

An Analysis of the Application of Kant's Critique of Practical Reason in Education

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Abstract:

Critique of Practical Reason, as one of Kant's three major criticisms, demonstrates the metaphysical problem of "how morality is possible". From theorems to suspensions, and then to methods, Kant systematically solved the difficult question of "what should we do" and built a rigorous thinking system. However, this thinking system can also be applied to education. In the teaching and education of students, guided by Kant's practical rationality and starting from the subject level, students can awaken their self-consciousness and show themselves as the self-consciousness in practice, and get "what should I do" clearly with the correct guidance.

Keywords:

Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, Morality

1. Introduction

Kant's interest in natural science was no less than his love for philosophy. Influenced by Euclidean geometry in his view of time and space, he had to establish his own concept of space in Euclidean geometry. Moreover, he could also see the shadow of Euclidean in his expression methods, for example, the format and classification methods in the three major critiques were similar to the original geometry. In this way, Kant's proofs of "knowing what is possible" and "how is morality possible" have played an inestimable role in the development of later philosophy. In terms of structure and form, it has rigorous logic. On the other hand, it also makes his thoughts more complicated and obscure, making it a difficult task to understand Kant. However, it does not affect the profound and extensive thought of Kant, and it is very enlightening to the method of education.

There is such a sentence in Faust: "Theory is gray, but the tree of life is evergreen." In the face of the contradiction and conflict between theory and reality, the tragedy of knowledge is frequently staged, especially when theory and knowledge become the only faith, the meaning of life is deprived, and the spirit is left alone in a dull prison. To break this cage is the duty and responsibility of philosophy and education, especially to break down the stale and rigid consciousness, reconstruct the lively texture of life, let the empty and nihilistic dogma down, and inspire the new vigor and vitality. It can be said that Kant's practical reason makes us return to rational man,

and becomes a permanent guide to happiness through obedience to virtue. The change of the theme from “What should man do” to “What should I do” in Critique of Practical Reason is an innovation of educational mode.

2. What Should Do

Kant's Critique of Practical Reason is mainly divided into two parts: the element theory and methodology of pure practical reason. Among them, the element theory as the main part, Kant is divided into pure practical reason analysis and dialectical theory according to the content. In the theory of analysis, Kant clarifies and deduces the principle and object of practical reason conceptually. In a nutshell, Kant divides the laws of practical reason into four theorems:

Theorem 1: “All practical principles which presuppose an object (matter) of the power of desire as the basis for the determination of the will are all empirical and cannot serve as any practical law.” [1] That is to say, if we presuppose in reality that we desire an object as the will, the practical rule formulated according to our will is an empirical, not universal or necessary, but a subjective assumption of the individual, a pleasant experience of the individual, and if such a rule is set as the law of practice, then the law of practice can only be an empirical law. Not only for others, but even for ourselves, when we meet again with the same object of desire, such a rule which is not a priori objective may be invalid.

Theorem 2: “All practical principles of matter are themselves of the same type and subject to the general principle of self-love or self-happiness.” [1] Kant believes that the human will to right is based on self-love or self-happiness, that is, the essence of our practice is to adhere to the principle of pursuing advantages and avoiding disadvantages. This point can be described in a sentence of Han Fei: “There is no Zhong Ni on the running car, and no Bo Yi on the overrunning boat.” [2] The consciousness that we practice according to the pleasurable sensation of the object of desire, that is, happiness, becomes a universal and supreme principle. It is obvious that this is subjective, “subjective sensibility”, a sensory experience rather than a rational one. At the same time, Kant annotates this theorem to show that lower appetites are essentially the same as higher appetites: for example, the pleasure of reading is no more noble than the pleasure of eating and drinking. For the will to pursue the two pleasures derives from the same source, and it is only that which pure reason exercises, beyond emotional pleasure or displeasure, by a practical law, that reason itself establishes itself, that is the higher power of desire, and that makes the legislation of the practical law possible.

Theorem 3: “If a rational being ought to think of his principles as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles which, not in terms of matter, but only in terms of form, contain the basis of the will's determinations.” [1] In this theorem, Kant clarifies that the principles subject to the prescribed grounds of the will can only be formal laws, and the will which prescribes formal laws can only be free will. We may desire any object, but we cannot take these subjective principles as general laws of practice, we can only take simple forms from them, and by this form of legislation we counteract the principles of will which are intended to be laws of practice. In short, we cannot make practical laws out of “matter”, so that only “form” is left, which has a logical law similar to Husserl's phenomenology of “essence through appearance”, except that in the end only form can be practical laws. At the same time, Kant also put forward the premise of legislation, namely, that if we are to make the principle of will

a universal law, we must obey the moral law which the pure reason of practice provides us with the deterministic command.

Theorem 4: “The self-discipline of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of the obligations corresponding to them; On the other hand, all arbitrary heteronomy not only does not establish any duty at all, but is opposed to the principle of duty and the virtue of the will.” [1] In this theorem Kant distinguishes between freedom of negative understanding and freedom of positive understanding, that is, heteronomy and self-discipline. In which the heteronomy guarantees independence of the law of will over the object of arbitrary desire, but depends on the natural law of some impulse or inclination, which is simply to eat what we want, to play with what we want. This sense of freedom based on our desire for material things, which is always related to our subjective will, is therefore considered negative freedom; Self-discipline, on the other hand, is what Kant wants to highlight, the free meaning in the practical law established by pure reason bypassing the desired object itself, he is the self-determination of the will, and at the same time, this is the expression of the moral law. It is in this sense that reason may be seen to legislate for itself, or “to legislate for itself.”

