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Misunderstanding the Question 'What is Enlightenment?': Venturi, Habermas, and Foucault

Misunderstanding the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?': Venturi, Habermas, and Foucault*

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When Franco Venturi delivered the George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge University in 1969, he flirted with the idea of entitling them "Was ist Aufklärung?" In the end, he decided against it, explaining that he feared that Kant's famous answer to this question has had the tendency of "leading research away from its proper path." This diversion, he argued, generally takes the form of a "philosophical interpretation" of the Enlightenment that searches for the philosophical origins of those ideas that were later put into practice in the popular writings of subsequent Enlightenment thinkers. Venturi maintained that such attempts to bring systematic coherence to the often baffling diversity of practical endeavors in which eighteenth-century advocates of enlightenment were engaged ran counter to the "fundamental character of Enlightenment thought," which he saw as distinguished by a "firm determination not to build philosophic systems, the complete distrust of their viability."[1] The "philosophical interpretation" struck Venturi as deficient, in particular, in its neglect of the political dimension of the Enlightenment. It was this particular aspect that he sought to capture in the title that he picked to replace the now discarded "Was ist Aufklärung?": *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment*.

Despite these reservations, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* nevertheless began with a brief discussion (which reprises Venturi's earlier essay in Italian on the topic) tracing the origins of the phrase *Sapere Aude!*, the quotation from Horace that

Kant characterized as the "motto of enlightenment."[2] Venturi's account is not without its peculiarities. First, while granting that the broader German debate on the question "What is enlightenment?" might be "interesting," he displayed little interest in it: he ignored the host of other responses to the question and focused exclusively on Kant. Second, his discussion of Kant's essay was limited to an examination of previous uses of the quotation that Kant took from Horace. As a result, it had nothing to say about the rest of Kant's essay, which addressed precisely the political concerns that Venturi argued had been overlooked by "philosophical interpretations" of the Enlightenment: the question of what restrictions a government might place on the rights of its citizens to express dissenting ideas and what obligations citizens had as members of organizations that require them, as a condition of their discharging their duties, to temper doubts about the practices in which they are engaged.[3]

Venturi was not alone in focusing on the famous opening paragraph of Kant's answer and neglecting almost everything else in both the essay and the broader debate that it joined. While Kant's response is regularly invoked in histories of the Enlightenment, discussions of the essay are often cursory and tend to be plagued by nagging errors. For example, Dorinda Outram opens one of the better brief overviews of the Enlightenment by informing her readers that "in 1783 the *Berlinische Monatsscrift* set up a prize competition for the best answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?'"[4] But, in fact, there was no such competition: Outram seems to have confused the prize competitions sponsored by the Berlin Academy with the much more modest request for clarification about the meaning of "enlightenment" in an article that appeared in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. Likewise, Louis Dupré begins *The Enlightenment and the*

Intellectual Foundations of the Modern Age by noting, "In 1783 the writer of the article 'Was ist Aufklärung?' … confessed himself unable to answer the question he had raised."[5] But the title of the article that triggered the debate was not "Was ist Aufklärung?" (it was instead the much more cumbersome "Is it Advisable Not to Further Sanctify the Bonds of Marriage through Religion?") and its author did not attempt to explain what enlightenment was; he challenged others to answer the question for him.[6]

Slips like these are, of course, quite minor and it would be pointless to dwell on them were it not for the possibility that this lack of attention to the context that gave rise to Kant's famous answer might have broader consequences. For the failure to understand the particular question that Kant was trying to answer typically leads to misunderstandings about what he was seeking to accomplish in his reply. And, because his answer has come to serve as a convenient summary of the way in which the Enlightenment understood itself, these misunderstandings may prevent us from appreciating the differences between the ways in which we see the Enlightenment and the way it appeared to those who we take to be participants in it. What follows seeks (1) to clarify, briefly, the particular question that Kant was answering, (2) to examine – using Jürgen Habermas' work as a case in point – the tension between readings that use Kant's answer as a way of discussing the Enlightenment as a discrete historical period and those readings that see it as offering a broad outline of an "Enlightenment Project" that continues into the present, and (3) to explore how Michel Foucault, in a series of discussions of Kant's response, sketched an approach to Kant's text that suggests a way of reframing Venturi's distinction between "philosophical" and "political" interpretations of the Enlightenment.

I. Clarifying the Question

In December 1783 the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* published a rejoinder by the clergyman and educational reformer Johann Friedrich Zöllner to an article published in the journal a few months earlier that questioned whether it was necessary for clergy to officiate at marriage ceremonies.[7] Zöllner was troubled by the article's claim that much of the population found the presence of clergy at weddings "ridiculous." Such an attitude, he suggested, testified to the corruption of public morals and confusion that had been wrought "in the name of *enlightenment*" in the hearts and minds of the citizenry. Yet, though Zöllner was disturbed by the damage that had been done in the name of enlightenment, he did not appear to be entirely certain what "enlightenment" actually involved. So he inserted a footnote that asked, *"What is enlightenment*? This question, which is almost as important as what is truth, should indeed be answered before one begins to enlighten! And still I have never found it answered?"[8]

While Zöllner had reservations about removing clergy from wedding ceremonies, he was not at all opposed to the broader aims of the movement that we would characterize as "the Enlightenment." In his own day he made a name for himself with his *Reader for All Classes*, a collection of essays on various disciplines aimed at introducing a diverse audience to many of the central ideas associated with the Enlightenment. He was not only a clergyman but also a Freemason and, most importantly, a member of the Berlin "Wednesday Society," a secret society of "Friends of Enlightenment" that was closely linked to the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.[9] On December 17, 1783 — the month Zöllner's request for a definition appeared in the pages of the journal — he joined his

fellow members to listen to a lecture by Johann Karl Wilhelm Möhsen,

Frederick the Great's personal physician and a scholar with wide-ranging interests in the

history of science, on the question "What is to be done toward the enlightenment of the

citizenry?" The lecture presented six points for discussion, the first of which proposed:

"That it be determined more precisely: What is enlightenment?"[10] Zöllner's footnote

would appear, then, to be less a testimony to his unfamiliarity with the concept of

enlightenment than a sign of the intense interest in the question within the influential

group of civil servants, clergy, and men of letters who made up the Wednesday Society.

