

## Between “We” and “Mankind”: Kant’s Enlightenment of Fictionality

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John Bender’s “Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis” gives us something unexpected: a new historical argument about the rearrangement of novel and fiction in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It also shows us that the present world needs to form a new consensus concerning the definition of fictionality, one very different from that of two hundred years ago. I am enthusiastic about his new perspective concerning the relations between fictionality and reality, but some critical questions arise. I will try to answer these questions in this paper. In any case, the final sentence of his essay would seduce us into a debate over the meaning of fiction in the present world. He ends the essay with: “At least in the Western cultural system, are not fact and fiction, reality and verisimilitude, proposition and hypothesis, truth and narrative, inseparably bound functions of each other?” (21). So I shall first delineate Bender’s new meaning of fictionality, which acquires public consensus in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Then, I shall argue that Immanuel Kant, one of the Enlightenment’s most significant thinkers, has a unique attitude toward consensus. Bender’s consensus about fictionality is constructed on the basis of Kant’s “What Is Enlighten-

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<sup>1</sup> John Bender, “Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis,” *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998): 6-28. Subsequent references to this paper appear parenthetically.

ment?”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we must re-examine how Kant describes public consensus in his argument on the Enlightenment. Finally, I shall come back to Bender’s present question. I believe there is no “yes” or “no” answer. Our answers will be quite ambiguous, and a certain ambiguity is necessary for Bender’s version of Enlightenment debate.

## I

I shall begin with the basic concept of the eighteenth-century novel in Bender’s argument. As the title shows, the novels he deals with in his essay fall into the category “Enlightenment fiction.” What does that mean? From the start, Bender does not regard the eighteenth-century novel as “fiction.” His essay starts as follows:

The eighteenth-century novel was part of a cultural system that worked to validate Enlightenment canons of knowledge by dynamically linking the realms of science and fiction in the very process of setting them in opposition. In contemplating the historical particulars of this always mobile counterpoise, this essay focuses on a realignment that occurred around 1750, when the guarantee of factuality in science increasingly required the presence of its opposite, a manifest yet verisimilar fictionality in the novel. (6)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, trans. and ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 58-64. This essay was originally published as “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” in *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 4 (1784): 481-94.

<sup>3</sup> For the literary representation of “manifest fictionality,” see Bender, “Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis” 16-18. He takes Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* as an example of this overtly fic-

Although it is not clear who is "dynamically linking the realms of science and fiction," the eighteenth-century novel is "in the very process of setting them [the two realms] in opposition." First of all, we should not confuse "novel" with "fiction." Generally, novel is thought to be a kind of fiction. Yet, according to Bender, not until the nineteenth century have these terms been synonymous. He shows us later that "the term *novel* became synonymous in English with *fiction* in 1871" (21). Therefore, the eighteenth-century novel is not exactly a *fiction*, but rather a cultural practice that has given meaning to *fiction* itself. Then, if it was not the same as *fiction*, how can we define the eighteenth-century novel? To this question, Bender suggests we examine "a realignment that occurred around 1750, when the guarantee of factuality in science increasingly required the presence of its opposite, a manifest yet verisimilar fictionality in the novel." The mid-century novel is here defined by its "fictionality" which is opposed to scientific "factuality." Novel is not to be defined by itself, but by its opposite, factual science. The process of establishing the scientific factuality, therefore, demands the fictionality of novel in the eighteenth century. Of course, this fictionality is not the same as that of nineteenth-century *fiction*, either. Thus, Bender uses the term "Enlightenment fiction" to designate the eighteenth-century novel.

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tional narrative, and points out the separation of science from literary fictionality. On the relations of novel and law in the eighteenth-century England, see Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987). See also Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992). For the recent discussion on the topic of fact/fiction, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).

It is clear that we have to examine the status of factuality in the realm of science in order to discuss the Enlightenment fiction.<sup>4</sup> This examination leads us to the novelistic fictionality of this period. However, is it possible for us to define the meaning of eighteenth-century versions of science? Although Bender tries to define science, we can never possess a clear definition of this term.<sup>5</sup> The point is, as his whole project shows, the definition of science as well as fiction will be constructed around their interactions. We cannot make use of the distinction between factuality and fictionality or the difference between science and novel in the ordinary sense. All we have at hand is a variety of half-scientific and half-fictional discourse. How can we find in it the future separation of science and fiction? The only way for us to take is the examination of an affinity of science and novel of the Enlightenment. And, then, it must be expecting the new distinction. Thus, it is not a difference but an affinity that makes us realize a *difference* between science and fiction.

What affinity do we find in science and novel? Why can these two systems of knowledge be closely related in the Enlightenment? To answer these questions, let us follow Bender's argument for a while. According to Bender, we see the affinity indicate the general trends of the Enlightenment.

