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ARTICLE

Beyond the Analytic of Finitude: Kant, Heidegger, Foucault

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ABSTRACT: The editors of the French edition of Michel Foucault's Introduction to Kant's *Anthropology* claim that Foucault started rereading Kant through Nietzsche in 1952 and then began rereading Kant and Nietzsche through Heidegger in 1953. This claim has not received much attention in the scholarly literature, but its significance should not be underestimated. In this article, I assess the likelihood that the editor's claim is true and show how Foucault's introduction to Kant's *Anthropology* and his comments about Kant in *The Order of Things* echo the concerns about finitude and subjectivity in Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. I then argue that Foucault's later preoccupation with Kant's essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* should be regarded as an attempt to develop an alternative to the Heideggerian interpretation of Kant, and the preoccupation with finitude, that had played such an important role in Foucault's earlier works.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, finitude, anthropology, critical philosophy

Introduction

The editors of the French edition of Michel Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* have claimed, in their *présentation* of the work, that Foucault started rereading Kant through Nietzsche in 1952 and then began rereading Kant and Nietzsche through Heidegger in 1953.¹ Their claim has not received much attention, but its significance should not be underestimated.

¹ Michel Foucault, *Introduction à l'Anthropologie de Kant*, edited by D. Defert, Fr. Ewald, F. Gros (Paris: J. Vrin, 2008), 8; Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, translated by Roberto Nigro and Kate Briggs (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 10. It is significant that the editors—Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Frédéric Gros—say that Foucault started “rereading” Kant through Nietzsche and Heidegger in the early 1950's, since the title of Foucault's lost DEA thesis (*La Constitution d'un transcendantal historique dans La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit de Hegel*, 1949) also suggests an earlier engagement with Kant.

If Foucault read Kant through Heidegger in the early 1950's, it is likely that this reading influenced his understanding of Kant in the early 1960's. And this would illuminate Foucault's introduction to Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* as well as the peculiar role Kant plays in *The Order of Things*. It would also explain some of the tensions in Foucault's later writings on the critical attitude of the enlightenment and its relation to Kant's critical philosophy. These tensions could be seen as evidence that Foucault was developing an alternative interpretation of Kant, which dispensed with the earlier, more Heideggerian concerns about finitude and the philosophy of the subject.

Before elaborating any further on the significance of the editors' claim, I will have to determine whether their claim is accurate. I address this problem in Section 2, which assesses the likelihood that Heidegger's influence shaped Foucault's interpretation of Kant in the early 1950's. I try to determine whether Heidegger continued to influence his understanding of Kant in the 1960's in Section 3, where I examine Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, and Section 4, where I turn my attention to *The Order of Things*. Finally, in Section 5, I show that Foucault's preoccupation with Kant's essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* in the late 1970's and early 1980's is, at least in part, an attempt to develop an alternative to the Heideggerian interpretation of Kant that had played such an important role in his earlier works. While Heidegger profoundly influenced Foucault's understanding of Kant, that influence was not unproblematic, especially as Foucault began to consider the practices of freedom through which subjects constitute themselves as something other than the empirical-transcendental double that man had become for the human sciences.

Background & Context

In the last interview he gave before his death, Foucault called Heidegger "the essential philosopher."² He goes on to say that Nietzsche exerted a greater influence on his thought than Heidegger, though he claims not to have understood Nietzsche until he started reading him through Heidegger.³ The dates Foucault mentions in the interview seem to confirm the editors' claim that he was reading Nietzsche through Heidegger in the early 1950's. Unfortunately, Foucault does not mention Kant at any point in the interview, so it remains unclear whether he thought Heidegger was as decisive an influence on his reading of Kant as he was on his understanding of Nietzsche.

It would not be surprising if Foucault were reading Kant through Heidegger at the same as Heidegger was shaping his reading of Nietzsche. We know that Foucault studied with Jean Beaufret at the *École normale supérieure (ENS)* at some point between 1946 and 1951.⁴ Beaufret was

² Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, translated by Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1996), 470.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Foucault entered the ENS in 1946 and received his aggregation in 1951, after failing the examination in 1950. His biographers do not indicate when precisely he studied with Beaufret.