Moses Mendelssohn was also a member of the Wednesday Society and was an

active participant in the discussions of Möhsen's lecture that went on within the society

in the first months of 1784. In May he presented a lecture to the society on the question

"What is Enlightenment?" and it is likely that this talk served as the basis for his response

to Zöllner's question, which appeared in the September issue of the Berlinische

Monatsschrift, three months before Kant's better-known response.[11] Kant was aware that

Mendelssohn had responded to the question, but since he could not obtain a copy of the

issue, he explained in footnote tacked on to the end of his article that we was submitting

his own response, "as an attempt to see how far agreement in thought can be brought

about by chance."[12] The peculiar footnote that closed "What is Enlightenment?" would

have readers believe that, had Kant actually been able to acquire the current issue of the

Berlinische Monatsschrift, he would not have bothered to submit a response, and did so

now only as a strange experiment designed to see if his article might repeat the arguments

of an essay the journal had already published.

Recalling this context helps clarify what Zöllner was looking for when he posed the question "What is enlightenment?" in the first place. He was seeking clarification about the meaning of a term that had come to be used as a way of denoting a group of practices that included, among other things, the proposal in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* urging the removal of clergy from wedding ceremonies. He was requesting that those who saw themselves as engaged in a variety of activities that, in differing ways, aimed at improving the society in which they lived step back from their efforts and try to explain, more generally, what it was that they were doing. He was challenging them, in short, to clarify the broader purposes that these efforts served. As it turned out, the flurry of responses that his footnote prompted offered little agreement on how to characterize the more general aims that the term denoted. In 1790 an article reviewing responses to Zöllner's question catalogued twenty-one different meanings of the term and concluded that the word had become so divorced from any clear conventions of usage that its discussion had degenerated into "a war of all against all" between combatants who marshaled their own idiosyncratic definitions.[13]

Whatever their differences, these responses shared one important feature: none of them took Zöllner to be requesting a characterization of the particular historical period in which they were living. Their intent was to clarify the activities in which they and their contemporaries were engaged, not to distinguish their particular historical epoch from earlier periods. There were, not surprisingly, occasional references to the character of the present age, but they were never the main focus of the responses. Kant, for example, does consider – in passing –whether his might be "an enlightened age," and responds by observing, "no but it is an age of enlightenment."[14] His use of the indefinite

article is telling: it indicates that while this might be an age of enlightenment,

his readers could nevertheless find, if they look backwards through history, other ages

that could make that same claim. Yet when Kant is invoked today at the start of accounts

of the Enlightenment there is a tendency to shift the way this passage is understood: Kant

is read as attempting to set out the general characteristics of what we now call *the* Age of

Enlightenment.

II. Enlightenment as Period, Practice, and Project

While those who invoke Kant's answer today may note – if only in passing – that

there were other answers to the question, any serious consideration of those responses has

been largely consigned to specialized studies on the German Enlightenment.[15] This

tendency to give pride of place to Kant's response can be traced back to the end of the

eighteenth-century: even at the time when the question of enlightenment was being

debated, there were already signs that Kant's answer was emerging as the most important

response.

Kant's growing fame may, in part, account for the impact of the essay. The

Critique of Pure Reason had been published three years earlier and had become a center

of scholarly and, increasingly, popular discussion. But this alone does not explain why

his answer trumped the others. After all, Moses Mendelssohn had an international

reputation that, at the time, matched that of Kant (his work was known in England and

France before Kant's) and his response may have been viewed by the members of the

Wednesday Society as their public answer to the question that Zöllner (echoing Möhsen)

had posed. Personal connections also may have helped: Kant had produced a number of

talented students (e.g., Johann Adam Bergk and Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk) who

had moved on to academic positions. By the 1790s they were publishing contributions to

the debate on the nature of enlightenment and, not surprisingly, their way of approaching

the question borrowed much from that of their teacher. [16] Finally, while Mendelssohn's

essay was deeply indebted to the general viewpoint of the so-called Wolff-Leibniz

philosophy, Kant's was – like the bulk of his contributions to the *Berlinische*

Monatsschrift – free of technical language. Though it is possible to trace connections

from Kant's essay on enlightenment to certain arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

(consider, for instance, Onora O'Neill's influential account of the role that public reason

plays in both works[17]), it is unlikely that anyone at the time or that many in the decades

that followed would have pursued these links. This meant that Kant's response to Zöllner

was an essay that could be readily understood by readers who knew little about Kant's

system as a whole. Whatever the explanation for its success, Kant's response has gone

on to inspire a secondary literature that has pursued two rather different questions: some

commentators have used Kant's essay as a point of departure for attempts to summarize

the main characteristics of the period, while others have used it as summary of a project

that, for better or worse, continues into the present.

     To read Kant's response in the first way turns his attempt to answer a question

about a process (i.e., "What is enlightenment?") into a response to a request for a

characterization of a period (i.e., "What was *the* Enlightenment?"). This is what Outram

and Dupré would appear to be doing when they cite Kant's answer at the start of their

discussions and it was this general approach that Venturi hoped to avoid doing when he

turned away from Kant's "philosophical interpretation" in order to offer an account of the

Enlightenment that focused on political considerations rather than philosophical conceptions. While there are good reasons (as sketched in the previous section) for arguing that this was *not* the question that Kant thought he was answering, those who read Kant in this way may not necessarily be condemned to produce the sort of "philosophical interpretations" of the Enlightenment that Venturi cautioned against.

One way of characterizing historical periods is to approach them from the standpoint of the general practices that defined them and one of the more striking features of Kant's essay is that it does appear to highlight a feature of eighteenth-century life that goes a long way in differentiating it from earlier periods: the emergence of what Jürgen Habermas has termed the "bourgeois public sphere."[18] Like all generalizations about historical periods, subsequent studies have found much to criticize in Habermas' account.[19] But, despite the shortcomings of Habermas' study, the now-considerable literature on the eighteenth-century public sphere that it sparked only serves to drive home the extent to which Kant may well have succeeded in highlighting a significant feature of the era in which he was writing. For one of the things that distinguishes the period we call "the Enlightenment" from earlier epochs is the emergence of a new set of social institutions – including coffee houses, scientific academies, salons, Masonic lodges, reading societies, philanthropic societies, as well as the growth of a reading public that provided a market for journals, newspapers and encyclopedias – that would play an important role in facilitating the exchange of ideas across an international community of readers and writers.[20] For this reason Kant's response to the question "What is enlightenment?" may not, *pace* Venturi, be the worst of guides to follow in approaching the period.[21]

There is, however, a second way in which the question Kant addressed has been understood. It is concerned less with what responses to the question in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* tell us about the eighteenth century than with the implications that the broader project in which Kant and his contemporaries were engaged might still have for the present. An example of this approach can be found in a later work by Habermas: his account of "The Project of Enlightenment" in his 1980 Adorno Prize lecture.[22] Habermas sees the "philosophers of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century" as laying the foundations of a "project of modernity" that is characterized by "the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art, all in accord with their own immanent logic." With a nod to his earlier account of the rise of the public sphere, Habermas notes that this project also seeks to release "the cognitive potentials accumulated in the process from their esoteric high forms" and to "apply them to the sphere of praxis, that is, to encourage the rational organization of social relations." While "partisans of the Enlightenment" such as Condorcet may have entertained the "extravagant expectation" that developments in the arts and sciences would lead, not simply to an increased control over nature, but would also "further the understanding of self and world, the progress of morality, justice in social institutions, and even human happiness," Habermas concedes that "little of this optimism remains" today. Hence, we are left with a choice: "should we continue to hold fast to the intentions of the Enlightenment, however fractured they may be, or should we rather relinquish the entire project of modernity?"[23]

