POST-MODERN REFUTATION OF FAITH AND RELIGION: EXPLORING FOUCAULT'S ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I have developed and explored the possible Foucauldian refutation of faith and religion implicitly running through his major and minor writings. Foucault strongly disagrees with Kant's exposition of 'pure reason' and 'critique' providing room to faith and religion. On the basis of Foucault's conception of human reason, which runs parallel to Kant's conception, I have argued that Foucault strongly rejects faith. The Foucauldian reason being purely historical and contingent does not permit belief *in* entities beyond history and culture. And from the standpoint of Foucault's critique following from his conception of reason, I have argued that religion turns up as a severe threat to critique. When critique aims to break apart the subject and identities it comes in direct and violent conflict with the fundamentals of religion. At the end, I have identified the problem in Foucault's argument for future research.

Keywords: Foucault, Postmodernism**,** Kant, Religion, Reason

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FOUCAULT'S POST- MODERN CONCEPTION OF REASON AND REFUTATION OF FAITH

Modernism and Post-modernism do not occupy the central stage of my argument. However, my argument presupposes the fundamentals of modern and post-modern schools of thought. Modernism is roughly presupposed as a set of doctrines in which human reason is considered to have a transcendental, goal-oriented, universal and ahistorical structure. Kants and Hegel's expositions of human reason are paradigmatic examples of this school of thought. I have considered post-modernism as the refutation of modernism. Post-modernism is oriented to believe in such a form of human reason, which is historical, relative and multifarious in its goals. Foucault and Lyotards' exposition of human reason are notable examples of post-modernism.

For Kant, critique is meant to be a rational inquiry into the *limits* of reason. The objective of Kantian critique is to avoid dogmatism and immaturity, and create a space for *faith*.[1] In order to know the limits of human reason, Kant investigates the conditions necessarily presupposed by all forms of human experiences and judgments. The inquiry into the inevitable presuppositions of human experience and judgment bring forth transcendental *a priori* forms of sensibility such as time and space, and categories of understanding, for example, substance or cause and effect. In Kantian philosophy, transcendental *a priori* conditions substantially limit the role of reason, thereby providing a legitimate justification to *faith*. Human reason, by

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), 9.

virtue of its unavoidable limits, cannot comprehend everything, especially such things that do not come into experience. Kant defends *faith* on the idea that human reason is not limitless. Instead, it is limited in its scope and operation. So, what is known *to*, and comprehensible *to* human reason is not the whole reality but a part of it. The rest stays unknown and inscrutable to human reason. Human reason cannot consistently refute or justify *faith* because the domain of faith overruns the scope of reason. One of the fundamental tasks of Kantian critique is to defend *faith* in the face of harsh critiques challenging the foundations of religion, for example the critique of David Hume. Kant is right to develop the important connection between the limits of reason (critique) and the defense of faith. From the perspective of Kant, the critique acknowledging the limits of reason can defend faith. That is why the conception of human reason is very important to understand either the defense of or the attack against faith. Kant traces the limits of reason from underneath presuppositions of human experience so as to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate use of reason. Keeping in view the transcendental limits of reason, Kant calls for the legitimate use of it. The legitimate use of reason neither challenges nor supports faith. However, it leaves room for it. In the Kantian philosophy, the legitimate use of reason guarantees *faith* in the sense that human reason limits itself just to the world of experience.

Foucault, in an essay, *What Is Enlightenment,* redefines the project of enlightenment. He analyzes Kant's earlier essay which was written with the same title in November, 1784. Foucault explains that Kant confronts the question of enlightenment in a very important way. Kant, for the first time, connects the present with philosophy. Foucault appreciates Kant's realization of the significance of the "present time" in terms of its effects upon the established patterns of thinking.[2] According to Foucault, Kant "is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement. He is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday".[3]

Philosophy, for the first time, does not make an appeal to teleology or totality to see the present as the manifestation of reason or the march towards a final destination. According to Foucault, Kant simply defines enlightenment as a 'way out' of immaturity from which everyone has to come out. Kant opines that **'immaturity'** signifies a certain state of one's will that makes one accept someone else's authority to lead one where the use of reason is called for. Kant holds the individual responsible for his immature status. The individual can attain maturity. Foucault's Kant initiates a new form of philosophical inquiry, "one that simultaneously problematizes man's relations to the present, man's historical mode of being and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject".[4] Foucault's Kant does not trace the cause of immaturity to the given society or the exploitative economic system. Instead, man's lack of courage to make use of reason constitutes his immaturity.

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[2]   Michel Foucault, *Essential World of Foucault,* Vol. 3*: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, (New York: The New Press, 2000), XXXV.

[3]   Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (United States: Pantheon Books, 1984), 34.

[4]   Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader,* 42.

Kant supports the use of reason, where the use of reason is called for, in order to get rid of immaturity.

Maturity or enlightenment lies not simply in the use of reason but importantly in its *legitimat*e use. As a consequence, it demands the knowledge of the limits of reason, what he calls 'critique', so as to know what legitimate and illegitimate use of reason is. At this moment, *critique* becomes a necessary component of enlightenment. Critique aims to explore the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate. Connecting himself with the project of enlightenment expounded by Kant, Foucault considers enlightenment as an age of critique. He refuses to consider it as a fixed set of doctrines. Instead, Foucault defines enlightenment as a 'philosophical ethos' that can be described as a permanent critique of a given historical era.[5] He explains:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.[6]

Philosophical ethos/attitude lies in refusal to accept anything that presents itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative. In other words, it is directed towards the contemporary limits of necessary, transcendental and universal. Foucault's sketch of Enlightenment is at odds with Kant's exposition on many accounts. First, Foucault argues that there are no transcendental *a priori* limits of human reason. Foucault rejects transcendentalism of Kant on the premises that human reason is not conditioned by its own transcendental limits but rather by the cultural limits. The cultural limits are either purely formal, what he calls 'archaeological', or contingent 'genealogical'. In both forms, human reason is not transcendentally constituted by a priori forms of limits. However, Foucault acknowledges the limits of human reason. In the Foucauldian perspective, the limits of human reason do not entail the possibility of *faith*. For there is nothing beyond or beneath the limits. The limits constitute the whole truth. It is the limit of one's reason to believe *in* God or to believe *in* deities. Neither God, nor deity exists. The existence or the non-existence of God does not reflect the facts but the limits. The limits of human reason govern the ways of understanding the world. The Foucauldian world does not let faith live. Additionally and necessarily, Foucault characterizes philosophical ethos as a 'limit attitude' because philosophical ethos attempts to analyze and reflect upon limits *of human reason* so as to see the desirability of going beyond them. In total contrast to the Kantian objective of critique, Foucault aims to challenge the limits and attempts to go beyond them. He ridicules the Kantian distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate use of reason giving support to *faith*. A historical investigation into limits will replace Kant's quest for transcendentalism. For the very idea of limits refutes the concept of historical totality.

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[5] Ibid., 42.

[6] Ibid., 50.

For Foucault, historical limits constitute the ways of *thinking* and action. For example, the contemporary practice of imprisonment constitutes a background of understanding in which torture turns up to be an *irrational* and *inhuman* way to punish outlaws. Like every practice, the practice of imprisonment *excludes* and *includes* some practices that appear to be rational and acceptable. Human practices function as a limit when they sketch the unseen boundaries of acceptability and rejection within which human reason operates.

Foucault takes a different route to understand and explore the category of reason and its limits. Considering reason as historical, Foucault thinks that historical exploration of reason, not formal, would develop maturity. As a result, the explorations of human discourses become the target of Foucault's critique. These discourses demonstrate the development of reason. Foucault argues:

> …criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making metaphysics possible.[7]

Foucault argues that the structures, institutions and rationalities of contemporary Western society are informed by human discourses. Human discourses led Western society to believe in the universality, certainty, and necessity of human reason. That is to say, Western discourses appeal to the universal forms of truth. In the face of limits which build up the backgrounds of understanding, Foucault argues that it is unreasonable to trust the universal claims of contemporary Western discourses. Foucault redefines critique as an intellectual activity that suspends the claim of universality associated with human reason in order to bring into light the contingent and historical conditions of its existence.

Foucauldian ungrounded reason is a more severe threat to *faith* than the Kantian. This is because the transcendental or grounded form of reason is normative and constructive**.** It is normative in the sense that it gives a criterion to differentiate the legitimate from illegitimate use of reason. In Kantian philosophy, humans are normatively bound to make legitimate use of reason whereas the illegitimate use of reason is condemned. That is to say, it is not appreciated to step into the world beyond experience by reason. This is not because there is no such world but human reason cannot have access to it. This is the constructive side of grounded reason. It believes in the world beyond sense experience. However, it is not rationally accessible. It condemns attempts that try to go beyond the world of experience. Thereby, it secures faith. In opposition to the concept of grounded or transcendental reason, Foucault's ungrounded or historical reason severely threatens faith. It is destructive as far as faith is concerned. Religion, in the context of historical reason, turns out to be one of many historical events. It has no reality outside history. Foucault understands religion as a historical entity. He critically explores the role of religion, Christianity, in the constitution of experience of *madness* and *illness* during the classical periods of Europe. With regard to madness, during seventeenth

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[7] Ibid., 45- 46.

century in Europe, insanity is understood in the context of the *Christian* notion of work. In this period, work or labor is understood as the source of salvation, and idleness as the cause of insanity. In Foucauldian terminology, religion played a 'limit' role by constituting classical reason to interpret madness in terms of idleness. In the backdrop of 'limit', Foucault defines the task of critique. He explains that, "when I say critical, I do not mean a demolition job, one of rejection or refusal, but a work of examination that consists of suspending as far as possible the system of values (limits) to which one refers when testing and assessing it".[8] It is a matter of pointing out unchallenged assumptions upon which human reason functions.[9] Critique lies in "separating out from the contingency that has made one what he is with a view to create a possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think".[10]

Foucault claims that human reason is neither based upon universality or necessity nor governed through purpose; rather it is the result of historical contingencies and arbitrariness. It does not mean that human reason is *irrational.* The notion of irrational is relative to reason. It *rather* signifies that the constitution of human reason can effectively be unmade.[11] Foucault challenges the Kantian view of human reason. He argues:

> I would say also about the work of the intellectual, that is fruitful in a certain way to describe that which is, while making it appear as something that might not be, or that might not be as it is… things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and changes, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as its necessity or, rather, what forms rationality offers as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational; it means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history- and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made.[12]

For Foucault, the task of critique is to show what can be unmade. It is important to bear in mind that there is nothing beyond limits. By doing so Foucault rejects any possibility of belief in something beyond historical contingencies. It is well known within the Kantian tradition that transcendental or pure reason cannot justify freedom. However, Kant believes in the category of freedom. This is because practical reason, to Kant, provides a rational justification to freedom. But, from the perspective of Foucault, in the face of historical contingencies, there can never be a sustainable distinction between pure and practical reason. However, Foucault, like

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[8] Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writing* (Great Britain: Rutledge, 1988), 10.

[9] Ibid.,154.

[10] Ibid., 84, 46; Foucault argues, "Critique does not have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those you fight, those who resist and refuse what is…It does not have to lay down the law for the law. It is not the stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is".

[11] Ibid., 37.

[12] Ibid., 36.

Kant, develops the critique of human reason on the norm of freedom. The norm of *freedom* has to be a historical contingent standard that is to be challenged and an attempt is to be made to go beyond it. But Foucault does not take this path. Perhaps, we can find an answer to this paradox within the following statement given by Foucault in response to the answer by a solider while fighting for his land in Middle East. The solider was asked if he would have fought against those whom he is presently with, had he been born on the side of the enemy. The solider replied, "I know only one thing. I want to win back the lands of my forefathers. This is what I have wanted since my teens; I *do not know* where this passion comes from, but there it is." "There we have it at last." Foucault said to me (Veyne) *"everything has been said, there is nothing more to say"*.[13]

Foucault does not know whether freedom is absolute truth or not. He knows that freedom lies in his blood and spirit and that is the *truth* for him. He develops critique on the norm of freedom and never dares to go beyond it. [14] He explains that "[T]he reasons my adversaries give for their claim that their preferences are the truth rest genealogically on nothing. (I do not claim) I am right and the others are mistaken, but only, the others are to claim that they are right".[15]

Critique or philosophical activity, for Foucault, is to think differently[16]. "Different Thinking" is not because it is the *only* truth and value that could be justified and placed on the top of hierarchy, but because one has to give impetus to the unfinished project of freedom as a central value given in a culture to which one belongs.

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[13] Arnold I. Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 227.

[14] Arnold I. Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors,* 226; Veyne rightly characterizes the Foucauldian intellectual as warrior. "A warrior is a man who can get along without truth, who only knows the sides taken, his and that of his adversary, and who has enough energy to fight without having to justify himself in order to reassure himself. The course of history does not include eternal problems, problems of essences or of dialectics; it only offers valorizations that differ from one culture to another and even from one individuals to another, valorizations that, as Foucault was fond of saying, are neither true nor false: they are, that is all, and each individual is patriot of his or her own values",

[15] "The others are wrong to claim that they are right", this Foucauldian claim is based upon the fact that the conditions of the possibility of being true or false are themselves neither true nor false. Therefore, no one can claim that he is right in the absolute sense.

[16] Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of the Modernity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), 276; A., Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors,* 230.
Habermas accuses Foucault of committing a fallacy of *performative contradiction*: to call everything into question amounts to depriving critique, of the standard that is essentially required for developing critique. According to Habermas critique cannot be developed while questioning every rational principle. Habermas explains it with reference to Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge. He writes that "putative objectivity of knowledge is itself put in question (1) by the involuntary *presentism* of a historiography that remains hermeneutically stuck in its starting situation; (2) by the unavoidable *relativism* of an analysis related to the present that can understand itself only as context-dependent practical enterprise; (3) by the arbitrary *partisanship* of a criticism that cannot account for its normative foundations.''

Foucault's concept of critique is extremely anti-religious. All religions have a hard core that cannot be challenged and put to critique and change. Foucault's critique does not believe in such forms of hard core or fixed set of beliefs and values. It considers the fixation of beliefs a threat to critique and freedom because rigidity and fixation end the possibility of thinking and acting differently. Religion attaches great value to the fixed patterns of life authenticated by the will of God/gods, whereas Foucauldian critique emphasizes upon doing things differently. In this context, Foucault argues:

> There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceives differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. .. But, then, what is philosophy today-philosophical activity, I mean- if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? [17]

The works of Foucault are attempts to think differently. Again he writes that "there is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one's way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out ways from there. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking?"

FOUCAULT'S CONCEPTION OF CRITIQUE AND REFUTATION OF RELIGION

Foucault believes in the possibility of change through critical *work*. He explains that change is only possible by changing people's minds. Trombadori, an Italian Marxist, in an introduction to a book, rightly explains that "In reply to Marx's famous thesis that philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world when the real point is to change it, Foucault would no doubt have argued that our constant task must be to keep changing our minds". [18] In the context of intensive writings, Foucault describes himself as a dog who constantly strives to change the patterns of thinking and acting. Foucault gives great importance to the reading and writing of history, not because he wishes to further authenticate the established ways of thinking but rather he desires to call them into question.

Foucault's history of madness, illness, order, power and sexuality is not a demonstrative work. He does not simply want to convey historical knowledge about madness, clinic, power and sexuality. Foucault explains the role of writings with reference to the idea of the *experience-book* that stands in radical opposition to religion.[19] Experience books are those that lead to substantial transformation of cultural horizons within which one judges, thinks and experiences. The writings are the means through which he tries to establish new relationships with oneself and with society. Foucault explains:

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[17] Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* (United States: Semiotext, 1991), 13.
[18] Ibid., 14.
[19] Ibid., 25- 43.

> I am perfectly aware of having continuously made shifts both in the things that have interested me and in what I have already thought. In addition, the books I write constitute *an experience* for *me* that I would like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of change. If I had to write a book to communicate what I have already thought, I would never have the courage to begin it. I write precisely because I do not know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think. As a consequence, each new work profoundly changes the terms of thinking which I had reached with the previous work… When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.[20]

Foucault, therefore, writes in order *not* to have face. The book, for Foucault, functions as an *experience*, much more than as the demonstration of a historical truth. "In sum, the critical history of thought is neither a history of acquisitions nor a history of concealments of truth; it is the history of "verifications" understood as the forms according to which discourses capable of being declared true or false are articulated concerning a domain of things."[21] The experience as the transformation of what one thinks and acts does not exactly lie in the historically verifiable material. Books such as *Madness and Civilization, Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality* constitute the potential to experience *the experience*. The experience which is the objective of critique is the construction made out of these writings. The experience historically does not exist before the appearance of those works[22]. This reflects the jest of the Foucauldian critique. The experience creates the fictional world that becomes real with the passage of time. Religion would never appreciate the creation of unusual worlds and realities which conform to or satisfy the will of individuals. "An experience is neither true nor false: it is always a fiction, something constructed, which exists only after it has been made. Not before; it is not something that is "true," but it has been a reality".[23]

Experience is a process of dismantling both *subject and object*; therefore it is a kind of fiction. It dismantles the very idea of subject and object: God, human and objects. Experience blocks and prevents from what one was doing and thinking. "An experience that changes us, that prevents us from always being the same, or having

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[20] Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 26-27; Also See David Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory,* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1994), 234; The kind of transformation that comes about through writing books has to be always personal, not involving society as a whole. Hoy and McCarthy, in response to this aspect of transformation, write that, "the aesthetics of personal experience is an inadequate ethical-political response to a world in which misery and injustice are rampant.'' But for Foucault, as one would see in detail in the last chapter, changing circumstances without changing peoples' minds is not an appropriate route to address the fundamental issues of life.

[21] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault, Aesthetics, Method, and Methodology*, Vol. 2, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1999), 460.

[22] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1988); Deleuze explains Foucault's way of historicizing. "It makes history by unmaking preceding realties and significations, constituting hundreds of points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions or improbable continuums''.

[23] Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx,* 36.

the same kind of relationship with things and with others that one had before reading it". [24]

We know that all religions function upon identities: God, gods, prophets, text, man, father, mother, Muslim, sacred and profane, etc. Foucauldian critique, from its deep essence, is against the formation and existence of identities. Because of its commitment to the category of 'limits', Foucault is bound to break apart subject and identities. The identity either in its abstract (human) or specific (God) form, encourages rigidity and fixed set of characteristics. That is why Foucault explains that he writes in order not to have face. Foucault resists the formation of an identity whereas religion favors the formation of norm-based identities. We can find several biographies of prophets and religious scholars, but none of Foucault. He is always against the idea of a biography. To Foucault, biography constitutes *an* identity that is to be broken apart. However, against the will of Foucault, a few attempts were made to write his biography.

Critique is the art of not being governed from what apparently claims to be self-evident, necessary and universal. By studying the different ways of thinking undertaken by human beings in history, Foucault wishes to establish that what one thinks and believes today is not something that is fundamental, necessary or universal. In the perspective of Foucault, all our beliefs are premised upon historical contingencies including our belief in God, prophets and revealed text. He argues:

> To show that things were not as necessary as all that; it was not as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it was not self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock him up; it was not self-evident that the cause of illness to be sought through the individual examination of bodies; and so on. [The objective of critique is] a breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledge, acquiescence, and practices rest….[25]

The construction of experience or destroying identity does not presuppose that identities are bad. Critique simply does not believe in goodness or badness of things. "A critique does not consist in saying that things are not good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based". [26] So, critique uncovers the unexamined assumptions and beliefs. Foucault does not consider religious practices in terms of *goodness or badness*. The practices, structures, institutions, rationalities are either dangerous or safe. They turn up dangerous as soon as they stop the development of critique.

Foucault does not offer any alternative in the place of modernism or religion. As far as the possibility of finding an alternative is concerned, Foucault has no appeal to that breed of thinking. It is wrongly believed that Foucault's studies on Greek ethics were an attempt to look for alternatives. He clarifies:

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[24] Ibid., 41.
[25] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault,* Vol. 3*: Power*, 226.
[26] Ibid., 456.

> No! I am not looking for an alternative; you cannot find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. You see what I want to do is not the history of solutions- and that is the reason why I do not accept the word alternative. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of probematiques. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper - and pessimistic activism.[27]

Foucault prefers the term dangerous over bad. The concepts of goodness or badness are usually employed by those Western traditions that believe in the ultimate restoration of *Goodness* such as the belief in the Day of Judgment or Messiah. 'Goodness' derives from the traditions of religion or modernism. That is why Foucault is biased regarding the use of these terms.

Foucault puts:

> Well, the important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions *leaves* individuals the liberty to transform the system. *Obviously, constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society*. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. *But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it do not have the means of modifying it. This can happen when such a system becomes intangible (dangerous) as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or necessarily consequence of medical science*...There is no question that a society without restriction is inconceivable, but I can only repeat myself in saying that these restrictions have to be within the reach of those affected by them so that they at least have the possibility of altering them."[28]

The structures, institutions and such forms of practices that control and discipline individuals by commands or imperatives must be challenged. The notion of religious or moral imperative is incompatible and inconsistent with the task of critique. For the critique is premised upon the idea of 'limit' not allowing individuals or structures to appeal to the universal forms of truth, justice and goodness. When everything is historically constituted and situated, no one can have the authority to command unconditionally. From the standpoint of Foucault, God or prophets being historical entities cannot impose unconditional imperative upon human beings. However, the objective of critique is neither to set up a utopian society nor to give alternatives. To dream of society without constraints or to give alternatives is to totalize, limit and to abstract from the concrete.[29] The alternatives can always be given in the form of future totalities. These totalities as the project of setting up free society, *ignore* and *overlook* the limits, *practices* and *ground realties* of the given period. Totalities, projects, future sketches and alternatives *limit* the choice of the individuals. Therefore, to develop critique on the basis of an

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[27] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault,* Vol.1, 256.
[28] Ibid., 147-148.
[29] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader,* 375.

alternative is dangerous. Foucault explains that "in fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall program of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions".[30] This statement can also be understood in the context of the appeals of religious scholars to their Prophetic traditions and practices. All religions happen to appeal to the sacred past to resolve the contemporary issues. Foucault destroys this important linkage of the present with the past. The *past,* because of its specific remote historical situatedness cannot resolve the problems of the *present.* By virtue of different space and time the past occupies, we cannot appeal to it.

Critique is possible by the use of reason. However, ungrounded reason has no *essence.* He explains that "there is a history of the subject just as there is a history of reason, the history of the reason is not manifestation of the rational subject".[31] When reason does not have an essence, by consequence, it cannot *distract* from its fundamental path. Foucault argues:

> I do not believe in a kind of founding act whereby reason, in its essence, was discovered or established and from which it was subsequently diverted by such-and-such an event…you cannot assign a point at which reason would have lost sight of its fundamental project, or even a point at which the rational becomes the irrational. [32]

For Foucault, modern society has not been turned up irrational or diverted from its true path but it is undoubtedly functioning through a specific form of rationality which is neither fundamental nor diverted.[33] It cannot be seen as collapse or disappearance of reason; and so it does not raise the need of developing a critique with a view to putting it on the right track. In the Foucauldian perspective, religion cannot be irrational, neither can modernism. To Foucault, religion also rests upon a specific form of rationality. Religion-based rationality encourages and promotes authoritarian and totalitarian set-ups and institutions. The Foucauldian critique of modern society and of religion is not in fact putting reason on the right track. He does not reject religion for being irrational. Instead, the religious way of life is not conducive to the growth of specific form of rationality premised upon the idea of 'limit'. Foucault argues:

> That is not my problem, insofar as I am *not* prepared to identify reason entirely with the totality of rational forms which have come to dominate- at any given moment, in our era and even very recently- in types of knowledge, forms of techniques, and modalities of government or domination; realms

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[30] Ibid., 46.

[31] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault,* Vol.2, 438.

[32] Ibid., 443.

[33] This critique is directed against the school of 'Critical Theory'. The Critical Theory believes in the fundamental nature of reason from which reason has diverted. Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* argue on the conviction that human reason is the instrument in the service of self-preservation of the subject. In the process of its struggle, the subject is deprived of purposive rationality and being dominated by instrumental rationality that does not reflect the fundamental nature of reason.

> where we can see all the major applications of rationality. ..*For me, no given form of rationality is actually reason*. So I do not see how we can say that the forms of rationality which have been dominant in the three sectors I have mentioned are in the process of collapsing and disappearing. I cannot see any disappearance of that kind. I can see multiple transformation, but I cannot see why we should call this transformation a *''collapse of reason''*. Other forms of rationality are created endlessly. So there is no sense at all to the proposition that reason is a long narrative that is now finished, and that another narrative is under way.[34]

According to Foucault, the formation and development of human discourses in Western history also establishes the fact that there is no fixed or transcendental essence of human reason. We observe "different forms of rationalities, different foundations, different creations, different modifications in which rationalities endanger one another, oppose and pursue one another."[35] Considering reason as transcendental is to negate the historical fact that human beings have gone through different experiences of madness, sexuality, punishment and disease.[36] Because of conceiving reason as essential and universal, freedom and morality, according to Foucault, have been interpreted as conformity to that essence.[37] Critique has to *avoid* its relation with the absolute forms of morality and freedom informed by religions and modernism. For these reasons, Foucault thoroughly studies Greek ethics.[38] One of the themes that Foucault explored in the eighties was the theme of "the care of the self." According to Foucault, the philosophers from Descartes to Husserl were predominantly preoccupied with the imperative to "know thyself" over that of "take care of thyself." [39] According to Foucault, the Western man has paid huge price for giving priority to that form of critique which is *only* directed to attain the traditional forms of knowledge and truth. However, the critique has to separate itself from the traditional issues of knowledge and truth and must be directed to the ethics as the "care of self". In this context, Foucault *questions* the connection between institutions and ethics. For him, "it is not at all necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge".[40] He explains that:

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[34] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault,* Vol.2, 448-449.

[35] Ibid., 443.

[36] Philip Windsor, *Reason and History*: *or Only a History of Reason* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 127; W.T. Murphy as summarizing the project of Foucault as the Deployment of Rationality against "Reason and History" writes: "the use of rationality (critical use of intellectual faculties and resources) against reason is an attempt to demonstrate the fluctuating, drifting, discontinuous organization of truth, of knowledge, of the process of knowing, and of thinking. As such, it is an attempt both to bring out and 'attack' the totalitarian ambitions, character and mode of functioning of science and of truth''

[37] Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault,* Vol.1*,* 262

[38] Ibid., 269.

[39] Ibid ., XXV, 228

[40] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader,* 350; "I would like to point out over here an internal tension that seems to be going on within the Foucauldian thought. Ethics that is the relationship of the self to the self has to avoid relating itself to knowledge and truth because relating itself to knowledge is to relate the self to the self through the means that is

> For centuries we have convinced that between our ethics, our personal ethics, our everyday life, and the great political and social and economical structures, there were analytical relations, and that we could not change anything, for instance, in our sex life or our family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on. I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or theoretical structures.[41]

Foucault further distances himself from the fundamentals of religion. He develops the critique not upon the traditional forms of knowledge and truth but upon personal aesthetics. Critique finds its true expression in the domain of arts and aesthetics. In Foucault's view, freedom is not to act in accordance with truth and knowledge as the most religious scholars believe. Freedom is the free construction of the self by the self. [42] Freedom is a practice, not conformity. Freedom is not something that can be possessed and guaranteed through legal structure. Foucault writes:

> Liberty is a practice… the liberty of men is never assured by the laws and the institutions that are intended to guarantee them. That is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable to being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because ''liberty'' is what must be exercised…I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to (itself) guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom. [43]

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not the intrinsic part of the self. Therefore relating the self to the self through knowledge and truth is to determine the self by something that is not the part of the self. The self has to give instrumental role rather than guiding role to knowledge and truth. As it is observed that Foucault has come to this conclusion that the ethics has to function independently of knowledge; knowledge and truth therefore gave foundation to Foucault to conclude it. Knowledge and truth play a central role, not secondary role, in the works of Foucault. Ethics that has to separate itself from knowledge and truth is itself already grounded upon certain truths and upon the relations of knowledge that Foucault overlooks here."

[41] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 350.

[42] A. Davidson, *Foucault and His Interlocutors,* 230, 231; Veyne rightly characterizes the Foucaultian conception of freedom in the following passage:
"The idea of style of existence played a major role in Foucault's conversations and doubtless in his inner life during the final months of his life that only, he knew to be in danger. Style does not mean distinction here: the word is to be taken in the sense of the Greeks, for whom an artist was the first of all an artesian and a work of art was first of all a work. Greek ethics is quite dead and Foucault judged it as undesirable as it would be impossible to resuscitate this ethics; but he considered one of its elements, namely the idea of work of self on self, to be capable of acquiring a contemporary meaning, in manner of one of those pagan temple columns that are occasionally reutilized in more recent structures. We can guess at what might emerge from this diagnosis: the self, taking itself as a work to be accomplished, could sustain an ethics that is no longer supported by either tradition or reason; as an artist of itself, the self would enjoy that autonomy that Enlightenment can no longer do without.'' But why should one create oneself as a work of art? Veyne answers because "there is no longer nature or reason to confirm to, no longer an origin with which to establish an authentic relationship (poetry, I would say in special case); tradition or constraint are no longer anything but contingent facts."

[43] Ibid., 245.

Freedom does not lie in the realization of desires without being determined and exploited. Freedom is creation *per se*. All religions, if they believe, believe in the form of freedom granted by God. Freedom in all religions is not human creation but a gift or power bestowed upon human beings by God, or gods. It does not originate out of human ontology.

CONCLUSION

Foucault is essentially anti-religious. He does not support the religious way of life grounded upon faith. He may consider faith or belief in God as disloyalty to the Earth. For him, each and every belief has its origin in historical contingencies.

But one thing that always remains a problem within the Foucauldian discourse is its weak justification of considering everything historical. If one can trace the history either of belief/faith or of madness, it never implies that God or insanity has no reality outside history or culture. Demonstrating the historicity of beliefs and religion only establishes the historical evolution of human understanding of God or madness. It establishes the poverty of human comprehension, not the non-existence of God.

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