

Socrates' Moral Education Thought of "Virtue Is Knowledge"

Wen Shi^{1,2*}

¹ Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, China

² Chengde College of Applied Technology, Chengde, Hebei, China

Email Address

350968068@qq.com (Wen Shi)

*Correspondence: 350968068@qq.com

Received: 15 December 2023; Accepted: 15 January 2024; Published: 12 March 2024

Abstract:

Virtue is knowledge is a point of view repeatedly demonstrated by Socrates. Socrates' philosophy of life is embodied in the rational principle of knowing oneself, the good principle of knowledge and the beautiful principle of purposiveness. On the basis of expounding the connotation of Socrates' "virtue is knowledge", this paper explores the important enlightenment of "virtue is knowledge" to the contemporary moral education in our country.

Keywords:

Socrates, Virtue Is Knowledge, Moral Education Thought

1. Introduction

Moral education is a borderline subject between ethics, sociology and pedagogy. The ultimate goal of moral education is to make people become people, that is, adults. Moral education has dual value, that is, it has intrinsic value for human development and instrumental value for social civilization development. Socrates' moral philosophy is an indispensable part of the history of philosophy. He put forward the basic proposition of "virtue is knowledge" (virtue is knowledge), and demonstrated around this center, challenging the relativist moral view, closely connecting morality, thinking and consciousness, and exerting a profound influence [1] on the two fields of ethics and philosophy. In this paper, on the basis of explaining the connotation of Socrates' moral education thought of "virtue is knowledge", the author tries to think about the enlightenment of the moral education thought of "virtue is knowledge" to the present era with a dialectical attitude.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The connotation of Socrates' "virtue is knowledge"

Socrates pointed out that knowledge and virtue depend on each other, knowledge is the premise of practicing virtue, all virtues contain rich knowledge, virtue is by no means an isolated existence of criteria and concepts, and ignorant people can not have virtue [2]. In order to demonstrate his point of view, he discussed the four popular

virtues at that time, namely, wisdom, justice, courage and temperance: wisdom is a virtue, and wise people can accurately distinguish right from wrong and distinguish between true and false with the help of knowledge when they encounter problems about thinking; Justice is a virtue, a righteous person can handle the relationship between himself and others in a correct way, and master a wealth of knowledge related to interpersonal communication; Courage is a virtue, for all brave people have rational knowledge, and if they cannot keep their reason, courage is of no value; Fourthly, temperance is a virtue, temperance is the restraint of one's desires, the strict control of one's needs, and the propriety of one's actions. It can be seen that every virtue in the world can find its corresponding knowledge. Not everyone has virtue, but as long as they are willing to study hard and receive good education, they can get rich knowledge. All virtues exist with knowledge as the carrier.

Virtue is knowledge based on rationalism. Socrates opposed the wise man's practice of separating man's virtue, which is the most important basic proposition [3] in his moral philosophy system. Socrates pointed out that virtue is the embodiment of the inner mind, which is the highest of all knowledge. It can lead people to do good things in life and live a good life, which is a noble skill. All people are virtuous. In the process of exploring nature and the universe, we must first establish a correct cognition of ourselves, and clarify the method and structure of cognition. Socrates believes that virtue and self-understanding are two different principles, which echo each other. When a person has a wealth of knowledge of virtue, he will deepen his understanding of himself. The understanding of the connotation of "virtue is knowledge" can be started from two aspects:

First, goodness is the end. Socrates sees "goodness" as the source of the good one seeks. Actions, thoughts, emotions, etc., all originate from the good. According to Socrates, all that we do is to make ourselves better. It is human nature [4] to want to make ourselves better and to strive for the good. Whether it is an individual or a state, if you can't distinguish good from evil, if you see the bad as good, if you see the bad as good, if you see the bad as good, then you are doomed to ruin and even cause great disasters. Good, therefore, is an end, and in the process of achieving this goal, the most important thing is to determine the standard of good, to understand what is really good. At the same time, Socrates made a distinction between "good" and "happiness", arguing that "good" and "happiness" are two different concepts and should not be confused. Although Socrates believed that "good" has rich connotations, including happiness, Socrates always stressed that the two should not be connected, and "good" should always be the final destination. In Socrates' eyes, as long as a person can have "good", no matter what kind of situation he will act with good thoughts, reflecting the good virtue. This proposition put forward by Socrates awakened people's enthusiasm for pursuing truth and virtue, innovated people's cognition activities, and promoted rationality and goodness. It was reasonable, feasible and of outstanding significance for progress. Second, virtue itself is knowledge. Virtue includes justice and all kinds of good things, and we can think of all virtue and justice as wisdom. Socrates believed that the virtues most valued by the Greeks, including fraternity, justice, temperance, courage, and piety, could be achieved through the transmission of knowledge. Human virtue can be embodied in many ways. Only by grasping its essence and connotation can we truly understand the knowledge [5] of virtue. In the study of virtue knowledge, we must first establish a correct cognition and understanding of ourselves. The knowledge related to "self" is both moral and truth [6]. In his view, some people

develop the necessary understanding of themselves, know what is best for them, and can draw a clear line between “doable” and “not doable.”

