

- 36 "The History of Sexuality," an interview with Lucette Finas in *Power/Knowledge*, 191. Cf. also "The Confession of the Flesh," *Power/Knowledge*, 211.
- 37 *The History of Sexuality I*, 67.
- 38 "L'extension sociale de la norme," 213.
- 39 "Final Interview," 12.
- 40 "What Is Enlightenment?," 34.
- 41 "The Regard for Truth," 29; *The Use of Pleasure*, 8.
- 42 Allan Stoekl, *Politics, Writing, Mutilation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 109; Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality* (New York: Walker and Company, 1962), 229–30.
- 43 "Foucault répond à Sartre," *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 46 (March 1–15, 1968), 20.
- 44 "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in Dreyfus and Rainbow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 237.
- 45 "Is it useless to revolt?," 8.
- 46 Richard Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism." *Telos* 67 (Spring 1986): 84, 85.
- 47 "The Subject and Power," 222.
- 48 Reiner Schürmann, "What Can I Do? in an Archaeological-Genealogical History," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82, 10 (October 1985): 545.
- 49 For an important statement on this theme, see the last lecture of Foucault's 1976 course, which was recently published as "Faire vivre et laisser mourir: La naissance du racisme," *Les Temps Modernes* 535 (February 1991): 37–61. For general discussions of the theme, see Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him" in *Foucault/Blanchot*, ed. J. Mehlman (New York: Zone Books, 1987); and Bernauer, "Beyond Life and Death: On Foucault's Post-Auschwitz Ethic," *Philosophy Today* 32, 2 (Summer 1988): 128–42.
- 50 Foucault, "Preface" to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xiii.
- 51 For an example of this view, see Stephen White, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory," *American Political Science Review* 80, 21 (June 1986): 428–30.
- 52 For accounts of Foucault's political work, see Claude Mauriac, *Le temps immobile 3: Et comme l'espérance est violente*, especially 261–591; Bernard Kouchner, "Un vrai samourai," in *Michel Foucault: Une histoire de la vérité* (Paris: Syros, 1985), 85–89; and Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989).
- 53 Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men," *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral, 1979), 77.

## 7 "What is enlightenment?": Kant according to Foucault

### I

Many commentators have noted a marked change of emphasis in Foucault's later thinking about issues of truth, ethics, and social responsibility. For some, this change was characterized chiefly by a certain relaxation of the skeptical rigor – the attitude of extreme Nietzschean suspicion with regard to truth-claims or ethical values of whatever kind – that had hitherto played a prominent role in his work. Thus, according to Roy Boyne, the shift can be located with a fair degree of precision as occurring between Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* (where Foucault's genealogies of power/knowledge seem to exclude all notions of truth, enlightenment, self-understanding or effective political agency) and the later, posthumous volumes where this doctrine gives way to a sense of renewed ethical and social engagement.<sup>1</sup> In this work, as Boyne reads it,

there is . . . the suggestion of a certain Utopian residue. It pertains to the exercise of discipline, but this time it is not so much a question of an alienating imposition, rather one of normatively reinforced self-regulation. . . . The stake in this contest is freedom. A self ruled by the desires is unfree. Therefore moderation equals freedom. Thus the exercise of self-mastery is closely connected to the state of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to deny that there remain great problems – especially from the standpoint of present-day cultural and gender politics – with Foucault's appeal to those techniques of self-fashioning that he finds best embodied in the ethos of Classical (Graeco-Roman) sexual mores. Although it offers an escape-route of sorts from his earlier outlook of cognitive and ethical skepticism, it still leaves certain crucial questions unanswered. Most important of these, Boyne points out, is the

question that has preoccupied thinkers from Plato to Kant and beyond: the relation between those various faculties of knowledge, practical reason, and esthetic taste whose claims philosophy has sought to adjudicate. What is at issue here – especially since Kant – is the status of the subject (the knowing, willing, and judging subject) as possessor of a certain strenuously argued autonomy, a freedom of reflective or self-willed choice that finds no place in the phenomenal realm of determinate causes and effects.

These difficulties are by no means peculiar to Foucault's project or the wider post-structuralist enterprise. In fact, they are at the heart of much current debate about the limits of moral philosophy as traditionally conceived, the antinomies of Kantian ("formalist") ethics, and the need for an approach that would take more account of the contingent, historical, or situated character of real-world ethical issues.<sup>3</sup> But they are pushed to an extreme by Foucault's insistence – still present in his later writings – that subjectivity is constructed through and through by the various discourses, conventions, or regulative codes that alone provide a means of "esthetic" self-fashioning in the absence of any other normative standard. For on this account the subject is indeed nothing more than a localized point of intersection, a product of the various contending forces that define its very conditions of possibility. In the early Foucault – the self-styled "archaeologist" of discourses, knowledges, and signifying systems – there is no real attempt to avoid this bleakly determinist conclusion. What analysis uncovers as it digs down into the stratified history of the present is a sequence of rifts in the order of discursive relations, a sequence that reveals the diversity of truth-claims from one epoch to the next, the utter lack of grounds – or validity-conditions – for judging between these incommensurable paradigms, and the fact that "man" (or the transcendental subject of humanist discourse) has arrived very late on the cultural scene and is even now heading for oblivion.<sup>4</sup>

In Foucault's middle-period texts this structuralist approach gives way to a Nietzschean-Deleuzian rhetoric of forces, affects, and power/knowledge differentials that would seem – on the face of it – more amenable to notions of practical agency and will.<sup>5</sup> But this appearance is deceptive since he still operates with a minimalist (indeed purely nominal) concept of the "subject" that gives no hold for the treatment of substantive ethical or socio-political questions.

And the problem persists, as I have argued, even in those writings of his final decade where Foucault has a great deal to say concerning the self and its various formative mechanisms. What emerges is not as much a radical re-thinking of these issues as a shift in rhetorical strategy, one that allows him to place more emphasis on the active, self-shaping, volitional aspects of human conduct and thought, but that signally fails to explain how such impulses could ever arise, given the self's inescapable subjection to a range of preexisting disciplinary codes and imperatives that between them determine the very shape and limits of its "freedom." In this respect at least – with regard to its ethical bearings – Foucault's work continues to generate the same kinds of deep-laid philosophical perplexity.

Of course Foucault was alert to such criticisms and addressed them repeatedly in the essays and interviews of his last years. One response was his distinction between "morality" and "ethics," the latter conceived as an activity of disciplined self-knowledge in accordance with certain shared or communal norms, the former as a discourse of rule-bound abstract generalities with no real claim upon the self and its modes of jointly private and social fulfilment. Thus, "Care for the self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others, in the measure that this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others."<sup>6</sup> And again: "*Ethos* implies a relation with others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community . . . whether it be to exercise a magistracy or to have friendly relationships."<sup>7</sup> For it is the greatest virtue of such ethical (as opposed to moralizing) thought that it places questions of value and human obligation where they belong in the context of a flourishing communal way of life, and thus helps to dissolve those sterile antinomies that have for so long plagued the axiology of Western (post-Classical) reason.

There is a parallel here with the argument of philosophers like Bernard Williams, who also put the case for a different way of thinking about ethical issues, one that would break with Kantian or other such "formalist" approaches, and would take more account of those contextual factors – the variety of culture-specific values, motives, and interests – by which we make sense of our day-to-day lives as moral agents.<sup>8</sup> And this is part of a wider movement of thought among liberals of various color who reject what they see as the overweening claims – the prescriptivist appeal to universal values or

abstract principles – bound up with the philosophic discourse of Enlightenment. In its place they suggest a return to the alternative tradition that stresses the essentially communal nature of our ethical commitments and priorities, the fact that such values can only be realized through a project of shared endeavor. Some – like Alasdair MacIntyre – conceive this project in Aristotelian terms as a doctrine of the practical virtues that would find its highest good in a life devoted to the exercise of civic, domestic, and private self-perfection.<sup>9</sup> For others (among them thinkers of a liberal-pluralist persuasion like Michael Walzer) it is a matter of respecting the variety of values, moral viewpoints, or cultural “forms of life” that will always coexist in any genuine participant democracy.<sup>10</sup> And in support of such claims – as far as they are taken to require philosophical support – most often there is some reference to Wittgenstein or another proponent of an anti-foundationalist view, to the effect (roughly speaking) that those “forms of life” go all the way down, so that there is no way to justify one’s beliefs, values, or ethical priorities other than by simply remarking that they make good sense for members of a given cultural community.

When this line of argument is pushed through, as by current neo-pragmatists like Richard Rorty, the upshot is to render “philosophy” pretty much redundant, along with any version of “enlightened” thinking – or critique of in-place consensus values – that claims to distinguish reason or truth from what is presently and contingently “good in the way of belief.”<sup>11</sup> For, on their view, there is simply no point in appealing to grounds, principles, validity-conditions, precepts of “practical reason,” or whatever, since the only thing that counts is the performative power to carry conviction with this or that “interpretive community.”<sup>12</sup> And in the end such conviction will always be relative to the values and beliefs held in common by at least some significant proportion of the community concerned. That is to say, one can only be deluded in thinking to criticize “false” or “ideological” consensus beliefs if those beliefs make up the very background of tacit presupposition – the cultural “horizon of intelligibility” – against which such arguments have to be assessed. And in this case (as Rorty cheerfully concludes) we might as well give up the whole vain enterprise and acknowledge that, for all practical purposes, there is *simply no difference* – no difference that makes any difference – between truth and what presently counts as

such by our own, albeit contingent and self-interested, cultural lights.

