

Foucault and Enlightenment: A Critical Reappraisal

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In a late discussion of Kant's essay, "Was ist Aufklärung?," Foucault credits Kant with posing "the question of his own present" and positions himself as an inheritor of this Kantian legacy.¹ Foucault has high praise for the critical tradition that emerges from Kant's historical-political reflections on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; Kant's concern in these writings with "an ontology of the present, an ontology of ourselves" is, he says, characteristic of "a form of philosophy, from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School," a form of philosophy in which Foucault, perhaps surprisingly, situates his own work.²

In another late essay, Foucault explains in more detail the sense in which he views his work as a continuation of the Kantian critical tradition. Foucault claims that what is central in Kant's discussion of Enlightenment is not "a theory, a doctrine, or a permanent body of knowledge" but instead a distinctively modern attitude, an ethos, one in which "the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is."³ And although he insists in this essay that it is not the case that "one has to be 'for' or 'against' the Enlightenment," he nevertheless once again positions his own work in the Kantian Enlightenment tradition as he understands it, "conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."⁴ From this perspective, Foucault offers a retrospective of his *oeuvre*, now understood as a modified form of Kantian critique. Foucault's critical project no doubt departs significantly from the letter of Kant's philosophy, but not, or so he claims, from its spirit:

criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological – and not transcendental – in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And . . . genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the

contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.⁵

Foucault's remarks in these late essays about the Enlightenment tradition in general and about the Kantian version of the Enlightenment project in particular have perplexed his critics and his supporters alike. After all, Kant had seemed to be the great villain of Foucault's account of the rise of the human sciences in *The Order of Things*. In that work, as James Schmidt and Thomas Wartenberg have put the point, "Kant had the dubious honor of awakening philosophy from its 'dogmatic slumber' only to lull it back into what Foucault dubbed 'the anthropological sleep' Kant's legacy . . . was viewed as decidedly problematic: a philosophical anthropology caught in the bind of treating 'man' as both an object of empirical inquiry and the transcendental ground of all knowledge."⁶ Moreover, although Bentham was perhaps the more obvious target of Foucault's genealogy of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*, Kant's moral philosophy can just as easily be seen to be implicated in one of the central claims of that book, namely, that "the soul is prison of the body."⁷ So what could Foucault possibly have had in mind when, in these late essays, he invoked Kant's critical project and situated his own work within the Kantian Enlightenment tradition?

One possibility, suggested by Jürgen Habermas, is that Foucault actually has two very different Kants; to put it crudely, there is the Kant that Foucault likes and the one that he doesn't.⁸ As Habermas puts it:

In Foucault's lecture, we do not meet the Kant familiar from *The Order of Things*, the epistemologist who thrust open the door to the age of anthropological thought and the human sciences with his analysis of finiteness. Instead we encounter a *different* Kant – the precursor of the Young Hegelians, the Kant who was the first to make a serious break with the metaphysical heritage, who turned philosophy away from the Eternal Verities and concentrated on what philosophers had until then considered to be without concept and nonexistent, merely contingent and transitory.⁹

Habermas goes on to argue that these two very different readings of Kant map onto a fundamental contradiction in Foucault's own thought. The question, as Habermas presents it, is "how such an affirmative understanding of modern philosophizing . . . fits with Foucault's unyielding critique of modernity. How can Foucault's self-understanding as a thinker in the tradition of the Enlightenment be compatible with his unmistakable critique of precisely this form of knowledge, which is that of modernity?"¹⁰ In Habermas's view, Foucault cannot have it both ways; the contradiction between Foucault's critique of modernity and his embrace of (an admittedly idiosyncratic interpretation of) the Enlightenment tradition is inescapable. Thus, Habermas concludes his remembrance written on the occasion of Foucault's death by suggesting that perhaps Foucault recognized and, in a characteristically veiled way, admitted as much in his final reflections on Kant. As Habermas puts it, "perhaps it is the force of this contradiction that

drew Foucault, in the last of his texts, back into a sphere of influence he had tried to blast open, that of the philosophical discourse of modernity.”¹¹

In response, Schmidt and Wartenberg have warned against too hasty a dismissal of Foucault’s late embrace of Kant and the Enlightenment tradition. They suggest, rightly, I think, that Foucault’s “invocation of Kant should neither be written off as simply an ironic gesture nor turned into a deathbed concession of defeat. It is instead a remarkably productive interrogation of a thinker who never ceased to inspire and provoke Foucault.”¹² However, despite their insistence that Foucault’s embrace of the Kantian version of the Enlightenment project was no passing fancy but instead was a persistent theme in Foucault’s writings over the last decade of his life, and despite their serious attention to Foucault’s different interpretations of this tradition in these relatively late works, Schmidt and Wartenberg seem to agree with Habermas that Foucault has two Kants. As they put it, “the Kant we meet in Foucault’s essay differs markedly from the thinker Foucault confronted two decades earlier in *The Order of Things*. . . . If the Kant of *The Order of Things* marked the advent of an ultimately empty humanism, the Kant of ‘What is Enlightenment?’ was a good deal more interesting and provocative.”¹³ Thus, although they are, I think, completely right to say that Foucault’s “stance toward the enlightenment remained a good deal more nuanced and complex than his critics would lead us to believe,” they nonetheless leave Habermas’s charge of a fundamental contradiction in Foucault’s thought unanswered.¹⁴

