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POLITICAL VIOLENCE, CONFLICT AND NATIONALISM: THE NIETZSCHEAN NIHILISTIC OUTLOOK

Ishaan Deepak Joshi¹

ABSTRACT

Drawing upon a comprehensive and discerning examination of the fundamental methodologies employed in contemporary politics and seminal works on philosophical thought to comprehend violence, it is possible to identify many hypotheses that serve as the foundational tenets of the concept that underlies political aggression. Nietzsche explored these concepts inside his literary works, whereby he abstained from differentiating across politics as a whole logic, and aggression, opting instead to substantiate their interconnectedness. The objective of this study is to conduct an analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche's perspectives on political violence, critically examine his critique of nationalism & nihilism, and contextualize his thoughts within the framework of contemporary politics.

KEYWORDS

Nihilism, Political Conflict, Aggression, Violence, Übermensch, Nationalism, Nietzsche, Religion, Warfare, Ethnocentricity

I. INTRODUCTION

Aggression does not constitute an incidental occurrence, but rather an integral component of the realm often known as politics. The inclusion of violence within the concept of politics is warranted due to the fundamental objective of politics, which is the structuring and management of societal affairs.

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It might be argued that the importance of violence in politics extends beyond its function as a mere tool. In essence, it may be argued that politics inherently encompasses elements of violence, but with variations in the manifestations and objectives of such violence contingent upon the specific political milieu.² Politics is a longstanding and enduring association between rationality and aggression, wherein it embodies discord and lacks any irreconcilable paradox from this standpoint.

II. POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AGGRESSION AND CONFLICT FROM THE NIETZSCHEAN PERSPECTIVE

The dichotomy that exists between rationality and aggression within the realm of politics does not imply that the latter inevitably transforms into violent or is inherently intertwined with it. The aforementioned distinction is limited to the realm of abstract theory and does not manifest in practical applications, when the use of violence becomes imperative for asserting and safeguarding the cognitive framework of a specific historical paradigm. In practical application, it is observed that the paradox of politics lies in the fact that the coercive actions of those in power can incite justifiable acts of resistance.³

It is certain that Nietzsche's political thought was founded upon a mentality that opposed democracy. The aforementioned perspective, together with a pronounced antagonistic stance towards socialism, subsequently became extensively employed in fascist discourse. Nietzsche's disdain for the masses, his advocacy for the pursuit of power, and his veneration of the *Übermensch* were factors that contributed to this phenomenon.

Moreover, Nietzsche provides a rationale for the validity of

² Fox, J. (2018). *An introduction to religion and politics: Theory and practice*. New York: Routledge.

³ Habermas, J. (2018). *Inclusion of the other: Studies in political theory*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

advantages, privileges, for disparities, while simultaneously dismissing the concept of liberty and equal treatment. Therefore, the concept of law is perceived as an outcome of authority, with its origins being shown in the principles governing armed conflict. The philosopher's reasoning is grounded in the assertion that righteousness is a benefit, and this benefit ought to be ascertained via existence.⁴

Nietzsche exhibits a markedly positive disposition towards war, as seen by his words. According to his perspective, the act of war bestows a sacred quality upon any objective, thereby suggesting that extended periods of peace should be avoided on a global scale. Furthermore, the philosopher establishes a correlation between aspirations for a novel and elevated cultural paradigm that would emerge as a consequence of warfare. Nietzsche argues in support of war, contending that via engaging in such behaviours, individuals are rendered more primal and so, more authentic. In the realm of culture, the period of hibernation serves as a transformative experience, when an individual emerges with heightened strength, both in terms of virtuous and malevolent aspects.⁵ Therefore, it may be argued that conflict and military establishments serve as archetypes of statehood and serve as tools for its progress.

III. NIHILISM, NIETZSCHE AND EXISTENTIALISM

Nihilism pertains to an approach to philosophy that rejects the norms and authorities established within society. A nihilist is someone who espouses a certain philosophical perspective that challenges and interrogates commonly accepted societal standards. The aforementioned word has been seeing a gradual increase in prominence across several domains, including culture, religion, the law, and social interactions.⁶

⁴ Appel, F. (2019). *Nietzsche contra democracy*. New York: Cornell University Press.

⁵ Nietzsche, F. (2019a). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Kyiv: Strelbytskyy Multimedia Publishing.

⁶ Gertz, N. (2019). *Nihilism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Upon careful examination of nihilism as a constituent of public relations, one may ascertain the reasons for its emergence and the specific historical context in which it arose. Hence, it is important to examine the fundamental beliefs and perspectives of nihilists, as well as the typical objectives they seek to achieve. The term nihilist often refers to an individual's rejection or denial of several concepts, including the significance of existentialism, the reality of authoritative figures, and the veneration of religious icons. Nietzsche's philosophical viewpoint might be characterised as radical nihilism, necessitating a revisionist perspective in the re-evaluation of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual principles.