the recipient of Heidegger's famous *Letter on Humanism* and the foremost Heideggerian in France at the time. His positions at the ENS and the elite *Lycées* Henry IV and Condorcet put him in a good position to influence the best and brightest students in France. And Beaufret apparently used the opportunities these positions afforded him to great effect. Some of the philosophers interviewed in Dominique Janicaud's *Heidegger en France* report that they absorbed a Heideggerian view of the history of philosophy without even realizing it, because Beaufret never mentioned Heidegger's name.⁵ The publication of Beaufret's *Leçons de Philosophie* suggest that Heidegger played a more explicit role in his lectures than Janicaud's interviews suggest. The published *Leçons* begin with a thoroughly Heideggerian reflection on the relation between philosophy and metaphysics.⁶ The same lecture contains a long section on Husserl and Heidegger.⁷ The lectures that follow also make explicit reference to Heidegger's views on Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant.⁸

Didier Eribon has said that Beaufret "talked a great deal about Heidegger" during the lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Foucault attended.⁹ Beaufret's lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason* do not often mention Heidegger, but there can be little doubt that his interpretation of Kant is based on Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Like Heidegger, Beaufret argues that the transcendental aesthetic is only intelligible after one has read the transcendental analytic and, especially, the chapter on the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding.¹⁰ And while he rejects Heidegger's claim that the pure concepts of the understanding are "ontological predicates," the fact that Beaufret devotes a special section of his lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason* to this question is all the more evidence that he was following Heidegger very closely.¹¹ Finally, it should be noted that Beaufret affirms the centerpiece of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, the "transcendental finitude" of the "I think," when he insists that transcendental apperception is essentially finite, since human beings lack the power of intellectual intuition.¹² If Foucault attended lectures like the ones contained in Beaufret's *Leçons de Philosophie*, then it is almost certain that he was reading Kant in a way that was strongly influenced by Heidegger.

Even if he did not inherit a Heideggerian reading of Kant from Beaufret, Foucault could have developed it by reading *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* himself. In fact, Heidegger's *Kantbuch* was translated into French by Alphonse de Waehlens and Walter Biemel in 1953, the same year Foucault's editors say he began reading Kant and Nietzsche through Heidegger. The

⁵ Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2001), 48, 210; see also Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

⁶ Jean Beaufret, *Leçons de Philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 17-38.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 56, 69, 70, 87, 108, 110, 113, 125, 138, 162-165, 170, 173, 219, 236

⁹ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, translated by Betsy Wang (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 31.

¹⁰ Beaufret, *Leçons de Philosophie*, 42-43. See also Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, translated by Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, 5th edition), 102 [§28].

¹¹ Beaufret, *Leçons de Philosophie*, 49-50. See also Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 39 [§12].

¹² Beaufret, *Leçons de Philosophie*, 59-60. See also Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 158-162 [§41].

translation by de Waelelens and Biemel made *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* a standard reference for French Kantians. Jules Vuillemin, the Kant scholar who recommended Foucault for his position in University of Lille in 1952, hired him at the University of Clermont-Ferrand in 1960, and later nominated him to the Collège de France, draws extensively on its account of temporality in *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne*, which was published in 1954.¹³ Even Alain Renaut, who is otherwise quite critical of Heidegger, devotes several chapters to Heidegger's reading of Kant in *Kant Aujourd'hui*. Renaut ultimately rejects Heidegger's anti-humanism, but he accepts the Heideggerian premise that Kant distinguishes himself from the Cartesian tradition by emphasizing the "radical finitude" of human knowledge.¹⁴ This is hardly surprising, since Renaut had studied with Beaufret and began his career as a Heideggerian.¹⁵

Hans Sluga has argued that if Foucault read *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, then it "left no further trace in his thinking, apart, perhaps, from stimulating him to study Kant."¹⁶ However, I think it is fairly clear that Foucault was among those whose understanding of Kant was shaped by Beaufret's Heideggerian lectures on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger's *Kantbuch*, and its enthusiastic reception in French Kant scholarship. The evidence I have presented does not definitively prove the influence of Heidegger on Foucault's reading of Kant in the early 1950's, but I think it shows such an influence is both possible and probable. There is certainly a chance that the editors' comment is not accurate and that Foucault arrived at his concerns about the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental and the analytic of finitude independently of Heidegger, but I think this is highly unlikely. The effects of Heidegger's influence on Foucault's reading of Kant are both obvious and substantial in the works he published in the 1960's, especially his *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and *The Order of Things*.

Heidegger, Foucault, and Kant's Anthropology

In the *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and *The Order of Things*, Foucault cites the famous question "What is man?" from *Kant's Logic*.¹⁷ This reference should be regarded as a kind of Heideggerian shibboleth. Until very recently, Kant scholars have not concerned themselves much

¹³ Jules Vuillemin, *L'héritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne* (Paris: PUF, 1954), 210-296.

