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# Trends. The Idolatry of Ignorance and Iconoclasm: Notes on the Taliban

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The New York Times has reported that at least some Taliban authorities have directed that all statues in Afghanistan--including those commonly viewed as priceless exemplars of cultural (largely Buddhist) heritage and as treasures--be destroyed. The Taliban's rationale--that these statues have been used as idols and deities by non-Islamic believers and may be turned into idols in the future--is largely discussed in the context of leading to a global cultural catastrophe, as an unacceptable decision, as gratuitous vandalism, as exemplifying a rigid ignorance deserving unique contempt and disgust.

However, much psychological theory and research suggest that the Taliban may be but exhibiting deeply seated tendencies that characterize all people. These include the repetition compulsion of parricide that at least figuratively may be necessary to develop psychological independence (Schmouchkovitch, 1995); self-actualization through iconoclasm--both literal and figurative (Kerrigan, 1985); engagement in literal and figurative iconoclasm in the face of myths deemed destructive or threatening to the self, one's cosmology, and one's worldview (Scott, 1989); the expression through iconoclasm of a circular wandering of imaginal psyche versus a linear ego sense (Whan, 1978); an avoidance of poor self-esteem and negative evaluation associated with idolatry (Cheng, 1997); resolution of ambiguity of image as combinations of idol, icon, self, or other (Corbin, 1983); and even the transcendence of idolatry through active recognition of the social reconstruction of reality (McWilliams, 1993).

So, should we be dealing with interpretations of the destruction of statues as Taliban ignorance or as Western mirror-imaging? (See Cheng, S-T. (1997). Psychological determinants of idolatry in adolescents. *Adolescence*, 32, 687-692; Corbin, H. (1983). Theophanies and mirrors: Idols or icons? *Spring*, 1-2; Decree from Taliban orders destruction of statues. (February 27, 2001). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Kerrigan, W. (1985). Ritual man: On the outside of Herbert's poetry. *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, 48, 68-82; McWilliams, S.A. (1993). Construct no idols. *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 6, 269-280; Schmouchkovitch, M. (1995). Psychopathology of parricide. *Evolution Psychiatrique*, 60, 339-349; Scott, N.M. (1989). Rosario Castellanos: Demythification through laughter. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 2, 19-30; Whan M.W. (19778). "Don Juan," trickster, and hermeneutic understanding. *Spring*, 17-27.) (Keywords: Afghanistan, Buddha Statues, Ideology, Idolatry, Taliban, Vandalism.)