

Article Type : Research Article
Date Received : 08.11.2024
Date Accepted : 26.04.2025



<https://doi.org/10.29029/busbed.1581554>

THE CRITICISM OF SECULAR CRITICISM

Ahmet KAYINTU¹

ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between secularism and literary criticism. When viewed from the perspective of academic and literary traditions in the West, it is easy to see that secularism, which has left almost no area untouched by its dominance, continues to maintain the same dominant attitude when it comes to literary criticism. This situation leads to the interpretation of works, especially when it concerns the subject of faith, sterilization and even incomprehension of universe of meaning of a literary work. Furthermore, the problems, misconceptions and limitations within secularism also show that this structure of thought needs to be enriched by including religious and spiritual criticism.

Keywords: Secularism, Religion, Criticism, Theory, Literature

¹ Doç. Dr., Bingöl Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, akayintu@bingol.edu.tr <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6539-0028>

Makalenin Türü : Araştırma Makalesi
Geliş Tarihi : 08.11.2024
Kabul Tarihi : 26.04.2025



<https://doi.org/10.29029/busbed.1581554>

SEKÜLER ELEŞTİRİNİN ELEŞTİRİSİ

Ahmet KAYINTU¹

ÖZ

Bu makale, sekülerizm ve edebi eleştiri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Batı'daki akademik ve edebi gelenekler açısından bakıldığında, hemen hemen hiçbir alanı etkisi dışında bırakmayan sekülerizmin, edebi eleştiri söz konusu olduğunda da aynı baskın tavrı sürdürmeye devam ettiği kolayca görülmektedir. Bu durum, özellikle inanç konusunu ele alan eserlerin yorumlanmasında, edebi bir eserin anlam evreninin sterilize edilmesine ve hatta anlaşılabilir hale gelmesine yol açmaktadır. Ayrıca, sekülerizmin kendi içindeki sorunlar, yanlış anlamalar ve sınırlamalar, bu düşünce yapısının dini ve manevi eleştiriye içerecek şekilde zenginleştirilmesi gerektiğini de göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sekülerizm, Din, Eleştiri, Teori, Edebiyat

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Bingöl University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, akayintu@bingol.edu.tr <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6539-0028>

1. INTRODUCTION

The inevitable rise of modernization since the beginning of the twentieth century, the First and Second World Wars, the attacks on the twin towers in the United States and the subsequent invasions under the guise of fighting terrorism, and Islamophobic practices in the West, have created further gaps between religion and secularism. This divergence, which previously allowed for a lesser degree of relative optimism about reconciliation, has now shifted to a ground between the dominant principles of religion and the worldly demands and principles of secularism, which are now seen by adherents and adherents of both worldviews as the two extreme, irreconcilable and irreconcilable opposites. The incidents taking place in the last twenty years, the attack the World Trade Center known as 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan and some other Islamic countries in the aftermath, resulted in widening the gap as an unbridged one among the supporters and opponents of two world views, that is secularism and religion.

In the aftermath of these global events, the relationship between religion and secularism has increasingly been framed not as a dialogue, but as a conflict. This polarization has been exacerbated by political rhetoric, media portrayals, and public policy decisions that often reduce complex socio-religious dynamics into simplistic binaries. In many Western contexts, religion has come to be associated—often unfairly—with extremism and anti-modern values, while secularism is frequently championed as the only viable path to rational governance and societal progress. Conversely, in several religious-majority societies, secularism is sometimes viewed with suspicion, seen as a foreign imposition that undermines indigenous identity and moral frameworks. As mutual distrust deepens, both spheres become more entrenched in their positions, making meaningful engagement increasingly difficult. Thus, rather than fostering a pluralistic and inclusive public sphere, the entrenchment of these opposing narratives contributes to a climate of fear, alienation, and ideological rigidity.

Western academia is governed by a presumptive secularism. This needs to be critiqued by a social and cultural critique. In all its uses, however, critique carries an implicit assumption of the capacity of reason to uncover error. Given the chain of connotations associated with secularism, the word “secular” can mean being irreligious or anti-religious, as well as being religiously tolerant, humanist, Christian, modern or simply Western. As another extension of secularism, the so-called “secular humanism” is also targeted by the right in American domestic politics and blamed by those who condemn it for destroying the fabric of the family, the moral individual and patriotism (Asad et al., 2009). While the meanings and concepts of secularism and criticism are quite different, the assumption that criticism must be secular in nature and secularism must be critical in the same way needs to be examined. Do these two phenomena really form such an inseparable whole (Asad et al., 2009, p. 10). This presumption of the inherent compatibility between secularism and critique can obscure the historical and political contingencies that have shaped both concepts. Secularism, far from being a neutral or purely rational framework, is embedded within particular power structures and historical narratives, often rooted in colonial encounters and Western epistemologies. It carries with it normative assumptions about what counts as rational, modern, and acceptable in the public sphere, often marginalizing religious forms of knowledge and subjectivity that do not conform to its criteria. Similarly, the act of critique—while positioned as a universal tool of enlightenment and emancipation—is frequently deployed within secular frameworks that dismiss alternative ways of knowing as irrational or regressive. The question, then, is not merely whether critique and secularism are coextensive, but whether this presumed bond limits the possibilities of critique itself. Can critique emerge from within religious traditions or non-secular frameworks without being immediately delegitimized? And what happens to the transformative potential of critique when it is confined to the epistemological boundaries set by secularism?

A close examination of the causes and antecedents of this situation reveals the influence of the Enlightenment's close relationship with secularism. As an assumption of the Enlightenment, the condition that a phenomenon that can be characterized as real, rational and scientific must necessarily be free from prejudice and religion and open to criticism was adopted as a reference point by all European intellectuals almost without exception. This idea, as expressed in Kant's philosophical and systematic approach, culminates in the idea that nothing, including reason, should be exempt from criticism, regardless of whether it is practical or theoretical. In addition, Kant appeals to the method underpinned by critical history and phenomenology, which Hegel utilised to expose the rational essence of Christianity. Therefore the belief is that criticism replaces religious and other baseless authority and prejudice with reason. One of the consequences of this is the attempt to equate criticism with the Enlightenment.

