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Enlightenment within the Limits of Reason Alone:

Kant, Foucault, Derrida

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Preface

In this paper, I will examine Enlightenment in relation to the notion of “reason.” The project of Enlightenment, which seeks to enlighten us all, is essentially conducted by reason. Therefore, we must question the foundation of reason when we critically consider Enlightenment. What does reason comprise? Furthermore, to what extent can we rely on it?

First, I will clarify the political aspect of reason and its use in Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” which is one of the seminal texts on Enlightenment. Second, by examining the text by Foucault titled “What Is Enlightenment?” I will demonstrate the historical aspect of Enlightenment. After that, in the latter portion of this paper, I will identify the limitations of Kantian “reason” and “Enlightenment” by referring to texts by Derrida that are directly connected to these notions.

1. Enlightenment and Politics: Public and Private Use of Reason in Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?”

“An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784), written by Kant, is often considered the starting point when discussing this issue.

I, therefore, deem it necessary to review this issue first. In the beginning of this short text, Kant defines Enlightenment as “mankind’s exit from his self-incurred immaturity.”¹ Immaturity is the state of “inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” and is therefore self-incurred. One has to escape from immaturity, Kant says, by having the courage to use one’s own understanding.

Moreover, Kant believed that to accomplish Enlightenment, there should be “freedom to make *public* use of one’s reason in all matters.” Here, the term “public use” is employed in the following sense: the use of one’s reason only for one’s occupation as a “scholar.” Furthermore, while “the public use of reason must at all times be free,” private use “may often be very narrowly restricted.” For example, while an officer on duty must obey his superior’s command, he should question the suitability or utility of the command. Similarly, while a citizen should not refuse to pay taxes imposed on him, he cannot be forbidden, as a scholar, to express his thoughts publicly on the inappropriateness or injustice of such taxes; and while a clergyman is bound to lecture his catechism students and his congregation according to the tenets of the church that he serves, he has complete freedom to publicly communicate his thoughts on the imperfections of the tenets.²

In “What Is Enlightenment?” Kant demands the above-mentioned “public use of reason.” Therefore, it is natural to assume that this text has *political* connotations, an idea that Michel Foucault later reinforces. Kant evidently argues for the institutions that make Enlightenment possible. It can be perceived in his direct mention of Friedlich II in the last part of the essay. There, after stating that Friedlich II “himself enlightened, does not himself fear shadows,” Kant suggests or demands “a high degree of civic freedom.”

A prince who does not find it unworthy of himself to say that he regards it as a *duty* to prescribe nothing to men regarding religious matters but rather to allow them full freedom in this area [i.e., religion]—and who

1. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” trans. James Schmidt, in *What Is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58.

2. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

thus declines the haughty title of “tolerant”—is himself enlightened and deserves to be esteemed by the grateful world and by posterity as the first, with regard to government, who freed mankind from immaturity and left them free to use of their own reason in everything that is a matter of conscience.³

But only a ruler who, himself enlightened, does not himself fear shadows, and at the same time has at hand a large, well-disciplined army as a guarantee of public peace, can say what a republic cannot dare: *argue, as much as you want and about whatever you want, only obey!*⁴

As one can see, Kant does not pose the essential question of what Enlightenment is. Instead, he asks, “What type of institution (or rule) makes Enlightenment possible?” or “How will it be possible?” His reflection on Enlightenment is not so much essential as it is political. It is true that Kant initially defines Enlightenment as “mankind’s exit from immaturity,” but later, he develops the discussion on “freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters” to make Enlightenment possible. In other words, Kant posed the question on the political, and did not develop the essentialist discussion on Enlightenment and its foundation—“reason.”

2. Enlightenment and History: Archeology and Genealogy of Subject in Foucault’s “What Is Enlightenment?”

I do not intend to criticize the Kantian argument. Rather, his discussion tells us that Enlightenment inevitably has to do with some form of rule or government. Although the essential definition—“Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from his self-incurred immaturity”—is given, Kant’s Enlightenment is never unrelated to the political. In a sense, Kant’s text on Enlightenment is important from this perspective.

Michel Foucault often directs his attention to Kant’s rather small works and

3. *Ibid.*, 62.

4. *Ibid.*, 63.

draws unknown aspects from them. In his own “What Is Enlightenment?” (1984), he develops an exceptional way of reading Kantian texts.

Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” was published as an article in *Berlinische Monatsschrift* and has been widely read, but it has not usually been regarded as a text that is closely related to his masterpieces under the rubric of “critical philosophy.” “Nevertheless,” Foucault writes, “notwithstanding its circumstantial nature, and without intending to give it an exaggerated place in Kant’s work, I believe that it is necessary to stress the connection that exists between this brief article and the three *Critiques*.”⁵

The reason is as follows: Enlightenment is, according to Kant, “the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use.” And “critique” by Kant has its role of defining “the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped.” So, the critique is needed precisely at this moment.⁶

This clarifies the essential connection between Enlightenment and critique in Kant. Furthermore, Foucault focuses on the relationship between Enlightenment and other texts by Kant on history. Most of them intend to “define the internal teleology of time and the point toward which history of humanity is moving.” On the other hand, “the analysis of Enlightenment, defining this history as humanity’s passage to its adult status, situates contemporary reality with respect to the overall movement and its basic direction.” As mentioned above, Foucault locates Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” “at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history.” By these considerations, Foucault recognizes a particular attitude toward the time, or “today” in Kant, and calls it “the attitude of modernity.”⁷ Then, beginning with an analysis of Kant, he sums up his point as follows:

I have been seeking, on the one hand, to emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical interrogation—one that simultaneously problematizes man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being,

5. Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 37.

6. *Ibid.*, 38.

7. *Ibid.*

and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject—is rooted in the Enlightenment. On the other hand, I have been seeking to stress that the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is (...) the permanent reactivation of an attitude—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.⁸

According to Foucault, Enlightenment is “defined as a certain manner of philosophizing.” However, it does not mean that one has to be “for” or “against” Enlightenment (he calls such an alternative the “blackmail” of the Enlightenment); rather, “we must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment.” Certainly, in arguing these points, Foucault points out, without a slip, the fact that Enlightenment itself was a historical event that appeared in the process of the development of European society. In this perspective, Foucault regards Enlightenment as a critical principle against “Humanism” that is often carelessly identified with Enlightenment. In other words, he contrasts Humanism and Enlightenment; one incessantly appears to be dependent on some principles, and the other is the principle of “a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy.”⁹

It is remarkable that, in paraphrasing it as a “historical ontology of ourselves,” Foucault calls it “genealogical” in its end and “archeological” in its method. These are keywords in Foucault that are frequently used in *History of Madness* (1961) to *The History of Sexuality* (1976–84). I sum up his reading of Kant as follows: Foucault, on reading Kant, interprets Kantian “critique” as genealogical and archeological, and not as transcendental and metaphysical as is usually understood. The “critique” that Foucault poses is no longer “practiced in search of formal structures with universal value,” but “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.”¹⁰

Let us return to the famous proposition that “Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from his self-incurred immaturity.” Foucault, by focusing on

8. *Ibid.*, 42.

9. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

10. *Ibid.*, 46.

the definition of Enlightenment as an “exit” (*Ausgang*) in this proposition, identifies an attitude that Kant has toward the “present”—it searches for a difference in “today” with respect to “yesterday.” Furthermore, with this presupposition, he points out that this “exit from immaturity” is dependent on political and historical conditions.

As mentioned above, politics and history are at the center of Kant’s and Foucault’s arguments concerning Enlightenment. However, it should be reinforced that this is not the weak point in their arguments.

But why is this the case? The reason can be found only if you compare them with certain essentialist discussants on Enlightenment. For example, Tzvetan Todorov, who regards Enlightenment as a progressive movement, often makes it an empty slogan. He says, “It is through criticism that we remain faithful and put its [Enlightenment’s] teaching into practice.”¹¹ He also states, “Asked if we were already living ‘in an enlightened age’, Kant wrote, ‘the answer is No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment.’ This would be the vocation of our species: to pick up the task of enlightenment with each new day, knowing that it is interminable.”¹² It is difficult to criticize his prudent view on Enlightenment, as long as we consider it a sort of slogan. However, one can perceive no details to see for reflecting on Enlightenment. That is, if one essentially asks the question “What is (the essence of) Enlightenment?” it sometimes turns out to be an empty slogan, as Todorov has stated. So, what is important is not to reduce the question of “What is Enlightenment?” into the propositional answer like “Enlightenment is X,” but to situate it in the dynamics of politics and history as Kant and Foucault did.

3. Enlightenment and Reason: Plurality of Reason in Derrida’s “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come”

The approach to Enlightenment in Kant’s work involves reflecting on it in relation to politics, and in Foucault’s work, to history. In both cases,

11. Tzvetan Todorov, *In Defence of the Enlightenment*, trans. Gila Walker (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 23.

