

Foucault and Theology: Interrogating the Subject

1. Relevance

This project is directed towards the program. It aims to further the research field of philosophical theology and the academic interpretation of religion by determining the consequences of the thought of Michel Foucault for that subject.

2. The research

For objectives and summary, cf. the electronic application.

2.1. Background and State of the Art

The work of French philosopher-historian Michel Foucault stands at a turning point in twentieth century thought. Emblematic of the structuralism whose rejection defined continental philosophy at the end of the century, he is also the explicit inspiration of central critical thinkers such as Deleuze and Agamben. At the same time, his interaction with earlier anthropology, religious history, phenomenology, analytic philosophy and history of science give his academic interventions a unique character as the convergence of the length and breadth of previous thought.

There is a series of points at which Foucault's work comes into contact with Christian thought and practice: the influence of Dumézil on his histories; the mediaeval and renaissance background to his histories of the classical age; the monastic disciplines and pastoral power that underlie his accounts of secular and scientific discipline; the asceticism produced at the conclusion of antiquity. And indeed, these contact points have been the object of study for those who have written on Foucault and Religion in the past (e.g. Behr, 1993; Bernauer, 2002; Caputo, 2004[1993]; Carrette, 2000; Clark, 1988; Davidson, 1994; McGushin, 2007; Moxnes, 2003; Nehamas, 1998).

The analysis of these contact points can, however, also function as ways into the central concerns of Foucault's work. The transformation of asceticism from a practice of freedom – albeit an ambiguous one – in antiquity into a technique for normalising deviancy in disciplinary institutions in modernity takes place in its Christian deployment. So a specific discernment of what is wrong with asceticism and discipline will require a study of that Christian transformation.

Such an analysis will further elaborate Foucault's own worldview. Those who have assumed that all power is evil, and that all use of the technologies that Foucault unveils is also evil, have not given due consideration to criticism of his work. Foucault's studies act as little panoptica for the material he works on. His strategy is based on a mimetic violence against what he critiques. And Foucault accepts this criticism. Power is not evil for Foucault (Foucault, 2000[1984]: 298). Technologies of discipline are not evil, just dangerous. It may be perfectly legitimate for someone in authority to use power and discipline to good effect.

These considerations beg the question: what is evil for Foucault? The answer that appears from a broad reading of his work is that nothing is evil, but everything is dangerous. If this is the basic view of the world espoused in his work, then his thought bears a remarkable similarity to the Christian-platonic view of evil as *privatio boni*. What is evil in the Christian tradition? Nothing is evil, but everything may become so, everything may decay and fail to fulfil its being.

There are a series of factors that make such a study more viable now than it would have been ten years ago.

Firstly, the central texts for some of Foucault's later works have been made available. In addition to the collection of articles, interviews and addresses in *Dits et Écrits*, the past years have seen the publication of transcripts (based on recordings and corrected by reference to Foucault's own notes) of his lectures at the Collège de France. Particularly relevant in this respect is the course *Security, Territory, and Population* (Foucault, 2007[2004]), which founds Foucault's analysis of "Pastoral Power" (Foucault, 1979). Pastoral Power combines the concerns of loyalty and city salvation with the domain of the care of the self as practised in personal asceticism. This transferral of religious techniques at the birth of secular government is a key moment in Foucault's analyses, and drives much of the agenda of his later work.

Secondly, the governmentality school, building on texts connected specifically with the above mentioned course, has developed a much more sophisticated and exegetically thoroughgoing version of Foucauldian criticism that not only enlightens the Foucault corpus, but also convincingly applies its main tenets – concerning contemporary government’s concern with security, the political significance of self-realisation, the distribution of techniques of conduct, and the coincidence of personal freedom with political intervention – to contemporary phenomena (Barry et al., 1996; Burchell et al., 1991). Particular focuses of treatment have been pedagogical theory, the practice of insurance, and what Nikolas Rose calls the ‘psy-disciplines’ (Rose, 1990). The energy and productivity this school of thought has brought to Foucault studies is equalled only by the extent to which it has ignored the grammar of the theological technology on which it crucially relies.

