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## **Foucault's Kantian Critique: Philosophy and the Present**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*In several lectures, interviews and essays from the early 1980s, Michel Foucault startlingly argues that he is engaged in a kind of critical work that is similar to that of Immanuel Kant. Given Foucault's criticisms of Kantian and Enlightenment emphases on universal truths and values, his declaration that his work is Kantian seems paradoxical. I agree with some commentators who argue that this is a way for Foucault to publicly acknowledge to his critics that he is not, as some of them charge, attempting a total critique of Enlightenment beliefs and values, but is instead attempting to transform them from within. I argue further that Foucault's self-professed Kantianism can also productively be read as a means of encouraging change in his intellectual audience, a call to courage to take up the thread of Enlightenment thought that Foucault finds in Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?": that of directing one's philosophical efforts towards questioning and transforming one's own present in its historical specificity, for the sake of promoting the values of freedom and autonomy therein. Though much of Kant's philosophical work is focused on that which lies outside of history, Foucault locates in some of it a concern for what is happening here and now that, I argue, he encourages his audience to take up for themselves through tracing his own intellectual lineage to*

*Kant. In so doing, he encourages contemporary philosophers to consider the value and effects of their work on the present social and political contexts in which they live.*

*KEYWORDS: Foucault, Kant, Enlightenment, intellectuals*

According to James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg, in a 1983 lecture<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault provides an ‘uncharacteristically straightforward declaration of his own allegiances,’ made more striking because he traces his intellectual lineage back to Kant (Schmidt and Wartenberg 1994, 284). Since Foucault spent so much of his career ‘showing that every alleged victory of enlightenment marked the triumph of a new and insidious form of domination’ many will likely wonder: ‘Foucault . . . a Kantian? . . . Who, one might reasonably ask, is kidding whom?’ (284).<sup>2</sup>

Numerous commentators have puzzled over Foucault’s claims to Kantian affiliation in his late essays, lectures, and interviews,<sup>3</sup> some of them concluding that Foucault has simply contradicted himself in one or more ways. Jürgen Habermas argues that Foucault’s later return to Kant, after his vehement criticisms of Kant in previous writings, is a manifestation of the need for a normative framework that his work undermines. According to Habermas, Foucault’s critiques call for normative grounds to show why certain discourses, practices and relations of power are problematic and should be resisted; yet this critical work itself denies the possibility of such grounds. Foucauldian critique ‘sees itself compelled to a relativist self-denial and [thus] can give no account of the normative foundations of its own rhetoric’ (Habermas 1987, 294). For Habermas, Foucault’s only response to why it would be important to ‘muster any resistance’ against dominating power is to appeal to ‘familiar determinations from the normativistic language games that he has explicitly rejected’ (284). Foucault’s self-affiliation with Kant is a symptom of the fundamental incoherence of Foucauldian critique: it requires normative standards while rejecting their possibility, and reverts to implicit

appeals to values grounded in the ‘philosophical discourse of modernity’ that it rejects (Habermas 1989, 179).<sup>4</sup>

Nancy Fraser makes a similar charge against Foucault, arguing that he seems inadvertently caught in Kantian values that he also criticizes. In pointing to the ‘dangers’ of ‘disciplinary’ practices of power, according to Fraser, Foucault often appeals (overtly or implicitly) to values that sound very much like the freedom and autonomy championed by Enlightenment thinkers: ‘if one considers the disciplinary, or carceral, society described in *Discipline and Punish*,’ and asks ‘what exactly is wrong with that society, Kantian notions leap immediately to mind’ (1989, 30). In the absence of any alternative normative framework, Fraser argues, Foucault appears to be ‘presupposing the very liberal norms he criticizes,’ and if this is the case he is ‘caught in an outright contradiction’ (30).<sup>5</sup>

Other commentators maintain that Foucault’s return to Kant in his late work is neither contradictory nor best characterized as a ‘return.’ Schmidt and Wartenberg argue that Foucault never tried to nor wanted to break entirely from Kantian thought, that Foucault’s ‘interest in Kant spanned his career,’ and his ‘stance toward the enlightenment remained a good deal more nuanced and complex than his critics would lead us to believe’ (1994, 303).<sup>6</sup> Amy Allen, borrowing a phrase Thomas McCarthy has used to describe Habermas’ social theory, argues that ‘Foucault, like Habermas, offers us a continuation-through-transformation of the Kantian critical project’ (2003, 183). Rather than rejecting Kantian philosophical critique in his early work and then claiming later that his own form of critique is Kantian, ‘Foucault’s stance toward Kant in his early work<sup>7</sup> was never as rejectionist as has been supposed’ (183). According to Allen, Foucault didn’t attempt to reject a Kantian philosophical approach entirely, only to find later that he was unable to do so; instead, he engaged in a sustained and consistent project of transforming certain aspects of the Enlightenment tradition and Kantian critique from within. Foucault undertakes an ‘immanent rather than a total critique of modernity’ in his early criticisms of Kant, Allen argues (190), by engaging in a kind of

Kantian critique of Kantian critique: he investigates ‘the limits and conditions of possibility’ of that which Kant took as a starting point for his own critique, namely the transcendental subject (192). Foucault argues that the modern subject --- and thus the Kantian critique which starts from it --- are grounded in contingent historical conditions, revealing thereby the potential for their transformation. Yet, according to Allen, Foucault’s conclusions are still arrived at ‘by a distinctively Kantian move’ (192).

Daniel Touey also argues that Foucault attempts to formulate a mode of critique that is Kantian in the sense that it examines the limits and conditions of possibility of topics such as knowledge and subjectivity (1998, 98). Foucault and Kant were both concerned with the question, ‘How is it possible that I do the things that I do, the way that I do them? What accounts for it?’; though of course they differed widely in how they answered (98). According to Touey, Foucault was engaged throughout his career with ‘recovering the critical standpoint, after the normative supports of Enlightenment thinking have been taken away,’ and this concern became a ‘central theme’ towards the end of his life, including in his later writings about Kant (85). He was trying to do a kind of Kantian critique without Kantian foundations. Foucauldian critique rests on grounds that are specific to the historical situation in which it takes place, a framework of ‘relative stabilities’ that are continually ‘shifting’ (96). Touey, like Allen, argues that Foucault takes a critical stance on present conditions and practices from an immanent position within them: ‘Criticism, Foucault (indirectly) teaches us, is always reflexive; always drawing on those very institutionalized practices that it is subjecting to critique’ (97).<sup>8</sup>

It is perhaps this reflexivity of Foucault’s critique that leads some to charge him with self-contradiction. Foucault reports a kind of ‘blackmail’ on the part of some critics: ‘you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism . . . ; or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality’ (Foucault 1997b, 120). Touey

suggests that in claiming Kant as his intellectual forefather, Foucault presented to such critics ‘an apology in the best Socratic sense: an argument . . . that his life’s work was not meant to destroy the critical tradition handed down by the Enlightenment but to reinterpret it in contemporary terms’ (1998, 88).<sup>9</sup> I find this reading compelling, in that in his later work on Kant Foucault does seem to be largely addressing his critics, and situating his work within the landscape of modern philosophy by pointing to his own affiliations therein. But I think there is more going on in his ‘apology’ than a defense against critics: just as Socrates was also calling for change in his audience, trying to get the Athenians to see the need to think and act differently, so too there is reason to read Foucault’s later work on Kant as a call for change in his audience of scholarly peers.