Habermas' concern here lies not with an historical period, defined by certain problems, institutions, and concerns, but rather with a project that is seen as commencing at a particular point in the past and continuing into the present, leaving us with a cluster of "intentions" that we, today, may either continue or abandon. Such an approach is not without its pitfalls. First, unlike Habermas' earlier account of the rise of the "bourgeois public sphere," any characterization of this sort will be forced to traffic in the sort of "philosophical interpretations" of the Enlightenment that Venturi advised historians to avoid. Since there is little reason to think that the diverse practical endeavors in which various eighteenth-century advocates of enlightenment were engaged are likely to present us with a comprehensive project that we might carry forward, invocations of the "Project of Enlightenment" will have to recast these eighteenth-century efforts in terms of the broader principles that allegedly informed them. Such reinterpretations, no matter how carefully executed, will inevitably have to screen out those concerns that, however significant they might have been for eighteenth-century thinkers, cannot easily be viewed as anticipations of the questions we still confront today.

This is particularly the case when the alleged "Project of Enlightenment" is seen – as it is by Habermas – as constitutive of (if not identical with) the so-called "Project of Modernity."[24] Drawing on the work of Max Weber, Habermas maintains that the touchstone of modernity is the disintegration of the "substantive" concept of reason (a conception that, in pre-modern societies, had been articulated in the form of "religious and metaphysical world-views") into the distinctive "value spheres" of science, morality, and art (spheres which adjudicate, respectively, questions of truth, justice, and taste).[25] It is easy enough to see how Kant's three critiques can be seen as prefiguring the

differentiation of value spheres that Habermas, following Weber, regards as the
defining feature of modern societies. But it is considerably more difficult to argue that a
concern with differentiating judgments of aesthetic taste from judgments about moral
worth or with enforcing a separation between empirical and normative were central
concerns of the Enlightenment as a whole. For example, the intense interest of
eighteenth-century thinkers in using anthropological accounts of "human nature" to
inform work in moral philosophy or the tradition of drawing analogies between
judgments about the beautiful and the good in the tradition of moral philosophy that
stretches from Shaftesbury, through Hutcheson, and onward to Schiller would appear to
have little interest in maintaining the clear demarcations between value spheres that
Habermas finds central to the "Project of Enlightenment." If the "differentiation of value
spheres" serves as the touchstone of modernity, it would be equally plausible to argue
that at least some important Enlightenment projects could be seen as antithetical to the
"Project of Modernity."[26]

The concession that while *some* "Enlightenment projects" may have paved the
way to "modernity," *others* did not is, however, not an option that is open to Habermas.
For, like others who invoke the "Project of the Enlightenment," he sees this project as
singular, not plural.[27] Having noted that little of Condorcet's optimism about the inherent
ability of scientific progress to spur moral and social improvement survives today,
Habermas goes on to observe, "Even among those philosophers who currently represent
something of an Enlightenment rearguard, the project of modernity appears curiously
fragmented," with different thinkers (e.g., Karl Popper, Paul Lorenzen, Theodor Adorno)
fastening onto one or another "of the moments into which reason has become

differentiated."[28] But to argue that reason has been "fragmented" into a variety

of contesting projects necessarily presupposes that there had once been a single, coherent

"Project of Enlightenment" – namely, the project that Habermas identifies with Kant's

critical philosophy as interpreted through the lens of Weber's account of the

differentiation of value spheres – that has now been fractured. Yet if this particular

project is seen as only one of several contesting notions of what enlightenment involved,

then the alleged "fragmentation" of Enlightenment projects might simply be viewed as

the continuation of an ongoing set of disputes in which different parties advance different

understandings of what the activity called "enlightenment" involves.[29]

This tendency to suppose that there is a single "Enlightenment project" is, of

course, hardly unique to Habermas. In much the same way, critics have tended to fasten

on one or another alleged representative of this project (the usual suspects include Kant,

Locke, Descartes, Hobbes, Bacon, and Condorcet), present them as representative of

"Enlightenment thought" in general, and then go on to find the roots of maladies that

allegedly persist into the present in the work of this particular thinker.[30] While much of

this literature has, at best, only a fleeting acquaintance with eighteenth-century thought,

the questions that it attempts to address are not necessarily insignificant. Despites its

often staggering failings as an account of eighteenth-century thought, at least some of this

literature can be seen as continuing to address with problems that are, in at least one

respect, not unlike the questions with which Zöllner and his colleagues were themselves

wrestling. For what is ultimately at stake here is the question of what is to count as

"enlightenment" and what consequences – both positive and negative – are associated

with differing conceptions of what enlightenment involves. This literature, in other

words, is wrestling with the question "What is enlightenment?" – which, of

course, is a rather different question from "What was *the Enlightenment*?"

While these two different ways of understanding the question that Kant was

answering are analytically distinguishable, they have frequently been intertwined. Time

and again, definitions of what *the* Enlightenment was tend to slide into assessments of the

various projects it allegedly championed. As Darrin McMahon has shown, some of the

earliest attempts to characterize the general aims of the *philosophes* came from their

Catholic opponents in France, who constructed an image of the movement that saw it as

much more radical – and considerably more unified – than it actually was.[31] Much the

same can be said for the impact of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's contributions to the so-

called "Pantheism Dispute" on the way in which the Enlightenment came to be viewed in

German-speaking Europe. Tracing the roots of the Leibniz-Wolff philosophy back to

Spinoza, Jacobi invented an enlightenment that was at once radical and irresistible.

While he intended to raise this specter as a warning, one of the paradoxical consequences

of his work was that it alerted other, less timid, souls to the radical implications that

might be drawn from a body of literature that, at the time, seemed anything but radical.[32]

Finally, as I have argued in a discussion of the peculiar definition of enlightenment that

has appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for well over a century, the history of the

concept of enlightenment in English has much to do with ideological struggles over the

role of the alleged conspiracy of "philosophes, Freemasons, and Illuminati" in sparking

the French Revolution.[33] From the start, then, attempts to explain what "the

Enlightenment" was have been inseparable from hopes and fears about the project it

allegedly embraced.

