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Anthropology as Critique: Foucault, Kant, and the Metacritical Tradition

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Abstract: While increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the relation between Foucault's conception of critique and Kant's, much controversy remains over whether Foucault's most sustained early engagement with Kant, his dissertation on Kant's *Anthropology*, should be read as a wholesale rejection of Kant's views or as the source of Foucault's late return to ethics and critique. In this paper, I propose a new reading of the dissertation, considering it alongside 1950s-era archival materials of which I advance the first scholarly appraisal. I argue that Foucault manifests a fundamental *ambivalence* to Kantian anthropology, rejecting it in theoretical terms while embracing its practical ('pragmatic') conception of the subject. Furthermore, I take these texts to collectively evidence Foucault's attempt to situate himself *within* the anthropological-critical tradition rather than extricating himself from it. If we interpret Foucault to reject this tradition's appeal to an essentialized, theoretical conception of subjectivity, what remains of anthropology is its inherent practical reflexivity in structure. Thus, I situate Foucault's conception of ethics as one's relation to oneself in continuity with this tradition.

I. Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to Foucault's notion of critique, both in relation to his genealogical practice (Williams 2002, Saar 2007, Koopman 2013) and more broadly (Butler 2002, Allen 2016, Tiisala 2017). As is widely acknowledged, one of Foucault's primary interlocutors on the issue of critique is Kant, also the subject of Foucault's second dissertation (*thèse complémentaire*) on Kant's *Anthropology* (IKA),¹ defended in 1961. While this literature has generally limited itself to texts dating from the 1970s and 1980s, IKA has begun to

¹ References to Foucault adhere to the following abbreviation scheme: IKA = *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*; LL = 1952-3 Lille lectures ("Knowledge of Man and Transcendental Reflection"); OT = *The Order of Things*; HS2 and HS3 = *History of Sexuality*, volumes 2 and 3. References to Kant are to the volume and page of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, except for CPR, which is to the standard A and B pagination, and accord with the following abbreviation scheme: APV = *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; CPR = *Critique of Pure Reason*; CPJ = *Critique of Judgment*; LA = *Lectures on Anthropology*; MM = *Metaphysics of Morals*; OP = *Opus Postumum*; WE = "What Is Enlightenment?"

attract increasing scholarly interest. However, much controversy remains over how to interpret the dissertation, as well as how it should inform more general views of Foucault’s work. Han-Pile (1998) argues that IKA demonstrates an incoherence in Foucault’s view, namely that there he critiques Kantian transcendental subjectivity while later helping himself to it in his late ethical period. McQuillan (2016) claims that IKA demonstrates Foucault’s debt to Heidegger in the 1950s and 1960s: Foucault’s invocations of Kant in the 1970s and 1980s thereby mark a “radical” shift from his prior Heideggerian emphasis on limits to the *transgression* of limits, newly taking Kantian critical philosophy as the “obstacle to be overcome” (194, 197-8).² By contrast, Allen (2003, 2008) and Djaballah (2008) both take IKA to show an underlying continuity between Foucault’s early and late interest in Kant. Allen suggests that APV provides Foucault with an example of a socially and historically conditioned, rather than transcendental, conception of the subject (2008: 37-44), while Djaballah claims that, with his conception of experience as constituted by discursive practice rather than thought alone, Foucault collapses the distinction between systematic and popular philosophical discourse initially instantiated by CPR and APV (2008: 12-13).

As I show in this paper, some of these scholarly disputes can be clarified by reading IKA in light of the conceptions of critique and subjectivity Foucault delineates in new archival materials, in particular his notes on Kant dating from the 1950s and a course given at the University of Lille in 1952-3 (LL) in which Foucault develops a genealogy of critique in the history of philosophy predating his 1978 “What Is Critique?” by 25 years.³ Here I advance the first scholarly appraisal of these materials. In LL, Foucault argues that critique, from Kant onwards, merges divergent moral-political and epistemological strands. On the one hand, “Kant takes himself to be an *Aufklärer* [an agent of the Enlightenment]” (75), rendering Kantian critique distinctly political—a point to which Foucault will return 30 years later. On the other, the foundation of Kantian critique into the *a priori* conditions of knowledge is an “interrogation of man” (75), a claim anticipating Foucault’s argument in OT. Thus, on Foucault’s view, ‘critique’ takes on a new meaning from Kant onward, becoming *both* newly anthropological *and* newly politicized. In IKA, Foucault emphasizes the emergence of a ‘pragmatic’, both historically situated and practical, domain of reflection, which I suggest is presupposed in Foucault’s own analyses of the care of the self in late antiquity (1982, 1984d). In LL, Foucault

² Although not my topic here, this thesis is disproved by Foucault (1963), where Kant is credited for posing the ‘limits’ of thought and *eo ipso* the possibility of their transgression; see also Allen (2008: 33).

³ These sources have only recently become available for consultation in the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris and are therefore still largely unknown.

traces the legacy of critique through, among others, readings of Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche.

Thus, while broadly sympathetic to Allen and Djaballah’s agreement as to the continuity of Foucault’s early and late interest in Kant, I stress here that Foucault’s own stance on the history of critique is fundamentally *ambivalent*. To grasp this point, it is helpful to keep in mind White Beck’s (1978) characterization of the history of the reception of Kant’s Critique as not merely critical, but ‘*metacritical*.’⁴ That is, Kant’s successors adopted the critical framework of the Critique towards the end of calling the Critique itself into question. Resituating Foucault as a meta-critic allows us to see that, for him, this philosophical tradition encompasses both *negative* and *positive* aspects, while nevertheless positioning Foucault himself squarely within it. While some Foucault scholars have taken for granted that Foucault rejects anthropology as a valid or productive domain of investigation (Gutting 1989, Han-Pile 1998), LL reveals that Foucault’s conception of anthropology also comprehends the *pragmatic* domain of reflection, and is therefore not exhausted by the search for a fundamental human essence. In fact, Foucault also classifies as broadly anthropological 19th century developments that increasingly reject the notion of transcendental *a priori* critique in favor of a thoroughly empirical, historically situated, and politicized (thus practical, or *pragmatic*) conception of critique—much, as I will argue, Foucault does. Thus, Foucault’s indebtedness to Kant is not limited to his reappropriation of the Kantian ‘transcendental’, interrogating the “conditions of possibility” of the “self-referential subject” (Allen 2003: 190); Foucault *ascribes himself* to the practical implications of this ‘pragmatic’ conception of subjectivity, which for him is also part of the Kantian legacy.

