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FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

While recovering from my illness, I had a chance to catch up on some reading I had wanted to do for a long time. Opening one interesting book, I almost leaped out of bed. I read some statements which shocked me much more profoundly than any of today's pronouncements in the news magazines or on the Op-Ed page of The New York Times. I had been reporting on some of those journalistic writings occasionally, as a warning against the kinds of intellectual dangers (and booby traps) they represented. But they looked like cheap little graffiti compared to the sweep of wholesale destruction presented in a few sentences of that book.

Just as, at the end of Atlas Shrugged, Francisco saw a radiant future contained in a few words, so I saw the long, dismal, slithering disintegration of the twentieth century held implicitly in a few sentences. I wanted to scream a warning, but it was too late: that book had been published in 1898. Written by Friedrich Paulsen, it is entitled Immanuel Kant: His Life and Doctrine.

Professor Paulsen is a devoted Kantian; but, judging by his style of writing, he is an honest commentator - in the sense that he does not try to disguise what he is saying: "There are three attitudes of the mind towards reality which lay claim to truth, - Religion, Philosophy, and Science....In general, philosophy occupies an intermediate place between science and religion....The history of philosophy shows that its task consists simply in mediating between science and religion. It seeks to unite knowledge and faith, and in this way to restore the unity of the mental life....As in the case of the individual, it mediates between the head and the heart, so in society it prevents science and religion from becoming entirely strange and indifferent to each other, and hinders also the mental life of the people from being split up into a faith-hating science and a science-hating faith or superstition." (New York, Ungar, 1963, pp. 1-2.)

This means that science and mystic fantasies are equally valid as methods of gaining knowledge; that reason and feelings - the worst kinds of feelings: fear, cowardice, self-abnegation - have equal value as tools of cognition; and that philosophy, "the love of wisdom," is a contemptible middle-of-the-roader whose task is to seek a compromise - a détente - between truth and falsehood.

Professor Paulsen's statement is an accurate presentation of Kant's attitude, but it is not Kant that shocked me, it is Paulsen. Philosophic system-builders, such as Kant, set the trends of a nation's culture (for good or evil), but it is the average practitioners who serve as a barometer of a trend's success or failure. What shocked me was the fact that a modest commentator would start his book with a statement of that kind. I thought (no, hoped) that in the nineteenth century a man upholding the cognitive pretensions of religion to an equal footing with science, would have been laughed off any serious lectern. I was mistaken. Here was Professor Paulsen casually proclaiming - in the nineteenth century - that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology.

Existentially (i.e., in regard to conditions of living, scale of achievement, and rapidity of progress), the nineteenth century was the best in Western history. Philosophically, it was one of the worst. People thought they had entered an era of inexhaustible radiance; but it was merely the sunset of Aristotle's influence, which the philosophers were extinguishing. If you have felt an occasional touch of wistful envy at the thought that there was a time when men went to the opening of a new play, and what they saw was not Hair or Grease, but Cyrano de Bergerac, which opened in 1897 - take a wider look. I wish that, borrowing from Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris, someone had pointed to the Paulsen book, then to the play, and said: "This will kill that." But there was no such person.

I do not mean to imply that the Paulsen book had so fateful an influence; I am citing the book as a symptom, not a cause. The cause and the influence were Kant's. Paulsen merely demonstrates how thoroughly that malignancy had spread through Western culture at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The conflict between knowledge and faith, Paulsen explains, "has extended through the entire history of human thought" (p. 4) and Kant's great achievement, he claims, consisted in reconciling them. "...the critical [Kantian] philosophy solves the old problem of the relation of knowledge and faith. Kant is convinced that by properly fixing the limits of each he has succeeded in furnishing a basis for an honorable and enduring peace between them. Indeed, the significance and vitality of his philosophy will rest principally upon this....it is [his philosophy's] enduring merit to have drawn for the first time, with a firm hand and in clear outline, the dividing line between knowledge and faith. This gives to knowledge what belongs to it, - the entire world of phenomena for free investigation; it conserves, on the other hand, to faith its eternal right to the interpretation of life and of the world from the standpoint of value." (P. 6.)

This means that the ancient mind-body dichotomy - which the rise of science had been healing slowly, as men were learning how to live on earth - was revived by Kant, and man was split in two, not with old daggers, but with a meat-ax. It means that Kant gave to science the entire material world (which, however, was to be regarded as unreal), and left ("conserved") one thing to faith: morality. If you are not entirely certain of which side would win in a division of that kind, look around you today.

Material objects as such have neither value nor disvalue; they acquire value-significance only in regard to a living being - particularly, in regard to serving or hindering man's goals. Man's goals and values are determined by his moral code. The Kantian division allows man's reason to conquer the material world, but eliminates reason from the choice of the goals for which material achievements are to be used. Man's goals, actions, choices and values - according to Kant - are to be determined irrationally, i.e., by faith.

In fact, man needs morality in order to discover the right way to live on earth. In Kant's system, morality is severed from any concern with man's existence. In fact, man's every problem, goal or desire involves the material world. In Kant's system, morality has nothing to do with this world, nor with reason, nor with science, but comes - via feelings - from another, unknowable, "noumenal" dimension.

If you share the error prevalent among modern businessmen, and tend to believe that nonsense such as Kant's is merely a verbal pastime for mentally unemployed academicians, that it is too preposterous to be of any practical consequence - look again at the opening quotation from Professor Paulsen's book. Yes, it is nonsense and vicious nonsense - but, by grace of the above attitude, it has conquered the world.