12. *Ibid.*, 151.

Enlightenment can be examined in its own context. Incidentally, as noted above, we are confronted with questions on reason in any attempt to *radically* reflect on Enlightenment. Kant and Foucault did not pose this type of question in the forgoing arguments. We usually discuss Enlightenment on the assumption that it is based on reason. So, if one likes to radically reflect on Enlightenment, then reason itself is to be examined.

There are quite a few well-known examples of works that criticized reason, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). Moreover, it would be safe to state that it has been a general stance on Enlightenment to criticize the violence of reason (or civilization) with Enlightenment as its embodiment. Although this type of argument is too general to be discussed here, it could be summarized as follows: the attitude like that of Adorno and Horkheimer is, by revealing the violent aspect of Western "reason" forced on the non-Western world, to reflect upon it critically.

However, positions like that might be too hasty in abandoning and burying the concept of Enlightenment. If Enlightenment has been brought about by the violence of reason, then it becomes important to examine the limit of reason itself carefully. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will introduce some texts of Jacques Derrida where the subject of Enlightenment is treated critically. Derrida often questions reason and Enlightenment in reference to Kant. However, his intention is not denying reason and Enlightenment, but "saving the honor of reason" and taking on the heritage of Enlightenment positively. This is why questioning reason and Enlightenment is necessary.

One of Derrida's texts that have discussed Enlightenment in relation to reason is "The 'World' of the Enlightenment to Come" (in *Rogues*, 2003). He writes, "Perhaps on that day, in the daylight of today, in the light of the enlightenment of this day, it would be a matter of saving the honor of reason."¹³ Here, he focuses on reason, which is closely related to "light," or enlightenment (*lumières*).

In the beginning of this text, Derrida shows us the origin of the

13. Jacques Derrida, "The 'World' of the Enlightenment to Come," in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 118–119.

term “reason” (*raison*) in French: reason (or *raison*) is derived from the Latin word ratio, which means “reason or calculation, account, and proposition.”¹⁴ In short, he emphasizes that “reason” in Latin languages inherently means “calculation, account, and proposition” simultaneously. This inherent connection between “reason” and “calculation, account, and proposition” is not self-evident in other languages like German (*Vernunft*) or Japanese (*Risei*). Derrida lets us note that this connection between “reason” and “calculation” is specific to Latin languages. From such a perspective, he defines the “reasonable” as follows: “What is ‘reasonable’ is the reasoned and considered a wager of a transaction between these two apparently irreconcilable exigencies of reason, between calculation and the incalculable.”¹⁵

Second, Derrida points out that there are plural rationalities (“rationality” is also derived from ratio), regardless of its etymology. According to Derrida, we have plural “rationalities,” both historically and geographically. There is no unique rationality, but “each of these [*i.e.*, rationalities] has its own ontological ‘region,’ its own necessity, style, axiomatics, institutions, community, and historicity.”¹⁶ Rationality, which is often considered universal, is actually not unique and invariable. We use the word “rationality” only to mean rationality that is based on certain “necessity, style, axiomatics, institutions, community, and historicity.” Thus, it inevitably varies with time or place. This also applies to “science” that is often defined to have falsifiability. By enumerating “the natural or life sciences, the human sciences, the social sciences,” and “politolgy, psychology, and literary theory” as “sciences,” he positively considers the heterogeneity of plural “rationalities” among them. On those grounds, he encourages us to go against architectonic, homogeneous “reason.”

Derrida consistently emphasizes the etymological and essential plurality inherent in reason and rationality. In other words, he questions “the masterly and mastering authority of architectonics,” despite the following declaration by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Human reason is by nature architectonic.” Furthermore, this will directly lead to the plurality of Enlightenment. Indeed, Derrida says,

14. *Ibid.*, 119.

15. *Ibid.*, 151.

16. *Ibid.*, 120.

Is it (...) in the name of their specificity and their future, their history, and their “enlightenment,” that we must call into question the masterly and mastering authority of architectonics and thus of a certain “world,” that is, the unity of the regulative idea of the world that authorizes that world in advance? ¹⁷

The phrase “regulative idea” is obviously taken from Kant. By criticizing the architectonics of the “world” founded upon the Kantian concept of “regulative idea,” Derrida suggests opening the plurality of “world(s),” “reason(s),” and “enlightenment(s).” This perspective is important in that it presents a possibility of opening the view of a single “world” to a plural one.

