

Vladimir Ern, “From Kant to Krupp,” *Mech i krest. Stat’i o sovremennykh sobytiakh [The sword and the cross. Essays on contemporary events]* (Moscow, 1915), 20-34.

From a speech given to the Religious Philosophical Society, 6 October 1914.

From Kant to Krupp... Why *Kant*? Why to *Krupp*? I begin with Kant as the greatest landmark in the parade of the German spirit. Kant has his predecessors, especially Eckhart, Luther, and Böhme. But I do not have time to speak about how each gave birth to the next. I will only say that it is not this aspect that gives rise to disputes. Not long ago all were agreed that grand German culture is unitary and continuous. We heard many earnest speeches asserting that the latest schools of German philosophy are infused with global and not only German traditions. Moreover, we all knew that the philosopher of the abstract idea, Hegel, burnt the incense of dialectical confession before the Prussian state, and his brilliant student Kuno Fischer bowed his bald head before Bismarck’s affairs. And those who knew of it were not surprised.

But now war is upon us. Under the soft skin of German culture we suddenly observe ravenous bloodthirsty claws. And the visage of the “nation of philosophers” has become distorted by bestial brutality. Mechelen and Louvain, Kalisz and Reims have invoked a storm of indignation, and suddenly everyone has amicably decided that German culture is one thing, and bestiality another, that Kant and Fichte are as innocent in the militaristic schemes of the Prussian Junkers as Shakespeare and Tolstoy, so long live Kant and Hegel, and may the Teutonic beasts be destroyed!

My speech is the most passionate protest against this simplified conception of world history. I will immediately offer my theses and then move on to demonstrations. First of all, I am convinced that the stormy uprising of Germanism is predetermined by Kant’s *Analytics*; secondly, I am convinced that the arms of Krupp are full of the most profound philosophicalness [*filosofichnost’*]; thirdly, I am convinced that the internal transcription of the German spirit in Kant’s philosophy naturally and fatally coincides with the external transcription of that same German spirit in the arms of Krupp. It stands to reason that in a short speech I must limit myself to the most general characterizations and dwell only on points of the most essential importance.

The crux of Kantian thought, finding its most extreme and dispassionate expression in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, reduces to two principles: to the absolute phenomenality of all external experience and to the absolute phenomenality of all internal experience. Two of the most radical propositions flow from these two principles, established in the transcendental *Ethics* and the transcendental *Analytics*: 1) no *noumenon*, i.e. nothing ontological, can be encountered in our external experience, and 2) nothing noumenal, i.e. relating to the world of the truly Real, can be given and realized in our internal experience. And since there are no other paths of cognition besides external and internal experience, the *Critique of Pure Reason* has become the global historical herald of the purist form of *absolute immanentism*. Of course, in Kant lived the remains of Platonic transcendentalism, and these remains are: the idea of intelligible freedom and the concept of “things-in-themselves.” But these Platonic reminiscences of Kant absolutely do not tally with his basic principles. That the concept of things-in-themselves is uncritical and arbitrary was brilliantly revealed by Fichte. That the concept of intelligible freedom is complete nonsense from the point of view of absolute phenomenality of internal experience ought to be clear to anyone who is not too lazy to think. Internal experience, thoroughly and irretrievably subjugated to

the phenomenological form of time about a single measurement, naturally cannot contain in itself the *noumena* of freedom.

The basic principles of Kantian phenomenalism were the unassailable axis of all further movement of German thought: Fichte finally de-ontologized Nature, Hegel without compunction conceived of all being as *absolute process*. Finally, a half century's collective work by neo-Kantianism has amicably established the universal-immanent theses. On the contrary, the Platonic reminiscences so characteristic of Kant's personality and so contradicting the foundations of his philosophy have the sense of appended propositions in the latest movement of German thought. In German idealism there is much Platonizing, especially in the mature Schelling, whom no one wanted to listen to already, but this Platonizing does not have ontological roots in the initial and basic lines of German thought and thus is always vanquished by the unearthly, foundationless feebleness of Luciferian Romanticism. For German thought Kant's phenomenalism is a solid and "scientific" attainment, an unassailable, concrete conquest of the German spirit. Platonist reminiscences are the dreamlike remains of old-German complacency.

The transcription of the supreme achievements of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the plan of historical self-determination of the German nation [*narod*] was itself outlined with fatal necessity. One must recall that in the atmosphere of Protestantism with its unconditional primacy of "rationality," the Kantian fixation [*fiksatsiia*, fixing in place, specifying] of the forces and capacities of reason was an event of extraordinary, *ecclesiastical* importance. One German historian completely correctly claims that "the *Critique of Pure Reason* had almost the same significance for us Germans as the revolution of 1789 did for Frenchmen." A certain primary truth about the most primary pre-experiential and pre-operative forms of rational cognition was established categorically as the highest and most brilliant representative of reason of the entire race. Everything historical and traditional, everything instinctive and natural, everything inspired and beneficial has thereby in principle been abolished in its absolute meaning and placed under the control and heavy hand of the phenomenalistic first principle. Oh, it was not in vain that Kant sensed the *legislative* character of his reason! He wanted to prescribe laws to Nature, indeed he became Lycurgus holding forth on the global stage of the German spirit.