Hence there is a belief that criticism replaces religious and other baseless authority and prejudice with reason. The first consequence is that criticism is equated with the Enlightenment. Secondly, there is a persistent demand for reasons for almost everything in modern life. When this demand is taken as the basis of all understanding, the resulting knowledge, action and relationship with others becomes criticism itself. There is also the belief that criticism replaces opinion or belief with truth and subjectivity with science, which leads us to the assumption that criticism is ultimately secular. One step further is the aim of dethroning God. This trajectory, however, invites its own form of scrutiny. If criticism is elevated to the supreme mode of understanding, it risks becoming a new

orthodoxy—one that, in rejecting all forms of dogma, may itself become dogmatic. The relentless demand for justification can lead to a paralysis of action, where nothing is permitted unless it can be rationally defended. Moreover, in casting aside tradition, faith, and subjective experience, criticism may impoverish the human imagination, reducing the richness of lived reality to what can be measured, reasoned, or proven. Thus, the triumph of criticism over authority does not necessarily result in freedom; it can also lead to alienation. The dethroning of God may not inaugurate an era of clarity, but rather a condition of existential dislocation, where meaning itself becomes elusive. In this sense, the project of criticism contains within it the seeds of its own contradiction.

The critical question here is this: How was it that criticism could take such a conception of religion seriously and consider itself 'secularly' independent by abstracting itself from it, when in Europe religion was seen as a phenomenon, an illusion, with an extremely weak connection to reality? Marx's main objection to the Young Hegelians was that they regarded criticism of religion, especially religious illusion, as the gateway to freedom, even as its guarantee and condition. According to their thinking, the way to be structured and behave in accordance with rational consciousness and thus to act correctly, to be impartial and to get rid of monopoly was to deactivate, suspend or even exclude religion. On the other hand, Marx's attitude differs from theirs. Drawing on Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religion, but transforming it, Marx saw religious consciousness not merely as a mistake, but as a symptom of an unhappy and mentally captive human existence, which recognized its existence not as illusion but as reality. The reality of religious consciousness was a sign of an unfree world, a world that "requires illusion". God is therefore "the illusory sun around which man revolves unless he revolves around himself", something he cannot do until his existence is liberated (Marx, 1978, p. 54).

According to Marx, there was a big difference between criticism of religion as an illusion and criticism of the conditions that produce religious consciousness. Criticism, characterized as fault-finding or error-hunting, marks religion as false, as error; critique, which aims to evaluate the whole of a structure, links religious illusions and the need for them to the specific reality that produces and necessitates religious consciousness. Moreover, critique expresses the desire for a different world in religion, where we are all "equal in God's eyes", where "good people will inherit the earth", or where we have the powers and virtues that we were previously endowed with. Thus, the critique not only sees religion as a hope to endure oppressive conditions and find a way out of them, but also reads religion as implicitly harboring aspirations and longings for humanity's current suffering. Religion as an expression of suffering is also a phenomenon that is a subject of protest. (Marx, 1978, p. 54). Marx attributes criticism the function of a tool for revealing and explaining the nature and order of things and scientifically deciphering all the mysteries concerning man and his environment. In the concept of criticism, Marx thus combines, instead of what he calls "merely theological criticism", the concretely defined apprehension of Truth, the practice of objectivity identified with science, and the realization of the true salvation of religion, true secularism.

This particular legacy from Marx and its path from German critical theory to Habermas ensured the intertwining, indeed the identification, of criticism with secularism in the Western tradition of critical theory. Within this tradition, criticism has, for more than 150 years now, acquired a position of privilege through the illusion of religion, even when religion is not the explicit target of criticism. Thus, criticism has secured a privileged position for over 150 years through the illusion of religion—even when religion is not the explicit object of critique. Modern thought has often aligned criticism with reason and freedom, positioning religion as irrational and oppressive. However, in doing so, it has overlooked the extent to which criticism itself has generated new dogmas. Criticism directed at or mediated through religion has gradually led to the emergence of secular belief systems, effectively replacing religion with alternative regimes of meaning. This reveals that criticism functions not only as a destructive force but also as a constructive one. Moreover, this privileged status has granted criticism a certain dominance within cultural and intellectual spheres, sometimes even rendering it immune to critique. Even today, the symbolic structures once provided by religion continue to resonate subtly in the authority attributed to critical thought. Therefore, the relationship between criticism and religion should not be understood merely in terms of opposition, but rather as a complex and implicit interplay.

In this way, religion and all that is religious and divine is not only explained by non-religious methods and means, rational, concrete and material, real, empirical and scientific, but it also replaces it. Thus the rational, material, real, scientific and human purpose both explains and replaces the religious, ideal, unreal, speculative and divine. This secular critique, and in particular both secularism and the critique itself, as an extremely useful tool in the hands of the West, has always brought with it negative connotations when it comes to religion, especially about Islam. Rather than producing correct, logical, reasoned and convincing analyses, the criticism in question constantly reproduces an opposition between Islam and secularism, or rather secular Christianity, by declaring a victory that has already been declared against Islam and in favor of Christianity, by identifying Islam with totalitarianism, aggression, death and violence, by also taking into account the prejudices inherited from history.

Rather than positioning and understanding the secular as anti-religious, perhaps it is better to think of the concepts and phenomena characterized as secular and religious as interconnected concepts that constitute an important sphere of modern power and governance. Thus, the status of the religious and secular changes according to the

powers and conjunctures of the modern state and the impact of, among other things, expansions and changes in these powers. It is necessary to question the discursive-intellectual dichotomy that lists Christianity, secularism, reason, tolerance, free thought and expression on the one hand, and Islam, fundamentalism, submission, intolerance, restricted thought and expression on the other. Building on this perspective, it becomes crucial to approach the secular and the religious not as mutually exclusive or oppositional categories, but as mutually constitutive domains that are deeply embedded in the apparatuses of modern governance. The shifting boundaries and meanings of the secular and the religious are often shaped by historical contingencies, state interventions, and broader geopolitical dynamics. Within this framework, one must also critically engage with the discursive formations that align the West with secularism, rationality, freedom, and progress, while simultaneously positioning Islam in relation to fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and backwardness. Such binary constructions obscure the complexities and internal diversities of both traditions and reinforce hegemonic narratives that legitimize particular forms of political and cultural dominance.

This requires challenging the conflict between secular criticism and religious censorship: Here secular criticism is associated with freedom, truth and reason, while religion or religious censorship is associated with intolerance, reaction, arbitrary judgment and coercion. In this binary opposition, the existence of the crime of blasphemy in Islamic society suggests to Western ears that there is no freedom of expression. Pope Benedict's 2006 lecture in Regensburg emphasized the idea that there is a clash of civilizations between Christianity, which reconciles Greek reason and faith in the Bible, and Islam, which encourages violence because it does not believe in reason (Benedict, n.d.).

In contrast, the eminent Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of “the unbridgeable gulf between Christianity and Greek philosophy” (Taylor, 2007, Introduction). This is so, however, because of the arrogance of the Western individual, who is supposed to be free from coercion of any kind, including in matters of belief, behavior and other matters. The modern West has set the boundaries of freedom so broadly that it considers the criminalization of blasphemy and sacrilege as a restriction of freedom. Furthermore, secularism rejects the demands of people with religious lifestyles, again on the grounds of freedom. If, as in one branch of Christianity, “the truth will set you free” and freedom is understood as the removal of constraints, then freedom of expression is the first principle of both truth and freedom.

However, if individual belief is considered incomprehensible to any entity other than God, as is the case in some practices of Islam, it is not individual belief that matters, but rather social practices and public behavior. Belief in Islam requires faith or belief in the unseen. The relationship of faith to freedom in Islam is therefore very different from the Christian orbit of blasphemy and freedom of expression. This observation touches on an important distinction between Islam and Christianity in terms of the role of faith, belief, and the interaction between religious beliefs and society. In many branches of Islam, particularly in traditional interpretations, belief is deeply personal and can be seen as known only to God, often emphasizing the internal nature of faith (“iman”) and the unseen elements of belief (such as belief in the afterlife, angels, and God’s will). In this framework, the external manifestation of faith—through social practices, public behavior, and adherence to religious laws—becomes crucial, as it is through these actions that a person demonstrates their faith. In contrast, the Christian tradition has historically had a more explicit focus on individual belief as central to salvation, particularly in Protestant traditions where faith alone (“sola fide”) is a key doctrine. In many Christian societies, debates around blasphemy and freedom of expression have often been more focused on what is said or believed in public discourse, because belief itself, especially when expressed publicly, has historically been seen as an individual right and a matter of personal conscience. This difference leads to varied approaches to the relationship between faith, freedom, and public discourse in both religious traditions. While in Islam, the emphasis on social practices and public behavior might prioritize maintaining religious and moral order, Christianity, particularly in modern Western contexts, may lean more toward the protection of individual beliefs and expressions, even when those beliefs challenge social norms.

It is often claimed that freedom of expression, the most important indicator of criticism, is central to democracy which has its roots in Christianity and is therefore alien to Islam. For example, many Euro-Americans, including Francis Fukuyama, have traced democracy to the Christian doctrine of the “universal dignity of man” to argue that “democracy” is a value unique to Western civilization. There is a widespread conviction that Christian doctrine is open to democracy because freedom finds its full expression in Christianity, which offers man the freedom to choose between right and wrong (Fukuyama, 2006, p. 196).

(Unlike Islam) church and state began as separate entities. However, it should not be forgotten that the Byzantine state church was the arena in which fundamental Christian doctrines were formulated and contested, and that even in the Middle Ages and beyond, the separation between religious and political authority was far from complete and political inequality was generally accepted as legitimate. According to another current trend of thought, the modern concept and practice of democracy can be traced to Christianity but to classical Greece. In pre-Christian Athens there were rudimentary democratic practices, including the concept of equal citizenship and the right to speak freely in the political forum, albeit in a limited way. Still there was no concept of the “universal dignity of

man". In European Christendom, the disappearance of many inequalities and the replacement of secular authority by ecclesiastical authority occurred gradually, with constant conflicts.

Marcel Gauchet states that "entering the age of individualism means leaving the religious age in which both dependence on the whole and indebtedness to the other are simultaneously abandoned" (Gauchet, 1997, p. 27). By removing the gods from the world, by turning them into "subjects", people begin to turn themselves into subjects. According to Gauchet, when the gods left their abode on earth, humans for the first time began to have control over their own world through the state. The key to understanding modern history is to understand how man sought to "own" himself in politics by gradually "freeing" himself from his external debt to religion and incorporating himself into a history of social experimentation (Gauchet, 1997, pp. 51, 57). "As God withdrew", Gauchet concludes, 'the world changed from something offered ... to something to be constituted'. According to Gauchet, as a result of the increasing isolation of religion and the idea of God from the world and society, the world has changed from being presented to us as given to a constructed structure that acquires its meaning through us. Instead of a single given conception of the world, there is a meaning that the individual lives in and constructs himself (Gauchet, 1997, p. 103).

According to him, there is another view that Christianity has been transformed and evolved into secularism (Gauchet, 1997, p. 95). Gauchet understands Christianity as the religion of man's exit from religion. According to Gauchet, Christianity is the seed that evolved into secular humanism, in the process destroying its own transcendental orientation and making possible the worldly autonomy that now lies at the heart of Western democratic society. In this case, Christianity transcended itself and moved on to an advanced stage, while Muslims, deprived of this transformation, remained backward (!) as societies unable to break free from religious obsession. Alone among all "religions" Christianity gives birth to a plural, democratic world; alone among all "religions" it gives birth to unlimited human agency. The basic human poverty that characterizes all religions is paradoxically overcome by and through a unique religion: Christianity.

Western Christianity as a parent that metamorphoses into a human offspring (modernity) reproduces itself as transcendence and universality (secularism) that materializes itself in earthly life. The methodology at work here is reminiscent of the phases of Jesus' existence. It is remarkable for the way in which the sacred Christian narrative of Jesus dying and rising again to take his place at the right hand of the Father is imitated in a narrative of the salvation of all humanity. Transcendence thus remains in our redeemed world, in our secular "European civilization", but it now has a different content and a different place. Secularization is not only a product of a Christian past, but also a proof of the enduring presence of Christianity in its post-Christian form (European civilization).

We have long since come across stories of the development of a distinctive European civilization, one that has been taken for granted without much question, one in which European civilization inherited a significant part of its virtues from Christianity, and one that has always been in conflict with another, the so-called "Islamic", claiming superiority. These stories of European identity also form part of the political discourse. As a part of it, these stories present a European identity. The first point implied by these stories is the assertion that Europe is the most advanced civilization in terms of democracy and human rights. The second point is the perception that the lack of "democratic traditions" in Islamic civilization, the Muslims' resort to the concept of coercive insult, and their inability to grasp the supreme importance of freedom, reinforces Europe's claim of superiority over Islam and Muslims.

The peoples that make up "European civilization" are highly differentiated in terms of class, nationalism and religious identity. They were often torn apart by internal conflicts in which warring parties used the same principle of critical public discourse to attack each other, and sometimes alliances were made with Muslim princes. In the West, there have always been significant movements that have sought to censor public communication, restrict and control democratic tendencies in the name of freedom, equality or a stable order. The entire history of European countries in the Americas, Asia and Africa, together with their oppression of the indigenous peoples they ruled, has been an integral part of "European civilization". Hannah Arendt argued that the racist policies of European imperialism were necessary for the development of fascism in Europe. Therefore, it is not easy to understand what exactly is being claimed when "democracy" and "freedom of expression" are said to be unique to "European civilization", while inequality and oppression are attributed to "Islamic civilization".

For Dewey, it is only when we succeed in becoming devoid of a metaphysical culture, a culture of belief in non-human powers and forces, that we reach full political maturity. It was only after The French Revolution that people learned to trust more and more in their own powers; Dewey called the religion that taught people to trust in themselves the "religion of love" (the opposite of the "religion of fear") because it is almost impossible to separate it from the condition of the citizen who concretely participates in democracy (Zabala, 2005, p. 6).

For Dewey, it is only when we succeed in becoming devoid of a metaphysical culture, a culture of belief in non-human powers and forces, that we reach full political maturity. It was only after the French Revolution that people

learned to trust more and more in their own powers; Dewey called the religion that taught people to trust in themselves the “religion of love” (the opposite of the “religion of fear”) because it is almost impossible to separate it from the condition of the citizen who concretely participates in democracy (Zabala, 2005, p. 6).

Dewey proposes freedom from belief as a measure of political maturity. However, he does not explain how and why having faith is an obstacle to political maturity, nor does he explain whether it is indeed possible to achieve full political maturity without faith. Nor does Dewey explain why he dismisses the possibility that someone with religious faith might be more self-confident. In suggesting that the self-confident person is committed to the religion of love, Dewey categorizes religion and prefers the religion of love. This distinction is quite problematic because, first of all, all religions, which have a system of reward and punishment, encourage good and discourage evil as a natural and logical consequence. For both are judgments about human beings who have the potential for both good and evil.

Rather than moving in a straight line, human actions move in a contradictory way. Therefore, it is not correct to categorize religion as positive or negative take the positive type as the basis and consider the other dimension as harmful. Although The French Revolution played an important role in achieving important gains in the modern world in terms of fraternity, solidarity, equality, freedom and democracy in a universal sense. However, it also pioneered the age of empires and led to nationalism, racism, war and genocide.

While it introduced Europe to concepts such as equality and democracy, it also led to disasters that resulted in blood and tears and thus formed part of the identity of Christian Europe. Therefore, the characterization of Europe as a civilization representing values does not explain who decides what really represents “European values”, how they are to be implemented and what they will actually achieve in a world of unequal power. Moreover, democratic nation states and democratic republics, especially since the early twentieth century, have the capacity to enact repressive laws internally, whether through brute force military means or economic sanctions, and to take away the freedoms of weaker peoples externally.

Western Civilization recognizes freedom of expression as a necessary principle for modern freedom. While religious criticism should be considered within this scope, its deliberate exclusion from the intellectual world and academic attention should be considered a violation of this principle. Aside from whether religious criticism is possible or not, the real issue is the impossibility, unthinkability, and even the prohibition of thinking and expressing thoughts based on religion. However, if the West is a civilization with its historical foundation in Christianity, does the concept of censorship and prohibition of expression have a place in this civilization since the West has become secularized? Are there prohibitions imposed by secular law, including censorship-like practices that restrict freedom of expression? What do prohibitions and protections of expression tell us about the idea of the “human being” as defined by them? And how does the idea of the human distinguish between the “religious” and the “secular”? Secular criticism is equated with liberation. Even if it is not considered censorship, secular modern societies have certain sanctions and legal restrictions on ideas, expression and communication.

For example, there are laws protecting copyright, property and trademark rights, and prohibitions deriving from them, to protect intellectual and artistic works, commercial rights and secrets. Thus, in modern, liberal and democratic societies legal conditions, restrictions and prohibitions that determine what can be communicated freely and how. It should be clear that copyright law is not only a restriction on free communication, but also a way of defining how, when and for whom literary communication (one of the most valuable forms of freedom in modern liberal society) can be considered free, creative and inalienable. The freedom to say what one wants, how one wants, depends in part on a certain concept of property. This concept implies a kind of proprietary subject whose freedom of speech is based on the truth of what is said, i.e. created and made available to the public.

There are laws and rules that are more related to the public sphere and whose relevance for the disposition of property is not immediately apparent: These are more related to ethics, as distinct from commercial laws such as copyright or trademarks and patents: Examples include immorality laws that concern the individual and the majority of society, and child pornography as part of child abuse. These laws and restrictions are excluded from the sphere of freedom and the debates that are claimed to be the hallmark of secular societies, even though they are not related to commerce, property and rights of disposition, but to ethics. Both sets of restrictions refer to the different ways in which property and its protection define the individual: In a secular society, which is characterized by a discourse accompanied by notions of unlimited freedom, these laws prescribe, first and foremost, self-limitation and self-defense in terms of what one owns, including one's body.

And our notions of 'occupying' and 'exploiting' another's body are central to the laws governing sexual mores. These concepts are also related to slavery, which is an illiberal form of property, since under modern law one cannot transfer the possession of one's own living body to another or acquire the right of possession over the body of another. Freedom is therefore seen as an inalienable form of property, a capacity that all individuals possess in their natural state and that is rooted in the living body. There are, of course, exceptions to the principle of absolute ownership over one's own body: for example, suicide - self-destruction - is not only forbidden but is viewed with

horror by most people in liberal countries, even though one is said to be the sole owner of the body in which one lives and gives life. This exception to self-ownership is often explained by secularists in terms of the humanist principle of the “dignity of human life”, which is not seen as incompatible with the atrocities of war. But war is presented as a way of killing and dying in the name of a nation or universal human liberation.

In addition to this contradiction, there are legal as well as moral issues and complexities related to the use of human organs and tissues for medical research. This confusion gives rise to feelings and thoughts that the sacred concept of the self-owning human being, which is the basis of freedoms in modern society, is under threat all the more reason, therefore, to vigorously defend property rights.

There is also ongoing debate about the individual's right to education, especially children's right to education. Most people believe that parents have the right to direct the education and upbringing of their children. But why? What are the bases for these rights? How broad is their scope? Can we defend parental rights against those who believe that we need more state control over education to protect children's autonomy or to prepare them for citizenship in a diverse society? Psychological and social science research shows that strong protection of parental rights is crucial for the well-being of parents, children and society as a whole.

In a liberal democratic society, there are two subject positions, one economic and one political, whose freedom is valorized and whose rights, responsibilities and limits are assigned. As a political subject, the citizen has the right to criticize openly and freely on political issues by taking the initiative and to vote for the political candidate of his or her choice, but is obliged to do so with the utmost secrecy. There is a paradox in the fact that one must decide with the utmost secrecy in order to freely exercise one's individual preference in choosing a candidate, while critical speech must take place in the public sphere in order to be free.

This difference assumes that the former assumes that the citizen is enveloped in a specific network of social relations, while the latter is an abstract individual with universal rights. As an economic individual, the subject has the freedom to work, spend and buy as he or she wishes and has the right to protect and dispose of his or her property. In modern liberal societies, freedom is the precondition for the individual producer to expand his capital and for the corporate power to limitlessly expand its consumption. However, the government or social power can restrict this individual freedom and use force to direct individual preferences and choices. Constraint on religious criticism is therefore rejected by secularism in the name of human freedom and independence, ostensibly because it implies dependence on a transcendent power. However, constraint and dependence are very much present in our secular world and go beyond the capacity of the individual subject to know and act.

The self-owning individual is a famous liberal idea, and within this conception, although there are limits to what one can do to oneself, there is greater freedom in relation to one's material property. Ownership of property does not only provide immunity from those who do not own it. It also guarantees the right to do what one wishes with one's property, as long as the rights of others are not harmed. The right to choose how one disposes of what one owns is an integral part of the liberal subject, and the subject's body, emotions and speech are considered personal property because they constitute the person.

There are problematic situations between Secular Liberal attitudes and rules on sexuality. In such a society, rape, the use of a person's body against their will for sexual pleasure, is a serious crime, while seduction, the manipulation of another person's desire, is not. The former is violence; the latter is not. In the latter case, no property rights are violated. Seduction, on the other hand, involves stealing a person's love and loyalty from the man to whom it truly belongs. This indicates that, with the exception of young children, seduction is not considered a violation in liberal society.

In secular liberal society, not only is seduction not criminalized, but it is positively valorized as a sign of individual freedom and the free exercise of individual disposition. Every adult is free to use his or her body, emotions and speech as he or she wishes, as long as he or she does not damage the property of others. The prohibition of seduction between adults is therefore considered a restriction on natural freedom itself. Such a prohibition is normally equated with a restriction on freedom of expression.

Thus in liberal democracies the individual as consumer and voter is exposed to various temptations, which are the combination of his needs and weaknesses, and which appeal to greed, vanity, envy, revenge, and the like. What might otherwise be described and condemned as moral vices are here essential to the functioning of a certain kind of economy and government. Numerous studies have described how television as a medium of communication attempts to shape the choices of viewers. Film generally attempts to seduce the viewer, even when no political or commercial message is intended. To seduce is to encourage someone to open up to the images, sounds, and words presented by the seducer, and to direct the seduced—consciously or unconsciously—to a goal originally conceived by him. The deliberate destruction of signs, that is, the attack on images and words that have the power to determine what counts as truth, has a long history that transcends the religious and secular divide.