Touey does not emphasize this aspect of “Foucault’s Apology” (the title of his article), but I believe it is an important part of understanding why Foucault took such pains to connect his own work with Kantian critique. I agree with Allen’s and Touey’s arguments that such a connection can legitimately be made. My argument focuses primarily on what it means for Foucault to insist on his philosophical affiliation with Kant, on what this *does*. I want to take this part of the notion of an apology further than Touey did, and consider how Foucault may have been using his linkage to Kant to encourage other theorists to rethink the role of philosophy and the philosopher to the historically-conditioned present. I argue that we can read Foucault’s self-professed Kantianism as a call for modern philosophers to pay more attention to what philosophical work can do in the present in which it takes place. It can be understood as an encouragement to consider the impact and import of philosophy on the here and now.

### **Foucault, a Kantian?**

In an essay entitled “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault responds to the ‘blackmail’ that he must either remain in the Enlightenment tradition or escape from it: ‘We have to move beyond the

inside/outside alternative, we have to be at the frontiers. Criticism . . . consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits' (1997b, 124). I agree with Touey and Allen that Foucault engages in immanent critique of certain aspects of Enlightenment thought, and he here discusses how such critique can be undertaken. Reflecting on the beliefs, values, practices, and methods that enjoy currency in the time and place in which the critic is located, focusing on those places where limits appear, the critic can consider whether those limits that seem necessary or universal might be instead grounded in the historical, the contingent: '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?' (124--125). Foucault claims that this project is connected to Kantian critique, in that criticism in general has to do with analyzing limits, and while Kant's concern in his *Critiques* was to find those limits that are necessary, that 'knowledge has to renounce transgressing' (124), critique today should be a practical one 'that takes the form of a possible transgression' (125). Instead of cutting himself off from Kantian critique through this significant change to it, Foucault is so intent on finding a way to link his work to that of Kant that he works hard to locate in the latter an example of the kind of critique he is himself engaging in, the kind that promotes transgression. The reading he gives of Kant in this regard is at times questionable, and certainly unorthodox; yet the repeated and difficult effort he makes to show that Kant himself engaged in transgressive critique indicates that Foucault thought it an important endeavour to affiliate his work with Kant's. Considering the nature of the transgressive critique that Foucault claims forges this link can help elucidate what he may have been trying to *do* by explicitly claiming himself an intellectual descendent of Kant.

In the first lecture of his course at the Collège de France in 1983, Foucault claims that Kant founded 'the two great critical traditions which divide modern philosophy' (Foucault 1997c, 99). The first Foucault labels an 'analytic of truth': 'in his great critical work, Kant posited and founded this tradition of philosophy that asks the question of the conditions under which true knowledge is

possible' (99). The 'analytic of truth' is transcendental in that it 'seek[s] to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action' (Foucault 1997b, 125). Foucault calls the second critical tradition founded by Kant an 'ontology of ourselves,' or an 'ontology of the present' (Foucault 1997c, 100). This is the transgressive form of critique that asks about possible transformations within the present, by 'separat[ing] 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' (Foucault 1997b, 125). Whereas the first kind of critique works to establish universal limits to knowledge and ethical action, the second reveals the possibility of transgressing limits by determining what in them may be historically contingent.

While critique as 'analytic of truth' is easy to recognize in Kant's work,<sup>10</sup> the 'ontology of ourselves' is more difficult to locate therein. According to Foucault, it is most clearly shown in Kant's essay "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" This text began a new trend in modern philosophy, Foucault argues: 'For the first time' (1997c, 86), one finds a philosopher considering, as a philosophical problem, the present and his/her own role as a philosopher therein, asking, 'What is my actuality? What is the meaning of this actuality? And what am I doing when I speak about this actuality?' (87). According to Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Foucault sees in this essay by Kant 'a philosopher qua philosopher realizing for the first time that his thinking arises out of and is an attempt to respond to his historical situation' (1986, 111).<sup>11</sup> The philosopher here considers a current concern on which philosophical thought could have an impact, and focuses on what such thought can *do* in the present, what 'mode of action ... it is capable of exerting' (Foucault 1997c, 87). Philosophical critique of this form is concerned with its own potentiality as *practice*, with its efficacy affecting what is happening here and now.

Foucault argues that this kind of critique is driven by a particular 'attitude' or 'ethos' towards the present that he claims characterizes modernity. This attitude involves a critique of the present

undertaken from a position within it, ‘a mode of relating to contemporary reality’ that both ‘marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task’ (Foucault 1997b, 113); it is a critique of the present taken up from a position within it. The ‘attitude of modernity’ values the present, but also has ‘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’ (117). The critic with this kind of ethos finds something in the present to which s/he appeals in a way that encourages change in the present, not by negating the present, trying to stand outside of it entirely, but by both ‘grasping it in what it is’ and altering it at the same time. Such a critic engages in ‘the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects [the reality of the present] and violates it’ (117). Foucault locates this kind of ethos not only in Kant’s essay on enlightenment, but also more directly in Baudelaire’s view of modernity in art. The modern artist finds something in the present that s/he ‘heroizes,’ not to try to ‘maintain or perpetuate’ the present (115), but for the sake of transformation. This can be achieved in theoretical work, as noted above, by paying attention to limits experienced in the present and determining the level of their dependence on historical contingencies. Indeed, historical analysis can itself be a practice of and incitement to transgression, insofar as it reveals contingency in what may previously have been thought necessary.

According to Foucault, Kant’s essay on enlightenment exhibits the character of transgressive critique as ‘ontology of the present’ in that it presents enlightenment as both an ‘ongoing process’ as well as ‘a task and an obligation’ (Foucault 1997b, 106). Kant pays attention to what is already happening in his present, and gives a call to action to individuals and states to initiate change to further the process. This essay exhibits an attitude of critique in that it operates as ‘an act of defiance, as a challenge’ to the ways people are being governed at the present time (Foucault 1997a, 28). It depicts enlightenment as an ‘exit’ or a ‘way out’ (Foucault 1997b, 104) of the ‘immaturity’ of being unable to ‘use one’s understanding without guidance from another’ (Kant 1983a, 41). Foucault notes



that Kant provides a kind of command to his audience to muster the courage to transform the present by pulling themselves out of their 'self-imposed' immaturity: "'Have courage to use your own understanding!'" (Kant 1983a, 41).<sup>12</sup> Kant also calls for political reform in this essay, encouraging leaders of states to facilitate the public's emergence from their immaturity by opening up the public sphere as a place where people can freely use their own reason to discuss and debate in public forums (44--46).<sup>13</sup> Kant promotes change by showing that current limits on autonomous uses of reason are contingent and malleable: the public is largely immature because of individual attitudes and social/political practices that are by no means necessary and inevitable. That people do not think for themselves is due, not to their inability to do so, but to 'laziness and cowardice,' 'lack of resolve and courage'; and these have been exacerbated by the fact that the 'guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men' have been sure to 'show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone' --- a danger that is 'not actually so great' as it is made out to appear, according to Kant (41). As Foucault interprets it, in this essay Kant practices critique as an ontology of ourselves --- he finds a current concern that calls for philosophical thought and argument, and issues a call for change by revealing some limits as contingent and in need of transformation.

According to Foucault, Kant also locates within his present a means to help him encourage others to engage in this change: he notes that there is already in existence an enthusiasm for individual freedom, autonomy, and political revolution amongst much of the contemporary public (at least that part with which he was familiar, namely Europe), and he appeals to this to encourage enlightenment as a release from immaturity. Kant analyzes the present as part of a teleological process in which humankind moves towards greater enlightenment, culminating in the establishment of 'a universal civil society administered in accord with the right' that allows for the greatest freedom of each member possible within the context of equal freedom for all (Kant 1983b, 33). For Kant we are driven towards this goal, Foucault argues, by a desire and enthusiasm for individual autonomy,

freedom and political revolution. Foucault points to the second essay of Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*, wherein Kant argues that we can locate a sign within empirical history to show that humanity is morally progressing. He finds such a sign in the enthusiasm for revolution that is shown by spectators of various revolutions in different times and places (Kant 1979, 151--157). This enthusiasm among spectators, those who are not themselves participants in revolutions, is universal throughout history, according to Kant, and it reveals that humanity is driven to progress towards the goal of a republican state (153). Foucault argues accordingly that Kant uses the 'enthusiasm for the Revolution' in France during his own present time as a means to incite change in the present (Foucault 1997c, 94). Such enthusiasm as a desire for freedom and autonomy, Foucault says, 'continues the process of the *Aufklärung*' for Kant (95). Kant appeals to this desire for freedom in his exhortation to the public to free themselves from their own immaturity, to use their own reason autonomously rather than being directed as to how to think and act from an outside source.<sup>14</sup>

Foucault links his own genealogical studies of current discourses, practices and institutions to the 'ontology of ourselves' he says originated in Kant's philosophical approach to his present in "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" Foucault claims that in these genealogies he attempts to find something within the present on which to focus, in order to initiate change in the present: he engages in historical analysis 'that starts off from this present day actuality' by asking, 'what are we and what are we today?' (Foucault 1997d, 158). While these critiques always start with and refer to present problems in the ways they are currently formulated and understood, Foucault argues that the point is not simply 'to follow what is happening' (158), to report what is going on as if it were the case that 'we are imprisoned in our own system' (160). The point is to try to provide, for himself and his audience, 'an experience of our modernity that might permit us to emerge from it transformed' (Foucault 1991, 33). He focuses in on 'a field containing a number of points that are particularly fragile or sensitive at the present time' (Foucault 1997d, 158), and considers their history to show 'both why and how things

were able to establish themselves as such,' and thus that 'what appears obvious to us is not at all so obvious' (161). In so doing, he appeals to a desire for freedom that exists in the present, in order to encourage others to take up the possibilities for change he reveals. Foucault claims to start from struggles that are already going on in the present, oppositions to power that are already taking place, where individuals are working towards greater freedom against limits experienced as oppressive (Foucault 1983, 211--212). He then 'locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power' (Foucault 1996c, 225), in order that this information 'might be used for a possible battle, to be waged by those who wish to wage it, in forms yet to be found' (Foucault 1996a, 262). Foucault thus characterizes his critiques of the present as attempts to change it 'by grasping it in what it is' --- he reveals the fragility of present beliefs and practices, and uses a desire for freedom that already exists to encourage their transformation.

It is thus possible to recognize how Foucault is connecting his own work to something he calls an 'ontology of the present' in Kant's essay on enlightenment. When he claims that we have not yet reached the maturity which Kant called for as part of enlightenment, he seems to be diagnosing his present in a way similar to Kant:

I do not know whether we will ever reach mature adulthood. Many things in our experience convince us that the historical event of the Enlightenment did not make us mature adults, and we have not reached that stage yet. (Foucault 1997b, 132)

If it is now asked, "Do we presently live in an *enlightened* age?" the answer is, "No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*." (Kant 1983a, 44)

We have not yet reached maturity, according to Foucault, and perhaps we never will. But are we still on the road to it? Should we be? We are, Foucault insists, 'historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment' (1997b, 120), and what connects us to it 'is not faithfulness to doctrinal

elements but the permanent reactivation of an attitude --- that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era' (119). We may still live in an age of enlightenment insofar as we engage in critique as 'ontology of ourselves' informed by a modern attitude. Foucault is clear in recommending this kind of critique as valuable at the present time:

I do not know whether it must be said today that the critical task still entails faith in the Enlightenment; I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty. (133)

Foucault characterizes his own work here as another step on the path towards the goals of freedom and autonomy, as 'work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings' (127), 'a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy' (123).<sup>15</sup> Thus Foucault argues that his own form of critique is connected to the Enlightenment in that it is informed by an attitude shared by Kant's "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" and that promotes Enlightenment values of freedom and autonomy (even if Foucault's views of what these values mean differs significantly from those of Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers).

This is a rather tenuous connection between Foucault's work and that of Kant, however, since it focuses only one short essay written late in Kant's life. What of the major critical works that proceed on *a priori* grounds and avoid appeal to the empirical, the contingent, the historical? Foucault does explain briefly what he sees as the connection between Kant's three *Critiques* and his essay on Enlightenment. For Kant, according to Foucault, Enlightenment means 'humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority,' and Kantian critique then plays the role of

defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what

can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped. Illegitimate uses of reason are what give rise to dogmatism and heteronomy, along with illusion. (Foucault 1997b, 111)

The critiques of reason and judgment, then, are necessary in order to ensure autonomy. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states in the Preface to the first edition, is a ‘tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, . . . in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws’ (Kant 1965, A xii); it is a forum in which reason considers its own capacities and limits, determines its own laws and disciplines itself thereto. Instead of bowing to the rule of someone or something else, through criticizing itself in the *Critiques* reason is able to operate autonomously to determine the limits of its legitimate employment. Such self-legislation is crucial, for if reason does not submit to its own laws, it will inevitably have to obey those of some other source:

if reason does not wish to be subject to the law which it imposes on itself, it must bow beneath the yoke of laws which someone else imposes upon it; for nothing --- not even the greatest absurdity --- can continue to operate for long without some kind of law. (Kant 1991, 248)<sup>16</sup>

Thus the limits which reason imposes on itself through what Foucault calls critique as ‘analytic of truth’ are important not simply for the purpose of determining knowledge for its own sake, but also for the sake of facilitating autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

For Foucault, then, Kantian critique as ‘analytic of truth,’ as locating the universal limits of knowledge and moral action, is undertaken in service of enlightenment as a process of reason coming to govern itself autonomously and release itself from the rule of others. Kant engages in critique as ‘ontology of the present’ in his essay on enlightenment, calling for change in the present grounded in

the capacity of reason to govern itself that the ‘analytic of truth’ has made possible. Foucault argues that the Kantian legacy has left modern critical philosophy with these two possible routes:

we can opt for a critical philosophy which will present itself as an analytic philosophy of truth in general, or we can opt for a form of critical thought which will be an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the actuality. (Foucault 1997c, 100)

Both paths, he claims, emerge from the work of Kant; and both have been represented in modern philosophy in the ensuing centuries. Not only does Foucault claim that the ‘ontology of the present’ has been the kind of critique he has been engaged in, and that it has existed in some form from Kant to ‘Hegel to the Frankfurt School, through Nietzsche and Max Weber’ (100); he also suggests this form of critique as a task that should be taken up for the future.

In a lecture from 1978, Foucault claims that in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries critical intellectual work was largely focused on the first strand of Kantian critique, the ‘analytic of truth’ that works to establish the legitimacy of knowledge (Foucault 1997a, 34--36, 48--49). Yet with increasing concern over practices of power that have changed over time but that continue to be constraining, critique as ‘an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting [the] arts of governing . . . transforming them’ comes more and more to the fore in European philosophy (28).<sup>18</sup> The theoretical and practical mechanisms that have been used to struggle against domination through appeal to universal reason, right and truth have not led to a reduction in problematic power relations but only to a change in their form (37--43). If it has been the case that over the past two centuries the ‘ontology of ourselves’ has been deemphasized in favor of an ‘analytic of truth’ that has not managed to promote autonomy and freedom, Foucault asks, ‘might it not now be necessary to follow the opposite route?’ (61). Kant

provided the origins of two forms of critical philosophy; if one has not promoted the Enlightenment values it seemed to promise, perhaps we should try the other and see where it leads.

It is therefore possible to read Foucault's and Kant's critical work in a way that connects the two, but this reading is neither obvious nor perhaps entirely convincing. As Allen notes, considering Habermas' charge that Foucault contradicts himself by rejecting Kantianism and then later claiming he is himself a Kantian of sorts, even if similarities between Foucault and Kant can be found 'one might push Habermas' point by arguing that Foucault's transformation of Kantian critical philosophy is so radical that it might as well be a negation' (2003, 192). Allen herself responds to this point by arguing that Foucault and Habermas are actually more in agreement than the latter seems to recognize, and thus if Foucauldian critique is a negation of the Kantian form, so is Habermasian critique as well (though Allen's main point is to argue that both are instead 'engaged in a radicalization from within of the Kantian critical project' (192)). But there is something more to be considered: what is accomplished by Foucault making a direct statement of his philosophical lineage, especially when the link to Kant could so easily be contested, or dismissed as more of a rejection than a transformation from within? What does Foucault's tracing of this intellectual heritage *do*? Why go to all the trouble of trying to locate and spell out this link? He could be read not only as defending his work against criticism, but also as calling for change in how philosophy is practiced today.

### **The Present of Modern Philosophy**

Certainly, Foucault is at least responding to critics of his work, pointing to consistency where they charge him with self-contradiction. If Foucauldian genealogy is a form of critique as 'ontology of ourselves,' if Foucault is working to criticize the present from a position within it for the sake of promoting change, it makes sense for him to acknowledge both how his own thought is rooted in the present, and how it is still possible for him to encourage change from a position within it. Stating his

own connection to Kant, then, could be a way for Foucault to consciously and publicly acknowledge that he is not trying to think from a historically detached position, but rather from a position within his own present as it is tied to its history in the Enlightenment. As noted above, Foucault insists that '[w]e must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment' (Foucault 1997b, 120). At the same time, he also argues that even if our thought is determined 'to a certain extent' by the Enlightenment, we are not entirely 'trapped' by this history: 'there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation . . . . But you can always change it' (Foucault 1996e, 386). For Foucault, we can always find possibilities for resistance to many of the limits to thought and action under which we find ourselves, even from the same sources and within the same discourses, institutions and practices as are responsible for the imposition of these limits themselves. 'As soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance' (Foucault 1996c, 224), because according to Foucault power is 'a mode of action upon the actions of others,' which presupposes that 'the one over whom power is exercised' is someone who is 'capable of action' (Foucault 1983, 220) and who is thereby 'free' in the sense of being 'faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized' (221). All power relations leave open numerous possibilities for action and reaction, some of which are capable of resisting and modifying the relation. Foucault needs to find some means of resistance to present power relations from within those power relations themselves --- he must work from what is already possible in the present, what makes sense here and now, what paths for change are left open. Directly and openly situating his own critical work within a part of the Enlightenment tradition roots it in the present as a historically specific time and place, and maps out the field in which possible sites of resistance can be found.

Therefore, if Kantian critique as an 'analytic of truth' sets limits that have led to problematic practices of power, as Foucault argues, we can also find a path to resistance and transformation left



open in the legacy of Kant's work (and that of other Enlightenment thinkers): the practice of critique as 'ontology of the present' that emphasizes freedom through transgression of limits.<sup>19</sup> This view of freedom can also be found in some aspects of Kant's work. It harkens back not only to the Kant of "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" (who encourages others to alter their self-imposed limits of 'immaturity'), but also to the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* who emphasizes that though there are absolute limits to human reason's realm of knowledge, it also has a 'natural tendency to transgress these limits' (Kant 1965, B 670). Kant explicitly links the concept of freedom to the action of transgressing limits: 'it is in the power of freedom to pass beyond any and every specified limit' (B 374).<sup>20</sup>

Consistency thus requires that whatever Foucault appeals to as a basis for change in the present be something that already exists in the present, that is left open by current beliefs, values, practices, etc. And he could answer charges of self-contradiction by Habermas, Fraser and others by acknowledging that he is indeed making appeal to Enlightenment values --- as Allen argues, he is engaged in an 'immanent rather than a total critique of modernity' (2003, 190). He is relying on values that already make sense to those whose present is shaped by the Enlightenment, i.e., that are already meaningful in the present, for himself and for his audience.<sup>21</sup> This is in part because he does not believe it is possible for him to think entirely neutrally, as if from outside the history that has shaped modern, Western, philosophical thought.<sup>22</sup> It is also because he attempts to use his genealogical critiques to *do* something, to act for change. In order to do so effectively, his critique must make sense and operate as a catalyst for transformative efforts by those who are already enmeshed to some degree in current discourses, adhering to at least some of their attendant beliefs and values. Unless major transformation has already taken place, in order to question, resist and move beyond the constraints of the present, we often have little choice but to appeal to beliefs, values and practices that are currently meaningful at the present time.<sup>23</sup> This is especially important for Foucault, who insists that 'the role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they must do' (Foucault

1996b, 462). He praises the intellectual who does not do so, and claims that he himself refuses such ‘prophecy’:

[W]hen I write a book I refuse to take a prophetic stance, that is, the one of saying to people: here is what you must do --- and also: this is good and this is not. I say to them: roughly speaking, it seems to me that things have gone this way; but I describe those things in such a way that the possible paths of attack are delineated. Yet even with this approach I do not force or compel anyone to attack. (Foucault 1996a, 262)

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, . . . who, in passing, contributes to the raising of the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth it, and what kind . . . it being understood that they alone who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can answer the question. (Foucault 1996c, 225)

If Foucault is committed to raising problems and pointing out possible paths of attack, for the sake of encouraging others to act (while leaving a ‘freedom . . . at the end of [his] discussion for anyone who wants or does not want to get something done’ (1996a, 262)), he would need to appeal to beliefs and values that already make sense to his audience as grounds for change. Otherwise, it is quite possible that his audience would either not understand his critique, or find themselves lacking the conceptual tools with which to do anything about it even if they did.

We can see why, to be consistent, Foucault would need to ground his own critique and its normative basis in what is happening ‘here and now,’ what makes sense in the present. But directly and publicly claiming his intellectual lineage from Kant does more, I think, than simply rebutting critics who charge him with self-contradiction. It is possible to read Foucault’s late work on Kant as an appeal to change on the part of philosophers, to reconsider the role of their own work in relation to

the present. I suggest that we can read Foucault's insistence on his own Kantianism as a kind of 'ontology of the present' of modern philosophy: he locates something in the present of modern philosophy, something that is already ongoing, that he also presents as a task to be taken up, namely, critique as 'ontology of the present' itself. He engages in a critique of modern philosophy through an ontology of its present, for the sake of promoting this kind of critique as a philosophical method itself. In so doing, he encourages other philosophers to pay attention to how their own work can affect the present, how 'the one who speaks as a thinker, a scientist, and a philosopher is himself a part of [the present] and (more than that) how he has a certain role to play . . . as both element and actor' (Foucault 1997c, 85).

Foucault begins his own essay entitled "What is Enlightenment?" by imagining that the newspaper to which Kant contributed his essay "*Was ist Aufklärung?*" still exists, 'and that it is asking its readers the question: What is modern philosophy?' (Foucault 1997b, 102). Foucault's essay is guided by a question about modern philosophy, and he claims throughout it that he is talking about how a certain 'type of philosophical interrogation' (119), a 'way of philosophizing' (132) that he himself engages in has its roots in the Enlightenment. His field of analysis here is philosophical theory, and his targeted audience appears to be philosophers and other theorists. It is possible he was trying to encourage change, transgression of limits in *this* audience. In returning to Kant, Foucault implies that he belongs, adheres to some extent to the norms and practices of the philosophical tradition descended from the Enlightenment; yet his discussion of Kant also provides a kind of exhortation to his intellectual peers to transgress the limits of how philosophical thought conceives of itself and operates today.

To do so, Foucault would need to appeal to some belief, value or practice already accepted in the present of modern philosophy, which could also be used to encourage change. This may be what he is doing when he claims that what connects 'us' in the present to the Enlightenment is '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' (1997b, 132). This attitude of seeking to transgress limits, this 'impatience for liberty' (133) has continued to exist in modern philosophy since Kant, Foucault indicates. We still have the enthusiasm for revolution that Kant noted in his own present, and we are still faced with the question of 'what must be done with this will for revolution' (Foucault 1997c, 99). Foucault insists that modern philosophy continues to ask about its own present, to consider its relationship to its own actuality: 'It is one of the great functions of so-called modern philosophy (which would begin at the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) to question itself about its own actuality' (89).<sup>24</sup>

Foucault's description of modern philosophy may seem odd and idiosyncratic. In reply to 'What is modern philosophy?' Foucault states that it is the philosophy which still grapples with the question, 'What is Enlightenment?' (1997b, 102); it is that which considers 'the present as a philosophical event to which the philosopher who speaks about it belongs' (1997c, 85). This is clearly not an exhaustive depiction of the various fields, methods and concerns of modern philosophy. Rather, Foucault here picks out one aspect of what is happening in modern philosophy, an aspect that may or may not have been especially prevalent even in what counted as 'philosophy' in the intellectual circles with which Foucault was familiar. I am suggesting here that we could read Foucault as locating an ongoing form of philosophizing in the present, even if it is not nor has been the dominant aspect of modern philosophy, and appealing to it as a means of encouraging change in the current field of philosophy from within. In keeping with the above points, he would need to find something already left open in the present, something in the philosophical tradition that makes sense to its practitioners here and now. He could then appeal to this as a basis for encouraging them to undertake change in their own practice and thus the field itself, given commitments they already possess. Focusing on what may seem a minor text by Kant, but which expresses and acts on values

that many modern philosophers still adhere to, could be a way to do so.

This would mean reading Foucault's self-affiliation with Kant in the following way. I agree with Touey that Foucault seems to be engaging thereby in a kind of apology *vis à vis* his critics, arguing that his genealogical critiques operate through appeal to Enlightenment values of freedom and autonomy. These are perhaps differently conceived than they were by Kant and others, but not radically so, since freedom as transgression of limits can be found within the Enlightenment tradition itself. But this apology may be also a call for change amongst modern philosophers to consider that the dominant legacy from Kant need not be the only one. The 'analytic of truth,' the search for universal and necessary truths, Foucault argues, could be seen as operating in the service of promoting freedom and autonomy in the present --- the role of philosophy in responding to the present to which the philosopher belongs could be seen as the impetus for seeking universal truths in the first place. As discussed above, for Kant autonomy is possible only if reason limits itself. The primary purpose, Foucault seems to be saying, for philosophy to seek the limits to reason is to promote freedom and autonomy in the present.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault could be read as suggesting with this interpretation of Kant a reconsideration of the limits of modern philosophy: if it has been practiced in certain ways as a legacy from Kant, Foucault reminds us that there are other aspects of Kant's work that have been less emphasized, and that could perhaps just as easily have become more a part of the current practice of modern philosophy than they are. If the 'analytic of truth' has been a prominent feature of the field, why hasn't the 'ontology of ourselves' been as much so? Why couldn't/shouldn't it be? By what contingency has the field of modern philosophy come to have the limits it does, and might we not find reason and the means to resist these limits from within the field itself? The means to resist and transform modern philosophy could be located in critique as 'ontology of ourselves.' We could, as Kant and other Enlightenment-inspired thinkers have done, focus more attention on the relationship between philosophical work and

the present from which it originates and on which it can have important effects. The reason for doing so would be to promote the values of freedom and autonomy --- the 'analytic of truth,' with its emphasis on universal truths and rights, has not well lived up to its promise of promoting these values, as Foucault has argued in his genealogical critiques. Perhaps, as he suggests, we should try another path left open in the present.

Foucault's return to Kant can provoke us to consider to what degree philosophy for Kant may have been more than a task in which we seek pure knowledge; it may also have been used by him as a means of *acting* in the present, as a way to encourage change for the sake of freedom. If Foucault is right in saying that many aspects of the Enlightenment legacy have *not* promoted such freedom, should we continue to think and speak and act in such ways? Should seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone be the impetus behind our current philosophical thought, or is it an important part of Enlightenment philosophy to act in the present and transform society? Allen Wood argues that for the original Enlightenment thinkers and *philosophes* rational reflection was closely connected to 'self-knowledge for the sake of action' (2001, 109):

Reason is a capacity to know the world, but chiefly it is a capacity to *act* in it, and because reason is also oriented toward society, its vocation above all is to *transform the social order* --  
- actualizing the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. (111; emphasis mine)

If this is the case, then through his reading of Kant's work as involving concern about the present, Foucault may be indicating to others that this kind of philosophical thought is a legitimate part of Enlightenment philosophy (in which we are still involved), and is worthy of consideration and pursuit.

By linking his own work to that of Kant, Foucault argues that critique as ‘ontology of ourselves,’ that philosophy as paying attention to and responding to concerns in the present, is a part of the Enlightenment tradition that modern philosophy is still shaped by to some degree today. Those members of his audience who consider themselves heirs to the Enlightenment should consider, he seems to be saying, that this tradition includes a practice of philosophers considering what role their work can and should play in their own present, for the sake of promoting freedom and autonomy. Foucault’s self-professed Kantianism could provoke questions such as: What is the relationship between Kant’s *a priori*, universalist arguments and his social/political commitments within his own historical present? What might he have hoped to *do* in the present with his own philosophical work? What did he consider to be his social and political role as a philosopher in his present? And further, if I am a philosopher who is to some degree an heir to the Enlightenment, and who is committed to the values of freedom and autonomy, should I be paying more attention than I am to what (if anything) my own philosophical work does in my present? This need not mean changing the nature of my work, but it would mean at least considering that reflecting on its relationship to the here and now is an important part of doing philosophy.

In short, Foucault’s return to Kant may be an attempt to inspire philosophers in the Enlightenment tradition to consider more seriously the ‘why’ of philosophy: Why is philosophical thought important? Why engage in it? What does/can/should it *do* in the present in which I am living? Foucault suggests, through his interpretation of Kant, that these are important questions to ask, because ‘our liberty is at stake’ (Foucault 1997a, 35).

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## Notes

1. The lecture to which Schmidt and Wartenberg refer is the first lecture of Foucault's course at the Collège de France in 1983 (Foucault 1997c).
2. There have been numerous articles published in the last two decades expressing how strange it is that Foucault should publicly claim himself a Kantian, and attempting to determine why he might have done so. In addition to the works discussed below, see, e.g., Gordon (1986), Harpham (1994), Hiley (1985), Pryor (1998).
3. Where I refer to Foucault's later work on Kant, here and below, I am including Foucault (1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d).
4. Similarly, Thomas McCarthy argues that in his later work Foucault undergoes a radical shift from views exhibited in his earlier work: from an early emphasis on the ubiquity of power and its subjection of individuals as 'subjects' to a late emphasis on an Enlightenment view of individuals as free, creative and autonomous in their resistance to power (McCarthy 1990, 463). The latter cannot be reconciled with the former, McCarthy argues.
5. Richard J. Bernstein considers whether Foucault's critics are making the problem of Foucault's relationship to normative standards out to be more than it needs to be, whether this problem arises only through 'imposing an alien grid or set of demands upon Foucault' (1994, 234). He argues that this is not the case; rather, the problem emerges 'from [Foucault's] *own* practice of critique,' because he fails to make clear 'the ethical-political perspective that informs [it]' (234). Consequently, according to Bernstein, Foucault leaves us with a body of work that 'forces us to

raise questions and at the same time appears to deny us any means for effectively dealing with these questions' (234).

As several commentators have argued (e.g., Touey (1998), Allen (2003)), and as I argue below, it seems clear that Foucault was trying to find a way to ground the process of questioning and evaluating without appealing to universal values that are valid outside history. Whether or not this is possible is another question; but I don't think that Foucault 'fail[ed] to see that what gets pushed out the front door is smuggled in through the back door,' as Bernstein argues (1994, 228). Rather, he seemed quite aware that the 'dangers' and 'problems' he raises are such from a perspective in the here and now. Specifically, as discussed further below, what counts as enough of a 'danger' to do something about has to be decided by those who choose whether or not to act -- not by Foucault in his role as an intellectual.

6. Schmidt and Wartenberg argue that there are several ways in which Foucault had been concerned with Kant throughout his career, and that his turn towards Kant near the end of his life is not such a clean break as it may seem (1994, 303--307). Though in his early writings Foucault focused on the oppressive potential of the universal limits on reason and concepts of the self set by Enlightenment thought, in his later work, according to Schmidt and Wartenberg, Foucault began to emphasize the enabling power of such limits: 'Power always appears in two guises: it dominates, but it also enables' (305). In his writings on Kant later in life Foucault focused on the growth of capacities (such as the ability to create the self aesthetically) that the Enlightenment made possible, they argue.

7. Allen focuses on two of Foucault's 'early works' where he discusses Kant: his *thèse complémentaire* --- a translation of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* along with an introduction to this text --- and *The Order of Things*.
8. Charles Scott argues similarly: 'Foucault's genealogical knowledge is . . . always in a position to critique, mock, parody, and ironize itself,' because '[i]t finds itself to be composed of the elements that it is also putting in question' (1991, 207). According to Scott, this kind of self-critique may be effective in opening genealogical discourse to new ways of thinking, by 'releasing itself from the grip of its own concepts' (208), thereby allowing for 'its own overcoming' (211). Touey does not argue that Foucault managed to *successfully* recover the possibility of critique after rejecting the grounds Kant gave for it; rather, he suggests that the problem of critique is one we must still grapple with today. We would do well, according to Touey, to 'engage in a genealogy of our critical impulse, to try to discover its historical genesis' as part of this effort (1998, 102).
9. Richard Bernstein also describes Foucault's essay entitled "What is Enlightenment?" as an apology: 'It is, in the classical sense, an apologia, a succinct statement and defense of his own critical project. It is also an apologia in the sense that Foucault seeks to answer (at least obliquely) the objections of many of his critics' (1994, 211--212).
10. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, Kant puts reason to the task of discovering its own nature and boundaries, and argues that 'nature' has placed 'unalterable limits' on what it is possible for human reason to know (Kant 1965, B 295). 'All our knowledge falls within the bounds of possible experience,' Kant argues (B185), and because reason also has 'a natural

tendency to transgress these limits' (B 670) it stands 'in need of a discipline, to restrain its tendency towards extension beyond the narrow limits of possible experience and to guard it against extravagance and error' (B 739). The first *Critique* itself serves to discipline reason by encouraging it to only claim knowledge within its limits, on the 'island' of truth beyond which lies 'a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion' (B 294). Excursions onto this ocean are not impermissible for reason --- indeed, 'human reason has a natural tendency to transgress [the] limits' of its knowledge, venturing into the realm of 'transcendental ideas' (B 670) --- but if reason claims knowledge thereby, it is deluded. The 'transcendental ideas' that reason accesses outside the limits of knowledge serve other important purposes in regulating and directing thought (B 671--732).

Reference to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* give the pagination numbers for the second edition (1787), listed as the 'B' edition, except where the text is included in only the first edition (1781), labeled as 'A.' The translation used is that by Normal Kemp Smith (Kant 1965).

11. Foucault claims that this essay by Kant marks 'the first time that a philosopher has connected in this way, closely and from the inside, the significance of his work with respect to knowledge, a reflection on history and particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing' (Foucault 1997b, 112). It may seem strange to claim that Kant viewed his own philosophical thought as arising out of his own place in history, given Kant's emphasis on *a priori*, universal and necessary truth in his critical work. It is possible, however, to argue that Kant's critical work was largely motivated by concerns specific to his historical situation, and that he himself recognized this to a certain degree --- not only in "What is Enlightenment?," but in the first *Critique* as well. In both of his prefaces to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant motivates his project by reference to what is happening in the present field of

metaphysics: unlike logic, mathematics and physics, metaphysics has not yet found itself on ‘the sure road to science’ (Kant 1965, B xv); rather, it finds itself to be a ‘battle-field of . . . endless controversies’ (A viii). It is the purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to find a way to quiet these disputes (if only by showing that they cannot ever be settled, and must be given up) and to show how metaphysics as a science is possible (A xii; B xxii). From such statements by Kant of what is driving the first *Critique*, and from what Foucault highlights in “*Was ist Aufklärung?*” (discussed further below), we can see how it is possible to argue that Kant at times recognizes how his thinking is at least motivated by what is happening in his own actuality, how he is responding to what seems at the moment to call for philosophical thought.

Still, I agree with Touey that Kant, unlike Foucault, ‘privileg[ed] regions of thinking as immune’ to the effects of history; ‘[h]istory clearly had no internal relationship to reason in Kant’s view --- reason can be realized in history, but cannot itself have an historical structure’ (Touey 1998, 101). Touey is right to say that ultimately, ‘it would be a mistake to attribute to Kant an understanding of history that elevated it to the same level as reason, or allowed for a mutually constitutive relationship between them’ (101). If this is what Foucault’s reading of Kant in “*Was ist Aufklärung?*” implies, I think it is mistaken. Yet we can still recognize some ways in which Kant’s work responds to and is meant to have effects in his own present, even if reason, for Kant, can operate entirely outside of history.

12. Focusing on the ‘call to courage’ Kant gives to his audience, a kind of call to action, Foucault points out that ‘[o]ne should not forget that [this text] was a newspaper article. . . . It is very interesting to see from what point on philosophers intervene in newspapers in order to say something that is for them philosophically interesting and which, nevertheless, is inscribed in a certain relationship to the public which they intend to mobilize’ (Foucault 1997a, 33--34).

Foucault is here emphasizing that in this text Kant is not simply explaining a philosophical point to other philosophers, or disseminating truth for the sake of knowledge alone, but is putting himself in a position to try to ‘mobilize’ the public to action. While he was certainly interested in philosophical understanding for its own sake, Kant was also undeniably concerned with the Enlightenment project of promoting social and political freedom, as well as peace. See, e.g., the various texts by Kant collected in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History and Morals*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

13. Of course, Kant famously insists that individuals must be allowed to use their own reason *only* in a public sense, when they are speaking or writing ‘before the entire literate world’ (Kant 1983a, 42). When one is operating within one’s particular social role, fulfilling the duties of ‘a civic post or office that has been entrusted to him,’ one is using reason in a ‘private’ sense, and must still follow the rules attached to the post and the guidance of authorities (42). In one’s role as a citizen speaking to other citizens, however, outside of one’s official duties, one must be allowed to freely express one’s views. Kant valued freedom of reason in the sense of ‘freedom of the pen,’ which he thought should be as wide as possible, including criticisms of the government: ‘regarding whatever in the ruler’s decrees seem to wrong the commonwealth, the citizen must retain the authority to make his opinions publicly known, and this authority must receive the ruler’s approval’ (Kant 1983c, 82).
14. Still, though Kant found something in the desire for revolution that revealed an ongoing process of enlightenment, he refused to allow for actual rebellion and revolution of the people against their ruling authorities, even if they are being governed unjustly. The people never have ‘coercive



rights' against their rulers that would allow for a justified rebellion (Kant 1983c, 82). Kant's reasoning for this injunction is in part that it would not be possible to turn the right of rebellion into a universal law, since to do so would be to 'introduce a state of complete lawlessness, where at the least all right would lose its sanction' (81), and to 'destroy all civil constitutions, thus annihilating the only state in which men can possess rights' (79). Possession of rights and freedoms requires a state of coercive power to preserve them from encroachment; and a maxim that allowed the people the right to rebel against their governmental leaders would undermine the very authority that allows for the existence of rights within the commonwealth in the first place. Kant also justifies his prohibition against rebellion by the requirement of publicity in one's maxims. He calls the following 'the *transcendental formula* of public right': 'All actions that affect the rights of other men are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity' (Kant 1983d, 135). In other words, 'if my maxim cannot be *openly divulged* without at the same time defeating my own intention, i.e., must be kept *secret* for it to succeed, or if I cannot *publicly acknowledge* it without thereby inevitably arousing everyone's opposition to my plan,' then my maxim goes against the right, i.e., is unjust (135). Since rebellion against a state leader would have to be kept secret in order to succeed, it does not fulfill the requirement of possible publicity and is therefore unjust. Thus, Kant's appeal to the enthusiasm for revolution as a means of encouraging change towards further enlightenment is not a matter of encouraging actual revolution itself (at least if it involves maxims that cannot be universalized).

