

Scope of Mutual Transformation of Western and Non-Western Civilizations in Foucault's Analysis

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Abstract

Both Hegel and Marx believe that non-Western world is not the natural part of dialectical process as non-Western cultures don't seem to take part in the process of historical development. So, the only way to turn the non-Western as Western and vice versa is through an arbitrary process as might have serious implications. Foucault also believes that discourse developing within the Western civilization does not follow rules shared by all civilizations. The Western discourse is not the result of practical necessity, but of some historical rules called historical 'a priori' only operative in the Western civilization. Modern historical a priori characterized by Foucault as "man", is providing order to the things in the West. "Man" conceived as a pre-requisite for contemporary Western discourse has its implications. This argument runs through *The Order of Things*. However, we also find an internal problem within Foucault's presentation which at the end provides a new platform for interpreting Foucault within the Foucaultian paradigm, with reference to the new notion of Western civilization. This gives a glimpse of hope for mutual transformation of the Western and the non-Western civilizations.

Classical Historical *a Priori*

If one intends to understand Western thought on the model of *what factors make human thought possible*, one would note two different, in some sense opposing, trends in it. On one hand, human thought is understood in relation to the external world irrespective of its conception and on the other hand, the structure of human mind in itself, without in relation to the world, is taken to be the source of human thought. Kant, in an attempt to reconcile both trends, shows that both the external world and the world of human mind play an important role in the formation of human thought. For Kant, there are transcendental *a priori* categories of human understanding that make, from the point of view of subject, human thought possible. These categories as not informed by any form of human experience are universally shared by all human beings. Human thought, as far as the constitutive role of categories is concerned, by consequence, must appear to be functioning on the lines drawn by human reason throughout human history. In other words, in the historical development of human discourses, no matter in what time or space human thought has originated, it must show the discourses are following the presumed Kantian form of human reason. History may, therefore, be a battle ground to establish or to deny the truthfulness of the Kantian categories.

Foucault, from the very start of his academic career, with the Kantian background, attempted to understand the historical development of human discourses with a view to identifying what *really* makes human thought possible. After approximately twenty years' academic struggle, from *Madness and Civilization* to *The Order of Things*, he comes to the conclusion that the Kantian categories, though being too abstract, fail to give satisfactory account of the relativity of human discourses in history. He, in *The Order of Things*, specifically identifies the

classification of Chinese encyclopedia as an example to show the stark impossibility, for a Western man, of thinking that¹²⁴.

The denial of the Kantian categories makes human thought open to a new and different interpretation. It may either be understood that it goes through a never ending process of becoming where no principle or aim has any role but some crude contingencies of culture, traditions or history govern it, or within history, some rules being temporal in character, condition the possibility of human thought. The rejection of the Kantian categories never leads Foucault to absolute relativism regarding discourses though he accepts the relativity of human thought. He observes within history the function of some rules, called historical *a priori*, at the background of the formation of Western discourses that I would like to explore by analyzing Locke's analysis of language and thought as a point of reference and verification.

For Locke, the objects in the external world affect human body in order to furnish it with ideas. The ideas, for Locke, are the object of thinking as the idea of whiteness or coldness received by mind when human body is in touch with ice¹²⁵. According to Locke, the idea is whatever is employed by mind for thinking. It is something that exists in human mind, specifically in the part of human mind that is responsible for thinking. It seems that, for Locke, thinking without ideas is not possible, as thinking always needs ideas to function. However human mind does not always think. It is possible for man to have ideas but may not be involved sometimes in the process of thinking. In Lockean philosophy, the possession of ideas does not guarantee thinking as Descartes suggest in *Meditations*.

Moreover, Locke makes a distinction between simple and complex ideas in terms of division. An idea is simple if it is not *further* divisible into more ideas like heat or soft whereas complex ideas are further divisible like the idea of a chair¹²⁶. Keeping the distinction of simple and complex ideas in mind, a simple idea, being property of human thinking, cannot be developed by thinking in itself. It has to depend upon sense-experience as far as simple ideas are concerned¹²⁷. Human mind no matter how strong it is, cannot generate a single simple idea.