I start by explaining Foucault’s negative appraisal of Kantian anthropology in IKA: what he takes its failed aspects to be (Section II). In the subsequent section (III), I reconstruct Foucault’s positive appraisal: the aspects of this project that he takes to be recoverable. In Section IV, I turn to LL, showing how Foucault traces both the negative and positive dimensions of anthropology post-Kant—and thus how he situates himself relative to this tradition as he conceives of it. In the final section (V), I argue that in Foucault’s analysis of the history of philosophy, anthropology and critique gradually merge into one. This merging also occurs in Foucault’s own thought, despite his care in determining which aspects of anthropology to reject and which to accept. I conclude that if we conceive of Foucault as rejecting

⁴ See also Beiser (1987) for a book-length treatment. As this work makes clear, the appeal to a socially situated account of reason does not originate with Hegel and Marx, but is prefigured by Kant’s ‘metacritical’ contemporaries, including Hamann and Herder. Kant’s engagement with these figures may have played a role in the increasing relevance of ‘practical anthropology’ in his moral philosophy: see Zammito (2002) and Wood (2003).

this tradition’s appeal to an essentialized conception of subjectivity, what remains of anthropology is its inherent practical reflexivity. It is in these terms that we can make sense of Foucault’s own conception of ethics as one’s relation to oneself.

II. Foucault’s appraisal of the negative dimension of anthropology

Commentators on APV have tended to focus primarily on its account of ‘moral character’ and contribution to practical philosophy (Frierson 2003, Wilson 2007, Wood 2003), whereas a shift in Kant’s theoretical position has been noted only in OP, not APV (Förster 2005, Friedman 1992). Foucault, by contrast, claims that APV (1798) introduces a shift in Kant’s view of the subject from CPR (1781-1787), one which inaugurates many of the constitutive features that characterize the history of philosophy post-Kant.⁵ He argues, first, that the distinction posited between pure apperception and inner sense in CPR loses its conceptual priority in the wake of a concern for a ‘unified’ conception of subjectivity and self-knowledge in APV. Second, he cites the increasing conceptual priority given to the *Gemüt*, the mind taken as a whole and considered in terms of its empirical determinations (e.g., sensation and self-affection), and which entails the emergence of a new concept—*Geist* or spirit—as the *Gemüt*’s ‘animating principle’. Foucault attributes the development of 19th-20th century transcendental philosophy and phenomenology, as well as the human sciences, to the increasing conceptual split between *Geist* and *Gemüt*.

According to a prominent strand of Kant interpretation, transcendental self-consciousness or the ‘I think’ in CPR constitutes the linchpin of Kant’s system, but is unable fully to be situated within the terms of that same system. For example, Strawson claims that the ‘I think’ represents “the tangential point of contact between the field of noumena and the world of appearances”, referring presumably to the Third Antinomy, where Kant asserts that it is because man “knows himself also through pure apperception” that he can know that he is free (1966: 173; A546/B574). Yet Kant’s affirmation here that pure apperception can constitute

⁵ Despite composing IKA in 1959-1960 in Hamburg, where Kant’s manuscripts were held, Foucault may not have worked with the manuscripts themselves (see discussion in Nigro 2008: 9, 13). Foucault dismisses the student notes comprising our current record of Kant’s lectures on anthropology, on which APV is based: “It is hard to have confidence in notes published 35 years after Kant’s death” (1961: 12). Nevertheless, some of the points Foucault cites as novel in APV are already in lectures dated contemporaneously to CPR, putting pressure on, or even contradicting, aspects of his analysis (see notes 9 and 15 below). However, my interest in this paper is to shed light on Foucault’s own position without systematically evaluating its philological veracity. See Guyer (2003), Stark (2003), and Brandt (2003) for discussion of the history of the composition of APV.

self-knowledge, and that this mode of self-knowledge is *required* in order to discern our own practical agency, explicitly contradicts Kant’s earlier denial that pure apperception can constitute knowledge: “We know our own subject only as appearance, not as it is in itself”, since the ‘I think’ absent empirical intuition is “entirely empty” and can at best be “taken only problematically” (B156, A355, A347). As a result, Strawson concludes that, when it comes to Kant’s account of subjectivity, Kant’s theory is shown to be “shaking itself to pieces” (174).⁶

In OT, Foucault concurs with this tradition of interpretation: Kant’s transcendental subject, “which is never given to experience (since it is not empirical), but which is finite (since there is no intellectual intuition), determines in its relation to an object = x all the formal conditions of experience in general” (1966: 256). That is, the Kantian subject cannot be known, but must in some sense be empirical (and thus knowable), even as it determines the conditions of knowledge as such. Foucault argues that the gap Kant introduces where a subject should seem to be irrevocably shaped the direction of philosophy post-Kant. If Kant left open a space he refused to fill, it remained to his German Idealist successors to do so. As White Beck notes almost two hundred years after the fact, it seems only obvious that what Kant’s theory of cognition lacks is “a transcendental physiology of thinking nature”, which “would give *good* reasons for the otherwise brutally factual attributes of mind which are presupposed without argument in the Critique” (1978: 35). What White Beck describes as a ‘transcendental physiology of thinking nature’ is, I would posit, what Foucault characterizes as ‘anthropology’, a notion he traces through the human sciences and post-Kantian philosophy back to APV. White Beck defines this general project of investigating the “nature and justification... of the knowledge claims *used* in [CPR]” as a ‘metacritique’ of pure reason (1978: 25). In IKA, Foucault details the ongoing dialogue Kant held during his own lifetime with two of his most prominent ‘metacritics’, J.S. Beck and J.G. Fichte.

Both Fichte and Beck reproached Kant for his lack of a unified account of subjectivity in his theory of cognition. Kant’s framework, they argue, makes self-positing or self-affection impossible, since if intellectual self-consciousness (pure apperception) is merely logical and has no object, it seems to preclude the possibility of empirical self-consciousness (inner sense), in which the self is to be posited as an object. The ultimate consequence of Kant’s inadequate treatment of self-positing is a “double self”—a subject divided between its active and passive guises to the extent

⁶ Strawson’s critique has continued to be broadly influential (Keller 2004: 1); see Cassam (1997) for a contemporary elaboration of Strawson’s central argument for the embodied rather than purely intellectual character of the ‘I’, and Kitcher (2011) and Longuenesse (2017) for responses.

that achieving unity between the two seems irretrievable (1961: 23).⁷ Both concur that what Kant took to be a merely theoretical faculty, namely pure apperception, has a fundamentally *practical* dimension, and that a unified account of subjectivity can only be derived by stressing the ‘I think’⁸’s practical function as what posits the object of inner sense (and thus as what posits itself).