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<sup>4</sup> For the historical account of scientific factuality in the Enlightenment, see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) and his *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis" 22. He uses the term *science* as "natural science" in the customary sense.

The eighteenth-century trends described here need to be understood as elements in a set of long-term transactions concerning the maintenance and ownership of impartial discourse, because public exchange aiming toward consensus was the medium that enabled the modern sense of objectivity and constructed and stabilized its terminologies. (6)

Here we notice that both science and novel share the common aim to get "the modern sense of objectivity" in their practices. As Bender suggests, this objectiveness can be detected through many novelistic discourses in the eighteenth century: for example, the "editorial objectivity" in Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, or the "narratorial objectivity" of Henry Fielding's novels (8). Then, it is quite reasonable to think that these novelistic practices are closely related to the scientific ones, in which a certain kind of objectiveness is required for observation, experimentation, and demonstration. Therefore, we should pay attention to the interrelations of science and novel in the Enlightenment. Given the same goal for our practices, we can redefine the apparent difference in a new way. The affinity of these two systems, therefore, shows us the importance of objectivity throughout the eighteenth century.

We notice here that it is quite difficult to obtain this objectivity. As we know, what is objective is not a matter of fact, but rather an instable and changeable reference point. All we can say is that objectivity is historically enabled and constructed through the public exchange of ideas. Even if the objectivity is the common aim for science and novel, these two domains of knowledge would never reach their goal. The "long-term transactions" in the above passage suggest the possibility of endless interactions of science and novel, and the impossibility of defining the objectivity by one discipline. In this sense, Bender's project is involved in current debates over objectivity: his essay itself is participating in the

“long-term” discussion on the status of discourse. Why, then, have people exchanged their ideas about this matter for such a long time? We should know the background of this debate. Following Jürgen Habermas’s theory of public sphere, Bender points to the active public communication taking place in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> But public coffee house science and emergent print culture are not the focus of his argument. As Bender clearly writes, the debate settled is one “concerning the maintenance and ownership of impartial discourse”: people were interested in possessing this impartial discourse. I have already mentioned the impossibility of acquiring universal objectivity. What of the impartial discourse? If it aims at ultimate objectivity, that may be impossible. Why does the modern sense of objectivity attract such interest? Because we can never possess it. We feel we can have an objective point of view. In other words, the objective point of view, which is produced by public interactions, gives us an expectation to attain the impossible.

The nature of public consensus is also not a permanent doctrine of knowledge acknowledged by all of us, but a temporary constructed opinion among people. It is indeed, as Bender writes, an “essential yet mobile reference point” that makes us ambivalent toward the truthfulness of knowledge (7). The point is not holding to a principle of knowledge, but to a principle devoted to interactions of knowledge. Only through the interrelations can we progress toward future consensus. In this

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<sup>6</sup> See Bender, “Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis” 7. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1991) 27-56.

sense, any consensus about fiction/fact, verisimilitude/reality, hypothesis/proposition is subject to a deconstruction. Consensus as a reference point is always unstable, always already constructing a new agreement.

Once we acknowledge the transitional nature of consensus, the focus turns to the method of interaction. Instead of asking what the consensus was in the Enlightenment, we are required to ask, "How does the temporary agreement producing the next consensus through interactions between science and novel come about?" Bender regards the "progressive improvement of knowledge" as the main purpose of public communication (7). That means, people communicate as part of the progress of knowledge by referring to a temporary consensus. The very moment we agree on a definition of objectivity, both science and novel have already proceeded much farther. Thus we can say that one of the characteristics of the Enlightenment is its swiftness of movement.

Although it is important to measure how quickly the "progressive improvement" has been made in the Enlightenment, we may stop here to consider the nature of the Enlightenment as a process. Following Bender's argument, we can draw a line around the mid-century status of science and novel: a moment of the *realignment* of factuality and fictionality between two disciplines. Then, the "manifest fictionality" in novelistic discourse turns out to be produced by and to be producing scientific factuality. This process leads to the decisive separation of the two areas of knowledge in the future. And we are surprised to see how fast public consensus on fictionality changes. In fact, people have a completely different stance toward science and novel in fewer than fifty years. But is this shift really progress? In what sense can we make a progress of our knowledge? If mankind has progressed in the last two centuries, what meaning does its progress have for our present life? I

believe it is worth trying to answer these questions. My following project neither begins nor ends with science and with novel.<sup>7</sup> For, according to Bender, the progressiveness of the Enlightenment culminates in Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" Since Kant's essay presents the importance of modern consensus aiming at progressive improvement, we can get some clues to the question. What it follows is an attempt to participate in the discussion over fictionality with regard to a public progress during the Enlightenment.