Thirdly, the work of Italian philosopher Agamben, whilst deserving independent treatment, has explicitly taken its cue from Foucault’s later work in order to investigate the religious technology at the roots of contemporary sovereignty. Agamben’s central thesis concerning the *homo sacer* – whose death can be counted as neither murder nor sacrifice – is concerned with how modern administrative sovereignty appeals to the conduct of humanity as a species (Agamben, 1998[1995]). Its object is not political life, but ‘bare life.’ Foucault had taken this direction in his analyses of the asceticism of late antiquity, cynicism, and early monasticism in his 1984 course (Foucault, 2009). Until recently, Agamben’s analyses had been notable for their ignoring Christian asceticism. With the 2007 publication of *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell’economia e del governo* (Agamben, 2007), however, this silence has been broken, and Agamben’s reading of the Christian tradition’s production of administrative government can finally be read alongside Foucault’s own hints on the theme (I have benefited from excellent notes on this work: Kotsko, 2008a).

There is in other words good reason to stop dancing around the theme of Foucault and Theology by examining asides, *ad hoc* comments, and occasional analyses in his writings, and address the relevance of his central concerns for Christian Theology. What is the problem of obedience – the specific practice Foucault thinks lies at the roots of Christianity’s negative asceticism – in the Christian tradition? What is the grammar of humility and original sin such that they both facilitate personal transformation and restrict free speech? How can fearless speech be dangerously allied to a normalising and diagnosing listener? How can personal transformation be valued without falling into the traps of either a demanding universalism or an ungenerous aristocracy?

2.2. Problem, hypothesis, method

This project will therefore grapple with the above themes in the context of the overall Foucauldian program. Asceticism will be examined both in its ancient context and its modern application; free speech will be discussed both in terms of a necessity of ancient democracy and ethics and in its function as a normative rule for citizen practice; the problematisation of the self will find its roots in ancient asceticism and be assessed as a foundation of modern techniques of psychology and its cognate disciplines. The approach taken can be characterised as sympathetic criticism. Rather than setting up Foucault’s thought as a straw man for Christian Theology on the one hand, or blindly adhering to his theses against all critics on the other, the project will explore the ways in which Foucault’s program and Christian Theology enlighten each other, and test the validity of criticism in both domains. To the extent that later work has undermined his theses, we shall assess how much damage this does to the work as a whole. To the extent that various readings of his work have produced alternative lines of inquiry within the research area defined here, these will be followed.

Since Foucault himself was both an analyst and a subtle theoretician, it will be apt to adopt his own methods in re-reading the texts and practices with which his work was concerned. This method owes a great deal to Dumézil in the way in which it reads cultural and religious practice and expression as logically structured discourses. More specifically, Foucault’s work attempts to identify and reconstruct the grammars and assumptions of a period by examining the ways in which words and practices work and are used. Only then can the classic works of reflection be addressed and revealed for what they are: simple realisations of particular moves that were entirely possible within a

discourse, reflections of historical discontinuity that had already taken place, or a poetic wrenching of language from its assumptions (what Bernauer calls ‘force of flight’ - Bernauer, 1990).

This approach will obviously have to be flexible in view of what we said above concerning criticism. All opposition to Foucault’s work may be taken into consideration, and if that attack can be shown to be detrimental to his method, then it may no longer be used with academic rigour.

The central research question will therefore be:

Is Foucault’s account of the role of Christianity in European history and the prehistory of the modern state coherent and justified, and what consequences does it have for our understanding of asceticism, truth-telling, universalism and secularism?

In order to delimit the themes, choice of material, and approaches, I include a rough description of the argument’s progress in what follows.

I: Ascetic Obedience

Firstly, the question of obedience. Foucault traces the roots of modern governmentality to sixteenth and seventeenth century concerns about sedition and revolt (Foucault, 2007[2004]: 15th March). Obedience is the passive state desired by the state administrator (and Foucault’s examples here are Francis Bacon and Niccolo Machiavelli).

Foucault traces the state of absolute obedience back to a practice central to his analysis of the birth of Christian monasticism (Foucault, 1979, 2007[2004]: 22nd February). Amongst the early Christian ascetics, obedience was a particular technique used to undermine vainglory and question one’s own moral choice. A monk or nun would do everything their companion asked of them – even absurd tasks – as part of this particular discipline.

The major problem Foucault has with this practice is twofold: firstly, it is part of the Christian practice of pastoral power, which united the practices of mortification with the theme of urban civilisation: you have to be ascetic in order to save us all. This demonic unification was to give us modern states (Foucault, 1979). Secondly, absolute obedience is directly contradictory to that freedom of speech produced by Christian confidence in a merciful God, so that Foucault’s sketch of Christian history involves a perpetual altercation between the ascetic pole, with its scepticism regarding the self and concept of original sin, and the fearless speech pole, with its mystical confidence and tendency to revolution (Foucault, 2009: 28th March).

Foucault’s analysis, whilst no doubt telling as regards the appropriation of religious techniques in modern government (on which he was followed by, amongst others, Certeau, 1988[1975]), has a number of historical weaknesses in its account of early Christian asceticism.

It is no major criticism of Foucault that his work on early Christian asceticism was sketchy: he admitted as much in his final lecture (and he was notoriously cagy about the publication of his work – the lecture publications may not have met with his approval). His thesis concerning obedience is however problematic on the following points:

it is blind to the distinction between coenobitic and anchoritic monasticism in antiquity. It is primarily in the former that obedience to community leaders and superiors is valued (e.g. in Basilus, 1950a, b: §2), whereas the practice of extreme obedience is exemplified in the latter (e.g. in 1993-2005: Book XIV).

it does not account for the ambiguity of obedience in antiquity as a factor that both subjects the monk or nun to the will of another and that allows them to commit wildly abnormal and exotic acts such as wrestling with hyenas, watering dead sticks in the desert, and persisting in distorted interpretation at the behest of one’s companion. This kind of behaviour can hardly be allied to programs of normalisation.

rather more seriously, it begs the question of the grammar of fearless speech. Whilst Cynic philosophers are attributed an unambiguous status as proponents of fearless speech, Christian ascetics with their problematisation of the subject are presented as opponents to it. However, fearless speakers in antiquity bring everyone’s life into question. They espouse a militancy of universal humili-

ation, where everyone must be forced to see their lives as absurd and start to seek the ‘other life’ (Foucault, 2009: 21st March).

Therefore, one clear challenge for contemporary Foucault studies is to compare the two forms of militancy – Cynicism and monasticism – to which he appeared to have such divergent attitudes, and to ascertain what specifically is the nature of this philosophical disaster of mortification in Foucault’s account. How does mortification differ from the revolutionary challenge to another life? Why is the Cynic’s problematisation of life not as demonic as the monk’s?

In order to answer this question, the project will both have to ascertain the role of the problematisation of life in Foucault’s work – and here the work of Agamben in furthering the enquiry will be relevant – and elaborate the early Christian ascetic approach to humility. The first task will involve a study of life and sovereignty in the writings from the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* onwards (Foucault, 1990[1976]). The second task will require an account of the use and foundations of Christian humility in placing the self between vainglory and despair, between transformation and forgiveness.

2: *Fearless Speech*

This enquiry is all the more important in light of the ambiguity of fearless speech for Foucault. Although some writers of Foucauldian ethics appeal to fearless speech as the unambiguous ideal – even the religious ideal (Bernauer, 2002) – of his critical thought, recent publications serve to counter that interpretation. The two attitudes towards fearless speech in Foucault’s corpus will open up the problem of dangerous thought in his work.

Foucault arrived at the study of the ethic of fearless speech via his investigation of the care of the self. He was curious at the Greek reversed ethics: not concerned with a set of rules governing one’s conduct towards others and thereby one’s self control, but rather characterised by a set of rules governing the mastery of the self, and thereby generating an attitude and treatment of other people.

The requirement that one speak the truth concerning oneself arises out of this care of the self. It is only by taking control of one’s own truth and discourse that one may cultivate one’s own freedom. Political activity may arise out of this care of the self. So Alcibiades learns to take care of himself in order to achieve political greatness; Socrates appeals to people to take care of themselves as an act of service to the state; much later, Marcus Aurelius will take care of himself in order to be a good person and thereby a good emperor.

Someone who has taken care of themselves – not least by listening to the fearless speech of an ‘other’ (Foucault, 2009: 1st February - the emphasis in the manuscript and original recording implies this other stands in contrast to the ‘other’ of contemporary ethical theory) – will then be able to speak out about goodness and justice in the state. Quite apart from their democratic rights, which gives them a right to speak and vote in their turn, they attain an independence of thought that allows them to speak the truth on specific issues. This independent thought may anger or oppose the government, and endanger the speaker. But it will not be determined by concerns of safety, vanity, or authority. It is the ‘free speech of the governed’ (Foucault, 1988a[1984]: 453).

Speaking fearless truths to another citizen will not necessarily lead to further fearless speech however. Questioning the subject in this way becomes a deeply suspicious act in Foucault’s more modern analyses. Foucault’s account of fearless speech constitutes the prehistory of ‘some famous pairs: the penitent and their confessor, the directee and their spiritual director, the invalid and the psychiatrist, the patient and the psycho-analyst.’ (Foucault, 2009: 9)

Foucault’s animosity to the psychiatric profession has become legendary. Although it is an exaggeration to place him in the anti-psychiatry movement (Foucault, 2000: 115, 2006[2003]: 13, 341-346, 2001[1977]: 377), a great deal of his earliest and last work can be traced to the project of writing the history of the science of mental illness. His criticism of the decay of fearless speech in its problematisation of the subject (as we described above) bears striking resemblance to his reaction to the practice of psychiatry in his own time.

A key instance of this reaction can be found in his televised interview with Noam Chomsky conducted by Fons Elders (Foucault and Chomsky, 1997[1974]). In the middle of the interview, tensions run high, as the interviewer offers Foucault the chance to self-diagnose (a practice that has only become more common since the 1970s). His reaction is significant:

ELDERS: Well, I'm wondering what are the psychological reasons for this...

FOUCAULT: [*Protesting*] Well, you can wonder about it, but I can't help that.

ELDERS: Ah, well.

FOUCAULT: I am not wondering about it.

ELDERS: But what are the objective reasons, in relation to your conception of understanding, of knowledge, of science, for refusing to answer these personal questions?

When there is a problem for you to answer, what are your reasons for making a problem out of a personal question?

FOUCAULT: No, I'm not making a problem out of a personal question, I make of a personal question an absence of a problem. (Foucault and Chomsky, 1997[1974]: 124)

If the questioning of the self is the foundation of both fearless speech and normalising psychiatry, what in Foucault's thought distinguishes them? It is by pressing this question that this project hopes to enlighten both the ethics of fearless speech and modern critical theory of subjectivation.

3: *Universalism*

Foucault's work is remarkably bereft of clear ethical condemnation. He finds the teaching of ideology and ethical values in a University context completely ridiculous (Foucault, 2007[2004]: 11th January). There is, however, at least one point at which he seems to have explicitly condemned the philosophy of late antiquity, and that is concerning its universalism.

It is often thought that Foucault was essentially in favour of Greek thought. Indeed, his eulogy of fearless speech would suggest as much. The situation is, however, a good deal more complicated. He himself explicitly denied that Greek thought was in any way a desirable form of philosophy, and again his reasoning is significant:

Q: ... These Greeks, did you find them admirable?

MF: No.

Q: What did you think of them?

MF: Not very much. They were stymied right away by what seems to me to be the point of contradiction of ancient morality: between on the one hand this obstinate search for a certain style of existence and, on the other, the effort to make it common to everyone, a style that they approached more or less obscurely with Seneca and Epictetus but which would find the possibility of realization only within a religious style. All of Antiquity appears to me to have been a "profound error." (Foucault, 1996[1984]: 466)

The problem, therefore, with the ethics of late antiquity was its aspiration to universality, which was ultimately realised in the Christian religion. In other words, what Badiou would later find appealing with the Christian tradition (Badiou, 2003[1997]), Foucault finds a problem.

There follow two consequences from this. Firstly, we find a principle which underlines Foucault's analysis of pastoral power (above, page 1). It is the universalisation of ascetic ideals that ground the demonic modern state Foucault is analysing in his later work on the police state and governmentality. Secondly, this universalisation is not simply an event of the classical age. Instead, the ascetic ideal common to all is to be found *in nuce* amongst the philosophers of late antiquity.

How does Foucault integrate these insights into his modern analyses? In his published analyses, the problem does not appear in any clear form. The most recent volumes of the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1992b[1984], 1992a[1984]) mainly plot the transition from ancient to late antique philosophy, with all the ethical developments this implies. However, in his statements on the current situation and his own academic values, Foucault embraces the values of self-transformation and almost ascetic vigilance.

The studies that follow, like the others I have done previously, are studies of "history" by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a "historian." Which does not mean that they summarize or synthesize work done by others. Considered from the standpoint of their "pragmatics," they are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently. (Foucault, 1992b[1984]: 9 - cf. also 1988b[1984]: 461)

Whilst forbidding the intellectual to tell anyone what to do, Foucault exhorts himself and them to render themselves ‘permanently capable of self-detachment’ (Foucault, 1988b[1984]: 461) and refers to his change in plans for the *History of Sexuality* as an example of an intellectual doing just that. In other words, he restricts the ethical ideal to one group of people, namely intellectuals.

This restriction in itself – although saving asceticism from universalisation – has its problems. It essentially forbids others from taking part in the ascetic ideal of flexibility and self-transformation. If Foucault is right in thinking these values to be political advantages, then this move would also involve gathering political potency within one particular group of knowledgeable citizens: hardly a just move in the information society.

Given that the early Christian ascetics were intensely concerned with the distribution of the ascetic ideal, we could re-write the Foucauldian story of ascetic universalism so that Christianity delays rather than provokes the common monastic ideal for all citizens. Monks in late antiquity were on the lookout for holy men and women in the city, or other unlikely situations – stories of unlikely saints abound from the first centuries of monasticism. Similarly, the Pelagian controversy in Augustine’s work was an epoch-making discussion of the validity of the non-monastic life and the limited scope of monasticism.

Foucault obviously has interesting contributions to this kind of discussion. In pushing these insights further, the project will engage with the recent analyses of secularism following from Charles Taylor’s seminal work (Taylor, 2007). One task still to be taken up in the light of this particular problem is the comparison of religious practice and religious doctrine (Milbank, 2009: 100). Foucault’s work on the integration of ontology and asceticism in the Platonist heritage (Foucault, 2009: 29th February) may prove to be a crucial step to moving the debate forward.

A further characteristic to this debate has been the undermining of any ‘clear identification of heroes and villains’ (Milbank, 2009: 89). If Christianity is going to take its classic view of evil seriously, then it will do well to take note of Foucault’s parallel claim that ‘everything is dangerous.’ This project will attempt to integrate Foucault’s critical approach with Christian theology of evil in a constructive contribution to contemporary discussion of Liberation Theology:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. (Foucault, 2000[1983]: 256)

2.3. Plan, leadership, organisation and collaboration

Plan

Although the project will be integrated at each point, it will include three main phases (as shown in the progress plan in the e-application):