¹⁴ Alain Renaut, *Kant Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 96-107.

¹⁵ Renaut broke with Beaufret in a review of his edition of Martin Heidegger, *Questions IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). While the objections Renaut raised in his review were primarily philological, he moved closer to the *nouveaux philosophes* during the 1980's and began publishing a series of polemics against Heidegger with Luc Ferry. See, for example, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, translated by Mary H.S. Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

¹⁶ Hans Sluga, "Foucault's Encounter with Heidegger and Nietzsche," in Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2nd edition]), 221.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, translated by Roberto Nigro and Kate Briggs (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 74-76, 82-87; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 341.

with this question, as it appears in a work of dubious authorship and questionable authenticity.¹⁸ Never one to let merely philological considerations constrain a “thoughtful dialogue” with the works of his predecessors, however, Heidegger made the question “what is man?” central to his argument in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.¹⁹ Reference to this question, and the assumption that it reveals the true nature of Kant’s critical philosophy, are among the distinguishing features of Heideggerian interpretations of Kant.

According to Heidegger, the addition of the question “What is man?” to the questions “What can I know?” “What should I do?” “What may I hope for?” proves that Kant’s transcendental philosophy is, first and foremost, a philosophical anthropology.²⁰ This is demonstrated by the fact that Kant says the other three questions “relate to [*beziehen auf*]” the fourth question about man.²¹ For Heidegger, this means that all of Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy is grounded in, and reducible to, a theory of the subjectivity of the subject. Ultimately, this means that Kant’s three critiques are nothing more than elaborations of different aspects of human subjectivity.

Throughout *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger distinguishes Kant’s philosophical anthropology—which attempts to found metaphysics on “the subjectivity of the subject”—from the empirical science of man—which is concerned with the biological, psychological, and social characteristics of human beings. Yet he also suggests that Kant’s failure

¹⁸ The shortcomings of *Kant’s Logic* (1800)—which was published by Benjamin Jäsche, a former student and colleague of Kant—have been well documented by Kant scholars; see, for example, Terry Boswell, “On the Textual Authenticity of Kant’s Logic,” *History and Philosophy of Logic*, vol. 9 (1988), 193-203.

¹⁹ Although it is common for continental philosophers to regard Kant’s critical philosophy as a philosophy of the subject, this approach has never been favored by Kantian scholars. That is probably sufficient to explain the indifference with which most Kant scholars regard the “What is man?” question. Yet recent studies of Kant’s *Anthropology* have only made Kant scholars more suspicious of the sweeping conclusions that are often drawn from this question, because they show how much more complicated the relationship between the transcendental unity of apperception, moral personhood, and humanity is in Kant than was previously realized. See, for example Robert B. Louden, *Kant’s Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert B. Louden, *Kant’s Human Being: Essays on his Theory of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Patrick Frierson, *What is the Human Being?* (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, translated by Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 [5th edition]), 144 (§36).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 144-146 (§36). When interpreting this passage, it should be noted that Kant’s account of the relation between the anthropological question and the other three questions does not appear in any text written by Kant himself. One set of student transcripts, the *Metaphysik Pölitz*, possibly dating from 1790-1791, does mention the “relation [*Beziehung*]” between the anthropological question and the other three questions, but Kant does not mention any such relation between the anthropological question and the other three questions in a letter to Carl Friedrich Staudlin from 1793; see Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Royal Prussian and later German, then Berlin-Brandenburg (Academy of the Sciences, Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900), XXVIII.2.1, 533-534; see also Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, edited and translated by Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 458; Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, (XI), 429.

to identify the “common root” of the faculties of sensibility and the understanding in the imagination led him to fall back on an empirical conception of man for his account of the “subjectivity of the subject.”²² In effect, Heidegger charges Kant with grounding his account of transcendental subjectivity on the empirical conception of man that is found in Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

The fact that Foucault asks, in his *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, whether there might be “a certain concrete image of man” at the heart of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, whose origins can be found in Kant’s *Anthropology*, suggests that he was, at the very least, concerned with the same problem as Heidegger.²³ The relationship between the conception of “man” as transcendental subject and the understanding of “man” that emerges in empirical science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is just as central to Foucault’s *Introduction* as it is for *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. In fact, given the context in which he was reading Kant and writing his *Introduction*, it is likely that the account of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental that Foucault develops in his study of Kant’s *Anthropology* is based on Heidegger’s *Kantbuch*. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that Foucault simply adopts Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant uncritically. Instead, he appropriates Heidegger’s understanding of Kant for his own purposes and, in the process, challenges the account of the relationship between man as a transcendental subject and man as the object of an empirical science that Heidegger proposed.