## II

First of all, I will discuss an approach to Kant's version of the Enlightenment. If the Enlightenment represents a past intellectual movement in philosophy, science, religion, and literature, his essay "What Is Enlightenment?" might be also regarded as a writing of the past. He wrote this essay almost two centuries ago, and, at that time, he was one of the respondents to the Berlin newspaper's article of the same question. As we know, this question was a contemporary topic for discussion. A

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<sup>7</sup> Bender starts his analysis of fictionality by comparing Newton and Defoe. Following his explanation, we can recognize "a certain denial of fictionality" as an affinity of science and novel in the early part of the century (10). He argues that the common denial comes from the contemporary reaction to narrative in general: "In both cases, narration symptomizes the disease of fictionality. Narration bears with it the infection of fictionality" (11-12). Since the fictional is regarded as a kind of epidemic disease, we may think of the interactions between two disciplines to be an attempt to prevent the social crisis. In this sense, the following citation is important to redefine the later separation of science and novel: "Yet in the emergent discipline of science, hypotheses, which were central to the experimental method, had to be vaccinated against fictionality" (15).

lot of responses to the question came from diverse men of the time.<sup>8</sup> Despite the simplicity of the question, it turned out to be quite difficult to get a consensus on the meaning of the subject. There could be found no decisive answer. As we shall see later, the question concerning the definition of a word never leads to a single answer. Indeed all we can see here are diverse meanings of "Enlightenment." The difficulty of defining the term, however, suggests an entertaining aspect of the discussion: people of the late eighteenth century might *enjoy* seeing such a debate take place on the newspaper. They might not necessarily be pessimistic without a solution. How about us? I believe people living in the present world still participate in, and enjoy, this debate. If so, was the Enlightenment *really* a completed movement in the past? It seems to me that we share in the enjoyment of the Enlightenment debate.

While the Enlightenment is often regarded as a historical epoch, no one could put it on the chronological table of Western history. In fact we see the duration of the movement even in the present day. It does not mean that there are no Enlightenment features characteristic of the eighteenth century. It just means that we never get any definite solution to the question which Kant tries to answer, while talking about it for a long time. Can we stop the discussion? With regard to Kant's inability to answer the question, Michel Foucault writes as follows:

A minor text, perhaps. But it seems to me that it marks the discreet entrance into the history of thought of a question that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering, but that it has never managed to get rid of, either. And one that has been repeated in various forms for two

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<sup>8</sup> For other respondents, see Schmidt, *What Is Enlightenment?* 1-44.

centuries now. From Hegel through Nietzsche or Max Weber to Horkheimer or Habermas, hardly any philosophy has failed to confront this same question, directly or indirectly. What, then, is this event that is called the *Aufklärung* and that has determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today?<sup>9</sup>

Foucault shows us the ambivalent nature of modern philosophy toward the Enlightenment. On the one hand, modern philosophers are conscious of their inability to solve the “what” question. Having reached no end point in the discussion, we could say that this endlessness was anticipated from the start. So it might seem nonsense to tackle an impossible task. On the other hand, instead of getting rid of the task, modern philosophers continue to go back to Kant: his text challenges them again and again. After all, just attempting a solution acknowledges the significance of the question itself. Therefore, they seek and reject an answer to the same question. It is in the ambivalence of modern philosophy that we can discern the modernity of Kant’s Enlightenment. But why is his text always new to us? Why can we enjoy Kant’s approach to the question of “Enlightenment”?

The newness, that we never tire seeking, of Kant’s Enlightenment lies in his attitude toward the question. As we know, Kant was thinking about the contemporary characteristics of the Enlightenment. In other

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” trans. Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 32. See, for a broader discussion on Foucault’s Enlightenment, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, “What Is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on ‘What Is Enlightenment?’” *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 109-21 and Christopher Norris, “‘What is enlightenment?’: Kant according to Foucault.” *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994) 159-96.

words, his task was to define a present-tense situation. His unique attitude toward the present causes the following generations to talk about the Enlightenment as if this movement were still going on. Without Kant’s reflection on the present, Foucault could not write his essay “What Is Enlightenment?”<sup>10</sup> Foucault’s essay has the same title as Kant’s. Some might say that Foucault has just made use of Kant’s text for his own argument, and that it is only from his contemporary point of view that he writes his essay on Enlightenment. Why does Foucault choose the same title? This repetition suggests his strong involvement in the Enlightenment and in Kant’s own version of the same question. Kant’s essay demands that people take a reflexive attitude toward the present. When Foucault writes *Discipline and Punish*, he writes as follows:

I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.<sup>11</sup>

An alternative title for Foucault’s essay could be “What is the Present?” As we have already seen, after mentioning some modern philosopher’s ambivalence, Foucault rewrites the original question as follows: “What, then, is this event that is called the *Aufklärung* and that has determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today?”<sup>12</sup> I

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<sup>10</sup> See Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present.” *Foucault: A Critical Reader* 103-8.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) 30-31.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” 32.

believe both Kant and Foucault are attracted to this same task of defining the present. The problem raised here is about the status of self in the present. Foucault shows us that the Enlightenment is always a historically present determinant of ourselves.