In secular liberal society, morality is perceived as a private matter and it is believed that it should not be a matter of law. However, paradoxically, this 'private' area has strained the law to such an extent that new legislation has had to be adopted in which these private issues are the subject. Although morality (religiosity) is not allowed to impose appropriate norms of speech and behavior on the individual (as in Muslim morality), these legal developments redraw the boundaries of individual freedom. The subject's right to have relations with his/her own children is limited by the right of the social welfare institution to monitor and intervene in this relationship. New sensitivities are created regarding what is appropriate and therefore what is ugly, especially in the area of sexual relations. While conformity is much stricter in 'public' behavior, in Islamic law, uninvited entry into the domestic sphere and violation of 'private' areas are not permitted. Thus, the boundaries of freedom are expressed in different ways in relation to the areas that can be roughly defined as 'private' and 'public', and different types of discourse exist socially to distance themselves from the repulsive, whether transcendent or worldly.

Criticizing dubious (religious) beliefs is presented as a requirement of freedom of expression, an act carried out with the belief that truth is power. Even in post-Christian Western society, many people agree with Christianity's claim that truth makes a person free. There is freedom of thought in Islam, but expressing and spreading this thought is forbidden because it is an insult to religion and people's faith. Thinking and thinking are not interfered with as long as it remains within the person's private world, and although it is within the scope of freedom, revealing it will have consequences because it is public knowledge. In this respect, it is necessary to distinguish these two situations from each other.

Secular criticism also seeks to create spaces for new truth, and like them, it does so by destroying the spaces occupied by other signs. The secular critic wants to see and hear everything: nothing is taboo, everything is subject to critical participation. If speech and behavior are to be restricted, it is because they must conform to politeness (willingly?). Good manners replace piety; the private and the public are clearly separated. But the situation on the ground is more complex than the simple binary (presence or absence of choice) allows.

The famous literary critic Edward Said wrote in an article titled "Secular Criticism" that "[c]riticism... is always situated, skeptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failures" (1983, p. 26). Several questions arise here. The first of these is the function of the concept of the secular here. Is secular criticism or is it a necessity for criticism to be secular? If so, it is necessary to know on what grounds this necessity is based. It should be clarified whether it refers to an authority or to sensibility. Secondly, since criticism makes judgments, since it tries to convince - itself and others - it should be explained to what extent it tries to overcome skepticism. Finally, if secular criticism sees itself in a struggle against the powerful forces of oppression, if it finds itself open to all "failures", it can be said that secular criticism claims heroism. This situation is also contradictory to the function of criticism

This is the title of Michel Foucault's last, well-known article, which began as a lecture given at the Sorbonne on 27 May 1978. 44 In this article, *History of Criticism*, Foucault attempts to equate critique with the Kantian concept of Enlightenment and thus to present critique as a singular feature of the modern West: "[It seems that] between the sublime Kantian enterprise and the minor polemical-professional activities that bear the name of 'criticism,' there existed in the modern West (roughly from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries) a certain way of thinking, speaking, and acting alike, a certain relation to what exists, to what it knows, to what it does, and also a relation to society, to culture, to others, and all this may be called the 'critical attitude.'" (p. 103) It is not clear whether Foucault wants us to understand that the "critical attitude" is a feature of the modern West alone, or that the "critical attitude" specific to the modern West is quite different from that found elsewhere - that it is the first time humanity has thought "the transcendent" in a way that would allow it to create its own future. In any case, it is clear that for Foucault, enlightenment means adopting a critical attitude, and that engaging in critique, as the West has done for several centuries, is tantamount to living in the Enlightenment: living heroically, as Kant put it at the beginning of this enterprise.

The word criticism has its origin in the Greek verb *krino*, meaning "to separate," "to decide," "to judge," "to struggle," "to accuse." It seems to have been first used in the judicial sphere, where both the act of accusing and the giving of judgment were called *krino*, thus referring to the ability to discern, ask probing questions, and make judgments. In this secular arena, the semantic beginnings of what we today call "critique" were not aimed at conquering universal truth, but at resolving certain crises justly and correcting certain virtues within a particular way of life (Koselleck, 1988, p. 103). The critique could also take the form of "free and open speech [*parrhesia*]" in the political forum. Critical preaching, especially associated with the Cynic philosophers of the fourth century BCE, was directed at everyone and aimed to teach people how to evaluate their own personal way of life. Christianity drew on this tradition of free and open speech and in the process transformed the word *parrhesia* to suit its own purposes. Criticism and open appeals to Truth continued to be an important part of popular preaching throughout the Christian era (Foucault, 2001).

In the late Middle Ages, priests would preach in public places, condemning certain ways of life and defending the Truth. At an academic level, the idea of criticism was used in a number of university disciplines, but until the

theological debates of the Reformation it did not refer to the same concept, whether applied to classical texts, the Bible, or social life. Thus, the answer to the question "What is criticism?" would often be: the evaluation and interpretation of the truth of scripture (Asad et al., 2009, pp. 50-51).

While Kantism dominated philosophical discourse in the late eighteenth century, other forms used literary and rhetorical means to criticize social ostentation and political corruption. The disparagement of rhetoric in nineteenth-century theories of language further reinforced this tendency. With Kant, the criterion of criticism became free reason, and truth was thought to be free from political and ecclesiastical constraints and guaranteed by the progress of rational science. One of the functions of reason was to bring peace to the seemingly endless war of doctrines. For the Enlightenment philosophers before Kant, criticism was rooted in a secularized metaphysics (the idea of human reason) and directed against the claims of church and state. For Kant, criticism was a process of epistemological correction, of the strictures of established rational boundaries and the distinction between private faith and public reason. But his formulation of criticism as an inquiry into the preconditions of scientific truths detached it from politics as much as from faith. In Kant's political philosophy, it is not criticism but law that ends the chaos of metaphysics and keeps the corrosive effects of skepticism under control. And his concern is no longer with worldly life but with epistemology (Asad et al., 2009, p. 50).