Whereas Schmidt and Wartenberg’s defense of Foucault focuses on his proximity to one of his two Kants – Kant the thinker of his own present – David Hoy’s defense of Foucault focuses on his distance from the other, Kant the epistemologist. Hoy argues, contra Habermas, that Foucault is not an enemy of reason and enlightenment, though he is, in the end, a postmodern rather than a modern thinker. Although the jumping off point for Hoy’s argument is an account of Foucault’s late essays on Kant and the Enlightenment, much of his argument is devoted to substantiating the claim that the trajectory of Foucault’s thought is a process of breaking free from Kant-qua-epistemologist. While Foucault’s claims about archaeological methodology in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* look to Hoy, regrettably, “like Kantian transcendental philosophy” inasmuch as Foucault “posits an a priori that can be deduced or at least indirectly inferred by this one particular method,” by the time he writes *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault has seen the error of his ways and his postmodern “pastiche emulates Nietzsche more than Kant.”¹⁵ Both archaeology and genealogy are, according to Hoy, attempts to think the unthought, which Hoy takes to be the task of both modern and postmodern thought. But whereas archaeology, with its “pretensions to epistemology (in the traditional sense of the privileged discourse about the conditions for the possibility of any and every form of knowledge),” remains caught in a modern way of thinking the unthought, genealogy, with its recognition that it is just one among many possible ways of thinking the unthought, an unthought which is itself also multiple,

moves beyond Kantian modernism into Nietzschean postmodernism.¹⁶ As Hoy puts it, in the shift from archaeology to genealogy, Foucault “moves from a modernist, quasi-transcendental neo-Kantian stance to a postmodern, neo-Nietzschean stance.”¹⁷ To my mind, the significant drawback of this interpretation of Foucault is that it makes his late embrace of Kant even more mystifying than it was before. If Foucault spent his whole life trying to break free of Kant, why would he return to him in the end? How could this return be understood as anything other than the capitulation that Habermas understands it to be, Hoy’s reading? Not only does Hoy not answer this question, he doesn’t even seem to recognize the need to reconcile the two *prima facie* incompatible versions of Foucault’s relationship to Kant that are present not only in Foucault’s work, varied and wide-ranging as it was, but also in the pages of Hoy’s own essay. Once again, Habermas’s charge against Foucault is left unanswered.

In the remainder of this essay, I shall attempt to answer this charge. Foucault’s admiration for Kant in his late work is quite explicit; thus, it seems to me that Habermas’s charge of contradiction can best be met by a reconsideration of Foucault’s early work on Kant. In what follows, I shall focus on this early work, in particular on Foucault’s *thèse complémentaire* on Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and the closely related account of Kant in *The Order of Things*. Contra Habermas, I do not think that Foucault has two Kants; rather, a careful reading of the *thèse* and the related early texts will demonstrate that Foucault’s stance toward Kant in his early work was never as rejectionist as has been supposed.¹⁸ Thus, I also dispute Habermas’s claim that Foucault’s seemingly contradictory stance on Kant is indicative of a deeper, more fundamental contradiction in Foucault’s thought.¹⁹ Indeed, I shall argue that when Foucault’s later work is viewed from the perspective of his early work on Kant, a striking continuity emerges, namely, a central and abiding interest in and critical engagement with philosophical anthropology. Foucault’s interpretation of Kant treats the *Anthropology* as a central rather than a marginal text and puts the anthropological question – what is man? – at the center of Kant’s philosophical work. Whether or not this is the best interpretation of Kant, I shall leave to Kant scholars, who are in a much better position than I to decide. However, I shall argue that Foucault’s early discussions of Kant demonstrate clearly that it is the question of subjectivity that is central for Foucault’s project from the very beginning.²⁰

The line of interpretation that I shall pursue in what follows not only affords us with a more plausible and coherent interpretation of Foucault’s work as a whole, it also reveals Foucault’s project as a rich, subtle, and defensible alternative to Habermas’s own way of taking up and transforming the Kantian critical project. I shall argue that Foucault, like Habermas, offers us a continuation-through-transformation of the Kantian critical project.²¹ Thus, to the extent that the Foucault/Habermas debate has been understood as compelling us to choose between rejecting the Kantian Enlightenment project or taking it up in a transformative way, it has been misunderstood.²²

I shall proceed as follows. In the first section, I examine closely Foucault's treatment of Kant in his *thèse complémentaire*, focusing on the complex relationship between the empirical and the transcendental. In the second section, I re-examine Foucault's account of Kant in *The Order of Things* and, drawing on my reading of the Kant thesis, suggest a new way of understanding that text's often-misunderstood call for the end of man. In the third section, I address some problems that arise for my reconstruction of Foucault's transformation of Kantian critique and defend Foucault's version of continuation-through-transformation of the Kantian critical project.

1. The Empirical and the Transcendental

Foucault's first extended discussion of Kant occurs in his *thèse complémentaire*, which consisted of a translation into French of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and a substantial introduction to the text. In his introduction, Foucault returns again and again to two related themes: the tension between the empirical and the transcendental in the account of man offered in the *Anthropology* itself, and the relationship between the *Anthropology* and the critical philosophy. Both themes ultimately return to the same problematic: the relationship in Kant's thought between the human being as historically constituted, on the one hand, and the structures of the human mind as constitutive of all possible experience, on the other. These themes set the stage both for Foucault's later discussion of Kant in *The Order of Things* and for my reading of Foucault's work.

With respect to the tension between the empirical and the transcendental within the *Anthropology* itself, the first point to notice is that Foucault returns repeatedly to Kant's claim that pragmatic anthropology takes as its object "what man as a free agent makes, or can and should [*kann und soll*] make, of himself."²³ For instance, Foucault notes that, for Kant, "man is not simply 'what he is,' but 'what he makes of himself.' And is this not precisely the field that the *Anthropology* defines for its investigation?"²⁴ Foucault views the conjunction of the descriptive account of man (what man makes of himself) and the normative account (what man can and should make of himself) in Kant's *Anthropology* as absolutely essential to an understanding of the text, and he draws the following implication from it: "man, in the *Anthropology*, is neither *homo natura*, nor pure subject of liberty; he is caught in the syntheses already brought about by his liaison with the world" (43). In other words, Kant's pragmatic anthropology studies human beings as they are, that is, empirically, but it also makes constant reference to the use and misuse of the various cognitive powers around which Kant organizes his empirical discussion. But even to talk of the use and misuse of those powers is to presuppose a normative notion of humanity (else what sense could be made of the notion of misuse?), and to presuppose a normative ideal for humanity is to presuppose that human beings are autonomous, that is, free either to live up to that norm or not.²⁵ On Foucault's reading, then, although pragmatic anthropology is

presented as a straightforward empirical study,²⁶ in reality, its empirical conception of humanity is only articulated with reference to the normative/transcendental conception, with which it stands in an uneasy tension.

A similar tension emerges from Foucault's discussion of the second theme mentioned above, that of the relationship between the *Anthropology* and the critical philosophy. A central argument of Foucault's thesis is that the *Anthropology*, rather than being a marginal text, occupies a central place in Kant's thought. He notes that, even though the text was only published after Kant retired his professorship in 1797, Kant began lecturing on pragmatic anthropology some twenty-five years earlier, in 1772. Thus, all the while that Kant was developing and refining his critical project, he was also lecturing every winter on pragmatic anthropology. Foucault suggests that this is more than mere coincidence; rather, he maintains that Kant's thoughts on anthropology are conceptually bound up with his critical philosophy. At the very beginning of his introduction, he asks,

Was there from 1772, and subsisting perhaps all through the *Critique*, a certain concrete image of man . . . which is finally formulated, without major modification, in the last of the texts published by Kant? And if this concrete image of man was able to gather together the critical experience . . . is it not perhaps because it has, until a certain point, if not organized and commanded, at least guided and secretly oriented that experience. (3–4)

In other words, Foucault maintains that a concrete or empirical conception of humanity haunts the critical philosophy, only to step out of the shadows in Kant's *Anthropology*. Conversely, he suggests that at the heart of Kant's anthropological analysis of man lies the subject of the critical philosophy, the transcendental subject: "it is also possible that the *Anthropology* had been modified in its major elements to the extent that it developed the critical enterprise: would not the archaeology of the text, if it were possible, permit us to see the birth of a '*homo criticus*' . . . ?" (4)

Of course, these questions are not meant to suggest an exact equivalence between the *Anthropology* and the critical philosophy. On the contrary, Foucault clearly recognizes the significant differences between these two parts of Kant's system. Unlike the First Critique, the *Anthropology* is a strange amalgamation of empirical observations on everything from relations between men and women to dinner table etiquette to physiognomy and its relationship to character. As such, Foucault admits that the *Anthropology* apparently has no "contact" with the main theme of the First Critique, namely, the "reflection on the conditions of experience" (56). However, this lack of contact is only apparent; in fact, Foucault suggests that there is a close relation between the two texts inasmuch as we might view the *Anthropology* as "the negation of the Critique" (56). For instance, the conception of man in the Critique is that of the transcendental subject; the "I" is presented not as an object, but as the transcendental unity of apperception that

serves as the general condition for the possibility of the experience of any object whatsoever. By contrast, the conception of man in the *Anthropology* is empirical; the *Anthropology* is, at first glance anyway, a study of “the region in which observation of the self has access neither to a subject in-itself, nor to an pure ‘I’ of synthesis, but to a ‘me’ which is object, and present solely in its phenomenal truth” (24). By viewing the human being as an object rather than a subject, the *Anthropology* negates or inverts the structure of the First Critique. However, Foucault insists that the empirical conception of humanity is “not . . . a stranger to the determining subject . . .” (24). In the *Anthropology*, the “I” “is not given at the start of the game to man, in a sort of a priori of existence, but when it appears, inserting itself into the multiplicity of a sensible chronicle, it offers itself as already-there . . . : it is in this ‘I’ that the subject will recognize its past and the synthesis of its identity” (57). The subject of the *Anthropology* is both empirical and transcendental: empirically generated rather than transcendently given “at the start of the game”; but once generated, it presents itself to itself as always already there.

Foucault also suggests that the interrelationship between *Anthropology* and the critical philosophy can be seen in Kant’s claim that pragmatic anthropology is both popular and systematic. The *Anthropology* is popular in that it is “a knowledge of man that man himself could immediately understand, recognize, and indefinitely prolong . . .” (92). Indeed, the *Anthropology*’s strange combination of anecdotes, advice, and examples renders the text quite accessible to a popular audience. Yet the *Anthropology* is also systematic insofar as it repeats the structure of the critical philosophy; according to Foucault, each of the three books in the first part corresponds to the three Critiques, with the second part echoing the texts on history and politics. But this is a repetition with a difference: “The *Anthropology* . . . repeat[s] the a priori of the Critique in the originary, that is to say, in a truly temporal dimension” (89). By repeating the a priori of the Critique in a temporal dimension, the *Anthropology* balances the a priori forms of possible knowledge on the one hand, and the principles of an empirically constituted and historically developed knowledge on the other (121).

Thus, Foucault suggests, the *Anthropology* (perhaps unwittingly) breaks open the framework of the critical philosophy, revealing the historical specificity of our a priori categories, their rootedness in historically variable social and linguistic practices and institutions.²⁷ Foucault’s reading of Kant’s *Anthropology* thus suggests that Kant’s system itself contains the seeds of its own radical transformation, a transformation that Foucault will take up in his own work: namely, the transformation from the conception of the a priori as universal and necessary to the historical a priori; and the related transformation from the transcendental subject that serves as the condition of possibility of all experience to the subject that is conditioned by its rootedness in specific historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

2. The End of Man

In the tension between the empirical and the transcendental, which Foucault claims is both at the core of Kant's *Anthropology* and at the core of his critical philosophy as a whole, Foucault sees "the problematic of contemporary philosophy" (105). He suggests, moreover, that "it will be good one day to envision the whole history of post-Kantian and contemporary philosophy from the point of view of this maintained confusion, that is to say, from this exposed confusion" (106). Viewing the whole of post-Kantian Continental philosophy from the point of view of the tension between the empirical and the transcendental is perhaps as good a way as any of describing the closing chapters of Foucault's archaeological *locus classicus*, *The Order of Things*. Indeed, Foucault never published his thesis on Kant. What was a 128-page typescript became a three-page historical preface to Foucault's translation, which ended with this final note: "The relationship between critical thought and anthropological reflection will be studied in a later work";²⁸ that later work was *The Order of Things*. In its closing chapters, Foucault spells out the implications of the tension between the transcendental and empirical sides of the modern subject. Here, this tension which Foucault had first diagnosed in Kant's *Anthropology* becomes the defining characteristic of the modern episteme: what is distinctive about the modern age is the concept of man "as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge."²⁹ The transition to the modern era is marked by the appearance of man "in his ambiguous position as the object of knowledge and as a subject that knows."³⁰ This tension also informs each of the three of man's doublets, most obviously, the empirical/transcendental doublet, in which man "is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible," but also the cogito/unthought doublet (in which man tries to think his own unthought and thus get free of it) and the retreat-and-return-of-the-origin doublet (in which man is viewed as both the source of history and an object with a history) as well.³¹

Although Foucault is clearly critical of Kant in these closing pages, he also makes two points that are all too often overlooked. First, Foucault credits Kant with opening up the possibility of the modern episteme, which marks a great event in the history of European culture, insofar as it reveals the classical thought that preceded it to be a dogmatic metaphysics. Of course, in the end, Kant's critical philosophy sets up its own metaphysics, a metaphysics of the subject which takes transcendental subjectivity to be the unquestioned ground of all possible knowledge, but that doesn't change the point that Foucault considered the deathblow that Kant dealt to the classical episteme to be of vast importance. Foucault makes this even clearer in the essay "A Preface to Transgression," written at around the same time as *The Order of Things*; there, Foucault clearly credits Kant with having "opened the way for the advance of critical thought."³² Although he goes on to criticize Kant for closing off the very opening that he had created, by substituting a metaphysical notion of the subject for the dogmatic metaphysics

that he so effectively demolished, he nonetheless indicates Kant's importance inasmuch as Kant's critical philosophy inaugurates the modern episteme and, in so doing, reorders our very ways of thinking about things.

Moreover, in this essay Foucault also notes that Kant gives expression to "an essential experience for our culture . . . the experience of finitude and being, of the limit and transgression," an experience that Foucault was himself very interested in examining.³³ This leads me to the second point about Foucault's analysis in *The Order of Things* that we must take care not to overlook: as Foucault emphasizes again and again throughout that text, inasmuch as we are in the modern episteme, and inasmuch as Foucault takes Kant's thought to be paradigmatic for that episteme, we can't help but think within a Kantian framework.³⁴ Foucault describes our episteme as "the thought that is contemporaneous with us, and with which, willy-nilly, we think."³⁵ Our episteme is our historical a priori. As historical, it is contingent; thus, he notes, "there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially at least) than the process of establishing an order among things."³⁶ But as a priori, the episteme delimits the (historically specific) conditions of possibility for being a thinking subject in our time, conditions that are necessary in the sense that they are binding upon us whether we want them to be or not (thus, "willy-nilly"). We cannot simply reject these conditions without at the same time surrendering our ability to be intelligible. As Foucault puts it in his description of archaeology: "What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility."³⁷ When this sentence is read against the background of Foucault's earlier work on Kant's *Anthropology*, Foucault's claim that the aim of archaeology is to interrogate conditions of possibility for knowledge takes on added significance. Although he still hopes at this point for the coming of a new episteme, and indeed hopes that his work might help to bring it about (hopes that he later views as overly romantic), Foucault also recognizes that, for now, his only choice is to think with the Kantian tools that he has. His articulation of the historical a priori is perhaps the best example of his early attempt to take up Kantian categories in a transformative way; and this attempt must be understood against the background of his own reading of Kant's *Anthropology*, which locates the possibility of just this sort of radical historicizing and contextualizing transformation in Kant's own work. In light of these facts, however, the interpretation of *The Order of Things* as a straightforward rejection of Kant seems overly simplistic.

Thinking along these lines permits us to rethink the infamous heralding of the end of man with which *The Order of Things* ends. Although Foucault emphasizes that we cannot know what the next episteme will be like or how the transition will come to pass, he nonetheless hopes that posing questions about it "may well open the way to a future thought," and he hopes that this opening will take us beyond "man," that "man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its

end.”³⁸ This statement is well known; the question is, how should we interpret it? Foucault’s Kant thesis sheds some light on this question, since the call for the “end of man” at the end of *The Order of Things* echoes Foucault’s call for a “true critique” of the “anthropological illusion” in the closing pages of his *thèse complémentaire* (127). Foucault characterizes the anthropological illusion as the illusion that anthropology is liberated from the “prejudices and inert weights of the a priori” (123). A “true critique” of this illusion involves the recognition that, as I discussed above, anthropology is from the beginning caught up in the tension between empirical and transcendental. The model for this “true critique” is Nietzschean; thus, the closing line of his thesis on Kant is as follows: “The trajectory of the question: what is man? in the field of philosophy is achieved in the response which challenges it and disarms it: the *Übermensch*” (128). However, I want to suggest that the choice of the word “critique” here is extremely significant; for what Foucault calls for here is a critique of critique, which means not only a criticism of Kant’s project for the way in which it closes off the very opening in thought that it had created but also a critique *in the Kantian sense of the term* – that is, an interrogation of the limits and conditions of possibility of that which Kant himself took as his own starting point, namely, the transcendental subject itself. Such an account is, in a sense, “transcendental” inasmuch as the historical a priori sets the necessary conditions of possibility that are constitutive for being a thinking subject in a particular episteme, and, as such, are indirectly the conditions of possibility for all of that subject’s experiences. However, such an account is obviously not transcendental in the same sense in which Kant uses that term, inasmuch as our understanding of those “necessary” conditions is grounded empirically, in an analysis of the contingent historical conditions that give rise to them and in which they remain embedded. The end of man thus amounts to the revelation that human subjects are always embedded in contingently evolved (and thus transformable) linguistic, historical, and cultural conditions.

This revelation is, contra many of Foucault’s critics, perfectly consistent with the project of reconceptualizing subjectivity, to which Foucault turned in his later work. Foucault’s critique of critique, his interrogation of the conditions of possibility of subjectivity itself, leads him to explore throughout his work first the modes by which the subject is constituted via language (archaeology) and social practices (genealogy) and later its modes of self-constitution through practices or technologies of the self (ethics). This shift from genealogy to ethics is thus a shift in emphasis and perspective, but not a radical break. As Foucault conceives it, the subject is constituted by forces that can be analyzed empirically in the sense that the discursive and socio-cultural conditions of possibility for subjectivity in a given historically and culturally specific location can be uncovered through an analysis of power/knowledge regimes. But the subject has always to take up those conditions and it is in the taking up of them that they can (potentially) be transformed. An episteme, a set of rules for discourse formations, or a power/knowledge regime sets the limits within which I can think, deliberate about ends,

and act, but it does not prescribe the specific content of any particular thought or of any particular action (except perhaps in the most extreme cases of domination).³⁹ The subject takes up these conditions and in and through that taking up constitutes itself as a subject through what Foucault later comes to call technologies or practices of the self.⁴⁰

This line of interpretation suggests that Foucault's critique of critique is an immanent rather than a total critique of modernity. If this is the case, then Habermas's charge that "from the point where he gave a threefold analysis of the compulsion to an aporetic doubling on the part of the self-referential subject, Foucault veered off into a theory of power that has shown itself to be a dead end. He follows Heidegger and Derrida in the abstract negation of the self-referential subject, inasmuch as, put briefly, he declares 'man' to be nonexistent" can be seen to miss the mark.⁴¹ To say that Foucault offers an abstract negation of the self-referential subject is to suggest that he rejects the Kantian subject *tout court*, but in point of fact remains unwittingly caught in the very same aporias and paradoxes that he himself had diagnosed as endemic to Kantian thought in particular and to the modern era in general. I would argue that instead of abstractly negating the self-referential subject, Foucault interrogates its conditions of possibility. That interrogation is designed to show the historical and cultural specificity, and thus contingency, of this conception of subjectivity, which in turn opens up the possibility of new modes of subjectification. In carrying out this interrogation, Foucault does not reject the Kantian critical framework; instead, he takes it up in a radically transformative way. As he puts it in "What is Enlightenment?":

Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.⁴²

Moreover, as I argued above, Foucault seems to find inspiration for this transformative project in Kant's own work, specifically in the *Anthropology*, which on Foucault's reading contains the seeds for just such a radical transformation of the Kantian critical project.

Foucault's critical transformation of Kant, which is based in the recognition that Kant set the terms of the debate within which philosophy still moves and which has its roots in Foucault's early reading of Kant's *Anthropology*, informs the whole of Foucault's oeuvre. The following passage from "What is Enlightenment?" offers an excellent characterization of the guiding impulse of Foucault's work as a whole:

We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment. Such an analysis implies a series of historical inquiries that are as precise as possible; and these inquiries will not be oriented retrospectively toward the “essential kernel of rationality” that can be found in the Enlightenment and that would have to be preserved in any event; they will be oriented toward the “contemporary limits of the necessary,” that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects.⁴³

In other words, Foucault’s works offer historically specific analyses of the present – of our experience of madness, health, punishment, sexuality, and so on. These histories of the present are designed to lay out the contingent conditions of possibility of our modern selves; pointing out the contingency of these conditions, moreover, harmonizes with the practical aim of making it possible for us to transform ourselves. For Kant, the courage to know that was characteristic of the Enlightenment was, as Schmidt and Wartenberg put the point, “ultimately the courage to recognize the limits of our consciousness.”⁴⁴ For Foucault, the courage to know is ultimately the courage to recognize the contingency of those limits, and to begin to think beyond them.