My point about Foucault can be put most simply by remarking that Rorty can recruit him with relative ease as yet another thinker who has been traveling this road toward something like a postmodern-pragmatist endpoint. Thus Rorty sees no great problem in playing down Foucault’s more “radical” claims – his Nietzschean rhetoric, his activist injunctions, his heady talk of “power/knowledge,” etc. – and playing up the theme of esthetic self-invention that supposedly aligns him with the liberal ironists and debunkers of Enlightenment wisdom. On this view, Foucault worked his way around to a position that was largely disabused of those old-fashioned ideas about truth, knowledge, emancipatory critique, or the “political responsibility of the intellectuals.” Insofar as he cut these pretensions down to size – as by advocating the role of “specific intellectuals” in contrast to the “universal” types of an earlier (superannuated) epoch – Foucault wins Rorty’s full approval. Where he lapses on occasion is in tending to suggest that the resultant “micropolitics” of localized struggle can effectively generate a dissident ethos that would run strongly counter to the currency of received (that is, “postmodern bourgeois liberal”) values and beliefs. To this extent Foucault has failed to take his own best lessons to heart; chief among them is the fact that there is no secure vantage-point, no “sky-hook” (as Rorty engagingly puts it) on which to hang one’s arguments, judgments, and criticisms, apart from the various kinds of suasive appeal that happen to work in some given cultural context. But of course Foucault knows this perfectly well, having always maintained an attitude of healthy skepticism with regard to the truth-claims of Enlightenment critique and their lack of any possible justification – least of all any transcendental grounding – except within the discourse (or the “final vocabulary”) of an outworn philosophic culture. In other words, Rorty can read Foucault – along with Heidegger, Habermas, Derrida, Rawls, and a good many more – as basically a kind of half-way pragmatist, one who might as well complete the journey by dumping all that pointless “philosophical” baggage and easing himself back into the communal fold. For it is Rorty’s belief that all these thinkers have been heading toward a pragmatist conclusion, despite their various unfortunate hold-ups along the way. And in Foucault’s case (Rorty suggests) the problem can be got around easily enough by discounting his more

grandiose or dramatic claims – those that would tend to disrupt the ongoing “cultural conversation” – and valuing his work for what it yields in the way of new vocabularies, metaphors, or styles of inventive self-description.

I am not suggesting for a moment that Rorty is right about Foucault, or that pragmatism is indeed where his arguments were always heading, give or take a few lapses into Nietzschean genealogy and suchlike frivolous pursuits. Indeed, one could instance numerous passages – early and late – where Foucault affirms just the opposite: that his researches into the history of penal institutions, of psychiatric practices, or gender-role construction should all be viewed primarily as active attempts to reshape the collective self-image and memory of Western culture, and thus to bring about desirable changes in the way we live now.<sup>13</sup> Certainly he showed small patience with interviewers who naively raised questions about the “relevance” of theory to practice, or who assumed that this relevance should somehow consist in a matching-up – a proven correspondence – between the themes of his writing and the activist concerns of his life as a public intellectual. From the Nietzschean standpoint such questions appeared strictly unintelligible, assuming as they did that theory or scholarship could exist in some realm of pure, disinterested knowledge, immune to the effects of institutional power or the motivating will to subvert or contest such power. On the contrary, he argued: these discourses were *performative* through and through, their truth-claims bound up with forms of disciplinary surveillance and control – or structures of instituted power/knowledge – that could be challenged only by a counter-discourse with its own performative efficacy, its own rhetorical power to redefine what counted as a relevant contribution to debate. All of which suggests that Rorty is absurdly wide of the mark in his effort to talk Foucault down to the level of an easygoing pragmatist exchange of views between like-minded partners in the cultural conversation.

On the other hand there is a sense in which Foucault lays himself open to just such a reading through his avowal of a Nietzschean-relativist stance in matters of interpretive validity or truth. Thus Rorty could argue that he has, after all, respected the spirit, if not the letter, of Foucault's texts; that it is the interpreter's prerogative to practice a form of strong-revisionist reading responsive to present-day

cultural needs; and that Foucault was in any case a thoroughgoing skeptic as regards the claims of authorial intention or scholarly objectivity. More than that, he could answer – again with some show of Foucaultian warrant – that we miss the whole point of these texts if we think that they are in any way concerned to offer arguments, reasons, or justifying principles for the stance they adopt on various questions of an ethical or socio-political nature. For, in Rorty's view, this is just another relic of the old foundationalist paradigm, the assumption that anyone with a case to argue – or a new scheme of values to promote – will need to offer more by way of philosophical back-up than a mere appeal to consensus ideas of what is “good in the way of belief.” But since Foucault is not a “philosopher” – since he labors under no such delusory burden – we should therefore read him as he asks to be read, that is to say, as a Nietzschean, strong self-inventor and source of new-found rhetorical strategies whose meaning is whatever we choose to make of it in pursuit of our own pet projects. “Such a reply would sound less shocking,” Rorty remarks,

if one substituted “poet” for “philosopher”. For as opposed to poets, philosophers are traditionally supposed to offer a “basis” for our moral obligations to others. . . . Unlike poets, they are supposed to be “rational”, and rationality is supposed to consist in being able to exhibit the “universal validity” of one's position. Foucault, like Nietzsche, was a philosopher who claimed a poet's privileges. One of these privileges is to rejoin “What has universal validity to do with *me*!” I think that philosophers are as entitled to this privilege as poets, so I think this rejoinder sufficient.<sup>14</sup>

Such, according to Rorty, is the pragmatist outcome of the “ancient quarrel” between poetry and philosophy that Plato was the first to articulate, and whose latter-day offshoot is the long-running feud between continental and analytic schools. The issue has been resolved pretty much by default, he thinks, since we can now recognize (after Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, et al.) that philosophy was always just another “kind of writing,” a discourse peculiarly prone to denying its own poetic or literary character, but none the less rhetorical for that. In which case it is the merit of Foucault's later work to have taken this message to heart and come up with a strong revisionist line – a poetics of endless metaphorical self-fashioning – that simply collapses the notional difference between philosophy and its old antagonist.

I have taken this detour via Rorty's essay because it shows the extent to which Foucault can be misread by a well-disposed liberal commentator and also the way that such a reading can latch onto problems with Foucault's work – philosophical, ethical, and political problems – that tend to be ignored by other more devoted or *echt*-Foucaultian types. For in one respect Rorty is undoubtedly right: if you follow Foucault's skeptical genealogies to a point where the subject – the knowing, willing, and judging subject – becomes nothing more than a transient illusion, a "face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," soon to be erased by the incoming tide, then this does give rise to some stark alternatives in the ethico-political realm. More specifically, it opens the way to Rorty's private-estheticist reading of Foucault by reducing the subject to a nominal entity – a vanishing-point or *tabula rasa* – with no scope for moral agency and choice unless through an act of pure, poetic self-invention.

It seems to me that Foucault found himself in the awkward position of one who sought to maintain a strongly oppositional or counter-hegemonic stance, yet whose outlook of extreme epistemological and ethical skepticism left him at the last with no ground on which to stand in advancing these dissident claims. This is nowhere more apparent than in the record of Foucault's repeated encounters with Kant, from *The Order of Things* (where Kant's philosophy figures as the merest of transient discursive paradigms) to the later writings where Foucault is engaged in what amounts to a full-scale revisionist reading of Kantian ethical themes. To pursue the often-complex and circuitous course of these encounters is, I think, the best way to grasp what is at stake in the current postmodernist turn against the discourse of Enlightenment values and beliefs.

## II

The most crucial text here is Foucault's essay "What Is Enlightenment?," which took its cue (and its title) from a piece that Kant published in November 1784 in response to a call for disquisitions on this topic by the liberal *Berliner Monatschrift*.<sup>15</sup> Up to a point Foucault offers what could well be taken as a summary account, a faithful exposition of the various claims that Kant advances on behalf of Enlightenment and its ethico-political bearings. Thus: "Kant

indicates right away that the 'way out' that characterizes Enlightenment is a process that releases us from the status of 'immaturity.' " By "immaturity" Kant means "a certain state of our will that makes us accept someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for" (WIE 34). So Enlightenment is defined, in Foucault's scrupulously Kantian terms, as a certain "modification of the preexisting relation linking will, authority and the use of reason" (35). Its motto is *Aude sapere* ("Dare to know!"), and it must therefore be construed "both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally" (35). But in presenting these claims in the mode of paraphrase or shorthand synopsis, Foucault finds room for misgivings as regards their "ambiguous" status, and in particular their failure – as he sees it – to resolve certain issues in the realm of practical agency and will. These doubts become steadily more prominent to the point where commentary leans over into overt dissent or a form of immanent critique.

Thus Enlightenment is characterized by Kant on the one hand as "a phenomenon, an ongoing process" and on the other as "a task and an obligation." In which case there clearly is an issue – one confronted by numerous latter-day schools of thought, among them Althusserian Marxism and the structuralist "sciences of man" – as to how these two perspectives could ever be reconciled. "Are we to understand," Foucault asks,

that the entire human race is caught up in the process of Enlightenment? Then we must imagine Enlightenment as a historical change that affects the political and social existence of all people on the face of the earth. Or are we to understand that it involves a change affecting what constitutes the humanity of human beings? But the question then arises of knowing what this change is. Here again, Kant's answer is not without a certain ambiguity. In any case, beneath its appearance of simplicity, it is really rather complex (WIE 35).

From this point his essay goes on to remark some of the further problems – the *antinomies*, Foucault all but names them – that emerge in the course of Kant's reflections on Enlightenment as "process" and "phenomenon." His treatment preserves an attitude of qualified respect, at least when compared with those pages of arch-skeptical commentary in *The Order of Things* where the Kantian

project appears as nothing more than a species of transcendental illusion, a mirage created, and soon to be erased, by the imperious order of "discourse." Thus Foucault now acknowledges that "this little text is located in a sense at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history" (38). Moreover, it marks the first occasion on which "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 a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing" (ibid.).<sup>16</sup>

But these tributes have a double-edged character that emerges more clearly as Foucault expounds what he takes to be the crucial and unresolved tension within Kant's philosophical project. This results from Kant's commitment to a notion of critique that, on the one hand, takes rise in response to certain highly specific historical conditions, while on the other hand claiming to transcend those conditions through an exercise of the human faculties – of understanding, reason, and judgment – deduced a priori as a matter of timeless, self-evident truth. On Foucault's reading, this latter must be seen as a form of residual anthropomorphism, a humanist or subject-centered philosophy that fails to take the point of its own best insights as regards the radically contingent or historically situated character of all such truth-claims.

Thus Kant still figures – here as in *The Order of Things* – as one of those thinkers whose will to contest and problematize existing relations of power/knowledge was itself the product of a finally un-self-questioning drive to establish its own "enlightened" credentials. And this despite the fact, which Foucault readily concedes, that any competent, good-faith discussion of these issues will have to go by way of a critical encounter whose terms always largely have been set in advance by that same legacy of thought. In short, "We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment" (WIE 43). But to this extent, precisely, we shall have to acknowledge – unlike Kant – that the Enlightenment project is (and always was) just one of those manifold discursive paradigms, those shifting orders of language or representation that make up the structural genealogy of Western reason. So the process of enquiring-back into this history of thought will not – in Foucault's words – "be oriented retrospec-

tively toward 'the essential kernel of rationality' that can be found in the Enlightenment and that would have to be preserved in any event" (ibid.). On the contrary, such thinking "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" (ibid.). Clearly this amounts to something more than a mildly revisionist reading of Kant, a modest proposal – in the history-of-ideas vein – that we take some account of social or circumstantial factors as well as substantive philosophical arguments. For Foucault's contention goes far beyond this amicable parceling-out of disciplinary domains. What it requires, in effect, is that we read Kant's philosophy as marked *through and through* by this error of mistaking culture-specific for a priori valid truth-claims, or "contemporary limits of the necessary" for limits intrinsic to our very constitution as thinking and willing subjects.

Thus it might well seem, on the evidence of "What Is Enlightenment?," that Foucault has scarcely altered his skeptical stance with regard to the agenda and entire axiology of Kantian critique. But this appearance is deceptive, as soon becomes clear as one reads further into the essay. For it is now Foucault's central concern to articulate an ethics premised on the values of autonomy, freedom, and self-determination attained though an exercise of practical will. And when he comes to describe this project in more detail, it turns out remarkably akin to Kant's own, as expressed in the famous threefold question "What can I know?, What should I will?, and What may I reasonably hope for?" The crucial difference in Foucault's way of posing these questions is that he treats them – in genealogical fashion – as belonging to a certain historically delimited configuration of knowledge, discourse, or the will-to-truth. That is to say, he rejects any version of the strong universalist premise that would hold such values to be more than contingent, more than just a product of our own (now waning) cultural attachment to the philosophic discourse of modernity. What remains of that delusory Enlightenment project is not so much "a theory, a doctrine, or . . . a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating," but rather – in Foucault's carefully chosen words – "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" (WIE, 50). And again, taking aim at the heart of Kant's distinction between reason in its "public" (critical) and "private" (doxastic or opinionative) modes:

criticism is no longer going to be practised in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as an 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, this criticism is not transcendental. . . . it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method (45–46).

In fact, Foucault precisely inverts Kant's order of priorities. On the one hand, he demotes the claims of "transcendental" reason (or critique) to the status of a merely localized episode in the recent history of thought. On the other, he identifies truth – for all practical purposes – with the level of contingent events or shifts in the order of power/knowledge relations that can best be revealed through a jointly "archaeological" and "genealogical" approach. Insofar as the Enlightenment project survives, it does so in a sharply delimited or relativized form, as an impetus to the kind of investigative thinking – the enquiring-back into its own genesis and historical conditions of emergence – that can offer no hold for the truth-telling claims of old-style "universal" reason. To adapt Karl Krauss's famous remark about Freudian psychoanalysis: Enlightenment now shows up as a symptom of the condition for which it once professed to be the cure.

And yet, as Foucault very pointedly remarks, there is no question of simply having done with that entire heritage of thought, no way of jumping outside it (so to speak) into some alternative – maybe postmodern – terrain of disabused skeptical hindsight. Such, after all, had been the attitude evinced in those pages on Kant in *The Order of Things* where Foucault proclaimed the imminent demise of "man" as the specular figment of a discourse premised on obsolete (Enlightenment) truth-claims and values. If he is now less inclined to adopt this style of heady post-structuralist talk, it is because he perceives the risk it entails, that of "letting ourselves be determined by more general structures of which we may not be conscious, and over which we may have no control" (WIE, 47). In short, Foucault's wager is that we can in some sense keep faith with the project of enlightened critique, while acknowledging that in another sense – on the strong universalist or transcendental reading – that project has long since run its

course and relinquished all claims to validity or truth. Thus "the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment," he writes, "is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era" (42).

What this amounts to is an argument for decoupling ethics from any version of the old foundationalist paradigm, the idea on the one hand that self-knowledge comes about through an exercise of autonomous practical reason, and on the other that this involves a critical reflection on the powers and capacities – as well as the constitutive limits – of human knowledge in general. Of course Kant's philosophy goes a long and sometimes tortuous way around to establish the relation between knowing and willing, or the complex "architectonic" of the faculties within which the various orders of truth-claim find their legitimate place.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he lays great stress on the need to respect these distinctions, especially that between phenomenal cognition and judgments in the ethico-political realm, since otherwise such judgments would ultimately fall under the laws of natural necessity, and would thus be deprived of their autonomous character, their standing as freely willed acts of assent to the requirements of morality and justice. In this sense it might be argued that Foucault – along with postmodernist skeptics like Lyotard – is merely following out the logic of Kant's own position when he seeks to drive a wedge between the truth-claims of Enlightenment reason and the project of ethical self-fashioning that survives the eclipse or demise of those claims.<sup>18</sup> Thus, "rather than seeking to distinguish the 'modern era' from the 'premodern' or 'postmodern,' I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of 'countermodernity'" (WIE, 39). In which case Foucault's revisionist reading would in fact be no more than a faithful rendition, an attempt to conserve this liberating impulse, or "to bring some measure of clarity to the consciousness that we have of ourselves and our past" (45).

So the Kantian questions still have a pertinence, a capacity to provoke critical reflection on the ways and means of enlightened self-knowledge that exist for us now as subjects inscribed within a certain culture-specific discourse. But on Foucault's account they need to be framed rather differently, re-cast in such a form as to exclude any notion of truth or critique as values transcending this

localized context of utterance. Thus: "How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as subjects of our own actions?" (49). These are still recognizably the same kinds of question that have occupied thinkers in the modern or critical-enlightenment tradition, from Kant to Habermas.<sup>19</sup> But they differ in respect of the one crucial point: that for Foucault self-knowledge can come about only through the exercise of a freedom – a space of individual autonomy – created in the margins or interstices of an otherwise ubiquitous will-to-power whose watchwords are "reason," "enlightenment," and "truth." Hence the single most important question for Foucault: "how can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?" (48). And his answer – to this extent in common with Lyotard and other postmodernizing critics of Kant – is to shift the main burden of enquiry from the relationship between knowledge and ethics (as developed chiefly in the first two *Critiques*) to the relationship between ethics and esthetics (as taken up in the *Critique of Judgment* with reference to the beautiful and the sublime).<sup>20</sup> For it then becomes possible to re-write the history of the present in terms of an elective genealogy that downplays the critical-enlightenment aspects of the modern, and that instead stresses the esthetic dimension – the very different "modernity" of a poet like Baudelaire – by way of contesting that other line of descent.

What is at issue here is an ambivalence that inhabits the key-word *modern* – almost, one could say, an elaborate pun on the meanings of that term – whereby it comes to signal the passage from philosophy to poetry, or from Kantian critique to the symbolist project of autonomous self-creation through esthetic means. "For the attitude of modernity," Foucault writes,

the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is. . . . Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it (WIE, 41).

Hence the great difference between Kant's and Foucault's ways of answering the question "What Is Enlightenment?" For Kant, it is a

matter of attaining intellectual and moral maturity through the exercise of criticism in its various modes, whether applied to issues of theoretical understanding (where intuitions must be "brought under" adequate concepts), to questions of an ethical or political order (where practical reason supplies the rule), or to issues in the sphere of esthetic judgment where the relevant tribunal can only be that of an intersubjective community of taste appealing to shared principles or criteria of value. For Foucault, on the contrary, this doctrine of the faculties is the merest of "transcendental" illusions, an elective self-image whose hold upon the discourse of Enlightenment was soon to be eclipsed by an advent of a "counter-modernism," a primarily artistic and literary ethos possessed of no such grandiose philosophical ideas. So it is that the esthetic moves to center stage as the focal point for everything that challenges, eludes, or subverts the truth-claims of Enlightenment critique.

Thus, "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" (WIE, 42). It is here, midway through his essay, that Foucault abruptly switches over from discussing modernity as a project of enlightened or truth-seeking thought to a sequence of reflections on Baudelaire, estheticism, and the ethos of poetic self-fashioning conceived as the hallmark of the authentically modern. His main text is Baudelaire's well-known essay on the painter Constantin Guys, an artist of the everyday, of fleeting impressions, of humdrum realities that are somehow "transfigured" into something more profound and revealing.<sup>21</sup> Thus Guys,

"in appearance a spectator, a collector of curiosities," should rather be seen (in Baudelaire's words) as "the last to linger wherever there can be a glow of light, an echo of poetry, a quiver of life or a chord of music; wherever a passion can pose before him, wherever natural man and conventional man display themselves in a strange beauty, wherever the sun lights up the swift joys of the *depraved animal*" (41).

What Foucault seeks to emphasize by citing these and similar observations from Baudelaire's essay is the passage, as he sees it, from a discourse of modernity premised on outmoded (Enlightenment) ideas of knowledge, reason, and truth, to a modernism that not only accepts its condition as a localized, ephemeral state of awareness but also turns this predicament into a source of new-found imaginative

strength by ironically "heroizing" the present moment and the scope it offers for esthetic self-creation. In short, "this deliberate, difficult attitude consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it" (39).

For Baudelaire, as indeed for Kant, modernity is characterized as a break with tradition, a sense of the "discontinuity of time" and the lack of those taken-for-granted certitudes – those items of received commonsense knowledge – that had once seemed to offer enough in the way of ontological or ethical assurance.<sup>22</sup> But where Kant conceived this break as a coming-to-maturity through the exercise of autonomous critical reason, Baudelaire imagines it – in high Romantic fashion – as the discovery of ever more-inventive variations on the theme of esthetic self-invention. And Foucault follows Baudelaire, rather than Kant, in equating modernity with that spirit of perpetual transformation, the "feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment" that alone enables us to grasp what is authentic in our experience of contemporary art-forms and life-styles alike. For it is precisely in "the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent" that consciousness discovers its true vocation as a register of novel modes and intensities of feeling, such as cannot be perceived, much less theorized, by a philosophy still wedded to Enlightenment notions of reason, truth, and critique. What this amounts to, on Foucault's interpretation, is a decisive break with those humanist motifs that attached themselves to the discourse of Kantian critical philosophy, and that prevented it – so he argues – from moving beyond its subject-centered or anthropological organs. "Humanism serves to colour and to justify the conception of man to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse" (WIE, 44). But with Baudelaire and the ethos of esthetic self-fashioning, there enters an alternative notion of modernity, one that renounces any such appeal to man as transcendental subject or constitutive source of knowledge and truth. Humanism can thus be opposed, as Foucault now thinks, "by the principle of a permanent critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy: that is, a principle that is at the heart of the historical consciousness that the Enlightenment has of itself" (44).

The word *critique* has here acquired a meaning very different from that assigned to it by Kant, or indeed by any of those thinkers, including Marxists, who took it to imply some determinate relation to

matters of epistemological warrant, or to issues of truth and falsehood conceived as something more than what is "good in the way of belief." It has undergone much the same kind of semantic shift as emerges in Foucault's revisionist usage of the terms *modernity* and *enlightenment*. That is to say, these words are no longer construed as signaling a decisive difference in the way that criticism bears upon the currency of commonsense or taken-for-granted knowledge. Now it is a matter of perpetual self-transformation, a process carried on in the absence of truth-claims or validating grounds, and aimed, very much as Rorty conceives it, toward an ethos of "private" (esthetic) fulfillment that would render such notions altogether otiose. This is why Foucault reads Kant with Baudelaire: in order to facilitate the otherwise dubious (not to say sophisticated) move that redefines *modernity*, *enlightenment*, and *critique* on his own preferential terms. "This ironic heroization of the present, this transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self – Baudelaire does not imagine that these have any place in society itself, or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art" (WIE, 42).

As we have seen, this is just the line that Rorty adopts in debunking the upholders of a public, that is, a politically engaged or civic, morality that would amount to something more than an attitude of benign disregard for whatever goes on in the private-individual sphere. Thus it does lend a certain *prima facie* plausibility to Rorty's claim that Foucault was a good neo-pragmatist at heart, despite his occasional lapses into other, more "radical" (and hence self-deluding) styles of talk. For the upshot of Foucault's revisionist reading of Kant is to *estheticize* issues of politics, morality, and social justice to the point where they become, in his own words, a "transfiguring play of freedom with reality," an "ascetic elaboration of the self" worked out by the Nietzschean strong individual in pursuit of his or her own desires, or in accordance with that mode of private self-fashioning, that "ironic heroization of the present . . . which Baudelaire calls art."

It is largely by means of this semantic slide, this elision of the difference between *ascesis* and *aesthesis*, that Foucault so adroitly negotiates the passage from Kant to Baudelaire. That is to say, it enables him to move – with at least some show of textual and historical warrant – from an ethics grounded in the maxims and postulates of enlightened practical reason to an ethics premised on the Nietz-

schean will to treat existence as "justified" solely to the extent that we can view it "as an esthetic phenomenon." And it is for this reason also – as I have argued above – that Foucault's late texts can so easily be appropriated by a postmodern-pragmatist thinker such as Rorty. For those texts undoubtedly lend credence to Rorty's view that "Foucault, like Nietzsche, was a philosopher who claimed a poet's privileges," and that "one of these privileges is to rejoin 'What has universal validity to do with *me*?' "<sup>23</sup> From this point Rorty, having set up the Kantian "universal" moralist as a target for the usual range of knock-down arguments, then proceeds to enlist Foucault as an ally in what he takes to be the only viable alternative, a project of "esthetic" self-fashioning that renounces any claim to normative validity beyond the individual or private domain. In short, there is no reason why a strong revisionist or poet-philosopher like Foucault should feel himself obliged to answer such questions as "Where do you stand?" or "What are your values?" And if he does so answer, then the best response is, "I stand with you as fellow-citizens, but as a philosopher, I stand off by myself, pursuing projects of self-invention which are none of your concern."<sup>24</sup> All of which follows, as can hardly be denied, from the estheticizing impulse – the strain of high romantic or counter-Enlightenment thought – that motivates Foucault to read Kant *avec* Baudelaire, thereby constructing his own (decidedly inventive) "history of the present."

### III

No doubt it will be said, with some justice, that when Rorty welcomes Foucault as a convert to this way of thinking, he is obliged to discount the whole dimension of Foucault's work that bore very directly on issues of a wider (socio-political) import. There is no denying his record of involvement with pressure-groups and activist campaigns concerned with (for instance) racial discrimination, abuses of psychiatric medicine, the persecution of "deviant" minorities, sexual transgressors, victims of the French penal system. Moreover, these concerns also found expression in a series of powerfully argued works (from *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic* to *Discipline and Punish*, *Pierre Rivière*, and the three-volume *History of Sexuality*) that leave no doubt as to Foucault's belief that scholarship and "theory" cannot be divorced from real-

world issues of moral and political conscience. In this respect he clearly belongs to that company of left-dissident intellectuals – Noam Chomsky and Edward Said among them – who, whatever their differences, stand worlds apart from the self-engrossed frivolities of current postmodernist fashion.<sup>25</sup> All this I would willingly concede, along with the fact that Foucault's writings have undoubtedly done more than most to sustain the existence of a genuine oppositional culture – a "counter-public-sphere," in Habermasian parlance – during these past two decades of concerted right-wing ideological offensives. My point is not to detract from this achievement, which in any case speaks for itself through the range and vitality of debates sparked off by Foucault's various interventions. What interests me more is the odd disjunction – the lack of theoretical fit – between Foucault's highly effective practice as a critical intellectual and the way that he persistently (not to say perversely) deploys every means, in his more speculative writings, to render such a practice untenable. For those writings could be seen to undermine the very ground – the very conditions of possibility for critical discourse – on which he nonetheless and *necessarily* claimed to stand when pursuing his other (historically and politically oriented) lines of research.

