

# What is Enlightenment?

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## I. Kant's text: entry into history of question of modern philosophy

- A. German/Jewish destiny (Mendelssohn)
- B. Uniqueness of Kant's formulation
  - 1. Past formulations
    - a. Present belongs to an specific era of the world (*Statesman*)
    - b. Present contains signs of future event (Augustine)
    - c. Transition to new world (Vico)
  - 2. Kant's formulation: negativity, exit, historical difference
- C. Textual analysis
  - 1. Exit: release from immaturity (= acceptance of authority in place of reason)
    - a. Examples:
      - (1) book/understanding (theory/cognition/C Pure R)
      - (2) spiritual director/conscience (practice/morality/C Practical R)
      - (3) doctor/diet (organismic nature/C Judgment)
    - b. Enlightenment modifies relations of will, authority, use of reason
  - 2. Ambiguity (collective process and individual task/obligation)
  - 3. Kant's use of 'mankind': (entire race or the 'humanity' of 'mankind?')
    - a. Conditions of escape: spiritual/ethical and institutional/political
      - (1) realms of obedience and reason must be distinguished
      - (2) public (free) vs. private (submissive) uses of reason
        - (a) 'private' = person as cog in machine
        - (b) 'public' = 'commonwealth of reason' / 'republic of letters'
    - b. Enlightenment = universal, free, public uses of reason
  - 4. Enlightenment as political problem: How assure freedom of public reason?
    - a. Age of Frederick
    - b. 'Contract of rational despotism with free reason'
- D. K's essay as 'crossroads' of the three Critiques and the history writings
- E. Uniqueness of K's essay: reflection on 'today' as difference in history

## II. The attitude of modernity (rather than as epoch)

- A. Exemplified by Baudelaire
  - 1. Ironic heroization: B's consciousness of discontinuity of time
  - 2. Transfiguring play with reality (contra the *flâneur*)
  - 3. Indispensable asceticism: oneself as object of elaboration
  - 4. Art as the locus of B's practice
- B. Characterized by Foucault:
  - 1. Negatively
    - a. Refusal of 'blackmail of the Enlightenment'
      - (1) F's acknowledgment of importance of Enlightenment
      - (2) Does not entail being 'for or against' Enlightenment
      - (3) But, we should analyze ourselves as conditioned by Enlightenment
        - (a) not Habermasian reconstruction and preservation of 'essential kernel'
        - (b) but analysis of 'contemporary limits of the necessary' for our self-constitution as autonomous subjects
    - b. Should not confuse humanism and Enlightenment
      - (1) Enlightenment as specific event in conjunction w/ historical processes
      - (2) Humanism as reappearing theme: too diverse for basis of analysis
  - 2. Positively: 'historical ontology of ourselves'
    - a. Limit attitude: situating ourselves at frontiers: (contra Kant at each point)

- (1) singular, contingent, arbitrary in universal, necessary, obligatory?
- (2) practical critique taking form of possible transgression
- (3) investigation of events by which we constitute ourselves as subjects
  - (a) genealogical in design
  - (b) archaeological in method
- (4) give new impetus to 'undefined work of freedom'
- b. Experimentation vs programming (contra 'global radicality' of Nazis / Stalinists)
  - (1) must open a realm of historical inquiry
  - (2) must test contemporary reality
    - (a) to find change points
    - (b) and determine form of such change [asking too much?]
  - (3) F's preference for New Left cultural struggles
  - (4) Philosophical ethos = test of limits to surpass; work on ourselves as free
- c. Objection: such partial localism risks determination by general structures
  - (1) No precise knowledge [*connaissance*] of our own historical limits
  - (2) But this doesn't necessarily entail disorder and contingency
    - (a) Stakes: paradox of relations of capacity and power [education]
    - (b) Homogeneity: study of practical systems;
      - i) technological: forms of rationality of practice
      - ii) strategic: freedom of action w/in such systems
    - (c) Systematicity: three areas of investigating subject-constitution
      - i) control over things: knowledge [savoir]
      - ii) action upon others: power
      - iii) relations w/ oneself: ethics
    - (d) Generality: [but not continuity or formality]
      - i) recurrence of these issues in Western culture
      - ii) investigated as problematicizations

### III. Summary: conclusion and return to Kant

- A. Doubt whether we will reach Kantian 'maturity'
- B. But we can give a meaning [*sens*] to K's essay
  - 1. Critical ontology of ourselves as ethos, philosophical life
    - a. Historical analysis of imposed limits
    - b. Experiments with going beyond
  - 2. Translation of this ethos into coherent 'labor of diverse inquiries'
    - a. Methodological: archeological and genealogical analysis of practices as technological and strategic
    - b. Theoretical: defining unique forms of relations to things, others, ourselves
    - c. Practical: careful test of reflection in concrete practices
  - 3. This may not mean 'faith' in Enlightenment, but it does mean
    - a. work on limits
    - b. That is, 'patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty'