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Although Marx's critique of capitalism, especially his theory of fetishism, requires experiential knowledge (my term for "spirituality"), his framework does not leave any conceptual room for such knowledge. The idea that spirituality is (perhaps the better) part of religion is a deeply held assumption of secular Western thought. Only in Michel Foucault's late lectures do we find a Western thinker realizing that what opposed spirituality, and subsequently suppressed it, is not science but religion. This essay reconstructs Foucault's reasons for making that startling claim and then explores how Marx's early insight into the secularization of European culture can be deepened with the help of Foucault's genealogical analysis of the disappearance of spiritual knowledge in the West. Equipped with a framework to understand the secularization of Western culture in a radically different way, the essay then tackles the question of reformulating Marx's theory of reification with the resources provided by experiential knowledge (spirituality).

Key Words: Experiential Knowledge, Michel Foucault, Karl Marx, Secularization, Spirituality

Two Interpretive Problems

Let me begin with two textual or interpretive problems, taken from the works of Marx and Foucault, respectively. I propose a conceptual frame to bring the two problems face to face in such a way that the problems and the solution to them have the potential to throw entirely new light on how we must understand the secularization of Western culture. The interpretive problems will thus be shown to have a significance that far transcends their exegetical context.

The first problem has to do with remarks in which Marx persistently draws analogies between Christianity (as a religion) and (features of) capitalism. These analogies begin to appear in an intriguing light when we try to make sense of Marx's (1975, 222) claim, in "On the Jewish Question," that the truly religious/Christian state is not the state that professes or embraces Christianity but the one that is secular. Exegetically, we cannot set apart the latter claim and the recurring analogies. Since my aim is not exegetical, I will not be making any attempt to pursue in detail these analogies to speculate about the underlying pattern in Marx's thought. Moreover, exegesis will not solve our problem even when we take into account the analogies that Marx continued to draw, throughout his life, between capitalism and Christianity. Instead, I will focus on his
characterization of the secular state as the truly Christian/religious state and explore its theoretical presuppositions.

We will need to ask: what theory of religion and secularization would give coherence to Marx’s intriguing intuition? For at this stage, his remarks are nothing more than intuition. But his remarks taken in conjunction with his witty and insightful characterization of what Luther’s Protestantism accomplished will set the stage for our conceptual exploration. In a set of remarks written using the rhetorical device of inversion that was so characteristic of his early writings, Marx (1975, 251, 342) says that Luther abolished the distinction between priests and laymen by turning all laymen into priests. Unlike many of his purely rhetorical inversions, this one is a gem of an insight that, if framed rightly, has the potential to throw light on the process of secularization in the West.

Where does spirituality fit in this story? To answer that question we need to take up the second textual problem: nearly as intriguing—and needless to say, as enigmatic—as the early Marx’s claim about the secular state is the late Foucault’s (2005, 27) claim that what opposes spirituality in European thought is not science but theology. Spirituality disappears from, or gets radically transformed in, European thought and sociality1 under pressure from theology—that is to say, from religion. He further claims that this transformed spirituality finds expression in nineteenth-century European thought, especially Hegel and Marx. Doubtless, one manifestation of that presence, however transformed, is precisely Marx’s intuition regarding the secular state and its political treatment of religion and civil society.

Having stated how one intriguing and enigmatic intuition can be supported and clarified by another similarly intriguing and enigmatic claim, it is time to see how we can go about seeking a theoretical defense and elaboration of these claims. Let me start with the second problem: that is, with Foucault (2005) and his extraordinarily rich lecture series for the year 1981–2, made available to us as The Hermeneutics of the Subject.

In the same way as Marx never makes clear what in Christianity (as religion) makes him characterize the secular state as the truly Christian state, Foucault never addresses the question of what in Christianity (as religion) makes it hostile to experiential knowledge. Notice that I have used “experiential knowledge” in place of “spirituality.” Since the latter term retains its Christian monastic roots, it is important, for the purposes of this paper, to signal a radically different sense of the term by using it interchangeably with experiential knowledge. Why is theology—the discourse, the science, or the self-description of religion—opposed to spirituality or experiential knowledge? Although this question is waiting to be asked, there is a reason why it does not occur to Foucault to raise it in this form. I will come back to it. Let me instead focus on “spirituality,” which Foucault discusses with great clarity and richness of detail. Spirituality or experiential knowledge has to do with exploring the conditions for the access to truth. Let us note this careful formulation: access to truth, not knowing truth (connaissance).

1. I put it this way rather than saying “European culture” for a reason that will become clear later on.
Access versus Knowing

The claim, which is both systematic and historical, is that "care of the self" and "know thyself" were linked motifs in the long summer of Hellenic and Roman thought, which brought into being a flourishing culture of the self for about a millennium, starting in the fourth century B.C.E. The startling discovery for Foucault is that this remarkable period has simply disappeared or been driven underground by the two other models that have come to dominate the historical account: namely, the Platonic and the Christian. In the Platonic model, both the motifs are present, but "know thyself" acquires a distinctly or exclusively epistemic character, so much so that anyone who has not read Foucault's discussion of what that dictum means will be baffled by this sentence! Well, it meant something completely nonepistemic: before you undertake a vow to the Delphic oracle, make sure you have the ability to fulfill it. While the Platonic model still gave a central place to the "care of the self," this motif totally disappears from the Christian model, to be replaced by something unknown to both the Greek and the Roman cultures: namely, faith.

The major task Foucault sets himself is to document the delinking of the access to truth from the condition of spirituality, from the practices that prepared subjects for the truth that would transform them in their being. The access to truth becomes transformed into knowing/having truth. The transformation was complete, with no trace of the condition of spirituality for access to truth, when Descartes formulated the proposition *ego cogito* and when Kant later went to the extent of denying that the structure of the knowing subject is knowable at all. The ground for this transformation was prepared by Christianity:

This theology, by claiming, on the basis of Christianity of course, to be rational reflection founding a faith with a universal vocation, founded at the same time the principle of a knowing subject in general, of a knowing subject who finds both his point of absolute fulfillment and highest degree of perfection in God, who is also his Creator and so his model. The correspondence between an omniscient God and subjects capable of knowledge, conditional on faith of course, is undoubtedly one of the main elements that led Western thought—or its principal forms of reflection—and philosophical thought in particular, to extricate itself, to free itself, and to separate itself from the conditions of spirituality that had previously accompanied it and for which the *epimeleia heautou* was the most general expression... During these twelve centuries the conflict was not between spirituality and science, but between spirituality and theology. (Foucault 2005, 26–7)

For the "care of the self" culture, subjects are not capable of truth unless they undergo a transformation or conduct certain operations on themselves. But the self to which these subjects are seeking access, the truth, is not the self—empirical or transcendental—of the philosopher. Nor is it the other world or the kingdom of the Christians being sought. The access sought was to a dimension of consciousness itself—self-consciousness, if you like, so long as it is not understood egoistically, as having the structure of the ego. If the access to the self or truth needs transformation through spiritual
practices, then in a very different way this access also transforms subjects in their very being.

So the element that is neither the subject nor the object but that can be accessed in multiple and multiply diverse ways, all attempting a transformation of the subject, the element that is both the beginning and the end, that initiates the transformation and that completes the journey, brings about a complex relationship between culture and sociality. The innumerably diverse modes of access—all the many philosophical schools and “cults”—generate cultural learning in the different practical modes that are elaborated throughout what Foucault calls the golden period of the Hellenistic/Roman model of the self. Thus, sociality—the relationship between people, the different socializing structures—begins to be modulated and articulated by the cultural learning that emerges in the practical exploration of the conditions of spirituality. Different groups or schools will bring in different domains of life—economics, medicine, art, erotics—within the ambit of the care of the self. The tendency is for the care of the self to “become coextensive with life” (Foucault 2005, 86). Even intellectual knowledge (connaissance) is here in the service of or subordinate to the practices of the self. Any aspect of life—love, old age, friendship—or any activity—economics or dietetics—can become the domain of application for the care of the self. This knowledge, this learning, is the cultural that articulates or modulates the social, which in its turn sustains the cultural.

It may seem that “cultural learning” is in some sense a pleonastic expression. I use it nevertheless to formulate the deep concern that explicitly subtends both Marx’s and Foucault’s inquiries into forms of knowledge that articulate or disarticulate the social. Marx’s concern with finding a richer notion of practice than what philosophy is able to provide converges with Foucault’s investigation of how the quasi-theoretical or scientistic modes of discourse produce distortions of intersubjective relationships. Both open up a new field of inquiry by showing how a certain kind of knowledge

2. Foucault (2005, 179) is emphatic about this point:

While having trouble with the word and putting it in inverted commas, I think we can say that from the Hellenistic and Roman period we see a real development of the “culture” of the self. I don’t want to use the word culture in a sense that is too loose and I will say that we can speak of culture on a number of conditions. First, when there is a set of values with a minimum degree of coordination, subordination, and hierarchy. We can speak of culture when a second condition is satisfied, which is that these values are given both as universal but also as only accessible to a few. A third condition for being able to speak of culture is that a number of precise and regular forms of conduct are necessary for individuals to be able to reach these values. Even more than this, effort and sacrifice is required. In short, to have access to these values you must be able to devote your whole life to them. Finally, the fourth condition for being able to talk about culture is that access to these values is conditional upon more or less regular techniques and procedures that have been developed, validated, transmitted, and taught, and that are also associated with a whole set of notions, concepts, and theories etcetera: with a field of knowledge (savoir).

What we see in this work is how the “culture of the self” enables the sociality of the period, which in turn sustains the care of the self or helps experiential knowledge to flourish. My own formulation of the relationship between culture and sociality owes much to an exchange with Balagangadhara (1994) on a series of insightful notes he produced to clarify his proposal to look at culture as a configuration of learning.
that does not fit the model of theoretical or intellectual knowledge is intertwined and interarticulated with sociality. Because their work goes a long a way toward illuminating the mutual dependence and support of sociality and spirituality, it can also be mined for understanding how secularization, the normativization of different domains of sociality, strips sociality bare of its rich articulations, its ability to act as the condition for the emergence of experiential knowledge.

**Normativization**

The context is now set for understanding how Christianity, born in this milieu, sharing on the face of it many of the motifs and problematics pursued by the schools, communities, and groups that practice the care of the self—motifs such as conversion, salvation, return to self, self-knowledge—nevertheless radically and unrecognizably transforms those motifs and problematics. In fact, as Christianity begins to be ascendant, theology on its behalf begins to separate the condition of spirituality from access to truth, transforming the latter into an autonomous development of intellectual knowledge (*connaissance*). This separation or uncoupling takes the form of an attack on the activities and domains—love, friendship, economics, dietetics, politics—that the “care of the self” culture had sought to integrate or to bring within its ambit. In other words, the sociality that was nurtured and articulated by the “care of the self” begins to be stripped of its cultural knowledge. The separated domains are subjected to a process of what we might call “normativization,” since the activities in these domains get transformed by subsuming them under moral norms so that theology can examine the “truths” of these domains.

Here is Foucault’s (2005, 255–6) analysis of the Christian model and its difference from the “care of the self” model:

How is this Christian model ... characterized? I think we can say that in this model knowledge of the self is linked in a complex way to knowledge of the truth as given in the original Text and Revelation: knowledge of the self is entailed and required by the fact that the heart must be purified in order to understand the Word; it can only be purified by self-knowledge; and the Word must be received for one to be able to undertake purification of the heart and realize self-knowledge. There is then a circular relation between self-knowledge, knowledge of the truth, and care of the self. If you want to be saved you must accept the truth given in the Text and manifested in Revelation. However, you cannot know this truth unless you take care of yourself in the form of the purifying knowledge (*connaissance*) of the heart. On the other hand, this purifying knowledge of yourself by yourself is only possible on condition of a prior fundamental relationship to the truth of the Text and Revelation. This circularity is, I think, one of the fundamental points of the relations between care of the self and knowledge of the self in Christianity. Second, in Christianity self-knowledge is arrived at through techniques whose essential function is to dispel internal illusions, to recognize the temptations that arise within the soul and the heart, and also to thwart the seductions to which we may be victim. And this is all accomplished by a method for deciphering the secret processes and movements that unfold within the soul and whose origin,
aim, and form must be grasped. An exegesis of the self is thus required. ... Finally, third ... [turning around on the self in Christianity] is essentially and fundamentally to renounce the self. With Christianity then we have a scheme of a relation between knowledge and care of the self that hinges on three points: first, circularity between truth of the Text and self-knowledge; second, an exegetical method for self-knowledge; and finally the objective of self-renunciation.

I had remarked in the beginning that Foucault never asks why theology attacks spirituality. This extended analysis is one place where we can begin to speculate what might be his answer to that question. There is little doubt that, in the last decade of his life, Foucault’s research focused on highlighting the radical difference between Christianity and Hellenic-Romanic thought. Truth, of course, is at the heart of what he uncovers. With Christianity emerges a conception of truth totally at odds with the conception that had organized the “care of the self” culture. If self-knowledge in the latter was access to a reality that was not the object of knowing, then knowing (connaissance) in Christianity is entirely and exclusively intellectual or theoretical. The examination of conscience, for example, is a knowing of the kind that Christianity brings into being, as is the endless decipherment of the self as an object, a domain. When Christianity began to attack domains like economics and erotics that had been integrated into the conditions of spirituality as part of the access to truth, those domains were opened up for knowing through the rational reflection of theology. A peculiar combination of rationality and morality began looking for “truths” in these domains, truths that allegedly provide subjects with knowledge about how they ought to act or what they ought to avoid. This combination of rationality and morality is what I would like to term “normativization,” the unique contribution of Christianity. If problematization was the route that many spiritual movements used to seek access to truth, Christianity fashioned normativization as the route for the salvation of souls.3

3. Greek ethics worries about whether it is appropriate to do certain things: for example, when to assert self-mastery, when to give in to the erotic approaches of young boys, or to take an example from the domain of dietetics, whether eating certain things is conducive to one’s well-being. Such worries are termed “problematization” by Foucault. This contrasts with what Christian morality does to actions: it begins to norm them—that is, make them “wrong.” The early Christians begin to classify a whole range of activities as morally wrong (Foucault 1985). The most difficult problem here is the relationship between truth and norm. Can that be investigated philosophically? It is clear that part of the reason for Foucault’s rejection of philosophy in favor of genealogy has to be that the philosophical route to that question will lead back to theology. Instead, he thought he could show how the ethical reflections of Greek and Roman schools and their exploration of the condition of spirituality as access to truth had nothing in common with the universally binding property of Christian morality (or its secularized versions) or with the Christian concept of Truth. Whereas the secularized version of Christian morality is relatively easy to track (think of Nietzsche’s work), the secularized version of truth has posed a far more difficult challenge. Although Foucault did not always formulate his earlier inquiry as tracking secularization, this tracking was evident, for example, when he discussed vertical or in-depth Christianization (as distinct from its horizontal spread through proselytization) or when discussing the welfare state as a pastoral form of power; however, once he began his inquiry that produced the volumes on the history of sexuality, it was clear that he was indeed explicitly investigating the relationship between truth and norm as that which structures the secularization process.
It is this normativization that provides the subject matter for the so-called secular knowledges such as psychiatry, criminology, and the moral sciences. Foucault’s later investigation into the conception of truth and knowing that Christianity developed thus clarifies the questions with which his earlier investigation into madness, delinquency, and sexuality were concerned. More importantly, his later work provides us with a novel hypothesis about how we can understand the process of secularization. Secularization is usually thought of as a process that registers either the decline of religion or, what is the same thing, a liberation from religious thinking (some even reviving the Weberian thesis of disenchantment as part of the process). If, however, we focus on the Truth of Revelation in the Text and see the effects of the truths that the subsequent normativization process generates, then we begin to understand secularization very differently.

This focus forces us to think about how secularization continues in an intensified fashion the religious attempt to transform access to truth into knowing truth(s). It is important to grasp what this transformation does to the sociality of the golden age of the care of the self. That sociality was richly articulated because it embodied the learning that the “care of the self” culture produced through its diverse explorations of the condition of spirituality. Secularization strips sociality of that cultural learning. Christianity as religion creates a religious-secular world. Secularization is, if you like, another face or garb of religion. The secular may once have contrasted with the religious—for example, when Christianity began to oppose itself to the entirely secular pursuit of spiritual knowledge in the Hellenistic-Roman culture. In the Roman world the secular began to contract and, eventually, as the process of the Christianization of the Roman world was completed, the secular world was absorbed within the religious world (MacMullen 1984; Markus 1990; Balagangadhara 1994). The distinction between religious and secular, then, is a distinction drawn within religion. The distinctions between man and citizen, civil society and political society presuppose theology for their intelligibility. Higher, universal interests are to be embodied in the state; base, particular passions are pursued in civil society. Marx unerringly pins this secular, liberal doctrine that enshrines the secular state as the ultimate human achievement for what it truly is: namely, secularized theology. Secularism is thus the way the secular state—that is, the truly religious state—deals with what it construes to be religions.4

**Fetishism through Genealogy**

The above is indeed the claim Marx makes in his “On the Jewish Question.” Most commentators of that text and of the early Marx have found Marx’s claim puzzling (Leopold 2007). But now that we have the historical, theoretical, and above all, the spiritual presuppositions for understanding his remarks in place, we will be in a position not only to

4. If the direction I am suggesting is persuasive as well as illuminating, we will have a coherent alternative to the current ways of thinking about the secular, secularization, and secularism (which have found expression in a spate of recent books and anthologies discussed with great fanfare on the website of the American Social Science Research Council).
appreciate the full force of Marx’s characterization of the secular state but also to give a different dimension to his understanding of alienation and fetishism. Let me quickly redraw the picture necessary for supporting my claim from the discussion of Foucault above. What I aim to do is something far more complicated than the usual sketching of the intellectual context; I’m staging this encounter between Marx and Foucault by seeking an alignment of their problems through their own conceptual story.

Let us ask how European sociality, as Foucault’s genealogy would have us sketch it, looked to Marx, who was fashioning his own concepts to understand it. It is important that this move is understood in the right way in order to grasp the significance of the argument I am building. I am not only eschewing the standard or default way of situating thinkers in their own times, I am also steering clear of the way Marxist scholarship has tended to look at the early and late Marx. I do not have the space here to explain why that is necessary or how I see that scholarship; the theoretical yield, I am hoping, will be enough justification. My strategy amounts to the suggestion that Marx’s critique needs to be situated within Foucault’s genealogy of Western normativizing culture (Dhareshwar 2014). From Foucault we have a twofold description of the secularization of the West. There is the disappearance, or at any rate subjugation, of spiritual knowledge, which leaves the domains of sociality stripped of their cultural learnings; the latter process is captured through the normativization of domains such as the economy, the polity, and erotics.

The same process also throws light on another significant phenomenon: philosophically, the subject as such becomes capable of truth:

The subject only has to be what he is for him to have access in knowledge (connaissance) to the truth that is open to him through his own structure as subject. It seems to me this is very clear in Descartes, with, if you like, the supplementary twist in Kant, which consists in saying that what we cannot know is precisely the structure itself of the knowing subject, which means that we cannot know the subject. Consequently, the idea of a certain spiritual transformation of the subject, which finally gives him access to something to which precisely he does not have access at the moment, is chimerical and paradoxical. So the liquidation of what could be called the condition of spirituality for access to the truth is produced with Descartes and Kant; Kant and Descartes seem to me to be the two major moments. (Foucault 2005, 190)

This liquidation process, I argue, while it produced a different conception of truth and the subject, also effected a reduction of the complex articulation of sociality that the “care of the self” culture had produced. Foucault hints that the condition of spirituality resurfaces in the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century and in the thought of Hegel and Marx (and also Freud), but this is in some sense a distorted attempt to reunite conditions of spirituality and truth. It is distorted because the transformation of the access to truth into the autonomous development of truth(s) is retained intact or at any rate is not seriously interrupted. Hegel’s phenomenological account of the movement of consciousness and self-consciousness into absolute knowledge would be a good, paradigmatic example. His account of family, ethical life, and the state is conceptually rich and nuanced, but it still presupposes the normativized
stripping of sociality in these domains. Marx in a way recognizes this, but his critique also misdiagnoses the problem, as one of offering a materialist account in place of the idealist dialectic of concepts (hence, his demand for an account of practice and sensuous activity that is as rich as the Hegelian account of concept formation). Marx’s early concept of alienation and his later theory of fetishism (the reification of social relationships and the personification of things) both obliquely register the process that has created a sociality separated from the cultural learning that had articulated it. The analogy that Marx so frequently and insistently draws between capitalism and Christianity shows that somewhere in his theorizing he glimpses a pattern, a link that eludes the explicit conceptual framework. That is the source of the philosophically uncertain status of alienation in his early work. While it seems to indicate something more than the physical separation of the product of labor, there was no conceptual room for Marx to see it as an expression of the experiential or spiritual condition, an experience-occluding structure. In the later theory of fetishism, we have one of the most profound understandings of the autonomization of the reified social relationship, yet Marx fails to realize that his own theory of class and productive forces succumbs to that process.5

From Foucault’s genealogy we have been able to extract a picture of how culture and sociality are interrelated: in that picture, culture as learning enables sociality and the latter in its turn sustains the former. That was what produced the long summer of the Hellenistic-Roman model of the care of the self. Christianity as religion and capitalism both separate the two and tend to destroy cultural learning. Alienation as a certain kind of experience expresses not the separation of the objectification of labor when the latter becomes labor power; instead, alienation is the separation of action—any action—from the condition of spirituality. Culture, as I have said, enables the social, and the social sustains the cultural. When culture is separated from the social, the latter is poised for reification in many ways. In Foucault’s (2003) account “race,” “class,” and “the nation” are prime examples of the process of reification: the “truth” of blood and history producing the nation, the “truth” of interest producing class.

Although I have deliberately switched to the Marxian term “reification” to render the link transparent and poignant, what creates this condition of sociality is the process that Foucault abstractly characterized as the autonomization of a certain conception of knowing and the forging of the link between truth and subjectivity. Once the domains that were the conditions of application of the care of the self were destroyed, sociality came under the purview of truths that the secular human sciences began to uncover. That process, the one I am calling secularization, transforms the practical domains—domains that had come under the ambit of the condition of spirituality—into spheres that appear autonomous. The practical/ethical sphere of erotics/economics/dietetics is thus unrecognizable in the domain of sexuality (Foucault 1985), whose

5. This may seem enigmatic but only if we fail to see that “class” itself is a product of normativization. Although sexuality is the fully worked-out example of a normativized entity in Foucault’s mature work (Dhareshwar 2014), he had opened up other inquiries that we can retrospectively see as attempts to demonstrate how “race,” “nation,” and “class” too emerge as products of normativization (Foucault 2003). The implication is clear: “class” is a theoretical term that cannot be used in social-scientific explanation everywhere in the world.
truths begin to form subjects; the problematic of self-governance and government of the other morphs into the pastoral project of the welfare state, transforming people into normed subjects or citizens. This, I suggested earlier, is a religious-secular world. The process that Foucault terms governmentalization is what I have been calling normativization. In the same way as monasticization minutely governed the life of the monk, the state, the judiciary, psychiatry, and other such quasi-scientific disciplines, including the human sciences, generalize the mechanism underlying the monastic life to different domains of sociality (Foucault 2007).6

Marx is indeed recognizing this world when he says that the truly Christian state is the secular state and not the theocratic state. The state, in the theological picture, had always laid claim to be the true Vicar of Christ, a claim that was at the bottom of the prolonged church-state conflict. In the secular-religious world, the state and politics come to represent the “higher” aspiration of the subject as citizen, with the subject’s “lower” or base aspirations being confined to civil society. The secular state deals with Judaism politically by making it part of civil society, and hence belonging to the baser side (Marx 1975, 222). Consistent with this stance, Marx seeks liberation from politics itself, for politics is after all, in this religious-secular world, a form of pastoral power (to switch to Foucault’s terminology). For Marx then, emancipation is emancipation from the secular-religious world. It is this picture that lies behind the recurring analogy between Christianity (as religion) and capitalism in Marx’s work (both early and late).

Here is an example where the analogy is so drawn that something more than an analogy is straining to break through:

Therefore the supporters of the monetary and mercantile system, who look upon private property as a purely objective being of man, appear as fetish-worshippers, as Catholics, to this enlightened political economy, which has revealed—within the system of private property—the subjective essence of wealth. Engels was therefore right to call Adam Smith the Luther of political economy. Just as Luther recognized religion and faith as the essence of the external world and in consequence confronted Catholic paganism; just as he transcended external religiosity by making religiosity the inner essence of man; just as he negated the priest as something separate and apart from layman by transforming the priest into the heart of the layman; so wealth as something outside man and independent of him—and therefore only to be acquired and maintained externally—is abolished [aufgehoben]. I.e., its external and mindless objectivity is abolished inasmuch as private property is embodied in man himself and man himself is recognized as its essence—but this brings man himself into the province of private property, just as Luther brought him into the province of religion. (Marx 1975, 342; emphasis in the original)7

6. Foucault does not always distinguish governmentalization as a mechanism from government as a domain. It is quite clearly the former that is of crucial importance for understanding secularization. Perhaps the only place where Foucault does explicitly use the term secularization to designate the phenomenon of governmentalization is in his lecture “What is Critique” (Foucault 2007, 44).
7. In Capital, the analogy is turned into a relationship of “fitting”: “For a society of producers, whose general social relations of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labours into relation with each
The image of the priest in every layman not only captures what Protestantism accomplishes but as an image also throws light on the normed/norming citizen of the secular-religious republic insofar as this priestliness consists in the assumption of the normative attitude. This passage from Marx is straining to argue that the creation of the province of religion and the province of private property—in which the essence of man as the subject of labor, of sexuality, of madness, of delinquency is lodged—that creation may not be two distinct processes. It is better regarded as two different descriptions of the same process.

**Spirituality as Experiential Knowledge**

Without an explicit conception of spiritual knowledge, which as Foucault says was driven underground by this time, Marx could only articulate the condition of spirituality by succumbing to the reification of the social. In his case, it turned out to be class. The class politics of the proletariat, he thought, would allow it to transform itself and the sociality that created it. As he was unable to explicitly theorize either alienation or, later, fetishism as the expression of the loss of the condition of spirituality, he could only think of combining intellectual knowledge and reified sociality as an alternative to the religious-capitalist world. As we look back on the tragic results of that experiment in the last century, the pressing question is how else to rediscover the conditions of spirituality and the access to truth in a world whose sociality seems insulated from any cultural learning that may be capable of such a rediscovery? That seems to me at the heart of Foucault’s later lectures, from which I have liberally drawn. And yet, he does not explicitly ask why religion/theology is hostile to spiritual knowledge. By way of a conclusion, let me return to that question.

It may be that Foucault takes himself to have answered this question insofar as his discussion of how truth as it figures in the conception of access to truth is radically different from truth in the conception of the subject capable of truth, explicitly talking about the “liquidation” of the condition of spirituality by the dominance of the latter conception. This is entirely right since Foucault associates the emergence of the epistemetic concept of truth with Christianity. He fails, however, to explicitly conceptualize this conception of truth as what distinguishes (Christianity as) religion. He often slips into categorizing the “care of the self” schools or groups as religious.

The problem here is not simply one of classification. The failure to distinguish religion from those practicing the care of the self has the disastrous consequence of ignoring one of the major ways in which the secular-religious world deals with those groups pursuing the conditions of spirituality: namely, by construing them as (false) religions. This of course may not be a problem in contemporary Europe (where the “care of the self” groups have disappeared) except in a marginal way, even though early Christianity did indeed deal with the pagan practices by casting them as rival or false religions. But in the non-Western world—as in India, which has been brought into the province of the secular-religious world through colonialism—the way the state deals with other as homogeneous human labour, Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e., in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion” (Marx 1976, 172).
traditions of spirituality is reminiscent of Marx’s description of how the secular-religious state would deal with the Jewish question. So there is the obvious danger of how the secular-religious world may use familiar strategies of normativization to liquidate surviving traditions of spirituality, if they have not already done so.8

If, however, spirituality is knowledge—what I have been calling experiential knowledge—then the issue cannot be only one of resistance and preservation. Are there new ways of interarticulating cultural knowledge and sociality? I have been using the term cultural learning (Dhareshwar 2015) whenever I have spoken of spiritual or experiential knowledge. The reason for that should be obvious: that is, learning is intrinsically linked to happiness. As Foucault too makes clear in his rich reconstructions of the culture of the “care of the self,” the conditions of spirituality and access to truth have no one path. There are innumerable ways and heuristics to discover or invent to seek access to truth that brings about transformation in the subject, bringing about happiness. Consequently, the sociality articulated by that cultural learning also tends to be richly layered and pluralized. When, therefore, the religious-secular world of capitalism has begun to strip sociality of all cultural learning, the urgent question for both practical-spiritual knowledge and intellectual knowledge is: how can we articulate new cultural learnings that find expression in the articulation of sociality itself? Perhaps both critique and genealogy will be of service in clarifying what that question demands.

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References


8. This is what is taking place in non-European and nonreligious contexts, such as in India. Concealed just beneath the superficial problem of terminology lies the biggest problem, which has gone unnamed. While taking the tolerant policy of “let’s ignore what people mean by religion so long as we know what they are referring to,” we pass over the problem of saying what exactly happens in this move. We repeat the way secular-religious culture (the state) treats spiritual traditions by misconstruing them as religions, thereby initiating at least one major way of liquidating them.
Dhareshwar