2.2. There is a difference between virtue and knowledge

There is a difference between knowledge and virtue, and there is no necessary connection between knowledge and virtue. With the development of education and the expansion of knowledge dissemination, there are a large number of illegal crimes in every field. People do evil not because they lack knowledge, some people will use their knowledge and technology to commit crimes. Many lawbreakers have rich knowledge reserves and are industry elites, but they do not make reasonable use of knowledge, but cause harm to society. On the contrary, some people have not received a good education, but their quality shines on countless people, sending out a dazzling light, and their character and spirit are admirable. Theoretically speaking, even if a correct understanding of virtue is established, it is not always possible to actively practice it in life. Aristotle analyzed this proposition of Socrates and found that he did not pay attention to the irrational part of the soul. Aristotle pointed out that people do all kinds of moral behavior not only comply with reason, but also the result of the joint action of reason and irrationality, and reason and emotion are intertwined. Socrates ignored the irrational content and put forward a one-sided view [8].

2.3. Accurately grasp the similarities and differences between “knowledge” and “virtue”

A dialectical attitude should be adopted to grasp the similarities and differences between virtue and knowledge. Cognition can not be accepted, acceptance may not be put into practice, to let the educated have a deep understanding, from the heart to express acceptance, in order to achieve the purpose of moral internalization. Therefore, moral cognition can not only stay at the superficial level, not only through guiding the educatees to establish a correct cognition of moral norms, but also in-depth and detailed analysis, so as to achieve the purpose of internalizing in the mind and externalizing in practice, so that they can apply this moral norms in life. The most crucial point in the analysis of Socrates' argument is to confirm that people can make decisions and carry out actions rationally. Human behavior is influenced by emotion, so when an individual's behavior is influenced by emotion, there is no guarantee of good behavior. It is because of the deficiency of emotion that we need to keep rational at all times. This requires unremitting pursuit of truth and goodness, rational judgment, enhance the ability to distinguish between true and false, in order to objectively examine the individual's thoughts, behaviors and emotions, correct improper behaviors, and finally guide the individual to form correct thoughts, good emotions and the control of behavior on the basis of eliminating deviations, and ultimately meet the requirements of virtue.

3. Results and Discussion

In the present era, there exists a certain disconnection between moral education and social life. The meaning of moral education has not been fully reflected. In order to bring moral education back to the right track, it is urgent to reflect on it based on social practice and draw the essence from the thoughts of the ancients. Going back to Socrates' concept of virtue, combined with school moral education, the enlightenment of the moral thought of “virtue is knowledge” to contemporary moral education is mainly reflected in:

3.1. Adhere to the concept of people-oriented, highlighting the subject of moral education

Taking moral education in higher education as an example, we should follow the people-oriented idea and take students as the subject of moral education. At present, there are obvious deficiencies in moral education in Chinese colleges and universities. In order to solve the problems exposed in the process of moral education, the concept of “people-oriented” should be infiltrated into moral education activities. The purpose of moral education for college students is to make them learn to survive and realize development. In carrying out moral education, colleges and universities should take the embodiment of students’ personal value and the promotion of students’ all-round development as the core content, and choose the content and methods of moral education for the purpose of promoting students’ self-development and perfection. In moral education, students should not participate passively. Teachers and students should have equal dialogue and interaction. Students should be guided to deeply participate in moral education learning activities to harmonize the relationship between teachers and students.

3.2. Practice the concept of “unity of knowledge and action” and attach importance to moral education practice activities

Socrates’ idea of “virtue is knowledge” is practical to some extent. The phenomenon of “different knowledge and action” generally exists in life, which means that knowledge and virtue do not go hand in hand. Some people have received many years of education and have rich knowledge reserves, but they do not necessarily have high moral standards. Even if they have mastered the knowledge of virtue, they will do immoral things. In the process of strengthening moral education, we should first enrich knowledge, including scientific knowledge, social knowledge, especially ethical and moral knowledge, and internalize knowledge in our minds on the basis of dabbling. Secondly, in the process of moral education, colleges and universities should pursue “unity of knowledge and action”, encourage students to use virtue knowledge in practice, publicize students’ good deeds and deeds, mold moral models, create a good atmosphere of moral education on campus, and make students deeply feel that morality is not a kind of thought, but to practice in life, virtue is knowledge, but also a long-term behavior.