The nature of idea, for Locke, seems to be intellectual or mental as it is an *exclusive* object of human thinking. Being mental in nature, the idea, though it is an affect of external world upon human mind, appears to have its own property and place which is totally different from the nature of objects in the external world. The mind being *non-physical* reality in Locke's philosophy is a seat of ideas which shows that the ideas are conceived as non-physical entities¹²⁸. Locke maintains dualism between the properties of physical and mental entities; though he does not directly address the problem of mind and body, as on a number of occasions, he separates the things of material and mental nature and importantly leaves intact distinction between brain and mind. Further, like Descartes, he also considers mind as a transparent

¹²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (trans.) (United States, Vintage Books, 1994), xv.

¹²⁵ John Locke, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (United States, Oxford University Press, 1975),130-134

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,421.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*,104.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

entity within itself as nothing that lies in mind may remain hidden from it. There is nothing uncovered or unconscious part of mind¹²⁹.

According to Locke, the mind remains transparent to itself until it conveys its ideas through language. The problem is not with the mind but the language in which the ideas are to be expressed¹³⁰. This shows that the language does not enjoy *natural relationship* with ideas but through convention that is based on human needs and desires. Man conveys ideas through words. The word that connotes an idea is an arbitrary imposition given by man. The word, in the first stage, does not refer to an object but to an idea. Therefore, the primary signification of a word is not a thing but an idea though an idea is an effect of an object upon human mind. And primary signification of an idea unlike a word is an object as there is no intermediary between idea and object.

As far as the representational capability of an idea is concerned it, without corrupting, represents the object as Locke observes natural connection between an idea and a thing. The entrance of language that establishes *conventional* relation simultaneously to an idea and to a thing at the second stage, breaks the transparency between the idea and an object. Locke, no doubt, considers language as a conventional, importantly not historical, tool to represent the ideas. On one side, the language being conventional, has social orientation and the ideas being inside the human mind, always remain inaccessible to others as private character. Because of this, the language is always liable to error that can be corrected with better use of words.¹³¹ This is an important point that Foucault shows in *The Order of Things* while explaining the classical historical *a priori*. Here, one can also note that Locke does not consider language as a historical entity but just a conventional tool which according to Foucault is maintained throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century till the rise of modern historical *a priori*.

Locke conceives the properties of objects in terms of primary and secondary qualities. The primary qualities of an object like number, shape, motion, or rest are the qualities that are not dependent on but rather existing by themselves whereas secondary qualities have no *substantial* existence but are just powers, by virtue of primary qualities, to produce sensation in human minds like color or taste¹³². These qualities existing in external world furnish us with ideas. The ideas being non-physical in the external world consisting of physical objects, cannot represent qualities by content. The idea of color has no qualities similar to those of a colorful object in the world. Both, by content, are different despite having natural connection between them. By implication, the natural link that Locke observes between an idea and an object can only be conceived not in terms of content but in an abstract form. Thus, an idea in mind and an object in the external world share the *same form*, making possible for an idea, not for a word, a *representation* of an object in the external world. The *representation* is possible not because of content but because of form that is common to both an idea and to an object like a map with just colorful lines of different length and shapes that *represent* the network of roads, bridges, rivers and houses in the external world. It is possible for a map to

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 476-477.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 134-135.

represent the external world not because it has exact roads or bridges but it shares *abstractly* the form with the external world. In Locke's philosophy, the relationship between an idea and an object is structured in a way to make possible *representation*, otherwise the possibility of *representation* cannot be entertained. The representation of object guaranteed by direct relation between an idea and an object can also be communicated with other people by the conventional use of language provided that the use of words is appropriate¹³³.

The whole discourse of Locke, including Berkeley, Hume, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz or generally the discourse developed from seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century, may be seen as developing in response to the theoretical or practical issues of that era. This, of course, cannot be denied as one also observes the appreciation and rejection of these thinkers like the rejection of Cartesian innate ideas by Locke or of Locke by Berkeley. We often find, at times without names, and at other times with specific names, the reply and criticism among thinkers of the same era which *apparently* shows that thought is the result of dialogical process among thinkers. Does this really show that the weakness or strength in the arguments of thinkers, at least to some degree, made possible the thought of other thinkers as Kant was awakened by Hume from dogmatic slumber¹³⁴? For Foucault, this is not the case that went within the Western civilization. Hume could not have played, mistakenly acknowledged by Kant, and can never play any kind of role, as a condition of the possibility of discourse, in the formation of the Kantian thought. Kant is made possible by the shift in the grounds of the condition of the possibility of discourse.