Foucault notes that Beck’s line of criticism runs contemporaneously to the publication of APV; while Kant ultimately leaves Beck’s concerns unanswered, Foucault argues that the exchange between the two philosophers helps explain the shift in Kant’s theoretical position from CPR to APV.⁸ Several years prior to APV’s publication, Kant writes his last letter to Beck, concluding his responses to Beck’s criticisms with the remark, “I notice, as I am writing this down, that I do not even entirely understand myself” (*Correspondence* 1999: 482; Foucault 1961: 20). Beck sends Kant three letters in which he presses Kant on the problem that the irreducibility of the understanding to the sensibility poses for the issue of how the subject can affect itself and on the relation between theoretical and practical consciousness—letters which went unanswered (Foucault 1961: 21).

Foucault writes, “In fact, even though the dialogue with Beck would never be reestablished, it continued as if at an angle” (1961: 21). In effect, Foucault reads APV as Kant’s ‘oblique’ response to Beck’s concerns. In APV, inner sense and pure apperception are defined as “consciousness of what man does and consciousness of what he feels”, respectively—definitions, Foucault writes, “which overlap those of the *Critique*, but with a certain shift” (1961: 22). By dint of being repeatedly pressed by Kantian metacritics such as Beck and Fichte, the post-critical Kant transitions to a view on which the theoretical and practical modalities of cognition are drawn closer together, and the self can be more explicitly posited as object of knowledge.

Thus, Foucault sees APV as Kant’s own attempt to respond to the critiques

⁷ See discussion by Foucault (1961: 23), as well as Kant’s response to this charge in APV (7:141n); see also di Giovanni (1985: 38) and Wallner (1984: 294) on the relation between Beck and Fichte’s positions. I return to Foucault’s relation to Fichte in Section V below.

⁸ Foucault’s reading faces certain textual difficulties. For example, see Kant’s discussion of the ‘I’ in LA Collins, dated to 1772-1773: “The little word ‘I’ is not a mere intuition of oneself, but.... also expresses a rational substance, for the I expresses that one makes oneself into an object of thoughts with consciousness” (LA 25:10). Here, Kant already puts emphasis on positing the self as object through intellectual self-consciousness. However, OP, which features explicit discussion of self-positing, has often been taken to demonstrate a shift in his theoretical position (Förster 2005). Thus, Kant’s increasing focus on securing a transition between critique and experience—manifested in late texts such as CPJ, OP, and MM—could presuppose a reliance on an *anthropological* level of investigation, which in turn implicates Kant’s theory of self-positing. Thus, in my view, Foucault’s analysis is more plausible if applied to the *distance between* anthropological and critical registers. Regardless, Foucault’s reading of the difficulties associated with the function of anthropology in Kant’s critical system can be taken without, I think, assuming his philological analysis.

lodged against him by later inheritors of his own critical project. The debate between Kant, Beck, and Fichte, Foucault claims, “permits one to define the space in which an Anthropology, in general, would be possible: a region in which the observation of the self doesn’t appeal either to a subject in itself, nor to the pure I of synthesis, but to a self [*un moi*] that is an object” (1961: 23). In APV, the ‘self-object’ can thus become “nothing but the subject such as it is affected by itself” (24; compare 7:140-5, 7:160-1).

It is in this sense that what Foucault terms an ‘anthropology’ becomes possible—a term that encompasses Kant’s sense of ‘anthropology’, but which also characterizes, Foucault argues, the course of much of the history of philosophy post-Kant, applying to crucial aspects of the views of such thinkers as Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Husserl. What it means to engage in anthropology, Foucault maintains, constitutes a level of reflection distinct from that of critique: anthropology is concerned not with transcendental *a priori* truths, but with “the analysis of concrete forms of self-observation” (24). Thus, APV occupies a position that is simultaneously *empirical*, because it treats the self as a ‘concrete’ object of knowledge, and *transcendental*, since, in so doing, it also treats the conditions that render experience possible. What in CPR was taken to be *a priori* and therefore outside the bounds of empirical knowledge is now referred back to an empirical ground, namely, the human subject. As such, and as Foucault points out in OT, one of the first instantiations of the ‘empirical-transcendental double’ can be found in APV, even though it was initially Kant himself who denounced this confusion as a form of paralogism—and therefore, by Kant’s own lights, as incoherent (1966: 352).

On Foucault’s analysis, APV’s more unified account of subjectivity can only be achieved by reformulating the basic terms of Kant’s system. Thus, the ‘I think’ becomes more explicitly identified with activity (and thus as practical), and inner sense with passivity (and thus as what is given as an object) (1961: 22). Foucault argues that part of the repositioning of these two Kantian terms entails an increasing emphasis on a new conceptual pairing: *Geist* and *Gemüt*.

Geist is defined in APV as “the principle of the mind [*Gemüt*] that animates by means of *ideas*.”⁹ As Foucault points out, however, the category of *Geist* introduces a number of interpretive difficulties in relation to Kant’s theoretical philosophy:

We are dealing here with a *Prinzip* [principle]. Not with a *Vermögen* [faculty] like memory, attention, or knowledge in general. Nor, moreover, with one of those powers (*Kräfte*) that the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* talks about.¹⁰

⁹ 7:246; see also 7:225, cited in Foucault (1961): 37.

¹⁰ See 20:245, 5:167.

Nor, finally, with a simple representation like the ‘pure I’ of the First *Critique*. Hence, a principle: but is it determining or regulative? Neither one nor the other, if we take seriously that ‘animation’ that is ascribed to it. (1961: 37)

Thus, *Geist* is not a faculty, a power, or a ‘simple representation’—it is a ‘principle’. But this is a cognitive function that seems to fall outside the conceptual space of the CPR: if it ‘animates’, it would seem to entail the activity of the understanding, but since it is aroused by the ‘ideas’ of the imagination (and thus by intuitions, not concepts), it must also involve the receptivity of sensibility. Thus, its function is simultaneously transcendental *and* empirical.

Foucault’s analysis of *Geist* in APV corresponds to his interpretation of self-positing and the inner sense/apperception distinction: in both cases, a function or faculty that is difficult to situate within the possible coordinates of CPR takes on the role of an organizing principle in APV. Indeed, in both cases, the faculties at issue threaten to give rise to transcendental illusion—‘ideas’ for *Geist* and ‘paralogism’ for the pure ‘I’—and therefore would seem to fall outside the bounds of possible knowledge. Nevertheless, in APV both become indispensable. With the emergence of *Geist* comes the simultaneous emergence of the *Gemüt*, the mind conceived as an empirical object of study in human beings.¹¹ Just as the human being can only be “cognized” from the “interior” if the transcendental and empirical poles of apperception are reconceived, *Geist* can only ‘animate’ the *Gemüt* if it can present it with ideas (7:125).¹² As Foucault argues, the function of *Geist* is to “make appear in the passivity of the *Gemüt*, which is empirically determined, the teeming movement of ideas... that come together and come apart like so many partial lives that live and die in the spirit” (1961: 39). The *Gedankenspiel*—the “play” of the “mental powers” set in motion by the animating ideas of spirit—thereby replaces CPR’s inner sense.¹³

Foucault argues that Kant’s theoretical system has thus been fundamentally reconceived: the conceptual priority no longer rests on the understanding-sensibility distinction, but on the *Geist-Gemüt* distinction that takes its place.¹⁴ As Foucault

¹¹ Much as the *Gemüt* is the empirical counterpart of *Geist* within Kant’s anthropological system, Foucault suggests that the human sciences are the empirical counterpart of transcendental philosophy post-Kant, anticipating the argument of OT; see (1961): 43, 73.

¹² Particularly moral and aesthetic ideas. See Kant’s discussion of spirit in CPJ 5:314.

¹³ CPJ 5:313; see discussion in Foucault (1961): 22.

¹⁴ Yet in LA Collins, dating from 1772-3, Kant writes, “Insofar as both [*anima* and *mens*] are united and the former capacity stands under the moderating influence of the other, it is called *animus*—*anima* is called ‘soul’ [*Seele*], *animus* ‘mind’ [*Gemüth*], *mens* ‘spirit’ [*Geist*].... In regard to the first way we are passive, in regard to the other, passive but simultaneously reactive, in regard to the third way we are entirely self-active” (25:16). Thus, even prior to CPR, Kant had associated *Geist* with

writes, “We could ask whether *Geist*, which materializes at the fringes of anthropological reflection, isn’t an element secretly indispensable to the structure of Kantian thought... *Geist* is at the root of the possibility of knowledge” (40-1).¹⁵ Consequently, the organizing dichotomy of Kant’s theoretical system, at least as it pertains to anthropology, no longer falls between the empirical and the transcendental, but between activity and passivity.

III. Foucault’s appraisal of the positive dimension of anthropology

LL clarifies the underlying ambivalence of Foucault’s stance on anthropology and critique, which, as I will show, can be traced back through IKA and the rest of Foucault’s ensuing oeuvre. In the lectures, Foucault argues that the relation between anthropology and critique inaugurated by Kant orders the history of philosophy that succeeds him: Kant’s “work linked anthropology and critical thought in a community of fate that characterizes 19th century philosophical thought” (1953: 47). While Kantian critique shows that “we are ‘with the truth’”, anthropology asks after the nature of this relation: “What does man have to be in order to be related in this way to truth?” (47-8). As a result, anthropology presents itself as a “critique of the critique”—in other words, as a form of metacritique (49).

Foucault’s reading of APV, as early as LL, suggests ways in which Foucault situates himself as a positive inheritor of particular aspects of anthropology. Foucault emphasizes the “practical aim”, namely that of “making use of one’s own experience”, with which APV takes up the faculties which correspond to the three *Critiques* (1953: 40). Foucault suggests that, for Kant, what it means to make use of one’s own experience is to judge: as Kant stresses in CPR, judgment, while fundamental to the possibility of cognition, cannot be taught, only practiced or exercised, and this only in an empirical context (A133/B172). Thus, APV “is nothing other than the ‘manual of this practice’, a ‘treatise for the good use of judgment’” (1953: 40). Its aim is to “contribute to the exercise of a [mode of] judgment which nevertheless cannot be learned” (1953: 40).¹⁶ That is, Foucault implies that APV

activity and spontaneity and *Gemüth*—as the point of connection between body and spontaneity—with passivity. See also reference to ‘*Geist und Gemüt*’ at 25:474, dating from 1775-6. However, see also Kant’s metaphysics lectures, where *Geist* is initially defined as spontaneity *without* a body (28:278).

¹⁵ The centrality of *Geist* in this passage suggests continuity between Foucault’s reading of Kant and his reading of Hegel. See Foucault’s master’s thesis on ‘the transcendental in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*’ written under Jean Hyppolite (Foucault 1949), and discussion in Macherey (ms).

¹⁶ Tiisala (2015) claims that Foucault’s view of discursive rules undergoes a ‘pragmatist turn’ around

requires the active involvement of the reader, since it merely provides an occasion for the reader’s *exercise* of her own judgment rather than giving determinate instructions for its use. As a result, what is most relevant for Kantian anthropology, as Foucault interprets it, is not its content, but its *form*: not the specific pieces of advice it proffers, but their *effects*—as well as the *relation* it establishes with its readership in the process.

Foucault’s analysis in LL accords with important passages in IKA that have widely escaped notice by commentators. For example, Foucault emphasizes Kant’s conception of the ‘pragmatic’. As Kant scholars have acknowledged, Kantian pragmatic reason is not technical, or self-preservational, rationality; nor, on the other hand, is it identical to moral reason.¹⁷ The pragmatic subject of APV is not the abstract, universal practical subject located outside the reaches of space and time; instead, the pragmatic subject is the practical agent reconceived as the concrete, historically situated, socialized subject embedded in a process of ‘self-making’ (Wood 2003: 41). As Foucault articulates the distinction:

The *Anthropology* is *pragmatic* in the sense that it does not consider man as belonging to the moral republic of minds [*cit  morale des esprits*] (that would be called *practical*) nor to a civil society composed of subjects of law (that would then be *juridical*); it considers man as ‘citizen of the world’... To be a ‘citizen of the world’ is to belong to a region at once as concrete as that of a specific set of juridical rules and as universal as that of the moral law. (1961: 26)

To be a ‘citizen of the world’ is *both* to be the empirical subject of contingent socialization and historical positioning *and* to be the possible subject of practical reason.¹⁸ Thus, pragmatic knowledge, Kant tells us (and as Foucault stresses), concerns “the investigation of what [the human being] as a free-acting being makes of himself” (Kant 7:119). This mode of knowledge, however, is neither *a priori*, nor quite empirical. Instead, it corresponds to a kind of situated know-how: anthropology “must come after our *schooling*” and requires the ‘having’ of a world rather than the

1967 with the composition of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*. LL and IKA seemingly anticipate this shift, since in both Foucault unearths a different possible conception of subjectivity in Kant—the Kantian pragmatic subject whose judgment must be exercised in empirical experience rather than explicitly given rules.

