

Kant's View of Supreme Goodness and Moral Self-Discipline and Virtue

Han Lihua

Taishan University, Tai'an, Shandong, 271000, China

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Abstract: Kant, the European philosopher, put forward the philosophy of moral practice in order to solve the problem of communication between the inevitable natural field and the free moral practice field. The idea of supreme good is the ultimate destination of his theory of moral practice. Kant put forward the moral view of the supreme good, which is based on absolute command and extends from the theory of individual motivation to the theory of moral obligation that is generally effective for all members of society. Kant emphasized the absoluteness of moral order. He put forward the theory of motivation of good will. The absolute command of good motives requires the universality of moral principles. Kant's theory of practical rationality emphasizes the priority of moral self-discipline and self-cultivation. He believed that virtue is the supreme condition for the pursuit of happiness. The supreme good consists of virtue and happiness. Virtue is the supreme good as a prerequisite in the supreme good.

1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant, the European philosopher, put forward the moral view of the supreme good, which is based on absolute command and extends from the theory of individual motivation to the theory of moral obligation that is generally effective for all members of society. He put forward his philosophy of moral practice in order to solve the problem of communication between the inevitable natural field and the free moral practice field. The idea of the supreme good is the ultimate destination of his theory of moral practice. Immanuel Kant's critical theory of pure reason, the critical theory of practical reason, the critical theory of judgment and the principle of moral metaphysics are based on the dispute over European empiricism and rationalism, as well as Hume's thinking about the contradiction between the finiteness of empirical knowledge and the universal necessity of conceptual knowledge. However, one of the historical backgrounds of his theory lies in the rationalism tradition formed since Plato, that is, rational cognitive activities transcend perceptual practical activities and acquire universal and necessary knowledge through pure rationality. Kant's theory of moral practice is conceived based on the communication between perceptual freedom and intellectual necessity, and resubmits and explains the problem of moral goodness that has been forgotten by predecessors. This has made contributions to solving the contradictions and disputes brought by the suspension of Plato's idea kingdom to later generations, and has important social significance.

2. Kant's Coordination of the Contradiction between Rational Cognition and Moral Practice

Kant once sighed: “There are two things, the more people often and constantly meditate on them, the more they fill their hearts with constant and increasing surprise and awe, the starry sky above my head and the moral law in my heart.” Rousseau said, “Life is free, but it is always in chains.”[1] Based on the balance between the law of necessity and the law of freedom, on the one hand, Kant pursues the rational knowledge of “knowledge legislates for nature”, on the other hand, he pays attention to the moral practice of “legislation for human freedom”. [2] He took the pursuit of virtue and the idea of the supreme good as the final goal of his three rational criticisms, and took the moral law of absolute command as the basis for his practice of rationality.

The contribution of Kant's philosophy lies in the combination of “legislation of man's nature” and “legislation of man's freedom” and the discussion of the moral practice principle of moral supremacy. Kant's philosophical problem is that of the German classical philosophy, that is, the relationship between reason, freedom and metaphysics. Western philosophy began to form a rationalistic tradition from Plato in ancient Greece. Through rational cognitive activities, it formed knowledge with universal necessity. Epistemology aims to solve such problems as where the universal necessity of knowledge comes from and its scope of application. Empiricism starts from scientific experiments and experience, and advocates that all knowledge comes from perceptual experience. From the perspective of theoretical science, rationalism believes that the Individuality and contingency of sensory experience is not enough to serve as the universal and inevitable basis of knowledge, and that knowledge is derived from the innate concept of rationality. Hume's skepticism questioned the contradiction between the universal inevitability of conceptual knowledge and the finiteness and probability of empirical knowledge, thus ending the debate between empiricism and rationalism. Hume's suspicion makes reason unable to prove the universal necessity of scientific knowledge, and reason and freedom also conflict. As a scientific reason of mechanical determinism, rationality is subject to the law of natural causation, which makes freedom as human value and dignity a problem. There is a contradiction between reason and freedom. Rousseau reflected on the enlightenment reason and thought that the rational civilization had limited freedom. Kant believes that reason and freedom are related to metaphysical problems. As the core of western classical philosophy, metaphysics is regarded as the basis of all philosophical problems. If metaphysics cannot be proved as science, the edifice of human knowledge is in danger of collapsing.

Kant initiated a Copernican revolution by thinking about “whether human beings have freedom, independent value and dignity in a world that strictly abides by the laws of nature”. On the one hand, he established the universal necessity of scientific knowledge through the innate cognitive form of the subject, on the other hand, he restricted human cognitive ability and opened up the way for freedom. He reconciled the contradiction between empiricism and rationalism as well as Hume's suspicion, and combined innate and experience to make the object conform to knowledge. On the one hand, knowledge is based on experience, on the other hand, the cognitive subject also has the innate cognitive form as the basis of experience. Experience provides material for knowledge, but its content is experiential. The cognitive subject provides the processing form for knowledge, and the cognitive form is innate. Kant established the corresponding relationship between logical judgment and the category of knowledge, so that scientific knowledge has both universal necessity and can expand new content, and realized “Man legislates for nature” in the form of congenital comprehensive judgment, the combination of transcendental perceptual theory and transcendental intellectual theory. [3] Kant highlighted the cognitive status of the subject, but its cognitive form of “the object conforms to the subject” makes us only know the performance of things to us, but not the thing itself, that is, the thing in itself. This unrecognizable thing in itself is caused by his limiting human cognitive ability to experience. But Kant's restriction on rational cognitive ability also shows that there is a free field