This same intertwining of definition and critique can be seen in the discussions of the relationship between the Enlightenment, modernity, and post-modernity that Habermas joined in his Adorno lecture. In his view, attacks on the project of modernity had been launched along three fronts. "Old Conservative" critics of modernity – a group that, in his accounting, included such figures as Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Robert Spaemann – regard the dissolution of "substantive rationality" with suspicion and advocate a "a return to positions prior to modernity," with differing forms of neo-Aristotelianism providing a convenient exit route.[34] In contrast, those thinkers assembled under the label of "New Conservatives" (a group that, in Habermas' account, included such disparate figures as Carl Schmitt, Gottfried Benn, and Ludwig Wittgenstein) "welcome the development of modern science" to the extent that it promotes "technological advance, capitalist growth and a rational form of administration," but are considerably less enthusiastic about the more culturally explosive aspects of modernity. As a result, they advocate political measures aimed at restraining the erosion of traditional values.[35] It is, however, precisely these cultural aspects of modernity that are embraced by the group of thinkers that Habermas designated with the politically charged label "Young Conservatives."[36] Guided by the spirit of Nietzsche, such thinkers

> appropriate the fundamental experience of aesthetic modernity, namely the
> revelation of a decentred subjectivity liberated from all the constraints of
> cognition and purposive action, from all the imperatives of labour and use
> value, and with this they break out of the modern world altogether.[37]

This was the tradition that, in France, leads "from Georges Bataille through Foucault to Derrida."[38]

Habermas' survey was, of course, rather schematic and he would later make adjustments in his treatment of the group that he assembled under the label "Young Conservatives."[39] Nevertheless, his classification is useful in allowing us to see how each of the various groups that Habermas saw himself as opposing winds up constructing its own particular understanding of what modernity involves and — in the process — pieces together its own particular version of the Enlightenment. Habermas' "Old Conservatives" have tended to see the Enlightenment as inaugurating an erosion of traditional understandings of morality and politics that ultimately culminates in nihilism, decisionism, and totalitarianism (hence the pride of place occupied in such accounts by Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber, who allegedly reveal the fateful consequences of the entire "Project of Enlightenment").[40] In contrast, accounts of the Enlightenment offered by Habermas' "New Conservatives" are compelled to separate those aspects of the Enlightenment that they endorse (for example, the Scottish Enlightenment, which is typically reduced to Adam Smith) from those that they regard as pernicious (namely, anything that can be seen as laying the groundwork for the French Revolution – for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau).[41] Finally, those thinkers that Habermas gathered under the label "Young Conservatives" have tended to create an image of an Enlightenment that is defined by a naïve faith in the powers of reason, an uncritical enthusiasm for science as the solution to all social problems, and an unshakeable attachment to the "grand narratives" of emancipation and legitimation.[42] In short,

everyone (Habermas included) winds up inventing the Enlightenment their

account requires.

III. Foucault, Enlightenment, and the "History of Thought"

In placing Michel Foucault in the company of "Young Conservative" critics of

modernity, Habermas was simply reiterating (albeit with more pointed political

implications) what, by the early 1980s, had become the conventional understanding of

Foucault's stance towards the Enlightenment: he appeared to be constructing an account

in which every alleged advance of enlightenment only served to breed new and more

insidious forms of domination.[43] Samuel Tuke and Scipion Pinel entered the eighteenth-

century prisons to separate criminals from the insane — but wound up creating a system

in which madness was sentenced to "a sort of endless trial, for which the asylum provided

the police, the prosecutors, the judges, and the executioners."[44] Freud shattered the

silence surrounding sexuality — only to subject those now freed to the "nearly infinite

task" of "telling oneself and an other, as often as possible" anything that might be

remotely linked to the body and its pleasures.[45] And in the most famous of the ironic

reversals that Foucault traced, *Discipline and Punish* provides an unforgettable account

of how prisoners, freed from the darkness of the dungeon, are captured all the more

securely in the light that floods through Bentham's Panopticon.[46] It was hardly

surprising, then, that when Foucault invited Habermas to a "private conference" to mark

the 200th anniversary of Kant's answer to Zöllner's question, Habermas understood the

invitation as "a call to a discussion in which we … would debate various interpretations

of modernity, using as a basis for discussion a text that in a certain sense

initiated the philosophical discourse of modernity."[47]

At the time of the invitation, Habermas was unaware that Foucault had just

completed a series of lectures at the Collège de France in which Kant's essay had played

a prominent role.[48] Indeed, during the last decade of his life, Foucault repeatedly invoked

Kant's response to Zöllner's question. The best-known of these discussions appeared in

the essay published by Paul Rabinow, several months after Foucault's death, in *The

Foucault Reader* under the title "What is Enlightenment?"[49] It was preceded by a

somewhat different discussion of Kant's essay in an article that appeared in the special

issue of *Magazine littéraire* marking the publication of volumes two and three of

Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.[50] Both essays were revisions (the latter more directly

than the former) of portions of the opening lecture of Foucault's 1983 course at the

Collège de France on "The Government of Self and Others."[51] Various other reflections

on Kant's response can also be found in various lectures, interviews, and occasional

writings from the last years of Foucault's life: as he explained at the start of his 1983

lectures, Kant's essay had become "something of a blazon, a fetish" for him.[52]

Foucault's earliest sustained consideration of Kant's essay dates from a 1978

lecture to the Société française de philosophie, a lecture that offers what is perhaps the

clearest indication of what it was that led him to reflect on Kant's response.[53] Foucault

took his point of departure from his ongoing investigations of the arts of governance – a

research project that spawned a considerable body of writing, most of which would only

make its way into print posthumously. The immediate concern of the lecture was with

the origins of what Foucault termed the "critical attitude" – an attitude that he linked to

the question "How not to be governed?" Surveying the various areas where

governance had been questioned – i.e., scriptural critique, juridical controversies, and

broader concerns about the grounds on which truth claims rest – Foucault drew a parallel

to the concerns that Kant had raised in his 1784 essay.[54] Foucault's chief concern,

however, lay less with Kant's answer to Zöllner's question than with the changing

relationship between critique and enlightenment in the nineteenth century. He saw

Kant's discussion as having been taken up by two different traditions of inquiry. Among

French scholars, the question that Kant was attempting to answer had been pursued by a

tradition that, beginning with inquiries in the philosophy of science, moved on to raise

questions of signification, truth, and rationality, which culminated in the question, "How

is it that rationalization leads to the rage of power." The German reception of Kant's

concerns moved along a somewhat different trajectory, focusing on the relation between

"the fundamental project of science" and the "forms of domination proper to the form of

contemporary society."[55]