4. Voice and Light of Reason: Derrida’s *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy*

Kant finds reason to be unique and architectonic and does not argue about its plurality. This can be distinctly perceived from the perspective of reason in Kant’s philosophical system. For him, reason, or the “regulative idea,” must be unique because it forms the very core of the subject. The enlightened subject—the one who gets the courage to use his/her understanding—will attain maturity by exiting his/her immaturity. Furthermore, this Enlightenment process can only be fully accomplished by a government or rule that allows us to use our reason publicly. However, Kant never questioned the core of Enlightenment—reason. While he wrote on religion within the limits of reason (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 1793), he never discussed Enlightenment within the limits of reason.

Among the many works by Derrida referring to Kant, *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy* (1983) is directly tied to the subject we are currently discussing. In this short book, whose title is derived from Kant’s *On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy*,¹⁸ Derrida intended

17. *Ibid.*, 121.

18. The title of the German to French translation is *D’un ton grand seigneur adopté naguère en philosophie* (Vrin, 1975), and the original text by Derrida is titled *D’un ton apocalyptique*

“to mime in citation, but also to transform into a genre, and then parody, deport, deform the well-known title of a perhaps less well-known pamphlet of Kant.”¹⁹

Kant once criticized the use of “superior tone” in philosophy, because a superior or haughty tone like that of an oracle covers the real voice of reason. However, as Derrida accurately comments, it is not a “tone” in philosophy in the strict sense of the word. Kant mentions “tone,” not “style” or “rhetoric,” in philosophy. However, how can we analyze the “tone” in philosophical writings in spite of the lack of phonetic nature of these writings? To be precise, Kant denounces here “a *manner* of giving oneself airs.”²⁰ Kant finds fault “only with those who give or take themselves for distinguished beings, with the grand air of those pretentious people who elevate their voice, with those who raise the tone in philosophy.”²¹ In other words, what Kant criticizes is not the tone itself but a manner or pretense of *Mystagogues*.

Those whom Kant calls *Mystagogues* pretend to have some secrets, as is perceived in their arrogance. Kant criticizes them because they pronounce a death of philosophy and frighten others with an air of importance.

Why does Kant use the word “tone,” and not “style” or “rhetoric,” in spite of “tone” being fictional? According to Derrida, a tone can be taken from others. “To change voice or mimic the intonation of the other, one must be able to confuse or induce a confusion between two voices, two voices of the other and, necessarily, of the other in oneself.”²² In Kant’s works, especially, what is important is the distinction between the voice of reason and the voice of the oracle.

To further highlight this point, let us review the last part of *On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy*, where in comparing moral law with the “veiled goddess,” Kant asked to himself if the voice of Isis (*i.e.*, moral law) comes from man’s own reason, or from an “Other” who speaks to man

adopté naguère en philosophie (Galilée, 1983).

19. Jacques Derrida, “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 122.

20. *Ibid.*, 123.

21. *Ibid.*, 128–129. Here, I corrected a wrong letter in a word in the English translation (replaced “grant” with “grand”).

22. *Ibid.*, 129.

through it. He concluded, “At bottom we would perhaps do better to rise above and thus spare ourselves research into this matter; since such research is only speculative (...)”²³ Rather, starting with this analogy of moral law with Isis, Kant distinguished between a didactic procedure and the *aesthetic* mode of representation as follows:

But the didactic procedure of bringing the moral law within us into clear concepts according to a logical methodology is the only authentically *philosophical* one, whereas the procedure whereby the law is personified and reason’s moral bidding is made into a veiled Isis (...) is an aesthetic mode of representing precisely the same object; one can doubtless use this mode of representation backward (...), and yet one always runs the danger of falling into an exalting vision [*schwärmerische Vision*], which is the death of all philosophy.²⁴

Mystagogues personifies the moral law that we must follow into a veiled Isis, and confuses the “reason’s voice” by introducing the “aesthetical voice” into it. Kant, on the other hand, criticizes the personification or aesthetic mode of representation, which bears the risk at bringing “exalting vision.” Kant insists, “A logical methodology is the only authentically *philosophical* one,” while personification of moral law is not a *philosophical* methodology but a procedure that runs the danger of leading to the death of all philosophy.

