A Comparative Study of Kant's Moral Philosophy and Confucian Moral Philosophy

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Abstract: Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophies originated from different civilizations in different times, and their moral philosophies are representative thoughts in the tradition of Chinese and Western moral philosophies. This paper selects Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophy thoughts for comparative study. Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophy is regarded as transcendental theory, and both of them emphasize the transcendental nature of moral root and moral consciousness at the level of moral source. Kant defined man as a limited biological existence, and man can only know the phenomenal world and the moral world forever, but can't go beyond the free will to enter the moral ontology and the self-contained things in the universe ontology. Confucianism unifies the inner and transcendence of human beings, the phenomenon and noumenon of the universe, and the moral world and the universe. Both their moral philosophies reflect the practical significance of putting moral principles into real life.

1. Introduction

Moral philosophy is an ideological tradition, which is not only a complete philosophical system, but also a practical theory. Kant and Confucianism pay attention to the practicality of moral philosophy. In the comparative study of moral philosophy, it can be clearly distinguished that they attach importance to the role of morality in people and behavior[1]. Kant believes that the most basic goal of moral philosophy and basic work is the basic principle of "seeking moral metaphysics", which Kant understands as a transcendental moral principle system, which applies absolute orders to human beings in all times and cultures[2]. Confucian morality not only advocates the super-utilitarian "sage" realm of moral goodness, but also strives to make the morality advocated by it have practical significance under the subject.

There are similarities between Kant and Confucianism in the thought of self-discipline in moral philosophy, that is, autonomous morality's concept with freedom of will or conscience as its core, as the theoretical thought of moral philosophy, is not only a moral principle or moral norm, but also contains the conscious practical motivation to put moral principles into practice. Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophies originated from different civilizations in different times, and their moral philosophies are representative thoughts in the tradition of Chinese and Western moral philosophies. This paper selects Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophy thoughts for comparative study.

2. Comparison of Theoretical Roots of Morality

In the field of moral philosophy, Kant's moral philosophy is usually described as "intrinsic" and "transcendental", while Wang Yangming's "the philosophy of the mind" is considered to have transcendental moral attributes. Based on this view, Kant's and Confucian's moral philosophy are regarded as transcendental theoretical thoughts, and both of them emphasize the transcendental nature of moral root and moral consciousness at the level of moral source[3-4].

Kant constructs moral philosophy on the basis of innate theory, where the concept of "innate" refers to "logically preceding" and holds that rationality is the theoretical basis for the emergence of

moral laws. Kant believes that free will is a transcendental rationality of human beings and an innate and unconditional principle of supreme goodness. Just as reason legislates for nature and for man, practical reason legislates for itself in free will. In this sense, practical reason is transcendental existence, which becomes the transcendental rational basis of Kant's moral philosophy.

Philosophers in China have expounded the moral attribute of "heart". Cheng Yi, Cheng Hao and Zhu Xi are the representatives of Neo-Confucianism. In terms of the moral connotation of the mind, they put forward the difference between the mind and the human heart, thinking that the mind is morality such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom, while the human heart is selfish[5]. Wang Yangming is a master of the Confucian theory of mind and nature. He inherited and carried forward Lu Jiuyuan's "the philosophy of the mind" in terms of the moral attributes of the mind, so he is regarded as one of the representatives of the Confucian "the philosophy of the mind" system. In Wang Yangming's "the philosophy of the mind" system, although the heart is the noumenon of moral attributes, it is not the transcendental source of moral philosophy, and there is still a noumenon of the heart in the heart, that is, Wang Yangming's so-called "conscience". Only by having a conscience in your heart can you put moral principles into practice.

3. Comparison of Moral Ontology

Another major difference between Kant and Confucianism is whether moral ontology and universal ontology are unified. Kant believes that free will, as the publisher of unconditional absolute orders, is limited to the moral world and not as good as the universe. The core and foundation of Confucian traditional thought is the unity of moral ontology and universal ontology. The history of Confucianism is also the history of the formation, development and final completion of moral metaphysics[6-7]. The so-called "harmony between man and nature" in Confucianism is not only a transcendence in morality and ethics, but also an identification with the origin of all things in nature.

Both Kant and Confucianism believe that the basis of moral law is innate, but the way to establish moral law is different. How did Kant establish moral law? As mentioned above, Kant first established the absolute command, and then established the moral law on this basis. Kant can only turn to moral law. Freedom is the basis of moral law, and moral law is clear in our hearts. We know free will through moral law, so moral law is the reason for understanding freedom. Confucius is a witness, and Confucian saints are witnesses to the truth that people are one, so unconditional kindness can be revealed. Kant pointed out that if there is no God and an ideal world that we can't see now but hope for, these noble ideas of virtue are the objects of praise and wonder, but they are not the motives for conception and implementation[8]. The discussion of Confucianism in this respect does not lead to moral theology like Kant. "Good is rewarded with good, evil with evil" is what we saints have personally seen. Therefore, in Confucianism, we don't need an external God to control our destiny, but we control our own destiny.

Kant believes that people can't choose a certain morality, but they have the will to decide their own principles of action. If people want to realize morality, they should show the autonomy of people's practical reason. Kant put forward the concept of self-discipline to demonstrate people's moral autonomy. Self-discipline is usually opposite to heteronomy, which means that people act according to their desires and hobbies, while self-discipline is based on their rationality. The tradition of Confucian moral philosophy is regarded as "the way of inner sainthood", that is, at the moral level, it advocates the goal of perfecting personality through people's own moral cultivation. Wang Yangming demonstrated the important position of man as a moral subject from the perspective of human nature. Confucian moral philosophy is a theory that pays attention to human mind, and Wang Yangming regards the moral application of mind as the participation of human subjective consciousness in moral activities[9]. Every moral subject has a conscience, and everyone has the possibility of being a saint. He advocates people's subjective consciousness and moral spirit awakening, and constructs moral philosophy based on this theory.