I have emphasized Kant's modernity for the present philosophy. Yet we must not take Kant's attitude as a way of seeing the Enlightenment as a totality. The debate over the meaning of the Enlightenment will continue, but this does not mean that the Enlightenment is a transcendental movement in history. There may be something eternal in this world. But if we regard the Enlightenment as a universal movement, we will miss its and our temporality. As Foucault points out, the Enlightenment has determined what we are for the last two centuries. But who or what has enabled the Enlightenment to determine who we are? The hypothesis I would like to propose here is that "we" try to determine ourselves through the Enlightenment at every single moment of time. And if we have made it determine ourselves, our temporal state of being must be always affecting the Enlightenment. As with the case of objectivity in Bender's argument, temporal consensus has been producing a new condition in the movement.<sup>13</sup> Now, with this view of the Enlightenment debate, we recognize a point of departure: the relationship of what we are and how we make the Enlightenment determine ourselves.

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<sup>13</sup> See my note 7. We should notice that the temporal consensus is always full of contradictions. As Bender's usage of the word "vaccinated" implies, we cannot be in a germ-free condition. Therefore, in the case of Newton, we discern his ambivalent attitude toward the fictional hypothesis: "Despite Newton's late theoretical declarations, his attitude toward hypothesis turns out to have been remarkably unstable across his career" (12).

## III

Now, let us look at Kant’s way of defining the Enlightenment. Here, following Foucault’s view of history, let us suppose that we are now in the Enlightenment. Although no definitive meaning of the Enlightenment is yet available, we can position ourselves in this ongoing movement—even if only through a mere reader’s identification with fictional characters.<sup>14</sup> How does Kant make the Enlightenment determine what we are? In the first sentence of the essay, Kant writes: “*Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity.*”<sup>15</sup> We are shown that the Enlightenment is the place in which we find ourselves. An “exit” usually means a door or a space through which we can leave a place. By definition, then, we are thought to stand at the door of the Enlightenment. What shall we do? With our “immaturity” behind us, we wonder if we have already grown up. Maybe if we step out of or through the door, we will enter “maturity.” But at the very moment we are in the Enlightenment, we cannot fix our state of being. We are neither in adulthood, nor in childhood. We are in the Enlightenment. Therefore, by using the word “exit” to define the Enlightenment, Kant makes our status ambivalent.

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<sup>14</sup> On the reader’s position as a subject of statement, see Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 113-38 and his *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 92-96.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” 58. The original sentence is “*Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit.*” H.B. Nisbet translates this sentence as follows: “*Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970) 54.

Adults or children? To be sure, Kant demands that our present status should be measured by degrees of maturity. He introduces the difference between child and adult. However, the child/adult scale we are given is not useful for determining what we really are. What shall we do again? One possible way for solving a dilemma is “*Sapere aude!*” (“Dare to know”), that is a motto of the Enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> But how can we have the courage? And even if we should have the courage to step outside, there is no guarantee that we will get there.

“Exit” also means the act of leaving a place. This time we can see a more dynamic aspect of the Enlightenment. In this case, we are not seen to stop at the way out, but rather are trying to leave a state of immaturity. The Enlightenment is, therefore, regarded as a process, not an inert standpoint. Indeed Kant writes: “If it is asked ‘Do we now live in an *enlightened* age?’ the answer is ‘No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*.’”<sup>17</sup> The Enlightenment as a process offers us a positive view of the future. But at the same time, we are made conscious of our present half-immature state. Of course, we cannot say we are completely childish. If so, Kant would write the first sentence like this: “Enlightenment is mankind’s self-incurred immaturity from which it exits.” Therefore, even if we put stress on the proceeding act of an “exit,” we are still immature adults.

What are we doing now? We are trying to determine ourselves through the definition of the Enlightenment. After all, the child/adult opposition, which Kant believes the Enlightenment introduces to us, leads to our ambiguous state of being. It seems to me that Kant at once

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<sup>16</sup> Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” 58.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” 62.

desires and refuses to put us into a fixed position. I would like to think about this ambivalent nature of Kant's Enlightenment.

About Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as an "exit," Foucault writes as follows: "We must also note that this way out is presented by Kant in a rather ambiguous manner. He characterizes it as a phenomenon, an ongoing process; but he also presents it as a task and an obligation."<sup>18</sup> We notice that Foucault is concerned with Kant's ambiguity, which is based on the opposition of process/obligation. Now we may say that the ambivalence of Kant's Enlightenment is derived from his sense of an "exit": its implied multiple meanings put the Enlightenment in a state of suspense. But we must also notice that this ambiguity does not keep us from moving on to the next stage. Can anyone stay in one place? And Kant does not allow us to put ourselves in a fixed position. Thus we should continue to define ourselves in a different way. An "exit" is still our starting point for discussion.

When Kant uses that ambiguous word for the definition, he also brings about important changes in the concept of the Enlightenment. His ambiguous attitude toward the Enlightenment is not only limited to "exit." Other words that we use to explain "exit" are open to various interpretations. We can see ambiguities in words such as "space," "process," "phenomenon," and "task." Foucault highlights Kant's ambiguous use of "exit" when he defines that word as "phenomenon." "Phenomenon" means not only the appearance of an object to one's mind as opposed to its existence in and of itself, but it also takes on the social, legal, and moral requirement implied by the word "exit." A phenomenon

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" 35.

comes to be regarded as an obligation. In this sense, an “exit” makes a new connection between “process” and “obligation.” Through an “exit,” therefore, we are given a new direction for the purpose of defining ourselves: this change of direction enables us to think about what we are in an ambiguous process of the Enlightenment.

As we have seen, Kant insists that we do not live in an “*enlightened* age.” We are now in the process of Enlightenment. Now that we realize how Kant introduces the ambiguous nature of “exit,” we may easily guess his ambivalent attitude toward this process. A “process” is not merely a series of natural developments nor an event producing gradual changes. On the contrary, process is always realized through differences: certain changes produce a process. It is generally said that an aging process makes us old. But what are the signs of the aging process in our body? First, we notice changes of skin or hair. When we talk about the learning process of our children, we recognize changes in speech and comprehension. In the case of the Enlightenment, a “process” seems to bring about some tangible differences in ourselves. Yet a “process” requires some difference with which to define itself. Without changes, a “process” will not inform us. Thus it is a difference that produces the Enlightenment as a process, not the reverse.

Now we begin to realize how important it is for us to introduce the difference which determines the nature of the Enlightenment as a process. The point is what difference we want to see in ourselves, not how we adjust ourselves in a general process of development. In this way, the first sentence of Kant’s essay has attracted many people’s interests. He insists that the Enlightenment must not be regarded simply as a general process affecting all of us. It now appears as each individual’s task. Let us now reflect on our individual interest in the Enlightenment.

Unfortunately, we cannot easily carry out this task. Although it is important for us to introduce our own measurement of differences, we are now living, by definition, in Kant's Enlightenment. We are defined as the readers of Kant's essay, not as the author of "What Is Enlightenment?" More precisely, we are the readers who identify ourselves as fictional "mankind" in his story. Some may say at once that we would go out of this fictional identification and that we should tackle a really urgent task, like other modern philosophers. Yet it seems to me that it is worth remaining in this idea of Enlightenment. There are several reasons. First, our main purpose is to examine Kant's way of making the Enlightenment determine what we are. Following Foucault's argument, Kant's Enlightenment is still affecting our ambiguous state of being. Therefore, we should know the extent of Kant's influence over the definition of the self today. Second, whenever we propose a new measurement, we are required to explain its importance for our life. To get out of Kant's ambiguity means to take another ambivalent attitude toward the Enlightenment. This latter ambivalence, therefore, should clearly answer the following question: in what sense is it more useful for us than Kant's present ambiguity? Indeed, Kant's Enlightenment enables us to introduce a new division in ourselves. But every time we try to do so, we have to go back to Kant and to reflect on our own ambivalence in terms of Kant's individual task. Lastly, it is quite obvious that "we" are needed for Kant. His attempt to define the Enlightenment is impossible without introducing "we" in his argument, whether we are merely the objects of his analysis or the powerful agents of his writings. Thus, I think that we should stay here in his essay, so that we may see Kant's attempt to define the state of self in the Enlightenment.

To sum up: I am suggesting that "we" remain in ambiguity in the

Enlightenment. Our ambiguity comes from the fact that we cannot be determined by any difference; even if it is necessary to introduce temporal differences in ourselves. “We” need differences in order to know what we are, but we can never fix ourselves in any single term of opposition. Instead, as we have seen, the differences that Kant brings into the discussion put us in the process of changing. And, as long as we are ambiguous, we can “live in an age of *enlightenment*.” We have also seen that ambiguity makes a new connection of one word with the other. This connection seems to be strange at first sight, but is inevitable as long as we are in the process of the Enlightenment. Thus ambiguity keeps producing a new difference in itself. What new difference can we find in ourselves?

#### IV

In what follows, I shall examine how Kant introduces us into the Enlightenment. The problem now concerns the definition of “self” in Kant’s essay. If we look at the first sentence again, “we” are taken to mean “mankind.” There would seem nothing new about this observation. Kant insists that we are, as members of “mankind,” essential subjects for the Enlightenment. Yet why does Kant use the word “mankind’s” instead of “our” in this sentence? Is the Enlightenment our exit, too? It seems to me that there is something to this ordinary association of “we” with mankind. I wonder if it is not a matter of fact to identify us with the general category of human beings. As in the case of “exit,” it is reasonable to think that mankind has a certain ambiguity in itself. Moreover, the ambiguity it implies would connect us with the movement in a unique sense. Then, I would like to see the relations of “we” and “mankind,” in both of which Kant is involved.

Mankind is a complex designation for us despite its appearance of simplicity. First, let us think about the possibility of mankind's development in the Enlightenment. In the first sentence, Kant suggests that mankind is moving out of its immature state. Here I do not ask again whether mankind has already done this task. As we know, the answer is always ambiguous. Instead, I want to raise another question: Is there any possibility for mankind to get out of its immaturity? Is it *really* possible? Kant would say yes. If it is impossible, it would be nonsense to make the distinction between immaturity and maturity. However ambiguous it might be, a prospect of the development is required for a reader's enjoyment. In this sense, we start reading the essay on the assumption that mankind will eventually pass through immaturity.

Is the Enlightenment our exit? To this question, Kant might say yes, again. Indeed, it is easy and quite natural to think that we are mankind. We are often employed for the indefinite use, in which the word refers to people in general, perhaps all human beings. As generally accepted, mankind means all human beings although it is used as a singular noun. So, in most cases, we may not have trouble substituting "we" for "mankind." For example, when we heard Armstrong say, "one giant leap for mankind," we felt his small step was really an amazing advance for all of us. Since "we" are interchangeable with "mankind," it may be said that we are now getting out of our immaturity.

Why "mankind"? Here we must take a look at the differences between "we" and "mankind." "Mankind" is relatively abstract, critical, and universal; the word "we" sounds more physical, familiar, and temporal. So it is a little strange if someone says, "Mankind often has curious dreams at night." Mankind can be intelligible to the extent that it is used in the critical discourse. Kant's use of mankind in the essay, therefore,

suggests that he wants to talk about ongoing process of mankind as a critical category. In addition to this nuance, we notice there is another difference in the grammatical usage of these words. Mankind takes the third-person perspective, while we the first-person one. As we know, the third-person perspective has acquired its importance for creating the impersonal discourse throughout the eighteenth century. We may take many examples from the various kinds of discourse to show its significance.<sup>19</sup> What, then, does this difference of perspective suggest? Kant's preference for the word "mankind" suggests that the first-person perspective is less appropriate for his subject of the Enlightenment. The third-person perspective implies the critical impersonality of the movement. Thus, Kant makes the rational choice for "mankind" to establish the objective "subject" of the Enlightenment.

So far, I have discussed how the first-person "we" defines a category of mankind. We become the third-person character of Kant's essay. This character is also the subject of the Enlightenment. The point is knowing that a difference exists between these words: mankind is an abstract, impersonal, and objective category of human beings, while "we" have a subjective perspective even when suggesting an indefinite use. We must not blur the difference. Yet soon emerges the similarity. There is an interchangeability between the two words, so that we can easily identify ourselves with the critical term of mankind. It is as if a "mankind" were living in the real world. Thus, we are defined both as a subject of its development and as a possibly progressing object in Kant's analysis. We are doubled as an objective subject in the Enlightenment.

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<sup>19</sup> See Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary* 43-198.

That's why we often think the ambiguity of development to be in ourselves: we see ourselves as immature adults.

Here again, let us look at the interchangeability of the two words. Why is it strange to say mankind dreams at night? I have already mentioned that the exchangeability of "we" and "mankind" does not mean both are exactly the same. The concepts are insufficiently compatible. Why? I think one reason is that we are quite accustomed to substituting a first-person standpoint for the third-person one. We hardly imagine the reverse is natural. This has something to do with the reader's shift of perspective in reading novels. When we read a novel, we can easily assume the character's point of view: "If I were in his/her position. . . ." No matter how complex it may be to explain this psychological process, we as readers can take a third-person perspective. Now, think about the character's shift of perspective. Can the fictional characters assume our reader's viewpoint? Within a story, this sort of substitution never happens. Therefore, it makes little sense to say, "If Crusoe were in my position, he would rewrite this sentence." Instead, we often say something like this: "If I were Crusoe, I would not bandy words." The excessive balance of one shift over the other can be regarded as an implicit premise of Kant's argument. By making use of our self-identification, Kant defines us as the main character of his story.

All these things make it clear that mankind is an appropriate subject of the Enlightenment. For Kant, it is enough to draw us into his discussion. And we can enjoy reading about the possibility of our own development. However, if, as I have emphasized, there are crucial differences between "we" and "mankind," his story of our improvement should contain some contradictions. Sooner or later, we won't be able to accept the usual equation of mankind and ourselves. In fact, the priority of the

first-person shift into the fictional one leads to producing an ambiguity for “mankind.” The very moment we regard mankind as ourselves in an ordinary way, the concept of mankind transforms itself: “mankind” becomes an ambiguous word.

Generally, mankind means all human beings living in this world. If really so, mankind’s development is equivalent to everybody’s improvement. At least, it’s development is based on the fact that each of us changes into an adult. Without a minimal change of the elements, mankind is not be able to develop. Yet, Kant denies this sort of individual improvement. Kant says as follows:

It is thus difficult for any individual man to work himself out of an immaturity that has become almost natural to him. He has become fond of it and, for the present, is truly incapable of making use of his own reason, because he has never been permitted to make the attempt. . . . Hence there are only a few who have managed to free themselves from immaturity through the exercise of their own minds, and yet proceed confidently.<sup>20</sup>

Here we find Kant’s negative attitude toward individual improvement. Of course, he says that “only a few” can manage to “free themselves from immaturity.” How many people can get out of their immature state? One, two, or three? We do not find an answer to the question. Instead, in the next paragraph, we see him saying, “But that a public [*Publikum*] should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, it is nearly inevitable, if only it is granted freedom.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly, Kant’s mankind does not refer to

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<sup>20</sup> Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” 59.

ourselves in the ordinary sense, but to "a public," another abstract category of human beings. In short, the development of mankind does not presuppose any individual improvement. The Enlightenment does not mean improvement for one or a few, much less all. Thus comes another interesting meaning of mankind: nobody.<sup>22</sup>

What, then, is mankind's exit? A group of people, everyone, is a familiar and accepted meaning of mankind. No one is another new meaning Kant introduces in this essay. Now the latter definition of the word can refer only to itself. In fact, Kant stresses this self-reflexivity in the first sentence: "*Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity.*" Who is responsible for immaturity? It is none of us who incurs the liability, but mankind itself. Strictly speaking, therefore, the Enlightenment is an exit for a linguistic element of mankind. In this way, Kant brings a contradictory definition of mankind into his discussion. Everybody's development becomes paradoxically nobody's. We may see here his deeply ambivalent attitude: he would not be able to define mankind in a single sense.

How does he solve this dilemma? After all, he makes use of our self-identification for the solution. We can always move around anywhere in his story. The range of "our" perspective must be enormous: from zero to almost infinite. That's why we can assume nobody's

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<sup>21</sup> Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" 59. Habermas writes, "In Great Britain, from the middle of the seventeenth century on, there was talk of 'public,' whereas until then 'world' or 'mankind' was usual" in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 26.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Gallagher points out the importance of "nobody's" novel in the eighteenth century in her *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 162-74.

improvement as well as everybody's in this narrative. And that's why we, the temporal and subjective beings, are essential to his essay. People in the eighteenth-century might have enjoyed reading this story. They could see their potential of improvement in a unique way. It can be said that Kant shows us a way of making probable what seems to be impossible.

The contradictory meanings of mankind makes us notice that we are all and, at the same time, none. That is, we are extremely divided from the start. Here we must also notice that it is nonsense to ask which way of defining our "self" is better or worse. We really need these two poles of self-identification, at least for our enjoyment of reading Kant's story.

So far I have been discussing our status in the Enlightenment. The task is to know what we are in the present. For this purpose, my discussion presupposes that we are mankind. As we have seen, for accepting this equation, we need a self-identification with mankind. However, in the end, we reach a completely ambivalent state of being. The reason for the ambivalence is simple: mankind can be intelligible only when we take its position. This limit of intelligibility is quite important: without a clear definition of "we," mankind cannot have any definite meaning. Why do we presuppose ourselves as mankind in Kant's essay? Because we want to see what we are in the Enlightenment. Therefore, here we have a circulation of discussion. Can we stop the discussion? Absolutely not. For Kant's essay insists that mankind never defines itself in a single way, but that we are able to have diverse meanings for ourselves. Thus, instead of showing what we are, Kant presents us with multiple positions that we can take in the Enlightenment narrative. Are we mankind? No, if one means by that all of us. Yes, if one means none of us, too.

## V

In conclusion, we cannot realize what we are doing from our present point of view. That's why the fictional has been important for our life.<sup>23</sup> If we are to know our state of being today, we really need the third-person perspective provided by fiction. In this sense, Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" offers us another "manifest fictionality" of the subject. Now we are ready to consider the relationship between the fictional and the real. So far, I have merely mentioned the character's effect on the present world in which we are living. How can the fictional self be realized? What relations should be developed between the fictional and the real? Along with this discussion, I think we have to explore the possibility of embodying the fictional self in a diverse way.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps some might object: "Along with your discussion, the distinction between fictionality and reality is nonsense. For you claim that we can be defined only in the fictional world." It is true that we need the fictional identification for knowing our "self." Yet, I have not insisted that everything is fictional. In fact, we are not totally fictional beings. If everything were fictional, we wouldn't have to make the distinctions as fact/fiction, reality/verisimilitude, or truth/narrative. In fact, we have needed these distinctions for a long time. What I have tried to say is that the fictional self can be modified from nothing to all. As we have seen, there is a wide-range of the third-person perspective, by which the fictional self is given an ability

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<sup>23</sup> For the discussion of the fictional self, see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> On the plurality of the subject, see Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 36-50.

to change freely. Then, why do we still assume a single form of “we”? Indeed, we have not been used to exiting from the fictional world in multiple ways. It may be difficult to bring completely different selves into ourselves. But it is never impossible. For the “exit” is always here: “*Sapere aude!*” Thus, I believe it important to consider the multiple possibilities emerging from fictional subject. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the interrelations between two worlds in detail. So, lastly, I would like instead to point out a few problems that arise when we continue this discussion.

Bender focuses on the “manifest fictionality” in the mid-century’s novelistic discourse. The affinities or interactions of science and novel could be discerned through this fictionality. Following Bender’s argument, this “manifest fictionality” of Enlightenment fiction turns out to be produced by and to be producing the scientific factuality. Science has increased its manifest factuality as novels became *fiction* in the nineteenth-century sense: the two areas of knowledge would be apparently separate.<sup>25</sup> In my discussion, Kant’s manifestation of fictionality suggests the difference between the individual in reality and the self as mankind. This difference makes us recognize that if the fictional self can be changed in a diverse way, we as individuals would become multiple, too. What relations are there between two versions of manifest fictionality? While the novel becomes more and more *fictional*, could individuals be embodied in multiple ways? I feel the inverse proportion

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<sup>25</sup> Bender points out the important effect of mid-century novelistic discourse on science: “the move toward verisimilar yet ‘possible’ fiction that occurred with Lennox, Sterne, and Walpole participated . . . in a turn toward the more imaginative or speculative variant of ‘truth’ advocated by Diderot and Buffon” (20).

here. For we are still "we" in most cases. Therefore, we should rethink the interrelations between the scientific and the fictional reality from Kant's point of view.

As we have seen, one public consensus always needs another. Bender's realignment of novel and science clearly suggests the endlessness of this movement. If so, after the nineteenth century, the equation of novel with *fiction* should find universal agreement. Consensus, in Kant's essay, could be interpreted as nobody's agreement. Of course, most of us wouldn't see it an appropriate definition of public consensus. Where would the power of effacing nobody come from? The discussion of the temporal definition of objectivity requires an explanation of the process of the disappearance of *fictional* self.

Some people may still think it unimportant to discuss the relations between fiction and reality. They insist that any differences are to be deconstructed after all. As we have seen, objectivity or progress cannot be reduced to single person's possession. But what is important for us is to enjoy the impossible task. To embody the fictional self must be also interesting. How can we enjoy this impossibility? In this paper, I have just mentioned Foucault's argument on Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" But without his strong interest in history of a self, I would not imagine my own singular state of being. We have now two interesting version of "What Is Enlightenment?" So in order to explore the possibilities of embodying the fictional self, we should examine their debate over what is the present in many ways. Even if it might be regarded as a fictional debate for the time being. When Kant wrote "What Is Enlightenment?" more than two centuries ago, he showed us that the modern subject was fictionally constructed: a real individual could not be a fictional subject. At that time, I believe, he could imagine the following reaction to his

essay. How does Kant reply to the following response to the same question, “What Is Enlightenment?”

Thus Enlightenment must be considered both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally. Men are at once elements and agents of a single process. They may be actors in the process to the extent that they participate in it; and the process occurs to the extent that men decide to be its voluntary actors.<sup>26</sup>

If we are to live as actors, does our reality become more manifest? Or is it still fictional? Now I don't get any clear response from Kant, but, through the attempt to find it, we can enjoy our performances in Kant's essay. At least, Bender's question about fictionality requires us to provide our various answers. How can we enjoy our performances in the Enlightenment? That must produce a new consensus, one that speaks to our current project here.

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<sup>26</sup> Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” 35.