The history of responses to the question "What is Enlightenment?" that Foucault

sketched in 1978 tends to confirm Venturi's misgivings about accounts of the

Enlightenment that take Kant's response as their point of departure: Foucault has nothing

to say about the political context of debates concerning the nature and advisability of

enlightenment and, instead, pitches his discussion on the level of the development of

philosophical and scientific representations. Nevertheless, the sketch does shed

considerable light on the trajectory of Foucault's own thought, and this trajectory helps

account for the significance he saw in Kant's response to Zöllner's question. For all of

their novelty, Foucault's first works can be seen as products of the French tradition in the

history of science that, in the lecture, he saw as culminating in the work of Bachelard and Canguilhem.[56] His own point of departure, in other words, had been with the culmination of the "French" side of reflections on the questions of critique and enlightenment. His subsequent shift in focus from considerations of systems of representation to studies of the implications of such systems for the development of power relationships (a move that is sometimes summarized as a turn from "archaeology" to "genealogy") led him from the concerns that he saw as dominant on the French side of the ledger to those that had been central to the German side. This shift in his focus may help to explain his declaration in the opening lecture of his course on "The Government of the Self and Others" (a declaration that would be repeated in the article on Kant's essay published in *Magazine Littéraire*) that his own work might best be situated in that "form of philosophy that, from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School" had been engaged in attempts to construct "an ontology of ourselves, of present reality."[57]

In a short eulogy written in the wake of Foucault's death, Habermas pondered this peculiar declaration of loyalties, questioning how Foucault's "unyielding critique of modernity" could be reconciled with his "self-understanding as a thinker in the tradition of the Enlightenment." How could Foucault, who traced the ways in which the "will to knowledge" was implicated in "modern power formations only to denounce it," now view the project begun by the Enlightenment as "an impulse worthy of preservation and in need of renewal"?[58] Habermas' rather puzzled response sparked a flood of articles on the so-called "Foucault-Habermas Debate" – a "debate" of a rather strange sort, since one of the alleged participants had died before it had begun. This literature focused, for the

most part, on the question of whether Foucault's "totalizing" critique of reason

deprives his own work of the normative grounding that it requires.[59] This particular focus

is in keeping with Habermas' conception of the Enlightenment as a period that "marks

the entrance into a modernity that sees itself condemned to draw on itself for its

consciousness of self and its norm."[60] But Foucault's understanding of the Enlightenment

turns out to have been a good deal different from that of Habermas.

At first glance, Foucault's 1984 discussions of Kant's response would seem to be

plagued by a number of the familiar misreadings of the essay. Like others before him,

Foucault betrays little concern with the origins of the question Kant was answering: the

essay published in *The Foucault Reader* portrays Kant as responding to a question that

had been posed by the journal's editors – allegedly in line with an eighteenth century

custom of questioning "the public on programs that did not yet have solutions."[61] While

he does note that Mendelssohn also responded to the question, the essay has nothing to

say about that response beyond the suggestion that it represented an attempt to

demonstrate that the German enlightenment and the Jewish *Haskala* were part of the

same history.[62] But, though Mendelssohn's essay was much indebted to traditions of

thought that had come to characterize the Berlin Enlightenment, it had rather little to say

about the particular concerns of the *Haskala* – when Mendelssohn addressed those

questions, he wrote in Hebrew, not German.[63] Nor is Foucault's ominous suggestion that,

in Mendelssohn's text, we find the *Aufklärung* and the *Haskala*, "announcing the

acceptance of a common destiny – we know to what drama that was to lead" particularly

useful in understanding the relationship between the contributions of Mendelssohn and

Kant to the discussion of the question "What is enlightenment?"[64] Foucault surrenders

here to the tendency to see everything in German history as slouching towards

the Third Reich, a perspective that is probably not the best angle from which to

understand Mendelssohn's text. If Mendelssohn was concerned with a "common

destiny," it had less to do with the relationship of Jews to Germans than with a destiny

that, borrowing a concept from the enlightened Christian theologian Johann Joachim

Spalding, he saw as common to all human beings.[65]

Foucault's reading of Kant's essay is further compromised by the well-known

passage in which he refuses what he termed "the blackmail of the Enlightenment" – the

idea that it is necessary to take a stand for or against the Enlightenment – and goes on to

insist that "we do not break free from this blackmail by introducing 'dialectical' nuances

while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the

Enlightenment."[66] Foucault succeeds in evading this "blackmail" only at the price of

overlooking one of the central issues that was at stake in the debate that Kant's essay had

joined. For Zöllner's question had been prompted by an interest in distinguishing what

he saw as the positive consequences of efforts at enlightenment (e.g., the educational and

ecclesiastical reforms that he championed) from those consequences that he saw as

considerably more troubling (specifically, the idea that there was something "ridiculous"

about having clergy at wedding ceremonies). As Werner Schneiders argued in his classic

study of the debate, one of the central issues at stake was the concern to distinguish "true

enlightenment" from "false enlightenment."[67] For this reason, Foucault's desire to avoid

the question of what differentiates positive and negative aspects of efforts at

enlightenment means that he misses what, for Kant and his contemporaries, was the very

crux of the question.

Finally, Foucault quickly narrows his focus to a consideration of the

way in which Kant's essay "raised the philosophical question of the present day," which

leads Foucault into a discussion of the way in which "philosophical thought" – from

Plato to Vico – has "sought to reflect on its present" and to an attempt to see situate

Kant's essay in the context of the differing ways in which philosophers have attempted to

understand the defining features of the epoch in which they live.[68] Such a reading runs

the risk of turning Kant's effort to explain "what enlightenment is" into an attempt to

characterize the distinctive features of "the Enlightenment." And this would appear to be

how Foucault reads Kant's essay in his article in *Magazine littéraire*, which urges its

readers to

> consider the following fact: the *Aufklärung* calls itself *Aufklärung*. It is certainly
>
> a very singular cultural process that became aware of itself by naming itself, by
>
> situating itself in relation to its own past and future, and by designating the
>
> operations that it must carry out within its own present.[69]

But those who attempted to answer the question "Was ist Aufklärung?" were not trying to

craft a name that would capture the essential feature of the epoch in which they lived.