3. The Impurity of Reason and the Possibility of Critique

The interpretation of Foucault’s relationship to Kant that I have defended thus far, if it is convincing, offers a response to Habermas’s criticism of Foucault discussed at the outset. Contra Habermas, Foucault does not have two Kants; his early work is misunderstood if we interpret it as a straightforward rejection or abstract negation of Kant’s conception of the transcendental subject. The early work is better understood as a critique of critique, an interrogation of the conditions of possibility of that which Kant took as his starting point, namely, the transcendental subject. If this is how we interpret Foucault’s early work, then Habermas is also wrong to suggest that Foucault’s relationship to Kant points to a fundamental contradiction in Foucault’s own thought. Instead, I would argue the converse: Foucault’s relationship to Kant suggests a way of viewing Foucault’s work as a continuous whole. One might even suggest that Foucault spent his entire career reworking Kant’s famous four questions, historicizing and contextualizing them as he went.⁴⁵ “What can I know?” becomes, in Foucault’s archaeologies, “how have discursive structures positioned me as a speaking and knowing subject?” “What ought I do?” becomes, in Foucault’s genealogies, “how have norms functioned insidiously to position me as a normalized, disciplined individual?” “What may I hope?” becomes, in his late work, “how can I attempt to turn myself into an ethical subject and my life into a work of art via practices and techniques of the self?” And, as with Kant, it is the fourth and final question – “what is man?” which we might recast in Foucauldian terms as “what has human subjectivity

been and what might it become?" – that sums up the first three and provides the guiding thread that links all of Foucault's work together.

However, these general similarities between Foucault and Kant's projects notwithstanding, one might push Habermas's point by arguing that Foucault's transformation of Kantian critical philosophy is so radical that it might as well be a negation. In other words, what sense can be made of transcendental inquiry that locates the grounds of our subjectivity in historical, social, and cultural contingencies? Why doesn't such a move void the concept of the transcendental and, in so doing, constitute a negation rather than a continuation of Kantian critical philosophy? In one sense, as I mentioned above, Foucault's move to this historical a priori does void Kant's conception of the transcendental, inasmuch as Kant's use of this term is exclusively tied to non-empirical reflection on the limits and conditions of possibility for experience, whereas Foucault's account of the conditions of possibility for subjectivity is decidedly empirical. However, I have also argued that Foucault arrives at this account by a distinctively Kantian move: namely, by asking after the limits and conditions of possibility of subjectivity itself, which, in turn, serves as the condition of possibility for subjective experience.

In so doing, Foucault no doubt radicalizes the Kantian approach to critique by presenting the subject as constituted by historical, social, and cultural conditions. As I have argued above, given the development of Foucault's thought, I think that this move is best understood as a transformation of rather than a negation of Kantian critical philosophy. Moreover, and this is the important point for my argument, on this point about the embeddedness of the subject in historical, social, and cultural conditions, Habermas and Foucault are actually largely in agreement. For, as Thomas McCarthy has convincingly argued, both Foucault and Habermas accept what McCarthy calls "the impurity of reason": "its embeddedness in culture and society, its entanglement with power and interest, the historical variability of its categories and criteria, the embodied, sensuous and practically engaged character of its bearers . . ." ⁴⁶ As such, both thinkers "call for a transformation cum radicalization of the Kantian approach to critique." ⁴⁷ Moreover, as McCarthy points out, for both Foucault and the Frankfurt School tradition of which Habermas is the most prominent contemporary member, this "desublimation of reason goes hand in hand with the decentering of the rational subject." ⁴⁸ Thus, if historicizing and contextualizing Kant's transcendental subject makes Foucault guilty of negating rather than transforming (or negating by radically transforming) Kant's critical project, then Habermas would seem to be equally guilty. At the end of the day, what I am most concerned with is showing that Foucault and Habermas are both engaged in a radicalization from within of the Kantian critical project; it is this basic similarity that Habermas seems unwilling to recognize when he interprets Foucault's early position on Kant as straightforwardly rejectionist and, on the basis of this reading, claims to uncover a basic contradiction between this reading of Kant and Foucault's late embrace of the Kantian project of Enlightenment.

In the end, McCarthy, too, seems unwilling to recognize the depth of the similarity between Habermas's and Foucault's critical projects, despite his recognition that both are attempts at a transformation-cum-radicalization of the Kantian notion of critique. He characterizes the key difference between Foucault and Habermas with respect to their accounts of subjectivity as follows:

While both approaches seek to get beyond the subject-centeredness of modern Western thought, Foucault understands this as the 'end of man' and of the retinue of humanist conceptions following upon it, whereas [Habermas] attempt[s] to reconstruct notions of subjectivity and autonomy that are consistent with both the social dimensions of individual identity and the situated character of social action.⁴⁹

However, as I argued above, Foucault's call for the end of man is best understood as the call for a critique of critique, and thus as the revelation that human subjects are always embedded in contingently emergent (and thus transformable) linguistic, historical, and cultural conditions. As such, the end of man is not at all inconsistent with the project of reconstructing subjectivity and autonomy. As a matter of fact, this is precisely the project with which Foucault concerned himself in his late account of practices of the self, which are defined as "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."⁵⁰ Now, obviously, there are crucial differences between Habermas's intersubjective and communicative account of subjectivity and autonomy and Foucault's aestheticized account. However, my point is that the differences between Habermas's and Foucault's projects have tended to be overstated, with Habermas cast as the pro-Enlightenment heir to the Kantian critical tradition and Foucault cast as they anti-Enlightenment, anti-modern, anti-Kantian. To the extent that the Foucault-Habermas debate has been presented in this way, the possibilities for articulating a middle ground between Foucault's and Habermas's critical projects have been obscured.

Even if we grant this response to the reformulated version of Habermas's charge, nonetheless it might seem that this reading of Foucault has raised more questions than it has answered. Assuming that Foucault's aim is an interrogation of the conditions of possibility of subjectivity, how is such a project even possible? From what perspective can he claim to have access to these conditions? Doesn't the claim that he can have access to them require Foucault to jump over his own shadow? *Ex hypothesi*, wouldn't Foucault himself, qua individual who has been conditioned by the current power-knowledge regime, necessarily be influenced (perhaps even determined) by these conditions to such a degree as to make critical reflection upon them impossible? Where exactly does the Foucauldian archaeologist or genealogist stand?⁵¹ If he purports to stand outside of his own episteme regime, then he seems to contradict his own claim that the episteme sets the necessary

conditions of possibility for being a subject in a particular time and place. If, on the contrary, he admits to standing inside his own episteme, then he no longer seems able to achieve the kind of critical distance that makes reflection on one's own episteme possible, thus, his claims about it and how it sets conditions of possibility for subjectivity are called into question.

Foucault himself vacillated on this issue over the course of his career. In his early work, he seems to have assumed that it was possible for the archaeologist to stand outside of her own episteme and reflect on it – whence his characterization of himself as a happy positivist. However, by the time he wrote “What is Enlightenment?,” he offered a different response:

It is true that we have to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits. And from this point of view the theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits and of the possibility of moving beyond them is always limited and determined; thus we are always in the position of beginning again.⁵²

In other words, Foucault now recognizes that the genealogist stands within the power/knowledge regime that she analyzes; thus, Foucault himself and, by extension, his thought are conditioned by the very conditions of possibility for subjectivity that he is trying to elucidate. While this way of thinking saves Foucault from the contradiction in which he seemed to be stuck when he assumed that it was possible to step outside of one's own episteme, it does so at the risk of undermining the critical force of Foucault's interrogations. However, this difficulty need not be intractable. Perhaps it is the case that epistemes or power/knowledge regimes are more open and supple than Foucault's rhetoric (particularly with respect to the former) tended to suggest. If this were the case, then it was a mistake to think that the only available options were being either wholly inside or wholly outside the episteme in question. Perhaps epistemes or power/knowledge regimes even contain within themselves resources that enable their own critique and transformation, which once again suggests that they are not completely closed inasmuch as they point beyond themselves.⁵³ This would explain the possibility of a critical perspective that is grounded in a particular episteme or power/knowledge regime, though the conception of critique that results would of necessity be local, historically and culturally specific, and pragmatic rather than universal and ahistorical.

Conclusion

I have endeavored to establish three interrelated points. First, Foucault does not have two Kants; his early work is misunderstood if it is interpreted as a straightforward rejection of Kantian thought. Instead, I have argued that Foucault's relationship to Kant is remarkably consistent throughout his life; from his earliest work on Kant up to and including his late essays on the Kantian version

of the Enlightenment project, Foucault is engaged in a continuation-through-transformation of Kantian critical thought. Second, clarifying his stance vis-à-vis Kant reveals a fundamental continuity in Foucault's philosophical project as a whole: as Foucault himself acknowledged, the subject is the general theme of his research. There is no inconsistency between his early call for the end of man – which is indicative not of a rejection of subjectivity *tout court* but of an interrogation of its conditions of possibility – and his late reconceptualization of subjectivity and autonomy in his account of practices of the self. Third and finally, if the previous two points are convincing, then Foucault can no longer be positioned as the counter-Enlightenment foil to Habermas's Enlightenment hero, or vice versa, depending on your views on "postmodernism." Foucault and Habermas no doubt offer two different ways of completing the project of the Enlightenment, two alternative continuations-through-transformation of the Kantian critical project, but there is much more common ground between their philosophical projects than has up to now been recognized by either side of the Foucault-Habermas debate.⁵⁴

NOTES

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1. Michel Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," in Michael Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 146.

2. *Ibid.*, 147–48.

3. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 50, 41.

4. *Ibid.*, 43, 50.

5. *Ibid.*, 46.

6. James Schmidt and Thomas Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self" in Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power*, 283.

7. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 30. This shouldn't be too surprising, since *Discipline and Punish* is clearly inspired by the second essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, the main target of which is Kantian moral philosophy.

8. Foucault, for his part, offers support for Habermas's reading in the essay entitled "The Art of Telling the Truth" when he distinguishes Kant's two different legacies – the ontology of the present and the analytics of truth – and embraces the former while remaining critical of the latter. However, in "What is Enlightenment?" he stresses the fact that Kant's answer to the question "Was ist Aufklärung?," which centers on what Foucault calls an ontology of the present, is integrally related to Kant's critical philosophy, and he specifically suggests that it is at the intersection of these two concerns that we can find the attitude of modernity that Foucault wants to embrace. See Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 37–38; cf. Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth."

9. Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," in Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power*, 150.

10. *Ibid.*, 152.

11. Ibid., 154. Christopher Norris suggests a similar reading of Foucault's relationship to Kant when he writes: "Foucault came around to a viewpoint [on Kant] strikingly at odds with his earlier (skeptical-genealogical) approach, and...one major consequence...was a radical re-thinking of the subject's role in relation to issues of truth, critique, self-knowledge, and practical reason." (Christopher Norris, "What is Enlightenment? Kant according to Foucault" in Gary Gutting, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 179).