But when the Romantics returned to the problems of aesthetics, the dominance of Kantian discourse in philosophy was challenged. The most important figure here is Hegel, who treated critique as inherent in history: transcendent reason and the phenomenal object (thought and reality) are not to be separated as Kant did. For Hegel, both are dialectical components of the real – contradictory parts of a developing self and a world in the process of becoming. In this way, the Hegelians abandoned the Kantian discipline of epistemology. From this move arose the famous Marxist dictum that critical theory – the activity of public criticism – is itself part of social reality.

Hegel explained the specific characteristics of the world we live in as being full of contradictions. Although one way to eliminate these contradictions was to present different and new philosophical interpretations, Marx took an anti-Hegelian stance, thinking that instead of changing the color of reality through interpretation, reality itself should be reviewed and transformed in a practical way. The reality in question was not moral, but rather economic-political, which was the determinant of everything for him. In a world where industrialization was accelerating, criticism was the mainspring of the movement of the organized working classes.

The concept of criticism ceased to be a tool of class politics in the twentieth century and was once again confined to epistemology. In the following period, criticism became a weapon against which ideological policies and intellectuals representing extremes were targeted and became the criterion of universal reason, a principle considered to be very important for the natural and human sciences. A scientific fact was defined as a fact that could be criticized and therefore falsified.

Because religious values are immune to rational criticism, because they are based on faith, they are neither neutral nor objective, and therefore cannot have the authority of scientific facts. To the extent that a "belief" is presented as a candidate for truth, it should be adopted provisionally, that is, not taken too seriously. Falsificationists such as Popper have reaffirmed a more direct connection between epistemology (what are the criteria for valid knowledge about the world) and politics (how can force be legitimately used to make or remake the social world). Since our scientific knowledge of the world is inevitably limited, they have argued, it is rational for the social world to be criticized and reformed only piecemeal (Asad et al., 2009, p. 51).

Theology has never been without criticism, and, especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century, theology has absorbed secular criticism. Over time, criticism became essential for the production of useful knowledge in universities, where modern philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Popper were also members. However, professional criticism had less to do with the right to freedom of expression than with the reproduction of intellectual disciplines and the culture of belief that came with them. The modern university emerged in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century along with secular culture (Roberts & Turner, 2000). Accordingly, the marginalization or exclusion of official "religion" in the American university was accompanied by an emphasis on research, professionalization, and specialization, which led to the fragmentation of the traditional map of knowledge that had been expressed in theological language until then. In this case, the humanities eventually emerged from the traditions of moral philosophy and philology, giving knowledge a distinctive "religious" flavor while restoring its coherence. One result of this was that a less sectarian, less doctrinal idea of religion became part of liberal culture and therefore of the understanding of criticism. This new edition of liberal education had two essential elements: "The first... was to introduce students to beauty, especially as it manifests itself in 'poetry' in the broad sense. Thus a second element was introduced into the humanities: an emphasis on the continuities that connect the 'poetry' of one period to subsequent periods and ultimately to our own."

Thus, there developed a sharper sense of the moral essence of European civilization being transmitted to students in higher education through the study of great literature, and a belief that literary criticism was a disciplined tool

for this purpose. This is one aspect of criticism that has religious roots without being religious. But there is another. Over the last few centuries, modern states have encouraged and used the developing sciences to normalize and regulate social life, thereby legitimizing a certain kind of disciplinary criticism. Thus, while freedom of criticism is represented as both a right and a duty of the modern individual, the capacity to produce truth remains subject to disciplinary criteria, and the material conditions of existence (laboratories, buildings, research funds, publishing houses, personal computers, etc.) are provided and monitored by corporate and state power to ensure that citizens can be useful.

In Western history, people have had very different understandings of this issue, and these understandings cannot be reduced to a simple distinction between secular criticism (freedom and reason) and religious criticism (intolerance and reactionism). The practice of secular criticism is now a sign of the modern, modern subject's relentless search for truth and freedom. The practice of secular criticism is now a sign of the modern, modern subject's relentless search for truth and freedom, its political activism. It has become almost a duty, closely linked to the right to free expression and communication. But every critical discourse has its institutional conditions that define what it is, what it recognizes, what it aims for, what it destroys and why. Neither philosophical nor literary criticism can successfully claim to be the privileged domain of reason. It is important whether the criticism in question is made in the form of parody and satire, confession of sins, political autocriticism, professional criticism or analyzed speech. In some areas of our modern life, there is an insistent demand for reasons to be given for almost everything. The relationship to knowledge, to action, and to other people that emerges when this demand is taken as the basis of all understanding is perhaps what Foucault had in mind when he spoke of critique. The "critical attitude" is the essence of secular heroism.

There can be no acceptable taboos for the secular critic. When boundaries are criticized, taboos disappear and freedom expands. But this criticism reinforces the ideological status of European Muslims as not yet fully human because they are not yet morally autonomous and politically disciplined. For not only does it liberate ideas from taboos, it also reinforces the existing distinction between those who are paradigmatically human and those who are candidates for inclusion in true humanity, who do not yet have bodies, feelings, and thoughts.