In short, in today’s moral education, we should promote the externalization of moral concepts into behaviors through strengthening practice, change the problem that people’s moral education is disconnected from the real social life, and guide individuals to pay attention to moral practice while constantly increasing knowledge accumulation, so as to achieve unity of knowledge and action, and truly understand the enlightenment of virtue.

3.3. Strengthen educators’ confidence in education and ensure the smooth development of moral education

China is currently in a special transition period, the rapid development of economy and society has changed people's values. The old moral concepts are incompatible with the new social development situation, but the new moral concepts have not been established, and certain obstacles have been encountered in the process of implementing socialist core values. Money worship and hedonism have bad effects on college students. Colleges and universities have many deficiencies in the education of ideals and beliefs, and some teachers are confused and lose confidence in moral

education. Socrates lived in a turbulent society. Although his views were not recognized by the society at that time, he courageously moved forward in the face of adversity and moved towards the bright direction. His thoughts gave off the fire of wisdom and had a far-reaching impact on later generations. Therefore, educators should firmly abide by the principles and standards of moral education, and improve the level and quality of moral education in the process of scientifically applying the moral thoughts of the ancients and modern educational methods, so as to ensure the smooth development of moral education in all stages.

3.4. Innovate the methods of moral education to ensure the practical effects of moral education

In the current moral education work, we should attach importance to the adoption of appropriate moral education methods to ensure that the final good practical effect of moral education. For example, interactive teaching, heuristic teaching and other teaching methods can be adopted to establish an equal communication relationship between educators and educatees, and guide both sides to find answers in the process of constant communication and interaction. In terms of the teacher-student relationship in school education, we should first establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship, through teachers' reasonable guidance, students' free speech and discussion and communication between teachers and students, deepen the understanding of the content of moral education. At the same time, problem-driven guidance and teachers' good guidance guide students to take the initiative to reflect, pursue true knowledge, and awaken their inner knowledge and morality. At the same time, on the basis of acquiring true knowledge, we should attach importance to promoting the internalization of knowledge through practice. Through inner reflection and external practice, we should improve the understanding of true knowledge, so as to truly have knowledge and virtue.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, Socrates teaches people to learn "virtue" through "virtue is knowledge." Under the background of today's times, morality is showing a trend of diversification. At this time, going back to Socrates to look at the original virtue, we need to make reasonable amendments to the existing moral values, further enrich the rational knowledge system, constantly pursue the truth, and realize the common development of "knowledge", "practice" and "morality". It is believed that by absorbing some thought essence from Socrates' "virtue is knowledge" and combining with the reality of current moral education, the level of social moral education will be further improved and the construction of a harmonious society will be promoted.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Tian, S.F. Socrates on virtue as knowledge. *Journal of yunnan university (social science edition)*, 2021, 20(3), 5-18.
- [2] Hao, Y.C. Virtue is knowledge? -- Aristotle's answer to the "Socratic" question and its roots. *Tianjin Social Sciences*, 2013, 03, 32-39.
- [3] Guo, Q. A Brief discussion on moral education from Socrates' "Virtue is Knowledge". *Journal of Jingchu University of Technology*, 2012, 27(06), 63-67.
- [4] Wang, S.Z. Interpretation of Socrates' "Virtue is knowledge". *Guide of Economic Research*, 2011, 35, 227-228.
- [5] He, M.M. Chinese Moral Education from Socrates' "Virtue is Knowledge". *Theoretical Studies*, 2011, 17, 27-28..
- [6] Yang, F. On Socrates' "Virtue is Knowledge". *Journal of Taian Institute of Education, Daizong Journal*, 2009, 13(04), 29-30.
- [7] Hui, B. Socrates' proposition that "Virtue is Knowledge" and its practical dilemma. *Journal of Xi'an University of Arts and Sciences (Social Science Edition)*, 2007, 02, 58-60.
- [8] Wang, S.Z.; Sun, J. Interpreting Socrates' "Virtue is knowledge". *Guide of Economic Research*, 2011, 35, 227-228.



© 2024 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)