At first glance, it appears that this critique is directed by Kant as a “highly enlightened” philosopher at “pseudo-philosophers” who misuse philosophical discourses. However, do they not share a more involved relationship? Can you not perceive the same attitude in Kant, who judges the aesthetic mode of representation of moral law as “death of all philosophy,” as *Mystagogues*, who pretend to know the secret of philosophy?

It is here that Derrida sets his deconstructive reading. He points out that Kant, too, falls into an apocalyptic discourse like “death of philosophy.” In other words, Kant, just like the *Mystagogues*, lends an urgent tone to his writing with the words “death of all philosophy,” which belongs to

23. Immanuel Kant, “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy,” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Fenves, *op. cit.*, 71.

24. *Ibid.*

an apocalyptic discourse in which he predicts an end. The Kantian discourse, therefore, is not immune to that apocalyptic discourse.

Moreover, it can be said that the Kantian attitude is hyperbolic if compared with the attitude of the *Mystagogues*. For it is in the name of Enlightenment that Kant undertakes to demystify the overlordly tone, and this very attempt to demystify or discover is “apocalyptic” in the true sense of the word. “Apocalypse” (*apokalupsis* in Greek), translated from the Hebraic *gala*, means uncovering, unveiling, or revealing something. In other words, an apocalyptic discourse is based on “light” that uncovers, unveils, or reveals. So, the light of Enlightenment that seeks to demystify and clarify is, in fact, the high point of the apocalypse.

In spite of these readings of Kant, Derrida never proposes to abandon reason or Enlightenment itself. He repeatedly emphasizes that we should inherit the project of Enlightenment today. What is necessary is not to abandon it but to become the heirs of enlightenment. Derrida’s argument is consistent in that it advocates the succession of *Lumières* (light/enlightenment). He writes:

There is light, and there are lights, the lights of reason or of *logos*, that are not, for all that, some other thing. And it is in the name of an *Aufklärung* that Kant, for example, undertakes to demystify the overlordly tone. In the light of today we cannot not have become the heirs of these *Lumières*. We cannot and we must not—this is a law and a destiny—forgo the *Aufklärung* (...) ²⁵

Derrida emphasizes the plurality of “lights,” just as he proposes the plurality of “reason” in “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come.” As light is not unique but plural, some of them may be mad.

Clarity is necessary (...) Yes. But there is a light, and there are lights, daylight, and also the madness of the day [*la folie du jour*].”²⁶

As is connoted in the expression “madness of the day” (*la folie du jour*,

25. Jacques Derrida, 1993, 148.

26. *Ibid.*, 147.

Maurice Blanchot), madness can be found in the clarity brought about by *Lumières* (Enlightenment, *Aufklärung*). As we have seen, while Kant did not question the stability of reason, Derrida undertakes to point out the possibility of the fall of reason. By deconstructing the distinction between the voice of reason and of exaltation in Kant, Derrida *reveals* the Western apocalyptic genealogy from Ancient to Enlightenment.

And I shall now start again from this fact: (...) the West has been dominated by a powerful program that was also an untransgressible contract among discourses of the end.²⁷

By taking Kant as an example, Derrida situates Enlightenment in the apocalyptic lineage, that is, the tradition to uncover the covered, of “light” in the West. There is no opposition between apocalypse and Enlightenment, but instead a continuity between them. However, it should be repeated that Derrida does not intend to abandon Enlightenment itself. Rather, we cannot and should not give it up.

5. Rediscovering Reason and Enlightenment Today: Derrida’s *Faith and Knowledge*

Let us suppose that there is continuity and not discontinuity between apocalypse and Enlightenment; further, there is a law or destiny for us to inherit the latter today. However, what does it mean to “inherit Enlightenment” or to “save the honor of reason” today? If we are a part of the cycle of “light,” from apocalypse to Enlightenment, what does it mean in concrete terms—as Derrida frequently emphasizes in italics or quotations—“today”?

Finally, concerning this point, let us move to *Faith and Knowledge* (1996). The main subject of this book is “religion,” generally considered the antithesis of Enlightenment. Derrida sometimes refers to Enlightenment while talking about religion.

²⁷. *Ibid.*, 145.

Everywhere light dictates that which even yesterday was naïvely construed to be pure of all religion or even opposed to it and whose future must today be rethought (*Aufklärung*, *Lumières*, Enlightenment, *Illuminismo*).²⁸

Here, too, Derrida urges us to reconsider Enlightenment. Enlightenment was, as Derrida says, construed—perhaps until now—to be pure of, or even opposed to, religion. Then, it is today that we have to think about its future. However, what is the “future” of Enlightenment?