Charles Taylor makes important religious claims in *Sources of the Self*, for example, in the closing pages, proposing that "the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater than that of secular humanism" as the basis for modern commitment. The book begins by identifying two basic ways of understanding or explaining the phenomenon of secularization. The first of these (which Taylor calls Secularity 1 or S1 for short throughout the book) emphasizes the division of society into two distinct spheres, the public and the private. In secular societies, religious belief is pushed out of public institutions, that is, privatized. In contrast to pre-modern cultures permeated by religion, secular societies offer modern individuals a new reality: now "you can fully participate in politics without ever encountering God." (Taylor, 2007, p. 1) "How did we go from a situation in Christendom where people lived in a purely theistic interpretation to a situation where we oscillate between two stances, where everyone's interpretation emerges in this way, and where, moreover, disbelief has become the main default option for many?" (Taylor, 2007, p. 14) What makes this development all the more surprising for Taylor is that it is specific to our era and the Latin-post-Christian context. How did this development come about? Taylor's answer to this question follows many well-established theories of secularization and points to the role of disillusionment as an important causal factor in the shift to secularism. In contrast to pre-modern cultures permeated by religion, secular societies offer modern individuals a new reality: now "you can fully participate in politics without ever encountering God." (Taylor, 2007, p. 1) "How did we go from a situation in Christendom where people lived in a purely theistic interpretation to a situation where we oscillate between two stances, where everyone's interpretation emerges in this way, and where, furthermore, nonbelief has become the main default option for many?" (Taylor, 2007, p. 14) What makes this development all the more surprising for Taylor is that it is specific to our era and the Latin post-Christian context. How did this development come about? Taylor's answer to this question follows many well-established theories of secularization and points to the role of disillusionment as an important causal factor in the shift to secularity. However, Taylor's study of disillusionment departs from these theories in a unique and important way. Taylor's approach is one that attempts to deconstruct the explanatory power of "extraction theories," which he defines as "stories of modernity in general and secularization in particular," which are explained by people losing, shedding, or escaping some of their previously limiting horizons, illusions, or epistemic limitations (Taylor, 2007, p. 22).

2. CONCLUSION

Theology and religion, which are thought and perceived to be in opposition to secularism and philosophy, have been constantly criticized by these two disciplines. This tradition of criticism has also increased its prevalence in universities and academic circles, and as a result, has led to the weakening, exclusion and discrediting of official religion. On the other hand, the fact that the doctrinal theses of Christianity and the Holy Bible in particular have not been able to hold their own against this tradition of criticism, which derives its power largely from scientific research methods, has also been effective in its defeat in the face of these criticisms. On the other hand, it is difficult

to understand why it is unacceptable for secularism to be subject to religious criticism, despite religion being subject to criticism by different disciplines. Similarly, it is also impossible to understand the absence of religious criticism as a way of analyzing these works, even though literary works on religious subjects have been and continue to be written. Therefore, religious criticism should be investigated as a possibility in order to try to understand the reflection of religion, which is a very human and social phenomenon, in literary works, apart from being a necessity of both situations and a matter of individual preference. The intricate relationship between religion, secularism, and philosophy has long been a subject of intense discourse, with each discipline often positioning itself in opposition to the other. While theology and religious thought have historically faced sharp criticism from secular philosophies and scientific methodologies, this dynamic has not only persisted but intensified in academic and intellectual circles. The rigorous analytical tools provided by scientific inquiry and philosophical critique have progressively challenged the foundational claims of religious doctrines, leading to the marginalization and even the discrediting of organized religion within modern academic frameworks. Particularly, the Christian doctrine, including the teachings of the Holy Bible, has found itself increasingly unable to defend its core assertions against the growing tide of evidence-based scrutiny.

However, the question arises as to why secularism itself seems to remain largely immune from similar critical engagement from religious perspectives. If religion, with its deeply embedded cultural and historical roots, can be subjected to rigorous criticism across various disciplines, it appears paradoxical that secular ideologies or philosophies, which also carry their own set of assumptions and interpretations of human existence, are seldom subjected to the same level of scrutiny. The absence of a comparable religious critique of secular ideologies within intellectual discourse is a gap that warrants further exploration. Furthermore, the continuous production of literary works addressing religious themes reflects a societal and intellectual engagement with religion, yet these works often fail to be analyzed through the lens of religious criticism. Literary criticism of religious themes not only offers an opportunity to scrutinize how religious ideas are represented and manipulated in artistic forms, but it also serves as a crucial point of intersection between religion and literature. Given the prominence of religion as a pervasive cultural force throughout human history, its representation in literature should not be overlooked. Literary criticism, therefore, should not be confined merely to an analysis of literary aesthetics or character development; it must also encompass a deeper inquiry into how religious ideas are woven into the fabric of societal narratives and human experiences. Thus, the exploration of religious criticism in literary studies is both a theoretical necessity and an intellectual obligation. It provides a means of understanding how religion, as a dynamic social and human phenomenon, is not merely reflected but actively shaped by the contexts in which it appears. Such a critical examination would contribute to the broader discourse on religion, secularism, and philosophy, challenging traditional boundaries and fostering a more nuanced understanding of their interrelations in the contemporary world.

REFERENCES

- Asad, T., Brown, W., Butler, J., & Mahmood, S. (2009). *Is critique secular?: Blasphemy, injury, and free speech*. University of California Press.
- Benedict, X. V. I. (t.y.). (2006, September 12). *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections*.
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless Speech*. Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, M. (1996). What is critique?. In J Schmidt (Ed.) *What is Enlightenment?: eighteenth-century answers and twentieth-century questions* (pp. 382-398). University of California Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2006). *The end of history and the last man*. Simon and Schuster.
- Gauchet, M. (1997). *The disenchantment of the world: A political history of religion*. Princeton University Press.
- Koselleck, R. (1988). *Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Çev. T. McCarthy). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marx, K. (1978). Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right: Introduction. *The Marx-Engels Reader*.
- Roberts, J. H., & Turner, J. (2000). *The sacred and the secular university*. Princeton University Press.
- Said, E. (1983). *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press.
- Taylor C. (1989) *Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Cambridge university press.
- Zabala, S. (2005). Introduction: A religion without theists or atheists. In S. Zabala (Ed.), *The Future of Religion* (pp. 1-28). Columbia University Press.

ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZNİ

Yapılan bu çalışmada “Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan “Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler” başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

1.yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı %100'dür.

Yazar 1: Araştırmanın tümünden sorumludur.

ÇATIŞMA BEYANI

Araştırmada herhangi bir kişi ya da kurum ile finansal ya da kişisel yönden bağlantı bulunmamaktadır. Araştırmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.