originates with the very origin of the state and its administration

(politics) under the headquarters of Myth, Domination and The Unconscious.

This original congruence between politics and religion is a symptom of the existence of a hopeless gap in the form of God, which is present in each individual. The very existence of this vacuum is an evidence of the epistemic necessity of any 'nearly theistic' belief, an assignment of every explanations to some deity, which historically may be replaced by political experience within the State. This description of human nature outlines a dramatic existential narrative, a hopelessly painful portrayal of the mankind's condition torn between two realities co-dependent and mysterious that cannot be defined, namely, existence and transcendence (Jaspers, 1994, 173-178). Transcendence gains importance when the world known by empiricism and science does not seem to be self-sufficient and does not explain itself. So when our efforts fail to make the world of experience knowable through reason, logic and science, lies the space for obscurantism to penetrate the locus of the state, accruing some of the more unfortunate examples of civilisational excesses through the twentieth century.

## References

- Berman, Marshall. 2010. *All That is Solid Melts Into The Air – The Experience of Modernity*. London/New York: Verso.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2004. "Uma interpretação da sociologia da religião de Max Weber". In: *A economia das trocas simbólicas*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 1976. *O Mito do Estado*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores.
- Collins, Randall. 1986. *Weberian Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colliot-Thelène, Catherine. 1990. *Max Weber et L'histoire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Eliade, Mircea. 2010. *O Sagrado e o Profano - A Essência das Religiões*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Fotense, Joseph. 1980. *Pythion: a study of Delphic myth and its origins*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1907. *Obsessive actions and religious practices*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1994. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Modern Library Edition.
- Freud, Sigmund. 2010a. O Mal Estar na Civilização, Novas Conferências Introdutórias à Psicanálise e outros Textos – Obras Completas Vol. 18. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Freud, Sigmund. 2010b. *L'Avenir D'une Illusion*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *As consequências da Modernidade*. São Paulo: Editora UNESP.
- Hobbes, Thomas. 2005. *Leviathan oder Stoff, Form und Gewalt eines kirchlichen und staatlichen Gemeinwesens*. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1976. *La Crise des Science Européennes et La Phénoménologie Transcendantale*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Jaspers, Karl. 1994. "Philosophical Faith and Revelation". In: *German Essays on Religion*, ed. Edward T. Oakes. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Leeuw, Gerardus Van Der. 1933. *Phänomenologie der Religion*. Tübingen : Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr.

- Levine, Donald. 1997. *Visões da Tradição Sociológica*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editores.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. "The Structural Study of Myth" In. *The Journal of American Folklore - Myth: A Symposium*. Vol. 68, N. 270. (October-December): 428-444. Jstor (January 19, 2013)
- Otto, Rudolph. 1917. *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*. Breslau: Trewendt & Granie.
- Schmitt, Carl. 2005. *Political Theology*. Chicago. MIT Press.
- Sheehan, Thomas. 1979. "Heidegger's Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion 1920- 1921". In. *The Personalist*, LX, 3. 312-334.
- Simmel, Georg. 1997. *Essays on Religion*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 2009. *A Loucura de Deus – do combate dos três monoteísmos*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água.
- Stanlis, Peter J. 1993. *Edmund Burke, The Enlightenment and Revolution*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Weber, Max. 2004. *Economia e Sociedade*. Vol. 1. Brasília. Editora UnB.