



Notes on Walter Benjamin's Theological Political-Fragment

Dr Chung Chin-Yi

Research scholar, National University of Singapore

Enigma719@hotmail.com

Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. (Benjamin, 1978: 312)

The above quote posits the Messiah as the culmination of history, all the injustices of worldly life will be righted and all the oppressed classes will be redeemed by the Messiah as the Messiah completes history and will represent the culmination of Messianic time which history is moving inexorably towards.

For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic. (Benjamin 1978: 312)

In this quote Benjamin posits that history cannot stand apart on its own account to the Messianic because time itself is Messianic and the culmination of all history, as such there is no existence of history apart from Messianic time and the culmination of the redemption of history and all the oppressed classes and losers in history with the coming of the Messiah

Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic, it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history it is not the goal, but the end. (Benjamin 1978: 312)

Benjamin thus distinguishes the realization of the holy Kingdom of God as a goal and as an end. According to Benjamin, with the culmination of history with the coming of the

Messiah, the realization of the Kingdom of God is not a telos or goal towards which history strives but the ultimate end and realization of history in which all will pass away and replaced by the holy Kingdom of God as the culmination and end of all worldly history

Therefore the order of the profane cannot be built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and therefore theocracy has no political, but only a religious meaning. (Benjamin 1978: 312)

Benjamin thus distinguishes the religious meaning of theocracy from the political, the political is transient and worldly and will pass away, as will the order of the profane which is prohibited from being built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom being opposed to it, but the profane along with the political as manifestations of the fallen empirical world will pass away into the realization of the transcendental ideal Kingdom of God which will find its realization at the end of history.

The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the Messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, containing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal toward which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of Messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the



Messianic direction but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom.(Benjamin 1978:312)

Here Benjamin distinguishes the Messianic and the profane as two polar opposites, but argues that though the profane acts through self-realization and self-indulgence and the satiation of selfish desires which acts contrary to the other giving logic of the Messianic Kingdom, it runs counter to the Messianic Kingdom but also can be a precondition of the Messianic in its exhaustion. Hence we see the similarities with Augustine and Siddharta. While Buddha encourages renunciation as the path to enlightenment, Siddharta says that it is necessary to experience the fullness of life and to err and sin in order to reach equilibrium and find the way. There are different paths to enlightenment- Govinda follows teachers but doesn't reach a true state of nirvana, while Siddharta who does not renounce the world finds enlightenment through experience. The final conclusion of the novel Siddharta is a mix of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity- finding salvation through the renunciation of sin and experiencing desire in order to renounce it. The novel is about the complexity of spiritual enlightenment, which comes through experience of the complexities of life rather than renunciation of the world. It is necessary for Siddharta and Augustine to experience sin and debauchery before they renounce the sensual and material life for more spiritual and enlightened experiences. Hence the profane order is necessarily experienced before it is exchanged for spiritual enlightenment or the order of the Messianic.

The profane, therefore, although not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a category of its quietest approach, For in happiness all that is

earthly seeks its downfall, and only in good fortune is its downfall destined to find it, Whereas admittedly, the immediate Messianic intensity of the heart of the inner man passes through misfortune as suffering.(Benjamin 1978: 312-13)

We see this recovery from the profane to the Messianic in the life of Augustine. Augustine experiences a life of suffering from satiating himself too much in the profane order to find God at the end of saturating himself in sin by turning away from sin to the Kingdom of God. Augustine then emerges from a life of darkness to a life of light in forsaking his life of sin for knowing God. While this meant a life of chastity, Augustine found it brought him closer to God to be chaste than while pursuing sins of the flesh. Augustine found that a secular life divorced from God had only left him spiritually adrift, impoverished and barren as he did not know the saving and redeeming grace of Christ. Augustine eventually emerged to become one of the most influential theologians of the Catholic church, and indeed many are amazed that even he could be redeemed when he had lived in such wanton sin and darkness prior to his redemption.

Augustine then moves from a life of deceit and lies to truth. His journey is one in which he exchanges the lie of worldly glory for the truth of God. While to be a child of God is to be esteemed lowly by the world's standards, Augustine discovers in his pursuit of Christ riches that are infinitely greater than the wealth and prestige he had gained by becoming a professor of rhetoric and indulging in wine and women.

From a heartless thief and perpetuator of lies through his practice and teaching of rhetoric Augustine moves towards the truth of Christ as savior and redeemer. Augustine then charts a journey from darkness to light,



forsaking his worldly ways for the truth and light of knowing and serving God.

To the spiritual restitution in integrum, which introduces immortality corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of its downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient world existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. (Benjamin 1978: 313)

Augustine the represents this passing away of the profane order to embrace the Messianic, as is Nature, Nature is the passing away and destruction of the profane order to be replaced with the Kingdom of God or the Messianic order.

To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.(Benjamin 1978:313)

It is this passing away of the profane order that is a stage of nature and this is the task of world

politics, whose method must be called nihilism because it is the destruction of all belief in the profane order or the belief that self-fulfillment leads to happiness. The destruction of the profane order which satiates self in search of happiness is to be destroyed to lead to its replacement with the Messianic order in which the consideration of the Other before the self in the kingdom of God will be replace it and replace all capitalist self-fulfillment with a Marxist utopia in which there is no class oppression or property but a kingdom of equality and love which is the fulfillment of the Messianic order and the passing away of the capitalist profane order.

Works cited:

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