beyond human cognitive ability that is not restricted by cognition. The restriction of rational cognitive ability opens the way for the freedom of practical ability. Because things are divided into two aspects: performance and things in themselves, on the one hand, people obey the universal and inevitable natural laws, understand the performance of knowledge to people, and master the universal and inevitable knowledge. In this field, people have no freedom. Man is a limited rational existence. If over expand rationality which is subject to inevitability, man lacks freedom. On the other hand, man is himself, and has the side that is not limited by the laws of nature. When people restrict rationality, they open the way for freedom. Therefore, Kant believes that it is necessary to limit knowledge and leave space for moral practice. He criticized rational psychology, rational cosmology and rational theology, attacked traditional metaphysics, and pointed out that category can only be applied to experience, and that its illegal and transcendental application to transcendental ideas beyond experience is to turn transcendental ideas into transcendental illusions. Because people's arrogant rationality often forces categories to be used transcendently, which leads to the antinomy of the two laws and the conflict between the "Plato line" and the "Ibekuru line". The problem of coordination between the inevitable natural law and the free practical law has emerged. In order to solve the antinomy between freedom and necessity, Kant used judgment as the medium to reconcile the problems in the field of inevitable phenomena and the field of free things in itself, realizing the transition from theoretical rationality to practical rationality.

3. Kant's View of Moral Practice Attaches Importance to Moral Self-Discipline

Kant's theory of motivation believes that the moral value of action is judged by motivation, and only when action is motivated by responsibility can it have moral value. The moral value of an action lies not in its expected results, but in its loyalty to its responsibilities. Kant's moral law regards the universal and inevitable law as a kind of responsibility, and its constraint and compulsion become the source of moral value. The categorical order contains all the rules of responsibility, and only the categorical order can become the law of practice.[4] The categorical order is an unconditional absolute order and a mandatory moral commandment. Kant put forward three formulas about moral orders: regarding the universality of moral laws, "only act according to the principles that you think may also become universal laws";[4]As for the compulsion of moral laws, "no matter who at any time should not regard themselves and others as mere tools, but should always regard themselves as ends";[6] As for the normative nature of moral laws, "all norms are consistent with the possible purpose kingdom through legislation, as is the case with the natural kingdom".[6] Kant's three formulas about moral law reflect the universality, compulsion and criterion of moral order. Kant believes that the reason of free practice which is determined by virtue law and the causality of rational cognition which is determined by natural law, both are determined in the same subject as human beings. The law of virtue is the existence itself in pure consciousness, and the law of nature is the phenomenon in experience consciousness. The two must be coordinated. Kant realized free and inevitable communication through judgment. Kant emphasized the issue of freedom in his article "Transition from Moral Metaphysics to Critique of Pure Practical Reason". His concept of freedom is the key to clarify the self-discipline of the will, because the will is the rational play of the living things, and is the inherent nature of all rational life will. Only by acting according to free will can practice be possible. However, freedom is not unlimited freedom, and only self-discipline freedom that acts according to the absolute command of moral law is feasible. Kant believed that people can only understand the phenomenon of things and can't understand things themselves, so behind the phenomenal world, there is a free world as a free thing that is not controlled by the law of necessity. People belong to both the perceptual world and the rational world. They obey both the natural law of heteronomy and the practical law of freedom. When obeying certain natural laws, people can exercise the freedom of practice, self-discipline of moral practice and play the role of categorical command.

Pure speculative rationality is determined by empirical science and natural law, while pure practical rationality is controlled by individuals themselves. Human freedom enables people to abide by natural laws while at the same time they can control themselves and exercise moral practical actions. Freedom links the natural field governed by natural law with the free field under the practical law, so that the arrogance of “wisdom” (such as the wise man) and the humility of loving wisdom (such as Socrates) since ancient Greece can be coordinated. Freedom takes good will as its purpose, and good will legislates and abides by the law for itself, which is moral self-discipline.