It becomes clear that Foucault does not follow Heidegger uncritically only a few sentences after he asks whether Kant’s *Critique* might be based on “a certain concrete image of man” found in Kant’s *Anthropology*. Instead of pursuing this question and trying to reduce Kant’s account of transcendental subjectivity to empirical anthropology—as Heidegger had done at the end of his *Kantbuch*—Foucault asks whether it might be possible that man, as described in Kant’s *Anthropology*, is really just an expression of the *homo criticus* that was first conceived in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁴ The conjunction of these two different ways of thinking about man in Foucault’s *Introduction* is significant, because it shows that Foucault does not simply accept Heidegger’s account of the origins of Kant’s philosophical anthropology. Foucault seriously considers Heidegger’s account, but he is just as willing to consider an alternative possibility—the possibility that Kant’s anthropology derives its conception of man from transcendental philosophy.

Later in the *Introduction*, when he returns to the “What is man?” question from *Kant’s Logic*, Foucault seems to privilege the view that the conception of man in Kant’s *Anthropology* derives from transcendental philosophy. At the beginning of this section, I called the “What is man?” question a Heideggerian shibboleth, because readers of Kant who are influenced by

²² Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 146-153 (§37-§38). Heidegger’s claim that the imagination is the common root of the faculties of sensibility and the understanding was refuted by Dieter Henrich in “On the Unity of Subjectivity” (1955); see Dieter Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant’s Philosophy*, edited by Richard Velkley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 17-54.

²³ Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Heidegger often regard it as the key to Kant's account of the "subjectivity of the subject." Foucault may be counted among those readers, because he agrees that the question concerning man "shows itself to be the fundamental question of philosophical reflection."²⁵ Like Heidegger, Foucault tries to explain how the question concerning man "relates to" the questions "What can I know?" "What ought I to do?" and "What may I hope for?"²⁶ Unlike Heidegger, however, Foucault argues that the answers to these questions are not founded upon, or reducible to, the question concerning man. They relate to that question in a number of different ways, corresponding to the different senses in which Kant understands man in the different parts of the critical philosophy. First, there is the conception of man as transcendental subject in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which relates to the question "what can I know?" There is also the conception of man as "person" in Kant's moral philosophy, which relates to the question "what ought I to do?" Finally, there is the conception of man that relates to the philosophy of religion and the question "what may I hope for?" According to Heidegger, the conception of man that is to be found in Kant's anthropology explains all of these different senses, because Kant (allegedly) says we could "reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one."²⁷ Foucault denies this claim, insisting that the question concerning man "has no independent content."²⁸ It merely repeats the divisions of the faculties and the different parts of Kant's critical philosophy.

Foucault's account of the "What is man?" question is, I think, clearly a step beyond Heidegger, because it provides a more sophisticated account of what it means for the anthropological question to "relate to" the other questions with which Kant was concerned. Yet it poses a similar problem: Foucault's account of the relation between the anthropological question and the other questions seems to subordinate the empirical conception of man to transcendental philosophy. Foucault seems to confirm this suspicion when he says the "structure and function" of the "empiricity" at stake in Kant's *Anthropology* is to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁹ Ultimately, Foucault argues, the "empiricity" of the *Anthropology* is nothing more than the repetition, in time, of the *a priori* of the first *Critique*.³⁰

While Heidegger's account of the collapse of Kant's philosophical anthropology at least provided a ready account of Kant's shortcomings and the need for a more radical foundation, nothing is simplified by Foucault's account. Indeed, Foucault argues, founding the empiricity of anthropology on the repetition of transcendental philosophy produces a great deal of confusion. When we try to understand the relation between the empirical repetition of transcendental

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 146 (§36); Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, 75-76.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, edited and translated by J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 538; Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, (IX), 25; Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 146 (§36).