The question that Kant and others were attempting to answer was "What is

enlightenment?" (or, as Kant's first English translator rendered it, "What is

enlightening?") not "What is *the* Enlightenment?"[70]

Yet, despite these misunderstandings, Foucault nevertheless grasped an essential

feature of what Kant and his contemporaries were doing. While the article that appeared

in *Magazine littéraire* (like the opening lecture of his 1983 course) was concerned with

linking Kant's discussion of enlightenment to his reflections on history and, ultimately, to

his assessment of the significance of the French Revolution, the essay that appeared in the *Foucault Reader* makes a sudden and, at least initially, rather perplexing turn: it examines Baudelaire's characterization of "modernity."[71] There is nothing in the Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France (which, after their opening discussion of Kant's essay, move on to a discussion of the notion of *parrhesia* in Greek philosophy) that corresponds to this turn, which would appear to have been prompted by the series of lectures (which began two days after Foucault completed his lectures on the "Government of Self and Others") that Habermas delivered in Paris on the "philosophical discourse of modernity" and which included a discussion of Baudelaire's account of modernity.[72] With the entry of Baudelaire into Foucault's discussion, there is a subtle shift in how Kant's essay is approached. Foucault suggests that Kant should not be seen as having offered "an adequate description of Enlightenment," but instead is best viewed as revealing a certain "attitude" towards the present, an attitude that parallels the stance towards the present found in Baudelaire. To read Kant's essay in this way means that "enlightenment" can no longer be understood as designating "a world era to which one belongs, nor an event whose signs are perceived, nor the dawning of an accomplishment." Professing skepticism towards attempts "to distinguish the 'modern era' from the 'premodern' or 'postmodern,'" Foucault observes, "Thinking back on Kant's text, I wonder whether we may not envision modernity as an attitude, rather than as a period of history."[73]

Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France help to clarify what this attitude involves. During the second hour of his lecture of January 5, 1983, Foucault offered a close reading of Kant's essay, noting that, while the opening paragraph begins by

characterizing enlightenment as an ongoing process (i.e., humanity's exit from

its "self-incurred tutelage"), it concludes with a shift to a language that "is no longer

descriptive, but prescriptive."[74] This shift is sealed by the famous phrase that Kant took

from Horace and designated as the "motto of enlightenment" — *Sapere Aude!* (Dare to

be wise!).   Enlightenment is now defined both as "an ongoing process" and as "a task

and an obligation;" it is both "a process in which men participate collectively" and "an

act of courage to be accomplished personally."[75]

In his essay on Kant's use of Horace's dictum, Franco Venturi offered an

insightful and erudite investigation of a few of the contexts in which this phrase, which

was ubiquitous in the eighteenth century, had been employed. He placed particular

emphasis on a medal containing the phrase that had been cast by the "*Société des

Aléthophiles*" — "The Society of the Friends of Truth" – a secret society of churchmen,

lawyers, and civil servants dedicated to the dissemination of truth in general, and the

philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff in particular (their images can be seen on the medal,

peaking out from behind the helmeted head of the goddess Minerva) who met in Berlin in

the 1730s. Meeting under the protection of secrecy, the group pledged themselves, in the

words of their founding statutes, "to seek truth with candor, and to defend it with

reasonable frankness."[76] Yet Venturi's tracing of Horace's motto back to the *Aléthophiles*

does not, by itself, say much about the significance that Kant might have attached to it.

Indeed, discussions of Kant's essay have tended to view its opening as rhetorically

effective, but not easily reconciled with the somewhat more cautious parsing of the

differences between public and private uses of reason that follows.

The discussion of the motto in Foucault's lectures on the "Government of Self and Others" seem — at least initially — to be destined for the same fate: he closed his "little epigraph" on Kant by noting that the lectures to follow would deal with the relationship between the government of the self and others "on a completely different scale, with completely different historical reference points, and completely different documents."[77] And, for the most part, his concern in the rest of the course would be with drawing connections between the topic of the previous year's lectures, which had focused on the notion of the "care of the self" in Greco-Roman thought, and his ongoing interest in tracing practices of "governmentalization," understood both as the government of others and as the government of oneself.[78] Central to both discussions was a consideration of the notion of *parrhesia* — "frankness in speaking the truth" — a concept that Foucault saw as situated at "the meeting point of the obligation to speak the truth, procedures and techniques of governmentality, and the constitution of the relationship to self."[79] Yet there are hints that Foucault saw the notion of *parrhesia* as more relevant for the consideration of the question that Kant was answering than it might first appear.

Towards the close of the lectures, Foucault recalls an encounter between Plato and the cynic Diogenes.[80] Seeing Diogenes washing his salad, and recalling that Dionysius (the Sicilian tyrant who Plato attempted to educate in philosophy) had also called upon Diogenes for advice — but had been rejected, Plato is reported to have observed, "Had you paid court to Dionysius, you wouldn't be washing lettuces." To this Diogenes is said to have responded, "If you had washed lettuces, you wouldn't have paid court to Dionysius."[81] For Foucault, this exchange succinctly captures the central polarity that has dominated considerations of the relationship between "philosophical truth-telling

and political practice": the tension between discourses that seek to cultivate,

and thus improve, the "soul of the Prince" (e.g., Plato's failed venture in Syracuse) and

those discourses that, delivered in the public arena, serve as a "challenge, confrontation,

derision, and criticism" of the conduct of rulers (e.g., the provocations of Diogenes). It is

in this context — so apparently remote from that of Kant's answer to Zöllner — that

Foucault returns briefly to the discussion of Kant that opened the lectures.

> In his theory of the *Aufklärung*, Kant … tried to analyze how
>
> philosophical truth-telling has two sites simultaneously which are not only
>
> compatible, but call on each other: on the one hand, philosophical truth-
>
> telling has its place in the public; it also has its place in the Prince's soul, if
>
> he is an enlightened Prince. If you like, there is a sort of Kantian
>
> eclecticism which tries to hold together what traditionally … was the
>
> major problem of the relation between philosophy and politics in the
>
> West: will this relation be established in the public arena, or will it be in
>
> the Prince's soul?[82]

The relevance of Kant's text for the line of research that Foucault was pursuing in these lectures

lies in its having addressed a set of concerns "which were traditionally problems of parrēsia in

antiquity which will re-emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which became

aware of themselves in the *Aufklärung*."[83] The "motto" Kant took from Horace — and which

Venturi traced back to those "friends of truth" who pledged themselves to candor and frankness

in its pursuit and its articulation — captures what is at stake in the practice of *parrhesia*: in the

contest of truth and power, wisdom requires courage.

While there is no explicit discussion of *parrhesia* in the discussion of Kant that appears in the *Foucault Reader*, the questions that Foucault had been pursuing in the last years of his life permeate the essay. For Foucault, Kant's concern lay with the exploration of "how the use of reason can take the public form that it requires, how the audacity to know can be exercised in broad daylight, while individuals are obeying as scrupulously as possible." He found a solution in what Foucault described as the "contract of rational despotism with free reason" that Kant offered to Frederick II at the close of his response to Zöllner:

> The public and free use of autonomous reason will be the best guarantee
> of obedience, on the condition, however that the political principles that
> must be obeyed itself be in conformity with universal reason.[84]

The terms of the contract Foucault sees Kant as proposing reiterate the general structure of what Foucault describes in the discussion in his lectures of the exchange between Pentheus and his servant in Euripides' *Bacchae* as the "parrhesic compact." Like Pentheus's servant, Kant takes the risk of speaking the truth, while at the same time, pledging his fidelity. And, Pentheus' response parallels the words that Kant put into Frederick's mouth: "argue as much as you want, about whatever you want, only obey!"