Kant's phenomenalistic first principle in the historical self-determination of the German nation unavoidably had to be condensed into extremely definite and concrete things. If internal and external experience are really deprived of any contact with the *noumenon*, i.e. with the world of the truly Real, then the noumenon has no place in either the theoretical picture [*predstavlenie*] of the human being about the aggregate of global life, or in the practical activity taken in all its manifestations. The cry of Nietzsche: '*der alte Gott ist tot*', is an obvious anachronism. The old God is dead, and he was guillotined in the labyrinth of Transcendental Analytics. The executioner of the old and living God was Kant, and since then the complex and titanic phenomenon of German culture has been only an all-German attachment to the shocking secret of the deicide accomplished in the unfathomable depths of the German spirit. Gioberti with amazing accuracy for his time calls Kant the purest psychologist. This means: the contact of reason with the Real, i.e. with God, was "legislatively" severed by none other than Kant.

In the plan of history theoretical deicide as an *a priori* principle obligatory for any "German" mind unavoidably leads to the worldly reign of force and power, to the grand dream of earthly mastery and of seizing all earthly kingdoms and all earthly riches in German hands. If all external experience is absolutely phenomenalistic, then in the arena of history there is

nothing holy, there is no genuine ontological Justice, there is no Divine Providence. The first great seedling of Kant's sowing was the magnificent flowering of phenomenalistic sciences in Germany. These sciences were interesting for everything but Truth, and they were unconsciously transformed into systematic, methodological and grandiose *reconnaissance* of all secular and spiritual conditions for the coming triumph of the German spirit. On the other hand, if internal experience is also phenomenalistic, then all imperatives and maxims of morality are unavoidably transformed into the quantitative principle of gymnastic magnification of the "will to power." The ontological and unconditional quality of volition is cast aside as *überwundener Standpunkt* [a vanquished standpoint].

Kant's categorical imperative in its absolute formality could not exert any resistance. He spoke emphatically, with the greatest force: "You must," but what exactly *must* he somehow could not articulate. The peals of the Kantian "Du sollst" thundered in the air and... killed no one. Germans became so accustomed to this inoffensive, atmospheric phenomenon that some of them tried to use it for practical ends. The famous follower of Kant, the exalted Windelband, said at the elections: "The categorical imperative forces me to vote for the national-liberals." *Se non è vero, è ben trovato!* [even if it is not true, it is well-conceived]. In any case the lines from Kant's empty categorism to the energetic of the industrial-scientific-philosophical aggression of the German nation [*natsiia*] are apparent. The German people in its entirety came to understand itself as a phenomenon [*fenomen*], albeit a grandiose one, but still *only* a phenomenon, and it steadily came to perceive itself in biological categories.

But from biology it is one step to zoological consequences. Killing the Real in the will, as achieved by Kant, postulated the extreme development of the volitional musculature, but killing the Real in reason, achieved by him as well, set out a deceitful arena for manifesting this musculature: for the German conscience ontological prohibitions and higher missions were removed from the whole world, and the geographical map of the Globe appeared to the German imagination as a giant and sweet "menu" unseen and unheard in the history of world feasting. But for this one had to dress the musculature of will and internal aggressions with the unassailable armor of militarism. The rise of Germanism as a military seizure of the whole world, as a violent world hegemony *manu militari* [by force of arms], is thus rooted in the depths of the phenomenalistic principle established in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is what justifies my first conviction about the natural and fatal dependence of the conversion of the German nation into the modality of global-military parading on the phenomenalistic philosophy of the Königsberg Lycurgus.

II.

Now to reveal my second conviction: on the most profound philosophicalness of Krupp's arms. Let no one think that I want to be ironic. I regard this thesis with the utmost seriousness. From what was said before, the deep connection of Krupp's arms with German philosophy has already been outlined. If German militarism is the natural offspring of Kantian phenomenalism, collectively realized in the plan of history by the entire race, then the arms of Krupp are the most inspired, the most national, and the bloodiest offspring of German nationalism. Genealogically the arms of Krupp are thus the offspring of the offspring, the grandchildren of the philosophy of Kant. But this conclusion is syllogistic. Materially it is not apparent, and in order to make it apparent I will approach the problem from another direction.