For a clear and well-argued case that Kant's praise of spectators' enthusiasm for revolution is consistent with his criticism of actors' engagement in revolution, see Clewis (2006).

15. Foucault connects the 'modern attitude' not only to a relationship with the present, but also, through his discussion of Baudelaire, to a relationship with oneself: 'Modern man, for Baudelaire,

is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself’ (Foucault 1997b, 118). Here Foucault links his later work on the aesthetic creation of the self, on ethics as care of the self, to the Enlightenment, thus indicating that his genealogical work and his later emphasis on care of the self both have Enlightenment roots.

16. E.g, if individuals insist on thinking ‘lawlessly,’ each with their own rules, eventually the moral authority of reason gives way to libertinism, and ‘at this point, the authorities intervene to ensure that civil affairs are not themselves plunged into complete disorder’ (Kant 1991, 249).
  
17. This points to another way in which Foucault’s work is similar to that of Kant: as Allen and Touey both argue, Foucault, like Kant, analyzes the possibility and limits of knowledge, moral values, and subjectivity (among other things) (Allen 2003, 191--192; Touey 1998, 98). As Foucault puts it, Kant attempted to ‘desubjugate the subject’ through his critique of reason, so that Enlightenment as the autonomous use of reason could be possible; and in so doing, he ‘set forth critique’s primordial responsibility, to know knowledge’ (Foucault 1997a, 36). Arguably, ‘knowing knowledge,’ its conditions of possibility and its limits, for the sake of ‘desubjugating the subject’ is precisely what Foucault is up to in much of his own critical work. Of course, Foucault is not focused on finding limits to knowledge that reason must hold to for the sake of autonomy, but rather those that can be transgressed for this purpose. Still, the goals of ‘knowing knowledge’ for the sake of ‘desubjugation’ are similar, even if the methods differ significantly.

18. Foucault claims it was always more prevalent in Germany than in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: ‘from the Hegelian Left to the Frankfurt School’ (Foucault 1997a, 38) there has been a recognition and critique of the relationships between reason and power that did not become a focus in France until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
19. Foucault explicitly argues that the critique of the present in which he is engaged (and which he claims to get from Kant) is a means of practicing freedom by engaging in and encouraging transgression of limits: such a critique is a ‘historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings’ (Foucault 1997c, 127). The freedom to which Foucault refers is something that is ‘practiced,’ something that one *does*: ‘Liberty is a practice. . . . ‘liberty’ is what must be exercised’ (Foucault 1996g, 339). For Foucault, practicing freedom has to do with taking stock of limits and working to transgress or transform them. In an interview, Foucault clearly links the notion of liberty as a practice to that of transforming limits: ‘the important question . . . is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. . . . [A] system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don’t have the means of modifying it’ (Foucault 1996f, 327). Similarly, Foucault argues that ‘practices of freedom do not exist . . . or are extremely constrained and limited’ under a ‘state of domination,’ where ‘an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political or military means’ (Foucault 1996d, 434).

John Rajchman argues that for Foucault, ‘our real freedom does not consist either in telling our true stories and finding our place within some tradition or ethical code, in completely determining

our actions in accordance with universal principles . . . . We are, on the contrary, “really” free because we can identify and change those procedures or forms through which our stories become true, because we can question and modify those systems which make (only) particular kinds of action possible, and because there is no “authentic” self-relation we must conform to’ (1985, 122). For Rajchman, Foucauldian freedom consists in ‘noncompliance in concrete situations of power’ (93).

20. Kant makes this statement in regard to the question of how far humanity might be able to progress towards certain ideals of perfection, such as the development of a civil society in which each member is both subject and sovereign, and in which each has as much freedom as is compatible with an equal freedom of the others. Kant states that we ought not to specify exactly how close we can get to perfection in ideals such as this, since ‘the issue depends on freedom;’ and whenever we specify limits, our freedom allows us to go beyond these --- further than we might have guessed when stating the limits to how far we can get towards our ideals (Kant 1965, B 371-374).

21. According to Thomas Flynn, Foucault takes on the critical task of pointing out dangers in the present that appear to be dangers in the present *to his audience*: ‘Historico-practical *critique* . . . is both revelatory (factual) *and* condemnatory (evaluative) in the sense that rhetorically it appeals to a set of values and beliefs that its audience presumably shares, namely, freedom-autonomy, but of whose endangerment it is unaware’ (1989, 196--197). The situatedness of Foucault’s critique means he does not have to provide any sort of transcendent, universal reasons for it: ‘Foucault neither offers nor seeks foundations beyond the presumed commitment of his audience to freedom-autonomy’ (197).

22. As Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow argue, in his genealogical work Foucault does not place himself in the position of ‘detached spectator’ of the present (1983, 103), because for him, ‘there can be no such ahistorical thinker exercising the ‘intellectual’s privilege’ and no such pure discourse’ (96). Instead, Foucault ‘thematizes the fact that he himself --- like any other investigator --- is involved in, and to a large extent produced by, the social practices he is studying’ (103). His criticisms are offered from the position of someone who is involved in that which is under question, but who also ‘distances himself from it’ (124).
23. Jana Sawicki also makes this point: ‘In the absence of alternatives to present principles and values governing political struggle, we must continue to appeal to the standards of rationality and justice that are available to us within the specific contexts in which we find ourselves. . . . In other words, appeals to rights, liberties, and justice (and struggles over how to interpret these principles) are not denied to us. These are the only sorts of appeals that make sense to us right now’ (1991, 100--101).
24. Foucault said something similar a number of years earlier as well. In an interview first published in 1977, Foucault describes what he sees as a change in philosophy since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (though he also claims this is a very ‘naïve’ picture): ‘the question of philosophy has been for a long time: “In this world where all perishes, what doesn’t pass away? Where are we, we who must die, in relation to that which doesn’t?” It seems to me that, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, philosophy has not ceased asking itself the same question: “What is happening right now, and what are we, we who are perhaps nothing more than what is happening at this moment?” Philosophy’s question is the

question of this present age which is ourselves. This is why philosophy is today entirely political and entirely historical' (Foucault 1996c, 222).

25. This may or may not be a defensible reading of Kant; I am not prepared to defend it here. I am less concerned in this essay with whether or not Foucault's interpretation of Kant is adequate than with what he may have been trying to do with this interpretation. His reading would need to be plausible to work in the way I suggest below, but it is not my purpose to argue here that it is.