4. The Importance of Virtue in Kant's View of Supreme Goodness

Plato's supreme goodness hangs high in the abstract and eternal realm of ideas and the world of truth. His view of supreme goodness is based on the virtue of justice, temperance, courage and wisdom, and the knowledge and idea of beauty. “Knowledge is virtue”, the concept of virtue is at the core of Plato's thought, and his thought of supreme goodness has obvious moral and ethical significance. However, Plato made the concept of supreme goodness in the realm of ideas absolutely eternal, with metaphysical implications. Aristotle also mentioned the issues of good, happiness and virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He believes that good is a purpose of life, and the highest good and purpose is human happiness. Kant put virtue at the top of happiness, and virtue is the absolute standard of supreme goodness. Aristotle opposed Socrates' statement that “no one intentionally does evil”, and believed that human virtue means making the choice of will. Good and evil are in human choice, and people should be responsible for their own actions. However, he did not emphasize the absolute command of maintaining good motives. Kant emphasized the absoluteness of moral order. Kant's practical rationality limits theoretical rationality, opens the way for freedom, and emphasizes that freedom is a prerequisite for moral activities. He put forward the theory of motivation of good will. The absolute command of good motives requires the universality of moral principles, and issues the “should” command to human practical rationality. Absolute command has universal validity and restraint. It is a moral law with rationality, universality and self-sufficiency. It is a universal law that is effective for the will of all rational people. It can become a free purpose that is effective for the purpose of the will of all practical subjects. It is a law established by the will of all practical subjects as a rational existence. In the field of practical reason, moral principles are unconditional as rational self-discipline, but the problem of the supreme good caused by practical reason is not completely solved by practical reason itself, which involves the coordination between the natural field of theoretical reason and the free field of practical reason. This is caused by Kant's dualistic philosophy of “phenomenon and free thing”, “theoretical reason and practical reason”. In this regard, Kant also launched a critique of judgment, believing that the coordination between the necessity of nature and freedom in the field of practice must be purposeful. He set up an intermediary for the communication between the two fields of theory and practice, making it a “purposeful” adjustment principle, namely judgment. There are “prescribed judgment” that is special under the general situation and “reflective judgment” rising from the special situation to the general situation. The latter has the principle of purposiveness and can solve the communication problem of necessity and freedom. Kant explained the aesthetic judgment and teleological judgment with the purpose of freedom.[5] Kant also introduced moral theology to solve the problem of the best of practical rationality. He put forward the moral postulate of free will, immortality of soul, and existence of God, and recognized it as true out of practical needs, and restored the ethical proof of God punishing evil and promoting good. People's good will and the choice of desire often conflict with each other. The absolute command of good will often can't match the spontaneity of desire. When choose between good and evil, desire will have bad motives because of weak will, and eventually degenerate into evil. Because of the degeneration of human nature, people need convert to make moral law sublimate to a noble and sacred religion. People realize salvation and favor through conversion, and religious emotion plays an incentive role.[6] But Kant stressed that religious emotion cannot replace moral efforts, and people still need

their own moral cultivation. Kant's three major criticisms and moral theological theories have transitioned from the necessity of nature to the moral law of freedom, and finally with the help of religion. The practice of reason and moral theology is based on moral practice. Kant emphasized the priority of moral self-discipline and self-cultivation, which reflected the practice view of justice and supreme good first.

Kant believed that virtue is the supreme condition for the pursuit of happiness and the supreme good. To become such a supreme good, there must be happiness. The supreme good consists of virtue and happiness, and happiness is not the main aspect of good. Virtue is the supreme good as a prerequisite in the supreme good. The connection between virtue and happiness can be understood as striving to become virtuous and strive for happiness. The two can be regarded as having a causal relationship. Epicurus school and Stoic school have different understandings of "virtue" and "happiness". Epicurus school believes that the action leading to happiness is virtue, that is, happiness is equal to virtue, and happiness is fundamental; The Stoic school believes that virtue guided by virtue is happiness, virtue is the real wisdom and happiness, and virtue is the first. Epicurus put its principles in the consciousness of perceptual needs, and virtue is included in the efforts for happiness. Happiness is the supreme good, and virtue is only the means to seek happiness. The Stoic school believes that the concept of happiness is contained in the efforts of virtue, virtue is the best, and happiness is only the awareness of virtue. Kant set up an ultimate goal for pure reason and practical reason - the supreme good. He believes that only the supreme good that combines happiness and virtue, including moral law, is the true supreme good. The principle of virtue priority of the Stoic school puts moral law above the purpose of happiness. It embodies this principle of the Stoic school that Kant's practical rationality takes precedence, which has certain ethical value. Kant believes that virtue is a kind of moral power. He opposes taking personal happiness as the supreme principle. He believes that happiness and the supreme good are not the same thing. The principle of happiness often corrupts morality. Virtue is the moral power of human will in the observance of responsibility. However, he does not reject the principle of happiness, but believes that happiness is an indispensable factor to improve morality. He believed that happiness is the understanding of virtue, as advocated by the Stoic school. Virtue is the unconditional supreme good and the condition of happiness.

Kant's view of the supreme good, from the critical analysis of pure knowledge to the criticism of pure practical reason, the criticism of judgment and the discussion of the principles of moral metaphysics, expounds the moral practice principles of motivation theory and absolute command, emphasizes the important role of human moral efforts, and takes moral theology as the moral guarantee, which has a good educational significance for society and future generations. Kant's moral theology is limited to hypothesis, not real religious belief, which is different from Christianity's moral premise based on theological belief. From the secular point of view, Kant relied on the assumed moral theological belief to provide moral guarantee for his view of the supreme good, which weakened the supremacy of his absolute command of the supreme good motive.

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