At this point, Kant defines the conditions that the basic law of practical reason needs to meet, and leads to the concept of the object of pure practical reason, namely, “the necessary object of understanding the power of desire” and “the necessary object of understanding the power of aversion”, that is, the object of “good” and “evil”. At the same time, he also related our subjective emotions to the moral law, in order to further explain the moral law as the motivation of practical reason. Pure reason in practice sustains our existence in a mission manner, a priori high order, which gives us the right to be free and open to the pursuit of the ultimate good.

3. What shall I Do?

In the first part, Kant discussed the elimination of the antinomy between morality and happiness. The pursuit of happiness does not go against the generation of virtue. The two are in a unified and comprehensive relationship, and happiness should be divided according to moral principles. However, in reality, it is often not as desired. Good deeds do not necessarily result in good deeds, and evil deeds do not necessarily result in bad deeds. In the face of impact, it is inevitable to question morality and happiness. Therefore, Kant established three suspensions: “freedom of will”, “immortality of the soul,” and “existence of God”. Thus, morality and happiness are placed within a practical rational moral and religious system. At present, Kant has not completely broken away from the mold of theological thought, or perhaps it is already a problem that belongs to epistemological arrogance. It is the “unspeakable” that Wittgenstein needs to remain silent about and Lao-tzu’s “extraordinary Dao” and “extraordinary name”.

For the second part of the book, in the methodology of pure practical rationality, Kant proposed that only when we regard our respect for morality as an obligation, conduct self examination with keen discernment, strictly and candidly demand ourselves, and admit our mistakes, can morality be established and guard our inner nobility. This obligation should be sublimated into a consciousness in teaching, in other words, we need to face the problem itself from the source, which is the direct subject of education. There is a poem by Zhu Xi that says, “If you ask about the canal,

you will find it as clear as this, only the source of flowing water can come”. That is exactly what it means.

Due to the innate education and different living environments that each person receives, their cognitive and comprehension abilities are also different. This requires us to have a differentiated “individualized teaching” approach, and develop different educational methods based on each student’s personality. However, starting from the logic of Kant’s practical rationality, our education does not directly target individuals, or rather has universality. Treating each student as an independent individual truly brings them a sense of moral self-discipline, connecting their subjective emotions with recognized moral principles. That is to say, give them freedom of will when they understand that this freedom is not a casual and barbaric growth. However, as students’ freedom is only a form of freedom, they do not have a deep understanding of the definition of freedom, but simply believe that they can do what they want without restraint, including what they are unwilling to do. Essentially, this is also more in line with the growth path of cognition. We cannot deprive them of such fantasies, and we can even say that we should not deprive them of such thoughts. Through people’s demand for rationality, the rights of nature should be demonstrated in daily behavior. Education should be a part of reflecting freedom.

In this way, it returns to the responsibility and obligation of the educators themselves. The task of educators at this level also requires them to be able to independently choose the correct values, or in other words, to understand the inherent essence of how humans become humans. They are a part of human beings, and as subjects, their rights are guaranteed by doing what they should do, achieving the liberation of their individuality and the fundamental unity of universal values. It’s like education gives us the freedom that belongs to our highest rights, while also allowing us to become ourselves rightfully and fearlessly. There is a path that is clear and legitimate, and this is also what education needs to point out.

This educational approach is divided into two steps: the first step is to make the educated understand that I have this absolute freedom of consciousness; The second step is to make it clear to them that my freedom should go beyond form and focus on tangible content, which needs to be obtained. In this way, the transformation from Kant’s practical rationality of “how to do it” to the need for educators to be clear headed by the educated, that is, “I” understand “I should do it this way”.

4. Conclusions

In summary, in the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant fully demonstrates the proposition of how morality is possible with a rigorous logical argument, and Kant mentions: “Pure geometry has some postulates as practical propositions, but they contain nothing more than the presupposition that we are capable of doing something if we are required to do it, and these are the only propositions of pure geometry that involve a being.” This justifies philosophy in the manner of the arguments of the natural sciences, in the hopes that morality will spread across society and become ingrained in every man’s consciousness.

Democritus once said, “For all those who indulge in the pleasure of the mouth, and eat, drink, and love excessively, the happy time is very short, only when they are happy in eating and drinking, and the ensuing harm is great.” [3] The desire for the same things continually comes upon them, and when they get what they want, the pleasure they have tasted is soon gone. There is nothing good in all this except the

fleeting pleasure, for there is always a renewed sense of unsatisfied need. It is clear that what Kant hopes to awaken is the moral law of man's self-discipline to assert himself in reason, as he puts it, and the longer he meditates on it, the more he is filled with wonder and awe.

The task of educators also requires a critical logical path to guide the basic direction of problem-solving. From this perspective, Kant's practical rationality is very enlightening. Of course, as Kant said, "Two things fill the heart with renewed and increasing awe and reverence the more often and the more steadily that they are meditated on: the starry skies above me and the moral law inside me." [1] Rather than actively forcing the starry sky and inner goodness upon our pupils, reminding them that these are essential, we need them to seek these things on their own. Although it is a more labor-intensive approach, this makes instruction more effective.

Conflicts of Interest

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