²⁸ Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, 86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

philosophy and transcendental philosophy itself, Foucault thinks we will inevitably encounter the question of limits and the problem of finitude.³¹ The problem of finitude is a problem that arises because the relationship between the anthropological question and the other three questions is not clearly defined. We understand that the answer to the question “What is man?” is related to the answer to the questions “What can I know?” “What ought I to do?” and “What may I hope for?” but we do not know exactly how. We know only that man is related to transcendental subjectivity, moral personhood, and the revolution in human nature that is the ultimate object of religion; yet he is reducible to none of them, because they all transcend him.³² Nor does man have any content or meaning of his own. Understanding the limit this imposes on anthropological reflection positively and empirically is the task of the analytic of finitude that emerges from Kant’s anthropological-critical repetition.

Kant and Heidegger in *The Order of Things*

The problem of finitude may be the overriding concern in the *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, but Foucault refuses to make that problem an essential problem of thought or existence. He does not elevate the problem of finitude to the level of fundamental ontology as Heidegger does in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.³³ Instead, Foucault historicizes the relation between the empirical and the transcendental that leads to the problem of finitude, in order to make way for a different way of thinking.

Foucault’s historical approach to the problem of finitude is already apparent at the end of the *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, where he suggests that “one day, the whole history of post-Kantian and contemporary philosophy will have to be envisaged from the point of view of the perpetuation of this confusion—a revised history which would start out by denouncing it.”³⁴ The confusion to be denounced is, of course, the ambiguous relationship between the empirical and transcendental senses of man that leads to the problem of finitude. This confusion is to be denounced, because it allows man to function “as an impure and unthought hybrid within the internal economy of philosophy.”³⁵ Foucault thinks this is particularly apparent in Husserlian phenomenology and Heidegger’s analysis of Being-in-the-world, which Foucault describes as the “empirical mortgage” (*l’hypothèque de l’empiricité*) of Husserl’s failure to overcome the limits Kant

³¹ Ibid., 106.

³² Foucault acknowledges that Kant’s question “What may I hope for?” pertains to religion, as Kant specifies in several different places. However, in his account of this question, Foucault relates it to a passage in the *Opus Postumum* and makes it a question about the limits of reason (see Ibid., 82); see also Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, 458; Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, (IX), 25. In this sentence, I have corrected Foucault’s reference and excluded the extraneous discussion of the limits of reason. However, I wish to acknowledge that this separates my analysis from Foucault’s account to some extent.

³³ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 1-2.

³⁴ Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, 107.

³⁵ Ibid., 106.

imposed on transcendental reflection. By “destructuring” the Kantian legacy in phenomenology, Foucault hopes to bring to an end “the proliferation of questions about man.”³⁶

The Order of Things develops this approach further and more systematically. In the second part of the book, Foucault situates the analytic of finitude within the modern *episteme*. By contrasting the order of knowledge in modernity with the order of knowledge in the classical age, Foucault demonstrates that the problem of finitude is not an essential or necessary problem. It is, on the contrary, a problem that emerges within a particular order of knowledge. The order makes the problem possible and the problem disappears when the order dissolves. When, at the end of *The Order of Things*, Foucault says man is “an invention of a recent date” and “the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge,” he is suggesting that this arrangement can disappear, just as the order that defined the classical age disappeared at the end of the eighteenth century. The image of man being erased “like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” is a reminder that the problem of finitude, as it arises from the modern *episteme*, is contingent and unnecessary.³⁷ Foucault’s archaeology explains the structure, function, and experience of that contingency.³⁸

In addition to the general, archaeological framework in which Foucault treats the problem of finitude, there is also a more specific account of the problem in the second part of *The Order of Things*. Given the emphasis he placed on the relationship between the empirical and transcendental in Kant and its relation to the problem of finitude in the *Introduction*, it is hardly surprising that Foucault identifies “the Kantian critique” as “the threshold of our modernity.”³⁹ According to Foucault, Kant’s critical philosophy “questions representation, not in accordance with the endless movement that proceeds from the simple element to all its possible combinations, but on the basis of its rightful limits.”⁴⁰ As such, critical philosophy distinguishes itself from the philosophies that preceded it—both rationalist and empiricist—by founding knowledge in a transcendental condition that precedes experience. This condition may be grasped in transcendental reflection—as the *a priori*—but only to the extent that this is possible for a transcendental subject. Because this subject lacks a power of intellectual intuition, the problem of

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁷ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

³⁸ It could be argued that Foucault’s account of the contingency of *epistemes* results in a certain conception of finitude, insofar as the order of each *episteme* is limited to a particular historical period and bounded by other *epistemes*. However, this conception of finitude differs considerably from the problem of finitude that Foucault describes in his *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, which follows from the confused relation between the empirical and the transcendental. It also differs considerably from the analytic of finitude Foucault describes in *The Order of Things*, where the problem of the relation between the empirical and the transcendental devolves into “anthropologism.”

³⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 242.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

finitude emerges in philosophy, so that “knowledge can no longer be deployed against the background of a unified and unifying *mathesis*.”⁴¹

Foucault describes how a similar approach emerges in empirical sciences, where labor, life, and language appear as “so many transcendentals” at the end of the eighteenth century.⁴² Labor, life, and language function as transcendentals, because they “make possible the objective knowledge of living beings, the laws of production, and the forms of language,” but remain “outside of knowledge.”⁴³ They refer, instead, to the “force” of labor, the “energy” of life, and the “power” of speech, none of which can be observed or measured in themselves.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, these “new empiricities” differ from transcendental philosophy in two crucial respects. First, the condition of empirical knowledge is located in an object and not in the transcendental subject.⁴⁵ Second, they are concerned with the “positivity” of what appears, rather than the “negativity” of its conditions.⁴⁶ This creates a conflict between transcendental philosophy and empirical science that was, according to Foucault, constitutive of European thought during the nineteenth century.⁴⁷

The conflict between transcendental philosophy and empirical science is resolved when man assumes “the place of the king.”⁴⁸ Transcendental philosophy, empirical objectivity, and appearance are all related to man, but this leads to even greater problems. Modern economics, biology, and philology explain the “concrete existence” of man—his labor, life, and language—but they do so in a way that makes him appear “exterior to himself,” as an object rather than subject.⁴⁹ Transcendental philosophy allows man to reflect on himself as the condition of all his knowledge, but this does not overcome the difference between man as object of the empirical sciences and man as the subject of transcendental reflection. Man becomes an “empirical-transcendental doublet” whose finitude is evident in his inability to resolve the two sides of his existence. Philosophy and science then become an “analytic of finitude,” insofar as they alternate between one side of the doublet and the other, endlessly repeating the dialectic of identity and difference that doubles and redoubles the relation between the empirical and the transcendental and their limits. However, in doing so, they fall prey to the prejudice of “anthropologism,” which Foucault calls “the great internal threat to knowledge in our day.”⁵⁰

It might seem that we have strayed very far from Heidegger at this point. However, the same Heideggerian themes that appear in Foucault’s *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology* also

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 244-245.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

appear in his account of the analytic of finitude in *The Order of Things*. Again, the major issue is finitude, which is a problem for empirical science and transcendental philosophy. The understanding of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental is similarly understood through the question “What is man?” and the way it relates to the possibility of knowledge. Foucault also quotes the passage in which this question appears from *Kant’s Logic*. And, even more than in the *Introduction*, Foucault presents an account of the relation between Kant’s four questions that shows transcendental philosophy, from Kant to Husserl, collapsing into anthropology. This, I think, testifies to the continuing influence of Heidegger’s reading of Kant on Foucault. There is nevertheless a serious challenge to this reading that emerges from Foucault’s archaeology. Instead of leading on to fundamental ontology, as Heidegger would have it, the analytic of finitude that arises from the anthropologism of the modern age is, for Foucault, a historical configuration of knowledge that is to be overcome.

Overcoming Heidegger’s Interpretation of Kant

Although Kant and Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant were central themes of his major works from the early and mid-1960s, Foucault rarely mentions them in works from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. Kant’s name is almost entirely absent from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality*; yet that does not mean Foucault had abandoned the problems that were so central to his earlier works. Indeed, Foucault continued to struggle with the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental in Kant as well as the influence of Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant until the very end of his career.

In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, Foucault developed a very different way of reading Kant than the one he found in Heidegger in the 1950’s. In a number of texts from the late 70’s and 80’s, Foucault opposes a conception of critique defined by the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “the analysis and reflection upon limits” to a “critical attitude” that transgresses the limits Kant’s transcendental philosophy imposes upon thought and the constraints that discipline imposes upon subjects.⁵¹ Foucault finds an example of this attitude—an example he admires and to which he repeatedly returns—in Kant’s essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* Unlike the *Critique of Pure Reason* or *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant’s enlightenment essay is an intervention in a contemporary debate about the time in which Kant lived and the way that period ought to be characterized. Foucault places a great deal of emphasis on this aspect of Kant’s essay in the opening session of his lectures at the *Collège de France* in 1982-1983, commenting the journal in which Kant’s essay was published, its contribution to the German enlightenment, and the importance of the Christian *Aufklärung* and the Jewish *Haskala* in that

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth)* (New York: New Press, 1997), 308-309, 315-316. On the contrast between Kantian critique and the alternative Foucault finds in Kant’s account of *Aufklärung*, see also Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997), 48-61.

particular context.⁵² It is the situatedness of Kant's essay, its relation to its time and place, that distinguishes it from his critical philosophy and his anthropology for Foucault.

