

Comparative Study of Humanistic Education Concepts between China and the West and Its Implications for Education Reform in China

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Abstract: This paper delves deeply into the distinction between the moral subjects in Marx's and Kant's moral thoughts. Kant's moral thought is based on transcendental philosophy. In his view, the moral subject is a rational being. The subject's initiative stems from free will, yet it has the limitation of being divorced from reality. Marx's moral thought is founded on historical materialism. For Marx, the moral subject is a real person in social relations, and the initiative is manifested in promoting social change and is also socially and historically determined. There are significant differences between the two in terms of the definition of the subject, the connotation of initiative, and the relationship with social history. This analysis is conducive to a deeper understanding of the development of moral philosophy and provides references for contemporary moral construction. For example, by integrating Kant's emphasis on rational norms and Marx's attention to social relations, we can promote the development of social morality.

1. Introduction

In the vast expanse of philosophy, the thoughts of Marx and Kant are like two brilliant stars, and their moral thoughts have had a profound impact on the development of ethics in particular. Within the scope of moral thought research, the concept of the subject is a core element. Kant's moral philosophy constructs a unique moral system based on transcendental reason, while Marx expounds a completely different moral concept from the perspective of historical materialism. With the continuous growth of the demand for moral construction in modern society, in-depth discrimination of the concept of the subject in Marx's and Kant's moral thoughts is of great significance, whether it is for deepening philosophical theoretical research or providing guidance for contemporary moral practice. Through this discrimination, we can more clearly grasp the development context of moral thoughts, understand the connotations, initiatives of moral subjects and their relationships with social history under different ideological systems, thus laying the foundation for constructing a moral framework that better meets the needs of contemporary society.

2. The Subject in Kant's Moral Thought

In Kant's moral philosophical system, the concept of the subject occupies a central position and

is a crucial element for understanding his moral thought.

Kant's moral philosophy is constructed upon his profound transcendental philosophy. His entire philosophical system attempts to explore the foundations in various fields such as human knowledge, morality, and aesthetics through the transcendental method. In the moral realm, this transcendental nature is particularly evident^[1]. Kant believes that morality has its innate and necessary principles, which are not dependent on experience but are based on human reason itself. His "Critique of Practical Reason" is an important work in his moral philosophy, in which he delves deeply into how the moral subject follows the moral law.

The subject in Kant's moral thought is a rational being. For Kant, reason is the key feature that distinguishes human beings from other existences and is also the essential attribute of the moral subject. Reason has multiple core significances in Kant's concept of the moral subject. Firstly, reason enables the subject to recognize the moral law. The moral law is an a priori and universal principle, which is not derived from empirical induction but is discovered through rational thinking. For example, a moral maxim such as "Do not lie" is, in Kant's view, not a moral maxim because we observe in daily life that lying brings bad consequences, but rather reason itself can recognize that the act of lying violates the universality and necessity of the moral law. Secondly, reason can prompt the subject to act in accordance with the moral law^[2]. The subject restrains its sensual impulses by virtue of reason and follows the requirements of the moral law. This is because, in Kant's concept, reason has the capacity to transcend sensuality. Sensuality often leads the subject to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, while reason enables the subject to recognize the value of moral behavior itself, thus practicing morality regardless of the temptations or hindrances of sensuality.

The origin of the agency of the Kantian moral subject lies in free will. Free will is an extremely important concept in Kant's moral philosophy. He believes that the reason why the moral subject can follow the moral law is that the subject possesses free will. This free will does not refer to doing whatever one likes in the empirical world, but is a transcendental sense of freedom. It is independent of the natural law of causality and is not dominated by sensual impulses. For example, when a person is faced with a situation where he can obtain great benefits by lying, his sensual desires may drive him to lie. However, his free will enables him to transcend this sensual impulse and act in accordance with the moral law (i.e., do not lie) recognized by reason. Free will endows the subject with autonomy in moral behavior, enabling the subject to self-determine whether to follow the moral law. This autonomy reflects the agency of the subject, that is, the subject does not passively accept moral requirements but actively practices morality by virtue of free will.

3. The Subject in Marx's Moral Thought

In Marx's moral thought system, the concept of the subject has a unique and profound connotation, which is constructed based on Marx's historical materialism theory.

Marx believes that the moral subject is the real person in social relations. Different from Kant who abstracts the subject as a being with transcendental reason, Marx emphasizes the sociality and reality of human beings. Human beings do not exist in isolation but are in a network woven by various social relations. For example, in capitalist society, the working class, as an important subject, their living conditions, moral concepts, etc. are closely related to the employment - labor relations in which they are situated. Workers are exploited by capitalists during the production process. This social relation determines their social status, economic situation and the resulting moral demands^[3]. They long for fair labor remuneration, reasonable working hours and respect for their dignity. These moral demands are generated based on their actual experiences in the capitalist production relations.

The initiative of the Marxian moral subject is reflected in promoting social change. Marx pointed

out that human beings do not passively adapt to the social environment but are able to change society through their own practical activities. In the process of historical development, the oppressed classes often have a strong motivation to change the status quo. Take the proletariat as an example. In capitalist society, they are at the bottom, being exploited and oppressed. However, it is precisely this situation that stimulates their class consciousness and prompts them to unite and carry out revolutionary struggles. They recognize that there are fundamental irrationalities in the production relations under the capitalist system, such as the appropriation of surplus value by capitalists without compensation. Thus, the proletariat attempts to break the old social order and establish a more fair and just society through revolutionary practical activities such as strikes and uprisings. This behavior of promoting social change reflects the initiative of the subject in Marx's moral thought.