> Pentheus replies as a good, wise sovereign: What concerns me is to know
> the truth and you will not be punished for telling the truth. You can speak;
> you have nothing to fear from me: "one should not be angry with one who
> does his duty." The servant who tells the truth does his duty. Pentheus
> himself guarantees that he will not be punished.[85]

For Foucault, then, Kant's answer to the question "What is enlightenment?" signals the moment when a set of problems that, in antiquity, had been central to discussions of the concept of parrhesia, "became aware of themselves" in the present.[86]

In reading Kant's essay from this perspective, Foucault was offering what he termed a "history of thought," an approach that, as he explained shortly before his death in an interview with Paul Rabinow, he saw as distinct from "both the history of ideas (by which I mean systems of representation) and from the history of mentalities (by which I mean the analysis of attitudes and types of action)."[87] His proposed "history of thought" would focus on what he termed "problematizations" —those moments when a previously "unproblematic field of experience, or set of practices which were accepted without question … becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions."[88] In such contexts, "thought" reveals itself not as something that "inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning," but rather as a capacity that "allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals."[89]

Both Foucault's peculiar fascination with Kant's response to Zöllner and the continuing importance of that debate itself may well reside here: for what does the debate over the question "What is enlightenment?" offer us if not a prime example of a moment when certain modes of thought and action become problematic, forcing those who were engaged in these practices to step back and think about what it was that they were doing and reflect on how their efforts at enlightenment were implicated in a complex "domain of acts, practices, and thoughts, that … pose problems for politics"?[90]

Approached in this way, Kant's answer to Zöllner, far from being the diversion

that Venturi took it to be, may well provide a fruitful point of entry into those political

questions that stand at the center of both the period and the project we have come to

designate with the word "enlightenment."

Notes

[1]   Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 1-2; for a discussion of the place of these lectures in Venturi's own account of the Enlightenment, see John Robertson, "Review: Franco Venturi's Enlightenment," *Past & Present*, no. 137 (November 1992): 183-206.

[2]   Venturi, *Utopia and Reform*, 5-9. For the earlier discussion, see Franco Venturi, "Contributi Ad Un Dizionario Storico. "Was Ist Aufklärung? *Sapere Aude*"," *Rivisa storica italiana* LXXI (1959).

[3]   On these issues, see Eckhart Hellmuth, "Aufklärung und Pressefreiheit: Zur Debatte der Berliner Mittwochgesellschaft während der Jahre 1783 und 1784," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 9 (1982): 315-314; John Christian Laursen, "The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of "Public" and "Publicity"," *Political Theory* 14, no. 4 (November 1986): 584-603; James Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 2 (June 1989): 269-291.

[4]   Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

[5]   Louis K. Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

[6]   For a general discussion of the origins of the debate and translations of some of the relevant documents, see James Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[7]   What follows draws on some of my previously published work, particularly "The Question of Enlightenment"; "What Enlightenment Was: How Moses Mendelssohn and Immanuel Kant Answered the Berlinische Monatsschrift," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (1992): 77-101; and my introduction to *What Is Enlightenment?*.

8   Johann Friedrich Zöllner, "Ist es Rathsam, das Ehebündniß nicht ferner durch die Religion zu Sancieren?," *Berlinische Monatsschrift* II (1783): 516.

9   For a brief discussion of Zöllner's career and his role in the "Wednesday Society," see Günter Birtsch, "The Berlin Wednesday Society," in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?* 238; for his Masonic connections, see Karlheinz Gerlach, "Die Berliner Freimaurer 1783: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung," in Helmut Reinalter and Karlheinz Gerlach, eds., *Staat und Bürgertum im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunder* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 212, 233.

10   For a translation of Möhsen's lecture, see Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment?* , 49-52.

11   For discussions of Mendelssohn's contributions to the discussion, see Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn; a Biographical Study* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1973), 656.

12   Kant, "An Answer to the Question 'What is Enlightenment?' in Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment?*, 64.

13   Anonymous article, "Kritischer Versuch über das Wort Aufklärung zur endlichen Beilegung der darüber geführten Streitigkeiten," in *Deutsche Monatschrift*, Vol. III (September-December 1790) pp. 11-43 and 205-237

14   Kant, "An Answer to the Question," 62.

15   See, in particular, Werner Scheider's classic account *Die wahre Aufklärung; zum Selbstverständnis der deutschen Aufklärung.* (Freiburg,: K. Alber); see also *Die deutsche Aufklärung /*, Erträge der Forschung ; Bd. 81 (Darmstadt :: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [Abt. Verl.],, 1978).

16   For translations of their contributions to the discussion, see Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment?* , 217-31.

17   Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason : Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[18]   Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere : An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

[19]   For a useful collection of essays, see *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992); see also Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 270-292 and Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (March 2000): 153-182.

[20]   For a discussion of the Enlightenment along these lines, see James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[21]   Indeed, as John Robertson notes, Venturi's own work on the Enlightenment drew heavily on accounts in Italian publications of efforts at reform in other parts of Europe. See "Review," 193-195.

[22]   Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge [England]: Polity Press, 1996), 44-46.

[23]   Ibid., 44-45.

[24]   In interpreting the Enlightenment in the broader context of the "Project of Modernity," Habermas reprises a theme that had been broached by Ernst Cassirer in his classic account *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), vi-vii.

[25]   See Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 44-45; the lecture offers a precis of an argument that is developed at considerably greater length in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); and further articulated in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987), 18-19, which notes the importance of Weber's younger Heidelberg colleague Emil Lask for this reading of Kant.

[26]   In this context, it is worth remembering that the alleged "modernity of the Enlightenment" was once a disputed topic; see, for example, Louis T. Milic, ed., *The Modernity of the Eighteenth Century*, Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 1 (Cleveland & London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971); for a survey of the changing relationship between "modernity" and "the Enlightenment," see David A. Hollinger, "The Enlightenment and the Genealogy of Cultural Conflict in the United States," in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7-18.

[27]   Cf. Thomas McCarthy's more tentative treatment of Habermas' work as the development of one of "the diverse projects" that have "been announced under the banner of 'enlightenment.' "Enlightenment and the Idea of Public Reason," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney, and Mark Dooley (London: Routledge, 1999), 164.

[28]   Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 46.

[29]   For an argument along these lines, see Endre Kiss, "Gibt es ein Projekt der Aufklärung und Wenn Ja, Wie Viele? (Aufklärung vor dem Horizont der Postmoderne)," in *The Postmodernist Critique of the Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Sven-Eric Liedman, Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of Science and the Humanities 58 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 89-104.