¹⁷ Here I am restricting myself to Kant’s invocation of ‘pragmatic’ in APV, since this term has different meanings in others of Kant’s texts. See Wood (1999: 203–205; 2003) for a taxonomy of the various senses of the term.

¹⁸ Many Kantians would insist that Kant’s practical subject already *is* the empirically situated historical subject (see, e.g., Herman 1993, 2007). However, as Foucault emphasizes, the coexistence of these two dimensions is more explicit in the pragmatic agent of APV than in Kant’s texts on moral philosophy of the critical period.

mere ‘knowing’ of it—a distinction Kant glosses as the distinction between participating in a play rather than merely watching it (7:120). Thus, the knowledge at issue is acquired not just for its own sake, but in order to be put to use.

The pragmatic subject, then, exhibits a kind of autonomy: by definition, she is a being who embodies a degree of discretion in how to fashion herself. However, the pragmatic subject must always begin from a determinate, socially specific starting point, and pragmatic knowledge must always be filtered back through her social context: ‘Pragmatic’, as Kant defines it in *LA Mrongovius*, “is the knowledge from which a general use *in* society can be made” (25:1210, cited in Foucault 1961: 32). The domain of the pragmatic involves a mode of autonomy that is more creative than strictly moral, retaining a socially shaped character.

While APV is the initial source of the ‘anthropological illusion’ Foucault so vehemently rejects, it is *also* the source of the mode of engaging in practical, historically situated critique to which the late Foucault explicitly ascribes. The pragmatic subject, as Kant conceives of it, is *also* the *Weltbürger* (7:120), a term whose double meaning Foucault stresses. The *Weltbürger* is the sociohistorically situated subject, “man as residing in the world” (Foucault 1961: 34). But the *Weltbürger* is also Kant’s cosmopolitan [*weltbürgerlicher*] subject, a mode of subjectivity which only the historical emergence of the Enlightenment has enabled to come into being, and consequently an unmistakably *Enlightenment* subject.¹⁹ Thus, Foucault interprets Kant’s claim that anthropology is “knowledge of the world” (7:120) as a “cosmopolitan idea, which has programmatic value, where the world would appear more as a republic [*cit *] to be built than as a cosmos given at the outset” (1961: 20). The anthropological Kant even takes up the position in WE that Foucault famously adopts as the basis for his own ethical approach (1984c), concluding the first section of APV with the claim:

The most important revolution from within the human being is ‘his exit from his self-incurred immaturity’. Before this revolution he let others think for him and merely imitated others or allowed them to guide him by leading-strings. Now he ventures to advance, though still shakily, with his own feet on the ground of experience. (7:229)²⁰

Thus, WE and the practical dimension of APV are situated at the same *pragmatic*

¹⁹ Of course, Foucault’s references to the ‘*Weltbürger*’, or cosmopolitan, should not be taken as an endorsement of Kant’s universalism or historical teleology, which is why I take him to stress its literal meaning as the subject residing *in* its worldly context as currently constituted.

²⁰ Compare Kant’s definition of enlightenment as one’s “exit from immaturity” and walking “without leading-strings” (8:33).

level of reflection²¹ insofar as both concern what subjects of the Enlightenment should ‘make of themselves’.

The ‘pragmatic’ level of practical reflection seems to be what Foucault himself invokes in his analyses of the ‘golden age’ of practices of the self in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity. Kant’s engagement with Hufeland’s *Makrobiotik* and expression of a desire to write a “*Dietetic*”, factors Foucault cites as directly influential on Kant’s composition of APV (1961: 29), constitute the same subject matter as what Foucault treats in Chapter II, “Dietetic”, of HS2 (1984b). Indeed, Foucault already uses the term “*travaux spirituels*”, spiritual efforts or tasks, to describe the practices Kant himself takes up in relation to his old age, practices that echo Foucault’s analysis of the role of old age in the practices of the self, or “spirituality”, of late antiquity (1961: 29; compare 1982: 16-20, 104-107). Many of Kant’s themes in APV (“dreams, problems of nutrition and digestion, reflections on the opportune time for thought”) are the same themes Foucault finds of interest in antiquity (1961: 31). Kant exhibits the same interest in *self-mastery* through practical techniques as Foucault’s Stoics: “We therefore see how the movements of the body... can be *mastered* by the movements of the spirit and their free exercise” (1961: 31).

What the ‘pragmatic’ point of view seems to involve for Foucault, whether in Kant’s *Anthropology* or Plato’s *Alcibiades*, is a popular, practical guide, directed as advice towards an ordinary reader (one historically and culturally situated in the same fashion as the author) for everyday use. Thus, APV is a “book of daily exercise”, and not one of “theory” or a “schoolbook” (1961: 33). It therefore requires regular employment on the part of its reader: “the present, imperious, and perpetually renewed form of daily usage” (33). Similarly, Foucault will declare in the Introduction to HS2:

The domain that I will analyze is constituted by texts that claim to give rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should: ‘practical’ texts, which are themselves objects of a ‘practice’ to the extent that they were made to be read, learned, meditated on, utilized, put to the test and which, ultimately, were intended to constitute the armature for daily conduct. (1984b: 18)

In both cases Foucault takes up the issue of ‘practical’ texts which themselves become objects of an everyday ‘practice’. Connected with this function is APV’s status as a self-cognizantly “popular” text, repeating CPR “on the popular level of advice,

²¹ This connection is even more explicit in LL; see my discussion below of Foucault’s references to Kant as “*Aufklärer*” (1953: 92). Moreover, Foucault’s 1950s notes on Kant cite Kant’s reference in the Preface of CPR to the “*maturity* of judgment of an age which can no longer content itself with the mere appearance of knowledge” (Foucault undated: 5-6, compare CPR: Axi, my emphasis).

storytelling, and example” which “can be found for every reader” (1961: 55, 59). The ‘popular’ dimension of this text resonates with the same aspect of another Kantian text from which Foucault claims to derive his notion of a ‘critical attitude’ (and with it, his ethical standpoint): “We shouldn’t forget that [‘What Is Enlightenment?’] was a newspaper article... [and thus] is inscribed in a certain relationship with the public which it intends to mobilize” (1978: 41). In both cases, Kant aims to address a mass audience in a way that has only become possible under the appropriate historical conditions—namely, those of modernity.

The negative and positive dimensions of Foucault’s treatment of anthropology resurface in OT, where Foucault’s explicit references to ‘anthropology’ are unambiguously negative. As Foucault argues there, Kant woke philosophy from its dogmatic slumber, only to lull it back into an “anthropological slumber”; indeed, Foucault claims that “‘anthropologization’ is nowadays the great internal threat of knowledge” (1966: 351, 258).²² Even here, however, Foucault retains the conception of a potentially positive upshot of the tradition of philosophical anthropology. While, in OT, Foucault famously predicts the death of man, he also speaks favorably of Nietzsche’s conception of the *übermensch*, situated as the culmination of philosophical anthropology in LL, as what might both hasten its downfall and take its place. Foucault insists that the death of man won’t present us with a “void” that we will have to fill, but instead with the opening of conceptual space necessary to think afresh the old anthropological presumptions of philosophical thought (353). This is the conclusion that Foucault reaches in the final line of IKA: “The trajectory of the question: *Was ist der Mensch?* in the field of philosophy comes to an end in the response that rejects and disarms it: *der Übermensch*” (79).

It might appear curious why Foucault would supplant the ‘death of man’ with the apparent smuggling-in of a different kind of subject—the ‘overman’. But we have begun to see what Foucault’s motivations for doing so consist in. The *pragmatic subject*, whose practical, reflexively oriented task is to ‘make something of herself’ and ‘think for herself,’²³ is what remains once the transcendental-empirical confusion of the subject as object of theoretical knowledge has been rejected as unsound. Thus, while the specific *content* of anthropology—its appeal to a determinate and universal human nature—is rejected as historical, empirical, and socially situated (and thus contingent), it retains its ‘pragmatic’, practical and reflexive, *form*. That is, Foucault is only committed to the practical self-relation by which the

²² See also Foucault’s bleak references to ‘anthropological individualization’ and ‘juridico-anthropological functioning’ in *Discipline and Punish* (1975: 100, 183).

²³ See Kant’s repeated references to the ‘maxim of enlightenment’: 7:200, 5:294.

subject can ‘make itself’ according to its own choosing, taking its historical situatedness as a starting point. While the term ‘anthropology’, when explicitly invoked, increasingly acquires an unambiguously negative meaning for Foucault throughout the 1960s and 1970s (most centrally in OT), the positive implications Foucault initially notices in the anthropological tradition are recovered in his elaboration of concepts such as practices of the self or aesthetics of existence at the end of his life—Foucault’s eventual response, in my view, to his 1966 appeal to the *Übermensch*.²⁴

IV. Kant’s metacritics

Now that I have outlined the main features of Foucault’s ambivalent stance towards anthropology, I will attempt to clarify how Foucault reads the post-Kantian history of philosophy as motivated by the very tension between anthropology and critique that generates Foucault’s own ambivalence. As I argue here, Foucault holds that the history of Kantian reception in the ‘critical’ tradition that interests him²⁵ draws much more from critique in its pragmatic mode than as transcendental and *a priori*. Moreover, Foucault’s point here is not just philological, but *genealogical*: that is, Foucault’s analysis is not merely historical in aim, but traces the philosophical lineage of his *own* thought.²⁶

In LL, Foucault sketches this metacritical strand from Kant to Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche. Many of these thinkers, Foucault argues, aim to “overcome critique by undertaking an anthropology—that’s to say, to do away with critique by giving it the human being itself as a foundation” (1953: 52). Foucault claims that Hegelian thought, for example, features two anthropologies: the particular section that sports the title, but also the “whole movement of subjective spirit” (53). Thus, Hegel is transitional: on the one hand, he, like Kant, exemplifies the explicitly defined split between critique, positioned as central to his philosophical system, and anthropology, positioned on the margins. On the other, his mode of critique is fundamentally anthropological, thereby exemplifying the collapse of the two modes of analysis into each other; Hegel’s critique takes itself to be both

²⁴ See discussion in Allen (2003: 89).

²⁵ See Foucault (1982: 29–30, 1983a: 22). In both courses, Foucault links “all 19th century philosophy... Hegel of course, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Husserl in the *Krisis*, and Heidegger as well” to the “structures of spirituality” of antiquity (1982: 29); see discussion below.

²⁶ Foucault’s 1950s notes on Kant also feature perhaps his first usage of ‘genealogy’, which he employs in describing Kant’s tribunal of reason (undated: 6; compare CPR A1x).

empirical and transcendental, thus tending toward psychologism and paralogism.²⁷ Foucault notes that for spirit, “knowledge is determined by itself” and “has an immediate relation to itself”, embodying a similar reflexivity as the Kantian pragmatic (53).

Feuerbach and Marx extend this tendency further, more explicitly aiming to undertake critique purely on the level of anthropology: what is relevant for them is not what constitutes the mere *possibility* of knowledge, but *concrete* knowledge, since it is only the latter with which we operate (1953: 56).

As Foucault reads him, Feuerbach presents a rupture of Kantian thought, even as his general project remains in many respects continuous with it. Much as Foucault initially stresses the inherent reflexivity of the Kantian critical project, characterizing anthropology as a critique of critique, he terms the aim of Feuerbach’s critique as a “superceding [*dépassement*] of the initial superceding [*dépassement*]” (1953: 72). Thus, Feuerbach’s anthropological philosophy shares the same internal structure of Kant’s philosophical anthropology. Foucault reinforces this interpretation when he remarks that Feuerbach “retraverses Kantian reflection, to the extent that it seems to come back at times, and in fact does come back to, a style of *Aufklärung*”, situating Feuerbach in the tradition of Kantian enlightenment to which he will repeatedly refer in his final ethical period (66).