When, says Foucault, we look at the development of thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, we notice that all thinkers during the seventeenth century *unconsciously* seem to construct thought in order to make possible *representation* as already shown in the case of Locke here. No matter how different the thinkers are like Descartes and Locke, they *unintentionally* thought to make possible *representation*. Is this a *coincidence* or there was some force within the seventeenth century discourse that governed the development of thought?

Before Foucault, Kant also made similar attempt, though with different aim and methodology, to identify the conditions of the possibility of human judgment. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, he surveys all possible judgments with a view to discover *inevitable* presumptions of judgment. Kant notices that all judgments *necessarily* presume quantity (unity, plurality and totality), quality (reality, negation, and limitation), relation (inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and reciprocity) and modality (possibility and impossibility, existence and nonexistence, and necessity and contingency). It is not possible for a human being to give judgment without involving quantity, quality or modality¹³⁵. The impossibility of judgment without quantity, quality or modality shows that a judgment is made possible by these. For Kant, the condition of the possibility of discourse is something *through* which the judgment is possible. He classifies these as transcendental a priori categories of human understanding.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 476-477.

¹³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer, Allen W. Wood, (London, Cambridge University Press 1998), 23.

¹³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 9, 212, 275.

Almost in a similar fashion, Foucault develops the same Kantian question: what is that *through* which the discourse in the seventeenth century is possible. Surveying the formation of discourse in the classical age, Foucault realizes that it is not just coincidence but rather the work of *Representation*, as a condition of the possibility of Western discourse, to have constituted a world view through which the things are conceived. *Representation*, in the classical era, conditions Locke including Descartes, Leibniz or Berkeley to conceive the objects in terms of qualities and the mind in terms of ideas.

In Renaissance (sixteenth century), the sign was not taken in terms of representation but resemblance. In the sixteenth century, things already bore the meanings (sign) that the man in process discovered, not imposed upon them whereas in the classical period the signs were man made¹³⁶. Looking at the nature of sign in sixteenth century Renaissance, as Foucault observes, seems to maintain triple system of sign. A sign, in the first stage, was that which was marked (like object in the external world), in the second stage, that which did the marking (the word or idea) and in the final, but most important, stage, that which made it possible to see the mark of the marked (resemblance). In Renaissance signs were not directly connected to a thing in the world but through resemblance, common to both sign and a thing, it linked with world¹³⁷. When the shift at the condition of the possibility of the Western discourse occurred towards the end of the sixteenth century, it totally changed the nature of sign. From seventeenth century onwards, a sign was seen in binary relation, taking away the role of resemblance, not in triple formation. The thing in itself, apart from the human mind, during the seventeenth century, did not hold sign. In other words, without human mind the possibility of idea and of word was not conceivable. In binary system, as discussed above in the case of Locke, an idea depending upon mind is conceived to be representing not resembling an object, whereas in triple system, a sign by definition did not *represent* but *resemble* something.

By consequence, in classical period, there was no possibility of unknown signs as the signs were conceived in relation to human mind. But signs in Renaissance as ontologically separated from human beings, would exist even if there was no human being in the world. The fundamental difference between Renaissance and classical signs lies in the way to determine the nature of relationship between a sign and signified: how a signifier is conceived to be linked with the signified. In Renaissance, it is linked through resemblance between an idea and object, whereas in classical age it is directly related with an object. Probably because of this reason, Foucault classifies the condition of the possibility of discourse in the sixteenth century in terms of *Resemblance* and of Classical as *Representation*. Why does he characterize *Representation* or *Resemblance* as historical *a priori* of Western discourse in the seventeenth century? The reason seems to be the same as given by Kant. *Representation* in seventeenth century, as Foucault's analysis of sign shows, is the point through which things are conceived. Throughout the seventeenth century, in Western discourse, the sign is understood in terms of representation that seems to be a break with Renaissance where it is taken as resemblance. All thinkers

¹³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. (United States, Vintage Books, 1994), 58.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

from Bacon to Kant, according to Foucault appear to be thinking on the lines of *representation*. Although Locke and Descartes belong to different traditions, both consider *idea* in binary terms and it remains the same till Kant.