Just as he suggested in the continuity between apocalypse and Enlightenment in *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone*, Derrida undertakes to demonstrate that religion and Enlightenment have the same source in *Faith and Knowledge*. Why is this? This is because religion, in general, has been conducted by “light” together with “God.” In particular, revealed religion is originally connected to the light that reveals people, which is the same as the light of Enlightenment. From this perspective, what has occurred in the modernization of the West was not the demystification of religion but the hyperbolization of the “light” of religion by Enlightenment, which is more dependent on, or closer to, the “light” than revealed religion.

However, this is just a retrospective view on Enlightenment. We need to ask again how one perceives the relationship between Enlightenment and religion *today*. Derrida goes on to say that reason, through which Enlightenment is developed, also has the same source as religion:

I also told myself, silently, that one would blind oneself to the phenomenon called “of religion” or of the “return of the religious” *today* if one continued to oppose so naïvely Reason *and* Religion, Critique or Science *and* Religion, technoscientific Modernity *and* Religion.²⁹

(...) perhaps we might be able to try to “understand” how the imperturbable and interminable development of critical and technoscientific

28. Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), 46.

29. *Ibid.*, 65.

reason, far from opposing religion, bears, supports and supposes it. It would be necessary to demonstrate, which would not be simple, that religion and reason have the same source. (We associate here reason with philosophy and with science as technoscience, as critical history of the production of knowledge, of knowledge as production, know-how and intervention at a distance, tele-technoscience that is always high-performance and performative by essence, etc.) Religion and reason develop in tandem, drawing from this common resource: the testimonial pledge of every performative (...) ³⁰

Why can one state that reason and religion, and technoscience and religion, are not opposed to each other but rather have a common source? This is because both are grounded in “testimony” and “faith.” According to Derrida, both reason and religion have developed from “the testimonial pledge of every performative.” Testimony and faith cannot be thought to be a privileged possession of religion or the opposite of the production of reason because we can never address one without the other. The faith of a testimony or a “performative of promising” is indispensable for any social bond. Without it,

(...) there would neither be “social bond” nor address of the other, nor any performativity in general: neither convention, nor institution, nor constitution, nor sovereign state, nor law, nor above all, here, that structural performativity of the productive performance that binds from its very inception the knowledge of the scientific community to doing, and science to technics.³¹

Is this view convincing enough? Derrida repeatedly refers to technoscience here. For, among productions of so-called reason, it can bring out most vividly the testimony and faith on which we are unconsciously depending everyday.

For example, Derrida suggests that the extent to which today’s machines work, which is the typical production of reason, is similar to magic. He

30. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

31. *Ibid.*, 80.

illustrates the transition of relationship between scientific incompetence and manipulatory competence. In recent past, soldiers did not always know how their firearms functioned, although they knew how to use them; furthermore, all the drivers of automobiles or travelers in a train did not always know how the machines work, although they relied on them for their mobility. However, Derrida says that these examples of relative scientific incompetence are not comparable with today's incompetencies. This is because most of us cannot provide to children a scientific explanation about how telephones function, and the same is true of television, fax, and computer. We use them only by relying on the "testimony" and "faith" that they work well, that is, on their performativity. So, seen from the outside, the work of machines is hardly distinguishable from a magical experience.

Space of such technical experience tends to become more animistic, magical, mystical. (...) Never in the history of humanity, it would seem, has the disproportion between scientific incompetence and manipulatory competence been as serious. It is not even measurable any longer with respect to machines that are used everyday, with a mastery that is taken for granted and whose proximity is ever closer, more interior, more domestic.³²

What "saving the honor of reason" *today* means is to reflect accurately on this scientific rationality, which has the same source as religion. Technoscience as a high production of reason, which we considerably depend on, has its roots in "testimony" and "faith," which is sometimes just naïvely thought to be religious. However, as Derrida emphasizes, we should not abandon but inherit this development of reason, which has been continuously reasoned or calculated. Furthermore, without opposing it with religious faith, we should closely examine today's view on reason. The so-called Enlightenment is no longer thought to depend simply on reason in common sense; it will become the work of self-examination without presupposed reason. The shift will occur from presupposing (singular and definite) "the reason" to inventing the possibility of (plural and

32. *Ibid.*, 91–92.

indefinite) “reasons.” Through such a redefinition or deconstruction of reason, Enlightenment will truly be called a “critique” in the Kantian sense or a “historical investigation of ourselves,” as Foucault defines it.