



Theology, Religion and Philosophy of Religion (TRPR)

TRPR is about learning to analyse, think, and understand. It's not about teaching people what to believe! To help you explore ideas about gods, religions, and meaning, here are 3 passages from great thinkers. You don't need to know anything about who the writers are; just engage with their arguments and ideas. There are some questions after each one to get you started. Feel free to answer in any way/format you wish.

A Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)

The importance of giving religion a prominent influence in a state.

Leaders and states who wish to keep themselves free from corruption must protect all religion, and treat it with proper reverence; for there is no greater indication of the ruin of a country than to see religion condemned. This is easily understood, when we know what the religion of a country is founded upon; for the essence of every religion is based upon one main principle. The religion of the Greeks and Romans believed that the gods could predict the future, good or bad. From this belief arose their temples, their sacrifices, their prayers, and all the other ceremonies.

Leaders came to use the gods' predictions to their own advantage. But when their deceit was discovered by the people, then people became suspicious, and disturbed all good institutions. It is the duty of leaders of governments to uphold the religion of their countries, for then it is easy to keep their people religious, and consequently well behaved and united. So everything that is supportive of religion (even if it is believed to be false) should be accepted, and used to strengthen it.

Questions

1. Are religions based upon one principle?
2. Does it matter if leaders believe in their country's religion?
3. It is the job of the state to uphold a single religion?

B Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Against Christianity

What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? Everything that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is increasing, that resistance has been overcome.

Not contentment but more power; not peace at any price but war; not virtue but efficiency – free from all the acid of morality. The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of our humanity. And they ought even to be helped to perish.

What is more harmful than any vice? Active pity for all the failures and all the weak: (in other words) Christianity.

1. Is power always good?
2. Is weakness always bad?
3. What does Nietzsche mean by calling 'morality' an 'acid'?

If you ask, however, how God relates to humanity, you must first ask what is the union of soul with flesh. For if you do not comprehend how your soul is united with your body, do not expect to be able to understand fully this other matter. We accept that the soul is something other than the body, because - when separated from the soul - a body becomes dead and inactive. But we do not understand exactly how this union of soul and body comes about. In the same way, we are agreed that there is a difference between God's nature and our human nature. But we refuse to ask the question, 'How?' That is something beyond the scope of reason. Rather, we accept that it is so, but it is something we cannot put into words.

1. Does each human being consist of a body and a soul?
2. How might human nature be different from God's nature?
3. Is there a limit to what we can express using words?