

## Comment on Fred Seddon's essay: "Kant on Faith"

Dr. Fred Seddon goes into a lot of trouble to prove that Rand's evaluation of Kant as "the most evil man in human history" is unwarranted. His argument amounts to the claim that Kant used the German word for 'faith' – 'Glauben' – while he actually intended to say 'Gedanke' – the German word for 'thought.' Thus the dichotomy with which Kant has been charged by Objectivists is not a dichotomy between knowledge and faith, but rather between knowledge and thought – 'thought' meaning 'conceiving' or 'imagining' what cannot be known. Seddon admits that he does not know why Kant used the word 'Glauben' instead of the word 'Gedanke,' but he makes the arbitrary assertion that he thinks that Kant meant 'thought' and not 'faith.' Seddon admits that he has no evidence for validating his thought about Kant's intention and turning it into knowledge. In this manner, Seddon demonstrates the shaky foundation of thought unsupported by evidence, which cannot be validated in order to become knowledge. If all we have is Seddon's thought, this thought will have to remain a thought for Seddon and those who want to share his thought, for whatever reason. Thus, the wedge between knowledge and thought is just as perilous as the wedge between knowledge and faith. Such a wedge opens the door for a strong-willed power-hungry leader who makes arbitrary assertions about other people's duty to follow his thoughts about the welfare of his people. For example, Karl Marx's thoughts in *Das Kapital* cannot be validated as knowledge, but are conceivable. In this respect, secular dictators are not different from or better than religious ones.

It makes no difference whether Kant meant 'belief' or 'thought' -- as far as his influence on the course of Western philosophy. We cannot know whether Kant intended to save free will rather than push Western philosophy in the direction of supporting dictatorships (as Seddon claims), but it really does not matter. What matters is how subsequent philosophers used Kant's ideas to cast a doubt over the very possibility of knowledge. Exempting Kant from responsibility for the course taken by Western philosophy does not change the course taken by Western philosophy.

Interestingly, the division between knowledge and thought has been discussed by Leonard Peikoff in his essay "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy" (*The Objectivist*, 1967). In this essay, Peikoff discussed the prevalent dichotomy in philosophical circles between 'analytic truth' and 'synthetic truth' – where 'synthetic' means 'validated by the senses' whereas 'analytic' means 'validated by the laws of logic.' Thus, 'a married bachelor' is false by the standards of both synthetic and analytic truth, whereas 'a bachelor who can fly to the moon by flapping his wings' is false by the standards of synthetic truth but true by the standards of analytic truth. Peikoff criticized 'analytic truth' just as much as Rand criticized faith, and for the same reasons: for divorcing man's mind from reality.

Finally, I would like to point out that Rand could read German, and it is conceivable that she read Kant's preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original. (See Rand comment in "Global Balkanization" about her knowledge of three and half languages: Russian, English, French and German – which she could read but not speak.) Thus, Seddon's assumption that she simply followed the English translation of "Glauben" as "Faith" can at least be questioned.