The essence of his European nihilism may be distilled into a set of fundamental principles that the philosopher is obligated to assert with a sense of severity, devoid of apprehension and prejudice. Nietzsche contends that the notion of truth has become obsolete. The statement "God is dead" implies the absence of a divine entity. Consequently, the absence of a higher power raises questions about the existence of an objective moral framework. In the absence of such a framework, the notion of permissible actions becomes subjective and open to interpretation.⁷ Nietzsche's work necessitates a meticulous comprehension, since he explicitly states his intention to refrain from addressing grievances and moralistic desires, instead focusing on depicting a future that remains unattainable.

Nietzsche posits a fundamental conviction that the events of the latter part of the twentieth century ought not to be dismissed, leading to the inference that nihilism will manifest as a prevailing reality for a considerable duration spanning at least two centuries. The development of European culture continues to be subject to persistent strain, resulting in an escalating exacerbation that poses a growing threat to mankind and the

⁷ Nietzsche, F. (2018). *The Joyous Science*. London: Penguin UK.

global community.⁸ Nietzsche proclaims himself to be the inaugural nihilist of Europe, assuming the role of both the theorist of nihilism as well as the harbinger of instincts. He presents nihilism as an inexorable phenomenon and urges for a comprehensive comprehension of its fundamental nature.

Nihilism may manifest as an indication of a conclusive deterioration in will be aimed towards existence. According to Nietzsche, all outcomes stemming from weakness are deemed negative, but the nihilism exhibited by the strong has the potential to serve as an indication of rejuvenation, representing the emergence of a renewed will for existence.⁹ Nietzsche asserts, without feigning humility, his possession of a unique instinct surpassing that of any other individual, particularly about the indications of decline and inception.

In general, Nietzsche espoused the viewpoint of negating the presence of a divine being and emphasizing the shortcomings of Christian religion taking the form of a religious doctrine. The concepts of nihilism consistently align with reality, and the rationale underlying its fundamental tenets is exclusively grounded in empirical evidence.

A nihilist is someone who approaches each event with dubious skepticism and distrust. Nonetheless, it is necessary to seek an alternate explanation for a phenomenon in several respects.¹⁰ As a result of Nietzsche's scholarly contributions, nihilism has attained recognition as a philosophical concept.

IV. THE NIHILISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON ETHNOCENTRICITY, RELIGION AND NATIONALISM

Nationalism is a political philosophy that prioritises the country as the

⁸ Clark, M. (2019). 'Nietzsche's Nihilism.' *The Monist*, 102(3), pp. 369-385.

⁹ Nietzsche, F. W. (2019b). *The Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer. The Antichrist*. Glasgow: Good Press.

¹⁰ Alan, W. (2018). *Nietzschean Nihilism: A Typology*. In Nietzsche. New York: Routledge.

foremost entity inside the state, serving as the pinnacle of unification as well as the central objective of all its endeavours. National exclusivity is a political philosophy that centres around the notion of prioritising one's own nation over others, typically with a tendency towards asserting national superiority. Hence, those who perceive their state as superior in relation to others might be classified as nationalists.¹¹ The emergence of nationalism may be traced back to the mediaeval period in Europe, characterised by the fragmentation of the continent into several minor principalities. During this time, the general population exhibited a lack of concern over their allegiance to a particular ruler.

During the Mediaeval period, a significant portion of the population exhibited commonalities in terms of language, social status, religious beliefs, and cultural practises. The oneness of the vast masses is indisputable due to their affiliation with a singular individual, namely a master. Furthermore, religion functioned as a unifying force among individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity within the context of a shared Christian faith. However, a significant shift occurred throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, as Christianity faced considerable challenges due to various splits and the growing secularisation of European society.¹² The need for a unifying concept that could bring people together necessitated the emergence of a novel thought, thus leading to the identification of nationalism as frequently being likened to a civic religion.

A clear correlation may be shown between Nietzsche's nihilism and nationalism. The nation is of utmost importance when considering the re-evaluation of values. Consequently, individuals are required to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the nation-state and prioritise its

¹¹ Gilbert, P. (2018). *The philosophy of nationalism*. New York: Routledge.

¹² Van Ginderachter, M., & Fox, J. (2019). *National indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe: National indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*. New York: Routledge.

interests over their own personal ones. The nationalist paradigm encompasses an ideological emphasis on selflessness and the readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice in service of the nation. The country serves as the principal locus of political authority, whereby all its constituents possess the right to engage in the established mechanisms aimed at attaining dominance.¹³ According to this line of reasoning, those who adhere to nationalist beliefs are metaphorically associated with the privileged class.