Kant's thing-in-itself refers to the matter that exists objectively, and its difference from the phenomena in the natural universe is a transcendental difference. Traditionally, China did not attach

importance to scientific research, and even real scientific research was carried out under the ethical ideal and concept of "harmony between man and nature". Therefore, China's traditional Confucianism is a philosophy that combines moral and religious significance. Generally speaking, because Kant defined man as a limited biological existence, man can only know the phenomenal world and the moral world forever, but can't go beyond the free will to enter the moral ontology and the self-contained thing in the universe. Confucianism unified the inner and transcendence of human beings, the phenomenon and noumenon of the universe, the moral world and the universe, thus creating a so-called realm of "body and use are the same".

4. Comparison of Practical Connotations of Moral Philosophy

Practice is an activity that human beings actively explore and transform the objective world, while practical rationality can achieve the initiative of practice and dominate human practical activities. Kant believes that if the practical rules are regarded as principles in a certain degree of universality and are separated from many conditions that will inevitably affect their realization, we will call the sum of these rules theory. On the contrary, not all actions are called practice, but only by following some generally assumed procedural principles are they called practice[10]. This consistency between theory and practice in morality, in Wang Yangming's theoretical thought, is similar to this view, which is the theory of "unity of knowledge and action" Kant demonstrates the consistency between moral theory and practice from the perspective of moral philosophy, with the aim of linking the theoretical thought of moral philosophy with the concrete practice ways or methods of practical philosophy. Wang Yangming's theory of "unity of knowledge and action" holds that there is an essential connection between "knowledge" and "action", which also reflects the consistency between moral theory and practice.

Kant takes reason as the source of morality and practical reason as the theoretical source of moral philosophy. He believes that practical reason transcends perceptual experience, while practical reason and will have similar concepts. But Kant only regards the principle of will as a code of conduct and does not involve the practice of morality. Wang Yangming's conscience, as a human moral consciousness, contains feelings and likes and dislikes, so it is necessary to remove selfish desires and expand his conscience. The appearance of conscience involves the practice of morality. This is a different view of their moral philosophy. Kant said: "The moral principle must be a definitive command, and what this command promulgates is exactly self-discipline." Wang Yangming believes that conscience is the noumenon of the heart and a universal moral consciousness that everyone has. Conscience is the evaluation standard of human's intrinsic moral value. Conscience urges people to have good ideas, and moral behavior is born from good motives. The similarity between Kant's and Confucianism's theories lies in that both of them put forward moral principles, and both of them have inherent universal apriority. Comparatively speaking, Kant's moral law is universal, inevitable and mandatory, and it is an objective moral principle; Wang Yangming's conscience is universal and conscious, and it is a subjective moral principle. Conscience is not an inevitable moral principle. Whether conscience can be used is related to everyone's moral consciousness.

On the basis of Kant's philosophical edifice, all human knowledge is his field of reflection, in which moral philosophy is an important part. In the construction of Kant's metaphysical theory, he thinks that metaphysics includes two parts, namely, natural metaphysics and moral metaphysics. The pre-Qin Confucianists also had their own demands and efforts to pursue moral metaphysics. Pre-Qin Confucianists did not care about the so-called "first philosophy", but it was not without its own metaphysics. One of the important contents of pre-Qin Confucian metaphysics is to seek the ultimate root of morality. According to Confucianism, although morality is intrinsic, it is also transcendental, reaching the heaven. The so-called "reaching heaven" means that people's original heart is not lonely or superficial, and it has deep ultimate roots and can always reach heaven. Perhaps the path and result of Kant and Mencius' pursuit of the basis of moral metaphysics are difficult to agree after all, but both of them have their own metaphysics. As long as any culture develops to a certain extent, it is impossible to be satisfied with some tangible images, but it is

bound to explore its metaphysical things. Every culture should form its own philosophy.

In Kant's moral view, abiding by the moral law without utilitarian purpose is the real good, while doing good in Confucian moral view provides possible suspicion for doing immoral things in the name of morality, that is, Confucius hates "homesickness"-the thief of virtue. Kant believes that "the fundamental evil lies in the improper position of perceptual motivation and moral rational motivation." Hypocrisy is an "allowable moral illusion". Kant's theoretical philosophy is different from practical philosophy. The former examines theoretical rationality and the latter examines practical rationality. Although both of them have the same innate rational ability, they work in different ways in understanding and practice. The law of practice is the law of freedom, that is, the moral law, which is different from the inevitable natural law. The former is the result of the application of pure rational practice, while the latter is the result of the application of pure rational theory. So Kant's so-called knowledge is knowledge, and knowledge and morality can't be the same, but the separation of knowing and doing, while Confucianism's so-called knowledge is wisdom, and wisdom and morality are integrated, so Confucianism advocates "the unity of knowing and doing".

5. Conclusions

Kant and Confucianism pay attention to the practicality of moral philosophy. In the comparative study of moral philosophy, we can clearly distinguish that they attach importance to the role of morality in people and behavior. There are similarities between Kant and Confucianism in the thought of self-discipline in moral philosophy, that is, autonomous morality's concept with freedom of will or conscience as its core, as the theoretical thought of moral philosophy, is not only a moral principle or moral norm, but also contains the conscious practical motivation to put moral principles into practice. The similarity between Kant's and Confucianism's theories lies in that both of them put forward moral principles, and both of them have inherent universal apriority. Kant's and Confucianism's moral philosophy systems contain rich theoretical values. The comparative study of their moral philosophy thoughts aims to provide ideological resources for the ideological and moral construction of contemporary China, which is also the significance of this comparative study.

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