This way, till Kant, signification never constituted a problem in classical age as things are represented through representation by a sign. A sign, having no intermediary between thing and itself, represents a thing by sharing its form. Neither exterior nor interior meanings are conceived with signs as signs are what they represent. By consequence, in classical era, according to Foucault, one can never observe the development of disciplines like hermeneutics but general grammar that only deals with meanings (ideas) associated with words¹³⁸.

The Nature of Historical *a Priori*

Foucault, as stated earlier, characterizes the condition of the possibility of discourse as historical *a priori*. It is historical in dual sense. First, it is not beyond time as historical *a priori* appears to change with the passage of time such as *Representation* replaced Resemblance at the end of the sixteenth century, and secondly, it is also understood that it is operative in the Western civilization only. Although the condition like *Representation* is historical, Foucault simultaneously claims that these rules are *a priori*. For Foucault, *a priori* nature of these rules signifies that these conditions of possibility of Western thought are not conditioned by Western experience but these seem to make Western experience possible. It is not through the experience of Locke we come to conceive a sign in terms of representation but specifically Locke's experience itself, and generally of seventeenth century is itself made possible by *Representation*. These conditions functioning as rules do not refer to the world, instead, the Western world refers to them.

Unlike the Kantian categories, historical *a priori* rules are *non-subjective* both in terms of place and role as these temporal rules making Western thought possible do not reside in human subjectivity but the location of these rules lies within discourse itself. In one perspective, these rules are the part of discourse as they make discourse possible; in the other perspective, the rules may not be taken part of discourse as they cannot be identified like the discourse itself. These rules never appear at the surface of discourse; no matter how strong the attempt is, as the attempt itself presumes the function of rules. In view of these characteristics of rules, Foucault characterizes them as *positive unconsciousness* of Western thought in the following way.

“What I would like to do, however, is to reveal a *positive unconsciousness*: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientists and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature¹³⁹”.

Here, Foucault does not wish to question the epistemic worth of historical *a priori* as there is no possibility and *never* will be of an external standard to measure its strength because the condition of the possibility of standard is itself guaranteed by those rules to which one *unfortunately* wishes to question them.

According to Foucault, the different discourses developed in the Western world in a particular space and time do not follow multiple historical *a priors*, as a single rule

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

governs the formation of the Western thought. Plurality or multiplicity in discourses of the same period is made possible by the singularity of the rule. At the bottom of the formation of discourses, there is singularity governing multiple facets of discourses and making them possible to emerge in different and opposite ways, and at times, discourses contradict one another as well. Contradiction, opposition, refutation or reconciliation among different discourses or the difference between truth and falsehood do not seem to be contradiction or synthesis of two or more opposite forces belonging to different historical *a priori*, rather the apparent differences or opposition, for Foucault, is grounded upon *singularity*. On the basis of this singularity, Foucault classifies the formation of discourses as Classical and Modern. And importantly, the nature of this singularity is neither practical or social nor economical or normative. It is *purely epistemological* in character both in terms of its very nature and functioning. This singularity identified as historical *a priori* is discursive in its nature as it is *positive* unconscious part of discourse and in addition, it plays its role of constituting Western discourse independently of all process of society. The political, social or even economical powers of society, for Foucault, seem to have their own *independent* domain, not affecting or conditioning the discursive function of historical *a priori*. As he explains:

“The human sciences (discourses) did not appear when, as a result of some pressing rationalism, some unresolved scientific problem, some practical concern, it was decided to include man (willy-nilly and with greater or lesser degree of success) among objects of science- among which it has perhaps not been proved even yet that it is absolutely possible to class him; they appeared when *man* constituted himself in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known¹⁴⁰.”

In other words, the condition of the possibility of discourse is not the socio-political or economical process of society but is something that cannot be characterized in these terms. It has its own domain existing apart from non-discursive process of society though having relation with them. Foucault does not mean to establish that the process of the formation of discourses in a Western society has no relation with society. Of course, the discursive formation, for Foucault, occurs only within society, even being a part of society. All these forces of society and the utilization of its recourses can only play their role when historical *a priori* has already made the ground for them to play any kind of role in the formation of discourse. Non discursive forces can influence only to the extent that historical *a priori* lets them influence. The historical *a priori* determines the role of other forces of society as much as the formation of discourse is concerned. In brief, the condition of the possibility of discourse lies within discourse itself, not in eco-political forces of society¹⁴¹.