Nietzsche held an unfavourable view towards the popularisation of nationalism. The philosopher who portrayed himself as an advocate for the liberation of the human intellect was afterwards characterised as an apologist for totalitarian oppression and anti-Semitic sentiments. It is imperative to address and challenge the prevailing bias around Nietzsche's anti-Semitic views and the perceived alignment of his philosophical framework with Nazi ideology. In contrast to prevailing notions, Nietzsche did not perceive the concept of *Übermensch* as synonymous with the harbinger of mortality.

From a philosophical standpoint, *Übermensch* may be seen as embodying the qualities of an intellectual, a creative individual, and a scholar. Broadly speaking, the author expounded upon the notions of racial dominance and inferiority within the framework of ethical and cognitive disparities. The competition of men embodies individuals characterized by robust personality traits, elevated levels of self-worth, and a profound sense of dignity. The race that is perceived as weak is often characterised as displaying cowardice, frequently resorting to humiliating others for personal gain. The philosopher refrained from exhibiting nationalistic fervour, acknowledging the presence of what he perceived as anti-French prejudice among contemporary Germans, followed by anti-Jewish attitudes, and then antagonism against countries of the Prussian

¹³ Ohana, D. (2018). *Nietzsche and Jewish Political Theology*. New York: Routledge.

Classification.

V. SOCIAL CONFLICT, POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The contemporary global landscape has witnessed a substantial transformation in the dynamics of political influence with regards to violence. The alterations corresponded with the advent of the information era marked by the distortion of public scrutiny. Hence, a distinct division between voluntariness and compulsion arises, which lacks clarity and definitiveness. For instance, contemporary electoral campaigns and invasive advertising employ media platforms to persuade individuals to support a certain candidate or purchase a particular product, so exerting influence on the public's decision-making process, potentially leading to outcomes that may not align with their best interests.

Nationalism is widely recognised as a highly significant discourse pertaining to collective identity in contemporary society. During the period after the Cold War, the proliferation of ideology has been expedited by the emergence of extensive and intense ethnic conflicts, many of which have evolved into international disputes.¹⁴ Currently, there exist around 160 regions characterised by ethnopolitical conflict across the globe. An illustrative instance is the endeavour of Catalonia to achieve secession from Spain, which has a notable presence of nationalistic sentiments, as seen by their proclamation of national independence. The occurrence of ethnic conflicts frequently stems from the presence of nationalist-oriented groups, hence substantiating Nietzsche's perspective on the detrimental impact of those who espouse nationalist and anti-Semitic ideologies.¹⁵

In the early 21st century, global society continues to exhibit religious inclinations, as many organisations actively propagate their diverse ideas

¹⁴ Stavenhagen, R. (2016). *Ethnic conflicts and the nation-state*. Berlin: Springer.

¹⁵ Dowling, A. (2017). *The rise of Catalan independence: Spain's territorial crisis*. New York: Routledge.

across different nations. The religiosity of populations has increased throughout time due to an increasing number of adherents. In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the political significance of religious bodies, mostly driven by the perceived danger emanating from some factions within these organisations. Furthermore, these institutions are progressively asserting their presence in the public sphere of even non-religious cultures. Religiously oriented aggression may be targeted at individuals who adhere to different religious beliefs or those who do not subscribe to any religious faith.¹⁶ From a security perspective, the current religious landscape in the contemporary world is regarded as concerning owing to the restricted range of approaches accessible for addressing these issues.

The association between security risks and religion, particularly Islamic fundamentalism, is commonly seen in relation to both individual and national safety. The lack of surprise is attributable to the association of radical, politicised Islam with the escalation of the terrorist menace throughout the latter half of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, particularly following the conclusion of the Cold War. However, despite its widespread recognition, the fundamentalism of the Islamic religion does not represent the sole manifestation of systematic violence based on religion. There is a possibility that individuals adhering to fundamentalist ideologies within the Hindu, Jewish, and Sikh communities might engage in extreme actions, therefore introducing complexities to the global landscape. Nietzsche posited that religion is superfluous within society as it not only governs individuals but also fosters discord among them, perhaps leading to widespread violence.¹⁷

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

¹⁶ Madeley, J. T. (2019). *Religion and politics*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁷ Lane, J. E., & Redissi, H. (2016). *Religion and Politics: Islam and Muslim civilisation*. New York: Routledge.

In order to culminate the current discussion, it is vital to encapsulate Nietzsche's viewpoint on warfare and strategies pertaining to power. Despite the philosopher's endorsement of the war and his elucidation of its favourable elements within his literary works, he refrained from extolling nationalistic sentiments, racial purge, especially xenophobia. Within the contemporary political landscape, individuals possess the capacity to substantiate their perspectives on matters of religion, as the allocation of authority to religious institutions frequently engenders adverse outcomes. Moreover, the nihilistic perspective towards society critically challenges the prevalent proliferation of informational impositions. Consequently, it is feasible to effectively discern veracity from falsehood, thereby decreasing the risk of being misled. Nietzsche's philosophical framework including nihilism, warfare, and the function of religion exhibits potential applicability to contemporary political contexts, yielding both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes.