

On Foucault's Concept of Political Spirituality

En torno al concepto de espiritualidad política de Foucault

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Abstract: In this essay, I will argue the relationship between Foucault's concept of "political spirituality" and the Iranian Revolution. Regarding Foucault's concept of "political spirituality", what must be stressed is that spirituality is combined with politics. For him, spirituality is a desire to liberate the body from the prison of the soul. He regarded spirituality as nothing to do with a religious doctrine, while he did not reject that Shi'i Islam was the source of political spirituality. Therefore, it would be necessary to ask what kind of politics can be realized through spiritual practice. I contend that this question is about the rationale of Foucault's intervention into the Iranian Revolution. Unlike mischievous Western propaganda, the establishment of theocracy was a realistic solution to the limit of liberal democracy. The disjunctive dualism of political Islamism, affirming a difference between the representative democracy and God's decision, suggests an alternative to Schmitt's answer to the question concerning liberal democracy. I argue that God is nothing else than the void of sovereign power, prohibiting any human tyrant who would occupy the place of the absolute authority. Only divine violence can be possessing the authority to suspend the legal system and declare a state of exception. Foucault's concept of "political spirituality" should be grasped with this concept of political Islamism to solve the problem of liberalism.

Keywords: Foucault, Political spirituality, Heidegger, Shari'ati, Schmitt, Sovereignty, Dictatorship

1. Foucault in Tehran

In October 1978, Michel Foucault met Ayatollah Khomeini, a symbolic figure of the Iranian revolution, at his exile house outside Paris after his first visit to Iran. Foucault made a decision to travel to the country again in November of the same year when the revolutionary movement against the last shah of the Persian monarchy reached its peak. He was then commissioned as a correspondent of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, and his original plan was to write on US President Jimmy Carter's international policy in the days of the Cold War, but he changed his mind during the first visit to the country. The Iranian Revolution engulfed his project. Before his engagement into the Iranian situation, Foucault vehemently committed the prisoners' rights movement with the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*. Through his work with this group, Foucault became involved in the Iranian issue. Two French lawyers who helped Iranians in political exile brought Foucault's attention to the matter. He already recognized the political situation of Iran in 1977 when he signed a letter to support the protest of the Writers' Association in Tehran with Sartre and other French intellectuals. Therefore, Foucault's interests in Iran were not a digression from his works but an ongoing project on his political commitment.

The discovery of the Iranian revolution leads him to the concept of "political spirituality" and the later works on ethics and the care of the self (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016: 161). During the last few years of his life, Foucault suggested the link between spirituality and *parrhesia* – fearless speech. The revolutionary spirituality that he witnessed in Tehran led him to the discovery of the possible exercise of transformative politics without the European axiomatics of the Enlightenment. The resistance on the streets in Tehran proved to him the self-creation of the ethical subject, the creation by which "people" are willing to change themselves from the inside out. By this spectacle of the protest, Foucault grew curious about the reason why people rose up and what they insisted. He described what the Iranians experienced as "the soul of the uprising" (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 255). He praised the Iranian protest in the sense that it will be a "true revolution" to bring out a "radical change in our experience", the transformation of "ourselves" – "our way of being, our relationship with others, with things, with eternity, with God" (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 255). How does this fundamental transition take place? More interestingly, Foucault suggested that "the repetition of demonstration", i.e., the tireless demonstrating of people's will. He argued:

Of course, it was not only because of the demonstrations that the shah left. But one cannot deny that it was because of an endlessly demonstrated rejection. There was in these demonstrations a link between collective action, religious ritual, and an expression of public right. It's rather like in Greek tragedy, where the collective ceremony and the reenactment of the principles of right go hand in hand. In the streets of Tehran there was an act, a political and juridical act, carried out collectively within religious rituals – an act of deposing the sovereign (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 254).

What impressed Foucault was the “demonstrating” of the collective will, the command of general will in Rousseau’s sense, whereby insisting the principles of right against the sovereign and beyond. The French philosopher believed that he encountered the “collective will” on the street in Tehran. He extended this experience into his view of history. Foucault did not merely describe the feeling of excitement but meticulously scrutinized the courage and the absence of fear that he saw in the scenes of protest. The formality of the repetition gives rise to the political moments which are not reduced to the rational doctrine of the Enlightenment. Foucault’s discovery of Iran could be regarded as a political engagement along the same lines as the postwar French intellectuals. This observation made his approach to the Iranian Revolution exceptional. He did not regard the Islamic revolution as the aberrant episode of a universal history but a unique event without a commitment to rationalism. However, Foucault’s affirmative evaluation of “political spirituality” is criticized as the erroneous consequence of a naive perspective to Islamism after the September 11th terrorist attack of 2001. For instance, Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, the authors of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, finds the root of the horrific terrorism in the Iranian Revolution and its radical Islamic politics. They claim that the political extremism of Jihad is seduced by “political spirituality” that Foucault valorized. Afary and Anderson denounce Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn alongside Foucault, having a reason for their defense of anti-imperialist Islamism, and declare that “they ignored the specific social and political context in which Al Qaeda arose, that of two decades of various forms of radical Islamist politics, beginning with the Iranian Revolution” (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 169). Against this argument, I will discuss the historical background of that concept and the influence of political Islamism on Foucault’s turn to his later works. Foucault’s understanding of the Iranian Revolution should be seriously considered for understanding this theoretical shift.

2. Politics and Spirituality

Interestingly, Afary and Anderson ascribe one cause of these leftist or postmodernist attitudes towards Islamic politics to the legacy of the Cold War. They argue that “most of the Left tended to view Islamism through the lens of Cold War politics, attributing its rise to ‘blowback’ from the US and Saudi Arabian backed war against the Russians in Afghanistan” (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 168). Indeed, their analyses of Islamism and its relation to the Cold War are too reductive to understand the reason why Foucault was fascinated with the Iranian Revolution and turned his interest to Kant’s question of the Enlightenment after his visit to Tehran. Afary and Anderson do not properly deal with the political implication of the Iranian Revolution under the regime of the Cold War.

The Cold War began with the mission of the US, taking on strategic responsibility for the world economy, defining its shape with Europe and the Third World after the Second World War. Its plan was well blended with anti-communism, intending to drive two regions to choose the market economy. US’s postwar task was to take over the periphery, which still sustained the international trading chain of the former imperial domains, such as Western Europe and Japan, and then became close to communism because of anti-imperialist resistance. Due to this rival vision of Americanism, both areas had no strong necessity for growing access to the US merchandising system. During this period, the Third World was mainly an ideological battlefield between capitalism and communism, nationalism, and Westernization. In the process of this ideological competition, Western philosophy served as leverage to catalyze political movements in each national territory.

Against this geopolitical background, Foucault saw the Iranian Revolution as the third way between the USSR and the US, a possible politics beyond the frame of the Cold War. For this reason, Foucault’s engagement in Iranian affairs and his theoretical shift to the affirmation of “political spirituality” must be regarded as the extension of his early philosophy, not the disillusionment of the revolutionary fever. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi correctly points out the meaning of the Iranian Revolution in Foucault’s later works:

The Iranian Revolution was not the only political event to which Foucault paid close attention. For many years, he considered himself a part of a movement against penal injustice and for prisoners’ rights, he supported the dissident Solidarity union movement in Poland and participated in activities in their defense, and he marched with protesters defending the rights of Vietnamese refugees. But no singular event in Foucault’s history generated such a distinct transformation in his thought as the Iranian Revolution (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016: 184).

Through his analysis of the Iranian Revolution to show the way in which people free themselves, Foucault defined structuralism not as a “document of impotence” but as a “philosophy or a manual of combat” (Afary & Anderson, 2005: 189). Even referring to Lacan, Foucault emphasized the existence of the unconscious in defining the function of the subject. His reconsideration of structuralism is nothing less than the critique of modernization, which has already turned out as archaism. In his first article to contribute to the Italian newspaper, Foucault described what he was struck at the bazaar in Tehran. There, he saw “unfit-for-use” sewing machines, which bore the inscription, “Made in South Korea”. The Western objects decorated with clumsy imitation of old Persian patterns symbolized the hollowness of modernity. By this observation of the scene in the market, Foucault recognized the reality of modernization under the slogan of Cold War capitalism, which was driven by the US in those days. Even the Carter administration of the US, the flag-bearer of human rights, supported the Iranian despotism to compete with communism. The Cold War made it imperative for the US to run a race with the USSR on its own terms by proving that a market economy could bring forth not just prosperity but justice, equality, and security. The political deadlock of the Cold War did not oppress communism only, but also all resistance from the bottom. The ideological propaganda of the Cold War justified the rampant state violence in the Third World. In this situation, political Islamism served as the third terrain by which the Iranian revolutionaries rejected both sides of the Cold War.

Regarding Foucault’s concept of “political spirituality”, what must be stressed is that spirituality is combined with politics. For him, spirituality is a desire to liberate the body from the prison of the soul. He regarded spirituality as nothing to do with a religious doctrine, while he did not reject that Shi’i Islam was the source of “political spirituality”. Therefore, it would be necessary to ask what kind of politics can be realized through spiritual practice. I contend that this question is about the rationale of Foucault’s intervention into the Iranian Revolution. In his interview with Duccio Trombadori at the end of 1978, Foucault argued:

What is history, given that there is continually being produced within it a separation of true and false? By that I mean four things. First, in what sense is the production and transformation of the true/false division characteristic and decisive for our historicity? Second, in what specific ways has this relation operated in Western societies, which produce scientific knowledge whose forms are perpetually changing and whose values are posited as universal? Third, what historical knowledge is possible of a history that itself produces the true/false distinction on which such knowledge depends? Fourth, isn’t the

most general of political problems the problem of truth? How can one analyze the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others? The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false — this is what I would call “political spirituality” (Foucault, 2001: 233).

Here, Foucault clarified “political spirituality” as “the will” to found each of practices, i.e., distinguishing true and false and governing oneself and others, in a different way from the given establishment. The will to alter these practices is a transformative activity that has to create its new beginning to change beyond its limit. For Foucault, truth is the regime of power for organizing production, regulation, distribution of discourse. Therefore, the regime of truth decides which one is true or which one is false. In this way, Foucault regards politics as not the scientific critique of ideological illusion but the production of the new regime of truth. His concept of “political spirituality”, i.e., the will to transform the given socio-economic conditions, links the politics of truth to spirituality. Because of its theological implication, it would be easy to misunderstand this concept as politics connected to religious faith. However, it is undeniable that Foucault’s concept of “political spirituality” emphasizes the collective will to create the truth by transforming oneself. Above all, his idea of spirituality presupposes the desire for liberation.

Before travelling to Iran, Foucault intensively studied Ali Shari’ati’s works, which hugely influenced the Iranian revolutionaries. I think this close reading of Shari’ati paved the way for Foucault’s eventual turn towards the ethics of the self. For this reason, his affirmative approach to political Islamism was not the aberrant caprice of a naive French intellectual blinded by the revolutionary fever. In *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Shari’ati interpreted the Islamic ideas by employing scientific concepts to provide the theoretical means for his audience rigorously. The purpose of Shari’ati’s lecture was to defend Islam in the effort to bring together three dimensions of today’s flows in religion, philosophy, and other human activities: mysticism, equality, and freedom. Alongside Shari’ati, Louis Massignon and his disciple, Henry Corbin, were also another reference for Foucault’s understanding of Islam. Even though Foucault came across Shari’ati and Corbin’s influence, he did not know that the hidden sources of the Iranian revolutionary thoughts were Western philosophy. One of them was Martin Heidegger.

3. Against “Westoxification”

For Shari’ati, modernization is sickness following the disease of “Westoxification”. Heidegger’s philosophy, he argued, could save Islamic people from this illness by teaching them the real face and spirit of the West. Above all, Heidegger’s concept of authenticity was regarded as a theoretical ground on which the Iranians’ readers, already christened by Sartre’s existentialism, could envision the alternative to Westernization. In the Iranian context, Heidegger’s notion of authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*, is used normatively for putting an ontological distinction between the owned life and the disowned life, even though Heidegger himself occasionally undertakes it for the description of *Dasein*’s unowned life between the authentic and the inauthentic. Shari’ati’s critique of Westernization echoed Ahmad Fardid, a professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran. Fardid was the established authority who mainly brought such an interpretation of Heidegger to Iran. Fardid studied Western philosophy at Sorbonne University and the University of Heidelberg. After his return to Iran, he organized the Iranian Heideggerian research group in the 1970s. Unlike prolific Shari’ati, who brought together Marxism and Third Worldism in his writings, Fardid’s philosophical framework stayed faithful to Heidegger’s original critique of a decadent West.

However, Fardid’s Iranian Heideggerian group worked as a meeting venue where the Iranian intellectuals exchanged their opinions about many political issues. They appropriated Heidegger’s philosophy to serve their ideas of the modern world from the non-European perspective, i.e., political Islamism. For them, Heidegger’s Greeks, the ideal life against the current decline, was the Orient, i.e., the spiritual life of Islam. Both Heidegger and Fardid, the authentic mode of existence was the radical ground for reevaluating one’s being. From this perspective, Fardid’s Iran would be the chosen nation in the middle between capitalism and communism like Heidegger’s Germany. Fardid regarded Westernization as a passage towards Islamic self-realization, and Heidegger would be a motivator to revive Islamism. Shari’ati advanced Fardid’s interpretations of Heidegger by revitalizing Shi’ism. His concepts of Red Shi’ism and Black Shi’ism aimed at splitting Islamism into two sides. Red Shi’ism is the pure form of religion concerning social justice and salvation, while Black Shi’ism is the deviated form of religion dominated by monarchy and clergy. The former exists for people’s liberation, but the latter sustains in service for the power elites out of touch with people’s needs.

Shari'ati's notion of Red Shi'ism is the theoretical basis on which Foucault elaborates his concept of "political spirituality".

Because of its notion denoted by its red color, Shari'ati's theory of political Islamism was identified with communism in the period of the Cold War, and most of the traditional Islamic leaders, except Ayatollah Khomeini, did not support Shari'ati's position. What should be stressed here is that Shari'ati's Red Shi'ism, despite his definition of it as a pure religious form, is nothing less than the religious practice for social justice and salvation. Some critics try to find the affinity between political Islamism and Heidegger's critique of liberal democracy and tend to conclude that there is an inner logic within Heidegger's philosophy employed by the anti-Western Islamists. However, I would like to argue that Heidegger's relation to the West was ambivalent because his philosophical vision could not find its political solution in any *realpolitik*, even when he supported Hitler. His critique gained its justification in the reality of Western imperialism, but his political faith in the National Socialist Party failed to escape from the impasse of a nation-state. His philosophy was desperately pursued to retrieve the forgotten Hellenic origins in the West, a fallen world of nihilism and technological madness. In this way, his concept of authenticity, far from its political failure, enabled the Iranian intellectuals to reject the inauthentic historicity of the monarchy.

4. Islamic Heideggerianism

It might be easy to argue that there are theoretical affinities between Heidegger's philosophy and Iranian Islamism in their anti-Western tendency and their rejection of liberal democracy. However, the Iranian reception of Heidegger was not the consequence of Islamic fundamentalism. Their refusal of modernization did not mean that they want to retreat from the secular world to the heavenly sanctuary of God. What they wanted to do was to build an Islamic utopia in their country, suffering from the anti-communist and anti-Islamic monarchy. Ironically, Fardid and Shari'ati, as well as other anti-Western Iranian intellectuals – e.g., Al-e Ahmad, Darius Shayegan, Reza Davari, and Abdolkarim Soroush – had known Western philosophy very well and were open to the Western intellectuals. Even Ayatollah Khomeini, the religious leader of the Iranian Revolution, backed up these Westernized anti-Western intellectuals. Ayatollah Khomeini's meeting with Foucault and his support for political

Islamism implicate that their anti-Western Islamism is not the reactionary politics against the West itself. Above all, the credit of such radical anti-Western tendency revolving around the Iranian Revolution must be given to the actual experience of the Western-backed monarchy of the shah. The Iranian state of exception was violently forced to exist through a military coup in 1953. A decade later, there began the Western imposition of democratic experimentation on the Iranian people's aspiration towards republicanism. The fermentation of anti-Western tendencies originated from the Iranian mistrust of the West, and as a result, Heidegger's critique of the inauthentic West attained its stage set for the tidal wave of the Iranian political movement to retrieve the lost authenticity.

Shari'ati's political vision, influencing Foucault's insight into "political spirituality", intends to bring people, ideology, and God together into a unified force. He believes that this unified wholeness will rescue people from the trap of irresponsible and clueless liberalism. God is not the symbolic object of religious worship but the political authority for organizing the mass movement. Shari'ati's background was comprised of a God-worshipping socialist group in which his father was involved and his education in Paris from the late 1950s to early 1960s. While residing in Paris, which was not a typical European city and at that time the world's hub of cultural and political movements, Shari'ati witnessed the intellectual resistance against the colonial rule of the French government in Algeria and the scene of unrestrained philosophical debates among Camus, Sartre, Aron, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Lefort, etc. He knew well the fact that not all of the West is necessarily bad. Therefore, it would be unfair to declare that his appeal to Islamic utopianism is simply the voice of fundamentalism. Shari'ati argued:

We are clearly standing on the frontier between two eras, one where both Western civilization and Communist ideology have failed to liberate humanity, drawing it instead into disaster and causing the new spirit to recoil in disillusionment; and where humanity in search of deliverance will try a new road and take a new direction, and will liberate its essential nature. Over this dark and dispirited world, it will set a holy lamp like a new sun; by its light, the man alienated from himself will perceive anew his primordial nature, rediscover himself, and clearly see the path of salvation. Islam will play a major role in this new life and movement (Shari'ati, 1980: 95).

I think what Shari'ati is saying here reveals that his vision is to bring forth alternative politics to the West-imposed straightjacket of the Cold War, given by the failure of the Enlightenment. Shari'ati's critique of Marxism and existentialism is strategic and even persuasive when he

defines dialectical materialism as “material monotheism” (Shari’ati, 1980: 45). For him, the Iranian situation was the consequence of the miscarried utopian project, alienating humanity from its primal nature. Salvation is, in this sense, another term to indicate the liberation of the essential human nature from any tyranny. However, liberation is only possible if one affirms God, an absolute category for embracing the primordial stance of all multiple objects beyond representation. Shari’ati’s political Islamism explains why the Iranian Revolution attracted Foucault. Most important is that the Iranian revolutionaries used Heidegger to reformulate traditional Islam for their political Islamism. As Gilles Deleuze once said, a theory is a box of tools that must be useful and functional in its experimental exercise. Heidegger in Tehran is an example to prove what Deleuze conceptualizes as the use of a theory.

5. God and Disjunction

Since the banishment of Ibn Rushd, who is more familiar to Europe by his Latin name Averroës, from Morocco, philosophy was regarded as the heresy of their absolute faith in the Islamic world. The philosophical debate between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazali ended up with the eviction of the philosopher and the demolition of his works. Ibn Rushd tried to prove the usefulness of philosophy in promoting religious belief and insisted that philosophy is the most sophisticated form of religion. Against this idea, al-Ghazali raised a question about the apparent contradiction between reason and revelation and searched for another solution for reconciling philosophy and religion. The contemporary Iranian intellectuals’ use of Heidegger in the 1970s should be considered in this background of Islamic philosophy. They recognized the schism between philosophy and religion, yet, employed Heidegger’s critique of the West to politicize Islam. In my opinion, the rise of political Islamism was ascribed to Cold War geopolitics. On the surface, the postwar US mission pretended to support human rights and liberty. Still, underneath the civilized ornament, its policy secretly aided the premodern tyranny of the shah and connived the worst form of state-directed violence against civilians. The geopolitical hypocrisy collided with the Iranian passion for their republic and grounded the circumstance in which they rejected both the US and the USSR for the state in the middle. For them, abolishing the anti-Islamic monarchy was an urgent task to bring forth the authentic republic.

Interestingly enough, the Iranian revolutionaries weaponized philosophy for radicalizing their religious faith and creating the terrain in the middle against the Cold War. The Iranian case shows that the function of philosophy is to create an intermediate zone beyond the boundary of any territory. I think that the Iranian Revolution is one of many cases showing the realization of such philosophical universalism. What Foucault encountered in Tehran would be the incarnation of the truths. The Iranian *realpolitik*, the realization of political theocracy as an alternative resolution to liberalism, probably attracted Foucault's attention. In his earlier lectures at the Collège de France from 1972 to 1973, Foucault teased out problems buried deep in the Hobbesian presupposition of sovereignty. Unlike Hobbes' conclusion, the birth of the sovereign disciplinary power does not end the wars between the individuals but brings forth a war within the state, i.e., a civil war. The establishment of sovereign violence is not the suspension of "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" but the return of the repressed war of all against all.

Foucault pointed out that the principle of quasi-equality brings forth the constant state of war, preserving the dimension of distrust. According to him,

The individual as such, in his relationship with others, is the bearer of this permanent possibility of the war of all against all. If there is in fact a war of all against all, it is first of all essentially because men are equal in the objects and ends they set their sights on, because they are equivalent in the means they possess for obtaining what they seek. They are, as it were, substitutable for each other, and that is precisely why they seek to replace each other and, when something is offered to the desire of one, the other may always substitute himself for the first, wanting to take his place and appropriate what he desires. This substitutability, this convergence of desire characterizes this original competition. (Foucault, 2015: 25-26)¹

Each individual cannot resist the fact that anyone could take the place of themselves. This never-ending competition among the nation-state members is the most critical feature constituting the enactment of the sovereign power. For this reason, there might be no constitutional foundation of the nation-states without the dominant ruler. In Foucault's sense, the political solving of the civil war is to invent a glorious person who prevails over the others with additional power. This balance of power system based on the supplement must be rendered workable; otherwise, the restrained civil wars erupt, and then the nation-state will be fallen into crisis. Therefore, the bearer of sovereign authority is necessary for modern liberal

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France 1972-1973*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2015), 25-26.

constitutions. Foucault's concept of "political spirituality" results from his observation in Iran to overcome this problem of liberal democracy, and this concept fundamentally rejects an anti-democratic solution to it.

As well known, Carl Schmitt also indicated the essential role of the supreme power in the modern state. He criticized liberal democracy as a political deception because it operates as if there is no exceptional decision-maker. For Schmitt, the legal order cannot function without a sovereign authority's decision. He argued that "whether God alone is sovereign, that is, the one who acts as his acknowledged representative on earth, or the emperor, or prince, or the people, the question is always aimed at the subject of sovereignty" (Schmitt, 1985: 10). From this perspective, Schmitt concluded that dictatorship is the only solution to the "metaphysical kernel of all politics" (Schmitt, 1985: 51-52). Interestingly, Schmitt criticized Hobbes' political philosophy as a consequence of mathematical relativism. According to Schmitt, Hobbes' critical problem is that he did not justify dictatorship as the solution for legitimacy, even though he also recognized the pivotal role of "decisionist thinking" like Donoso Cortés. In Schmitt's sense, a sovereign is nothing else than a person who decides on the state of exception. Even in any form of theocracy, there must be a human being, a particular personality, who chooses to reset the given legitimacy. Religion is, thus, one of many political forms, not an apolitical realm.

Schmitt's political theory, to some point, clarifies the weakest link of modern representative democracy; however, at the same time, it gives rise to the dilemma of dictatorship. He defended the decisionism of dictatorship, anticipating the Last Judgement against atheist-anarchist politics. Schmitt deplored that "American financiers, industrial technicians, Marxist socialists, and anarchic-syndicalist revolutionaries unite in demanding that the biased rule of politics over unbiased economic management be done away with" (Schmitt, 1985: 65). For him, the separation of politics from the economy is the essence of representative politics. Due to this depoliticizing logic of modern democracy, "there must no longer be political problems, only organizational-technical and economic-sociological tasks" (Schmitt, 1985: 65). Shari'ati also apprehended this fundamental problem of liberal democracy, and his political Islamism aimed at reviving politics against its apolitical economism. However, Shari'ati did not follow Schmitt's solution. Unlike Schmitt's approval of dictatorship as a theological variation, Shari'ati put an emphasis on the paradoxical relationship between God

and humans – “a simultaneous denial and affirmation, a becoming nothing and all, essentially an effacement and a transformation into a divine being during natural, material life” (Shari’ati, 1980: 120). In other words, God serves as a supplement to humanity, and its existence founds the disjunctive synthesis of life. Life should not be reduced to the binary logic of contradiction and must affirm the paradox of its multiplicity. God functions as an immanent drive, continuously liberating humanity from its corporeal limit.

Foucault’s position is much closer to Shari’ati rather than Schmitt. In an interview in 1977, Foucault pointed out that “we are perhaps living the end of politics”, and then added that “politics is a field which was opened by the existence of the revolution, and if the question of revolution can no longer be asked in these terms, then politics risks disappearing” (Foucault, 1989: 223). No doubt, the Iranian Revolution enabled him to confirm what he said – the rebirth of politics through revolution.

6. Conclusion

Unlike mischievous Western propaganda, the establishment of Islamic theocracy was a realistic solution to the limit of liberal democracy. The disjunctive dualism of political Islamism, affirming a difference between the representative democracy and God’s decision on exception, suggests an alternative to Schmitt’s answer to the question concerning liberal democracy. God’s state of emergency will return when the constitutional institution stops working. In this way, God is nothing else than the void of sovereign power, prohibiting any human tyrant who could occupy the locus of supremacy. Only divine violence can be possessing the authority to suspend the legal system and declare a state of exception. God is not a single bearer of sovereignty but rather the revelation of unrepresentative politics, which founds people’s liberation from the represented power. Foucault’s concept of “political spirituality” should be grasped with this idea of political Islamism to solve the problem within the political system of liberalism. Foucault clearly stated that the Iranian movement was strong enough to abolish their dictatorship “when people attempted to inscribe the figures of spirituality on political ground” (Foucault, 2001: 451). This courageous decision was made by the collective will to transform the regime of truth, attempting to create another departure of political practice. Therefore, “political spirituality” is nothing to do with political theology but instead the

abolition of theological legacy in politics. The meaning of spirituality for those Iranian people who went to their deaths had no belief in individual salvation but the establishment of the Islamic republic. This goal of revolution is quite different from Schmitt when he identified a person who decides on exception with theological authority. Not surprisingly, Foucault defines “the arts of existence”, i.e., the care of the self, as “those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre” (Foucault, 1986: 10). In this sense, it is not difficult to say that his ethical project is originated from “political spirituality”, seeking the infinite liberation of the self from the given regime of truth, not any self-management for individual interests.

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