Because Kant takes the historical and political situation of the enlightenment seriously, Foucault thinks "a new type of question appears in the field of philosophical reflection" in Kant's essay.⁵³ A few pages later, Foucault identifies this question as the question of modernity, which emerges from the enlightenment as "an undoubtedly very singular cultural process which very quickly became aware of itself in a certain fashion, by naming itself and situating itself in relation to its past, future and present, by giving the name *Aufklärung* to the process, rather to the operations that this movement must effectuate within its own present."⁵⁴ The question of modernity interests Foucault, not only because it emerges within the context of the enlightenment and problematizes that context, but also because it "did not remain localized within the eighteenth century or even the process of *Aufklärung*."⁵⁵ Instead, the question of modernity gave rise to "a certain way of philosophizing," which Foucault calls "modern" philosophy, whose essential function is "questioning itself about its own present reality."⁵⁶

Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment," which he prepared for a seminar he was to attend at Boston College with Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and Charles Taylor in 1984, was probably composed at about the same time as the 1982-1983 lectures.⁵⁷ Foucault's essay takes up the question of modernity that Kant introduced in his enlightenment essay, but it also goes beyond commentary to describe the kind of philosophical reflection that Foucault considers both modern and necessary. After reviewing the context and contents of Kant's essay, and digressing about Baudelaire and the modern attitude, Foucault says he has "been seeking to stress that the thread which may connect us with the Enlightenment 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."⁵⁸ The "permanent critique of our historical era" that Foucault associates with the "philosophical ethos" of the enlightenment is nothing other than the "modern" philosophy that Foucault identifies in his 1982-1983 lectures. His attempt to reactivate that enlightenment "critique" and that "modern" philosophy leads him to sketch its contours at the end of his essay.

⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 6-40. Although he emphasizes the situatedness of Kant's essay, Foucault also considers some possible connections between Kant's critical philosophy and his enlightenment essay in the second hour of his lecture on January 5, 1983; see *Ibid.*, 30-32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁷ See Michael Kelley, *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 2-3, 124-126, 149-150.

⁵⁸ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 312.

Negatively, Foucault says, the reactivation of the philosophical ethos of the enlightenment must resist what he calls “the blackmail of the enlightenment” — the insistence that enlightenment is something one must be “for” or “against.”⁵⁹ If one is to adopt a critical attitude, one must “refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative” and engage in a series of historical analyses that are “as precise as possible,” so as to determine “what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects.”⁶⁰ One must also remember that the conditions of our autonomous self-constitution are particular—they are not necessary or sufficient conditions for human self-actualization. Humanism may have been as important for enlightenment thought as it was for classical philosophy, Christian theology, Marxism, and existentialism; yet Foucault warns against the confusion that results from identifying humanism and the enlightenment. While humanism “has always been obliged to lean on certain conceptions of man borrowed from religion, science, or politics,” the critical attitude of the enlightenment problematizes these concepts and questions their significance for the present.⁶¹ By avoiding the blackmail of the enlightenment and the identification of humanism and the enlightenment, Foucault thinks we will be better able to understand the present, and to reflect on it critically and philosophically.

Positively, Foucault calls the critical attitude of the enlightenment a “limit-attitude.”⁶² However, the attitude one adopts towards limits involved in this kind of philosophy is different from the “analysis and reflection upon limits” found in Kant’s critical philosophy.⁶³ While Kantian critique attempts to determine “what limits knowledge must renounce exceeding,” Foucault says the critical attitude of the enlightenment must be “a critique of what we are saying thinking, and doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves.”⁶⁴ This critique leads us to question whether the limits imposed upon us are really “universal, necessary, obligatory” and what place is occupied by “whatever is singular, contingent, and the produce of arbitrary constraints.”⁶⁵ As a result of this questioning, Foucault says, critique must abandon “the search for formal structures with universal value” and transform itself into “a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.”⁶⁶ “In that sense,” he continues, “this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible; it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method.”⁶⁷ Foucault goes on to specify that this critique will be “archaeological—and not transcendental—in the sense that it will seek to identify the universal