Indeed, Foucault insists, the two poles of anthropology and critique were never so far apart to begin with. Citing the distinction between “moral, political, psychological critique”, such as the “Christian critique of fallen nature [*nature déchuée*]”, and “philosophical critique as the determination of *a priori* conditions of knowledge”, Foucault writes:

These two senses of critique were not as different as they are for us: Kant takes himself to be an *Aufklärer* [enlightener] (extricate the philosophical meaning of the *Aufklärung* [enlightenment]). But most importantly, his work, far from invalidating this superficial relationship, only ever deepened it, by turning it inside out once it found that the interrogation of man was the foundation of critique. (1953: 75-6)

That is, anthropology—the appeal to a human subject as the ground of critique—is already implicit in the *political* subtext of Kantian critique, by which it assumes a historical and social specificity and a collective rather than solely individual effort.²⁸

²⁷ This anthropological reading, which Derrida (1969) rejects as distorted by the influence of Kojève’s lectures on Hegel, was not uncommon in France at the time; see also discussion in Butler (1987: 63-65) as well as Foucault’s critique of Hegel in *OT* (1966: 261). I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

²⁸ See O’Neill (1989).

Critique thereby comes to negate its initial claim to abstraction from empirical conditions, developing into “the very movement of political reform” (76).

Foucault reads Marx as providing yet another iteration of metacritique, calling into question Feuerbach’s notion of alienation. The subject of alienation is not the “essence of the human subject”, as per Feuerbach, but the “real human subject” (1953: 80). But, Foucault asks, “what does it mean to say that the real human subject [*homme*] has become estranged from himself: that reality has become estranged from reality? What can alienation mean if it’s deprived of the metaphysical foundation of [having an] essence?” (80). For Marx, alienation therefore has to do not with the essence of humanity, but with the “set of work conditions in a given society” (82). This position, Foucault notes, is in tension with Marx’s humanism, since “all humanism is a revindication of human essence” (83). Consequently, Marxist philosophy can only be rooted in a conception of alienation which Foucault claims that Marxism has “rightly disassociated itself from and rejected” (83). The tension between Marxism and humanism or philosophical essentialism can only give way to Marx’s dropping of all metaphysical (for Foucault, ‘philosophical’) pretext.²⁹ Marxism therefore heralds the end of a claim to a strictly *a priori* domain of analysis, exempted from the imperfections and inconsistencies of the empirical world.

Foucault argues that the critical tradition he demarcates in these lectures culminates with Nietzsche,³⁰ who, in heralding the arrival of the overman, marks the arrival of the ‘death of man’—the beginning of the end of anthropology. At the same time, Foucault argues that some of the concerns implicit in anthropology from the outset split off into a new domain of analysis altogether. This domain continues to seek, or implicitly presuppose, an essential human nature, which, as Foucault argues throughout the 1960s and 1970s, lives on in certain approaches in psychology, neuroscience, and related domains,³¹ but here all philosophical pretext is dropped. Broadly speaking, the path culminating in Nietzsche, on the other hand, scrutinizes the conditions of social reality and the status of collectively held truths; this strand, for Foucault, constitutes the true legacy of the critical tradition. For both strands, anthropology in its classical sense is ultimately “surpassed” and “erased”, but for two distinct reasons: for the first, because philosophical anthropology gives way to methods of biological and medical investigation, losing all practical import; for the second, because the practical force of anthropology is instead

²⁹ Foucault’s 1952–3 critique of the essentialism of Marxian alienation therefore predates Althusser’s (1965) famous critique of the same point. See also Wood on the lack of adequate argument for species being (1981: 18) and Cohen on the drawbacks of Marx’s ‘philosophical anthropology’ (1978: 345–7).

³⁰ In LL, Foucault also considers Dilthey and Heidegger, which I bracket due to space constraints.

³¹ The connection between anthropology and the human sciences is also a key target of Foucault’s critique in IKA and OT; I lack the space to discuss it at greater length here.

radicalized, losing its pretext to a metaphysical foundation and, with it, its reliance on the fact of an essential human nature (1953: 103, 104). The ultimate inheritor of the latter strand is Nietzsche. It is Nietzsche who ultimately does away with the notion of ‘man’ or the human subject; and it is Nietzsche whose philosophy “abandons the task of philosophizing”, who realizes an “*Unphilosophie*”, an antiphilosophy, due in part to his skepticism of the validity of the *a priori* and transcendental subject (141, 140). In so doing, Nietzsche further radicalizes Marx’s implicit ‘ending of all philosophy’.

V. Conclusion

The way in which Foucault situates himself relative to the anthropological, metacritical tradition he delineates throughout LL clarifies several points of interpretation. It is well-known that Foucault sees himself as taking up a Nietzschean approach in his own philosophy. What is new, however, is that in these early texts Foucault does not simply position Nietzsche in *contrast* to the rest of the philosophical tradition, but stresses Nietzsche’s *continuity* with this tradition—even as Nietzsche, much like his predecessors, alters its course. Thus, as I mentioned in Section III, Nietzsche’s positioning as the culmination of philosophical anthropology allows us to dispel the unambiguously *negative* appraisal of anthropology in OT that has often been ascribed to it (Gutting 1989, Han-Pile 1998); Foucault’s heralding of the *Übermensch* at the conclusion of OT can be situated, in my reading, along with the *positive* evaluation of the ‘pragmatic’ aspects of anthropology advanced in IKA and LL.

A similar analysis can be advanced with regard to Foucault’s own self-positioning: he does not situate himself outside this tradition, occupying an epistemic position some have criticized as untenable (e.g., Gutting 1989). Instead, on my reading, Foucault is a metacritic: his critique, like Nietzsche’s, refutes the essentialist or naturalist tendencies of anthropology, but is still in line with this tradition’s growing emphasis on the empirical domains of history, of political change, and of the interrogation of the ‘illusion’—or, for Foucault, the apparent obviousness or seeming universality (Tiisala 2017)—of socially produced concepts. This is what explains why Foucault, in the final years of his life, would return repeatedly to this ‘critical’ strand of Western philosophy, reiterating that it constitutes the tradition in which he situates himself. As he says in 1982 and 1983, “It’s this form of philosophy that, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, in passing through Nietzsche, Max Weber, etc., created a form of reflection with which, of course, I identify myself to the

extent that I can”, and that implicitly “rediscovers the care for the care of the self” (1983a: 22, 1982: 30).

Stressing Foucault’s reading of how Nietzsche, Marx, Feuerbach, and Hegel develop out of a particular strand of responding to Kant—one that, according to Foucault, is more continuous with Kant’s political and anthropological writings than his explicitly ‘critical’ ones—allows us to see how Foucault may have viewed the connection between these thinkers, all pivotal in distinct ways for his own thought. To see this, these lectures should be understood as Foucault’s attempt to undertake, not just genealogy *as* critique, but a genealogy *of* critique (which in itself functions as a kind of metacritique). As we’ve seen, while critique comes in different historical forms, it shares the same underlying metacritical attitude (where Foucault (1984c: 1396) simply refers to a critical attitude), enabling its own historical dynamicism: the movement of metacritique is inherently non-universal and non-constant, recalling Foucault’s definition of a limit-attitude in “What Is Enlightenment?”.³² It would seem, then, that Foucault here undertakes a genealogy of his *own* philosophical position, reaffirming its own particular historicity and lack of universality in the process—and, in a sense, thereby reinforcing its own validity.³³

While scholars such as Allen (2003, 2008) and Djaballah (2008) have acknowledged the importance of Foucault’s early engagement with Kant in establishing the continuity in Foucault’s conception of autonomy or critique, no one has yet acknowledged that the more general framework of Foucault’s ethical approach is already extant in rudimentary form in Foucault’s early engagement with the history of critique.³⁴ For example, Foucault insists repeatedly that the metacritical tradition embodies an internal reflexivity as its basic form: he refers variously to Kant’s critique of critique, Feuerbach’s supercession of a supercession, and Hegel’s self-determination of thought. What remains of metacritique—once critique gives rise to anthropology, the two pulled increasingly close together, critique becoming fundamentally *altered* by anthropology, and anthropology finally ejected altogether—is just this formal reflexivity in structure. Once the anthropological pretenses are hollowed out, the result is a structural reflexivity without a constituting subject. One key aspect of Foucault’s own eventual metacritical stance, then, is the refutation of the very idea of anything other than a thin, purely formal conception of the practical

³² “In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?” (1984c).

³³ Foucault often characterizes this mode of critique in Kantian terms. For example, he criticizes anthropological thought for “swimming in total paralogism” (1965: 480).

³⁴ This explanatory route has the benefit of not resting the basis for Foucault’s ethics wholly on his references to ‘autonomy’. See Koopman’s critique of Allen on this point (2013: 206-8, 221-2).

agent, to be conceived solely as a reflexive relation to oneself: “The self is nothing other than relations to self. The self is a relation” (1983b: 117). Foucault critiques conventional understandings of morality on this score:

In order to be called ‘moral’, an action can’t be reduced to an act or a series of acts that conform to a rule, a law, or a value.... [Moral action] also implies a certain relation to the self; this is not only ‘self-consciousness’, but self-constitution as a ‘moral subject’... He acts on himself, undertakes to know himself, control himself, test himself, perfect himself, transform himself. (1984b: 35)³⁵

While Kant’s conception of practical reason is no doubt included in Foucault’s criticism, I submit that the initial, though still rudimentary, articulation of Foucault’s point is already present in Kant’s definition of what it means to be *pragmatic*: to make something “*of oneself as a free-acting being*” (7:119, my emphasis).³⁶

If we examine Foucault’s later self-ascriptions in the 1970s and 1980s, we can see how his early analysis of the metacritical tradition in the 1950s and 1960s is in continuity with his later views. In texts such as “What Is Critique?” (1978) and “What Is Enlightenment?” (1984c), Foucault characterizes the philosophical dimension of his life’s work as that of a creative reappropriation of Kant’s critical project, situating himself in the Enlightenment tradition. In the opening sentence of an encyclopedia entry for himself, Foucault opts to characterize his own philosophical project as follows: “If Foucault is to be inscribed in the philosophical tradition, it is in the critical tradition which is that of Kant” (1984a: 1450). In “What Is Enlightenment?”, Foucault writes, “If the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one.... The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a *practical* critique that takes the form of a possible transgression” (1984c: 1393; my emphasis). That is, Foucault adheres to the practical conception of critique which,

³⁵ See also Foucault’s definition of ‘subjectivation’ as “the formation of a defined relation of self to self” (1980: 227).

³⁶ While one might think that this reflexivity was already present in Kant’s characterization of the merely empty ‘I think’ of theoretical cognition accompanying “all my representations” (B131), Foucault only embraces the reflexivity of this conception in its *practical* form rather than theoretical—as in Fichte’s emphasis on the dependence of the ‘I think’ on the activity of the subject. See Foucault’s self-description of his “Fichtean” conception of the will as “the pure act of the subject”, where the subject, reciprocally, is “what is set and determined by an act of the will” (1979: 41–2). While we might then wonder what Foucault took himself to gain from post-Fichtean developments in the metacritical tradition, it should be noted that Fichte’s is still the theoretical subject that constitutes the ground of its experience and is thus not *thoroughly* practical in Foucault’s sense. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to clarify this point.

he had argued 30 years earlier, was already implicit in Kant’s own understanding of his critical project.³⁷ Yet this involves both the negative *and* positive aspects of Foucault’s initial evaluation of Kantian anthropology. In his encyclopedia entry, Foucault reaffirms the negative appraisal, opposing the appeal by the “anthropological” philosophies he rejects to a “constituting subject” to which one can ascribe all knowledge in general (1984a: 1453). In its place, however, Foucault situates his positive appraisal, endorsing the project of analyzing the “concrete practices” by which the subject is constituted—the analyses of the practices of the self that characterize his ‘ethical turn’ in the 1980s (1453). Confirming this interpretation, Foucault identifies the “practical” dimension of his reappropriation of the critical project with the elaboration of another “principle of his method”: that of “appealing to ‘practices’ as a domain of analysis, approaching one’s analysis along the angle of what ‘one does’” (1454).

Thus, Foucault is in continuity with the tradition of anthropology and critique insofar as he conceives of himself as rejecting the traditional *a priori* conception of critique, as well as the appeal to “all anthropological universals” which rest on essentializing conceptions of subjectivity (1453). In doing so, what remains is an analysis of the *practices* by which subjects are constituted, and by which they constitute themselves. Moreover, if Foucault defines critique as essentially characterized by continuous, reflexive self-interrogation, this, too, is a practice subjects can employ to constitute themselves as critical agents—and thus to begin to interrogate their own self-constitution as subjects.³⁸

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* = *Translations my own*

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³⁷ Foucault also reaffirms this reading in his analysis of the legal-political language of CPR (1983a).

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