In short: there is a near-schizophrenic splitting of roles between (a) Foucault the "public" intellectual, thinking and writing on behalf of those subjects oppressed by the discourses of instituted power/knowledge, and (b) Foucault the avowed esthete, avatar of Nietzsche and Baudelaire, who espouses an ethos of private self-fashioning and an attitude of sovereign disdain toward the principles and values of enlightened critique. That he managed to negotiate the tensions of this dual identity, although not without visible signs of strain, is I think one of the more remarkable aspects of Foucault's life and work. For Rorty, of course, this is simply not a problem, or not one that a strong revisionist like Foucault ever needed to confront, having thought his way through and beyond all those tedious old debates about truth, enlightenment, ethical responsibility, the "political role of the intellectuals," and so forth. Thus we ought to be content, Rorty urges, with a reading of Foucault that honors him, like Freud, for "helping us to see ourselves as centerless, as random assemblages of contingent and idiosyncratic needs" and for thereby opening up "new possibilities for the

aesthetic life."<sup>26</sup> But the signs of tension are there, as I have argued, in Foucault's protracted series of engagements with Kant, in the talk of "truth" – however elusively defined – that figures so often in his late essays and interviews, and above all in his growing resistance to that strain of facile ultra-relativist talk that forms such a prominent (and depressing) feature of the avant-garde cultural scene. All of which suggests that he cannot be so easily recruited to a postmodern-pragmatist or counter-enlightenment ethos whose watchwords are the "end of philosophy," the demise of Enlightenment critique, and the eclipse of the subject – the Kantian knowing, willing, and judging subject – as a phantom entity whose lineaments have now dissolved into a "random assemblage [of] contingent and idiosyncratic needs." For this is simply to say – whether wittingly or not – that we should look back to Hume, rather than Kant, as an elective precursor for the "new possibilities" that arise with the postmodern passage to a discourse relieved of those old, subject-centered concepts and values. But in Foucault's later writings this idea meets up with a good deal of principled resistance, whatever his attraction – as detailed above – to that wholesale estheticizing impulse that would otherwise bring him out squarely in accord with the Hume-Nietzsche-Rorty line of argument.

What is at issue in these texts is the notion that truth can be relativized to the point where it becomes nothing more than a reflex product of the epistemic will-to-power, a symptom – as thinkers like Lyotard would have it – of the old meta-narrative drive to transcendence bound up with the philosophic discourse of modernity.<sup>27</sup> Such had no doubt been Foucault's position in his early "archaeologies" of knowledge, including those remarkable (if also highly questionable) pages on Kant in *The Order of Things*. And it emerges again – yet more emphatically – in his middle-period essays (such as "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History") where truth-claims are exposed to all the skeptical rigors of a thoroughgoing relativist creed, a Nietzschean "transvaluation of values" pushed to the very limits (and beyond) of rational intelligibility. But what Foucault came to recognize as his work went on – notably his detailed researches into ethics, sexuality, and the modes of self-knowledge entailed by these emergent disciplines of conduct and thought – was that they made sense only from a critical viewpoint informed by certain distinctively "enlightenment" values and presuppositions. Hence his remark that "thought is not what

inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning," but is rather "what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals."<sup>28</sup> This passage is Kantian not only in the minimal sense that it raises certain questions – of agency, autonomy, ethical conduct, reflective self-knowledge etc. – which were also some of Kant's most important concerns throughout the three *Critiques*. My point is rather that it views them as standing in a complex *but accountable* order of relationship, an order whose specific modalities (like the relations between "acting" and "reacting," "conduct" and "thought," the "meaning" of action and its "conditions" or "goals") are described in terms that suggest a very close resemblance to Kant's project of thought.

Not that one could plausibly interpret Foucault as engaged in a covert campaign to resuscitate the Kantian doctrine of faculties in anything like its original form. What can be said, on the evidence of this and similar passages, is that Foucault came around to a viewpoint strikingly at odds with his earlier (skeptical-genealogical) approach, and that one major consequence – manifest in all his later work – was a radical re-thinking of the subject's role in relation to issues of truth, critique, self-knowledge, and practical reason. The following reflections from a 1984 interview are so clearly indicative in this regard that they merit lengthy citation.

To say that the study of thought is the analysis of a freedom does not mean one is dealing with a formal system that has reference to itself. Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from social, economic, or political processes. But here their only role is that of instigation. They can exist and perform their action for a very long time, before there is effective problematization by thought. And when thought intervenes, it doesn't assume a unique form that is the direct result or the necessary expression of those difficulties; it is an original or specific response – often taking many forms, sometimes even contradictory in its different aspects – to these difficulties, which are defined for it by a situation or a context and which hold true as a possible question.<sup>29</sup>

Again, this passage goes beyond the mere rehearsal of vaguely Kantian themes and issues. What it raises most crucially is the

question – much debated by present-day exegetes – as to how far Kant's dictates of "practical reason" must be seen as just a set of empty abstractions, a universalist morality devoid of ethical substance, or (in Foucault's words) as "a formal system that has reference [only] to itself." Such had, I think, been Foucault's view when he composed those pages in *The Order of Things* where man, or the Kantian "transcendental subject," figures in precisely that negative role, as delusory figment of a discourse premised on its own purely circular or self-confirming "system" of quasi-universal concepts and categories. And in his subsequent work – notably *The History of Sexuality* – he remained committed to a genealogical approach that stressed the specificities of context, the social and historical conditions of emergence for various ethical codes, rather than anything remotely akin to Kant's universalist maxims. Yet it is also the case, as the above passage makes clear, that Foucault came to think of these conditions as intelligible only from the critical standpoint of an ethics that "problematized" past or present modes of conduct and belief, which thus allowed thought to intervene with the effect of "provoking difficulties" around them. And it is by virtue of this thinking intervention, he argues, that discourse transcends its confinement to the currency of in-place consensus values – those that belong to a given "situation" or "context" – and attains a more properly ethical perspective.

This is not to deny that Foucault comes out in favor of a heterodox reading of Kant, one that treats ethics as primarily a matter of fashioning the self in accordance with techniques – or inventive variations on the strong individualist *rapport-à-soi* – analogous to those of the symbolist poet. As he puts it in a 1983 interview: "What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our lives?"<sup>30</sup>

What such an attitude promotes, as I have argued elsewhere, is a wholesale estheticization of ethics and politics that typically seizes upon certain passages in Kant, most often passages that work by way of analogy or figural comparison, and treats them as a pretext for maximizing the gulf between issues of knowledge or truth, on the one hand, and issues of ethical accountability, on the other.<sup>31</sup> Of course

this reading finds warrant – up to a point – in Kant's appeal to the tribunal of taste (in particular, to our judgments of the beautiful) as a means of suggesting how ethical judgments can claim intersubjective warrant without the recourse to determinate concepts that would render such judgments otiose. And it is further borne out (as postmodernist commentators often remark) by those passages from the third *Critique* where Kant invokes the sublime as an analogue for that which absolutely exceeds our powers of cognitive or phenomenal grasp, and which thus – through an inward or reflective movement of thought – gives access to the realm of "suprasensible" ideas. Such passages undoubtedly justify the claim that, for Kant, there exists a certain affinity between issues of esthetic judgment and questions in the realm of ethics (or practical reason). But it is equally clear to any attentive reader that Kant never seeks to conflate these realms in the current postmodernist fashion. Nor does he argue, like Lyotard, for a drastically antinomian version of the Kantian sublime, one that would enforce the radical "heterogeneity" of cognitive and evaluative phrase-regimes, and thus (in effect) create an insuperable gulf between matters of factual understanding and questions of ethical judgment.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, Kant goes a long way around – and deploys a variety of oblique or analogical arguments – in his address to this most problematical of boundary-disputes in the three *Critiques*. But he nowhere endorses the kind of postmodernist (or estheticist) reading that would treat ethical issues as wholly divorced from questions of circumstantial warrant.

Such readings can be seen as the most extreme variant of that objection to the supposed "formalism" of Kantian ethics that Hegel was the first to articulate, and that is nowadays taken up by critics of a liberal-communitarian persuasion. From this point of view, it is a matter of choice between, on the one hand, an abstract, rule-based morality of generalized precepts or maxims and, on the other, an ethics that would sensibly renounce such presumptive universalist claims and take account of the contingencies – the range of social, cultural, political and other such irreducibly context-specific factors – that people have to cope with in their everyday lives as situated moral agents. And from here it is no great distance to Rorty's postmodern-neopragmatist outlook, that is to say, his suggestion that we give up the misguided quest for reasons, principles, ideas of justice, validating grounds or whatever,

and view ourselves rather as creatures whose identity consists in nothing more than a "random assemblage" of "contingent and idiosyncratic needs." For in this way, he thinks, we can best learn to live without those old (henceforth obsolete) ideas, while also enjoying a new-found sense of open-ended creative possibility, a freedom to devise all manner of novel "vocabularies" in the quest for better, more adventurous modes of self-description.