The nature of relationship between discursive and non-discursive forces of society cannot be understood in causal or in binary terms, such as, in terms of “cause and effect” or “determine and determined” “governing and governed”. The terms of cause and effect presume that cause exists prior to an effect in a way that a thing or an event causes the development of another thing or event that does not exist before as for example, fire causes heat. Here, heat does not exist prior to fire. Secondly,

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 344-45.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 307-312.

the effect, at least, shares some, though in lesser degree, attributes of fire as a thing cannot make something red unless it has property of redness. Keeping these attributes of cause and effect in mind, I would like to establish that Foucault cannot maintain causal relationship between discursive and non-discursive forces of society because the “principle of causality”, for Foucault, itself presumes a particular historical *a priori* in which it became possible, in particular space and time, to see things in terms of cause and effect. He does not reject “causality” as a principle of Western understanding as such but rejects its role in terms of *priority* over historical *a priori*.

Historical a Priori: Classical and Modern

Foucault, surprisingly, argues that in the classical period neither *language* nor *man* existed. Apparently, this claim seems to be contradicting the fact that there is *language* being spoken and understood by *man* in the seventeenth century. Of course, Foucault cannot deny this as he himself builds the analysis of signs developed during the seventeenth century. Foucault’s claim seems absurd only when one does not realize the discontinuities appearing through an in depth analysis. Things at their surface look similar and so familiar to us. But as one goes deep into the very core of things, *archaic*, one will discover that there was no language and man in the seventeenth century. The methodology that leads one to go beyond and simultaneously to the bottom of things is called *archaeology*. In other words, only through *archaeological* analysis, not simply the analysis of discourses, one may be able to see things in their true nature, otherwise the surface of discourses may lead to wrong conclusions just as some people in Western civilization, according to Foucault, still maintain that man or woman as well as language existed before the eighteenth century.

Through archaeological survey of discourses in the seventeenth century, Foucault shows that the idea represents the object through form. As far as representation of an object of thought is concerned, no language is required as communication is thought to be the only function of language. The language being *conventional and practical* in nature has no influence in the representation of the object of thought as the very idea of representation was conceived not in linguistic but through idea. The language that was not conceived *historical* but *conventional* throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century shows the possibility that through better and careful use of words the representation can be communicated to others. This aspect of seventeenth century’s thought attracts Foucault’s attention. Emphasizing the very idea of representation through language, he claims that there is no language before the end of the eighteenth century as the very conception of language that is presumed by modern discourse, in contemporary world was totally missing during the seventeenth century. Human thought, in modern discourse is never conceived, first, independently of language and secondly, the language is conceived as historical. The discourse from Bacon to Kant, (only referring to Philosophy), through Foucaultian spectacle, seems to be a break from modern tradition, from Kant, as these traditions enjoy two different conceptions of language.

According to Foucault, the break between classical and modern views regarding language is because of the shift at the conditions of the possibility of Western discourse. The Western discourse, at the archaic level, went through a fundamental shift at the order of knowledge that appears in the form of the Kantian thought. Kant, for the first time in Western history, raised the question that was

unconceivable during the seventeenth century in regard to direct link *between* an idea and an object. For Kant, the idea of representation through representation is questionable as he looks for the conditions of the possibility of representation itself. Kant looks beyond representation to see how human judgments are possible. He, in consequence, discovers the forms of sensibility and transcendental *a priori* categories as the conditions of the possibility of human discourse. For Foucault, the discourse developed during the seventeenth century and the discourse after Kant onwards, despite their similarities, are, at the bottom, made possible by different historical *a priori* as modern discourse does not accept Representation as a condition of the possibility of human thought but attempts to ground representation beyond representation itself. The subject, in the Kantian view, with formal conditions replaces the classical *Representation* as the condition of the possibility of knowledge.