1. Patristic period: here the main sources for the study of late antiquity will be mapped out and studied with relevance to the three main sections of the project (ascetic obedience, fearless speech, and universalism). These sources will include both practical philosophers of late antiquity (Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, but also the neoplatonists that Foucault did not treat in any depth himself – Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, etc.) and ascetic theologians of the patristic period. For the purposes of this study, focus will be directed towards those most interested in asceticism – Augustine and Cassian in the West, and the Cappadocian Fathers and Desert Fathers in the East. The classic works of hagiography from this period will also be relevant. This period will also be characterised by regular contact with other patristic scholars in Norway, and extensive use of the textual resources of the Oslo libraries.
2. Foucault exegesis and discussion: here my interpretation of Foucault’s work will be carved out. Particular focus will be directed towards the governmentality and asceticism period, from about 1976 onwards. Secondary material will also be studied and systematised. Towards the end of this period, I will check my understanding against unpublished sources kept at the Foucault archives (www.michel-foucault-archives.org/) by making a short visit there. This period will include visitations to the University of Nottingham and the Copenhagen Business school in order to discuss questions of Foucault exegesis and later developments there.

3. Writing, analysis, and presenting: this period will be spent primarily writing and discussing conclusions and further lines of analysis. The networks and interdisciplinary collaborations of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo will provide excellent contexts for the presentation of the project's research findings.

Existing expertise

Foucault's work has been influential in the study of theology in at least two fields. Firstly, the analysis of asceticism and gender determinations in the early church (Moxnes, 2003; Moxnes et al., 2002): Halvor Moxnes has been central in this field, and the research section for the study of the sources and history of Christianity will be an ideal context for the discussion of Foucault's approach to asceticism and the issues it raises (cf. also the forthcoming special edition of the *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* on Foucault and Paul – www.jcrt.org).

Secondly, the analysis of religious-based aid practice in terms of moral discipline. Recent researchers identify proto-religious welfare and charity measures in the light of Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary determination of behaviour. One of the Nordic forerunners in this field has been Trygve Wyller (Wyller, 2009), and his research network and the faculty's research group for the study of religion and ethics in the contemporary age and the recent history of Christianity will be a further natural contact point for discussion of the significance of Foucault's work for Theology.

International and Global Perspectives

The field of philosophical theology has grown enormously in the past fifteen years, and not simply because of the highly discussed 'return of religion.' Since central continental philosophers have started turning their gaze towards European religion as being too important to leave to the religious (Agamben, 2005[2000]; Badiou, 2003[1997]; Žižek, 2000), the interaction has become a lively exchange.

Central moments of that exchange have been a number of high quality interrogations of key philosophers by theologians (cf. for example the Continuum "Philosophy and Theology" series and the "Interventions: Very Critical Introductions" series edited at the Centre of Theology and Philosophy, Nottingham, and published with Eerdmans). Some of these volumes have essentially argued that these philosophers can only be coherent if they abandon their atheism (particularly those coming from the Radical Orthodox wing of theology); some essentially defend 'their' philosopher from all criticism and make them amenable to the field of theology. There is, however, a keen need for sympathetic accounts of the interactions between philosophers and theologians that do not shy from criticism of either end of their subject matter. This project addresses this need, and joins a number of other young scholars that are attempting to do so (e.g. Kotsko, 2008b). The centre of theology and philosophy at the University of Nottingham (<http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/>) is also a focal point for those who share that felt need.

Research context

The Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo was established as the first faculty at the Royal Frederick University in Christiania (later Oslo). The faculty has, as the only Theological faculty at a Norwegian university, a significant responsibility to society in relation to teaching, research, and communication. The faculty is often used as an expert reference by central authorities.

The faculty has been a traditional Evangelical Lutheran faculty with strong links to the Church of Norway, but in its meeting with the postmodern and globalisation it is in the process of being transformed into a Faculty of Theology for the new millennium.

The faculty has on average around 500 students and 18 permanent academic employees, 30 doctoral, post-doctoral, and other research fellows, and 10 administrative employees.