The Marxian moral subject has social - historical characteristics. This means that the moral concepts, behavior patterns and the role of the subject in society are constantly changing with the development of history. In different historical periods, the level of social productive forces, production relations and social structures are different, which will inevitably affect the moral situation of the subject. For example, in feudal society, the feudal landlord class was in a dominant position, and their moral concepts emphasized the maintenance of the hierarchical system, believing that there were natural differences between the aristocracy and the common people. This moral concept was adapted to the feudal production relations at that time. With the development of productive forces, capitalist production relations gradually emerged, and the bourgeois moral concepts focused on individualism, free competition, etc., which reflected the economic characteristics of capitalist society based on private ownership and market competition. In socialist society, the concepts of moral subjects have undergone new changes, paying more attention to collectivism, social fairness and the all - round development of human beings, which are determined by the production relations with socialist public ownership as the main body.

4. The Debate on the Subject between Marx's and Kant's Moral Thoughts

In the field of moral thought, there are profound debates between Marx and Kant regarding the subject of moral thought, which involve multiple important aspects such as the essential attributes, manifestations of initiative, and considerations of historicity and universality of the subject.

First of all, in terms of the essential attributes of the subject, Kant attributes the essence of the moral subject to a priori reason. In his philosophical system, the subject is an abstract existence endowed with pure reason as an inborn trait, which exists independently of the empirical world^[4]. Moral laws proposed by Kant, such as the "categorical imperative," are universal laws obtained by the subject through pure rational thinking. The subject judges the morality of an action based on this reason and, in the process, tries to exclude as much as possible the interference of sensual desires and external environmental factors. It is like on a moral scale, reason is the only weight, guiding the subject to act in accordance with moral requirements. Moreover, Kant emphasizes the autonomy of the subject, and the root of this autonomy lies in free will. The subject can break free from the shackles of the law of natural causality and independently decide its own actions relying on the moral laws revealed by reason. For example, when facing a moral dilemma such as whether to lie or not, the free will of the subject will prompt it to overcome the impulse to lie that may stem from the sensual level (such as to avoid punishment or gain benefits) and instead follow the moral law of "do not lie" recognized by reason.

However, Marx's view of the moral subject is completely different from Kant's. Marx believes that the moral subject is a real person in social relations. He criticizes the abstract concept of the subject divorced from social reality. In Marx's eyes, man is a product of society, and all aspects of

human moral concepts and behaviors are shaped by the social relations in which one is situated. Taking capitalist society as an example, the moral situation of the working class is inextricably linked to their position in the production relations. Workers are exploited by capitalists, and this economic relationship determines their strong moral demands for fairness and justice. They are eager to change this unreasonable production relationship in order to obtain better living conditions and due respect. In addition, Marx emphasizes the class nature of the subject. Different classes, due to their different positions in the social production relations, have different moral concepts and interest demands. For example, in the capitalist production relations, the bourgeoisie is in a dominant and exploiting position, and their moral concepts tend to safeguard private ownership, free competition and other principles beneficial to their own interests; while the proletariat, due to their exploited situation, focuses more on unity, fair distribution and other aspects in their moral concepts.

Looking at the manifestations of the initiative of the subject, the initiative of Kant's subject is mainly reflected in the observance of moral laws. The subject first recognizes moral laws through reason and then overcomes sensual impulses with the help of free will to practice these laws. This initiative is an internal force based on individual reason and will. Imagine that when a person is in an unsupervised situation and still adheres to the moral principle of honesty, this is the manifestation of what Kant calls the initiative of the subject. In Kant's moral system, the subject is relatively independent of the social structure, and the exertion of its initiative is more reflected at the level of the interaction between the individual and the abstract moral laws.

In sharp contrast is Marx's view. The initiative of Marx's moral subject is manifested in promoting social change. Subject classes in oppressed positions, such as the proletariat, will actively take actions to change society after recognizing their situation in the unreasonable social production relations. They will change the social structure through collective actions such as organizing trade unions, conducting strikes, and launching revolutions. The workers' movement in 19th - century Europe is a good example. At that time, the proletariat united to resist the exploitation of capitalists and tried to build a more fair and just society. This initiative is based on a deep insight into social reality and a strong desire to change the status quo and functions within the framework of social relations.

Finally, from the perspective of considerations of historicity and universality of the subject, Kant's concept of the moral subject has a strong sense of universality. He is committed to constructing a moral system applicable to all rational beings. However, this universality ignores to some extent the diversity of morals in different historical periods and social - cultural backgrounds. His moral laws are a priori and eternal, without fully considering the impact of changes in social structures, economic relations and other factors on morality during the historical development process. For example, his moral theory does not fully take into account the differences in moral concepts and the moral behaviors of subjects in different socio - economic forms (such as feudalism, capitalism, socialism, etc.).

5. Conclusions

To sum up, there are multi - dimensional differences between Marx's and Kant's moral thoughts in terms of the subject. Kant's moral subject is an abstract rational being, and he explores moral laws and the subject's initiative within an ideal transcendental framework. Marx, on the other hand, places the moral subject in the real soil of social relations, emphasizing the social and historical nature of the subject and its initiative in social change. These differences reflect two different philosophical paths and ways of thinking. For contemporary moral construction, we should draw on the strengths of both. By learning from Kant's emphasis on reason in moral norms, we can have a

clear value orientation when constructing a moral system; at the same time, by absorbing Marx's attention to social relations and social change, we can make moral construction closely combined with social reality. Only in this way can we construct a moral system that not only has noble rational values but also can effectively guide social practice, and promote contemporary society to develop in a more just, harmonious and moral direction.

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