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 312-313.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 313-314.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 315.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events.”⁶⁸ And he explains that

this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is possible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.⁶⁹

These claims are important, because, in the space of a few sentences, Foucault effectively identifies his own work with the philosophical ethos of the enlightenment. Not only does he endorse the “limit-attitude” the enlightenment adopts with respect to the present, but he even suggests the method through which enlightenment “critique” proceeds is essentially the same as his own archaeological-genealogical investigations. Finally, before he moves on to a new discussion, he also seems to endorse the aims of enlightenment critique—“to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.”⁷⁰

At this point, it might be necessary to remind ourselves that Foucault’s account of the critical attitude of the enlightenment, an attitude with which he associates his own work, is derived from his reflection on Kant’s enlightenment essay. The difference between the Kant that Foucault finds in his studies of “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” and the Kant that he calls “the threshold of our modernity” in *The Order of Things* is both radical and tremendously significant. The fact that Foucault finds in Kant’s enlightenment essay a different kind of critique, one that leads beyond the anthropologism of the analytic of finitude is evidence that Foucault was pushing beyond Heideggerean interpretation he adopted in the 1950s, toward a new reading of Kant that would help him overcome the conception of man as an empirical-transcendental double that had come to dominate the human sciences. That he continues to oppose the critical attitude that he finds in Kant’s enlightenment essay to the “analysis and reflection upon limits,” however, suggests that Heidegger’s reading of Kant remained an obstacle that he would have to overcome.⁷¹

Conclusions

I have argued that the editors of the French edition of Foucault’s *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology* are likely correct when they say that Foucault began reading Kant through Heidegger in the early 1950’s. While there is no definitive evidence proving the truth of this claim, there is a great deal of evidence supporting its probability. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that Foucault’s understanding of Kant was shaped by Heidegger in his *Introduction* and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; see also Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175-192.

⁷¹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 315.

The Order of Things. Foucault's preoccupation with the question "What is man?" from Kant's *Logic* and the way it "relates to" the questions "What can I know?" "What ought I to do?" and "What may I hope for?" suggests that Foucault's interest in the relationship between transcendental philosophy and anthropology is derived from Heidegger's *Kantbuch*. Similarly, his account of the confusion that emerges from the anthropological-critical repetition and the anthropologism associated with the analytic of finitude suggest that Foucault's objections to Kant are closely related to Heidegger's criticism of Kant.

Nevertheless, there is in Foucault a series of criticisms of Heidegger's understanding of Kant that complicates any account of Heidegger's influence. First, in the *Introduction*, Foucault rejects Heidegger's account of the relation between the question concerning man and the other three questions. Foucault complicates the relation between these questions and, instead of arguing that Kant's transcendental philosophy collapses back into empirical anthropology, suggests that Kant's anthropology is merely a confused repetition of the conceptions of man that emerged in Kant's transcendental philosophy. Although he agrees with Heidegger that the central problem that arises from Kant is the problem of finitude, Foucault denies that there is anything essential or fundamental about this problem. The problem of finitude is not a problem of fundamental ontology, but the effect of a certain order of knowledge. Instead of meditating on the profundity of the analytic of finitude, or making oracular pronouncements calling it "originary" and "essential," Foucault calls for its overcoming.

Foucault's meditations on Kant's essay "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" suggest that one way to overcome the analytic of finitude is to adopt a critical attitude like the one that emerged during the enlightenment and use it to develop new "modern" forms of philosophical reflection. In "What is Enlightenment," Foucault recommends this attitude and these forms of reflection as ways of transgressing the limits that have been imposed upon what we think, say, do, and are. By transgressing these limits, we promote what Foucault calls "the undefined work of freedom," claiming for ourselves the autonomy to constitute ourselves as subjects.⁷² It is significant that Foucault's account of this attitude and these forms of reflection derive from his studies of Kant's enlightenment essay, because it represents a very different way of reading Kant than the one Foucault adopted from Heidegger in the 1950s, which played a decisive role in his archaeology of the human sciences in the 1960s. That Foucault discovered a different way to read Kant during the late 1970s and early 1980s suggests that he was making progress in his attempt to overcome the analytic of finitude. Yet the fact that he still sees Kant's critical philosophy as the obstacle to be overcome by a new critical attitude and new forms of philosophical reflection suggests that he was still struggling with the Heideggerean interpretation of Kant that he encountered in the 1950s.

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⁷² *Ibid.*, 316.

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