The faculty also has an administrative team devoted to the running of research projects. It has a good track record of successful bids for funding from the Norwegian Research Council, a series of high quality publications and research projects, and regularly receives visits from leading scholars in its field.

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham is officially ranked as one of the best research destinations in the UK. Home to the above mentioned Centre of Theology and Philosophy, it holds biennial conferences with leading researchers (cf. <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/Rome2008/>). It has a particularly strong team in the Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology, including world-renowned Deleuze expert Philip Goodchild and leading theologian John Milbank.

Copenhagen Business School is a higher education institution in Denmark that produces leading research in a number of research fields. It is particularly qualified in the area of Foucault Studies, hosting as it does the international journal *Foucault Studies*

(http://rauli.cbs.dk/foucault_splash.html).

Candidate Qualifications

Andrew Thomas attained his masters degree at the University of Durham and his doctorate at the University of Nottingham. He has published articles in the study of religious practice, critical examinations of philosophical theory and practice, and postcolonial theory. His doctoral research analysed the emergence of ‘holy fools’ in the Christian tradition, and included extensive analysis of asceticism and negative theology, not least that described in the Greek texts of the church of late antiquity. He has participated in patristic networks and has administratively managed a series of research projects at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. A fuller CV is attached to the electronic application.

2.4. Budget

The Norwegian Research Council’s own rates have been followed for the three year post-doc project and 12 months of overseas fellowship with family in Nottingham and Copenhagen respectively.

3. Perspectives and Strategic Base

3.1. Strategic base

The University of Oslo has made the study of religion one of its seven strategic priorities. The research program Religion in Pluralistic Societies (PluRel) is its inter-faculty program in the subject. Its central focus is to strengthen research on religion, society, and the interaction between the two. PluRel aims first at developing the apprehension of religion and piety, and secondly at contributing to answering to the needs for knowledge that arise when society must face challenges of habitual values. About one hundred researchers from six different university faculties and one university museum participate in the program.

Through interdisciplinary cooperation the program aims to render the University of Oslo visible as a national and Nordic nodal point in this field, and to enhance UiO research on an international level. The program is coordinated by Prof. Terje Stordalen and hosted by the Faculty of Theology.

The study of Foucault’s interaction with theology forms a natural part of this program and will benefit from its inter-disciplinary resources and approach.

3.3. Environmental perspectives

It is not anticipated that the research will produce results relevant to environmental perspectives except for insights into the issue of how humans transform their own way of life and behaviour (For more on how this is a vital task in the current environmental crisis, cf. Goodchild, 2002).

3.4. Ethical Aspects

It is not anticipated that the project will involve empirical studies of particular human beings or animals. Since the aim of the research is to understand freedom and self-transformation in the problematic context of disciplinary politics, it is not anticipated that it will contribute to increased control and manipulation of individuals. The project leader will, however, submit to the judgement of any ethical committees considered necessary.

3.5. Gender equality and perspective

Foucault’s work has had significant influence on the gender studies in the past decades, and this project will endeavour to keep this perspective alive in its studies of asceticism in late antiquity and

government in modernity. Gender is one of the key features that need negotiation in order to think differently in Foucault's system, and so it will function well as a test case for the ascetic production of truth and ways of life in theology and criticism.

4. Communication with stakeholders and dissemination

4.1 Communication with stakeholders

The most relevant stakeholders in this kind of project are the faith communities involved in the study of Christian Theology. However, there has also been increasing interest in the nature and function of secularism in recent years, so that a wider audience for this project may be envisaged.

The Faculty of Theology has institutional access to the Church of Norway and other faith communities. It has also recently paved the way for public discussion of secularism. There is no reason to believe that it will relinquish this function in the near future.

4.2. Dissemination

For publication place, see the electronic application. In addition to academic publishing, it is anticipated that the researcher will engage in public debate and accessible publishing in all the channels available: the University's press apparatus; newspaper features; public lectures and addresses.

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