Anyone who has studied the history of styles must always be amazed by the profound and rigorous correspondence between the style of a given era and its hidden soul. Insofar as we

know history, we find everywhere the indestructible drive of humanity to impress its hidden spiritual life, unconsciously, almost “vegetatively,” in diverse material formations. One of the purest forms of the most genuine impression of the spirit in matter is medieval gothic. In Reims cathedral or in Notre Dame de Paris we have the stone transcription of an unspoken *tonos* [tone system] of old French Catholicism. In the towers, statues, chimeras, arches, columns, and vitraux tapestries of gothic shrines we can, following Huysmans, penetrate into the deepest secrets of medieval religion. And it is not at all necessary for these material manifestations of the spirit of a given era or a given people to be without fail an esthetic phenomenon, or, simply put, for them to be “beautiful.” Sometimes the most extreme “deformity” [*bezobrazie*, also with the connotation of outrage] imprinted in matter can also be the most precise and apparent disclosure of hidden spiritual realities. It’s not a matter of beauty, but something else. Here it is important to establish the living bridge between “external” and “internal”, to grope at the living fabric by which the crystallization of internal energies into external material forms takes place.

The arms of Krupp from this point of view are boundlessly characteristic and indicative. Even if we had not established the connection of Kantian phenomenalism to with German militarism, then I venture to say that we would be able to take the opposite route: from militarism to phenomenalism. For the very attentive and intent eye the analysis of the Krupp canons, without any mystical visions, would have to show without a doubt what a fundamental, profound life-feeling, capable of being expressed easily in philosophical terms, characterizes the nation [*narod*] that created these arms. Take note: the arms of Krupp are unquestionably the summit of German industrial technology. If we regard their “matter,” then their construction will seem infinitely refined, ingenious, and—if one can express it this way—intellectually condensed [sic: *sgushchenno-intellektual’nyi*]. One would need extreme, unprecedented development of physics, mechanics, mathematics, and construction technology in order to create these gigantic weapons of destruction. One would need the joint collective work of generations of scientists, industrialists, and state figures in order to realize them. Moreover, one would further need some secret national consensus, some profound, racial self-definition of will. After all, the technology of Germany, in its deepest scientificity and theoretical foundationalism, according to expert estimations, occupies the first place worldwide. Of course, the efforts of private individuals were not enough to seize this primacy, there had to be some sort of powerful collective dispensation. In the biggest arms of Krupp Germany’s primacy in technology is reaching the human *limit*. Strange to say, these weapons are almost untransportable, almost go beyond the bounds of practical suitability, almost impossible in the sense of unrealizable destructiveness. If we draw our attention away from any evaluation of these monstrosities and focus only the colossal amounts of human energy invested in them, we must then come to the paradoxical conclusion: in the quantity of wasted efforts and in the solidarity of collective creativity the arms of Krupp unquestionably surpass so unprecedented, it would seem, a manifestation of collective, centuries-long construction as medieval gothic.

But still more indicative is the *quality* of energy realized in the arms of Krupp. The essence vested in them, their entelechy and soul, are unusually eloquent in their meaning, a meaning laid completely bare. Above all, it is unusually self-confident, arrogant, and proud. It gleams and shines not only from its external patina and the cleanness of the work, but it is also entirely fraught by the indisputability of mathematical calculations, by the apodictic nature of rigorous estimation, and by the necessity of overpowering destructive effects. This is why the Germans are so blind and so fatally confident in victories they have not yet achieved. The arms of Krupp were for them an all-German, national *a priori* of all military-political

“experience,” one that had to unfold before them. Possessing the secret of these weapons, the Germans as it were “anticipated” the basic lines of impending events and persuaded themselves that they had in their hands the most profound principle of this Kantian “legislation,” by which the whole raw material of the coming upheavals must unavoidably be formed by the categories and “schemes” of the fundamental lusts of pan-Germanism. They even subjected strategy to the arms of Krupp!

And this could happen only because the entelechy essence of the arms of Krupp coincided with the deepest self-definition of the German spirit in the philosophy of Kant. For besides proud arrogance, the entelechy of the arms of Krupp is basically characterized by self-absorption, by self-containedness, by absolute practical self-legitimacy. The arms of Krupp are the purest form of scientifically and technically organized “being for itself.” The profound self-determination of the German nation [*natsiia*] finds in these its extreme and most awful expression. The phenomenalistic principle “accumulates” [meaning “charges up”] in the weapons of Krupp in its most terrifying condensations and becomes like a tool bringing about the legislation of pure reason at the grand scales of global hegemony. The destructiveness of the gigantic artillery of Krupp, their savage violence logically issue from their phenomenalistic essence. International law, faith in the gospel, the shrine of religion, and human honor, are all absolutely “viewpoints that have been surpassed.” For its propagation phenomenalism does not need the kind agreement or persuasion of nations subjected to the process of German phenomenalization. The arms of Krupp are a phenomenon too vital, and not requiring any justifications of the subduing force and truth of the phenomenalist principle taken *an und für sich*. Thus in the Zion of German phenomenalism, where the Holy of Holies is the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the arms of Krupp occupy an honored and logically necessary place. Kant in the most characteristic and original moments of his philosophy dialectically postulates Krupp, Krupp in its most brilliant creations gives material expression to the phenomenalist foundations of Kantian philosophy. In this manner my second conviction about the most profound philosophicalness of the arms of Krupp is also justified.