Such is the private-estheticist ethos that Rorty proposes as an antidote to Kant, an escape-route from the "formalist" rigors that he, like the liberal-communitarians, finds so objectionable in Kantian ethics. For Foucault, likewise, it appears to offer an alternative to the whole tradition of Enlightenment ethical discourse, a means of conceiving the autonomous self and its actions, thoughts, and desires in such a way that it would no longer be subject to the vexing antinomies of Kantian practical reason. It would rather be a question of promoting, in Foucault's words, "the reflective and voluntary practices by which men not only fix the rules of their conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to modify themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life a work which bears certain aesthetic values and obeys certain stylistic rules."<sup>33</sup> These *values* and *rules* must therefore be thought of as somehow intrinsic to the self, as belonging to that range of voluntary practices (or self-willed disciplinary techniques) by which subjects are "modified in their singular being" and thereby achieve, like Baudelaire's "man of modernity," the greatest measure of autonomy in conduct and thought. Indeed, one is mistaking the import of Foucault's argument if one uses (as I did just now) these two distinct terms – subject and self – as if they were more-or-less synonymous or simply interchangeable. For it is precisely his point that the *subject* as conceived within an ethical discourse like Kant's is always a product of that imaginary, specular mode of self-relation that generates the various endemic conflicts and antinomies of humanist thought. What is required is therefore a non-subject-centered discourse, one that views the self "in [its] singular being" as the locus of those various practices and rules by which the process of self-transformation somehow comes about. Only thus, so it seems, can thinking regain that long-lost ethical vocation that had not yet suffered the fatal swerve toward forms of internalized conflict or imaginary misrecognition.

Hence Foucault's main purpose in the later volumes of *The His-*

*tory of Sexuality*: to show how it was that the Classical ethos of disciplined, esthetic self-fashioning gave way to a range of ethical standpoints – whether Stoic, Christian, Kantian, Freudian or whatever – that envisaged the subject as a site of conflict between opposed principles or value-systems. But one can see very clearly from the above-cited passage, as well as from my tortuous commentary upon it, that Foucault fails to articulate this cardinal distinction with anything like the consistency or rigor that his argument requires. What are we to make of those "reflective and voluntary practices" that seemingly take rise within a "singular being" whose selfhood is integral and as yet untouched by the alienating ethos, the unhappy consciousness of modernity? What exactly can it mean for this unitary being to enter upon a process of voluntary "self-transformation" whereby its constitutive "practices" or "rules of conduct" are viewed (so to speak) as the raw material for its own esthetic elaboration? Far from providing an answer to these questions, the passage breaks down into two contradictory lines of argument: one premised on a notional appeal to the self as a unified, autonomous locus of agency and will; the other enmeshed in a subject-centered language of "reflection," non-self-identity, and, as Foucault would have it, specular misrecognition. The antinomies persist, that is to say, despite all Foucault's strenuous efforts to think his way through and beyond them. Nor are these problems effectively resolved by invoking the esthetic as an alternative terrain, a realm wherein the self might achieve true autonomy by shaping its life in accordance with those "values" and "rules" that characterize the discipline of artistic creation. For one still has to ask what relationship exists between the "reflective and voluntary practices" that go toward this project of esthetic self-fashioning, and the "singular being" whose life is thus subject to a process of willed transformation. In short, Foucault's argument is deeply confused, not least when he claims to have annulled or overcome the antinomies of Kantian ethical discourse.

#### IV

In Foucault's later writings there are many indications that he had come to recognize this troubling liability in his own work. They

include those passages where he broaches a markedly different relationship to Kant and the heritage of Enlightenment critique. Even at the time of *The Order of Things*, his period of greatest resistance, there is an undertow of grudging acknowledgment that the Kantian project in some sense defines the very conditions of possibility for present-day critical thought, and thus cannot (despite all his programmatic claims to the contrary) be treated as just another episode in the history of bygone discursive formations. This acknowledgment becomes more explicit in his later work to the point where, with his essay "What Is Enlightenment?," Foucault seems embarked upon a reading of Kant that is also a kind of belated self-reckoning, a renegotiation of problems bequeathed by his own project to date. What marks this protracted encounter, as I have argued, is a complex pattern of ambivalent (sometimes contradictory) responses, a pattern that repeats itself with singular insistence in the writings and interviews of his final decade. It is a tension that results on the one hand from Foucault's espousal of a Nietzschean or private-estheticist creed, and on the other from his growing recognition that the truth-values of enlightened thought – of reason in its jointly epistemocritical and ethico-political modes – cannot be abandoned without at the same time renouncing any claim to promote or articulate the interests of justice, autonomy, and human emancipation. Foucault is thus faced with a genuine dilemma, but not the kind of self-delighting paradox or wished-for aporia that figures so predictably as the upshot of readings in the postmodern-textualist mode.

Often this conflict is inscribed within the compass of a single sentence, as when Foucault declares (*contra* Kant) that criticism will henceforth "not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to know and to do," but should rather seek to "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" (WIE 46). On the face of it such comments are directed squarely against the residual humanist or anthropological elements that Foucault still detects in Kantian thought. They would then have to be construed as supporting his claim that an ethics (or esthetics) of radical self-invention is the only kind of project that merits our allegiance in an epoch of postmodern, post-Enlightenment thought. Yet it is equally clear that the above sentence corresponds at every point to Kant's own claims in the original text "What Is

Enlightenment?." Once again it is a question – quite as much for Foucault as for Kant – of thinking our way through and beyond those limits, those various forms of self-imposed tutelage or servitude, which will show up as merely "contingent" (i.e., as socially conditioned or historically produced) only insofar as we exercise our powers of autonomous critical reason. And "autonomy" in this context can hardly be understood as involving nothing more than the private dedication to a mode of being – a *rapport à soi* – which affords the greatest possible scope for the project of esthetic self-fashioning. Thus it may well be the case, according to Foucault, that we must henceforth conceive this indispensable "work of thought" not so much as attempting (in Kantian fashion) "to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science" but rather as seeking "to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (46). But we then have to ask what such claims could amount to in the absence of a public or critical sphere – a tribunal of "autonomous" judgment, in the Kantian sense – that would serve to evaluate their various orders of truth-telling warrant or ethical accountability. For freedom is not merely undefined, but strictly *inconceivable* if located – as Foucault often seems to locate it – in a private realm quite apart from the interests of emancipatory critique. What beckons from the end of this particular road is a postmodern variant of the Kantian sublime that nonsensically counsels us to "judge without criteria," and whose appeal, as with Lyotard, lies in its offering an escape-route from other, more pressing issues of ethical and political conscience.

So Foucault had good reason for shifting ground with regard to post-structuralism and kindred forms of modish ultra-relativist doctrine. The nearest he came to rejecting these ideas outright was in the interview with Paul Rabinow, conducted in May 1984 just a few weeks before his death.<sup>34</sup> Most significant here is the way that Foucault moves on directly from questions of ethics and politics to issues of truth, language, and representation, in each case adopting a clearly marked critical distance from the attitudes and assumptions that had characterized his earlier work. Thus to Rabinow's question "What is a history of problematics?" Foucault responds by defining those respects in which the "work of thought" differs from the kinds of analysis – among them, presumably, post-structuralist approaches – that take it for granted that language (or discourse) is the ultimate

horizon of intelligibility. Such thinking is now conceived as "something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behavior" and also as "something quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this behavior." On the contrary, the work of thought becomes possible only insofar as it enables the thinker "to step back from [a certain] way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals."<sup>35</sup> For it is precisely at the point where "a given" is translated into "a question," or some present mode of conduct into an issue concerning that conduct and its ethical implications, that thinking can begin to problematize the grounds of its own more habitual or taken-for-granted beliefs. And if this means abandoning the main tenet of post-structuralist doctrine (i.e., the claim that thought is constituted through and through by the codes, conventions, language-games or discourses that make up a given cultural order), then Foucault seems ready to do just that. Thus: "The work of philosophical and historical reflection is put back into the field of the work of thought only on condition that one clearly grasps problematization not as an arrangement of representations but as a work of thought."<sup>36</sup> As it happens this is the closing sentence of the last text collected in Rabinow's *Foucault Reader*. One could hardly wish for a firmer declaration of the distance that Foucault had traveled from the reading of Kant that affords such a brilliant (if negative) climax to *The Order of Things*.

When I cited these passages previously it was in order to suggest the deep-laid ambivalence – the unresolved conflicts or tensions – that resulted from Foucault's *Auseinandersetzung* with the truth-claims of Enlightenment critique. We can now see how much was at stake in this contest of interpretations, this attempt (at the outset) to represent Kantian philosophy as one passing episode in the history of an error, and then – as the issues posed themselves more sharply – to define his own project in uneasy relation to that same much-disputed heritage. No doubt this change of mind came about for various reasons, among them Foucault's growing opposition to "structuralism" and its various offshoots, not least on account of their failure to afford any adequate grasp of the complex relations between truth, knowledge, and the ethical "work of thought." But there was, I think, another, more urgent motive in the problems that Foucault encountered, especially during the late 1960s and

early 1970s, when called upon to offer some principled justification of his own current stance on moral and ethico-political questions. For it is clear from some of his essays and interviews at the time (notably those translated in the volume *Power/Knowledge*) that Foucault very often came close to endorsing an attitude that resembled Lyotard's postmodernist notion of "judging without criteria." That is to say, he briefly went along with what amounted to a private-decisionist creed, one that in principle rejected any form of reasoned, enlightened, or "abstract" morality, and that staked all its claims to ethical good faith on a direct appeal to individual conscience as the sole arbiter of action and choice in this or that particular context. After all, this was the heady period before and after *les événements* of 1968, when French dissident or leftist intellectuals were required to take their stand on numerous issues and to choose between a range of competing positions – Marxist, Trotskyist, Marxist-Leninist, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, anarchist, incipient "post-Marxist," etc. – that could hardly be treated as a matter of straightforward deduction from first principles. At the time it must have seemed that there were as many groupings (or short-lived activist "groupuscules") as there were local issues and day-to-day turns in the course of political events. In this situation one can fully understand why Foucault should have registered the appeal of a "micro-politics" that seemed most responsive to these momentary shifts of tactical alliance, these unpredictable "conjunctures" brought about by the absence of any large-scale unifying movement.

What the times thus required was a flexible attitude, a readiness to abandon high-sounding talk of "truth," "principles," "justice," "emancipatory interests," or whatever, and a corresponding will to bend all one's energies to various short-term "specific" projects of localized resistance and critique. Insofar as such projects stood in need of justification, it could only be a matter of pointing out their strategic usefulness in pursuit of some goal whose desirability was simply self-evident to those pursuing it, but whose ultimate good could never be determined with reference to higher ("universal" or "transcendent") grounds of ethical judgment. For to fall back on such Kantian precepts was a hopelessly obsolete gesture, an evasion of issues that at the time presented themselves entirely in specific, conjunctural, or local-interventionist terms. Thus, for ex-

ample, when asked to offer some thoughts on "revolutionary justice" by the members of a Maoist collective, Foucault in effect took the line of least resistance by denying that such questions could possibly be answered, or answered with the kind of principled, self-validating argument that his interlocutors apparently expected.<sup>37</sup> At this point, as I say, there was little to distinguish Foucault's situationist attitude to issues of ethics, politics, and justice from Lyotard's postmodernist treatment of such issues as belonging to a realm of "sublimely" incommensurable truth-claims, and hence as allowing no appeal to shared standards or criteria of judgment. For this appeal could work only – could carry some degree of argumentative conviction – insofar as there existed a communal sense of what should count as valid, legitimate reasoning in any given case. And therefore, since agreement was so evidently lacking, one had no choice (as Foucault then saw it) but to give up the quest for justifying grounds and respond to each new situation as need or opportunity arose.

In an interview with Rabinow et al., one finds him looking back on these episodes from his earlier career with a mixture of impatience and wry self-criticism. "There were Marxists," he recalls,

who said I was a danger to Western democracy . . . there was a socialist who wrote that the thinker who resembled me most closely was Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. I have been considered by liberals as a technocrat, an agent of the Gaullist government; I have been considered by people on the right, Gaullists or otherwise, as a dangerous left-wing anarchist; there was an American professor who asked why a crypto-Marxist like me, manifestly a KGB agent, was invited to American universities, and so on.<sup>38</sup>

From which Foucault would appear to draw a lesson very much in line with both Lyotard's doctrine of plural, incommensurable "phrase-regimes" and Rorty's advice that we give up on the quest for any ethics or politics that would bridge the gulf between our private and public spheres of existence. Thus: "The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos."<sup>39</sup> And this ethos presents itself mainly in esthetic terms, that is to say, as a project of "poetic" self-invention that has more to do with "personal" attitudes, beliefs, and predilec-

tions than with anything in the nature of arguments, principles, or philosophical "ideas."

Yet once again there are signs, in the same interview, of Foucault's not wishing to go all the way with this postmodern-pragmatist-estheticist line, and indeed of his adopting a stance more akin to the opposed ("Enlightenment") view. For it is, as he remarks, "not at all a matter of making a particular issue of my own situation; but, if you like, I think that by asking this sort of ethico-epistemologico-political question, one is not taking up a position on a chessboard."<sup>40</sup> In other words, there are issues that can (and should) be raised beyond the private estheticist sphere, and that cannot be reduced, as he sometimes suggests, to an argument for the merely contingent relation between matters of personal ethos or life-style and questions of a wider (socio-political) concern. Insofar as one takes a stand on such issues, one is *not* just adopting some set-piece "position on a chessboard" ("socialist," "liberal," "Gaullist," "left-wing anarchist," "crypto-Marxist," or whatever), but arguing a case whose validity-conditions will always involve both factual truth-claims and the appeal to certain standards – certain stated criteria – of right and wrong. Hence the resistance that Foucault puts up to any account, like Rorty's, that would treat him as traveling a long way around to basically postmodern-pragmatist conclusions. For such thinking comes down to a form of inert consensus-ideology, an apologia for existing values and beliefs that would place them beyond reach of counter-argument or effective oppositional critique.

One last example, also from the interview with Rabinow et al., may help to define more exactly where the difference lies between Foucault and the proponents of a postmodern ethics that exploits the sublime (or its own strong-revisionist reading thereof) as an analogue for the radical "heterogeneity" that supposedly inhabits (or inhibits) all forms of determinate ethical judgment. Its significance can best be grasped through the contrast with Lyotard's shuffling and evasive response on the question of terrorist "morality" vis-à-vis the claims of legal obligation or citizenly virtue. The example is that of Poland, one that Foucault, speaking in 1984, regards as indisputably "touching us all" and therefore as presenting a decisive test-case for anyone who seeks to address these issues in a real-world,

practical context. "If we raise the question of Poland in strictly political terms," he remarks,

it is clear that we quickly reach the point of saying that there is nothing we can do. We can't dispatch a team of paratroopers, and we can't send armoured cars to liberate Warsaw. I think that, politically, we have to recognize this, but I think we have to agree that, for ethical reasons, we have to raise the problem of Poland in the form of a non-acceptance of what is happening there, and a non-acceptance of the passivity of our own governments. I think this attitude is an ethical one, but it is also political; it does not consist in saying merely 'I protest', but in making of that attitude a political phenomenon that is as substantial as possible, and one which those who govern, here or there, will sooner or later be obliged to take into account.<sup>41</sup>

My point is that Foucault, unlike Lyotard, acknowledges the claims of certain moral imperatives that *necessarily* hold for any conscientious subject in possession of the relevant facts, and whose validity cannot be relativized to this or that "phrase-regime," "discourse," or cultural "form of life." Nor can this be merely a matter of one's private attitude, a position arrived at on no firmer basis than Lyotard's fall-back gesture, his voluntarist or decisionist notion of ethics as a leap of faith beyond any standard of reasoned accountability. For as Foucault describes it, the posture of "non-acceptance" is one that follows from a critical review of the best available evidence, a commitment made "as substantial as possible" by giving due weight to all those factors – historical, political, socio-economic, etc. – that enable one to reach an informed judgment. So it is not so much a question of "judging without criteria" (in Lyotard's oxymoronic phrase) as of asking which criteria properly apply in some particular set of circumstances, and then – on those grounds – deciding what should count as a consequent, good-faith, or ethically warranted response.

Thus "politics" is secondary to "ethics" only in the sense that ethics confronts such issues at the crucial point where an adequate knowledge of the given situation passes over into a *reasoned and justified* commitment on moral-evaluative grounds. Thus, in Foucault's words,

When thought intervenes, it doesn't assume a unique form that is the direct result or the necessary expression of these difficulties; it is an original or specific response – often taking many forms, sometimes even contradictory

in its different aspects – to these difficulties, which are defined for it by a situation or a context, and which hold true as a possible question.<sup>42</sup>

This passage brings out Foucault's eminently Kantian concern to explain how ethical judgment is, on the one hand, a matter of autonomous, freely willed choice – since always to some extent underdetermined by the factual evidence – and, on the other, obliged to take account of such evidence in order to justify its actions, commitments, or evaluative priorities. By this time he had advanced a long way toward abandoning the extreme nominalist position – the attitude of cognitive skepticism linked to a relativist philosophy of meaning and value – that had marked his writings from *The Order of Things* to the period of Nietzsche-inspired "genealogical" thought. Such ideas had been enlisted in the service of a fashionable "end-of-ideology" creed that rejected all truth-claims as a matter of course, and that cheerfully embraced the postmodern prospect of a "cultural conversation" of plural, heterogeneous discourses henceforth given over to judging in the absence of factual or ethical criteria. Whatever their erstwhile appeal for Foucault, or his own central role in promoting them, these ideas now struck him (it is reasonable to infer) as philosophically incoherent and as possessing nothing like the "radical" charge that their adherents claimed for them.