As the *idea*, for Foucault, in the classical age enjoys natural relation with the object, the relation between the idea (mind) and the object (world) was not taken to be problematic as far as representation is concerned. With this aspect of the classical era, Foucault claims that there was *no* language in the seventeenth century. Of course, during the seventeenth century, people reflected upon the words and their associated meanings (which Foucault does not deny as he himself refers to Berkeley when he explains the idea of *Representation*). Importantly, Foucault does not consider it as reflection upon language. For Foucault, the demise of the classical historical *a priori* gives birth to language as it was the first time the language is taken as historical entity with which both thought, relation with the external world and communication is bound. In this way, the language appears an object of discourse after the mid of eighteenth century¹⁴², when not only communication but thought bound with language being conceived as historical and practical, it developed the need to either purify language (leading to logical positivism), or to understand the background, both in depth and on surface, so as to work out the closest possible meaning inside the word, of which hermeneutics is the result. For Foucault, the techniques of formalization and of interpretation that are apparently opposed to each other, are made possible by the same historical *a priori*.

Modern historical *a priori* that looked beyond the representation to see the condition of the possibility of Western discourse not only gave birth to language as historical reality but to man as well. According to Foucault, man like language is a recent invention and he (man) did not exist before the end of the eighteenth century¹⁴³. As the *Representation* in classical era was clubbed with a question regarding its origin and constitution, it gave birth to man as *subject and object of knowledge*. According to Foucault, for the first time in Western discourse at the beginning of nineteenth century, man saw the *limits* of knowledge, not *Representation*, as conditions of the possibility of knowledge itself. Man, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, *questioned* the power of *Representation* that had been unquestionable during the classical era. Here, man *like Representation* in classical period when it remains unquestioning, seems to provide foundation to Western discourse. By virtue of this role that man plays for the first time in

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 308.

Western history, Foucault, emphasizing this role, characterizes it as birth of man. Of course, man existed before the nineteenth century as a biological, social or economical being. The point that Foucault wants to make, though in a dramatic way, is to expose man's role in providing foundation to Western knowledge. More than this, man, because of this role, also made himself as an object of knowledge. Foucault considers this as something *unique* as far as Western formations of discourses are concerned. Throughout Western history, the conditions of the possibility of knowledge like *Resemblance* or *Representation* never became an object of knowledge as it appears to be *in* contemporary age when man simultaneously provides foundation to knowledge and also becomes an object of that knowledge itself. In other words, man seems to be master and slave at the same time. On one hand, he determines the formation of knowledge and on the other hand, is determined by that knowledge itself. Foucault emphasizes this basic characteristic of modern man in these words:

“When natural history becomes biology, when analysis of wealth becomes economics, when, above all, reflection upon language becomes philology and classical *discourse*, in which being and representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by *Las Meninas*, but from which his real presence has for so long been excluded¹⁴⁴.”

This is a unique position that man enjoys for the first time in Western civilization. As man itself becomes an object of knowledge, in turn, it also produces *human sciences* like philosophy, psychology, sociology, criminology, or psychiatry. These human sciences, according to Foucault, are not the result of some pressing rationalism, some unresolved scientific problem, or of some practical concern but rather the birth of man at the end of the eighteenth century made them possible¹⁴⁵. These human sciences are different in their approach and orientation from other sciences like economics, philology and botany. Of course, for Foucault, these sciences like human sciences are also made possible by modern historical *a priori*. The sciences, not including human sciences, generally consider man from the perspective in which *he* is conceived as a being determined by economic, physical, cultural forces, such as in economics man is treated as an economic agent unlike in philology where he is taken as a speaking being. Human sciences do not take man as an empirical object, rather these conceive man from the perspective of a subject who actively contributes representations in the formation of knowledge. For example, in physiology, human being like any kind of living species is conceived as an organism determined by physical laws whereas in psychology the life of the human being is interpreted from the perspective of representations that he contributes in the formation of knowledge¹⁴⁶. Of course, there are overlapping relationships between human and empirical sciences which Foucault does not deny. Foucault here only wants to point out the orientation of these disciplines.

The Order of Things: Need for Reinterpretation of Foucault

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 344,345.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 352.

I will try to establish, being within and without challenging the main argument of *The Order of Things*, that modern historical *a priori* being classified as *man* cannot be shared by non-Western culture.

The way Foucault sketches the formation of discourses in Western civilization takes away the possibility to see *commonality* as far as the discursive formation is concerned, at any stage, between Western and non-Western civilizations as the development of discourses are not seen as the result of practical necessity or as a rational critique, rather these are the result of cultural specific governing rules that outright exclude the cultures outside Western civilization. If the formation of discourses was conceived in terms of practical necessity or the product of rational critique presuming some form of the universality of human beings, the discourses, though they may exclusively be developed in the Western society, can be shared with the non-Western world as the idea of practical necessity or of rational critique that does not reject the very possibility of discourses. Modern historical *a priori*, like all historical *a priori*, that provides ground to the order of things in contemporary Western world, according to Foucault, is functioning through discourses. It plays its role until it is not called in question from within the same civilization as the discourses don't develop or change from outside influences and conditions. No civilization outside the Western discursive boundaries can, by implication, transform or influence the development of thought within the West as the discourse is exclusively subject to the rules only operating in the Western culture.

Secondly, *man* as the subject and the object of knowledge providing the condition of the possibility of discourse has changed the orientation of modern sciences. Modern sciences being developed with the background of *man*, almost exclude the role of God in providing *order* of things. Because of taking man as a condition of the possibility of knowledge, modern sciences are not ready to give active role to religious symbols in the formation of knowledge. Knowledge, in modern world, seems to be exclusively forming in human categories, which is the consequence of taking man as a condition of the possibility of modern discourse. This realization raises an important question. Are people either free to take *man* or other than man as a condition of the possibility of discourse? In other words, is one free, living outside the Western world, not to presume *man* as a condition of the possibility of knowledge?

In the Foucaultian world, this is not possible theoretically, though practically there may be some cases. Foucault elaborates it in detail in *Archaeology of Knowledge* that I will discuss here in brief. According to Foucault, the formation of discourses in the Western cultures is simultaneously the formation of subject and object, including strategies, of discourse. The subject or the individual does not approach the object from the outside of discourse as he himself is an *element* within discourse. The discourse cannot be discourse technically until it has developed the individual capable of understanding and developing it. The formation of discourse necessarily implies the formation of subject as well¹⁴⁷. By consequence the subject

¹⁴⁷ See, Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. Alan Sheridan (United States, Pantheon Books 1972), 41-49.

cannot go outside of discourse and to ground the formation of discourses at his own will. The formation of discourses is not at the will of an individual even though he *specifically* knows the conditions of the possibility of discourse. The individual outside the Western culture, as far as the fundamental argument in *The Order of Things* is concerned, cannot *just* take the discourse while putting aside man as a condition of the possibility of discourse. One cannot be part of the formation of discourse either through introducing Western based discourses in non-Western cultures or by the political process. In the Foucaultian world, the discourses emerge as *racial* belonging to a particular culture without providing ground to link with non-Western cultures at any stage.

Here, therefore, I feel the need to reinterpret *The Order of Things* not just because it leads to a dead end but *The Order of Things* itself implicitly, though differing from the main argument, offers a ground to reshape the argument.

Reinterpretation of Foucault

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault employs the concept of the Western culture or civilization to link different historical a priori to it. He writes, “Now this archaeological inquiry has revealed two great discontinuities in the episteme of *Western culture* the first inaugurates the classical age (roughly half-way through seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age”¹⁴⁸. Foucault does not divide the periods into classical or modern just for the sake of understanding but he observes some fundamental discontinuities that totally changed the formation and the development of discourses in those periods. These discontinuities, for Foucault, do not just show disagreements regarding language or man but rather the periods roughly divided into eighteenth and seventeenth centuries are the periods governed by different historical *a priori*. When discourses change at their foundation, such as in the classical and modern periods, they, by implication, leave no *common ground* to link them especially in a case when discursive formation is simultaneously seen as the formation of *subject* and of *object*. The concept of the Western culture that Foucault employs to identify the discontinuities is a concept with theoretical (discursive) background. It is not external or outside of discourse but rather within certain discourse it is understood and quiet applicable. Because of its *discursive nature*, one may often find disagreements regarding the exact meaning of being a part of Western civilization. As the concept of the Western civilization cannot be given in isolation from a particular theory and time or space, by the implication of the main argument of *The Order of Things*, it has to be governed by historical *a priori*. On the face of the argument, there are three distinct historical *a priori* classified in *The Order of Things* (Resemblance, Representation, Man) which shows that each concept, including the concept of the Western civilization as well, is to be linked with historical a priori. If the notion of the Western civilization is presuming a particular historical a priori, it, by necessity, cannot transcend and link different historical a priori with itself. With these arguments, I think that Foucault’s use of Western civilization as a unity that connects different historical a priori in *The Order of Things* is not justifiable.