III.

What conclusion proceeds from the two theses established here? A momentous conclusion, one that provides as it were the key to the spiritual meaning of the breaking European cataclysm. From the theses established here we must deduce above all that the war we are experiencing is unprecedented in its scale and its brutality, that it is in its most profound spiritual core a clash of *world-historical foundations* [*nachala*]. The German people in this clash, just as the Russian people, and perhaps all the nations allied to us as well, have decisively mobilized the entire holdings of their spiritual and material existence. Behind the blinds that have suddenly concealed the German people from the whole world we must without any faint-heartedness detect a great series of the greatest names who have been creating “culture” over the centuries, while here at home an abstract deference before that culture is widespread to this day. From Eckhart to Kant went a great process of internal cognition of the German idea. From Kant began the most complex realization of the cognized idea in the plan of historical being. And all this process is something unitary and continuous leading right to the Krupps and Zeppelins with logical necessity. The Germans themselves perfectly sense this “vicious circle” in their parades of the spirit. The world of German science and German philosophy subscribes to the declaration of the unconditional equivalence of German culture with German militarism. Such stentorian and honored names as Harnack, [L.] Brentano, Schmoller, E. Meyer on the one hand, and on the other Wundt and Ostwald, themselves subscribe to this postulation of the essential homogeneity and unified

conception [*zamysel*] of German culture that I have tried to made in the present oration. The fact that the Germans themselves take pains to assert my interpretation of the spiritual roots of modern warfare is the final, unexpectedly experimental verification of the correctness of my basic theses.

Now in conclusion permit me to say a few words about the *evaluation* of what I have heretofore described as a dispassionate historian. The picture of the stormy bacchanalian uprising of Germanism in fulfilling a profound national dream seems to me not only lofty and shocking, but also deeply tragic, and full of universal meaning. In the spectacle of modern Germany, above whom the unseen right hand [of God] has already written *mene mene tekel upharsin* [from the Book of Daniel, invoking a sense of impending doom], we see, in the apt simile of Viacheslav Ivanov, all the elements of ancient tragedy. The Greeks with unsurpassable profundity sensed that at the base of tragic death lies a certain concealed, often mysterious guilt, and one of the favorite plots of tragedy, natural and almost intentionally transparent, was for the Greeks *hubris* [translated as *nadmennost'*, *spes'*], directed not against people, but against the gods. Hubris is also the root of the German tragedy. Metaphysical pride, first shown by Eckhart, penetrates the more original sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In Hegel it is spread about by a brilliant fire. In the bleeding Nietzsche it passes into tragic madness. And this madness, as I demonstrated four years ago, is natural and fatal. After hubris unavoidably follows *ατη* [blind folly], i.e. the shadow cast over reason, the tragic eclipse of worldly powers of understanding. In the German people this corresponds to the transition to comprehensive phenomenalist self-definition. The German madness passes scientific forms, methodological ones, philosophical ones, and finally, breaks out in militaristic violence. The greatest calculators of the world suddenly miscalculated in all their calculations and, having made a series of "insane" diplomatic and strategic errors, they have lunged straight under the sword of retribution of Nemesis. Whether this sword will be released sooner or later, we will not venture to say. In any case it is already hoisted, and the arrival of Ceres [the Greek deity who, among other things, polices the boundary between the living and the dead], i.e. of final destruction, that makes up the third and final moment [act] of the tragedy is, we believe, not so far off.

And this stately tragic spectacle, in which a nation [*narod*] of nearly one hundred million [sic] participates *in corpore*, has at its back centuries of charged and intensive culture full of the most profound universal meaning. The path of the German people that has led them to unavoidable catastrophe is an achievement and an internal experience of all humanity. Luciferian energies with extreme effort, especially in the last century, have converged in the German people, and now when the boil is bursting, all humanity in a concordant spasm feels the world-historical catharsis.

We will amicably pray to the great God of battle, who has now taken into His strong hands the future of the whole world and the future of our people, for two things:

For our glorious troops by their spiritual power and by the great mantle of the Immaculate to prostrate and drive before them the armored German hosts.

For the catharsis of the European tragedy to be experienced by us in all its depth, and for us to overcome forever not only the periphery of bestial manifestations of German culture, but also to become free from its same profound principles, now revealed to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Translation: KH