

Kant and the Nature of Science

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Editor:

It is a very positive development in my opinion that Michael Clover, in his 2/6/97 letter, seeks to locate the scientific enterprise within some larger philosophical context. As I have stressed on many occasions, one simply cannot discuss an issue as basic as the nature of science in a serious manner without getting explicit about implicit metaphysical assumptions.

Clover, however, to me appears rather confused in his foray into philosophical territory. First of all, it is not just Aristotle and Rand that insist on an objective reality. Plato, Kant, as well as people like Augustine and myself who hold an orthodox Judeo-Christian outlook, with equal intensity, insist on objective reality.

Secondly, Clover's implication that Aristotle, Rand, and he reject the notion of noumenal reality is, in the case of Aristotle just plain wrong, and in the case of Rand and Clover, contradicted it would seem by the very words they employ. Aristotle believed quite earnestly in a reality beyond the material world. He was firm in his conclusion there must exist a Prime Mover behind all else that is: "And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is a Mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality" (Metaphysics 12.7.1072a23-26). Aristotle argued forcefully that the material world we apprehend with our senses depends on a different kind of reality which exists independently of it. Clover, although he rejects the notion of a Prime Mover, by employing words like 'consciousness', 'theory', 'concept', and 'mind', is bearing witness to quantities that rightly belong to the noumenal (from nous, Greek for mind) category.

Perhaps the most pivotal philosopher Clover mentions is Kant, because it was he, in *A Critique of Pure Reason*, who unleashed on the world the astounding proposition that there is an impenetrable barrier between the phenomenal and the noumenal and that the phenomenal alone can be accessed by reason, while the noumenal is the realm of intuition and faith. It was but a short step from Kant's model for reality to a strict materialism which denies the noumenal

category altogether. Indeed the Western world for the past 200 years and much of the rest of the world in this century has reaped the horrendous human consequences of this latter outlook. Where does Ayn Rand's materialist (objectivist) philosophy fit in? It is precisely in the mainstream of this Kantian legacy.

The Nazi horror as well as the Marxist nightmare, with its tens of millions of political executions, both are the ideological offspring of Kant's ideas. But these ideas also permeate our own American culture, especially its educational institutions, at this moment in history even as the letters to the Monitor clearly testify. I believe it is urgent for our very survival as a society to begin to understand that Kant was tragically wrong. I am grateful for the Monitor editorial policy that allows such a discussion as this to happen.

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