There is more than one way of accepting and spreading a philosophic theory. The

guiltiest group, which has contributed the most to the victory of Kantianism, is the group that professes to despise it: the scientists. Adopting one variant or another of Logical Positivism (a Kantian offshoot), they rejected Kant's noumenal dimension, but agreed that the material world is unreal, that reality is unknowable, and that science does not deal with facts, but with constructs. They rejected any concern with morality, agreeing that morality is beyond the power of reason or science and must be surrendered to subjective whims.

Now observe the breach between the physical sciences and the humanities. Although the progress of theoretical science is slowing down (by reason of a flawed epistemology, among other things), the momentum of the Aristotelian past is so great that science is still moving forward, while the humanities are bankrupt. Spatially, science is reaching beyond the solar system - while, temporally, the humanities are sliding back into the primeval ooze. Science is landing men on the moon and monitoring radio emissions from other galaxies - while astrology is the growing fashion here on earth; while courses in astrology and black magic are given in colleges; while horoscopes are sent galloping over the airwaves of a great scientific achievement, television.

Scientists are willing to produce nuclear weapons for the thugs who rule Soviet Russia - just as they were willing to produce military rockets for the thugs who ruled Nazi Germany. There was a story in the press that during the first test of an atom bomb in New Mexico, Robert Oppenheimer, head of the Los Alamos group who had produced the bomb, carried a four-leaf clover in his pocket. More recently, there was the story of Edgar Mitchell, an astronaut who conducted ESP experiments on his way to the moon. There was the story of a space scientist who is a believer in occultism and black magic.

Such is the "honorable and enduring peace" between knowledge and faith, achieved by the Kantian philosophy.

Now what if one of those men gained political power and had to consider the question of whether to unleash a nuclear war? As a Kantian, he would have to make his decision, not on the grounds of reason, knowledge and facts, but on the urgings of faith, i.e., of feelings, i.e., on whim.

There are many examples of Kantianism ravaging the field of today's politics in slower, but equally lethal, ways. Observe the farce of inflation versus "compassion." The policies of welfare statism have brought this country (and the whole civilized world) to the edge of economic bankruptcy, the forerunner of which is inflation - yet pressure groups are demanding larger and larger handouts to the non-productive, and screaming that their opponents lack "compassion." Compassion as such cannot grow a blade of grass, let alone of wheat. Of what use is the "compassion" of a man (or a country) who is broke - i.e., who has consumed his resources, is unable to produce, and has nothing to give away?

If you cannot understand how anyone can evade reality to such an extent, you have not understood Kantianism. "Compassion" is a moral term, and moral issues - to the thoroughly Kantianized intellectuals - are independent of material reality. The task of morality - they believe - is to make demands, with which the world of material "phenomena" has to comply; and, since that material world is unreal, its problems or shortages cannot affect the success of moral goals, which are dictated by the "noumenal" real reality.

Dear businessmen, why do you worry about a half-percent of interest on a loan or investment - when your money supports the schools where those notions are taught to your children?

No, most people do not know Kant's theories, nor care. What they do know is that their teachers and intellectual leaders have some deep, tricky justification - the trickier, the better - for the net result of all such theories, which the average person welcomes: "Be rational, except when you don't feel like it."

Note the motivation of those who accepted the grotesque irrationality of Kant's system in the first place - as declared by his admirer, Professor Paulsen: "There is indeed no doubt that the great influence which Kant exerted upon his age was due just to the fact that he appeared as a deliverer from unendurable suspense. The old view regarding the claims of the feelings and the understanding on reality had been more and more called in question during the second half of the eighteenth century....Science seemed to demand the renunciation of the old faith. On the other hand, the heart still clung to it....Kant showed a way of escape from the dilemma. His philosophy made it possible to be at once a candid thinker and an honest man of faith. For that, thousands of hearts have thanked him with passionate devotion." (Pp. 6-7; emphasis added - no other comment is necessary.)

Philosophy is a necessity for a rational being: philosophy is the foundation of science, the organizer of man's mind, the integrator of his knowledge, the programmer of his subconscious, the selector of his values. To set philosophy against reason, i.e., against man's power of cognition, to turn philosophy into an apologist for and a protector of superstition - is such a crime against humanity that no modern atrocities can equal it: it is the cause of modern atrocities.

If Paulsen is representative of the nineteenth century, the twentieth never had a chance. But if men grasp the source of their destruction - if they dedicate themselves to the greatest of all crusades: a crusade for the absolutism of reason - the twenty-first century will have a chance once more.

Ayn Rand

OBJECTIVIST CALENDAR

The following starting dates have been scheduled for taped lecture courses (some of these courses have already begun).

Allan Blumenthal's Music: Theory, History and Performance. Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Sept. 15 (contact Al Kincius, 403-264-5254); Hartford, Oct. 21 (Brian Bambrough, 203-563-7902).

Leonard Peikoff's Modern Philosophy: Kant to the Present. Boston, Sept. 26 (Roger Burkhart, 617-253-1000, Dorm Line 5-6178, after 7 P.M.); Minneapolis, Oct. 17 (Jane Kettleson, 612-633-4085, eves.). Founders of Western Philosophy: Thales to Hume. West Lafayette, Ind., Oct. 19 (Richard Matula, 317-463-3646, eves.); St. Louis, Oct. 17 (Fulton Huxtable, 314-291-7130). Dr. Peikoff's Introduction to Logic. Kansas City, Oct. 19 and Cape Girardeau, Mo., Nov. 2 (Fulton Huxtable, 314-291-2539, call collect); Lafayette, Cal., Oct. 26 (Raymond Cole, 415-653-2323, weekdays or 415-283-2778, eves. and weekends).

B.W.