[30]   For an overview of criticisms of this sort, see James Schmidt, "What Enlightenment Project?," *Political Theory* 28, no. 6 (December 2000): 734-757.

[31]   Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment : The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[32]   For an overview, see Frederick C Beiser, *The Fate of Reason : German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44-126.

[33]   James Schmidt, "Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the "Oxford English Dictionary"," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 3 (July 2003): 421-443.

[34]   Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 53.

[35]   Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 53-5; for Habermas' subsequent discussions of this group, see *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, Studies in contemporary German social thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 22-47.

[36]   On the background of this term, which referred to a group of radical conservatives during the Weimar Republic whose ideology combined "Spenglerian pessimism, Nietzschean nihilism and vitalist actionism," see Hans-Jurgen Puhle, "Conservatism in Modern German History," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 4 (October 1978): 709-10.

[37]   Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 53.

[38]   Ibid.

[39]   Sorting out the differences between Derrida and Foucault would be one of the tasks of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

[40]   For an account along these lines, see Leo Strauss' 1940 lecture, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 353-378; for a discussion of the intellectual and political context of the lecture, see Eugene Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2006) and William H. F. Altman, "Leo Strauss on "German Nihilism": Learning the Art of Writing," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 4 (2007): 587-612.

[41]   For an attempt along these lines, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

[42]   See, for example, Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii-iv, 39-40, 72-3.

[43]   The next few lines reprise the discussion in James Schmidt and Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Foucault's Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge [Mass.]: MIT Press, 1994), 284 the interpretation that follows, however, revises this account in light of subsequently published lectures from the last years of Foucault's life.

[44]   Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), 503.

[45]   Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 35.

[46]   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 200-209.

[47]   Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge [Mass.]: MIT Press, 1994), 150.

[48]   Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College de France, 1982-1983*, ed. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6-39.

[49]   Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 32-50.

[50]   Michel Foucault, "Un cours inédit," *Magazine littéraire*, May 1984; the text was subsequently translated as "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution," trans. Colin Gordon, *Economy and Society* 15, no. 1 (February 1986): 88-96; and as "The Art of Telling the Truth," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge [Mass.]: MIT Press, 1994), 139-148.

[51]   The article in *Magazine littéraire* is based on the closing part of the first half of the lecture of January 5, 1983 (*Government of Self and Others* 11-21) while the article in the *Foucault Reader* (which was initially delivered as a lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, in the Spring of 1983) draws somewhat more loosely on themes introduced in the second half of the same lecture, which was devoted to a close reading of Kant's essay (Ibid., 26-39).

[52]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 7.

[53]   Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?," in *What is Enlightenment?*, 382-398; for a succinct summary of the ways in which Foucault's earlier discussion differs from the interpretation in the 1983 course, see the appendix by Frédéric Gros in Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 378-9.

[54]   Foucault, "What is Critique?," 386-7.

[55]   Ibid., 388-9.

[56]   For a brief discussion, see Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault: A User's Manual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault: 2nd Edition*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-16; and for a comprehensive treatment, Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Modern European philosophy (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[57]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 21; see Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," 148 for the published version; see also his 1978 interview with D. Trombadori, translated in Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New Press, 1997), 273-4.

[58]   Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," 152, 154.

[59]   For an attempt to shift the focus of the discussion, see *Foucault Contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue Betweengenealogy and Critical Theory* (London: SAGE, 1999).

[60]   Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," 152.

[61]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 32; in the 1983 lectures, Foucault notes that his neglect of the political context of the essay does not mean that he views such matters as "not interesting or even

important." But a consideration of such issues, he observes, would force him to enter "a domain of historical details and clarifications for which I have to confess straightaway I am not competent." See Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 25-26.

[62]   His 1983 lectures have a bit more to say about Mendelssohn, see Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 8-10.

[63]   On this aspect of Mendelssohn's work, see David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996).

[64]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 33.

[65]   On Spalding and his importance for the German Enlightenment, see Hans Adler, "Die Bestimmung des Menschen: Spaldings Schrift als Ausgangspunkt einer offenen Anthropologie," *Das Achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 18, no. 2 (1994): 125-137.

[66]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 42-3. It is likely that the immediate target of this remark was Habermas .

[67]   Schneiders, *Die Wahre Aufklärung*..

[68]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 33-4; for a similar formulation, see Foucault's 1982 text, "The Subject and Power," in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, Essential Works of Michel Foucault (New York: New Press, 2000), 335.

[69]   Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth," 141-2; the parallel passage in the 1983 lectures is even more emphatic: "an interesting line to pursue in the study of the eighteenth century in general, but more precisely of what is called the Aufklärung, would seem to me to be the fact that the Aufklärung names itself the Aufklärung." *The Government of Self and Others*, 14.

[70]   For a discussion of the first translation of Kant's essay, see James Schmidt, "Inventing the Enlightenment," 429-430. It bears remembering that the fact that German nouns are inevitably accompanied by articles does not mean that those articles should always be translated. On this point, see

the discussion in Philip Nicholas Furbank, *Diderot : A Critical Biography*, 1st American ed. (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 450.

[71]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 39-42.

[72]   Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 8-11. Habermas had delivered the lectures on the topic in Paris between March 7 and March 22, 1983. Foucault's lectures on the "Government of Self and Others" concluded on March 9.

[73]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 39.

[74]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 28.

[75]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 35; for the parallel discussion in the lectures, see *The Government of Self and Others*, 28.

[76]   Uta Janssens-Knorsch, "Jean Deschamps, Wolff-Übersetzer und 'Aléthophile français' am Hofe Friedrichs des Großen," in *Christian Wolff 1679-1754*, ed. Werner Schneiders (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983), 259.

[77]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 39, for the characterization of the discussion of Kant as "not exactly an excursus: a little epigraph (*exergue*)", see 6.

[78]   For the lectures on "the care of the self," see Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005); for an early formulation of the notion of "governmentality," see Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'," in *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Sterling McMurrin, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982), 223-254.

[79]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 45; see also Foucault's lectures on the topic, delivered at Berkeley in the autumn of 1983, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Semiotext(e), 2001).

[80]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 292.

[81]   Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), § 58.

[82]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 292-3.

[83]   Ibid., 350.

[84]   Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 37.

[85]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 162-3; for a similar account, see Foucault's lectures at Berkeley from the autumn of 1983, *Fearless Speech*, 32-3.

[86]   Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 350.

[87]   Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 1997), 117; the distinction is elaborated, at greater length, at the start of his 1983 lectures at the Collège de France, *The Government of Self and Others*, 2-3.

[88]   Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 74.

[89]   Foucault, *Ethics*, 117.

[90]   Ibid., 114.