The notion of the Western culture, though it creates apparently some kind of tension within his thought, shows a glimpse of hope to me. This hope gets further strength when I see Foucault’s remarks on Kant in *The Order of Things*.

According to Foucault, Kant was the first thinker who specifically broke away from classical historical *a priori* by looking beyond *Representation* to see what makes, including *Representation*, knowledge possible. Kant, in the process of investigation, realized that there are some forms of sensibility and transcendental *a priori* categories of understanding that make judgment possible. Kant’s critique of representation and its acceptance in philosophical circles shows that there is *common ground* between the Classical and Modern *a prior*, though Foucault does not explicitly acknowledge it, which makes possible for Kant to understand the very idea of representation and to develop a critique of it otherwise there is no other way to understand the Kantian critique. The *common ground* which Foucault, on surface, rejects as he maintains the formation of discourse in relation to specific

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, xii emphasis added.

historical *a priori*, though he, in writings, accepts when he develops Kant's critique of representation on the basis of modern historical *a priori*. So far as the argument of *The Order of Things* is concerned, Kant's critique of empiricism and rationalism based upon *modern historical a priori* can never be reasonably conceived until one believes that there is some kind of common discursive ground between the classical and modern conditions of the possibility of knowledge that make the Kantian critique of *Representation* applicable. This ground cannot be other than the Western civilization that Foucault implicitly presumes.

Conclusion

The common ground for Foucault, which he implicitly affirms is the Western civilization as he, on a number of occasions, relates distinct historical *a priori* that constitutes different discourses with different truths and methodologies with it. We find some sporadic comments or hints from Foucault to identify the fundamentals of Western civilization that may explain the birth of distinct historical *a priori* that he thoroughly explored from *Madness and Civilization* to the *History of Sexuality*. According to Foucault, the Western Civilization may be marked with the notion of 'Will to Truth', which may be taken as a discursive principle explaining the formation of different and conflicting discourses¹⁴⁹. Therefore, the link that connects, though implicitly acknowledged by Foucault, classical and modern historical *a priori* through Kant is *Will to Truth*. By virtue of this *will*, the Western civilization has gone through different, in some sense, conflicting formation of discourses over the last two and half thousands years during which Greek, Christian and Modern sciences and disciplines partake¹⁵⁰. It is encouraged that Foucault not *only* sees the formation of discourses in Greek and Modern sciences with respect to *Will to Truth* but also includes the middle period dominated by Christian ideals with the same notion as well. This way, Foucault does not create *epochal* character of Western civilization in which periods *qualitatively* emerge to be distinct from one another as ancient, feudal, capitalist or socialist. The fundamental problem with the epochal view of the Western civilization is that it perceives the past or the tradition as qualitatively inferior; therefore it is not worthy to have an appeal to it. Foucault's notion of *Will to Truth* does not consider the development of Western civilization in a linear plane though he observes periodical divisions based upon discursive formulations. This, I think, is the most positive character of the Foucaultian thought as it creates possibility for the Western civilization to return back to the tradition. Of course, the notion of the Western civilization marked by *Will to Truth* cannot *simultaneously* be maintained with the concept of historical *a priori* as the concept of historical *a priori* is purely formal and epistemological whereas the notion of *Will to Truth* is practical in orientation. Importantly, the practical orientation *Will to Truth* shows that the individual enjoys some form of

¹⁴⁹ Here, I disagree with Béatrice Han as she locates the shift, Foucault makes in *Discourse on Language* published as appendix in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. As I have shown that there is tension in *The Order of Things* that was later realized by Foucault as mentioned by Béatrice.

Han Béatrice, *Foucault's Critical Project: between the Transcendental and the Historical*, trans. Edward Pile (California, Stanford University Press, 2002), 7, 77-92-93

¹⁵⁰ Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (London/New York, Routledge 1997), 224.

freedom in developing discourses that is denied by the notion of historical *a priori* in which the individual itself appears as an element of discursive formulation.

The incommensurable division between Western and non-Western civilizations only emerge in Foucault's philosophy when one reduces Western civilization to particular historical *a priori*. But if one broadens the perspective and to see the things from the notion of *Will to Truth* that is the mark of Western civilization, the Western and non-Western world may, *if* at any level, share the same notion; the possibility of mutual transformation cannot be denied that I think Foucault offers to the people living inside or outside of the Western civilization.