12. Schmidt and Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment," 287.

13. Ibid., 283.

14. Ibid., 303.

15. David Hoy, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?" in Jonathan Arac, ed., *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 32. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

16. Ibid., 26–27.

17. Ibid., 32.

18. On this point, see also Norris, "What is Enlightenment?" I wholeheartedly agree with Norris's argument that Foucault's work is neither a simple return to Kant nor a straightforward post-modern repudiation of Kantian ideas, but disagree with the sharp contrast that Norris draws between Foucault's early and late views on Kant.

19. This is not to say that there are no contradictions in Foucault's thought, just that his stance vis-à-vis Kant is not indicative of a contradiction.

20. Thus, my argument lends support for Foucault's own claim that it is the subject, not power, that is the general theme of his research. On this point, see Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power," in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2e (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 209. For the argument that power is the general theme of Foucault's research, see Hubert Dreyfus, "Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 1–16.

21. Here I borrow a phrase that Thomas McCarthy often uses to describe Habermas's critical social theory. See, for example, David Couzens Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 2.

22. At the very least, Habermas seems to have understood it this way. See the two chapters on Foucault in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, tr. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

23. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, tr. M.J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 3.

24. Foucault, *Introduction à L'anthropologie de Kant*, thèse complémentaire. Xerox copy of typescript available in the Centre Michel Foucault, Paris, 52; hereafter cited parenthetically. All translations are mine. For other references to Kant's use of the terms *kann* and *soll* to describe the object of pragmatic anthropology, see also *ibid.*, 39–40, 55, 63.

25. For helpful discussion of this point, see Gregor's introduction to the English translation of Kant's *Anthropology*. (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, xvii–xviii).

26. On this point, see Kant's division of ethics into the empirical part (pragmatic anthropology) and the rational part (metaphysics of morals) in Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 1–2.

27. Here Foucault is clearly pushing Kant in the direction of Hegel. Indeed, one might suggest that as soon as Foucault begins to think of the a priori as historical, he sounds much more Hegelian than Kantian. I would not disagree that Hegel as well as Kant had a profound influence on Foucault's thought. However, Foucault seems interested in exploring the ways in which Kant's own thought can be seen, when viewed from a certain perspective, to move in the direction that Hegel later took. In any event, it seems worth taking seriously Foucault's self-understanding as an heir to the Kantian Enlightenment tradition, even if his own contribution to that tradition is influenced by post-Kantian philosophical developments. I am grateful to Sally Sedgwick for pushing this point with me.

28. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* (Paris: Vrin, 1994), vol. 1: 26.
29. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, tr. A. Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 310.
30. *Ibid.*, 312.
31. *Ibid.*, 318.
32. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in D.F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 36; see also 38. I am grateful to Dianna Taylor for pointing out the importance of this essay for a consideration of Foucault's relationship to Kant and also for helpful and interesting discussions about Foucault's reading of Kant.
33. *Ibid.*, 40.
34. On this point, see also Norris, "What is Enlightenment?," 184.
35. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 250.
36. *Ibid.*, xix.
37. *Ibid.*, xxii.
38. *Ibid.*, 386, 387.
39. Here I agree with David Hoy, who makes the same point in Hoy, "Power, Repression, Progress: Foucault, Lukes, and the Frankfurt School," in David Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1986), 128, 132–33, 142.
40. A fuller discussion of Foucault's account of practices of the self and how this account can be integrated into Foucault's earlier work is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I do think that what I have said here lays the groundwork for such a discussion. What I am most concerned with establishing is that there is no conceptual reason why Foucault's archaeological and genealogical insights cannot be integrated with those of his ethics. The claim that they cannot be so integrated – a common claim in the critical literature on Foucault, particularly among Habermasians – typically rests on the claim that Foucault's ethical notion of practices of the self relies on the very notion of subjectivity that he himself spent so much time rejecting. (For a version of this argument, see Thomas McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School," *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).) I am suggesting that this claim is based on a misunderstanding of Foucault's early work.
41. Habermas, "An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative vs. Subject-Centered Reason," in Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 296.
42. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 45.
43. *Ibid.*, 43.
44. Schmidt and Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment," 290.
45. In his introductory lectures on logic, Kant writes: "The field of philosophy . . . may be reduced to the following questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? 4. What is Man? The first question is answered by Metaphysics, the second by Morals, the third by Religion, and the fourth by Anthropology. In reality, however, all these might be reckoned under anthropology, since the first three questions refer to the last." Kant, *Introduction to Logic*, tr. T. Kinsmill Abbott (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963), 15. Other commentators have also noted the similarity between Foucault's philosophical projects and Kant's three questions, though they have interestingly neglected to mention Kant's fourth question – what is man? – which is, I think, the most important of them all for understanding Foucault's relationship to Kant. See, for example, James Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Ecstatic Thinking" in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 46–47; and Norris, "What is Enlightenment?," 169.
46. McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason," 43–44.
47. *Ibid.*, 43.
48. *Ibid.*, 44.
49. *Ibid.*, 48.
50. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1985), 10–11.

51. This is another of Habermas's criticisms of Foucault. See Habermas, "An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject."

52. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 47.

53. I am grateful to Nancy Fraser for suggesting this point to me.

54. Thus, I would agree with Dreyfus and Rabinow when they describe Foucault and Habermas as "the two thinkers who could legitimately be called the heirs to [the eighteenth-century debate over Enlightenment], because they embody two opposed but equally serious and persuasive ways of reinterpreting the philosophic life through understanding the relation between reason and the historical moment." (Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'" in Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, 109.) However, I think they overdraw the contrast between the two thinkers when they go on to claim that Foucault's and Habermas's understandings of society, critical reason, and modernity are incompatible.