## V

Had Foucault lived longer, this resistance might have taken a more overt and polemical form, a challenge to many of the orthodox notions now canvassed in his name. As it is, one can see from the late essays and interviews, especially those that pursue his engagement with Kant, how far he had come in the process of re-thinking his relation to the project of Enlightenment critique. Of course there is no question of claiming Foucault as a good Kantian at heart, a prodigal son who once ventured forth among the vanities and snares of post-structuralist fashion but finally acknowledged the error of his ways and embraced the family creed. Such an argument would ignore those numerous points of tension – "aporias" in the strict, not the current all-purpose rhetorical, sense of that term – that continue to vex Foucault's later dealings with Kant. Yet very often it is precisely at the moment when Foucault is asserting his distance from

this legacy of thought that he also bears witness to its present-day significance, its capacity for raising the right kinds of question with regard to matters of ethical, social, and political conscience. Thus "the thread that may connect us to the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to its doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era" (WIE 42). We shall misread this and other passages like it if we take them as signaling a postmodern break with all the values of Enlightenment thought. For what could be more in keeping with Kant's critical imperative than this requirement that philosophy take nothing on trust – its own "doctrinal elements" included – but persist in the kind of self-questioning activity that allows of no privileged exemptions, no truth-claims (epistemic or ethical) that cannot be justified on reasoned or principled grounds? Such, after all, is Foucault's ways of linking the "work of thought" with the maintenance of a distinctive "philosophical ethos," one that involves the "permanent critique" of naturalized attitudes and values. If this is no simple "return" to Kant, still less can it be thought of, following the current doxa, as a flat repudiation of Kantian ideas in the wisdom of postmodern hindsight.

When Foucault denounces what he calls the "blackmail of the Enlightenment," his phrase can best be taken as referring to the mythical and demonized view of that tradition adopted, with little in the way of corroborative evidence, by doctrinaire postmodernists like Lyotard. And yet one also finds him, just a few sentences later, declaring that "as an enterprise for linking the progress of truth and the history of liberty in a bond of direct relation, it [the Enlightenment] formulated a philosophical question that remains for us to consider" (43). This affirmative characterization is demonstrably nearer the mark, both as a matter of adequate description (on philosophic and historical grounds) and as regards the motivating interests of Foucault's own engagement with Kant and the discourse of Enlightenment critique. It explains why he continued to treat such questions as a "privileged domain for analysis," a "set of political, economic, social, institutional, and cultural events on which we still depend in large part" (42). Where the conflict arose was in Foucault's uncertainty, still present in his last writings, as to whether those events were historically contingent at bottom and should

therefore be treated as just another (albeit for us a uniquely "privileged") episode in the structural genealogy of Western thought, or whether, on the contrary, they marked the passage to a new and henceforth indispensable mode of socio-cultural analysis. The former reading is undoubtedly borne out by his work from *The Order of Things* to the late 1960s. Thereafter one can find evidence for both interpretations, often – as I have argued – within the same text and in response to the same sorts of question. But the fact that this remained an issue for Foucault, and the more so through successive encounters with Kant, is evidence enough that he never espoused that line of least resistance (or retreat into postures of private-esthetic whimsy) enjoined by the postmodern skeptics.

In this respect Foucault indeed kept faith with what he saw as the enduring value of Enlightenment thought: its capacity to "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." On Rorty's account this would simply be a matter of exchanging one life-style or "final vocabulary" for another, a process that occurs for no good reason save that of momentarily relieving our boredom and providing some new, equally "contingent" set of topics for the ongoing cultural conversation. One could, if so disposed, read Foucault's sentence as a straightforward endorsement of the postmodern-pragmatist line. Thus it might plausibly be construed as urging that "enlightenment" is a thing of the past, that truth is just a matter of what is (currently and contingently) "good in the way of belief," and that value-commitments make sense only insofar as they carry weight – or possess some measure of suasive appeal – for members of an existing interpretive community. But there could then be no accounting for the logic of Foucault's sentence, as opposed to its vaguely rhetorical drift. That is to say, one would be at a loss to understand his assertion that criticism can "separate out" those contingent factors that have "made us what we are" from those other "possibilities" that remain at present unfulfilled, but which yet provide a standard – in Kantian terms, a regulative idea – for the ethical "work of thought." These are not just options that offer themselves randomly according to the current conversational state of play, or within the presently existing range of language-games, discourses, elective self-images, etc. Rather, they are conceived as *conditions of possibility* for that attitude of "permanent critique"

that Foucault identifies with the Enlightenment ethos in its authentic, self-questioning form.

It is here that Foucault implicitly takes issue with the facile strain of counter-Enlightenment rhetoric that has often laid claim to his own work, early and late, as a principal source of inspiration. Small wonder that he became increasingly disposed to assert his distance from post-structuralism and its various offshoots on the Francophile cultural scene. For there is nothing more alien to Foucault's thought than the kind of ultra-relativist orthodoxy that erects its own lack of critical and ethical resources into a quasi-universal "postmodern condition," a terminal indifference with regard to issues of truth and falsehood or, to paraphrase Jonathan Swift, that state of perfected self-assurance that comes of being blissfully well deceived. And conversely, there was no question more central to the evolving project of Foucault's life and work than the one taken up in Kant's inaugural essay on the theme "What Is Enlightenment?" Any reading that manages to sidestep this question, or that returns a confidently negative response, is bound to misconstrue that project at numerous points.

## NOTES

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley; *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley; *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley.
- 2 Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, 144.
- 3 See, for instance, Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985).
- 4 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. A. Sheridan.
- 5 See especially the essays collected in Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. D.F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon.
- 6 Foucault, "The Ethics of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (interview), in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1988), 7.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985).

- 9 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985).
- 10 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*.
- 11 See, for instance, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (C.U.P., 1991); and *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (C.U.P., 1991).
- 12 For some ingenious variations on this postmodern-pragmatist theme, see Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989).
- 13 See especially Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. C. Gordon.
- 14 Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy," 198.
- 15 Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" trans. Catherine Porter, in Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, 32–50. Hereafter cited as *WIE* with page-number in the text. See also Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in L.W. Beck, ed., *Kant: On History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963). For further commentary on Foucault's reading of Kant, see Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What Is Maturity: Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'" and Ian Hacking, "Self-Improvement," all in Hoy, ed., *Foucault, A Critical Reader*.
- 16 See also Foucault, "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution," trans. Colin Gordon, *Economy and Society* 15 (February 1986): 88–96.
- 17 See Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1984) for an incisive treatment that takes full account of these complexities in the Kantian project of thought.
- 18 See, for instance, Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
- 19 See especially Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1971).
- 20 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- 21 Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," in F.F. Gautier, ed., *L'Art romantique (Oeuvres complètes IV)* (Paris, 1923).
- 22 For a differently angled though pertinent commentary on these same texts of Baudelaire, see Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983), 142–65.
- 23 Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of

Foucault," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 198.

- 24 Ibid.
- 25 For their respective (and sharply differing) views on the role of the critical intellectual, see "Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault: Human Nature, Justice versus Power" (transcript of televised dialogue) in Fons Elders, ed., *Reflexive Waters: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), 133–97. See also Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf of War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992) for further discussion of the issues raised by Foucault's refusal to play the role of so-called "universal intellectual" in the type-cast Enlightenment mould.
- 26 Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 27 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).
- 28 Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," interview with Paul Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader*, 388.
- 29 Ibid., 388–89.
- 30 Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" (interview), in Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*, 340–72; 350
- 31 See Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism*.
- 32 Lyotard, *The Differend; Phrases in Dispute*.
- 33 Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 350.
- 34 Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,"
- 35 Ibid., 388.
- 36 Ibid., 390.
- 37 Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," trans. John Mepham, in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. C. Gordon, 1–36.
- 38 Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," 376.
- 39 Ibid., 374.
- 40 Ibid., 376.
- 41 Ibid., 377.
- 42 Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," 388–89.

## 8 Modern and counter-modern: Ethos and epoch in Heidegger and Foucault

In one of his last essays, one that is uncharacteristic in its positive and programmatic format, Michel Foucault asked: "What is modern philosophy? . . . modern philosophy is the philosophy that is attempting to answer the question raised by Kant two centuries ago: What is Enlightenment?"<sup>1</sup> Foucault, echoing Kant, answered that Enlightenment is not the name of an epoch but the exit from immaturity to maturity. The possibility of that exit lies in the relationship the philosopher establishes with the use of reason at the present historical moment. Such a philosopher is not searching for origins and uncovering totalities, nor sculpting utopias. A modern philosopher, one who is curious about the specificity of the present moment, is someone seeking to find out what difference it makes to be thinking today. This is a critical task in the Kantian sense of an exploration of limits. The task is to inquire into the conditions in which the use of reason is legitimate "in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped."<sup>2</sup> Such an inquiry entails reflection on the limits of the individual's free use of reason, the political conditions under which that use is possible, and a diagnosis of the current state of affairs. It sits at the crossroads of "critical reflection and reflection on history." As we will see, it requires an understanding of thought as a practice and critical thought as a specific kind of situated testing and reflection on the results of that testing which is thoroughly active.

Today one domain of the field of thought that has been increasingly problematized is the question of modernity, witness the extraordinary proliferation of texts on post-modernity. I follow Foucault, however, in casting the question somewhat differently; not by opposing modernity to post-modernity, but by opposing modernity to